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Unlivably accelerated lives: a political critique of neoliberal capitalist time regimes

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Abstract

This thesis enquires into the nature of the temporal formations that structure our lives and, notably, the realms of work and production. Drawing on literature from various disciplines to articulate its own theoretical framework, it characterises what I term *neoliberal capitalist temporalities*. These are socially constituted, power-laden constructs that regulate lives across space-time. Building on the works of Rosa, Crary and Martineau, it argues that the historical development of capitalism has always been tied to the enforcement of particular temporal cartographies or 'distributions' (Rancière). In this sense, neoliberal capitalist temporalities are an intrinsic element of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

I identify the practices of increasing acceleration, continuous functioning, and logistical rationality as three central features of neoliberal capitalist temporalities. I also investigate how productivism, the normative ethos at the core of these temporalities, validates and enables neoliberal capitalism's relentless extraction of value from both animate and inanimate resources to the point of burning them out.

The thesis refines a critique of neoliberal capitalist time regimes on the basis of the fact they produce what I define as *unlivability*, expanding on Butler's work. Arguing that unlivability is differentially distributed across demographic categories, and that it most clearly manifests in the sphere of labour, I discuss present-day examples of ongoing acceleration of work that yield unprecedented types of labour precarity. I both critique and denormalise the phenomena of chronic stress, overwork and burnout experienced by millions of people today.

Further developing Rosa's argument concerning the three main crises of late modernity (2013), I analyse in concrete terms how neoliberal capitalist time distributions have a destructive impact on human health, politics, and the natural environment. Two keys to this are cheapening strategies and the homogenisation or subordination of nature's various temporalities to neoliberalism's uniform global temporality. I examine the manner in which contemporary time regimes dismantle the conditions of possibility for politics on three levels: they erode the material and bodily capacities for individuals' involvement in politics, they deny our ontological

constitution as relational subjects, and they foreclose the temporal-structural requirements for institutional democracy and for protest politics to take place.

This thesis is therefore a multifaceted critique of neoliberal capitalist temporalities that first makes them visible to then challenge their hegemonic, self-evident status. Finally, I discuss alternative ways of navigating time and resisting the productivist push to participate in exploitative and self-exploitative dynamics. I propose a relational, post-growth politics requires that we inaugurate and recuperate other ways of relating to time, to work and to our world.

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Lorena Ramírez Hincapié
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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Lorena Ramírez Hincapié

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But in its blind unrestrainable passion, its werewolf hunger for surplus labour, capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the working day.

Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, 2015, p. 179.

Introduction

The theoretical reflections in this thesis depart from the generalised day-to-day experience of never having enough time for all the things we have to do –let alone those we would like to do—, of feeling we have less and less time even whilst we are rushing faster and faster from one activity to the next. This is what Hartmut Rosa refers to as the paradox of time-scarcity in modernity:

> time appears as fundamentally paradoxical insofar as it is saved in ever greater quantities through the ever more refined deployment of modern technology and organizational planning in almost all everyday practices, while it does not lose its scarce character at all. On the contrary: "the more time we save, the less we have" (Rosa, 2013, 16).

The explosion of technological development over the past couple of centuries has drastically reduced the amount of time required to complete productive tasks for many people; and yet, an extremely large portion of the global population works overlong hours and feels 'time poor' (Basso, 2003; Giurge *et al.*, 2020). The only explanation for this paradox, Rosa tells us, is that the sum of the temporal demands (or costs) placed by today's growth-oriented societies on individuals *exceeds* the temporal gains that they obtain through timesaving machines (2013, 79). The problem of time-scarcity can hence be conceptualised in terms of overload, of combined pressures, and incompatible demands.

While this problem affects all areas of our lives, it becomes most tangible when conceived as the very thread that connects work-related stress to stress-related illness, and stress-related illness to burnout and sometimes death. This is a thread that is becoming thicker and harder to ignore for national health systems across the world. Based on systematic reviews and meta-analyses of data from more than 2,300 surveys collected in 154 countries between 1970 and 2018, the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation have now published the first global study that shows a conclusive correlation between working long hours and an increased risk of dying from heart disease or stroke (WHO, 2021). According to this study, three-quarters of a million people are dying from overwork every year. In less linear but

not less real ways, the thread of time-pressure and overwork also intersects with the threads of mental health disorders, eating disorders, addictions, burnout syndrome and suicide (Cohen, 2016; Kobayashi and Middlemiss, 2009; Villavicencio-Ayub, 2019).

Contemporary societies are responding to the dilemma of time-scarcity with a continuing acceleration of the pace of life, and with the normalisation of this trend (Rosa, 2013). Thus, many of us may have been taught that not having enough time is our own fault, that it is our responsibility to correctly administer our time, and that if we struggle it is simply because we have not yet mastered the art of time-management. After all, according to the common sense of our neoliberal universe, every success as much as every failure is an individual's own responsibility (Bauman, 2013; Butler, 2018; Lazzarato, 2009). Against this received idea, this thesis apprehends the phenomena of time-scarcity and time-pressure as direct results of the social acceleration that, Rosa identifies, is structurally necessary for capitalism.

However, as I explain in Chapter 1, speaking of time-scarcity is insufficient: it only scratches the surface of the problem. What we are truly talking about is the articulation, mapping and partitioning of time into social constructs that regulate our navigation across it in specific ways. I argue that, today, these temporal structures or *time regimes* are primarily instituted and enforced by neoliberal capitalist forms of power. In this sense, this thesis seeks to develop a deeper understanding of hegemonic time regimes today and the way in which they are part and parcel of the neoliberal capitalist system. Drawing on the work of scholars from various disciplines to articulate a theoretical framework of its own, the thesis characterises neoliberal capitalist temporalities, highlighting what differentiates them from early capitalist temporalities, and identifying productivism as its pivotal normative rationality.

Parallel to this theoretical-descriptive endeavour, the thesis progressively refines a critique of neoliberal capitalist time regimes on the basis of the fact that they produce what I define as *unlivability*. My critique takes as its starting point Rosa's argument that capitalism's "endless compulsion toward escalation" has given way to dysfunctional relationships to the world on three levels: the level of subjects' relationship to themselves, of people's relationship to the social world, and of humans' relationship to our non-human environment or nature (2013, 87). Rosa

calls them the psychological crisis, the crisis of democracy, and the ecological crisis, respectively, and refers to them collectively as the "three great crises of the present day". Taking Rosa's diagnosis seriously, I rework his argument by conceiving of these as one all-encompassing crisis of livability, and by examining the concrete ways in which neoliberal capitalist time regimes contribute to it. I support my theoretical arguments with a number of case studies that illustrate how contemporary time distributions have a destructive impact on human health, on politics, and on all forms of life on Earth.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to elaborating and presenting the theoretical framework that guides the development of this research project. I there introduce the concepts of *temporality* and *temporal cartography*, and place them in dialogue with the terms already proposed by Rosa, Crary and Martineau. I then incorporate Rancière's work on *the distribution of the sensible* in order to better understand the aesthetico-political dimension behind the construction of temporal orders, and the manner in which they mediate our perception of the world. I then expound and go beyond Judith Butler's account of *unlivability*, an idea whose theoretical potential she does not exhaust and which, I argue, has a temporal dimension. Manipulating the notion of unlivability from a temporal perspective, I define an *unlivable temporality* as an ordering of time that exhibits a contradictory tension between the demands it issues and the conditions it provides for their satisfaction. I turn unlivability, thus, into a tool for critiquing the exacerbation of time-scarcity by the trends of *induced* precarity and destitution that scholars such as Butler (2015), Brown (2019) and Lazzarato (2009) have correlated to neoliberal modes of governmentality. In this sense, I propose to think of 'time poverty' (Giurge *et al.*, 2020) as a form of dispossession or expropriation within the neoliberal capitalist framework of *precaritisation* (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013). The last section of Chapter 1 assembles a layered definition of *neoliberal capitalism* and justifies my choice of this phrase to designate the contemporary paradigm where the phenomena under study are situated.

Drawing on the works of Martineau and Lukács, Chapter 2 traces the historical emergence of contemporary time regimes. It also integrates Rosa's theory of dynamic stabilisation with Jonathan Crary's critique of our 24/7 world to argue that the very constitution and solidity of capitalism relies on a model of rationalised, abstract time as well as on acceleration and the

principle of continuous functioning. Subsequently, I discuss how the advent of automation, of biocognitive capitalism and the attention economy have radically changed the ways in which value is produced and accumulated in time. This shows, on the one hand, how the fundamental categories that for Marx originally structured the capitalist wage system are now obsolete and, on the other hand, how one of the distinctive traits of specifically *neoliberal* capitalist time regimes is their unprecedented degree of pervasiveness and influence across almost all areas of human life.

Chapter 3 discusses the implementation of logistical rationality in contemporary work environments as part of the McDonaldisation trend that chracterises these spaces. I show how the pursuit of the four principles of rationalisation –efficiency, calculability, predictability and control— necessitates the framework of abstract time (Martineau) and the homogenising, quantifying language of logistics. In this sense, the standardisation of workers' performance is first and foremost a homogenisation of their temporal progress. Connected to this, I draw attention to how the fact that it is now machines the ones that lead and monitor production processes forces humans to work at inhuman tempos.

I then shed light on how labour precarity is temporally inflected along three main dimensions: a) uncertainty about job continuity, b) the temporal pressure to work fast, and c) the control of workers' shifts, breaks and compulsory overtime. In order to do this, I present four exemplary workplaces where logistical rationality placed in the service of neoliberal capitalist productivism institutes what I term unlivable working time regimes. I approach the sphere of sweatshop labour, where both the pressure to work as fast as possible and systematic overtime make workers' jobs markedly precarious and temporally unlivable. Secondly, I discuss recent reports of working conditions at Amazon, where the relationship between technological performance monitoring and time pressure comes to the foreground. Next, I present the case of meatpackers in the US and Canada, for whom the risk of suffering a serious injury represents an added layer of labour precarity alongside job insecurity and the pressure to keep up with the factory line speeds. I emphasise that, in all three cases, worker efficiency is obtained through the production of job insecurity, or by capitalising on preexisting forms of social and financial vulnerability. Finally, I comment on how logistical rationality also manifests in the design of the

latest text-to-speech technology, a paradigmatic tool for the acceleration of cognitive labour. Chapter 3 therefore elucidates the manner in which neoliberal capitalist time regimes effectively manifest in the realm of labour through logistical rationality and its deployment of specific technologies. It also argues the hegemony of these temporalities produces unlivable overlaps between various forms of labour precarity, old and new, that render workers particularly vulnerable.

In Chapter 4, I delve into the nature and origins of productivism as a distinct normative rationality that privileges work above all else, and that today provides the legitimating criteria for the enforcement of neoliberal capitalist time regimes or time distributions. I then look at how productivist discourse animates contemporary hustle culture, and the defense of instrumentalised or "deliberate" rest. I connect this to Han's reflections on *achievement society* and neoliberal forms of subjectification. The final section of this chapter moves to a consideration of the ways in which conventional work patterns and time regimes are being challenged and reconfigured. It first addresses the Lying Flat movement as a case of inoperative resistance to China's fierce overwork culture that opens the possibility for a future return to work with a different set of values and temporal norms. Finally, I discuss the 4-day week as the most widely recognised alternative to conventional working time regimes and the reasons why, despite its lien with productivist values, defending this model is important in the struggle to protect worker health and wellbeing, and not just to enhance a company's productivity.

Chapter 5 builds on all preceding chapters in order to further develop Rosa's overarching argument that capitalism's escalatory dynamics have led not only to a psychological crisis, but also to a crisis of democracy and an environmental crisis. Taking Rosa's argument one step further, I contend that neoliberal capitalist time regimes play a particular role in the late capitalist production of these crises through the deployment of specific kinds of temporal violence and temporal subsumption. Thus, in section 5.1 I show how stress and burnout are in fact the result of a 'neuronal violence' linked to acceleration (Han, 2015). Section 5.2 exhibits the correlation between neoliberal capitalist temporal structures and the development of the fast-paced, atomistic and consumerist *form-of-life* (Jaeggi) that many are being incited to adopt. It then examines how this compromises our capacity to act as political subjects and communities, our

resilience as agents of political protest, and the democratic credibility of institutional decision-making processes. Finally, section 5.3 critiques the Capitalocene's production of the climate crisis, understanding it as the result of the radical desynchronisation between the temporalities of nature's reproduction and the accelerated temporalities of capitalism's extraction, production, consumption and disposal cycle. I discuss the cases of the dairy industry, of soil degradation and of long-lived toxic waste as three paradigmatic examples of *temporal-ecological rifts* (Gamble, 2022) to argue that acceleration and the lack of recovery time are two key forms of the late capitalist, anthropocentric violence that is bringing us closer and closer to irreversible ecological tipping points.

* * *

Working with Laclau's categories, Oliver Marchart understands the social as "the field of the *sedimented*, *unquestioned* rituals and institutions" and argues it is "nothing but the political in the sleeping mode, ready to be reactivated at any moment" (2022b, 133; my emphasis). In this sense, an important argument of this thesis is that temporalities tend to become invisible, to solidify and merge into what we come to see as the normal (back)ground of social life. They become as matter-of-fact as the concrete walls of our house. Contemporary time regimes thus remain hidden in this field that Marchart calls the sedimented social and are therefore largely immune to critique, exempt from public scrutiny or debate. Furthermore, when they are challenged, it is only at the level of small, local struggles for specific causes, but not in a way that questions them in their entirety.

It is precisely the aim of this thesis to shatter the sedimented nature of time regimes today and bring them forward, into view, as *political* artifacts open to critique, as a locus of disagreement in Rancière's sense. Accordingly, the dissertation first visibilises neoliberal capitalist temporalities in order to then argue they are problematic for a variety of reasons. Chief among these are: that they produce unlivability and exacerbate precarity; that they perpetuate social inequalities, race and gender gaps; that they are premised upon an individualistic ontology that threatens politics; and that they are key drivers of ecological destruction. Following Foucault's suggestion (in Rabinow, 1997, 315) to look for the contingent "in what is given to us

as universal, necessary and obligatory", my epistemic framework is based on the premise that the existing time regimes are not the only ones there can be, that other forms of temporal organisation and regulation are possible and necessary. Hopefully, the reflexivity of this critical limit-attitude will allow us to broaden our imaginative horizon in order to (re)build other forms of inhabiting a shared time.

Chapter I. Theoretical foundations

1. Assembling a theoretical vocabulary for temporal artifacts

Hartmut Rosa finds that in both the vast social-scientific and philosophical bodies of literature on time, a unified or systematised concept of time has not been arrived at. Across and within these disciplines, scholars still differ on "even the most elementary questions concerning the reality of time", and tend to fall either into the trap of treating time as a self-evident given, or into the one of construing it as an unfathomable enigma (2013, 3). The notion of time has thereby been fragmented into a plurality of often incommensurable understandings, which is why I must now clearly delimit the methodological approach and the terminological bases from which I will develop my argument. It is not my intention, in this thesis, to provide insights on the ultimate essence of time nor to propose a generic definition of time that can serve all disciplines. Far from this, my aim is to study the manner in which contemporary social and political forms of power erect and enforce certain temporal structures (or regimes) in order to regulate our navigation across time in specific ways.

Underlying the very formulation of this objective is the presupposition that –whatever time is in the realms of science or metaphysics— within the scope and context of the present research time is, first and foremost, understood as a social phenomenon. Among the authors that best expound this positioning is Jonathan Martineau, who explains:

> [T]ime is a *social* phenomenon. This means that any idea or practice of time comprises a series of social determinations and mediations. […] Time is produced by and through social practices, and time systems, as well as the architecture of temporal relations vary from one society or historical period to another. […]
> Time is in need of a de-reifying critique: not a 'thing', a natural object, or a neutral ('given', 'ahistorical' and 'asocial') universal feature of human consciousness; time is rather a locus of struggle over meanings and practices, and as such can function as a powerful political and ideological tool (2015, 2, 5).

Grounded in this approach, the following sections present the terms that will build the core of my theoretical apparatus. I first acknowledge the three main layers of socio-temporal analysis proposed by Giddens and Rosa. Next, I present time as a socially-mediated field that different forms of power are constantly trying to colonise and regulate. From this, it will become clear how we can only ever experience time in the form of power-laden structures, or *temporalities*. I then refigure the concepts of temporality and temporal cartography in relation to Rancière's categories to show how the drawing of a temporal cartography is an inherently prescriptive operation that allocates functions to groups of people across space and time. In section 1.4, I use Foucault's analysis of early disciplinary methods as a preliminary illustration of the concept of temporality and its two dimensions: the rationalising and the normative. I close the first section drawing links between the Protestant ethic's condemnation of idleness, the imperative to make an intensive use of time within disciplinary settings, and what would much later emerge as the productivist moral code that enthrones work above all else.

The second section introduces the concept of *unlivability,* which I retrieve from Judith Butler's *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*. I contend, however, that Butler's account of *unlivability* is incomplete without taking into consideration the temporal dimension. Thus, based on Butler's framework but also seeking to move beyond it, I fully elaborate *unlivability* as a theoretical tool and reinterpret it from a temporal perspective. The third section integrates the preceding ones in order to propose the compound notion of *unlivable temporality,* with which I intend to articulate a political critique of neoliberal capitalist time regimes. Finally, section 4 of this chapter provides a working definition of the term 'neoliberal capitalism', with which I will refer to the contemporary paradigm where the phenomena under study are situated.

1.1. Layers of temporal analysis

As a starting point, I wish to introduce the differentiation between the three social *levels of time* that, according to the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa, "determine the being-in-time of actors" (2013, 8). This triad, which Rosa takes from Peter Alheit and Anthony Giddens, is composed of 'everyday time', 'biographical time', and the encompassing 'historical time' in which the other

two are embedded. Now, adding complexity to this initial distinction, Rosa explains that each of these levels has, in turn, its own temporal *patterns* and *perspectives* (2013, 9). The notion of *temporal patterns* designates the "rhythms, sequences, speeds, synchronization requirements" and durations of the activities and practices that unfold in each of these levels (9). *Temporal perspectives*, on the other hand, refer to the horizons of past, present and future and their relevance for action (*ibid*). What is of interest to us is that, as Rosa affirms, these patterns and perspectives are "to a great extent determined by social structures" and by the specific synchronization requirements of different social spheres. Rosa then argues that the harmonisation of the three levels towards which actors are constantly striving represents "the paradigmatic site for the mediation of structure and culture, of systemic and actor perspectives" (12). In other words, for Rosa, studying the interplay between these three levels and their patterns offers a vantage point to explain how structural imperatives and individual orientations align and adjust to each other, overcoming the structure *versus* agency dichotomy that usually limits classical sociological analyses. He hence closes this introductory exposition by stating that

> everyday time, the time of life and the time of the world are bound together in a meaningful whole that orients culture and action, one in which cultural patterns and structural necessities, systemic requirements and actor perspectives are made congruent (2013, 11).

Let us now turn to the major theoretical concept that will guide this research, the notion of *temporality*.

1.2. Temporalities, or temporal cartographies

Several theorists have written extensively on the relationship between power and the ordering of space. Among the first ones to do so was Carl Schmitt, from whom Wendy Brown cites two elucidating extracts:

> Schmitt writes, "every ordering of human affairs also materializes in an ordering of space. Consequently, revolutions of human societies always also involve alteration of our conceptions of space." Schmitt develops this point differently in *Nomos of the Earth*, where he says, "every

> new age and every new epoch in the coexistence of peoples . . . and power formations of every sort, is founded on new spatial divisions, new enclosures, and new spatial orders of the earth (Brown, 2019, 51).

Commenting on this, Brown underscores that spatial demarcations feed into our imaginaries of the common (or of its absence), as when for instance neoliberalism reconfigures divisions of public and private space, or produces gendered, racialized and gentrified spaces. In the same way, the institution of *temporal orders* makes some ways of inhabiting and influencing the world conceivable while obscuring others. This is perceptively communicated by Peter Osborne, who writes of a 'politics of time':

> indeed of all politics as centrally involving struggles over the experience of time. How do the practices in which we engage structure and produce, enable or distort, different senses of time possibility? What kinds of experience of history do they make possible or impede? Whose futures do they ensure? (1995, 200).

The Foucauldian style of Osborne's questions inclines us to think of a certain governmentality of time, where 'temporal' (instead of discursive) 'formations' function like those groupings of statements with which a form of power influences the conduct of subjects. And, indeed, as we will see in more detail, Foucault was well aware of the strong nexus between a strict regulation of time and the success of disciplinary governing techniques. He saw the rigid time-tables of prisons, schools, barracks, and workhouses as key disciplinary instruments to ensure that working bodies adhere to the rhythms, tasks and cycles imposed by authority (Lilja, 2018, 423; Rosa, 2013, 7). Not only is time "always already socially mediated" (Martineau, 4) and mediating our experience of the world, but we can only ever experience time in the form of power-laden temporal structures, territories or partitions that circumscribe our horizons of possibility, of thinkability and of action.

As we asserted earlier with Martineau, time is socially constructed and the units with which we measure it are social artifacts. It is only within temporal constructs that adverbs such as 'early' and 'late' make any sense, that people can submit to work schedules, order food deliveries (Rosa's everyday level), take vacations or commit to paying mortgages (biographical

level), and that entire nations hold general elections every so many years (historical level). Thus, the figure I will now introduce is that of a socially constituted and politically driven *cartography of time*. Theorists have used a variety of phrases to refer to this idea: Hartmut Rosa speaks primarily of *time regimes* and *temporal structures*, Jonathan Crary calls them *temporalities,* whereas Martineau uses indistinctly *time system, time regime* or *social time*. Although I will eventually resort to all of these terms, I abide for the most part to the interchangeable use of *temporality*, *time regime* or *temporal cartography* defined as: a socio-political construct that guides and regulates the navigation of people across time. In this sense, a temporality directs both the manner in which time is measured and the ways in which it is allocated, managed, stratified and commodified.

Deleuze and Guattari would see a temporal cartography as the result of temporal *territorialisation, i.e*., the institution of a temporal *territory*. In basic terms, a territory is "a conceptual device which produces order, working as a function which organizes sets of elements otherwise indeterminate and confused" and which differentiates their arrangement from an outside (Aurora, 2014, 1). Territories stem from the deliberate marking and naming of what was previously smooth, un-striated space. Although relatively stable, they are always susceptible of being defined and redefined through processes of *deterritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation*, which applies to the case of temporal structures too. Texts, maps, and Deleuzian territories are all orders crafted to domesticate chaos. In this sense, I incorporate the term *temporal cartography* into my work to foreground the fabricated or artificial nature of the temporal maps that are the object of critique. Speaking of cartographies makes conceivable, from the start, the possibility of challenging or denaturalising the logic from which a given temporal map was drawn, and rendering it invalid.

Now, I must here underscore that the use of this metaphor depends on a contemporary understanding of the cartographic exercise, one where time and space are bound together. Modern maps are, first and foremost, dynamic images. Unlike the maps of old, which were static, digital maps display changes in space across time. Another characteristic of today's maps, also enabled by modern satellite and radar technology, is that they chart space-time down to the most infinitesimal detail. This is related to the fact that their primary function is to police the mapped

territory. Because they now integrate the temporal dimension, contemporary maps are thus dynamic representations that enable dynamic forms of policing.

In a similar way, the concept of temporal cartography I am proposing presupposes the production of a mobile, shifting map where the elapsing of time is the central parameter for the regulation of human action (which, of course, also happens in space). Within this analogy, temporal units such as minutes, seconds, weeks, or years, and spatial coordinates alongside them, provide the language through which a temporal map can be articulated, but they are not the map themselves. The map emerges with the normative codes and discourses that prescribe how we should move throughout our day, month or year. Because of this, I argue a temporality can also be compared to an *orthography* of time, for its charting also involves a *prescribing and policing* of the correct way to "spell" what Rosa calls time-patterns: rhythms, speeds, sequences, durations and synchronicities. Here, rules of punctuation, which are orthography's complement, become rules of punctuality.

I find that the production of a temporal cartography has two intertwined dimensions: the analytical and the normative. The analytical or rationalising dimension refers to the subsumption of time into the grid of a specific measuring system (e.g., clock-time and calendar-time) and to the ensuing delimitation of what in the next section I present as 'temporal partitions'. The normative, or we could say *orthographic,* dimension on the other hand relates to the set of values and discourses behind the articulation of these partitions and to their accompanying norms on how time should and should not be used.

1.3. Temporal cartographies as distributions of time

I would now like to argue that the drawing of a temporal cartography/orthography can be conceived as what Rancière calls a *distribution of the sensible* by *the police*. The reason why I am approaching Rancière is because, using a language both critical and sophisticated, he shows us how politics is an always already aesthetic phenomenon and, thus, how the institution of

specific temporal formations starts at the level of their very perceptibility. In this sense, his theses postulate the contestation of spatial and temporal partitions as a taking distance from received ways of perceiving and as learning new ways "of being, saying and seeing" (Rancière, 2011, 6).

This translation into Rancière's terminology is more straightforward than it seems, for the two analogies that I have been using already share common traits with Rancière's concepts. The idea of cartography resonates with that of *the distribution of the sensible* insofar as it represents a deliberate exercise of constituting and representing the world (materially and symbolically) in a certain way. A temporal cartography is always partial, fabricated, and anchored in a particular perspective. It represents *a* world, not the world. Likewise, the notion of orthography relates to Rancière's *police* because it highlights the prescriptive nature of time regimes. Let us look more closely at this correspondence by reading Rancière himself.

In "Ten Theses on Politics", Rancière defines *the distribution of the sensible* as:

> a generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed. The partition of the sensible is the dividing-up of the world (*de monde*) and of people (*du monde*). […] This latter form of distribution, which, by its sensory self-evidence, anticipates the distribution of part and shares (parties), itself presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what not, of what can be heard and what cannot (2010, 106).

The distribution of the sensible functions thus as a sort of cognitive a-priori insofar as it presupposes the perceptibility of some things and the imperceptibility of others. It is through this kind of distribution that social orders and hierarchies become both *legible* and *legitimate*. In relation to a temporal cartography that in itself prescribes specific temporal routes, the distribution of its territory starts with the visibilisation of specific temporal blocks, intervals or *partitions* (Rancière). The idea that a week has seven days, that the financial year starts and ends in April, that we are supposed to take time off in December and April, according to the Judeo-Christian calendar, and that every workday ends until after 5 pm are all examples of temporal

partitions that, having been instituted as part of political agendas, have a privileged visibility for people living in contemporary Western societies.

An interesting example in this respect is the celebration of Ramadan by Muslims living in the Western world, or in Muslim countries that have become partly Westernised and are intent on further integrating themselves into the Global North's trading circuits. During Ramadan, fasting makes the pace of daytime activities slower, while nights become invested with a wealth of social and religious significance. Individuals who practice Ramadan will sometimes find themselves in the midst of the clash between two distributions of the sensible, which are always *temporal* distributions: that of the Western world that does not recognise Ramadan as an official holiday period, and that of their own culture, where eating is extracted from the usual partition and re-situated at the interval between sunset and sunrise. It is significant here that this temporal interval, only visible (relevant) to Muslims within this context, is not given in terms of a fixed number of hours, but rather varies depending on the latitude and the time of year. *Id est*, this interval is not defined in terms of Universal Coordinated Time units, which is the temporal language of globalised 24/7 financial capitalism.

What is valuable from Rancière's theoretical constellation is not just the insight that the distribution of the sensible provides for certain modes of perception, but that these modes already prescribe and proscribe specific forms of life, activity and social co-existence. In a different text, Rancière reformulates the concept as follows:

> By this I mean the way in which the abstract and arbitrary forms of symbolization of hierarchy are embodied as perceptive givens, in which a social destination is anticipated by the evidence of a perceptive universe, of a way of being, saying and seeing. *This distribution is a certain framing of time and space* (Rancière in Bowman and Stamp, 2011, 6; my emphasis).

The distribution of the sensible is therefore what binds specific material, spatial and, crucially, temporal partitions with the symbolical order through which a given form of power affirms itself. Rancière explains that he chose to name his book on workers' emancipation "La Nuit des

Prolétaires*"* to stress that the contestation of imposed temporal partitions was a key site in their struggle for emancipation. This struggle involved, at its core, a breaking away

> from the very partition of time sustaining social subjection: the obvious partition being that workers work during the day and sleep during the night. Therefore, the conquest of the night was the first step in social emancipation, the first material and symbolic basis for a reconfiguration of the given state of things (*ibid.*, 7).

This makes clear how important the disturbance, suspension, or abolition of dominant temporal partitions is for overthrowing "the given" status quo. As I will be arguing throughout this thesis, if we want to move beyond neoliberal capitalism, finding effective forms of resistance to its temporalities is an indispensable step in the process.

Let us now turn to *the police,* the other pivotal term in Rancière's vocabulary. For him, the police is a particular distribution of the sensible that, unlike other distributions,

> is characterized by the absence of void and of supplement: society here is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places. In this matching of functions, places and ways of being, there is no place for any void (2010, 119).

Also referred to as "the symbolic constitution of the social", the police is a mechanism whose partitioning is also an *allocating* of functions. In other words, the distribution of the perceptual universe or sensorium by the police simultaneously assigns specific places, specific modes of doing and of being to specific social groups. In this particular passage, Rancière does not refer to time, but since he writes "modes of being" and given his previous acknowledgement of the role of temporal partitions vis-à-vis subjection, we can safely assume he is not eliding the temporal dimension in this critical account of the police.

The *police* in Rancièrean terms is not a subject but a verb related to a position of power: a 'constitution' of the social, a 'distribution', and an 'exclusion'. As will be justified in later sections, I argue neoliberal capitalism can be attributed the name and properties of the police in

relation to its institution of particular distributions of time, or temporal cartographies, as the only possible ones. These distributions outline the 'correct' ways of navigating time today, an orthodoxy of time-use, if you will. But any mapping of time requires charting it against at least one other variable, for time given on its own signifies nothing. Time is, in fact, inextricable from space. The impossibility of dissociating time and space in analyses has led scholars, from both the natural and the social sciences, to introduce concepts that acknowledge them as a "co-constituted entity", where, as Doreen Massey writes, "temporality is spatial and spatiality is temporal" (Fent and Kojola, 2020, 822). Thus, a distribution of the sensible takes place across three interconnected axes:

i. Time
ii. Space (Rancière's "places")
iii. Kinds of action (Rancière's "modes of being and doing")

Because all distributions of the sensible are intrinsically normative, one can posit the existence of a fourth variable, the normative criterion, that ultimately organises the arrangement of the other three variables. This fourth variable, thus, refers to the manner in which every temporality prescribes a certain "orthography" of time. It is important here to recognise that the distributive operation and the prescriptive operation are one and the same. I conceive of it under the name of 'utility or 'relevance' drawing on Michael Räber, who explains that normative codes dispose "a general model of the utility of time, which distributes actions along a horizontal line and according to criteria that determine which actions are possible, necessary, or relevant, and which are impossible, contingent, or irrelevant" (2023, 2). Like Giddens (1994), Räber argues that productivism is the normative code that structures our sense of time today. As such, it "occupies citizens' habits of linking action, time, and utility through a normative ethic" which deems actions useful the more they contribute to continued growth and production (Räber, 2023, 7). Utility, which is a context-dependent notion, is here primarily defined as productivity. In Chapter 4, I provide a more detailed characterisation of productivism and analyse some examples of the contemporary overwork culture to illuminate the manner in which productivism upholds neoliberal capitalist temporal partitions.

A distribution of the sensible is therefore defined by *correlating* or connecting certain forms of perceiving the world along the dimensions of time and space with certain kinds of activity and a certain degree of utility or necessity. For instance, the coordinates of a temporal partition could be: (9:00 to 17:00, the office, working efficiently, utmost importance). Within the same arc of this distribution is the allocation of these *nexii* to specific groups of people depending on their place in the social hierarchy.

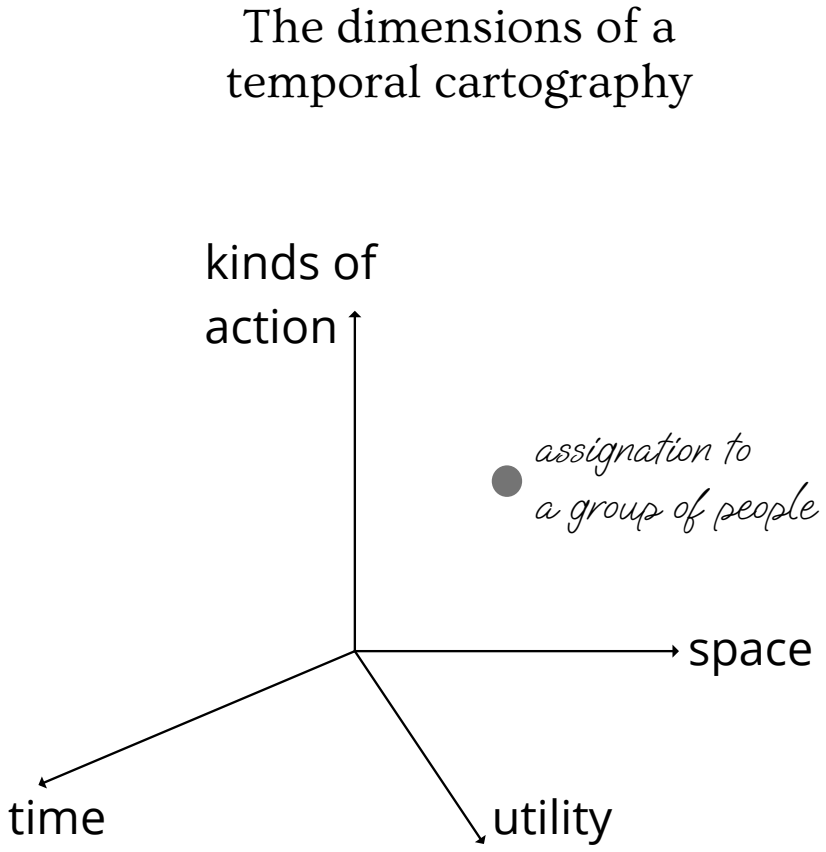

Figure 1.

The second, fundamental aspect that characterises the distributive process of the police is that in this pairing of temporal partitions with functions, places and ways of being, “there is no place for any void” (Rancière, 2010, 108). In the context of our temporal cartographies, this means there is no place for free, deterritorialised or uncharted time. In the 24/7 time regimes under

which we are forced to function, all time is plotted and partitioned: all time must serve a productive purpose. Even activities such as sleeping or recreating oneself are captured within these temporal cartographies and are evaluated on the basis of their relevance for the creation of value. Although, from a traditional perspective they have low utility quotients and will therefore have a peripheral place in a cartography aimed at growth and productivity, they are still subsumed into the distribution and correlated to subjects and places. For now, let us turn to the lesser-known part of Foucault's work in order to better understand the history of methods for temporal control, which were first developed within disciplinary settings during the eighteenth century.

1.4. Spatial territorialisation and temporal control

The phenomenon of spatial territorialisation to which I referred on page 20 with Schmitt was further studied by Deleuze and Guattari (1980), Said (1994), and Agamben (1998), informing their analyses of sovereign power and imperialism. But while their understanding of spatial domination was refined, they did not elaborate enough on the ways in which power also territorialises time, except for Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish* (1995), Foucault argued that control over time is *just as fundamental* as the ordering of space for any regime to consolidate itself.

Although Foucault's *oeuvre* has been mostly received as an archeological examination of the coalescences of power and knowledge into concrete institutions, discourses and forms of authority, I would here like to recuperate Foucault as a prescient theorist of social time. Importantly, his analyses of the disciplinary methods that were implemented in schools, prisons, armies and factories since the eighteenth century demonstrate that the regulation of time, of space and of movement take place simultaneously. One can clearly relate this to Rancière's own emphasis on the fact that the distribution of the sensible is an operation whereby specific groups of people become *simultaneously* "tied to" modes of doing and modes of being in space and time.

Interestingly, Foucault uses the word 'partition', Rancière's favoured term, when describing the emergence of a new "infinitesimal power over the active body" characterised by a different scale, object and modality of control:

> it implies an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising processes of the activity rather than its result and it is exercised *according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement*. These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called 'disciplines' (Foucault, 1995, 137; my emphasis).

The gradual invention of these disciplinary methods allowed those in power not only to ensure that other bodies do "what one wishes" but also that they operate "as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines" (138). Foucault here documents the birth of an "art of the human body" which had three central aims: expanding the body's skills, intensifying its subjection and founding a relationship where obedience furthers usefulness, and conversely. He thus dedicates the section of Docile Bodies in Part Three of *Discipline and Punish* to characterising the different methods used by this new art. He starts by describing the art of distributing individuals in space. Drawing on the historical example of a factory, Foucault shows that the principles of *enclosure*, *individualizing partitioning* and *functional sites* enabled authorities to monitor, inspect and evaluate more closely the performance of individual workers.

Next, Foucault deploys a section on "The control of activity", where he reconstructs how different disciplinary institutions adopted the model of the time-table in order to "establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, and regulate the cycles of repetition" (149). Foucault explains that as schools, factories and the military adopted these time-keeping methods from monastic life, they also refined them by counting in quarter hours, in minutes and seconds (150). He then refers to the minute description of the four sorts of marching steps outlined in the 1766 *Ordinance to regulate the exercise of the infantry*. By noting that every kind of step was correlated to a specific length and duration, he shows how an entirely new "degree of precision

in the breakdown of gestures, and movements, another way of adjusting the body to temporal imperatives" was being brought into play:

> What the ordinance of 1766 defines is not a time-table – the general framework for an activity; it is rather *a collective and obligatory rhythm, imposed from the outside*; it is a 'programme'; it assures the elaboration of the act itself; it controls its development and its stages from the inside. […] to each movement are assigned a direction, an aptitude, a duration; their order of succession is prescribed. Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power (152; my emphasis).

Another aspect of this 'anatomo-chronological schema' is that for the execution of a single gesture the whole body is interpellated insofar as it is its condition of "efficiency and speed": "[i]n the correct use of the body, which makes possible *a correct use of time*, nothing must remain idle or useless: everything must be called upon to form the support of the act required" (Foucault, 152; my emphasis).

This leads us again to the normative aspect of these programmes: the fact that their ultimate aim is to constitute "a totally useful time". The "totally useful time" of disciplinary spaces (namely, the factory and the barracks) is a clear instance of what I have previously defined as a 'temporality' or temporal cartography. It satisfies the conditions to qualify as a temporality, first, because it is deliberately "constituted", secondly, because it minutely prescribes how individuals should navigate space and time, and thirdly, because it operates based on a normative framework, which in this case revolves around maximising the usefulness of bodies in time. This latter trait became evident for Foucault in the sphere of labour, where the punctuality of wage-earners started to be more rigorously monitored and sanctioned, and where any kind of amusement, rest or play was "expressly forbidden" (150). The logic, commonsense by then, was that "[t]ime measured and paid must also be a time without impurities or defects; a time of good quality, throughout which the body is constantly applied to its exercise" (151, *ibid*). Indeed, as David Graeber succinctly notes, the capitalist premise that a worker's time is not his own leads to the moral conclusion that "idleness is theft" (2018, 103). Foucault formulates this as the principle of non-idleness:

> The principle that underlay the time-table in its traditional form was essentially negative; it was the principle of non-idleness: it was forbidden to waste time, which was counted by God and paid for by men; the time-table was to eliminate the danger of wasting it – a moral offence and economic dishonesty (1995, 154).

He does not elaborate more on this because, by the eighteenth century, when the disciplines under his scrutiny were forming, the negative principle of non-idleness was already a well-established social norm, one upon which the disciplines were building additional modes of regulation. However, he does acknowledge that the prohibition against wasting time comes from the Judeo-Christian worldview and is inflected by a powerful moral argument. It is nonetheless fundamental, for our line of enquiry, to further unpack this imperative against inactivity. In this respect, no one has written a more pristine rendering of the Protestant aversion to idleness than Max Weber as he comments on the writings of Richard Baxter, a Puritan church leader and theologist:

> Hence, of all the sins, the wasting of time constitutes the first and, in principle, the most serious. A single life offers an infinitely short and precious space of time to 'make firm' one's own election. The loss of time through sociability, 'idle talk', sumptuousness, and even through more sleep than is necessary for good health (six to eight hours at most) is absolutely morally reprehensible. Franklin's maxim – 'time is money'—is not yet expressed by Baxter, yet this axiom holds in a certain spiritual sense. Because every hour not spent at work is an hour lost in service to God's greater glory, according to Baxter, time is infinitely valuable (Weber, 2012, 105).

In the Puritan order, life becomes infused with a sense of urgency: every moment must be seized and turned into something fruitful, lest its wastage brings sin. Tied to Baxter's stark condemnation of idleness is his praise of hard work as the very purpose of life and the sole means for ascetic redemption. As we now know, Baxter's text is part of the discursive formation that was contributing to the consolidation of the Protestant values that would later become widespread social norms and, as Weber shows, would engender the 'spirit of capitalism'.

While the proscription on wasting time remained weighty, Foucault identifies that because its coercive power was not enough for disciplinary purposes, a forceful, extractive approach to time was implemented in addition to it:

> Discipline, on the other hand, arranges a positive economy; it poses *the principle of a theoretically ever-growing use of time: exhaustion rather than use; it is a question of extracting, from time, ever more available moments and, from each moment, ever more useful forces.* This means that one must seek to intensify the use of the slightest moment, as if time, in its very fragmentation, were inexhaustible or as if, at least by an ever more detailed internal arrangement, one could tend towards an ideal point at which one maintained maximum speed and maximum efficiency (154; my emphasis).

Foucault's unearthing of eighteenth-century 'temporal statements' proves that speed and efficiency were already valued back then. He gives us the fossils of what, during advanced capitalism, would evolve into logistical rationality and the vocabulary of 'optimised productivity and utility'. Furthermore, he shows us how temporal control is part of a wider modality of *gouvernement* that seeks to exert a constant influence over the conduct of subjects.

The hold of these time structures, however, is never absolute. As Foucault has repeatedly argued, "there is no power relationship without the means for escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies, at least, *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle" (1982, 794). The possibility of resisting that characterises free subjects is in fact the condition and the permanent support for what is always an 'agonistic' exercise of power (1982, 790). This is why Rosa affirms that the concordance of the three levels of time under the arc of a temporality is never secured *a priori* but rather only achieved through *repeated processes* of chrono-political contestation: "The question *who* determines the rhythm, duration, sequencing, and synchronization of activities and events forms a central arena for conflicts of interest and power struggles. *Chronopolitics* is thus a central component of any form of domination" (2013, 12).

Rather than suddenly emerging as a fully-formed structure, a temporality is often the contingent product of a variety of historical sediments that a power formation gradually agglutinates and appropriates. In this sense, it is a palimpsest. For instance, the temporalities

upon which disciplinary spaces relied were designed taking inspiration from the way in which older disciplinary spaces partitioned time and space: "the factory was explicitly compared with the monastery" (Foucault, 142). The "individualizing partitioning" of workers and the use of bells to mark the change of activities are the two main tactics that factory managers adopted from the monastic life.

Temporalities, or temporal cartographies, are thus four-dimensional territories that establish which are the legitimate, 'correct', or 'proper' uses of time, space and action as opposed to the deviant or improper uses. Although they are sometimes circumscribed to a clearly delimited perimeter, as in the case of the factory or the prison, they are mostly diffuse and discontinuous in their scope. Temporalities are 'alive' in the sense that they undergo slow changes just as language does, they compete, intersect and sometimes merge with others. And yet, although there are still various temporalities in our world, I would like to claim that, with the advent of neoliberal capitalism, many of them have developed common traits and aligned in their normative dimension, making it possible to speak of an overarching "neoliberal capitalist temporality". As Crary notes, "certainly, there are differentiated temporalities, but the range and depth of distinctions between them diminishes" (2014, 57). Throughout the following section I will develop the sources and traits of neoliberal capitalist temporal cartographies.

2. Unlivability

2.1. Introducing unlivability

In *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler reflects on the conditions, the meanings and the effects of plural, embodied political action. Yet before developing her arguments on the specific claims and enactments of different groups across the world, she lays out the setting where these forms of protest and expression are emerging. Butler argues there is a generalised trend of precarity and destitution which is both the underlying motive for these

different demonstrations and also the hostile environment where they are forced to make their demands heard. No matter how dissimilar these public assemblies may seem, Butler affirms that at the most fundamental level they are all delivering "a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity" (2018, 11). She attributes this lack of livable conditions partly to the neoliberal imperative of individual "responsibilisation" under which we are required, and expected, to fully sustain ourselves while the conditions for realising this are relentlessly dismounted:

> If responsibility is first and foremost a responsibility to become economically self-sufficient under conditions that undermine all prospects of self-sufficiency, then we are confronted by a contradiction that can easily drive one mad*: we are morally pushed to become precisely the kind of subjects who are structurally foreclosed from realizing that norm.* Neoliberal rationality demands self-sufficiency as a moral ideal at the same time that neoliberal forms of power work to destroy that very possibility at an economic level, establishing every member of the population as potentially or actually precarious (2018, 14; my emphasis).

Butler's subsequent arguments show that this paradoxical structure of neoliberal rationality asphyxiates not only our economic subsistence but every level of our existence. She concludes that if we are constantly demanded to achieve *x* under conditions that preclude *x*, the contradiction that haunts us is that we are living the *unlivable* and that we must act without the conditions to act:

> The fantasy of the individual capable of entrepreneurial self-making under conditions of accelerating precarity, if not destitution, makes the uncanny assumption that people can, and must, act in autonomous ways *under conditions where life has become unlivable*. The thesis of this book is that none of us acts without the conditions to act, even though sometimes we must act to install and preserve those very conditions (Butler, 2018, 16; my emphasis).

One of Butler's concerns throughout this book is how best to understand those contemporary forms of assembly that are, paradoxically, a kind of action that unfolds *without* the conditions for acting, whilst performatively demanding these. But what I would like to foreground here is the use of the word 'unlivable', through which she seems to be regrouping a variety of social issues associated with neoliberal governmentality. Butler lists the increasing privatisation of

public services and institutions, including schools and universities, temporary labour, rising unemployment, the housing crisis, "unpayable debt", and the erosion of the healthcare and pension systems as the main components in this scenario of *unlivability*[1]. Her introduction of a vocabulary of un/livability complements the vocabulary around precarity she had previously developed: while precarity is certainly a form of unlivability, the latter is a broader and more pliable category that designates the geographically differential, yet nonetheless interrelated forms of hardship and vulnerability that are being actively produced across the globe. The mark of unlivability, moreover, is that it underscores an incongruity between what we are pushed to be or do, and the absence of the adequate conditions for effectively satisfying those demands.

2.2. Re-theorising unlivability: temporality

At face value, the term 'unlivability' denotes the *absence* of the indispensable conditions required for a livable life. Since the ethico-political discussion on what is a livable life borders on the one around what a 'good life' is, the notion of *unlivability* proves to be a 'thick ethical concept', *i.e.* a concept where description and moral evaluation are inextricable from each other (Putnam, 2002; Taylor, 1967 in Sayer, 2011, 42). The negatively laden semantics of *unlivability* are also illuminated by Butler's use of other 'thick ethical' notions alongside it: induced precarity, insecurity, dispossession, expropriation, individualisation of risk, and "unmanageable exposure to arbitrary loss, injury or destitution" (2018, 69). Thus, this word that in colloquial language sounds merely hyperbolic works, inside Butler's text, as a critical evaluation of what we are living through as biopolitical and neoliberal subjects. Here, the function of *unlivability* is as judgmental as it is descriptive of the ways in which neoliberal capitalism jeopardises our very ability to live: "there can be no embodied life without social and institutional support, without ongoing employment, without networks of interdependency and care, without collective rights to shelter and mobility" (Butler, 2018, 84). Whereas these are certainly indispensable conditions for livability, I want to contend there is another set of fundamental preconditions for livability which relate to the fact that we are living organisms whose health depends on the unfolding of various biorhythms across time just as it depends on air, food and water. In this sense, the central

[1] Although Butler lists them with the US in mind, she acknowledges these are global trends and thus never restricts her arguments to a particular national context.

argument I want to advance so as to complement Butler's claim is that there can be *no embodied life either* without the preservation of those bio-temporal structures upon which our very existence is premised. In the section on 'unlivable temporalities', I explain in greater detail how bioderegulation is a factor in the equation of *unlivability*.

Some people would perhaps draw on the Capabilities Approach in order to think about the temporal requirements for livability. Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's model is concerned with defining an objective metric of well-being by positing capabilities as thresholds of well-being and by putting forth an (open-ended) set of central capabilities that would ensure the basis for a good, dignified life (Nussbaum et al., 1993; Robeyns, 2016). However, the discussion around *unlivability*, as derived from Butler's account, is less about deciding which are the positive criteria[2] for determining what a good or even a livable life is, than about analysing the negative, sweeping tendencies of social precarity, dispossession and vulnerability that are thwarting those freedoms and opportunities in the first place. This is why I will not engage with the Capabilities Approach; it will be enough for our purposes here to assert *unlivability* refers to a landscape where the possibility of attaining and staying within those thresholds of livability is being increasingly obstructed.

In its reverse formulation, *unlivability* designates the presence of a range of measurable states or socio-economic conditions that thwart livability. For instance, the state of "people at risk of losing employment and having their homes taken away by banks" or of people seeking "to gain an education at the cost of unpayable debt" (Butler, 2018, 17, 68). Other examples are single parents forced to taking multiple jobs to maintain their families, people doing full-day shifts and informal kinds of employment, people having to commute three to four hours daily just to get to their workplace, people who are ill but cannot afford private consultation or treatment, or who cannot even afford to take days off their (non-health-securitised) work, or people who may have a good and stable income but whose mental health is being seriously damaged due to chronic stress, like the 264 million people worldwide living with anxiety (WHO, 2017).

[2] Here, too, there is substantial disagreement on what the relevant criteria for a livable life are, and how to weigh them (Robeyns, 2016).

Importantly, *unlivability* also has a psychological dimension, which is well-expressed by Butler as "a felt sense of precarity, lived as slow death, a damaged sense of time, or unmaneageable exposure to arbitrary loss […] this is a felt sense that is at once singular and plural" (2018, 69; my emphasis). The sense of feeling trapped is another instance of this, apparent in research on investment banking where "both employees and managers reported feeling 'trapped' in a regime of working up to 120 hours per week for years" (Michel, 2011 in Blagoev et al., 157). It is related to a sense of living always on the edge, of leading an imposed and unsustainable way of life. It can also be related to the concept of self-alienation which Hartmut Rosa defines as "a state where subjects pursue goals or follow practices that, on the one side, no apparent actor or factor is forcing them to follow –since there are alternative options– and that, on the other side, subjects do not really desire or approve of" (2012, 113; my translation). *Unlivability* can therefore be conceived as having both an objective and a subjective component.

Butler's account of *unlivability* also highlights that, far from being a natural state of affairs, it is the result of deliberate practices such as precaritisation which, being "usually induced and reproduced by governmental and economic institutions, [it] acclimatizes populations over time to insecurity and hopelessness" (2018, 15). In the same tonality, Crary also uses the term "unlivable" in relation to 24/7 temporalities and the late capitalist production of instability and hopelessness: "everything necessary for a minimal sense of stability, whether jobs, homes, communities or healthcare is, by design, always on the edge of being discarded, downsized, foreclosed, demolished (2022, 8). But, in that paragraph, Crary does not quite substantiate the link between these temporalities and the concrete ways in which precarity and instability are produced by capitalism. In addition, Crary seems to be intimating that late capitalist temporalities are unlivable only because they "infuse the conditions of living and working together with desperation and hopelessness" (*ibidem*). As I argue throughout this thesis, this is just *one* of the many specific reasons why neoliberal capitalist temporalities are unlivable; *id est*, I understand *unlivability* in a much wider sense. Let us go deeper into the fabricated nature of contemporary civil disprotection, brilliantly rendered by Maurizio Lazzarato:

> Within the neoliberal logic, all protection against risks, all institutions of 'social property' are apparatuses that must function at a minimum level (minimum wages, minimum pension, income, etc.). […] Via these techniques of the minimum, neoliberal politics *operate a reversal of institutions of protection into apparatuses that produce insecurity* (2009, 128; my emphasis).

If we conceive of *unlivability* as embedded within a certain neoliberal 'government of conduct' (Foucault) we can see it is the *result* of a variety of strategies and systemic frameworks, such as juridical and financial structures. It is perpetuated by the operation of various dispositifs[3] that contribute to the wreckage of social infrastructures and that prevent social mobility.

As a central element of neoliberal capitalist valorisation and accumulation processes, debt plays a significant role in the production of *unlivability* thus understood. Although it is not the focus of this research, it is important to underscore that the design of the creditor-debtor system, which, as Lazzarato argues, is the control mechanism through which neoliberalism seeks to organise all social relations, is premised upon the capture of people's futures (Charbonneau and Hansen, 2014, 1045). Debt is here the condition under which one's future has already been colonised, monetised and translated into the logics of rent and of risk (Devenney, 2019). Functioning as a moral form of subjectification centred on economic solvency, and propped upon a variety of institutional and technological instruments, the debt economy is in fact often at the root of what I call the neoliberal production of unlivability. Reflecting on the subtle kind of power that debt exerts on subjects, Lazzarato writes, "you are free insofar as you assume the *way of life* (consumption, work, public spending, taxes, etc.) compatible with reimbursement" (2012, 31). His words illuminate how entering into debt not only reduces subjects' purchasing power but, more fundamentally, it restructures their entire lives, habits, and work patterns. In this sense, debt is an indirect driver of the overwork patterns and the productivist ethos that I discuss throughout this thesis. We should also conceive of debt as a particular kind of expropriation of the future whereby subjects are placed in a permanent race to not fall behind in their payments, and to earn as much as possible so as to offset the debt and reclaim whatever time may be left

[3] In the Foucauldian schema, these apparatuses involve both material and ideational content.

for themselves. Finally, the reason why debt is eminently connected to the temporal dimension of *unlivability* is because it simultaneously establishes, on the one hand, the certainty that the subject's future labour must serve the purpose of reimbursement and, on the other, a magnified uncertainty as to how that subject will procure a permanent income, pay its debts and still have access to decent living conditions.

In light of the above, some clarifications become pertinent. I will discern in my work between *unlivability*, which is the landscape of unsustainable hardship where we are forced to live and act, and the structural phenomena that generate *unlivability* as a consequence. In other words, I seek to differentiate *unlivability* as an abstract 'thick-ethical' category from the heterogeneous group of practices and tendencies that can populate this category as causes, perpetuators or exacerbators of *unlivability*.

Here, it is important to stress with Butler that, like precarity, *unlivability* is not a homogeneous phenomenon. Rather, it is differentially distributed across categories such as gender, class, race, age and geographical location. Also, because *unlivability* refers to various forms of vulnerability, exclusion and duress, different groups of people will experience different kinds of *unlivability* to different extents. The above notions must further be distinguished from the subjective experience of *unlivability*, where the embodiedness, cultural situatedness and the psychological makeup of individuals inform the manner in which they interpret and respond to what impinges upon them.

In syntactic terms, I will use the adjective 'unlivable' to qualify a situation when it responds to the bipolar logic of a required impossibility. For example, extreme indebtedness is unlivable insofar as it is required by some to continue living but at the same time it draws them further away from livable conditions. On the other hand, I will tend to use 'unlivability' or 'the unlivable' as a noun to designate the sum total of different unlivable circumstances apprehended as a general state of affairs.

2.3. Unlivability: a differentially distributed experience

Based on Butler's work, we have established that *unlivability* indexes a discrepancy between, on the one hand, the dismantling (by neoliberal capitalist processes) of the preconditions for livability and, on the other, the escalating demands placed on us (by neoliberal capitalist discourses). My method has been to transpose Butler's affirmation that we are confronted with a "responsibility to be economically self-sufficient under conditions that undermine all prospects of self-sufficiency" (14) to the temporal level in order to show that the contradictory structure of unlivability also permeates this level and is directly reflected in how our navigation across time is being policed. Thus, I maintain neoliberal capitalism *absurdly requires us to be temporally self-sufficient under conditions of collective time-scarcity*. This is one instance of what I call 'temporal unlivability'. But my more general argument is that unlivability, broadly understood, almost always has a temporal dimension, one that rarely comes to the fore.

Unlivability manifests in many guises, but, in addition to the already discussed experiences of radical uncertainty and instability, its temporal dimension can be most clearly appreciated in three, often interconnected, forms of hardship: economic pressure (low GDP, struggling to meet one's living expenses), work pressures (being systematically subjected to stress and overwork), and exhaustion (functioning on an insufficient sleep regime). Everywhere across the globe, people experience one, two or all three of these forms of hardship, in different proportions and to different degrees. In this respect, it is nonsensical to circumscribe unlivability to specific countries, ethnicities, or age groups.

However, there are some overarching trends that confirm the thesis that unlivability is unevenly distributed across demographic categories and geopolitical lines. For example, there are some nations where people predominantly struggle with temporal pressure and a slight degree of economic difficulty, whereas other countries face the overlap between the three forms of hardship, all at very high levels. The Appendix presents recent international studies that chart the annual GDP per capita by country against a) hours slept per day and b) number of hours worked per year. Interestingly, but not unexpectedly, there are clear correlations between financial poverty and time poverty, as well as between financial wealth, longer sleep duration and less working hours. With some exceptions, countries where the annual GDP is above

$40,000 per annuum sleep over 7 hours and 15 minutes. Conversely, countries where the GDP is below $30,000 sleep on average less than 7 hours per night.

Similar kinds of geopolitical disparity appear in meta-analyses that document the historical change in hours worked per year, by country. Giattino *et al*. report a notable decline in the working hours for early-industrialised countries over the last 150 years (2020). However, the same decrease did not happen for "developing" countries, that is, countries that were colonised and economically marginalised. Indeed, Giattino and his co-authors acknowledge that "there are still large differences between countries: workers in poorer countries tend to work much more than workers in richer countries" (2020; see Charts 2, 3 and 4 in Appendix). With 2,475 hours worked per year, Cambodia was the most overworked country in 2019. That is the same number of hours that most European nations were working at the start of the twentieth century.

Upon a revision of the various datasets, the idea that severe unlivability lies in the overlap of different forms of hardship starts to become visible: the nations that according to Table 7 (Appendix) work the most are the same nations that in Chart 1 sleep the least. Cambodia, Myanmar and Bangladesh (top 3 in Table 7) are not in the first chart because the very poverty of their workers prevented them from being potential Sleep Cycle users but, because these are sweatshop-driven countries, they would surely be in Chart 1's lower left quadrant too. With the exception of South Africa and China (ranked 6 and 7), every country in the top 16 of the most overworked countries (Table 7) sleeps under 7 hours.

As Giattino *et al.* note, gender is another "key dimension along which large within-country inequalities exist" (2020). Sadly, as Chart 8 in the Appendix demonstrates, all countries surveyed by 2016 remained below the gender parity line in terms of leisure time, with some countries displaying a markedly unequal ratio between men and women's leisure time. The problem, clearly, is the amount of unpaid social reproduction and care work that women perform and that in patriarchally dominated countries are not even conceived as work. The other side of this problem is the lack of state support, benefits, and caregiving facilities, which often translates into a burden on the time-budget of women. This is further aggravated by the gender pay-gap, another social ill with the same origin as the leisure time gap. If on average "women earn 24

percent less than men and perform two and a half times more unpaid care and domestic work than men" (Elson, 2017), not only does this mean that they have much less rest and leisure time, but also that they are more susceptible to experiencing unlivability understood as the clash between actual capacities, present conditions, and unsatisfiable demands.

A brief note on leisure time: I maintain it should not be thought of as a luxury, but rather as part of the essential "down" time through which we recover from tiredness and stress. Spending time for oneself doing leisure activities should be understood as part of the regular routine through which persons (consciously and unconsciously) preserve, or safeguard, their physical, mental and emotional health. In this sense, general time-poverty always entails leisure time-poverty and this makes people more vulnerable to stress, exhaustion, and a low immune system. This, in turn, creates a vicious cycle where permanently tired individuals perform less well in all respects and therefore become less likely to be able to emerge from a precarious situation. Thus, the lack of leisure time makes it *objectively* harder for people to survive the unlivable tension between workload demands, economic hardship and physical exhaustion. In terms of *subjective* experience, the absence of leisure time worsens cortisol levels and further reinforces the sense of being trapped in an endless rat race where there is no respite, and nothing to look forward to. Furthermore, leisure and what Alex Soojung-Kim Pang terms *deliberate rest* (2018) contribute to our creative capacities.

The different data we have assessed throughout this section shows that the amount of sleep people get, the number of hours people work, and the GDP per capita are all influenced, and thus partly determined, by a country's socio-economic status. Life in poor countries tends to be characterised by the unlivable combination of short nights, long workdays and a low GDP. For semi-developed countries, there is also substantial pressure to work many hours per week, but workers have better salaries. But even in wealthy nations people struggle with precarious contracts, immense workloads and stress. As I stated earlier, it is also important to recognise other factors such as gender, ethnicity and social class that make the exposure to these pressures unequal even for people living in the same country.

We are therefore speaking of different forms of unlivability, forms that are indissociable from their social, cultural, political and economic contexts, and to which people are exposed in the most unequal ways. Despite their incommensurability, it is nonetheless possible to identify the imprint of the neoliberal forms of government that everywhere produce precarity and that corrode the conditions for living and acting. It is having assimilated unlivability as a condition that is, as Butler says of precarity, "both singular and plural", that I now develop the notion of an 'unlivable temporality'.

3. Unlivable temporality

3.1. Defining an unlivable temporality

Temporal unlivability can also be formulated inversely, as the inhabiting of an *unlivable temporality.* Having previously defined the terms 'unlivable' and 'temporality', the definition of an *unlivable temporality* now appears as quite straightforward: it is an ordering of time which exhibits a contradictory *tension* between the demands it issues and the conditions it provides for the satisfaction of those demands, and which results in a diminished life, permanently on the brink of collapse[4].

Now, because unlivability is unevenly distributed across social categories, it would be extremely reductionist to speak of 'an unlivable temporality' in the singular. Rather, different populations are confronted with different temporalities where unlivability factors (which are also multiple) will be more or less present. In spite of these demographic variations, I contend that contemporary temporalities are all bound by the central fact that they stand in a symbiotic relationship to neoliberal capitalism. Thus, if at certain moments I speak of a neoliberal capitalist temporality in the singular, this will be for the sake of a more general argument, but never intending to obscure with this overarching abstraction the plurality of concrete time-regimes that shape our lives.

[4] In fact, part of the subjective experience of unlivability is an awareness of that tension.

As I will also demonstrate in Chapter 3, neoliberal capitalist temporalities promote the exploitation (or self-exploitation) of human resources to the last productive minute of their day while the associated social structures, policies and discourses continue to place ever more demands on individuals, whom they posit as 24/7 automatons. This is achieved through the (literal) incorporation of a variety of devices that measure and record the amounts of time subjects spend on every activity, either productive or recreational, and that then relay the data between them, effectively creating a surveillance society (cf. Han, 2015). This trend has become further exacerbated by the post-pandemic shift to online work, or home-office, and its long-term consequences are yet to be seen.

An unlivable temporality is one in which, quite literally, it is impossible to continue living for an extended period of time. As they try to keep up, most persons manifest a severe decline in health, many experience burnout and others, at the very extreme, commit suicide or die from physical exhaustion (Kobayashi and Middlemiss, 2009). These examples respond to the concept of 'bioderegulation' coined by Teresa Brennan to describe the disparity between the demands of the insatiable economic world and our capacities as embodied beings whose biology necessitates certain recovery times to function (2003). This incompatibility between imposed and required time-regimes can also be conceptualized as pertaining to the first of the three kinds of desynchronisation that, according to Rosa, afflict us today[5].

3.2. Bioderegulation as a contributor to unlivability

The import of time in the widening abyss between what we are pushed to achieve or become and what we can effectively do without sacrificing our health is underscored by Teresa Brennan, who writes, "time and speed matter because of an ongoing tension between the speed of production and the way that the reproduction of natural resources, including labour-power,

[5] The three forms are: that between structurally-induced temporal patterns and the temporal patterns of actors; secondly, the incongruence between the three horizons of time that guide actors; and finally, the manner in which some social subsystems or productive sectors (for instance, the economy, or science and technology) outpace others (e.g. law and politics) (2013).

cannot keep pace with that speed" (2003, 12). Since here too we encounter the vocabulary of tensions and breaches, we can conceive of unlivability from a time-centred perspective as the condition of being suspended in "the gap between the speed at which natural resources and human beings are used up and the time they need to regenerate" (13). Brennan notes that, in their attempt to bridge that gulf, humans force themselves to conform "to the new rules of inhuman time" (19) imposed by economic deregulation, which is as ruthless towards nature as it is towards them: "just as that pace outstrips the ability of nature to reproduce or sustain itself, so too does it press human beings to their limits" (22). Brennan thus proposes the term 'bioderegulation' to name the biological consequences of this attempt to survive in precarity. Strictly speaking, 'bioderegulation' could refer to the dis-adjustment of biological cycles in any living organism due to any cause. However, Brennan uses it to describe, primarily, the erosion "of the internal constraints protecting" a human body that overworks itself and, secondly, the crumbling of over-exploited natural resources:

> The difference is that human beings press themselves willingly. They berate themselves for laziness or keep on when they should stop, ignorant of the price they will pay for the money they make, or anxiously aware of that price, but lacking an alternative when the cost of living steadily outstrips salaries and wages. What the human mind has devised is now at war with the human body, and this, too, is a question of regulation, in that the body's "self-regulating systems" are overridden by the pace and demand of production. To match that pace, the human mind demands that the body sacrifice its own good, or "deregulate." The deregulated body is one that goes without enough sleep, rest, proper food – taking prescribed drugs to silence its chronic illnesses and escalating allergies (22).

The central aspect worth retaining here is the image of the deregulated human body, to which we will return. Although slightly nuanced, the claim that humans press themselves willingly hardly holds in the conditions of induced precarity that frame our reflection. Saying this obscures precisely those forms of neoliberal subjectification which I wish to highlight as correlated to the production of unlivability. Brennan then moves on to speak of deregulation in general terms, and explains:

> Deregulation does not mean the absence of all forms of regulation; it means passing regulation to the machine. The faster the machine can go, the greater the temptation to make all components of production (including human labor) perform at the same pace. Where deregulation abolishes labor standards, so labor can be regulated by the machine, labor is more likely to be pushed past reasonable limits (20).

It is worth marking the similarity between this paragraph and the first pages of *24/7*, where Jonathan Crary notes the unprecedented extent to which human capacities and cognition are being manipulated to match those of machines. As a gruesome example, he details how the US Department of Defense is funding scientific research on how to enable the human brain to go without sleep "while preserving high levels of mental and physical performance" (2). Presciently, he notes that "the sleepless soldier would be the forerunner of the sleepless worker or consumer" (3). Some pages later, he presents 24/7 as "a non-social model of *machinic performance* and a suspension of living that does not disclose the human cost required to sustain its effectiveness" (Crary, 9; my emphasis). As we will see in the next chapter, this violence that subjects human life to the yoke of uninterrupted labour is central to the operation of the contemporary capitalist system. The fact that regulation, as Brennan says, is passed on to the machine does not mean that (de)regulation is value-neutral: rather, it means that it is in the service of capitalist growth and surplus value production. What Brennan calls "natural constraints" no longer matter; the engine's maximal capacity is understood as the only limitation to the speed of production. In Chapter 4 we will look at examples of what we could call the machinic temporality of capitalist production, and see how the normative axis of this temporal cartography is centred on the maximisation of production.

Brennan, however, fails to account for the fundamental mechanisms that cause deregulation in the first place, as when, for instance, she writes: "the other side of deregulation in all its forms […] is the increasing pace of production, distribution, exchange and consumption". She does not properly unpack how it is the capitalist imperative to accelerate the production and consumption cycle which produces and encourages all forms of deregulation. The command to always increase the output is not "the other side", or a by-product, of deregulation: it is the driver of the tendency itself. Furthermore, Brennan's excessively loose usage of the word "deregulation" subtracts analytical potential from it. This is apparent in her affirmation that "bioderegulation

erodes the internal constraints protecting the body at the same time as deregulation in the legal sense steals human time in the name of market freedom" (19). She speaks of bioderegulation, legal deregulation, and also of commercial deregulation and globalisation as if they were all simultaneous and same-level processes when, in fact, they all remain incomparable in many respects. Although they are both metaphors, 'bioderegulation' illustrates a natural response and surrender to prolonged duress, while 'legal deregulation' names a set of more abstract and complex exercises of power within an intersubjective field of political and juridical norms. Whereas the latter is a legitimation strategy for the relentless value-extraction from what Jason Moore calls 'the web of life' (2015), the former designates the actual jamming of the web of life's internal clock. These are not, as Brennan claims, parallel and homologous but rather two qualitatively different and causally connected processes.

Leaving aside these weaknesses, the advantage of Brennan's account is that it demonstrates that bioderegulation is the cost of pushing our capacities to their limits, and that its effects are further aggravated by the tearing down of the social infrastructures with which states are supposed to protect and support their citizens:

> The personal shortfall**,** between what a body can do and what it is asked to do, is not only met by travelling further or migrating or working harder and working longer. It is exacerbated by unemployment or underpayment, rising living costs and indebtedness. These are the results of an economy in which time for human regeneration becomes expensive (Brennan, 22).

As is plain to the reader, the above factors are precisely those which Butler groups under the label of precaritisation, understood as the neoliberally-driven destruction of the conditions for livability. What this piece of research seeks to do is precisely analyse how and under what logics time for human regeneration has become expensive, and then reclaim it as an indispensable, nonnegotiable condition for dignified human life.

To summarise, if unlivability describes our world, it does so as much in economic and spatial terms, as in temporal ones. This is why I propose to speak of an unlivable temporality, a theoretical construct to help us imagine the normative forces that are exerted upon our transit through time. I also argue that whilst temporalities have always dictated the pace of social

cogwheels, and many of them have been hostile, the current temporality of neoliberal capitalism is the most pervasive one yet and exhibits a number of unprecedented traits[6].

4. Neoliberal capitalism

As an indispensable methodological positioning, I will now make explicit my understanding and usage of the words 'capitalism' and 'neoliberalism' throughout this work. This piece of research intends to study the governmentalisation of time as we experience it nowadays, that is, in the face of ICTs, globalisation, financialisation, and in a post-pandemic world. This is certainly a complex scenario that escapes labelling but, for the sake of convenience, I will mainly refer to it as 'neoliberal capitalism'.

Before I unpack what exactly I understand by 'neoliberalism' and 'capitalism', I will deflect a potential counter-argument in relation to their usage. They are two of the most used and often abused labels in the humanities and social sciences, to the extent that they have become catch-all terms, criticised by some for attempting to pack so much meaning that they end up signifying nothing at all. As Wendy Brown notes in *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* (2019), there is still substantial contestation as to what exactly the word 'neoliberalism' (and, I argue, 'capitalism' too) means in academia. In spite of the disagreement on the semantic boundaries of the terms, I insist their usage is still productive and indicative of macro-phenomena that, like a heavy suitcase, must necessarily be given a lexical grip in order to be carried and handled, no matter how much heterogeneity is inside it. In this vein, Brown argues scholars should not let dissensus in the realm of terminology prevent them from approaching phenomena that have an undeniable and transdisciplinary significance:

> as is the case with other world-altering formations, including capitalism, socialism, liberalism, feudalism, Christianity, Islam, and fascism, ongoing intellectual contestation about their underlying principles, elements, unity, logics, and dynamics *does not vitiate their world-*

[6] A few parts of Chapter 1 and 3 are included in the article "Unlivably Accelerated Work: How Neoliberal Capitalist Temporalities Produce Labour Precarity" (2025) in *Las Torres de Lucca, International Journal of Political Philosophy,* vol. 14 (1) Dossier 'Critical approaches to work in the neoliberal era: social suffering, politics of bodies and new democratic imaginaries', invited eds. Alessandro Pinzani, Laura Quintana y Alfredo Sánchez Santiago. https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/ltdl.95882

> *making power*. Neoliberalism— the ideas, the institutions, the policies, the political rationality— has, along with its spawn, financialization, likely shaped recent world history as profoundly as any other nameable phenomenon in the same period, even if scholars continue to debate precisely what both are (2019, 17; my emphasis).

Here, we see how Brown uses the term 'neoliberalism' as an encompassing signifier to refer to a cluster of ideas, social entities, structural formations, governing techniques, *etcetera*. Abiding by Brown's defense, I will proceed to define first 'capitalism' and, secondly, 'neoliberalism' in order to then integrate them as 'neoliberal capitalism' to speak of the distinctively contemporary system that structures our lives today.

4.1. Defining capitalism

The most basic definition of capitalism that one can encounter in the literature is one like that provided by Maggie Humm: "an economic system in which the means of production are in private ownership" (1990, 23), but this is as incomplete a definition as it is unsatisfactory. We will start by contesting the fact that capitalism is not, and never was, merely an economic system, for it determines all processes within a social body. As concerns capitalism's primary goal or orientation, we will retain Andrea Fumagalli's succinct appraisal of capitalism as "a process [or paradigm] of accumulation and valorization" (2011, 7).

The other crucial feature of capitalism is that "it depends on the exploitation of underclass groups for its survival" (Hooks, 2015). It cannot be stated enough that every step in the development of capitalism, since its origin, has been cemented on the oppression of a subjected Other, be it female, black, indigenous, or 'nature'. Rosemarie Tong integrates the economic and the oppressive traits into a more comprehensive definition that looks at capitalism from two different angles:

> when viewed as a system of exchange relations, [it] is described as a commodity or market society in which everything, including one's labor power, has a price and all transactions are fundamentally exchange transactions. Capitalism, when viewed as a system of power relations,

> is described as a society in which every kind of transactional relation is fundamentally exploitative (Tong, 1998, 96).

In relation to the marketability of everything, it is worth underscoring that Marx himself identifies as the main characteristic of "the capitalist age" that "in the eyes of the labourer himself labour-power assumes the form of a commodity belonging to him" (Marx in Lukács, 1967, np). Lukács here foregrounds that the category of abstract labour, which we now see as an incontestable measuring-rod, "the labour of the capitalist division of labour existing both as the presupposition and the product of capitalist production, is born only in the course of the development of the capitalist system" (1967, np). So, as a preliminary definition based on the synthesis of the above, we can say capitalism is *a system of both exchange and power relations* that yields the ceaseless *accumulation of profit* by those who own the means of production through the *exploitation of those who are forced to sell their labour power.*

As the reader can see, I have been building a stacked definition of capitalism, where every layer brings more detail and complexity to the object's characterisation. The works of Deleuze and Guattari, and of Etienne Balibar, can provide us with the finest-grained layer in this attempt to portray capitalism in high definition, so to speak. For Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism is "neither a 'mode of production' nor is it a system: rather, it is a series of devices for machinic enslavement and for social subjection" (Lazzarato, 2006). I agree with Deleuze, Guattari and Lazzarato[7] that capitalism is not a system in the sense of an impervious material structure, but I think it is certainly a system in the sense of a logical construct with a consistency of its own. Just as Lazzarato holds that devices "are machines, but [they] do not depend on techne"[8], I hold that systems can be (ideo)logical and discontinuous structures. In other words, a system such as capitalism cannot be represented as the neat correlation between, for example, ascending in a job hierarchy and occupying a higher floor in a building. In their endeavour to grasp the pillars of a capitalism that is conceived from an almost transhistorical perspective, Deleuze and Guattari propose in *Mille Plateaux* the notion of an "axiomatics of capitalism":

[7] Although Lazzarato does actually use the phrase "capitalist system" in the following section of that essay.

[8] On this, he writes, "The technological machine is only one instance of machinism. There are also technical, aesthetic, economic, social, etc. machines" (2006).

> Axiomatics directly considers purely functional elements and relations whose nature is not specified, and which are realised simultaneously in very diverse domains, whereas the codes that are relative to these domains enunciate specific relations between qualified elements, that cannot be extrapolated to a superior formal unit (overcoding) except through transcendence and indirectly. Immanent axiomatics, however, finds in the domains that it traverses as many models of realisation" (1980, 567; emphasis in original, my translation).

The axiomatics of capitalism is primarily characterised by working at the level of decoded flows, two examples of which are bare labour and independent capital. And it is at this level that it becomes easier to behold how the above-mentioned processes of accumulation and valorisation-through-exploitation have been unfolding since the Renaissance and the colonisation enterprises. This corresponds to what Etienne Balibar calls 'historical capitalism', a process spanning "four or five centuries […] in which valorization has seized one domain of life and human agency after another, and particularly reproduction after production" (Balibar, 2020, 285). Balibar's 'historical capitalism' is similar to what Jason Moore and Raj Patel call the Capitalocene, although the latter is conceived not only in historical but also in geological terms:

> We argue that what changed is capitalism, that modern history has, since the 1400s, unfolded in what is better termed the Capitalocene. Using this name means taking capitalism seriously, understanding it not just as an economic system but as a way of organizing the relations between humans and the rest of nature (2018, 14).

Their argument, which will be of relevance to us later, is that the list of serious ecological problems the planet and its species now face should not be attributed to the *anthropos*, to Humanity in the abstract, but rather to the "naturalized inequalities, alienation and violence inscribed in modernity's strategic relations of power and production" (Moore, 2015, 173). For these authors, speaking of a 'Capitalocene' thus makes visible the instrumental rationality behind "commodification, imperialism, patriarchy, and racial formations" that the Anthropocene narrative would otherwise obscure (*ibidem*). So, while the places of the oppressor and the oppressed have been occupied by different groups since the 1400s, and the techniques of subjection have been perfected, the axiomatics of capitalism have remained the guiding principle

for social domination and value production. Here, 'Capitalocene' would be the name for the macro-historical frame within which subsequent capitalisms have appeared as different "models of realisation" of an overarching axiomatics.

The definitions of capitalism I have integrated from the theorists above are useful as an abstract model of how capitalism has "behaved" and adapted throughout the past five centuries of 'historical capitalism', which "emerged from the Great Discoveries and was reborn successively" (Balibar, 284). In this account, historical change does not affect the fundamental axioms of capitalism we identified: *accumulation* (*id est,* capture, extraction) and *valorisation* at the expense of underclass groups; instead, it merely contributes to the "natural" development of capitalism. Now, while the axiomatics of capitalism may indeed have remained untouched by historical vicissitudes in this 'classical' capitalism, what Balibar demonstrates is that *contemporary* capitalism marks a watershed both for history and for these axiomatics. To put it plainly, whereas in 'historical capitalism' the antagonisms and social formations[9] that defined the political, the institutions of modernity, and the nature of market relations maintained more or less the same world-making power, with the advent of global financialised capitalism, all these structures and formations suffer radical transformations. A case in point is the category of labour, whose meaning has expanded to include so-called 'immaterial labour'. In addition, 'labour' has become dissociated from 'productivity': subjects can work long hours and still have low productivity and, by the same token, subjects can unwittingly become productive while they rest or entertain themselves. This blurring of 'productive' and 'unproductive' spheres is identified by Andrea Fumagalli as a key feature of 'cognitive biocapitalism' (2011, 8).

Balibar refuses the notion of an 'end of capitalism' as much as he resists the claim that we are living under just another stage of capitalism within the evolutionist trajectory outlined by Marx. He seeks to displace the opposition between, on the one hand, the idea of a teleologically oriented Capitalism, whose stages and crises can be predicted along a univocal path and, on the other, that of a definitive 'end of capitalism', impossible to imagine in the abstract and without allusion to what would come in its place. Balibar argues instead for an 'absolute capitalism' that,

[9] For Balibar, "the typical social formations of historical capitalism are 'classes' (defined in terms of property) and 'nations'"(285).

albeit historically bred, is now transforming those historical conditions from which it emerged and bringing about new polarizations and hierarchies. He describes our current paradigm as follows:

> Ours is a capitalism that keeps accumulating, in fact, on a broader basis, having achieved a form of 'global transformation' of all dimensions of life under the law of the valorization process (for which private property is just a legal instrument, however indispensable), but whose rules are very different from the rules of yesteryear – a very long yesteryear indeed, since it covers at least five centuries of transformations (2020, 284).

He goes on to explain that "such capitalism does not only *come after* a certain (long-term) history, but *radically modifies* the social formations, the typical conflicts, and the hierarchy of institutions of that history" that served, so to speak, as its breeding ground (284, my emphasis). Paradoxically, Balibar's 'absolute capitalism' appears to us as the most extreme, resilient and totalising execution of Deleuze and Guattari's 'axiomatics of capitalism' but, at the same time, it represents an unprecedented historical moment where the balance of geopolitical powers across the globe, the sources of value-production and the categories of the political are being completely overhauled.

In this section, we first identified the core features of capitalism in order to arrive at a working definition of it as an intrinsically exploitative system of exchange relations that is geared towards accumulation and valorization. We also ascertained how these operations of accumulation and valorization can only be achieved through the continuous subjection of 'underclass groups' (Hooks). Then, turning to Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical framework, we examined how 'machinic enslavement' and 'social subjection' are the two complementary modes of social domination through which capitalism has historically maintained the inequality that is a prerequisite for its existence. The axiomatics of capitalism appear as the value-system that, throughout the past five centuries, has legitimated the 'capture apparatuses' through which different incarnations of capitalism have perpetuated 'machinic enslavement' and 'social subjection' to serve the instrumental accumulation of capital. The violence of capitalism's various machines, in its different historical and geographical instances, proves to be the

executive force that has upheld capitalism throughout what Moore and Patel call the Capitalocene. Finally, we approached Balibar, who argues that contemporary, 'absolute capitalism' represents a break with the previous 'historical capitalism', for it reconfigures the very axiomatics of capitalism, challenging the definition of its decoded flows as well as the ontology of the socio-political terrain that once served as its cradle.

4.2. Defining neoliberalism

Wendy Brown's work is a good starting point for defining neoliberalism because, apprehending it as a "*constellation* of principles, policies, practices and forms of governing reason", it lays bare the heterogeneity within this concept (2019, 9; my emphasis). She then colours it in by offering and integrating two main readings of neoliberalism: a neo-Marxist account and a Foucauldian one. For the neo-Marxists, neoliberalism appears as "an opportunistic attack by capitalists and their political lackeys on Keynesian welfare states, social democracies, and state socialism" (18). Neoliberalism thus rendered is understood as a calibration of economic institutions and social policies for the benefit of the global free market. Thus, the privatization of public services and spaces, the creation of tax havens, the 'race to the bottom' for cheap labour, the emergence of an oligopoly and the exacerbation of inequalities are some of the most evident consequences of this "attack" on welfarism which originated with the Washington Consensus.

The Foucauldian approach, on the other hand, places the emphasis on neoliberalism as "a novel political rationality" where market principles become "ubiquitous governing principles" applied across all spheres of society (Brown, 20). Simultaneously, markets are "built, facilitated, propped up and occasionally even rescued by political institutions" (*ibidem*). The key point, however, is not that these principles exist as one political current among others but rather that they become what Brown calls "saturating reality principles". Nick Couldry, in turn, proposes the notion of 'hegemonic rationality' to illustrate this onto-epistemic collapsing of the world into a flat, uniform order:

> Neoliberalism is, in short, a 'hegemonic rationality' and like all rationalities it reduces the complexities of what it describes. The fundamental term in neoliberalism's reduction of the world is '*market*': neoliberalism presents the social world as made up of markets, and spaces of potential competition that need to be organized as markets, blocking other narratives from view" (Couldry, 2010, 40).

In his 1978-79 lectures, Foucault shows how this reduction of the world to markets is effectively achieved by imposing competition and the figure of *l'entreprise*' on all basic units of society (the household, the family business, the local community, etc), by making them its *puissance informante* (2004, 154; paraph). And by extension, *homo oeconomicus* is converted "from a subject of exchange and the satisfaction of needs (classical liberalism) into a subject of competition and human capital enhancement (neoliberalism)" (Brown, 2019, 20). It is only because of this shift in what Brown calls "values, coordinates and reality principles", that the logics of competition have in recent years invaded social spheres that had never known it before. Thus, subjects today must valorise themselves not only as qualified professionals, but as potential dating partners, as sperm or egg donors, or as aspiring students in the respective dating, reproductive and educational markets.

Brown's appraisal of the Foucauldian and the neo-Marxist perspectives on neoliberalism resonates with Balibar's claim that neoliberalism is an ambiguous category that "oscillates between an ideological discourse and actual transformations of economic institutions and practices" (280). Balibar seems to present the objective (structural) dimension as counterposed to the subjective (ideational) one, yet Brown finds such an antithetical reading simplistic and thus distances herself from it. Nonetheless, they are both intent on stressing that neoliberalism is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires just as many theoretical lenses in order to understand it in all its complexity. Aligned with this approach and recognising that those different lenses might not be perfectly compatible, I would now like to read these two accounts, the neo-Marxist and the Foucauldian, alongside the work of Nick Couldry, who proposes that neoliberalism creates meaning on three main levels which he calls *neoliberalism proper, neoliberal doctrine, and 'neoliberalism as culture'* (2010, 34). The first level refers to "the market fundamentalist principles advocated, from Friedrich Hayek to Milton Friedman, to institute market functioning

as the "dominant reference-point" not only of economics but also of political and social life. Secondly, Couldry discerns "the wider set of metaphors, languages, techniques and organizational principles that have served to implement neoliberalism proper as the working doctrine of many contemporary democracies" (p. 34). Finally, there is the normalisation of neoliberalism as culture, its "*embedding* as rationality in everyday social organization and imagination" (p. 36). My argument is that the neo-Marxist reading illuminates and critiques the material effects derived from the first and second levels, that is, from the implementation of neoliberal principles by world leaders. On the other hand, the Foucauldian reading, which focuses on governing techniques and modes of subjectification, situates us on the second and third level, where neoliberal discourse becomes the naturalised rationality that structures our cognition of the world and self-understanding. Although Couldry's proposal of three levels works for an analytical reading, I understand these levels as having no priority one over the other and consider that in the real world it is impossible to prise them apart: for example, commercial advertising is informed by culture but also remakes culture and public debates, which then feed into policy-making but also clash with lobbying, etcetera. With these caveats in mind, Couldry's model remains useful since it allows us to produce a more pliable and multi-dimensional image of neoliberalism.

A final aspect to integrate into this picture of neoliberalism is its insidious corrosion of the social. Theorists have used a variety of phrasings to describe this tendency, but they all revolve around the semantic field of 'destruction'. Butler claims neoliberal rationality "destroys" the possibility of economic self-sufficiency, and "decimates social services" (14-5). In Brown, "neoliberal economic policy devastate[s] rural and suburban regions, emptying them of decent jobs, pensions, schools, services, and infrastructure as social spending drie[s] up" (2020, 40). Likewise, Balibar notes "neoliberalism systematically destroys the commons and abolishes the limits of commodification" (287). Lazzarato argues this dismantling of the social is achieved through three parallel strategies: "individualization, insecuritization and depoliticization used as part of neoliberal social policy to undermine the principles and practices of mutualization and redistribution that the Welfare State and Fordism had promoted" (2009, 109). Like Butler, who always reminds us this is an *induced* precarity, the Italian theorist foregrounds that these conditions are deliberately produced by the compound operation of discursive and non-

discursive *dispositifs* whose aim is "to constitute the world in a determinate way" so as to govern the conduct of individuals. A final point worth noting in this respect is the argument put forth by Balibar that absolute capitalism, which already incorporates neoliberalism, "needs to make use of the very public structures and social functions that it seeks to delegitimize and undermine. It must keep alive (even if starving) what it destroys continuously" (287). An example of this turn of the screw is the fact that the health of large banks depends, in the last instance, on the nation state whose public spending they constrict and steer to their own benefit. In the same way, Lazzarato shows how the pension system has become coopted by enterprises, which use the pension funds of their employees as a fiscal resource.

The same perverse exploitation of an *unacknowledged presupposition* happens in relation to the realm of unpaid labour, the care economy and social reproduction, which are nothing less than the foundations for social life. They involve the time-consuming activities necessary to satisfy the basic needs of, for instance, the average entrepreneur of the self that is required to spend from 8 to 10 hours per day at the office and has a long commute. The system that pays this employee pays only for those 10 hours he spends inside the office but it does not take into account the daily hours needed for this employee to rest, shop, cook, eat, and get ready to re-appear as a functional human resource the next day at the same time. The disembodied company that *employs*, in every sense of the word, these bodies thus externalises all the time and energy costs –often performed by others: unpaid family relative, underpaid carer or subcontracted cleaner— needed to sustain the everyday necessities of their workers[10]. The fact that the Covid-19 pandemic has normalised the home-office model does not make this trend any less real. If anything, it makes this externalisation even worse: by having their employees do the same amount of work (or more, as myriad studies have shown; see Osborne, 2021) from home, companies do not even need to pay for the rent, water and electricity of the workplace.

In the preceding paragraphs we have identified some of the main features of neoliberalism by following Wendy Brown's integration of the neo-Marxist and the Foucauldian accounts of

[10] The fact that cooking, cleaning and caring for others are often underpaid or unpaid and unacknowledged occupations, and that these are often performed by women or non-white people shows how by this token the time of these social groups is also systematically de-valued by the capitalist system.

this ‘constellation’. The Foucauldian vantage point shows how with neoliberal ‘reality principles’, the world is construed as a market and subjects as nothing but competing entrepreneurs of the self. Neoliberalism is thus a ‘hegemonic rationality’ (Couldry) that is premised upon an individualistic ontology and whose central tenets are the figure of the enterprise and competition between social actors. We then paired the two accounts with Couldry’s theses on how neoliberalism creates meaning along three planes, in order to conclude it has indeed become a heterogeneous world-altering formation that permeates our social lives at every level, from policy-making to our collective imaginaries. Finally, we recognised the destructive drive of neoliberalism vis-à-vis public institutions and services, and towards any sense of political community. For this, we drew attention to Balibar’s claim that capitalism uses socialist institutions for its own agenda, and to the article where Lazzarato demonstrates how neoliberal *dispositifs* “promote insecurity, inequality and individualization” as part of the governing techniques of contemporary enterprise societies.

4.3. Neoliberal capitalism as a mutating species

To recapitulate our theoretical examination, it is clear no one concept will ever be sufficient to capture the intricacy of our current paradigm; and yet, this paradigm must be named in order to be theoretically manipulated. Therefore, in this thesis I will refer to it with the phrase ‘neoliberal capitalism’ as defined above. I also resort to other, more recent and less popular, denominations such as ‘post-Fordism’, ‘absolute capitalism’ (Balibar) or ‘cognitive biocapitalism’ (Fumagalli) to foreground specific aspects of this capitalism, from different critical angles. My main descriptive intention in using all these terms, however, remains univocal: to make visible what is the latest stage of capitalism but is also, as advanced by Balibar, an altogether different brand of capitalism, one that, through endless mutations, has come to transform its own conditions of emergence and persistence.

Contemporary capitalism proves to be singular and plural at the same time: singular insofar as it is an unprecedented phenomenon with common features worldwide, plural in that it manifests in a thousand guises and recycles its own effects as causes for further expansion.

Because the singular and the plural converge in the biological notion of a 'species', Callison and Manfredi's mature understanding of 'neoliberalism' as a mutating species is a valuable tool for theorisation:

> Rather than treating neoliberalism as a monolithic ideology to be either vanquished once and for all or embraced and sustained *en toto*, the volume theorizes its multiple and mutating forms—as an intellectual and political project, a program of economic governance, a form of normative reason, and an order of material production (2020, 2).

I contend that it is precisely the neoliberal 'gene' in the capitalist code what is allowing capitalism to mutate faster and adjust to even the most inhospitable environments. For what neoliberal discourse does, in its recent entwining with neo-conservatism, is it naturalises the enthronement of "market freedom and moral traditionalism" while de-democratising the state (Brown, 2020, 43, 47). Neoliberal capitalism is thus synonymous with a relentless erosion of the political, whose consequences we will address in the final sections of this thesis.

I have provided a rather ample definition of neoliberalism: one which, while it broadly understands 'neoliberalism' as a historical marker, seeks to foreground the multiplicity of intertwined social phenomena that this term descriptively encompasses. I wish, however, to make explicit that, in relation to contemporary time regimes, neoliberalism represents a direct exacerbation of their unlivability. Neoliberalism makes our spatio-temporal cartographies unlivable chiefly through the dismantling of the welfare state and of what Butler calls institutions of social support. As Butler and Athanasiou (2013), Lazzarato (2009) and Lorey (2015) among many others have argued, neoliberalism is connected to an unprecedented wave of insecuritisation processes, whereby people become increasingly exposed to different forms of hardship while their prospects for economic self-sufficiency dwindle. Three key aspects of the characteristically *neoliberal* production of precarity in this sense are those I describe on pages 38-39: insecuritisation, the creation of debt, and the privatisation of formerly public institutions. By destroying livable conditions, these trends drive individuals to economically desperate situations, which, in turn, make them more likely to accept jobs that have an element of exploitation, unfairness or labour precarity. As I show in Chapter 3, such jobs are often structured

around unlivable time regimes that have a tremendous impact in the physical and mental health of workers. The neoliberal resistance to legal regulation also comes into play here, for the payment of unfair wages and, more generally, the imposition of exploitative or hazardous working conditions remain a significant issue in countries and in industries where there are no adequate sanctions for employers in place.

With the above, I have sought to make clearer, first, the link between neoliberalism and the inducement of socio-economic vulnerability. Now, this link extends even further, to the matter of temporal unlivability, if we consider how cases of extreme poverty and socio-economic vulnerability correspond to the condition of having to spend most of one's waking hours working (either to be able to purchase the next meal, buy a medicine, or offset the debts into which one has already incurred). An important reason why this condition is unlivable is because it represents a form of imprisonment in time: in a time that is eminently organised according to neoliberal logics. Through its inducement of precarity, destitution and socio-economic vulnerability, neoliberalism therefore corners people into unlivable situations, where their capacities to act and the horizon of what they can do with their time are subordinated to and constrained, but never annulled, by their struggle for daily survival.

Chapter 2 will now lead us into a socio-historical analysis of the conceptual pillars through which neoliberal capitalism came to erect today's unlivable temporalities. Finding support in the works of Rosa, Crary, Martineau, and Lukács, I will show how the emergence of capitalism was premised, from the beginning, on a certain understanding of time as a substance to be domesticated into divisible parts, and to be conquered through ever-increasing acceleration. The latter half of that chapter will examine the role of rationalisation in relation to labour-time and then ask after the changes in the sale of this modern commodity brought about by neoliberal developments.

Chapter II. Theoretical models of capitalist time

This chapter proposes to study the specific temporalities produced by the amalgamation of capitalist and neoliberal techniques of government and subjectification. The objectives are, first, to lay bare how our widespread time-scarcity and "damaged sense of time" (Butler, 2015) – which are generally construed as the normal way of life, or as part of the "natural", *ergo* unchangeable, pace of the world— are in fact the result of the unlivable temporalities that are established and perpetuated by the neoliberal-capitalist 'machine' (*sensu* Deleuze and Guattari). Secondly, to show how these time structures are not external to the prevalence of the neoliberal-capitalist complex but rather constitutive of it. For this, I collate the arguments propounded by four social theorists whose different perspectives supplement each other. In the first section, I approach Hartmut Rosa's work in order to reconstruct the manner in which accelerated temporalities become wrought and imposed on social life for the preservation of the *status quo*. Then, I comment on Jonathan Crary's book *24/7* to colour in greater detail the intricacy of the ties between capitalism, neoliberal subject-production and the experience of unlivability. The third section is based on *Time, Capitalism and Alienation* (2015) by Jonathan Martineau, who provides vital insights on how abstract clock-time coalesced into a capitalist time-regime and proves essential for its processes of value-production. Finally, I will establish a dialogue between Martineau's text and Georg Lukács touchstone essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" to further elucidate the phenomenon of the rationalisation of time and what its far-reaching consequences are.

1. Social acceleration

Hartmut Rosa sets forth the Theory of Social Acceleration as a new framework from which to interpret modernity. Rosa identifies that sociological analyses of modernity have been traditionally informed by four perspectives which are prevalent

> for example, in the works of Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, and Marx, respectively: culture, social structure, personality type, and relation to nature. From these perspectives, or material dimensions, the process of modernization is identifiable as a process of rationalization,

> differentiation, individualization, or instrumental domestication, respectively (fig. 1) (Rosa and Scheuerman, 2009, 78-9).

Yet, for Rosa, they remain partial and inadequate accounts of modernity as long as the dimension of time is absent from the analysis. He therefore proposes the idea of 'social acceleration' as an independent but also a more fundamental category that "irreducibly cuts across the 'cornerstones' of the 'classical' analytical grid" (2013, 61). When he argues that it is an 'independent' principle of modernity, he means that the phenomena of acceleration cannot be explained as side effects of the other basic categories and their study demands 'acceleration' as an *analytically* separate category (2013, 23). In phenomenological terms, however, Rosa notes that social time runs across all four dimensions and "cannot neatly be separated from them" (Rosa and Scheuerman, 2009, 79). Because the temporal dimension traverses all aspects of social life and because it plays a crucial part in their constitution, Rosa refuses to configurate 'social acceleration' as merely a fifth, additional perspective of analysis. Instead, he grants it epistemological primacy arguing acceleration "seems to represent the principle that connects and drives" the other tendencies of modernization (2013, 61).

1.1. Definition of social acceleration

Rosa proceeds to offer what aims to be an "analytically adequate and empirically useful" definition of social acceleration:

> The recourse to Newtonian physics is more helpful if one replaces the distances contained in the given equations with an abstract quantitative variable. Acceleration can then be defined as *an increase in quantity per unit of time* (or, logically equivalent, as a reduction of the amount of time per fixed quantity). Various things may serve as the quantity measured: distance traveled, total number of communicated messages, amount of goods produced (category 1) or the number of jobs per working lifetime or change in intimate partners per year (category 2) or action episodes per unit of time (category 3; see figure 2.1) (2013, 65).

With this general definition as a starting point, he is able to bring together a diversity of phenomena under the tag of 'social acceleration' and then classify them into three sub-

categories: technical acceleration, acceleration of social change, and acceleration of the pace of life. Broadly speaking, technical acceleration refers to intentional, machine-based and goal-directed processes of acceleration and optimisation. The second kind of acceleration relates to the increasing speed at which different forms of social change are taking place: "The underlying idea is that *rates of change themselves are changing*. Thus, attitudes and values as well as fashions and lifestyles, social relations and obligations… as well as forms of practice and habits, are said to change at ever-increasing rates" (Rosa and Scheuerman, 2009, 83; my emphasis). Finally, Rosa proposes the "heightening of the pace of life" as a third subdivision to capture the trend of shortening or condensing more episodes of action per unit of time as is the case in, for example, consuming fast food, speed dating, power naps or multitasking (2013, 64). Important to note here is that even though these are logically independent types of acceleration, they "mutually reinforce each other in a self-amplifying circular movement" (Rosa *et al*., 2017, 58).

1.2 Dynamic stabilisation, the strategy of capitalism

Rosa's early work was centred on satisfying a gap in the largely de-temporalised sociological literature on modernity by advancing 'social acceleration' as a more systematic approach to examine the causes, phenomena and consequences of contemporary social change. In recent years, however, his descriptive intention has extended to a more critical-normative stance, as can be seen in *Alienation and Acceleration* (2012) and in his article "Appropriation, Activation and Acceleration: The Escalatory Logics of Capitalist Modernity and the Crises of Dynamic Stabilization". In the latter, Rosa, Dörre and Lessenich apprehend *social acceleration* as just one component of a larger process they denominate *dynamic stabilisation*, which is the mark of modern societies. According to their Triple-A-Theory, dynamic stabilisation is achieved through the "socio-economic *appropriation* of land, resources and capacities"; secondly, by "cumulative social, technological and cultural *acceleration"* and, thirdly, by relentless "political and 'governmental' *activation* of the population" (Rosa, *et. al.*, 2017, 56; my emphasis). In this new, more comprehensive model Rosa's notion of social acceleration, with its three subdivisions, is recast as one of three key mechanisms that in conjunction achieve dynamic stabilisation.

Being the only way in which modern societies can secure their durability, dynamic stabilisation provides another way of defining them:

> [A] society can be called modern when its mode of stabilization is dynamic, i.e. when it *needs (material) growth, (technological) augmentation and high rates of (cultural) innovation in order to reproduce its structure and to preserve the socioeconomic and political status quo* in terms of its functionality and its basic institutional and distributional order (Rosa *et. al.*, 2017, 54).

Here, Rosa and his co-authors emphasise that when speaking of a dynamically-stabilising society, they are not implying it needs growth or innovation to "achieve some new goal or progressive state" but just in order to continue existing and functioning (*ibidem*). The German scholars then show that dynamic stabilisation can be best appreciated in (the operation of) capitalist economies and argue that it is the trait which has given them the notable robustness and adaptability necessary to survive historical upheavals and crises. Hence, they write:

> All known capitalisms to date could only establish themselves as relatively stable formations when they managed to integrate the systemic imperative of dynamization into their specific 'social orders' (Streeck, 2009). Capitalism, therefore, does not simply denote a type of society that relies on the market as a mechanism of coordination, on the self-valorization of value or on bureaucratic rationalization. Capitalist systems in all varieties resemble a bicycle that gains in stability with the speed of its forward motion, while it easily tips when slowing down or coming to a halt (2017, 56).

Several insights must be drawn from the above. First, that capitalist societies are the modern forms of social organization which have best incorporated dynamic stabilisation as their mode of reproduction. Secondly, that if a society stabilises dynamically, this already implies it is characterised by a structural need for constant growth and escalation just in order to persist. In other words, the endurance of this type of society through time is conditioned upon its incessant expansion: either it keeps growing or it collapses; either it keeps going faster, or it falls. Third, that dynamic stabilisation is not an accessory but rather a *constitutive, built-in* feature of capitalism as a historical power formation. Crucially, this means that acceleration, the temporal vein of dynamic stabilisation in Rosa's account, proves to be a condition *sine qua non* of capitalism. This is why Rosa, Dörre and Lessenich contend that "the principle of acceleration can be identified as a shared essence of all capitalisms, whereby intra-capitalist changes of formation […] can be reconstructed as being based on the logic of escalation of speed (Harvey, 1990, 2010)" (2017, 58).

In more particular terms, the link between capitalism, dynamic stabilisation and value-production is what explains the need for the acceleration of production. While absolute surplus-value is produced by the prolongation of the workday (overtime), relative surplus value is obtained through *the acceleration* of the worker's labour (via time pressure and automation) so the contraction of his necessary labour-time yields the extension of his surplus-labour time, in a workday with fixed length (Marx, 2008, p. 220). Acceleration thus proves a fundamental element for the capitalist production of relative surplus value, for to the extent to which capital is able to increase the efficiency of its means of production (workers and machines), it can obtain greater profits.

1.3. Slowdown and inertia in late capitalism

Although capitalism, now as before, largely depends on dynamic stabilisation, this does not mean, as Rosa himself is careful to note, "that in contemporary society absolutely *everything* is accelerating" (2013, 23). In this sense, we must also acknowledge that some phenomena and processes resist acceleration or even manifest tendencies to slow down. This is particularly relevant insofar as, according to Rosa, "slowdown and stoppage are appearing in modern society ever more frequently and in increasingly severer forms as *unintended consequences* of acceleration processes" (2013, 84). He puts forth the concepts of *dysfunctional deceleration*, for which the traffic jam is the paradigmatic example, and of *pathological slowdown,* epitomised by depression when it arises as a reaction to the social pressure to accelerate (*ibidem*). Rosa also briefly refers to cases of undesired unemployment and economic recession as dysfunctional forms of deceleration. In the former case, workers' inability "to keep up with the high speed of work and innovation demanded" becomes grounds for excluding them from the workforce, "leading to extreme deceleration in the form of undesired unemployment" (Rosa, 2013, 84). Another key driver of unemployment is late capitalism's preference for hiring less people with larger workloads over hiring more people with smaller (reasonable) workloads. This is why Basso affirms that "in this capitalist market society the two diseases, unemployment and overwork, feed off one another, while furiously attacking the very same part of the 'social body' – namely, the working class (or working classes)" (2003, 1). Neoliberal capitalist temporalities, thus, can also manifest for some people as decelerative time regimes. As Rosa argues, this is the

case for the unemployed, for certain minority groups and sects, and for the socially excluded. This does not, however, invalidate the thesis that most social spheres and especially the contemporary labour market are overwhelmingly inundated by the forces of social acceleration. It does not conflict, either, with the critique of time poverty put forth by scholars such as Giurge *et al.* (2020).

Rosa identifies that slowdown "is also, to a far greater extent, a side effect of (acceleration-induced) desynchronization phenomena, *e.g.,* in the form of waiting times" (84). As he explains, waiting times occur when a faster system is hindered by a slower one with which it needs to be synchronised. But waiting times today are also often generated by the assymetry between system demand and system capacity, *id est*, by the overload or saturation of systems. This is clear in the case of technological, bureaucratic, medical and many other service-provider systems, where system overloads occur in the form of 'traffic jams'. What is interesting here is that capitalism has devised a way to profit even from waiting times. In more and more private services, clients are offered a 'fast lane' with no delays in exchange for an extra fee: "pay more and don't wait, or wait less". The access to services hence becomes de-democratised and is, instead, conditioned upon the financial wealth of users, clients, or patients. The flipside of this elitist bypassing of waiting times is that precarity, unlivability and social vulnerability are related to the situation of having no option but to wait.

Rosa's analyses show how there are "islands of deceleration" in the midst of acceleration, how deceleration is sometimes an unintended effect of acceleration, and how it is sometimes intentionally used as a recovery strategy in preparation for further acceleration (2013). But Lisa Baraitser's work, unfolding from an entirely different perspective, argues that our globalised capitalist societies are in fact producing a paradoxical situation where some people experience an undecidable mixture of *both*, acceleration and deceleration, at the same time. Borrowing the phrase from Ivor Southwood, Baraitser speaks of "non-stop inertia" as

> the temporality of downward mobility under conditions of economic austerity; the search for diminishing viable accommodation, healthcare and welfare; the temporality of the disabled and the under or unemployed who are kept permanently busy being assessed for dwindling

> benefits, or working in low-paid jobs that maintain steady states of poverty; and work that maintains and services debt that is designed not to be repayable in the lifetime of the individuals concerned (Adkins 2012). In this temporal imaginary the present is experienced as time that is both relentlessly driven and yet refuses to flow (Baraitser, 2013, 9).

Baraitser is here portraying a picture of unlivability (unviable accommodation, unpayable debt) and precarity that echoes with that of Butler's (2018). Yet, unlike Butler, she traces a clearer link between unlivable conditions and this experience of time that is "both relentlessly driven" and stagnant. The coexistence of both movement and inertia is due to the fact that the everyday is experienced as constantly hectic, while the longer durée of life is perceived as paralysed. Her words, thus, capture the complexity and plurality of what neoliberal capitalist temporalities actually encompass.

2. 24/7: The principle of continuous functioning

I now turn to the work of Jonathan Crary, who advances a similar argument around the centrality of acceleration to capitalism, albeit with different accents and terminology. In his critical analysis of the "expanding, non-stop lifeworld of twenty-first century capitalism", he propounds the notion of a '24/7 temporality' to describe "the generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning" (2014, 8). Whereas Rosa seems more concerned with the exponential or escalatory dynamics of capitalism, Crary is preoccupied with their *uninterruptedness*. Capitalism, he claims, installs a normative model of permanent activity that "requires 24/7 temporalities for its realization" (15). As we concluded in Chapter 1 while expanding on Rancière's work, the normative element is cardinal in any kind of spatio-temporal distribution. Chapter 4 is devoted to fully explicating the normative model, centred on productivity, growth and efficiency that animates and justifies neoliberal capitalist temporalities as the only temporalities that there can be. Denying the "rhythmic and periodic textures of human life", a 24/7 temporality is instead "aligned with what is inanimate, inert, or unageing" (Crary, 9-10). Crary evokes the painting of *Arkwright's Cotton Mills by Night*, by Wright of Derby, to illustrate capitalism's suppression of "the cyclical temporalities, whether seasonal or diurnal,

around which farming had always been based" (62). In this pictorial representation of how eighteenth-century industrialisation was propelled by artificial lighting, Crary sees

> a radical reconceptualization of the relations between work and time: it is the idea of productive operations that do not stop, of profit-generating work that can function 24/7. At the particular site shown in the painting, a human labor force, including many children, was set to work at the machines in continuous twelve-hour shifts. Marx understood how capitalism was inseparable from this reorganization of the time of living labor, as a way of creating surplus value (62).

Crary thus presents us with a number of major historical shifts that contributed to the progressive lengthening of the work-day, the first being the disconnection of labour from the movements of celestial bodies and their patterns of light and darkness. Then came a variety of other technological achievements that made the productive machinery more and more efficient, until the twentieth century when it became possible to have factories, information and transport networks, and a global stock market running 24/7. Within capitalist teleology, this appears as the logical endpoint of the constant upgrading of the means of production. Yet the turn of the screw brought by neoliberalism, Crary argues, is that it is now humans who are being 'engineered' to better satisfy the demands of capitalism in its 24/7 manifestation: "24/7 markets and a global infrastructure for continuous work and consumption have been in place for some time, but now a human subject is in the making to coincide with these more intensively" (2014, 4).

Crary foregrounds that Marx had already signalled this intrinsic connection between capitalism and continuous functioning at large. He also notes that, parallel to this restructuring of labour time, Marx had identified the shortening of communication lags and the faster circulation of commodities as the other sphere where time was being overhauled: "if circulation was an essential process of capital, it was because of 'the constant continuity of the process'. In effect, Marx is positing *24/7 temporalities as fundamental to the workings of capital"* (Crary, 65; my emphasis). Backed by his reading of Marx, Crary's analysis thus arrives at the same conclusion reached by Rosa, Dörre and Lessenich, namely, that a 24/7 temporality is the only temporal environment where a capitalist society can satisfy its imperatives of constant growth (which includes exchange), appropriation and acceleration.

When Rosa speaks of acceleration, and Crary of 24/7 temporalities, they are dealing with related but not identical phenomena. Rosa's object of study is a broad historical process that started to unfold since the early 1700s, throughout the course of which a variety of temporalities have competed with each other, been instituted and displaced. Crary, on the other hand, is focusing his lens on the '24/7 temporalities' which are the time-regimes established by the latest moment of capitalism. So, while Crary would certainly agree with Rosa's claim that social acceleration is an ongoing process that comes in waves and that was historically kickstarted by "technical innovations and their industrial implementation" (2013, 40), Crary believes that, at present, the introduction of new, faster technological devices "will only be facilitating the perpetuation of the same banal exercise of non-stop communication, social isolation, and political powerlessness, rather than representing some historically significant turning point"(40). '24/7' is thus a metaphor of sorts to illustrate an oversaturated temporality where, according to Crary, no more acceleration is possible: we're in the top gear, so it has become static. Or, put another way, even if there is more input or social change, our human experience of time has become so saturated that it will not register any more increases in the pace of the world: "Now the accelerated tempo of apparent change deletes any sense of an extended time-frame that is shared collectively, which might sustain even a nebulous anticipation of a future distinct from contemporary reality" (Crary, 41). Despite this slight divergence in perspective, we can conclude from their combined insights that capitalism requires from the start a temporal regime based on *relentless* and *increasing* activity. The implications of this are numerous and we will come back to examine them in more detail at a later stage.

3. The creation of standardised 'abstract time'

3.1. Abstract time

In the preceding sections, I have been trying to show how capitalism presupposes a particular temporality in order for it to properly function as an exploitative system of production and accumulation. Yet I would now like to answer, more specifically, the question of *what does capitalism "do" to time*? How does it remake it? Jonathan Martineau's socio-historical inquiry, entitled *Time, Capitalism and Alienation* contributes to understanding how capitalism transformed previous temporal configurations into a hegemonic time-regime (2015). It is important however to first stress that for Martineau, who favours a relational ontology, time is not a thing but rather "a processual relation between events, 'socio-natural' processes, activity, and humans" (19). This is why he proposes the notion of *social time relations* to refer to the qualitatively different conceptions and practices of time that, intertwined in singular ways, have been found to exist across different places and historical moments. Now, the core of Martineau's argument is that, parallel to the rise of capitalism, the coarse and rich substance of time-relations becomes standardised and flattened into 'abstract clock-time' which, coalescing with the Gregorian calendar, starts to function as the "hegemonic time-form" organising social life across the globe (38). He describes how capitalist societies "exported and imposed clock-time on non-Western societies through colonialism, imperialism, or other forms of geopolitical pressure", a long process which culminated with the institutionalisation of World Standard Time, today's Universal Coordinated Time (127). He clarifies, however, that his use of the expression 'rise to social hegemony' does not intend to cast a totalising narrative according to which clock-time would have become *the only* temporal framework that henceforth reigns over every corner of the planet, eradicating all other social times. Rather, it means that clock-time is embedded in the capitalist *tendency* "to dominate and subordinate other time relations […] but always in a contested relation with other temporalities" (126). As previously outlined, in the final chapter we will come back to explore what those other resisting temporalities are or could be and the possibilities for politics that they might open.

Martineau's investigation retraces the passage from the invention of the mechanical clock in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe to the development of 'clock-time', its associated time-form, into an established "social time infrastructure" after the 19th century. Throughout this endeavour, he shows that the change brought about by clock-time is that it produces an abstract

sort of time composed of equal and interchangeable segments, as opposed to the unequal hours "with varying lengths according to the seasons which were the traditional hours in medieval societies" (61). As we will see, this also brought about a shift from what E.P. Thompson called a 'task-oriented' approach to work, to a time-oriented one. Martineau takes the distinction between *abstract* and *concrete* time from Moishe Postone who, in turn, derives it from the Marxian postulate that labour has a dual character:

> "'Abstract time', for Postone, is thus 'uniform, continuous, homogeneous, "empty" time, [and] is independent of events', while concrete times are 'functions of events: they are referred to and understood through natural cycles and the periodicities of human life as well as particular tasks or processes' (Postone, 1993, 201-2)" (Martineau, 113).

We can relate *concrete times* to "the rhythmic and periodic textures of human life" that Crary has found to be suppressed by contemporary 24/7 environments (9). Thus, for instance, bodily processes such as sleep, digestion and pregnancy all have their concrete times, as well as cognition and emotions. In addition, Martineau lists art, food production, social relationships and natural ecosystems as realms whose concrete times are under assail by the law of value (168). *Abstract* time, in contrast, is rationalised time so that, in the evocative words of Georg Lukács, "[it] sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable things (the reified, mechanically objectified performance of the worker)" (1971, 5).

Now, a cautionary word about clock-time and the Gregorian calendar-time is pertinent. Inasmuch as they are complementary time-reckoning systems –the first measuring *everyday time* and the other *biographical time*— they do not prescribe a particular use or allocation of time in themselves. This holds true even if their institution follows a particular political agenda, and even though their basic time-units are socially constructed and "come to find bases of measurement in nature only, it would seem, *a posteriori*" (Martineau, 39). I therefore contend they are not temporalities on their own. However, when they "come together under capitalist social time relations" as Martineau argues, and when they are normatively incorporated by the capitalist imperatives to never waste a second and to accelerate, which Weber has traced back to the Protestant work ethic, then the whole assemblage can indeed be called a *temporality*.

3.2. The rationalisation of time

The spread of abstract time is not incidental to the development of the capitalist system. Rather, I argue capitalism and abstract time exist in an intimate relation of mutual constitution and dependency. In order to prove this, I will first draw attention to the role of abstract time in the commodification of labour, in order to then demonstrate how rationalisation, the capitalist operation *par excellence*, starts with the production of abstract, rationalised, time.

The progressive implementation of clock-time as the standard time-measuring system has been crucial to the development and expansion of the capitalist system[11]. This is due to the centrality of *abstract time* to processes of value-formation and appropriation. The reason why, according to Martineau, *abstract time* is at the basis of value is because the notion of *abstract labour* at the heart of Marx's labour theory of value relies itself on the idea of *abstract time* as the objective frame where labour-time, since early capitalism, is measured. The logical connections between them are the following: Marx argues that the defining trait of the capitalist age is that "in the eyes of the labourer himself labour-power assumes the form of a commodity belonging to him" and that, at this stage, "the commodity form of the products of labour" becomes the "universal category of society as a whole" (Marx in Lukács, 3). The fact that, with the capitalist shift, labour becomes commodified[12] entails that a labour market where different kinds of labour are sold starts to emerge. But in order for these to be traded, they must first be apprehended through the mediating language of *exchange value*. Just like object-commodities with qualitatively different use-values need to assume a quantitative exchange-value in order to become marketable, "radically different forms of human labour" become exchangeable in the market through the notion of abstract labour: this is the 'third term' that makes them all commensurable (Martineau, 116). It is important to note that this process, whereby heterogeneity is rendered commensurable through a reduction to sameness, is already part of the rationalising

[11] Capitalism did not invent clock-time. As Martineau explains, it "recuperated" an already-existing clock-time infrastructure" that, since feudalism, was characterised by the gradual spread of clocks in public places and that, in opposition to work bells, was of social interest as a more objective way to measure and delimit work time (95).

[12] Through the process of commodification, the use-value of an object is replaced by an exchange value, *i.e.* a monetary price for which it can be exchanged in the market.

drive that characterises capitalism. It corresponds to the law of equivalence that, for Adorno and Horkheimer, "rules bourgeois society" and "makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them to abstract quantities" (2002, 4).

In their conversion to abstract labour, diverse productive activities, each with their own concrete time, become reduced to what they share in common: the expenditure of human energy. But this reduction to abstract labour can only be achieved through the notion of abstract time; for it is only in terms of abstract, identical time-units that concrete labour can be quantified and thereby assigned a price in the market. As Martineau explains, labour power is bought and expended *as* labour-time (117) so that a given amount of time, such as a standardised workday, is exchanged for (*i.e.,* remunerated with) a standardised wage. Likewise, the fact that a finished article congeals a given amount of labour-power *measured as an x amount of labour-time (of z productive activity)* is what determines the magnitude of that commodity's value. In this respect, Lukács shows how this harnessing of the notions of labour, time and commodity into a new constellation is an exclusively capitalist development:

> Here we need only establish that labour, *abstract, equal, comparable labour*, measurable with increasing precision *according to the time* socially necessary for its accomplishment, the labour of the capitalist division of labour existing both as the presupposition and the product of capitalist production*, is born only in the course of the development of the capitalist system* (1967, 4; my emphasis).

In this respect, Graeber notes that the idea, widely accepted today, "that one person's time can belong to someone else is actually quite peculiar" and would have been unthinkable for most civilisations prior to industrial capitalism. Graeber then refers to Moses Finley, who argues that in order for an ancient Greek or Roman to have accepted that one could buy a potter's time, they would have had to overcome two conceptual leaps:

> first, to think of the potter's capacity to work, his "labor-power," as a thing that was distinct from the potter himself, and second, to devise some way to pour that capacity out, as it were, into uniform temporal containers—hours, days, work shifts—that could then be purchased, using cash (2019, 103).

What is significant is that both of these leaps are historically anchored at the dawn of capitalism. As Lukács noted above, the notion of labour-power as a commodity (always given in terms of

labour-time) that can be individually traded did not exist before capitalism. Likewise, Graeber argues with the aid of E.P. Thompson's work, it was only with the advent of industrial capitalism that the task-oriented approach[13] to time gave way to a new understanding of time as both "a grid against which work can be measured", and as a personal possession that can be bought and sold. Graeber emphasises that the consolidation of this different "time sense" involved both "a technological and a moral change" (106). Graeber's account corroborates and sums up what we have already learnt about the social history of time from other theorists. As we know from Foucault's insights in Chapter 1, the moral shift relates to the Judeo-Christian condemnation of idleness, here understood as the theft of the employer's time. The technological change, in turn, consisted in the invention of mechanical clocks, which as Martineau has shown us, meant that time could be measured with much higher accuracy and therefore "chopped up into units that could be bought and sold for money" (Graeber, 105). The very unfolding of capitalism thus proves indissociably tied to the maintenance of a universal time-reckoning framework that allows labour to become quantifiable and exchangeable. Abstract time, understood with Martineau as "a constant sequence made of the succession of equalised empty and homogeneous durational time-units" (117), therefore lies at the foundation of capitalist processes of value-creation.

Lukács attributes the shift towards abstract time and, more generally, the phenomenon of reification to the overarching principle of "rational mechanisation and calculability" which, being a cornerstone for capitalism, increasingly permeates all aspects of social life (6). Rationalisation has been defined in its simplest form as method, and as making things calculable and predictable (Weber, 2012; Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002; Lukács, 1971). Weber "designates as rationalization every expansion of empirical knowledge, of predictive capacity, of instrumental and organizational mastery of empirical processes" (Habermas, 159). This mastery of empirical processes indicates that, in addition to the objectives of *calculability* and *predictability*, rationalisation has another central aim: *replicability*. At the macroscopic scale, Weber treats modernization as societal rationalisation because both the capitalist enterprise and the modern state are tailored to "purposive rational action" (Habermas, 166). Likewise, Weber speaks of a *methodical-rational conduct of life* as a whole when: "persons and groups generalise

[13] I provide a fuller description of this approach on page 84.

practical rationality in its entirety, *i.e.,* over time and across all social spheres" (Habermas, 173). Thus, rationalisation in Weber appears as the technique that drives socio-historical processes of development in modernity. Hartmut Rosa builds on this understanding in order to elaborate his own interpretation of rationalisation as acceleration:

> for Weber too the Protestant-capitalist evaluation of time is part of an encompassing (and accelerating) historical movement, namely, the underlying Western processes of *rationalization*. Insofar as this process is rooted in shortening and enhancing the efficiency of means-ends relations in the sense of instrumental rationality, it can be described as an acceleration process that aims at the accelerated realization of ends through the minimization of the necessary steps or an increase in the effectiveness of the means employed. Rationalization in this sense means to be able to achieve *more in less time* (and with less input) (Rosa, 2013, 50).

Lukács, in turn, explains that rationalisation primarily means “being able to predict with ever greater precision all the results to be achieved [and] is only to be acquired by the exact breakdown of every complex into its elements” (4). In the field of production, this translates into the fragmentation of manufacture into specialised tasks and stages, which is also the fragmentation of the productive subject, and which necessitates the inexorable ticking of a clock to pace it with the utmost precision:

> the period of time necessary for work to be accomplished (which forms the basis of rational calculation) is converted, as mechanisation and rationalisation are intensified, from a merely empirical average figure to an objectively calculable work-stint that confronts the worker as a fixed and established reality (Lukács, 4).

As they undergo a process of standardisation, specialised tasks are correlated to the specific number of minutes and seconds it takes to perform them. And the worker, whose personality was already sacrificed by the sale of his labour-power and who has to rid his work of all individual markers, must now further integrate himself into the machinic process of production and keep up the pace or else be pushed out of the assembly line (cf. “man-machine systems” in Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). If we remember that for capital, human resources are nothing more than “a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system” (Lukács,

5), and that this system will yield the most profits the less delays or interruptions it suffers, then it is clear why in today's hyper-rationalised world, workers are demanded to work at the exact speed of the machine (be this in the factory, in the sweatshop, in the till, or in the office). While for the workers interiorising the mandate and the practical skills to achieve *more in less time* is an indispensable skill to survive in the precarious global labour market, for the CEO, their ability to do this signifies a crucial raise in that "effectiveness of the means employed" to which Rosa alluded. As we will see in Chapter 3, the neoliberal capitalist obsession with calculability, predictability and replicability has crystallised in the phenomenon of McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2004) and in the much-venerated 'logistical rationality' (Archer, 2020) that today governs production systems at large whilst seeking their constant optimisation.

Marx provides one of the most striking illustrations of this contemporary condition where the economic (and, as Butler argues, consequently moral) value of workers is determined by their capacity to sustain an accelerated pace, to deliver, to work 'under high pressure':

> Through the subordination of man to the machine the situation arises in which men are effaced by their labour; in which the pendulum of the clock has become *as accurate a measure* of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives. Therefore, we should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but rather *that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour*. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at the most the incarnation of time. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything: hour for hour, day for day… (Marx in Lukács, 5; my emphasis).

The above passage and Lukács' commentary on it evoke the image of time as an infinitely unfolding roll of parchment where workers' activities are entered in the form of spatial intervals. This parchment roll is the master-sheet where every activity is scheduled and seamlessly connected to the next one. And it is only humans' ability to keep running-and-achieving at the same speed of that endless progression what will make them 'successful', 'productive' and 'worthy' individuals, or else, 'failures', 'losers' and 'lazy social parasites' (cf. Han, 2015).

The rise of capitalism as the dominant social formation was essentially a process of extending instrumental rationality to all spheres of social action. The works of Weber, Lukács and, indirectly, Durkheim show how, applied to the economy, rationalisation produces the division of labour into specialised tasks and the calculable work-stint, while reading Weber alongside Foucault illuminates how, in the realm of public administration and the management of populations, rationalisation appears as bureaucracy and surveillance. But since, as we have seen, rationalisation is at its core an analytical process based on quantification so as to better predict and control outcomes, this depends on a model of rationalised, abstract time within which to project calculations. In other words, the capitalist instauration of rationalisation as a general scheme for social functioning (aimed at the ubiquitous extraction of value) cannot be conceived without, first, rationalising time into a territorialisable temporal continuum. The rationalisation of time is therefore a central precondition for the capitalist system: abstract clock-time proves to be the time of capitalism.

4. Contemporary reconfigurations of the Marxian categories

We have seen how, with the rise of capitalism, labour becomes commodified and exchanged by first becoming objectively measurable in terms of abstract (labour) time. This implies that the category of 'labour time' was crucial to the consolidation of the capitalist wage system and its production of surplus value. This section will briefly reflect on how the rise of automation has, as three major consequences, a reduction in the value of human labour, an increase in its pace, and an increase in the surplus value that can be derived from a given amount of working hours. I then integrate this with the contemporary problem of 'bullshit jobs', as diagnosed by David Graeber. The final section of this chapter discusses how the series of technological developments that have accompanied the late stages of capitalism into neoliberalism and 'biocognitive capitalism' are, to a significant extent, rendering obsolete the category of 'labour time', as well as the other fundamental dichotomies that structured Marx's *Capital*.

4.1. Automation and labour-time

In the Fragment on the Machines of *The Grundrisse*, Marx notes the increasingly prominent role of technology in the production of value and of commodities. He identifies that with the advent of mechanical production, "the mass of direct labour time, the quantity of labour employed" ceases to be "the determinant factor in the production of wealth" (2015, 624). Instead, he argues,

> to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes *to depend less on labour time* and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose 'powerful effectiveness' […] depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production (624; my emphasis).

Since the human worker is no longer "the chief actor" but more of a "watchman" and "regulator" of industrial manufacturing, his labour is no longer central to the production process, nor does it limit the speed at which commodities are made. With automation, the investment of 'labour time' thus loses its status as the key factor in the production of wealth: its theft by capitalism becomes, in Marx's famous words, "a miserable foundation" (*ibidem*). It is not only that machines are incorporated into the production process, but rather that they, as the epitome of fixed capital, *dictate* the whole process. Thus, for Marx, capitalism has fully developed "only when fixed capital appears as a machine in the production process, *opposite labour*; and the entire production process appears as not subsumed under the direct skillfulness of the worker, but rather as the technological application of science" (2015, 618; my emphasis). If fixed capital now governs direct (individual, embodied) labour and is *external* to it, this means that it is the machine's time (its speed, rhythms, sequences) which commands the worker's labour as a time regime imposed from the outside. This takes us back to the previously cited passage where Lukács traces the emergence of the "objectively calculable work-stint" as something "that confronts the worker as a fixed and established reality" (4). In this sense, the progressive overtaking of production by machines has driven the structuring of the workday further and further away from a task-oriented approach: "E.P. Thompson referred to the temporal organization of work in pre-capitalist peasant societies as 'task-oriented'. By this he meant that the time of work seemed to be dictated by the concrete tempos, time patterns and time extensions of the tasks at hand" (Martineau, 79). Graeber provides some good examples of this approach when he describes how people in rural

Madagascar (still) say that to walk to another village "would take two cookings of a pot of rice", or that, in Medieval Europe, "people spoke similarly of something as taking 'three paternosters,' or two boilings of an egg. […] In places without clocks, time is measured by actions rather than action being measured by time" (Graeber, 104). Today, with mechanised and McDonaldized work, the labourer is first hired for an abstractly-given amount of time, and then a number of tasks are assigned for him to compress into that work-stint.

In relation to our current purposes, which are explaining today's temporal unlivability, the two most important effects of the mechanisation of production are that human labour is cheapened and, secondly, that the workday *does not shorten*. Marx explains how machinery "increases the relation of surplus labour to necessary labour, by enabling labour, through an increase in its productive power, to create a greater mass of the products required for the maintenance of living labour capacity in a shorter time" (Marx, 701). Even though machines drastically reduce the necessary labour-time of workers, their working hours per day do not decrease because the saved time is immediately converted into more working hours, but now for the production of relative surplus value. Against "the highly bourgeois assertion that fixed capital makes the worker's labour shorter", Marx contends,

> Capital employs machinery, rather, only to the extent that it enables the worker *to work a larger part of his time for capital*, *to relate to a larger part of his time as time which does not belong to him*, to work longer for another. Through this process, the amount of labour necessary for the production of a given object is indeed reduced to a minimum, but only in order to realize *a maximum of labour* in the maximum number of such objects" (2015, 701; my emphasis).

Machines therefore only save time for the owners of the means of production, who in spite of having reached the necessary quota of production in less hours than they would have without machines, go on to employ people for the rest of the day "upon something not directly and immediately productive, *e.g.* the erection of machinery" (Dilke in Marx, 709), something not perishable, *i.e.* something that can accumulate as capital. In this way, Marx shows how the machines' diminishing of necessary labour time, which is a creation of free time, immediately becomes re-captured as *surplus labour-tim*e. This is capital's tendency to "always, on the one side, create disposable time and, on the other, to convert it into surplus labour" (707). It is worth,

at this stage, noting the direct correlation between the demand to work as fast as possible (stress) and the production of relative surplus-value, and likewise, between the imperative to work for as long as possible (overtime), and the production of absolute surplus-value. Subjecting workers to these two main forms of temporal pressure, overtime and a faster work-pace, allows capital to maximise both kinds of surplus-value.

In terms of basic subsistence goods, most countries have reached a point where their actual productive capacities can easily meet their population's short and medium-term needs. This would be true for all countries if they were self-sufficient monads with equal amounts of resources and technological development. Of course, this brushes the futile debate on what is a vital need, and on whether the vital needs of citizens from different countries can be computed in the same way. The current globalised state of affairs further complicates matters; in particular, the fact that the nature and proportion of the economic flows that move between the Global South and the Global North is unequal. Whereas the former provides the planet with many of its raw materials, food and cheap unskilled labour through outsourcing, the latter supplies (whilst retaining ownership of) most cutting-edge technology, heavy industry and machinery for mass resource-extraction. The Global North is also the centre for the production of specialised research and knowledge, which attracts and retains highly skilled workers. Yet *even in spite of* this global interdependence, and of the exploitative colonial dynamics that still mark the unequal distribution of working hours across the planet, technological development in general means that what we used to be able to build and produce in a matter of years can now be done in months, and what took months can now be achieved in days. And yet, people continue to work artificially long hours all over the world. On this subject, David Graeber contends:

> In the year 1930, John Maynard Keynes predicted that, by the century's end, technology would have advanced sufficiently that countries like Great Britain or the United States would have achieved a fifteen-hour work week. There's every reason to believe he was right. *In technological terms, we are quite capable of this. And yet it didn't happen. Instead, technology has been marshaled, if anything*, to figure out *ways to make us all work more.* In order to achieve this, jobs have had to be created that are, effectively, pointless. Huge swathes of people, in Europe and North America in particular, spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed (9; my emphasis).

Graeber refers to a report comparing employment in the US between 1910 and 2000 to foreground how the number of jobs in the farm and industry sectors have dramatically collapsed while

> "professional, managerial, clerical, sales, and service workers" tripled, growing "from one-quarter to three-quarters of total employment." In other words, productive jobs have, just as predicted, been largely automated away. (Even if you count industrial workers globally, including the toiling masses in India and China, such workers are still not nearly so large a percentage of the world population as they used to be). (10).

Graeber then denounces that "rather than allowing a massive reduction of working hours to free the world's population to pursue their own projects, pleasures, visions, and ideas, we have seen the ballooning" of what he terms bullshit jobs. He defines a bullshit job as "a form of paid employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence even though, as part of the conditions of employment, the employee feels obliged to pretend that this is not the case" (28). Graeber divides jobs into two main categories: real, or useful, jobs and bullshit jobs. On the side of the bullshit jobs, he says there are "partly bullshit jobs, mostly bullshit jobs, and purely and entirely bullshit jobs" (42). Departing from this, he offers a perceptive diagnosis of why so many people are still working too much, and those that are not are unhappy:

> Real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited. The remainder are divided between a terrorized stratum of the universally reviled unemployed and a larger stratum who are basically paid to do nothing, in positions designed to make them identify with the perspectives and sensibilities of the ruling class […]. Clearly, the system was never consciously designed. It emerged from almost a century of trial and error. But it is the only explanation for why, despite our technological capacities, we are not all working three- to four-hour days (44).

It is not completely clear whether Graeber's 'we' pronoun refers to the whole of humanity, but it seems this is the case, since a lot of the statistics he provides are given in global terms:

> If it's really true that as much as half of the work we do could be eliminated without any significant effect on overall productivity, why not redistribute the remaining work in such a way that everyone is working four-hour days? Or four-day weeks with four months' yearly vacation time? […] Why not start shutting down the global work machine? (Graeber, 202)

Half of the answer lies in his dissection of the bullshit-job phenomenon, where he explains with hundreds of interviews and cases, why there has been such a proliferation of meaningless occupations that instead of contributing to the creation of social value, destroy it. The other half of the answer relates to the Protestant work ethic, the condemnation of idleness and the enthronement of work as an end in itself. This is already manifest in Marx's note that capital asks workers who finish their tasks earlier to keep working on something else (like building machinery), but to always keep working.

As we have demonstrated throughout this subsection, automation does not in itself guarantee a shorter working day nor the abolition of precarious employment. Rather, as Kyle Lewis argues,

> the link between automation and freedom cannot and will not be facilitated without adequate policy intervention. The past century has shown us that automation technologies have more often than not been introduced by employers as a way of simply maximising productivity without sharing the surplus time and/or profits with employees. This trend will continue unless a practical and enforced link between automation and free time is constructed (2019, 28).

In today's precarious labor market, human energy and time are differentially subjected to the technologically driven accumulation of value pursued by states as much as by transnational companies. People have become accustomed to toxic work environments where work becomes an endless series of impossible deadlines, or else, in the case of bullshit jobs, a soul-killing enterprise. Instead, we need to reformulate our relationship towards labor: both in purposive terms, and in ontological ones. We need to abolish the subordination of human time to the time of the machine and, simultaneously, reclaim human time *beyond* the time of labour as a "space" for rest, leisure, commonality, potentiality and inoperativity (*sensu* Agamben). Chapter 5 discusses the 4-day week and other alternatives for deceleration in the sphere of labour that challenge the current system by placing people at the centre.

4.2. Labour in cognitive biocapitalism

In the scenario of cognitive biocapitalism[14], the categories of 'direct labour' and 'labour-time' as Marx understood them lose significance for capital's computation of the value it produces. As a category of analysis, 'labour-time' loses relevance in relation to the production of value because the latter is not tied to the workday anymore but rather expands across the whole lifetime of individuals. Fumagalli provides a pristine elucidation of this fact in his fourth thesis on cognitive biocapitalism:

> Value production is no longer founded in material production alone. Productive activity is increasingly based on immaterial elements, that is to say, on intangible 'raw materials', which are very hard to measure and quantify, and which come directly from the utilization of the relational, sentimental, and cerebral faculties of human beings. The process of valorization loses, in this way, the measuring unit usually connected to material production. This measure used to be somewhat defined according to the necessary amount of labour needed for the production of commodities, measurable on the basis of the tangibility of production and the necessary time for production. With the advent of cognitive capitalism, valorization tends to graft itself onto different forms of labor, which go beyond the official work-time and coincide more and more with the whole life-time (2011, 10).

Fumagalli argues that, although the work / rest-of-life distinction may still nominally exist, in reality "it becomes impossible to define a temporal barrier between work- and non-work-time" because all the vital faculties of individuals become implicated in the performance of their job and, *vice versa*, their job profits from what they do "outside" of it (12). He also attributes this to

[14] Fumagalli and Morini propose the term *biocapitalism* to refer to "a process of accumulation that not only is founded on the exploitation of knowledge but of the entirety of human faculties, from relational-linguistic to affective-sensorial" (2010, 235). They see this phase of capitalism as based on "an *anthropogenic* model, where life must work for production and production must work for life (Hardt and Negri, 2000)" (Fumagalli and Morini, 2010, 238).

the taking over of our lives by ICTs. In this contemporary paradigm, where the boundaries between 'on' and 'off' work, 'on-' and 'offline', 'the productive', the 'reproductive' and 'the unproductive' are all dissolving into the blurry mass of a 24/7 world, the division between 'necessary' labour and 'surplus' labour crumbles too.

While, on the one hand, we are demanded to work intensively, in a time that is productive and thus "without impurities" (Foucault) –and we are asked to interiorise this imperative—, on the other, the capitalist system has learned how *to derive value from the time that we do not spend working* but rather resting, socialising, or entertaining ourselves through its creation of 'the attention economy'. This is manifest in the emergence of a whole market around the themes of rest and relaxation, ranging from natural or artificial sleep aids, sophisticated pillows, to expensive meditation and sleep apps. In relation to socialisation, value is derived from it because most of the spaces where we encounter our friends, be it the pub, Whatsapp or Zoom (where the personal and the professional spheres are most hard to tell apart), are private even if access to them is, for the moment, still free. But perhaps this value-extraction is most apparent in relation to the kinds of consumption and socialisation that we undertake in the virtual world: we log off the work email, but then immediately log into Facebook, Netflix or Amazon, where it is not just our money and our data what generate value but our very attention. This subsumption of the spheres of socialisation and recreation into the value-generating machine is precisely what David Hill identifies as a distinctive marker of 'communicative capitalism', which he sees as primarily oriented towards the "acceleration of its informational regime":

> In its ideal form this is a state in which workers toil down the data mine under ever more precarious conditions, whilst in their free time they are subjected to data-mining through the communicational technologies with which they attempt to find respite and social connection (Hill, 2015, 1).

As we recreate ourselves and accept the terms, conditions and 'cookies' of these virtual marketplaces, we are unwittingly made to perform a qualitatively different kind of labour, but still labour. Our rest and recreation thus become times where the coopting of our attention, which is our time, continues to serve the capitalist accumulation of value. To this we must add the impact of the generalised home-office model, which according to Andrea Fumagalli is actually

an "expropriation of the workplace" and indexes the overcoming of the separation between production and reproduction (2011, 12). Here, work-time, parenting time, leisure time and house-chore time become inextricably mixed with each other, making it harder for subjects to measure the length of their 'official' workday.

It is important, however, to here clarify that I am only pointing to the obsolescence of 'labour-time' *as an analytical category* to accurately grasp and describe the current modes in which value is extracted from us. This is because, since we are now posited as permanent 'prosumers' (producers and consumers), processes of valorisation and accumulation now take place in more complex ways above and beyond the traditional grid of 'labour-time'. Yet labour-time in itself, as a concrete social reality, remains fundamental to the functioning of 'absolute capitalism': after all, it is the actual spending of time at the workplace what defines us as productive subjects, what entitles us to our wages, and then allows us to engage in consumption activities. The measuring of labour-time (as hours worked per day and per week) is also a crucial instrument for disciplining subjects in space and time. Most employers still equate working long hours with high productivity, and use those metrics as an indicator of their employees' performance, engagement with work and entrepreneurial drive. In addition, neoliberal subjects are also being trained to *monitor themselves* as they work autonomously or from home: if they have not met the minimum threshold of working hours that indexes satisfactory productivity, subjects will have learnt to develop a sense of guilt and will compensate this with self-sanctioning. Labour-time thus remains a key anchoring point between time and capitalism, although one that now takes new and rather inconspicuous disguises.

Another important Marxist dichotomy that becomes obsolete in cognitive biocapitalism is that of 'fixed' versus 'variable' capital, which fuse together in the figure of 'human capital'. Fumagalli argues that, today, the human being is made to contain "within itself the functions of both fixed and variable capital, that is, of both the material and machinery forms of labor belonging to the past and of the living labor of the present: bios" (11). Here, we find another unlivable tension: insofar as humans perform the functions of fixed capital, they must emulate machines as closely as possible by erasing their singularity, but insofar as they fulfill the role of variable capital, they must always appear as distinct, creative individuals ready, for instance, to become Youtube influencers and sign branding contracts with corporate sponsors. By

incorporating both functions, humans become means of production as well as product; they earn purchasing power and then reinvest it in themselves. This reiterates Crary's thesis that it is now human beings who are being modelled or engineered to better fit the 24/7 universe where most intervals of human life have "been penetrated and taken over as work time, consumption time, or marketing time" (15).

It seems, however, that the tension between the demand to become an automaton and that of becoming a unique individual ultimately resolves itself on the side of the former: humans must become machines if they are to remain within capital's productive circuits and escape obsolescence. In *The Undercommons*, Harney and Moten identify that, in response to the problem of a subject that "has become too cumbersome, too slow, to prone to error" for capital, logistics emerges as the "newly dominant capitalist science" that promises "to be rid of […] 'the controlling agent,' to free the flow of goods from 'human time' and 'human error'"(87, 91, 2013). They relate this to "the fantasy of what Marx called the automatic subject" which, according to them, exists today under the guise of 'human capital'. Harney and Moten's analysis demonstrates how the language and rationality of logistics are now conquering all areas of the general intellect in order to bring into effect the becoming-machine of humans:

> Logistical populations will be created to do without thinking, to feel without emotion, to move without friction, to adapt without question, to translate without pause, to connect without interruption, or they will be dismantled and disabled as bodies in the same way they are assembled, by what Patricia Clough calls population racism (91).

Harney and Moten hit the nail on the head by noting logistics is conditioned upon subjects that are able *to hollow themselves* to this unprecedented degree. And although every infinitive phrase in this passage reveals something important, we find most relevant the demands "to translate *without pause*, to connect *without interruption*". For capital, halts and interruptions are useless, they denote loss. In a world where humans are treated as disposable, interchangeable or replaceable instances of 'human capital', they are only allowed to pause for the strictly necessary time they need to eat and sleep in order to keep functioning, much in the same way machines are only paused to receive maintenance and recharge fuel. And even these pauses seem too long for

capital, so it is searching for ways of foregoing them: in addition to the outright replacement of human labour with machines, the world of work is becoming more and more disembedded from spatial and temporal enclosures so that people can work *while* they have lunch, attend online meetings *while* they do house chores. This same aversion to pause and rest is manifest in the US military's search for "ways to enable people to go without sleep, and to function productively and efficiently" (Crary, 2014, 2). However, as we will see in the following chapters, living beings cannot persist on a maximum-stress and minimal-rest regime: sooner or later, they collapse.

This chapter has sought to interrogate neoliberal capitalism from the perspective of time and, conversely, to inquire what are the aspects from our experience of time today that can be traced back to capitalist, and to the subsequent neoliberal, forms of power. In order to do so, we first examined the notions of social acceleration and dynamic stabilisation propounded by Rosa and his co-authors to demonstrate that capitalist societies are by definition accelerating ones. We also approached the work of Crary to further emphasise the point that it is now subjects who are being trained and programmed to exist in a mode of continuous functioning. Then, based on Lukács, we conducted a deeper examination of the manner in which commodified labour acquires an exchange value by means of its measurability in terms of abstract time. With this, we concluded that the rationalisation of time into its abstract time-form was the first step of the capitalist rationalisation of society at large. The very constitution and solidity of capitalism thus relies on rationalised, abstract time as well as on acceleration. Next, we examined how the advent of neoliberalism, biocognitive capitalism and the accompanying automation of production have reconfigured the categories of the classical Marxist theses. In particular, we followed the decreasing significance of 'labour-time' in relation to the production of wealth, from Marx to Fumagalli, where the concept itself becomes obsolete. Finally, we concluded that, as human labour becomes subordinated to machinic time and as humans themselves robotise, the traditional dichotomies of 'necessary' versus 'surplus' labour, 'production' *vs* 'reproduction', and of 'fixed' *vs* 'variable' capital do not hold anymore. Chapter 3 will take us into a deeper investigation of how the accelerated temporality of capitalism connects to the different forms of time-based unlivability and labour precarity that are being experienced by millions in today's fierce labour market.

Chapter III. Unlivably Accelerated Work

1. The rationalisation of work: logistics and McDonaldization

In his effort to " 'modernize' Weber's rationalization thesis", George Ritzer argues in *The McDonaldization Thesis* that "the fast-food restaurant, rather than Weber's bureaucracy, is the better paradigm" for the process of rationalization in the contemporary world (2004, 2). He defines McDonaldization as "a process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant—efficiency, calculability, predictability and control—are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world" (Ritzer, 4). Indeed, these four principles are precisely those that, as we saw in the preceding chapters, more generally structure all processes of rationalisation. In Chapter 1, we presented the principle of *control* with Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, where he explains how disciplinary methods are aimed at obtaining "a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines" (138). Then, based on Weber's and Luckács' diagnoses in Chapter 2, we learnt how *predictability* and *calculability* are also fundamental aims of rationalisation. Likewise, we saw that, for capitalist production to yield profits, it requires the highest *efficiency* in its means of production: the larger the number of commodities produced in a given amount of time, the lower their production cost and the larger the surplus value derived. Rosa's work showed us that, if efficiency means 'being able to do more in less time', and it requires acceleration, then it is no surprise that all modern productive activities have undergone a process of acceleration. Ritzer contends that as rationalisation extends across sectors and continents, the world of work is notoriously being subjected to the yoke of its four principles.

The American sociologist goes on to describe the proliferation of McJobs, which he sees as characterised by the five dimensions of McDonaldization. Not necessarily related to the food industry, the jobs

> tend to involve a series of simple tasks in which the emphasis is placed on performing each task *as efficiently as possible*. Second, *the time* associated with many of the tasks is *carefully*

> *calculated* and the emphasis on the quantity of time a task should take tends to diminish the quality of the work from the point of view of the worker. That is, tasks are so simplified and streamlined that they provide *little or no meaning* to the worker. Third, the work is *predictable*; employees do and say essentially the same things hour after hour, day after day. Fourth, many non-human technologies are employed *to control* workers and reduce them to robot-like actions. Some technologies are in place, and others are in development, that will lead to the eventual replacement of many of these 'human robots' with computerized robots. Finally, the rationalized McJobs lead to a variety of irrationalities, especially the dehumanization of work (Ritzer, 60; my emphasis).

Ritzer went on to publish a variety of extensions to his thesis as he applied it to different realms of our globalised world; he even discusses the McDonaldization of academia and the McDisneyization of tourism. However, the intersection between human labour and the mass production of goods is perhaps the field where the McDonaldization phenomenon is most evident and extreme.

Before the McDonald's food chain, the Fordist factory in the early 1900s was the first systematic implementation of this model of mechanised, efficiency-oriented production. Factories, of course, have continued to evolve since Ford's time, but the central aims guiding their management and design remain the same: to produce more (standardised) goods in less time, with zero interruptions. Speed and continuity. If these were the capitalist values that guided the industrialisation of production from Ford to McDonald's, it was logistics which, as the "newly dominant capitalist science" (Harney and Moten, 2013) based on ICTs and satellite technology, would take them even further from the 1990s onwards.

Megan Archer argues that, being founded upon cybernetic thought and method, logistics necessitates "the translation of real-world systems and behaviours into quantifiable variables and models" (2020, 10). This means that logistics must first reduce subjects and objects to variables that can be entered into formulas, with the formula *par excellence* being the efficiency measurement, given as *items processed per time-unit.* The items could be component parts of an unfinished product, or the finished product itself, and the time-unit could be given in minutes, hours, or days. The processing entity could be a human worker, a robot, or the conjunction of

both. Examples of this metric are number of Amazon parcels or chicken carcasses processed per minute, number of hamburgers or toys manufactured per hour, or cars assembled per day. The particular nature of both the items being processed and the workers processing them is irrelevant and thus effaced as they become translated into the cybernetic language through which logistics organises production; for the logistical system, it matters only *how many* of *x* items is *y* producing per hour. As Archer identifies, 'logistical rationality' is "underpinned by a regime of quantification, calculation and modelling" that focuses on what things "*do*, not on what they *are*" (2020, 10). In other words, logistics is concerned not with the content but with the structure and fluidity of its "systems of communication and control" it uses to supress uncertainty (*ibidem*). It is in this sense that Harney and Moten write: "logistics wants to dispense with the subject altogether" (2013, 87). The tendency of modern logistics to abolish subjects and completely divest them of their qualities confronts us directly with its sombre origins, which lie in the Atlantic slave trade, "the first great movement of commodities", "the transport of commodity labour that was not, and ever after would not be" (Harney and Moten, 2013, 92). As logistics' inaugural moment, the shipping and containerization of black people marks their degradation from beings to things and, further, to nothing. In this respect, Archer argues that because logistics has become infrastructural to the organisation of the contemporary world, the ways in which "we think, we live and produce knowledge", remain very much underpinned by the racialised epistomologies, the colonial and imperialist rationalities, that gave birth to logistics in the first place (2020, 10).

Logistical rationality is most evident today in contemporary assembly lines, which are long, extremely complex manufacturing systems designed to ensure standardised and efficient production. They require different degrees of human intervention at different points. Although machines are now capable of performing increasingly difficult tasks with astonishing precision and are now endowed with sensor systems that allow them to self-regulate, full-automation remains a *desideratum* for most factories across the world. Human presence and labour are still required in general terms, even if only to log instructions or supervise the operations. In most cases, however, humans are needed for complex physical or cognitive tasks that no machine today can achieve:

> While there are examples of fully automated assembly lines, most assembly lines are mixes of humans and automated labor. Humans perform the assemblies and tasks that are too sensitive or complex for machines, while machines do the work that's too repetitive, dangerous, or error-prone for humans (Klaess, 2021, np).

Importantly, Klaess also notes that today "advanced robotics, collaborative automation, and more sophisticated software" allow "humans to work more intimately with machines on assembly lines than ever before" (*ibid.* np). This unprecedented intimacy means that humans must be perfectly synchronised with machines. In the Amazon industry, for instance, this is ensured through the establishment of production quotas or "performance expectations" in the form of *items processed per time-unit* for workers to attain. This metric thus serves as a standardisation device to make sure that, as Marx wrote, one worker during an hour is equal to another one, and to all others on the factory floor.

> Standardisation here should be thought of as an integral part of processes of translation into logistical legibility – the mechanism by which the world is translated and represented in such a way that it can be replicated and repeated in kind. Further, in this context, standardisation is a normative process by which a standard is delineated and set as a benchmark for the correct way of doing things – epistemologically, procedurally, and materially (Archer, 2020, 11).

Here, it is crucial to acknowledge that abstract time is the primary quantitative variable in any logistical model. As a territorialised temporal continuum where different processes can be simultaneously scheduled and tracked, abstract time provides the foundation for standardisation and, more generally, for the pursuit of the four principles of rationalisation listed earlier by Ritzer.

The data and metrics that logistical systems generate in real-time as production takes place allow managers to set a benchmark efficiency rate against which to evaluate and compare the performance of several machines, or of multiple workers. This helps them identify if a machine or a worker is lagging behind the "correct" (standard) pace of production. The slow machine will be fixed or replaced, whereas the slow worker will be threatened with dismissal, or replaced as well. As we have argued, the problem with these measurements is that, first, they are based on

abstract time, and thus disavow the fact that humans cannot replicate and time their gestures with the same precision as machines do, and, secondly, that humans make mistakes and must start all over again.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I illustrate how different forms of employment today are subjected to McDonaldization and to logistical rationality. I also show how this process makes these jobs temporally unlivable, precarious and sometimes hazardous for those holding them. This will lead us into the reflection on exhaustion and burnout that unfolds in Chapter 5.

2. Temporal unlivability, overwork and labour precarity across occupations

2.1. Temporal unlivability and labour precarity

There is no labour precarity in the singular, but rather different *kinds* of it. When enough of these overlap, it is customary to speak of 'precarious work'. But because, as Lorey argues, precarity and insecurity are now "normalized at a structural level", even jobs that do not strictly qualify as precarious often bear one or more types of labour precarity (2015, p. 63). Rodgers and Rodgers propose to think of labour precarity along four dimensions:

- Temporal – low certainty over the continuity of employment
- Organisational – lack of workers' individual and collective control over working conditions, working time and shifts, work intensity, pay, health and safety
- Economic – insufficient pay and salary progression
- Social – lack of legal, collective or customary protection against unfair dismissal, discrimination, and unacceptable working practices; and social protection (access to social security benefits covering health, accidents, unemployment insurance) (1989 in Jain, Aditya & Hassard, Juliet, 2014).

The lacks listed here respond to the contradictory structure of unlivability outlined above: for instance, if workers are demanded to work long hours, under time pressure, and be highly

productive but the underlying conditions are poor pay (poor nutrition), and insufficient recovery time, their entire bodies come under unsustainable levels of stress; they are trapped in an unlivable situation. It is important to think of these conditions both in terms of unlivability and of precarity. While the first term foregrounds the discrepancy between capacities and demands, the second highlights that this condition of heightened exposure to injury, violence, poverty or death is *induced* (Butler, 2018) by neoliberal forms of governmentality. The problem becomes even more insidious when multiple forms of precarity start to become normalised and to overlap, for they reinforce each other and place workers in a position of extreme vulnerability. I will return to this point with examples in the next section.

For Rodgers and Rodgers, the temporal dimension of work precarity refers to the low certainty a worker has over how long they will retain the job. This uncertainty and the increased risk of being made redundant for no particular reason signal the predominance of the neoliberal logic according to which workers are treated as dispensable, replaceable human resources. The utilitarian approach to the making and breaking of employment contracts is also spurred by the rise of "outsourcing and new forms of flexible employment (such as part-timework, telework and on-call work)", which increasingly free employers from forms of responsibility towards their employees and from accountability towards third-party regulatory agents (Jain, Aditya & Hassard, Juliet, 2014).

Now, although Rodgers and Rodgers label the second dimension of precarity "organisational", this one is just as markedly determined by temporal variables as the former. The difference is that, while the first dimension relates to workers' futures, the second dimension bears on workers' *everyday* experiences of time and space according to the rules imposed by their management. It also involves the materiality of their working conditions, where the existence or nonexistence of health and safety protocols signifies a greater or lesser degree of labour precarity. In cases where the organisational dimension is a source of precarity, workers have little control over the '*hows'* of work: how it is to be performed, for how long, how intensely, etc. It is at this level that workers are often assigned unreasonable workloads, leading them to work under time pressure and /or overtime in what effectively are forms of exploitation. Labour precarity is therefore *temporally inflected* along three main dimensions: uncertainty

about job continuity, the temporal pressure to work fast, and the control of workers' shifts, breaks and compulsory overtime.

2.2. Types of jobs and types of overwork

In Chapter 1 I signalled the correlation between overwork and unlivability, but we must also acknowledge that there are different types of work, and different drivers for overwork, which run through the whole spectrum from poverty to affluence. Below, I present three main profiles or 'ideal types' of workers with a tendency to face the three mains forms of temporal pressure identified above: job uncertainty, pressure to work fast, and pressure to do overtime. This will allow us to identify the particular ways in which these different kinds of occupation are exposed to different forms and degrees of temporal unlivability and labour precarity.

i. The sweatshop employee from the Global South

In the academic field, the term 'sweatshop' has been defined as

> any workplace in which workers are typically subject to two or more of the following conditions: systematic forced overtime; systematic health and safety risks that stem from negligence or the willful disregard of employee welfare; coercion; systematic deception that places workers at risk; underpayment of earnings; and income for a 48-hour work week less than the overall poverty rate for that country (Arnold and Hartman, 2005, 35).

'Sweatshop' is thus an umbrella term to describe a variety of workplaces where labour rights, health regulations and safety standards are not respected. Since the 1990s, when the sweatshop phenomenon started to gain more public and government attention, the list of dangerous and exploitative working conditions that they sustain has become well-known: wages below the legal minimum, delayed salaries, poor or no ventilation, poor building and fire safety standards, minimal compensation for injury or death on the premises, non-existent safety nets, and violent repression of workers that unionise or protest (*International Labour Rights Forum*, 2015). Furthermore, the *Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de L'Homme* has found that

"garment workers can be subject to an alarming level of control both within factories and at hostels, including thorough restrictions on their freedom of movement and communication outside the factory" (2014). In particular, sweatshop owners have been known to withhold workers' salaries or passports as a means to prevent them from resigning (*Labour Behind the Label*, 2017). Also, "physical, sexual and verbal abuse is common and well documented" in sweatshops, some of which have links to slave labour (*The World Counts*, 2022).

The sweatshop worker receives an extremely low wage that is rarely enough to cover basic living expenses and may not even comply with the legally required minimum, works under precarious and often unsafe conditions, faces job insecurity and forced overtime. In addition, being subcontracted, migrant, or illegally hired are other factors that make these workers more vulnerable to threats, coercion or any other kind of economic exploitation.

This first category of overwork is characterised by a pungent sense of necessity that does not afflict the other two types to the same degree. In terms of the 'Global South' label, I am aware that, as Etienne Balibar asserts, "increasingly, there is 'North' in the South (where China is the emerging superpower) and 'South' in the North (where migrants cross borders in increasing numbers)" (Balibar in Callison and Manfredi, 2020, 271). I use the North/South divide merely as an indicative one, preferable to the First- vs Third-world one.

ii. The average precarious worker

"Average" precarious workers earn more than sweatshop workers (who face extreme precarity) but still an insufficient amount to comfortably cover their living expenses or save any money. They are usually offered a formal work contract that offers them some legal protection and labour rights but, again, only at a very minimal degree. The majority of the globe's workforce faces some form of labour precarity, be it in rural or in urban settings. Precarious workers are produced both by multinational corporations as well as by small employers forced to compete with those multinationals and cut down on production costs as much as possible. The average precarious worker is typically under probation, on a zero-hours contract, always potentially replaceable and often being asked to do unpaid overtime.

To this category belong McJobs, Graeber's 'shit jobs', which he says "are usually blue collar and pay by the hour" (33) and also some 'bullshit jobs'. A good example of a shit job with high temporal pressure is the housekeeping job at a large hotel, where workers do have a contract, but receive the minimum wage and are expected to clean an extremely large number of rooms in an extremely short time-span. In addition, as Graeber notes, "[t]hose who work shit jobs tend to be the object of indignities; they not only work hard but also are held in low esteem", and are "generally treated with arbitrariness and disrespect" (33).

iii. The high-earning extreme worker

I take the adjective 'extreme' from the phrase 'extreme job' which Hewlett and Luce coined and popularised in 2006 after conducting several surveys, focus groups and interviews in the US. They define an *extreme job* as follows:

> [S]urvey respondents have such jobs if they work 60 hours or more per week, are high earners, and hold positions with at least five of these characteristics:
> • Unpredictable flow of work
> • Fast-paced work under tight deadlines
> • Inordinate scope of responsibility that amounts to more than one job
> • Work-related events outside regular work hours
> • Availability to clients 24/7
> • Responsibility for profit and loss
> • Responsibility for mentoring and recruiting
> • Large amount of travel
> • Large number of direct reports
> • Physical presence at workplace at least ten hours a day (2006, 51).

The authors claim that "extreme jobs are no longer a rarity. Our data reveals an enormous increase in work pressure for high-caliber professionals across ages, genders, sectors, and continents" (*ibidem*). Unlike the two other types of overworked labourers we delineated, almost two-thirds of Hewlett and Luce's respondents "admit that the pressure and pace are self-

inflicted", that is, their submission to an incredibly tight and exhausting schedule is not primarily driven by economic necessity but, rather, because the job provides them with a stimulating environment and colleagues, high compensation, recognition or status (Hewlett and Luce, 52).

In the preceding paragraphs, we have seen that overwork exists across most professions, sectors and industries but, also, that in each of these it takes different forms and comes in different packages. Different workers overwork for different, sometimes combined, reasons: sweatshop and undocumented workers, for instance, do it for their mere survival. Workers with better but still precarious contracts are often pressured to work under stress and do overtime due to insufficient legal protection, or to remain competitive and prove their commitment to their employers (Kobayashi and Middlemiss, 2009). People who have "extreme-jobs" (Hewlett and Luce, 2006), on the other hand, are forced into overwork due to the fast pace, high demands and high stakes of their jobs. In the first two worker groups, as I mentioned earlier, two or more of the dimensions of precarity identified by Rodgers and Rodgers often come tied together: exploited workers are forced to consent to organisational and temporal kinds of precarity because economic and social kinds of precarity keep them in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis their employers. Workers' lack of collective bargaining power, of outlets through which to safely report unfair demands, and the absence of sanctions for employers prevent workers from overturning their situation and securing fairer contracts.

Let us now approach some concrete examples, one for each worker type, of the ways in the neoliberal capitalist obsession with acceleration and productivity permeates different work environments and produces labour precarity by subjecting workers to unlivable time regimes.

3. Relentless and faster production

As we discussed in Chapter II, the advent of industrialisation signified important changes both for the mass production of goods and for the way human labour is understood. We identified that automation cheapens human labour and does not shorten the workday. Yet, two other shifts must be underscored. First, the normatively driven move away from a task-oriented approach towards an efficiency-oriented one, where *efficiency equals more output in less time*. Secondly, the fact that, since it is now machines who are the 'chief actors', in Marx's words, in many manufacturing processes, their operation speed is less limited by the hand of the human labourer[15]. The answer to the search for efficiency above all else was a thorough rationalisation of the entire production process, from the ways in which labouring bodies ought to operate, to the introduction of automation and logistical technologies. By imposing speeds, time frames and output ratios, the latter are the technological means through which neoliberal capitalist temporalities are effectively instituted and enforced. In addition to dividing and subdividing the process into stages and phases with specific durations, automation and logistics perform the constant monitoring required to ensure that things are running without delays or interruptions. The process is thus understood as an assemblage where no component is idle but rather always contributing to the whole and synchronised with its speed.

In what follows, we will look at some contemporary cases where the time-regime imposed on the worker corresponds to the condition of what I call 'temporal unlivability'. Although they represent extreme cases, I argue they are not exceptional: the rationality that underpins them is to be found across all sorts of work environments, involving both manual and cognitive labour. As we will see in these examples, there is an unbridgeable gap between what the machine, the algorithm or the company is asking of the human worker and what the latter can effectively do with their biological capacities in terms of speed.

[15] Marx's affirmation that machines are the "chief actors" of more manufacturing processes *does not imply that humans work less,* only that they work on different tasks.

3.1. The sweatshop factory

Our first scenario is the sweatshop, whose production model has become the paradigm for the global apparel, toy and electronic industries (Bunting, 2011; Brown, 2009). There are two main kinds of sweatshops. First, there are large factories with substantial technological infrastructure where the workforce is measured in the thousands. These larger factories are usually the ones that sign contracts with big transnational retailers and are expected to undergo periodical audits. The other type of sweatshops are smaller factories with a few hundred workers that are subcontracted by the larger sweatshops to perform mostly manual labour. Because this second-degree subcontracting obstructs traceability, the smaller sweatshops are where the most extreme labour rights violations occur, as these places evade inspections and keep their practices obscure. The only reason why sweatshop workers "consent" to these aberrant conditions is because they have no better alternative to make a living, but this does not remove the exploitative dimension from their situation. We are bringing sweatshops into focus not because humans there collaborate with machines (to varying degrees) but, rather, because these are the places in the world where humans most closely *imitate machines*: workers produce the largest number of commodities in as little time as possible, for the lowest possible cost, and function with the least number of interruptions. Sweatshops thus represent the extreme of the global tendency towards the precaritisation of labour.

The temporalities that reign within sweatshops' walls corroborate the fact that they epitomise labour precarity. Workers must work as fast as possible, but their shifts seem to have no end:

> Factory managers typically push employees to work between 10 and 12 hours, sometimes 16 to 18 hours a day. When order deadlines loom, working hours get longer. A seven-day working week is becoming the norm during the peak season, particularly in China, despite limits placed by the law (Bryher, 2017).

A recent factsheet created by *The World Counts* reports that "in the worst cases, sweatshop workers are forced to work as much as 72 hours without sleep" (2022). Sometimes, this happens because, instead of workers' salaries being conditioned upon the number of hours worked, some sweatshops impose 'productivity targets' on their workforce, inciting them to work as hard as

possible for as long as they can endure. In 2011, reporter Madeleine Bunting cited the case of Sri Lanka, where

> wages were paid on productivity targets – despite such a practice being illegal. At one factory in Girigara, basic pay was cut if targets set by the management were not achieved. At another factory owned by the same company in Katunayake, workers didn't receive any incentive pay unless the entire quota was reached, but workers reported that the targets were impossible to meet so they never got their bonuses, even if they missed toilet breaks and rest periods to try and reach the target. At other factories, workers were forced to work overtime to meet productivity targets.

Working at such rates and sacrificing sleep over extended periods of time cannot but have important consequences for health. As we noted with Teresa Brennan in Chapter 1, there is a widening gap between the speed at which humans are "being used up and the time they need to regenerate" (13). From this perspective, we could define sweatshops as the places where that breach is expanded to the maximum, thereby provoking the highest levels of bioderegulation in their employees. Chapter 6 discusses the wide range of, typically long-standing, health issues derived from extreme forms of overwork.

3.2. The Amazon workplace: treating humans as robots

Our second scenario is the Amazon warehouse, where the time-regime is 1,800 inspected packages per hour, 30 per minute (Sainato, 2020). Amazon's hyper-complex supply chain and its reliance on advanced logistics is a perfect example of how having to closely collaborate with machines pushes humans to work at inhuman tempos. In his report on the "unsafe and grueling conditions" at Amazon's warehouses for *The Guardian*, Michael Sainato describes the unreasonable demands that the company places upon its workers as it aims for ever faster. He starts with the case of Rina Cummings, an employee who

> has worked three 12-hour shifts every week at Amazon's gargantuan New York City warehouse, called JFK8, on Staten Island since it first began operations in late 2018. As a sorter on the outbound ship dock, her job is to inspect and scan a mandated rate of 1,800 Amazon packages an

> hour – 30 per minute – that are sent through a chute and transported on a conveyor belt before leaving the facility for delivery (Sainato, 2020).

The mandated rates, which are euphemistically called by Amazon managers "performance expectations", are monitored by computers, which "write employees up" when these rates are not met, regardless of accidents: "When packages, especially envelopes with liquid, burst on the conveyor belt, Cummings often has to stop the belt to clean up the mess, but is still expected to hit her hourly rate" (*ibidem*). Sainato interviews some ex-employees who confirm having had the same experience and openly complain about Amazon's stressful and unsafe work environment. Raymond Velez, who "was required to pack at a rate of 700 items per hour", says "workers are regularly fired for missing rates" (*ibid*). Juan Espinoza, in turn, narrates, "I was a picker and we were expected to always pick 400 units within the hour in seven seconds of each item we picked. I couldn't handle it. I'm a human being, not a robot" (*ibid*). Ilya Geller's words, in turn, reveal in the clearest way the unforgiving nature of the surveillance systems that Amazon uses "to ensure productivity rates are met":

> You're being tracked by a computer the entire time you're there. You don't get reported or written up by managers. You get written up by an algorithm," said Geller. "You're keenly aware there is an algorithm keeping track of you, making sure you keep going as fast as you can, because if there is too much time lapsed between items, the computer will know this, will write you up, and you will get fired (Sainato, 2020).

Together, the conveyor belt (which connects workstations and, ideally, should always be moving) and the algorithm can be conceived as an industrial disciplinary device insofar as they "broadcast" what Foucault calls a "*collective and obligatory rhythm, imposed from the outside (1995, 152)".* Amazon's tracking algorithm has been taught to understand 'correct functioning' as uninterrupted progress, 24/7, but human exertion inevitably requires pauses and recovery lapses.

Time pressure is not just a coincidental downside of having a job at Amazon, it is a central part of the contract. In another article (2021), Sainato reports how Amazon delivery drivers are subjected to the same regime of time-pressure and surveillance, to the point that they are having to renounce normal bathroom breaks for fear of being sanctioned or fired: "Fourteen-hour shifts

were common […] and the pressure to meet delivery rates meant Meyers used a plastic bottle to go to the bathroom on a daily basis". Amazon subcontracts different delivery service providers to satisfy its global shipping demand. Sainato explains that, in order to get hired by Amazon, these providers must maintain competitive delivery times, and they get "paid bonuses on metrics such as route completion percentages" (*ibidem*). So, in order to achieve these metrics, the delivery service providers have tracking devices in place, which notify them "any time a van is off route or stops for longer than three minutes" (*ibidem*). Meyers hence reports "I would personally get called by a dispatcher every time I stopped to go to the bathroom. Sitting on the phone with them made the stop take longer. It just wasn't worth the angry looks in the morning or *the worry I'd get fired*" (Sainato, 2021, my emphasis). Here, employees are being forced to postpone or abbreviate beyond reason and dignity what is a biologically indispensable human need: the need to empty their bladder. They need to drink water in order to stay alive and function, but the system opposes what this action entails: to discharge it, because it eats up part of the time they have already purchased from the worker. Thus, it is the 'concrete times' associated to the satisfaction of biological needs[16] what the algorithms and tracking systems disavow and what Espinoza's statement "I'm a human, not a robot" seeks to reclaim.

This shortening, decimating and close monitoring of work-breaks is one of the features of contemporary work precarisation. Whereas in previous decades, break times were *included* in workers' shifts as part of their normal activities, labour precarity today consists in externalizing those pause-times as temporal costs that fall upon the worker: the lunch break and the toilet break are barely accounted for in the worker's daily schedule. Temporal unlivability here means that the worker is forced to finding ways of fitting them in a twelve or fourteen-hour workday with no respite, and the longer the breaks she takes, the more she will be penalized with a reduction in wage or a missed delivery order.

The most important conclusion from both Amazon reports, however, is that worker efficiency is being obtained through the production of job insecurity. Workers are made aware of the possibility that any of them may get fired at any given moment, without warning, under the

[16] And, simply, to the fact that, unlike machines, people feel good some days and unwell other days, which makes their performance variable.

pretense of a few minor shortcomings. Thus, the mandated hourly rates work in tandem with the surveillance system as a coercive dispositif (*sensu* Foucault) to make employees work as fast as possible under the implicit threat of being fired. Insecurity and precarity manifest in the consciousness of employees as what Butler calls "a heightened sense of expendability or disposability" (2015, 15). Far from being restricted to the Amazon warehouse, this phenomenon has increasingly become the norm in neoliberal capitalist work environments of all types. Indeed, Lazzarato elucidates how the production of insecurity, as well as of inequality and of individualisation are key strategies used by neoliberal forms of power to influence—or, in the above cases, *to accelerate*— the conduct of subjects (2009). Along these lines, Isabell Lorey (2015) argues that precarisation is not something that endangers neoliberal modes of governing by spreading from the margins but, rather, that precarisation exists in the middle of society and functions there as a neoliberal "steering instrument" (56):

> Precarious living and working conditions are currently becoming normalized at a structural level and have thus become a fundamental governmental instrument of governing. […] we still live in a security society, but it is one that has become governable through precarization (2015, 63-4).

A good illustration of Lorey's argument is precisely that whereas the lack of toilet breaks and job insecurity used to be associated only with sweatshop labour, they have now become completely normalised practices in places like Amazon, which are supposed to be Western, legally-compliant work environments that pride themselves on fostering their employees' "self-development". The same can be said in relation to Amazon's contempt for worker safety, which became apparent when the injury rates at JKF8 were "found to be three times the national average for warehouses" (Sainato, 2020). Precarious working conditions are therefore no longer the mark of the peripheral "third-world" sweatshop; they exist everywhere across the globe and, it must be emphasised, the temporal pressures that characterise them are not accessory but part of their very foundation.

3.3. The meat industry

Since early industrialisation, every step in the meat-production chain has been steadily accelerating, from the breeding of animals to their slaughtering, processing and packing. The US meat industry, in particular, pioneered faster breeding techniques:

> Producers discovered that animals could be kept inside, and fed grain, and could be bred to grow more quickly and get fatter in the right places. Since 1925, the average days to market for a US chicken has been reduced from 112 to 48, while its weight has ballooned from a market weight of 2.5 pounds to 6.2 (van der Zee, 2018, np).

In this respect, the genetic modification of both animals and plants has to a great extent been guided by the goal of producing organisms that need less time to attain full growth. In the particular case of plants, they are being engineered to survive plagues but also, importantly, to preserve their freshness in spite of prolonged shipping journeys and display times.

Likewise, meat factories were among the first ones to incorporate automated production lines and remain, to this day, one of the sectors most heavily reliant on them (Berger, 2021, 108). The use of automation in meat-processing plants "has led to significant increases in line speed for beef, pork, sheep, poultry and fish operations" (Barbut, 2013, 1). These increases follow from the tireless lobbying of meat producers to push restrictions on the evisceration line speed higher and higher. For instance, although a few years ago the Trump Administration's approval of the 175 birds per minute (bpm) limit was controversial, this limit has now again been updated to a vertiginous 250 bpm (Loria, 2021). At least, this is the case in the various countries where the multinational Marel sells its products, for its integrated "processing solution" of 15,000 bpm remains, since 2019, one of the fastest and best-selling lines today. Ted Genoways reports that US pork processing plants have also witnessed a dramatic acceleration of their operations:

> in 2002, Hormel's production lines were running at 900 pigs per hour; by 2007, they were running 1,350 pigs per hour. That's a 50% increase in five years, but the number of workers on the line increased by only about 15%. So, obviously, everyone is working harder, working faster, and mistakes occur (2014).

Sarah Berger explains that the rationality behind line speed legislation in Canada, whose history is similar to the American one, is primarily oriented towards ensuring "the microbial safety of consumer products" (2021, 101). Berger notes that the OECD's 1993 definition of 'food safety' as merely the absence of microbial hazards is highly deficient as it is defined negatively, and exclusively from the perspective of consumer well-being (102). For her, this results in "a failure to account for other tangential harms, societal or environmental, associated with production methods" and in a dismissal of the risks for workers and animals as outside of the assessment's jurisdiction" (103). Most alarmingly, not even the mandate to neutralise microbial risks for consumers is being respected with the implementation of high line speeds (Genoways, 2014). In spite of a report from the USDA's inspector general denouncing "recurring, severe violations [that] may jeopardise public health", the USDA is not only advocating a self-inspection pilot project but now is proceeding along a path towards implementing it across the US (*ibidem*). Genoways then draws attention to the fact that company-employed inspectors were found to be "less likely to report problems" than their government-employed counterparts. "One government inspector reported 'seeing copious amounts of faecal and other contamination being missed by the company inspectors'. When asked the reason, he responded bluntly: 'It's the speed of the chain.' " (Genoways, 2014).

Another aspect significantly impacted by line speeds in slaughterhouses and meat processing plants is worker safety, in relation to which Berger affirms: "occupational risks are well-documented, including injuries related to repetitive movements, holding awkward postures for extended periods, and working in extreme temperatures (hot and cold) surrounded by fast-moving, sharp instruments" (100). Indeed, it has been statistically proven that "people who work at any meat-packing plant for five years have a nearly 50-50 chance of suffering a serious injury" (Genoways, 2014). The primary reason why this risk is so elevated is because it is directly proportional to the high speeds at which the lines and the machines operate. While it is a risk that could be minimised by reducing line speeds and processing quotas, companies are clearly more interested in making profits than in protecting the limbs of their workers. The risk of suffering a serious injury is another case of organisational labour precarity. But to this kind of work precarity becomes attached a second kind: the social dimension of work precarity that Rodgers and Rodgers define as lack of legal, collective or customary protection against

unacceptable working practices (1989 in Jain, Aditya & Hassard, Juliet, 2014). This is the case of the many legal and illegal migrants that work in American and Canadian meat-processing plants:

> an extensive study of packing-house workers conducted by the University of Iowa in 2008 suggested that the number of injuries may be significantly under-reported. The study found that the large numbers of undocumented workers from Mexico and other parts of Latin America are almost half as likely to report an injury or job-related illness as their white counterparts (Genoways, 2014).

Latin American workers are less likely to report an injury, to unionise, or to denounce unfair labour practices for fear of losing their jobs or of being deported. Representing a large percentage of the workforce in American slaughterhouses, these undocumented migrants confirm the portrayal of slaughterhouses as places of marginalisation where, "[i]n the words of Chas Newkey-Burden, […] vulnerable animals are often slaughtered by some of society's most vulnerable humans" (Berger, 110). Meat industry workers are not particularly well remunerated for dealing with animal carcasses all day long, do not always have job security, and regularly work under time pressure. The risk of losing a finger or limb due to a breakneck line speed, or of developing a neuropathy due to dangerous tools (Genoways, 2014), and then not receiving adequate healthcare, compensation nor convalescence leave mean that meat-processing plants take conventional labour precarity to a whole other level. Like sweatshops, meat-processing plants are able to get away with paying unfair wages and providing unsafe working conditions because, for them, there is a seemingly inexhaustible supply of human resources in financially desperate situations who will settle for any job. The fact that, by working at meat-processing plants, undocumented workers are disproportionately exposed to serious injury and that they are also unlikely to report it or demand compensation is a perfect illustration of how inequality is produced and perpetuated through what Butler calls the differential distribution of precarity. In conversation with Athena Athanasiou (2013), Butler distinguishes a fundamental precarity[17] understood as "an existential category that is presumed to be equally shared" from a second-degree precarity, which is "a condition of induced inequality and destitution" and which exploits

[17] Which she also calls 'precariousness' (2013, 20).

the existential condition (2013, 20). Thus, while precarity in the first sense is a condition that we all face as living beings, precarity in the second sense refers to the fact that some groups of people are markedly more exposed to harm than others. Athanasiou brilliantly condenses this latter meaning as follows: "[I]n describing the politically induced condition in which certain people and groups of people become differentially exposed to injury, violence, poverty, indebtedness, and death, 'precarity' describes exactly the lives of those whose 'proper place is non-being'" (2013, 19). In her more recent work, Butler connects this disparity between the protection of some populations and the abandonment of others to "the differential ways that populations are valued and disvalued" by specific "forms of power that establish the unequal worth of lives by establishing their unequal grievability" (2021, 56). From this perspective, the repeated increases in line speeds represent increases in indifference towards workers' health and wellbeing; they are a statement of the disposability of their lives (and the replaceability of their bodies in the workplace). The correlation between high line speeds, a high serious injury rate and informally employed workers is no coincidence; rather, it follows the logic of the differential assignment of disposability upon which the neoliberal production of precarity relies:

> This is indeed related to *socially assigned disposability* (a condition which proves fundamental to the neoliberal regime) as well as to various modalities of valuelessness, such as social death, abandonment, impoverishment, […] *workplace injuries* (Athanasiou, 2013, 19; my emphasis).

Through its "differential ways of allocating precarity, of assigning disposability" neoliberalism produces inequality and perpetuates it at a structural level (Butler, 2013, 20). Here again, slaughterhouses and meat packing plants resemble sweatshops; these are places where the lives of workers are understood to have little or no 'grievability' (Butler). But if these places were already dangerous and precarious, with the advent of Covid-19 they became even more so. During the peak of the pandemic, several meat-packing plants across the world refused to close, resulting in hundreds of thousands of their workers contracting Covid-19 and a number of them dying (van der Zee *et al*., 2020; Reid *et. al*, 2020; Berger, 2021). A recent study concluded that "334,000 COVID-19 infections are attributable to meatpacking plants in the U.S. with associated mortality and morbidity costs totaling more than $11.2 billion" (Saitone *et. al.,* 2021, 1). The designation of meat-industry workers as 'essential workers' recreated contradictions that Butler

identified in relation to the value of soldiers' lives: "[o]n the one hand, they are considered indispensable […] On the other hand, they are designated as a dispensable population" (2015, 17). Finally, we could conceive of this allocation of injury or health risks as part of the prescriptive operation through which, in the Rancièrean framework presented in Chapter 1, *the police* assigns functions and places to specific groups of people as it institutes a certain distribution of the sensible.

To sum things up, the speed of meat-processing lines determines the extent to which the workplace is deliberately made safe or unsafe, denoting a greater or lesser valuation of worker's lives and health, a concern or else a disregard for their wellbeing. The trends above described represent a new combination of various kinds of labour precarity, a combination that did not exist twenty years ago because integrated line technologies did not allow such processing speeds. The regulation of line speeds is therefore not merely a logistical dilemma focused on balancing out the maximisation of profits with consumer safety. Rather, it also fundamentally involves ethical and political questions on the value of the lives, human and animal, inside the processing plant, and on their entitlements. The case of meat industry workers is a compelling example of how modern technology's ability to satisfy the capitalist imperatives of relentless and always-faster production enables the onset of new and perversely overlapping forms of labour precarity.

3.4. The acceleration of cognitive labour

So far, we've examined how the production of material goods has been steadily accelerating across different industries; but today's 'informational', 'communicative' or 'cognitive' capitalism is increasingly structured around what some call *immaterial labour* (Hardt and Negri, 2000) and others *cognitive labour* (Hill, 2015). Various terms such as "creative labour, network labour, cognitive labour, affective labour and immaterial labour" have been recently coined in different attempts to acknowledge and theorise the important transformations that advanced capitalism has brought to "working life and workers' subjectivities" (Gill and Pratt, 2008, 2). Although, as Gill and Pratt note, these terms are not reducible to each other, their proliferation indicates that both the ways in which we work and the products of our labour have changed and continue to do so. Throughout this section, I will discuss how it is not only manual labour that is

being dramatically accelerated but also these new forms of 'immaterial' or 'cognitive' labour. Yet before I proceed, I consider it is necessary to clarify the existing terminology and recognise its limitations.

Hardt and Negri define *immaterial labour* as the kind of labour that, instead of producing a "material and durable good", produces an "immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication" (2000, 290). Examples of *immaterial labour* would thus include academic research, work in the creative and cultural industries, work in the service economy as well as in corporate positions. Another term that has gained currency in this regard is *cognitive labour*, which David Hill uses to designate the contemporary shift where productivity is expanded "from the body to the soul of the worker, expropriating mental energies as well as putting to work the subjectivity of the worker" (2015, 13). For Hill, *cognitive labour* goes beyond creative or knowledge work and is identifiable in "all labour that is communicational, relational or affective" (*ibidem*). Hill therefore files retail service, hospitality, care work and customer relations under this label too.

Upon a more rigorous and critical examination, however, the term 'immaterial labour' has been found to pose some problems (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Dyer-Whitheford, 2005). The main reason for this is because it seems to disavow the fact that, no matter how "immaterial" its products may be, it is still premised upon a human body of flesh and blood sitting in front of a material computer, or dealing with other physical bodies. As I have noted before, capitalism likes to turn a blind eye to the fact that, before bodies are able to work, they need to have eaten, rested and been cared for. There has never been any pure *vita contemplativa* without the material toil of everyday social reproduction, which has historically been assigned to the female gender. And in relation to the tools for immaterial labour, these are also tied to very concrete processes of production: George Caffentzis noted as early as 1998 that, being made of conflict minerals, "the computer requires the sweatshop, and the cyborg's existence is premised on the slave" (cited in Gill and Pratt, 2008, 9). So, far from being disembodied and disconnected from the tangible world, allegedly "immaterial" labour can only ever exist based on preceding forms of material labour, such as the manufacture of the computer and the caring for the working body. As we have previously discussed, the fact that the majority of precarious workers are expected to work

8 to 10 hours per day plus their commute disowns the fact that they require time for their basic care routine and social reproduction, time which they usually end up subtracting from their hours of sleep. In this context, high-earning workers that perform "immaterial labour" and have a cook, a cleaner, a babysitter, a chauffeur, or an unpaid relative to care for them, are benefitting from a form of socio-economic privilege whereby they are able to lighten their real-life workload by externalising some of their "material" labour and the correlated time-costs onto others.

Although the category of 'cognitive labour' is perhaps too broad, it does not negate the materiality of all labour and thus evades the above points of criticism. So, while being aware of its insufficiencies, let us use 'cognitive labour' presently to refer to the kinds of labour and the kinds of worker subjectivity that:

a) rely primarily on the cognitive faculties of individuals, on their whole person (affective, bodily, and mental capacities), without fully excluding manual labour
b) depend to a great extent on the use of ICTs
c) often involve specific communicational skills

We will thus consider knowledge work, creative work, service work and white-collar jobs as forms of 'cognitive labour'.

The argument I want to put forth now is that *speed* and *continuity*, the principles of capitalist production, have also been enshrined in the world of cognitive labour. This is achieved through the deployment of logistical rationality, which in turn is underpinned by *productivism*. As I discuss in Chapter 4, productivism is the dominant normative code that structures our relationship to time and work (Räber, 2022). Although the finished products are not in this case Amazon packages or chicken breasts, logistical rationality is implemented just as effectively to ensure the fast and ceaseless production of knowledge, intellectual property, services, and cultural products. As Pang recounts,

> the template of industrial labor, including its underlying assumptions about work and rest, was copied by service industries, professions, and bureaucracies in the mid-nineteenth century. The modern office was conceptualized as a machine for rationalising and organizing intellectual labor, and it copied the working hours of factories (2018, 23).

The standardisation of cognitive work today is therefore comparable to that of the production of material goods. Forms of cognitive labour that were formerly de-regulated or very lightly regulated have now been seized as terrains of close monitoring, subjected to mechanisms for accountability and are being required to accelerate their production pace. The quest for speed and continuity is in truth a search for efficiency and optimisation, all aimed at *further* growth and productivity, the two paramount values at the core of the moral, discursive and sensory regime of productivism.

The current state of technology offers an enormous variety of instruments to implement the logic of acceleration in the domain of cognitive labour. Just as we saw in the Amazon cases, most corporate offices and call centers are endowed with monitoring devices that measure screen time, performance quality, and number of tasks completed:

> The employees' computers do not simply facilitate their daily tasks but also monitor – inflexibly – their productive output and presence at the terminal, timing the duration of periods away from the screen. In some cases, Jones observes, workers must raise their hands to request permission to take toilet breaks, with only an arbitrary allotment of time allowed for such vital bodily functions (Hill, 2015, 13).

Monitoring screen time has been a default surveillance strategy for some time now, but technology today is assuming an even more prominent role *vis-à-vis* cognitive labour and expanding its sphere of influence on workers' lives. The rising popularity of the new *Speechify* software provides an excellent illustration of this. Speechify is a new text-to-speech reader that can read out loud any text that is entered into it. Based on artificial intelligence and deep learning, this technology offers a range of different human-sounding voices, male and female, with different accents and intonations, in order to make the listening easier to engage with. While text-to-speech (TTS) technologies have actually existed for several decades now, what makes Speechify innovative and so appealing to neoliberal workaholics are three features: a reliable conversion of any text file into voice, different 'listening speeds' and a mobile-friendly format. The Speechify reader has a scale of listening speeds, from 100 words per minute to 800 wpm; in addition, because it can be downloaded as an app, users can take their listening with them

wherever they go. The assumption here, according to Speechify adverts, is that all users want to "get more done in less time" and multitask. Thus, again, we find that the promise of speed and uninterruptedness are the golden qualities that make this product competitive.

As I have said, the TTS technology in itself is not particularly new, it has merely been perfected, nor is there anything inherently problematic about its existence. In fact, it is easy to imagine persons with impaired vision, dyslexia, ADHD or other special needs benefitting from this kind of technology in order to study a full degree, or do work they wouldn't be able to do otherwise. However, a discourse analysis of the Speechify video advertisement reveals much about our societies' relationship to (over)work and about the naturalisation of the productivist normativity so characteristic of contemporary neoliberalism (cf. Couldry, 2010; Griffith, 2019; Räber, 2023).

The video advert starts by (pre)supposing that the person watching the commercial is often in the difficult situation of "having to read an incredibly long email from [their] boss that [they] have to finish before the big meeting starts in 10 minutes". "Or", the female advert voice envisages, "you're cramming for an exam the night before, but can't bear to keep your eyes open to read one more textbook chapter" (2021, 00:09). In the well-known marketing strategy of first presenting a problem, and then proposing the product-as-solution, Speechify first normalises a world full of deadlines and temporal unlivability, in order to then promote itself as the magical solution. The deadlines, the unreasonable reading load imposed by the boss or the teacher are not, in themselves, to be challenged; rather, it is you, the entrepreneur-of-the self, who shall find ways to "get more done" and survive the rat race. The violence of the word "cramming" to describe the forced memorisation, and the use of the phrase "cannot bear to keep your eyes open" reveal the sacrificial logic according to which climbing the professional (or academic) ladder is supposed to hurt. It's the same logic that Erin Griffith finds carved in cucumbers inside water coolers at WeWork offices: "Don't stop when you're tired. Stop when you're done" (2019).

The advert then introduces Speechify: "a reading assistant powered by artificial intelligence and deep learning, and designed consciously for students and working professionals who want to get more done" (2021, 00:41). As we saw in Chapter II, being able to "get more done in less

time" is precisely Rosa's definition of rationalisation, which, for him is at base a process of acceleration. The advert continues with two contradictory injunctions: first, we're told Speechify will allow us to "spend less energy reading, and more energy comprehending", yet immediately after this sentence we're exhorted to "choose [our] listening speed. Start at 230 words per minute, and build to 500 words per minute, which is 2.5 times faster than most people read". Whereas at first it seems this software is meant to help us better process and "retain information", the invitation to *train ourselves* to double our listening speed seems to stand in direct contradiction with the goal of actually remembering the content of what we read.

Towards the end of the video advert, the portability of this service is flaunted in the following terms: "Don't have enough time to finish? Take your reading on-the-go with a single click". In this scenario, where you have to leave your desk but *should* continue reading, having Speechify means there is no excuse for breaks anymore. The eyes may get a break, but not the brain nor the ears. In short, Speechify is designed so that one can *continue* reading after one has stopped reading; so that one *never stops* working. As the productivity-oriented reading becomes reformatted into a productivity-oriented listening, the activity does not become less material: rather, its material preconditions are different. Whereas reading requires a visual support (book or screen), lighting and, usually, a chair and a room, listening requires an electronic device with enough battery, a sound-reproducing system, and a quiet environment. And, they both require time. However, given that listening without doing something else is seen by many today as a waste of time, the listening time gets superimposed on other 'concrete' times, for example, those of the commute, the workout, or the cooking, resulting in a decrease in the quality of the tasks being simultaneously performed.

3.5. Bullshit jobs

Before we move on to the next chapter, I'd like to discuss the phenomenon of 'bullshit jobs' identified by Graeber. This is a category of jobs that, although not directly connected to overwork, is related to unlivability and to a maimed experience of time as pointless monotony.

Bullshit jobs are rarely ridden by the severe temporal and financial pressures that characterise the three job profiles we examined in section 3.2. However, this does not automatically make them good, enjoyable or dignified jobs. Graeber's extensive research into the subjective quality of experience when holding a bullshit job shows us that being repeatedly forced to do an utterly pointless activity, or else having to pretend to work, can be as psychologically damaging as being caught in a frenzy of relentless action. In differentiating 'shit jobs' from 'bullshit jobs', Graeber points out:

> These are two profoundly different forms of oppression. I certainly wouldn't want to equate them; few people I know would trade a job in a pointless middle-management position for a job as a ditchdigger, even if they knew that the ditches really did need to be dug. All I wish to emphasize here is that each is indeed oppressive in its own way (33).

Whereas jobs that are precarious due to bad working conditions, poor pay and constant time pressure wear people down with an over-saturation of tasks and responsibilities, bullshit jobs, at the other extreme of the spectrum, wear people down for the opposite reason. The latter provide them with no sense of purpose, no intellectual stimulation or social motivation. Graeber's subjects frequently report feeling numbed in a miasma of extended boredom and confusion. In this sense, bullshit jobs seem to exist within what Baraitser terms "obdurate temporalities", experiences where subjects must relate to time through modes of endurance (2017, 2).

Based on the hundreds of stories that he received, Graeber put together an inventory of "the moral and psychological effects of being trapped inside a bullshit job" (83). The first characteristic that he found "at the core" of these jobs was their purposelessness, and the profound "spiritual violence" that derives from not being able to achieve or contribute anything. Graeber dismounts the economic theory according to which humans will always seek the largest benefit for "the least expenditure of resources and effort" (96) and argues that, while this may be true in some domains of life, there are many others where it is not. As part of this counterargument, he refers to the work of Karl Groos, who discovered the experience of "pleasure at being the cause" when children discover they can produce a predictable effect in their surroundings (98). Graeber argues that this pleasure accompanies us into adulthood and drives all forms of creative action, from our desire to play, or to create art, to our passion for and

investment in any kind of personal project. Humans, here, are not trying to minimise effort in any way: on the contrary, they are giving their full selves for the sake of *the poietic action itself.* With an exquisite phrasing, Graeber rightly observes that when we are engrossed in doing something we can do very well, "even as we dissolve into what we do, the foundational 'pleasure at being the cause' remains, as it were, the unstated ground of our being" (98). This combination of intense focus and enjoyment, also famously baptised by Csikszentmihalyi (2017) as the state of *flow*, makes us oblivious to the passage of time.

In contraposition to this experience of pleasure, bullshit jobs turn time into an unpleasant swamp and *deprive* people of that ability to have a meaningful impact on the world. That impact could be something as simple as seeing that something needs to be done (made, fixed, cleaned) and then perceiving oneself as the agent that is capable, and in charge, of doing it (the self as the maker, the fixer, or cleaner):

> being trapped in a job where one is treated as if one were usefully employed, and has to play along with the pretense that one is usefully employed, but at the same time, is keenly aware one is *not* usefully employed, would have devastating effects. It's not just an assault on the person's sense of self-importance but also a direct attack on the very foundations of the sense that one even *is* a self. A human being unable to have a meaningful impact on the world ceases to exist (Graeber, 99).

Another common characteristic across the accounts collected by Graeber is the falseness that bullshit job-holders are forced to display as an implicit part of their work-agreement. This falseness unfolds in two levels: on a superficial level, they are constantly being asked "to look busy", to "pretend to work", or to "tidy up already tidy shelves" (92). On the deeper level, sometimes the entire position is superfluous and yet the job-holder has to find a way to justify their presence and self-worth at the workplace, where often others do not take them seriously precisely because they have a bullshit job. Ultimately, it ends up being a pretending to others as much as a pretending to oneself that one has a useful purpose in the workplace, *i.e.*, that one is not wasting, indeed squandering, one's time. Graeber puts it most perceptively when he writes:

"[i]f make-believe play is the purest expression of human freedom, make-believe work imposed by others is the purest expression of lack of freedom" (100).

However unsatisfactory and hollow these jobs may be, many people cannot quit them so easily, for sometimes these are their only realistic option for earning a living. Here, we confront another aspect of a global situation that is, as Graeber deplores, "genuinely perverse": the fact that "our society has reached the point where not only is the social value of work usually in inverse proportion to its economic value (the more one's work benefits others, the less one is likely to be paid for it), but many people have come to accept this situation is morally right" (204). In the book's testimonies, people recount how, no matter how much they wanted to resign, they couldn't find an economically viable alternative in the face of debt, a precarious labour market and high competition for other vacancies.

Finally, it is worth noting Graeber's work offers us another insight into the unequal distribution of time-scarcity. Although many wealthy people are time-poor, like CEOs and extreme job-holders, they could find a less time-consuming occupation without suffering dire economic consequences. Yet the predominant trend for job-holders below the 1% is that they are either overworked, unemployed, or else bored to death. Of course, there are also those lucky enough to have real (non-bullshit), enjoyable and well-remunerated jobs, and other groups with different relationships to time and work, but the stark reality for an increasing number of people is that work is becoming either unlivably stressful, precarious and exhausting, or decently-paid but unlivably boring and inane.

In addition (but this is just a hypothesis), bullshit jobs temporally impoverish not just those who hold them, but the rest of society too. I'm venturing this claim as a supplement to Graeber's fact-based affirmation that bullshit jobs do not contribute social value but, actually, destroy it. If bullshit jobs involve, for instance, sending out unnecessary forms, filling spreadsheets, or doing telemarketing –these are examples found in Graeber—, this means that the people who are asked by bullshit workers to fill-out those forms, answer questionnaires or take a sales phone-call, are also being robbed of some of their time for something that in reality has no enduring purpose. Finally, Graeber incites us to reflect on the way society could look if

there were no bullshit jobs and, instead, the jobs that existed were real, well-paid jobs taken by choice. He asks us to imagine the wealth of time that would be freed up, and what we, being effectively freed of time, could do with it.

* * *

Throughout this chapter I identified the increasing rationalisation, standardisation and surveillance of labour as developments aimed at heightening productivity by accelerating work. I lingered on a variety of workplaces to show the various strategies through which employers increase the efficiency of their means of production: the imposition of unattainable quotas to vulnerable sweatshop or Amazon workers, the increase of evisceration line speeds in the meat industry, and the proliferation of productivity-enhancing software in cognitive work are some prominent examples. Likewise, I recognised logistics and automation as two key mechanisms through the acceleration of work is achieved and, more generally, through which neoliberal capitalist temporalities and their productivist agenda are routinely enforced. I underscored how all of these rationalising processes depend on a model of abstract time within which calculations are projected. I also ascertained how the forced acceleration of human labour to inhuman tempos has damaging consequences for worker's safety, mental health and autonomy. Finally, these analyses allowed us to conclude that the production of temporal unlivability by neoliberal capitalist time regimes in the workplace is correlated not only to disciplinary mechanisms of old, but also to the introduction of new, overlapping and mutually reinforcing forms of labour precarity and socially assigned disposability.

Another aim of this chapter was shedding light on the unequal experiences of time and work pressure across different professions. Based on the various accounts of workers from different industries, I concluded that, despite the marked disparities in what is at stake for each, most workers are systematically exposed to temporal pressure, the demand to work overtime, and job uncertainty. On the opposite side of the spectrum, those who are unemployed, underemployed, or hold bullshit jobs face extremely slow and / or monotonous temporalities, which precisely for this reason are also difficult to endure. This shows how unlivability can take

many forms or, in other words, how neoliberal capitalism makes life unlivable in a wide variety of ways.

In the next chapter I develop an in-depth characterisation of productivism as the normative code that legitimates and underpins the models of pathological overwork we described above. In Chapter 5 I examine the import of these consequences, with a particular focus on mental health, and also address the impact of today's accelerated cycles of production, consumption and discarding on animal life and our natural environment.

Chapter IV. The normativity of time distributions

In Chapter 1 I argued that the layered notion of an unlivable temporal cartography I have been developing can be conceived from a Rancièrean perspective as a *distribution of time* through the neoliberal capitalist *police*. In this chapter, I focus on the normative dimension that underpins said distribution. I start with a characterisation of productivism, so as to then argue that 24/7 neoliberal capitalist temporalities are indeed time distributions driven by productivist values. I then examine the manner in which productivism dominates many contemporary workplaces today in the form of hustle culture, which, more than a genuine enthusiasm for work, is a set of rather rigid social and ethical norms to which employees must submit if they want to survive today's precarious and fiercely competitive labour market. I note how hustle culture primarily manifests in the form of excessive working hours regimes, temporal partitions that have become deeply ingrained into today's work culture thanks to a variety of power dynamics, collective practices, and reward-systems. Section 3 articulates a critique of the 'deliberate rest' model advocated by many today on the basis of the argument that, far from represent a true alternative to the productivist logic, it remains entirely within its normative remit. Section 4.1. examines the subversive potential of the Lying Flat movement as a refusal of work in favour of unproductive uses of time. Finally, section 4.2. discusses the rise of the 4-day week model and contends that, although it involves to a certain extent the instrumentalisation of rest, it nonetheless represents a welcome initiative for the betterment of working conditions that has the potential to introduce a better balance between work and rest on a wider scale.

1. The productivist normative code

Giddens defines productivism "an ethos where work has a very distinctive and central role", having been "separated out in a clear-cut way from other domains of life" (1994, 175). Räber, in turn, conceives of productivism as the normative code that predominantly occupies our sense of time today (2023). More particularly, he argues, it "occupies citizens' habits of *linking action, time and utility through a normative ethic of growth* and efficiency in production, which holds

that the more their actions and uses of time contribute to continued growth and production, the more useful they are" (2023, 5; my emphasis). But in order to fully understand contemporary productivism, it is important to recognise the manner in which, as both Räber and Giddens note based on Weber's work, it originally developed out of Protestant values, which then became secularised.

Weber identifies a major shift in the Puritan conception of work whereby it acquired an unprecedented relevance as an organising principle of life in Protestant societies. He finds this new valorisation of work best expressed in the seventeenth-century treatises of the Presbyterian priest Richard Baxter, which condemn idleness and praise hard work on the basis of two main arguments: "First, work is the tried and proven mechanism for the practice of asceticism […] Second, in addition and above all, as ordained by God, the purpose of life *itself* involves work" (2012, 106). The Protestant reverence for work then manifested as a move away from 'economic traditionalism', where people saw the need to work only as much as was necessary to meet their subsistence requirements, and toward the 'modern economic ethic', where "labour is an absolute end in itself, or a 'calling'" (Weber, 2012, 24). This represented a momentous transformation in the understanding of work, which became displaced from the domain of mere necessity to that of virtuous living. Far from unfolding naturally, Weber tells us, it was only gradually achieved through a religious education of the working masses. Giddens, for his part, sums up this metamorphosis as a detraditionalisation of work that simultaneously endowed it with moral precedence and, consequently, with a compulsive or "obsessional" character for Puritans.

Work, thus, provided the foundation for this 'modern economic ethic' that, "legitimates and provides the motivation" for the rigorous organization of Puritan ascetic life (Kalberg, xviii). Kalberg finds Weber developed his explanatory work along two main themes: 1) the strict organization of believers' conduct into "controlled, methodical-rational lives" and 2) "the directing of these systematically organized lives toward work in a vocational calling, wealth and profit" (2012, xxxi). Weber describes this Protestant orientation of life towards work as an 'ethical substructure' and, famously, as the very "spirit of capitalism". By using these phrases, he everywhere underscores how fundamental a pillar for the development of modern capitalism was this shift: as important, he argues, as were technological and legal developments, or the

expansion of trading routes. Weber hence gives us the precursor to twentieth-century productivism.

Weber recognises that this outlook on life and work eventually lost its religious foundation, as was already manifest in Benjamin Franklin's "remember, that time is money". This is why Giddens speaks of Puritanism "dropping away" from the attitude towards ceaseless accumulation of early entrepreneurs, leaving only modernity's obsession with control (176). Thus, while Protestant values became secularised, what remained untouched was the centrality of work in our lives, which Kalberg finds reflected in the way work has colonised our vocabulary: "we arrange 'working lunches', we 'work out', we 'work' on love, our relationships, our personalities, and our tans. […] If we take naps, they must be 'power naps'. 'Workaholics' take 'working vacations'" (2012, xxi).

Räber stresses that productivism is based upon the ideal of the rational and responsible person, defined in terms of their ability "to use and maximize the intellectual, bodily and natural resources in order to produce economic and social goods" (2023, 5). He also identifies how the complementary images of man as "the human motor" and time as "a quantifiable currency" were instrumental for the consolidation of productivism (*ibid*). This economistic approach to the body's motor capacities and time resonates with Foucault's descriptions of the logic behind the disciplinary methods discussed in Chapter 1: "one must seek to intensify the use of the slightest moment […] as if […] one could tend towards an ideal point at which one maintained maximum speed and maximum efficiency" (1995, 154). Foucault's historical analyses help us identify that the Protestant normative code was characterised by three core strands, veins which reappeared, in a secularised form a century later, as part of French disciplinary systems, and which still galvanise contemporary productivism. These three veins are a) the valorisation of "a totally useful time"; b) the use of control mechanisms; and c) the emphasis on working as hard as possible. The difference today is that whereas in the 18th century an array of disciplinary methods was used to enforce an intensive use of time, twentieth-century productivism relies significantly on subjects disciplining themselves.

Now, connecting this to Rancière's idea of temporal and sensorial distributions, Räber explains that from Rancière's perspective productivism is "not an ideology that critical theory

needs to unmask, but a normative regime of perceptions, meanings and sensibilities that it rather needs to articulate and counteract" (2023, 5). Productivism is therefore a regime that structures our perceptual universe and, insofar as it does so, it also distributes time "through narratives and through articulations of the sensorium" (*ibidem,* 6).

The argument I put forth now, drawing on the work of Rancière and of Räber, is that neoliberal capitalist temporalities and social acceleration itself are fundamentally underpinned by a productivist normative code. In other words, the distribution of the sensible and of time that these temporal constructs institute is primarily oriented towards a productivist system of values.

In the following sections, I engage in a critical discussion of contemporary phenomena where a productivist distribution of time is at work. I first comment on the normalisation of hustle culture, connect this to findings on overwork in corporate environments, and then move on to critique the instrumental approach to rest that is being championed by many today, in order to illustrate how productivism structures our temporal and sensible universe. Finally, I briefly explore alternative working time models and how these require a shift in the normative conception of how time should be used.

2. The normalisation of 'hustle culture'

In a brilliantly critical article, Erin Griffith draws attention to the rise of 'hustle culture', which she describes as "obsessed with striving, relentlessly positive, devoid of humour and –once you notice it— impossible to escape" (2019). We could think of hustle culture as driven by the contemporary discursive (sub)formation within neoliberalism that defends the uncompromising pursuit of productivity:

> In San Francisco, where I live, I've noticed that the concept of productivity has taken on an almost spiritual dimension. Techies here have internalized the idea —rooted in the Protestant work ethic— that work is not something you do to get what you want; the work itself is all. Therefore any life hack or company perk that optimizes their day, allowing them to fit in even more work, is not just desirable but inherently good (*ibidem*).

Hustle culture incorporates a logistical approach to the work-schedule, which is primarily promoted through social media and the culture industry, and thanks to an ever-growing number of productivity apps. Social media, in particular, represent a nodal point where so-called "life hacks" are shared as valuable advice on how to make one's routine more efficient and productive. Discussion forums in these platforms address everything from productivity gadgets to cognitive enhancers. In addition, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and LinkedIn have become spaces where reporting one's feats at work simultaneously allows workers to gain social acceptance, receive emotional support to cope with stress, and win one's employer's esteem. A perfect illustration of this trend is evoked by Griffith, who affirms, "I saw the greatest minds of my generation log 18-hour days and then boast about #hustle on Instagram. When did performative workaholism become a lifestyle?" (2019). Griffith argues young professionals are being trained to display an unconditional love for all things work-related[18]. In these cases, by copying overwork patterns from the media and feeding those back into them, working subjects become complicit in further amplifying, normalising and romanticising overwork and self-exploitation. Ultimately, Griffith shows us that hustling is a survival strategy that can be achieved in two ways: actually hustling and / or posing as a hustler. At the level of the pose, people compose a narrative that commodifies and advertises their (real or falsified) ability to do extended periods of grueling work as a desirable asset of their human capital. Showcasing their alignment with the productivist ethos that rules the fashionable world of self-made entrepreneurs allows these people to benefit from it.

The overwhelming power that productivism has over our lives today is clear from the fact that "many contemporary workplaces are characterized by persistent working time patterns with more than 60 hours per week, constant availability and an ever-increasing pace of work" (Blagoev *et al.*, 2018, 156). Writing from the field of human resource management, Blagoev and co-authors note that, even despite explicit attempts on the part of firms to improve the

[18] In order to explain the willingness of young people to display this love, Griffith refers to a text by Anne Helen Petersen, who argues: "Millennials […] are just desperately striving to meet their own high expectations. An entire generation was raised to expect that good grades and extracurricular overachievement would reward them with fulfilling jobs that feed their passions. Instead, they wound up with precarious, meaningless work and a mountain of student loan debt. And so, posing as a rise-and-grinder, lusty for Monday mornings, starts to make sense as a defense mechanism" (Griffith, 2019).

work-life balance of their employees, "excessive working hours practices prove incredibly rigid" (*ibidem*). They reference several recent studies in order to lay out a comprehensive account of the different factors that can explain this phenomenon. While they of course acknowledge the influence of ICTs, they see the perpetuation of these working time regimes as greatly attributable to the taken-for-granted social and cultural norms that place value on working long hours. In this sense, they acknowledge the relevance of increasing research into "how new forms of organizational control in knowledge-intensive organizations (Alvesson, 2004) can perpetuate excessive working hours and mislead individuals into experiencing their extreme workload as 'self-chosen' by concealing the underlying power dynamics (Costas and Grey, 2014)" and into socio-cultural norms such as "the 'work devotion schema', which tend to equate overwork with loyalty, performance and commitment" (Blagoev *et al.,* 2018, 157). Among their most consistent findings is the fact that working flexible hours is accompanied by a negative stigma, while working long ones is seen as a "sign of loyalty and commitment"[19] (159). This reiterates the ongoing predominance of the culture of 'presenteeism' which, according to Kobayashi and Middlemiss, "plays upon employees' fear of loss of income or employment and can result on them going to work despite being ill" (2009, 141). Hustling, thus, primarily manifests as working long hours no matter what. This has become the sometimes explicit, sometimes unspoken prerequisite for being recognised as a good employee, a solidary colleague, and an unstoppable 'rise-and-grinder' (Griffiths, 2019). Amidst rampant labour precarity, people here work overtime not because of love or enthusiasm for their profession, but only in order to avoid being made redundant or demoted. Even if productivism is not the determining factor in these individuals' relationship to work, it certainly is part of the neoliberal hustle culture that inundates their work environment and institutes the rules of the labour-market game to which they must submit.

Productivist power mechanisms, discourses and reward systems combine in such cohesive ways that, despite deliberate efforts from some employers to implement shorter working hours

[19] Pang notes that because "in industries where the 'product' is intangible and projects may take years to complete" there are no clear-cut productivity metrics, the number of hours worked becomes the standard by which employees demonstrate their commitment and grit (2018, 23). In this sense, "service workers and professionals are rewarded not just for performing work but also for 'performing' busyness at work" (*ibidem*).

and encourage a better work-life balance, regimes of excessive working hours remain highly persistent (Blagoev *et. al.*, 2018). Moreover, recent studies have shown **"**that group dynamics can generate self-perpetuating vicious cycles of escalating availability and responsiveness to clients and superiors (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Perlow, 2012) that, in turn, perpetuate excessive working hours regimes" (Blagoev *et al.,* 2018, 159). Thus, in precarious work environments, employees (are made to) feel that, in order to survive, they have to constantly demonstrate who is the most devoted to their boss, who is willing to sacrifice the most time and energy for the job, who has truly internalised the firm's ethos, who has merged their very identity with that of the company. We could therefore argue that many contemporary jobs involve a process of subjectification where workers learn to discipline themselves to the point of overriding their bodily needs and sacrificing all their time to stay on the job, or to climb the professional ladder.

This phenomenon has become particularly rife in the field of investment banking, where "both employees and managers [have] reported feeling 'trapped' in a regime of working up to 120 hours per week *for years*" (Michel, 2011 in Blagoev *et al., 2018*). Although they are high earners (even non-managers earn well in investment banking), if 'trapped for years' is the phrase they use to describe themselves, then we are speaking of people for whom changing to a similar job in another firm would make no difference, since the entire financial industry seems to have been colonised and corrupted by the overwork culture.

In their article "Employers' Liability for Occupational Stress and Death from Overwork in the United States and the United Kingdom", Kobayashi and Middlemiss critically address "the legal treatment of stress-related illness at work and, in particular, death by overwork (known as *Karoshi* in Japan)" to denounce how neither country has properly addressed this health and safety problem in juridical terms (2009, 137). As they compare the UK and US regulations, the authors deplore that the American Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA) "does not impose maximum limits on working hours", that, problematically, it "does not prohibit dismissal or any other sanction for workers who refuse to work overtime", and that "employers are free to impose non-voluntary overtime upon workers who work beyond 40 hours a week" (143). The authors also manifest that

> [a] serious concern in the US is the amount of 'mandatory overtime' imposed on employees. Employers will often make working above the standard working week of 40 hours compulsory, with the threat of job loss or other reprisals such as demotion, assignment to unattractive tasks or working weekend or night shifts for non-compliance (2009, 143).

We must therefore conceive of productivism and of hustle culture as part of what Nick Couldry terms 'neoliberal culture': "neoliberalism's *normalization*, the embedding of neoliberal rationality in everyday social organization and imagination" (2014, 38). Couldry thinks of neoliberal culture as a hegemonic rationality through which subjects learn to perceive and interpret the world. Without explicitly acknowledging it, Couldry's work is oriented in a Rancièrean direction given he recognises certain spaces and certain voices enjoy a privileged visibility and audibility within the neoliberal matrix of meaning. What is relevant from Couldry's work here is the idea that neoliberal culture, and productivism with it, form part of our way of interacting with the world from the conscious level all the way to the unconscious one, where internalised and perhaps unexamined beliefs guide our behaviour unless we adopt a reflexive stance. It is at this level that, in other cases reported by Blagoev *et al*., deeply "internalized norms of devotion to work" become part of workers' identities and offer resistance to new working hours schemes (159).

Blagoev *et al*. do not elaborate more on the origins of the social, cultural and ethical norms that make overwork a common and acceptable practice, but it is precisely my argument that they can be traced back to the history of productivism we have outlined above. The authors do, however, provide a useful definition of working time regimes as "dynamic sociotemporal phenomena that emerge within a web of heterogeneous and 'loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings' (Acker, 2006: 443)" (Blagoev *et al*., 2018, 158). The keyword here is *heterogeneous*, because it points to the fact that moral norms never exist in isolation, but rather always prove entangled with concrete social objects and phenomena. This is well-captured by the authors' evocation of "a complex web of 'taken-for-granted and mutually reinforcing practices, interactions, expectations, policies and reward systems that reflect and reinforce the ideal-worker schema' (Kelly at al., 2014: 486)" (Blagoev *et al.*, 2018, 158).

But, within this intricate web of power that is always demanding more productivity, it is important to distinguish two different kinds of forces exerting influence upon working subjects, each of which takes place on two levels. Byung-Chul Han refers to these two main spheres of influence as the *paradigm of disciplination* and the *paradigm of achievement* (2015). The paradigm of disciplination is organised around the negativity of *Should*, whereas the paradigm of achievement is ruled by the positivity of *Can*. One could posit them as two subvariants within the productivist normative code. The paradigm of disciplination can be broken down into "external" and "internal" forms of shaping conduct. External forms are for example surveillance and sanctioning mechanisms, while internal ones refer to the processes of neoliberal subjectification whereby workers monitor, evaluate and sanction themselves constantly (virtually acting as their own supervising authority) according to specific moral norms which they have, by then, incorporated.

Han's argument is that, in late modernity, "the paradigm of disciplination is replaced by the paradigm of achievement, or in other words, by the positive scheme of *Can*" because the latter is much more effective in getting subjects to maximise their productivity (9). The paradigm of achievement can also be conceptualised in terms of external and internal drivers, but the difference is that the world is there construed as a field of infinite possibilities opened by the prevalence of *Can*. As Han affirms, far from excluding each other, both paradigms overlap since they are geared towards the same aim: "*Can* increases the level of productivity, which is the aim of disciplinary technology, that is, the imperative of *Should*. Where increasing productivity is concerned, no break exists between *Should* and *Can*; continuity prevails" (2015, 9). The combination of hustle culture with the paradigm of achievement is perhaps most apparent in the case of extreme-job holders, the ultimate entrepreneurs of the self. According to Hewlett and Luce, 42% of their respondents take "far less time off than they are officially entitled to", and 66% "say they love their jobs" (2006). The authors attribute this to the fact that, beyond a large monetary compensation, many workers feel motivated by (and attached to) their extreme job due to other factors such as intellectual stimulation, high-quality colleagues, recognition, and power or status. We could think of these incentivising factors as precisely that which, by composing the horizon of *Can*, of possible achievements, keeps extreme workers effectively motivated and highly committed to their jobs.

To summarise the preceding sections, productivism is the normative code that predominantly structures contemporary time regimes. Granting a central place to work in our lives, it shapes the way we perceive, act and interact with the world. Functioning as a distribution of the sensible and the temporal, it has the power of turning overwork and exploitation into normal, acceptable and matter-of-fact practices. In a rather simplified version, what sustains this distribution is the cycle of individual statements and practices (learnt from prior socialisation) that are circulated in public spheres, where they become legitimated, turned into an institutional labour practice, a social policy, an implicit reward system or a viral Tiktok video, which then reaffirms the neoliberal distribution of the sensible according to what Räber calls "the gospel of productive work". My closing argument is that productivism further thrived with the advent of "achievement society" (Han), which not only uses it as a driving force for expansion but also sells it as a product, branded as the mindset of winners. This makes productivism seem more like a vehicle to reach one's aspirations than a multi-layered disciplinary scheme.

3. The instrumentalisation of rest

Productivism is not only a particular relationship to work but, by extension, a particular relationship to rest. A clear instance of a productivist discourse on rest is Alex Soojung-Kim Pang's book, which, while titled *Rest*, is actually "a book about work" (2018, 1). Pang starts by noting that "[m]any of us are interested in how to work better, but we don't think very much about how to rest better" (1) and counters that "with a little work and understanding, you can learn to do [rest] a lot better" (14). But if we think of rest as non-doing, then we cannot 'do' it correctly or incorrectly. In Pang's approach, however, rest is a goal-oriented activity to be performed *in the service of work*: the purpose of rest is to recover from past exertions and be able to do future exertions. The notion of rest thus always already presupposes that of work. In this coupling, rest becomes subsumed into the realm of activity and performance and is thereby subjected to evaluation along a 'better' or 'worse' spectrum. Within this normative framework, the central criterion for determining what constitutes 'good rest' is therefore the extent to which a certain kind of rest aids the working subject to stay productive (the best kind of rest being that which helps one become more and more productive). Now, what Pang argues is that the

productivity literature has completely overlooked the role that rest plays in attaining what he calls 'success' or 'greatness':

> Productivity books offer life hacks, advice about how to get more done, or stories about what CEOs or famous writers do. But they say almost nothing about the role of rest in the lives or careers of creative, productive people. When they do mention rest, they tend to treat it as nothing more than a physical necessity or inconvenience. Books about rest or leisure, meanwhile, seem mainly interested in escaping work, not improving your ability to do meaningful work. […] As a result, we see work and rest as binaries (Pang, 2018, 1).

Pang claims to be offering a different kind of book, one which, instead of treating work and rest as "polar opposites" or "adversaries", understands that they are indissociable complements (3). He rightly identifies that often people think of rest as merely "the absence of work, not as something that stands on its own or has its own qualities" (2). He therefore strives to give us a richer understanding of rest as something that makes us more productive and creative, that enhances our life and gives meaning to it.

Pang recounts how one of the insights that led him to write the book was the realisation that "creative achievement needs to be approached obliquely" (6), which is where rest comes in. According to Pang, the key to producing "good work" is what he calls 'deliberate rest': a kind of rest that is "psychologically and physically restorative but also mentally productive" (14). It is this kind of 'deliberate rest', he contends, what allowed some of history's most creative authors, scientists, politicians and businessmen to become exceptional at what they did. *Rest* thus compiles the various strategies that these historically outstanding figures incorporated into their daily routines, alongside a revision of the science of rest. Pang's main argument is therefore that if we learn how to 'do' rest better, it will provide an oblique point of support for us to come back to our work and do it exceptionally well, whilst evading burnout. However, there are several reasons why Pang's discourse and his proposal are problematic. Firstly, Pang keeps changing the images he uses to portray success without committing to one: becoming 'super-creative', becoming hyper-productive, becoming a leading figure in one's field, amassing financial wealth, or becoming a world-class performer are some of these. His notion of success is therefore vague

and incoherent, as one may well become supercreative whilst remaining unknown, or else become wealthy without being exceptionally good or particularly productive. Most importantly, one may be extremely productive, but without bringing creativity or enjoyment to one's work. While Pang's text sometimes associates greatness with creativity, at other times it seems to merely refer to increasing one's mean productivity. The ambiguity in Pang's notion of success makes his normative register ambivalent and does not save it from falling into a productivist, goal-oriented account of success.

Another aspect that is not without its problems is Pang's reliance on the notions of 'deliberate rest' and of a disciplined approach to rest because they divest it of its spontaneous, playful and aimless qualities. In other words, rest there becomes instrumentalised and permanently subordinated to work and achievement. As Hartmut Rosa argues, this kind of strategy belongs to the forms of intentional deceleration aimed at better coping with the swift-pacedness of life; they are, in other words, strategies of acceleration-through-slowdown, where one "refuels" only to "get going again" (2013, 87). Utilitarian views of rest are therefore highly compatible with the productivist ethos that, since its crystallisation with the Protestant work ethic, has been passed down through the centuries and is still zealously preserved by modern hustle culture. While Pang affirms that his book "isn't meant to just be a life-hacking manual, nor [does he] advocate turning rest into a tool for increasing our productivity or value in the marketplace" (18), his central arguments do presuppose an instrumentalisation of rest oriented towards producing "good work".

Pang does clarify that he understands work in a much wider sense, as something with which we have a unique personal connection, as something that galvanises us, that gives our lives meaning and a sense of purpose, as that which we are "willing to organise [our] lives around". Nonetheless, Pang's conception of work, somewhat tied to the Protestant idea of vocation, remains too romantic in the sense that not everybody has a clear image of what their "life's work" is and, even amongst those who do know what fulfills them the most, only a few are actually able to pursue that calling given our world's precarity and unequal access to opportunities.

In the section "Morning Routine", which is more about work than about rest, Pang's text does read like a conventional productivity book, praising the virtues of getting an early start:

> Among corporate leaders and finance types, an early morning is a regular feature of daily life. Some jump into work immediately. For executives running multinational corporations or working in global financial markets, an early morning is a necessity because international markets are operating around the clock. The first emails of the day from Apple CEO Tim Cook go out around 4:30 am and by five he's working out. […] Fritz van Paasschen, former CEO of Starwood Hotels and Resorts, goes for a run at the relatively late hour of 6 am but makes up for it by running 10 miles (78).

By presenting us with the routines of these individuals, Pang understands to be describing the epitome of productivity in the corporate realm. While not overtly prescriptive, the problem with his selection of examples is not that it seems to recommend getting up before dawn, but that the purpose of this be "to jump *immediately* into work" or "to get the chance to exercise" as if, for some reason, focused work or exercise were banned or impossible to do later in the day. We do not know at what time these CEOs end their day (and, by 'end', I mean actually going to sleep) but it is likely they do not end it very early. This means that in order to get as much as possible done every single day, these (clearly productivist) CEOs choose to cram their days with activities, starting from 4 or 5 am. One could also question the extreme degree of 'earliness' in Pang's advocacy for early mornings. First, we are not all CEOs or stock brokers. Secondly, the fact that the global financial market runs 24/7 actually makes getting up at 5 am as arbitrary as getting up at 3 am. Why not stay up all night checking the stock market for that matter? Pang then goes on to argue that getting up early is not only good for high productivity but also for boosting one's creativity.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with wanting to find out what are the times of day when our brain can function at its highest capacity, *i.e.,* what its 'optimal' state is. There is nothing wrong with wanting to work in our most lucid state and to be efficient so that we can, for instance, write in 2 morning hours what would perhaps take us 4 or 5 hours to write at another 'non-optimal' time of the day. And it is not just about wanting to perform at our best but, crucially, doing so on a consistent basis, without burning out after the first few rounds of work. Learning how to do this is, indeed, a valuable skill and understanding the place of rest is at the core of this

ability. Pang seeks to give us the tools in order to learn this skill in the form of strategies for a balance between work and rest. I do not reject his project; in fact, most of his advice is excellent, for my own experience as an academic has led me to the same conclusions of what works and what does not. The present thesis could not have been written if I had not first come to understand what are my own optimal times of day for writing, my optimal intervals for deep concentration, and, more generally, my physical, mental, emotional and sleep needs. In addition, Pang familiarises the reader with some very interesting studies on psychology, the science of rest, memory and cognition. It is the rationale behind the entire 'deliberate rest' project, however, what is not subversive enough. Although Pang is a strong critic of the self-destructive overwork culture that has taken hold of the US and of many parts of the world, his own proposal is still propped against a very similar kind of working subject: the neoliberal entrepreneur of the self. The very practice of deliberate rest is premised upon the idea of a self-governing and self-monitoring productivist subject, surreptitiously construed as a role model throughout the book.

To sum things up, what Pang offers us is not so much an emancipatory pathway out of neoliberal time regimes, but merely a way out of their unlivability. Not a radical break with the normative logic of productivism but rather a healthier, less toxic, version of productivism. Deliberately resting for work is as prescriptive a regime as deliberately working with as little rest as possible: the difference is that the first regime is a much smarter and sustainable approach to productivity. Within the deliberate rest framework, rest becomes subjected to metrics, assessment, quantification and hierarchising on the basis of how much a restful activity contributes to productivity, to 'outcomes': "[r]estorative daytime naps, insight-generating long-walks, vigorous exercise, and lengthy vacations aren't unproductive interruptions; they help creative people do their work" (11). Recreational activities are not valued in and of themselves: to be justifiable, they need to have the potential of improving cognitive performance or fostering creativity. While this is a valid strategy for concrete goals, it is problematic to argue, as Pang does, for placing rest in the service of work as our default, normalised *modus vivendi*, for it forces work into the centre of our lives, at the expense of everything else.

4. Alternative time partitions for work

On the basis of the preceding sections, it is fair to argue that productivism has evolved into a 'burnout culture' where "working more is thought to equal working better" (Autonomy, 2023). Although this culture has shaped the majority of the contemporary labour market and remains hegemonic today, more and more people have come to realise its toxic and pernicious character. As we will see in Chapter 6, consistent overwork and chronic stress (the typical offspring of neoliberal capitalist work-time regimes) have been scientifically correlated to a variety of physical and mental illnesses, and to increased risk of a premature death. The sky-rocketing of mental health disorders during the past couple of decades, pandemic effects aside, has made clear for employers, employees, and the wider public, that the world cannot continue speeding down the conventional productivist road. The frustration and sense of imprisonment that these work regimes induce have driven people to devise collective forms of resistance.

4.1. The Lying Flat movement

The Lying Flat movement in China is a poignant example of such recalcitrance, where young people are voicing an "I've had enough", and a call for deceleration, out to the world. Among this trend's main drivers are China's so-called 996 working culture, where people work from 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week, its former single-child policy and its shrinking labour market. These factors place unprecedented levels of pressure on young people "to work even harder and outperform their peers" (Davidovic, 2022). As an alternative, 'lying flat', or *tang ping*, is about "not overworking, being content with more attainable achievements and allowing time to unwind" (BBC, 2021). Many young Chinese are therefore taking time off work and choosing lower-paying jobs with fewer responsibilities over high-earning jobs where they have to sacrifice it all: "they now have the confidence to pursue a slower-paced life" (Davidovic, 2022).

"I'm continuing to get rid of the negative energy in my life. I think 2022 will be an upgrade on 2021, but I still don't want to do anything. I will continue to 'lie flat'. I enjoy this state" (Davidovic, 2022). I cannot but connect the words of this Chinese young man to the inoperative moment that Honig finds in the *horizontal* refusal of work by Euripides's bacchants. In *A Feminist Theory of Refusal*, Honig highlights the radicality of "the simple act of sleeping [in the forest of Cithaereon], and the enjoyment of relaxation" by the women who fled their prescribed roles in the Greek tragedy

(2021, 25). The passivity of the Lying Flat movement in China, and to some extent the Great Resignation phenomenon in the US, can be conceived as collective forms of inoperativity that bring about a suspension of use, and "a suspension of the everyday" (Honig, 2021, 15). Yet because, as Honig claims, pure inoperativity "does not by itself press action into concert with others" (2021, 102), it is but the first step in a broader 'arc of refusal' that must also incorporate the practices of *inclination* (sensu Cavarero) and *fabulation* in order to be not just subversive but also transformative. As Honig argues, "The effort may fail, but the return to the city, I claim, is fundamental to a feminist theory of refusal that aims to transform the city, not to abandon it" (2021, 1). The return to the city is a more than adequate metaphor, given that many of the 'flat liers' actually come from rural China to the big industrialised cities, only to find themselves trapped in a meaningless, isolating and exhausting routine. The complexity of the Lying Flat movement, however, already prevents one from reducing it to inoperativity only: while for some it is appropriated as a personal, silent journey, for others it is a form of protest, a revised lifestyle and / or an interval of intentional deceleration before coming back to a professional life that will never quite be approached as before. This is why it remains unclear to what extent this movement can qualify as an "assembly" of tired bodies. In my view, it represents the voluntary passage of subjects from what Peter Handke terms solitary *I-tiredness* to the open, relational tiredness that can found communities and help one retrieve *resonance* (Han, 2015; Rosa, 2019). Thus, while the element of *inclination* may perhaps be present in the Lying Flat movement, it is for Chinese theorists and social media experts to determine the extent to which this movement has engaged in counter-narrative practices of *fabulation*. For, as Honig contends, it is through these that the movement's arc of refusal would be complete, that its meanings can come to a fully-fledged articulation.

The Lying Flat case demonstrates how breaking away from neoliberal capitalist time regimes implies the need to coin alternative normative codes, from which will derive alternative temporalities and a different relationship to work. We are still far from bringing these changes to the level of social policy; and each country, each self-regulating community, will have to do that conscious exploration to arrive at a more livable model of work, tailored to its own needs. At the smaller scale, however, some organisations have started experimenting with unconventional ways of distributing and using time. Among these alternatives, the 4-day week

is a noteworthy example of a work model that has proved a win-win deal for both employers and employees.

4.2. The 4-day week

At the time when I started writing this thesis, the 4-day week was a marginal idea, with a lot of scepticism around it. But, as Autonomy affirms,

> over the past five years, the four-day week has seen an incredible journey from the fringes to the mainstream […]. The central idea, shortening working hours for no loss of pay might once have clashed with the received wisdom of dominant burnout culture […], but following the success of pilot schemes around the world, overwhelmingly positive research, and societal shifts driven by Covid, working time reduction appears an increasingly 'common sense' approach to the world of work" (2023, 9).

This uplifting statement from Autonomy think tank comes at the end of the UK's 4-day week trial, the world's biggest one so far and "a resounding success" (2023). The UK's trial had been preceded and inspired by earlier pilots such as those run by Microsoft in Japan, by Unilever in New Zealand, by Iceland's public sector, and by 4 Day Week Global in the US and Ireland, all of "which found encouraging results across all of the metrics tracked" (Autonomy, 2023, 11).

Thus, of the 61 organisations that participated in the UK "six-month pilot in 2022, 54 (89%) are still operating the policy a year later, and 31 (51%) have made the change permanent" (Hall, 2024). The scope and magnitude of the benefits for workers was astounding: "39% of employees were less stressed, and 71% had reduced levels of burnout at the end of the trial" (Autonomy, 2023, 6). Employees' levels of anxiety, fatigue and sleep issues also decreased, while mental and physical health both improved (*ibidem*). On the whole, this translates into positive effects on wellbeing reported by 82% of the workers, and into a more balanced and fulfilling personal life according to 96% of them.

On the employer side, "50% found [this model] reduced staff turnover, 32% said it improved job recruitment, and nearly half (46%) said working and productivity had improved" (Hall, 2024). In addition to the 4-day week's undeniable benefits, its attractiveness lies in that, as trials have shown, it offers an extremely adaptable model:

> Resisting the idea that the four-day week must be 'one- size-fits-all', each company designed a policy tailored to its particular industry, organisational challenges, departmental structures and work culture. A range of four-day weeks were therefore developed, from classic 'Friday off' models, to 'staggered', 'decentralised', 'annualised', and 'conditional' structures (Autonomy, 2023).

The 4-day week has therefore consolidated itself as a progressive and achievable policy in a variety of professional settings. Now, insofar as the 4-day week has been primarily championed as a business strategy rather than as a policy intended to improve working conditions, it remains tethered to productivist values. As the 4 Day Week Global website advertises, this model offers CEOs a way to "work smarter, not longer" and to improve work/life balance "without sacrificing business results" (2024). Their logic, here, is analogous to that of "deliberate rest" proposed by Pang (who is, incidentally, Director of Research for 4 Day Week Global). Contrasting with the typical 5- or 6-day workweek, and with many firms' 24/7 availability requirements, the 4-day week represents nonetheless significant improvements in the working conditions and general quality of life for employees. Thus, whether or not endorsed from a productivist rationality, the fact that the 4-day week has solidly proven advantages for workers, received media and academic attention, and that it continues to be implemented in more and more places is a valuable victory over the unlivable working time regimes that drive workers to exhaustion, illness and depression.

Inasmuch as productivism remains the hegemonic normative code that jointly structures work and time in the present age, there is still a lot to be fought for: namely, workers' right to more livable, less stressful, precarious and exploitative working time regimes, as well as more gender parity in the distribution of free time. But the slow advent of the 4-day week, as well as the introduction of menstrual leave, paternity leave and the broadening of the categories of 'bereavement and 'compassionate leave' in some countries are encouraging steps in the right direction that denote an active reclaiming of what Postone terms *concrete times* (1993). These policy changes are characterised by a greater receptivity to the non-linearity of human life, by an acknowledgement that this life is marked by the *irregular* temporalities of birth, menstruation, parenting, sleep, illness, and death, among many other natural processes. As an alternative spatio-temporal distribution that has fought its way to implementation, the 4-day week is reducing that unlivable gap between what we are demanded to achieve and what our bodies can

actually handle by improving the balance between work and recovery time. Similarly, menstrual leave represents the institutional recognition of a bodily interruption in the normal pace of work by a policy that authorises and *includes* this hiatus in the temporal cartography of work. In many cases, the improvement of living and working conditions not only requires the development of flexible working schemes, but also enough welfare-state support for people with special needs or with caring responsibilities. If we truly want to change course, we should continue welcoming and fostering alternative temporal partitions such as these, for they are small, or not so small, "material and symbolic reconfigurations of the given state of things", as Rancière so lucidly once wrote (2011, 7).

I opened this chapter with an excavation into the Protestant origins of productivism to show how it became a powerful normative force that, making life revolve exclusively around work, was fundamental for the historical rise of capitalism. I proceeded to examine the latest manifestations of productivism within contemporary hustle culture, where overwork patterns are not only naturalised but also praised, and behind the instrumental approach to rest. But then I turned to cases where subjects successfully institute alternative time distributions that challenge the neoliberal capitalist commodification of time and refuse its focus on work. These "small victories" corroborate Martineau's claim that "embodied temporal resistance to [marginalising] processes is never completely shut down" (2015, 8). Indeed, we must recognise that ordinary people are can and do resist the imposition of capitalism's time regimes. In addition to getting new policies approved, people everyday find ways to make ends meet, not just in financial terms, but in temporal ones too. Whether by cutting corners, bending the rules, or multitasking, people manage to deliver what is expected of them whilst protecting their priorities. This is why Martineau argues the commodification of time should not be understood "as a once-and-for-all event, but as a *conflictual* process implying a tendency by capitalism to create and reproduce an abstract time framework which alienates, subsumes and abstracts from concrete social times, while being contested and resisted by women and men as embodied historical agents thriving for the reappropriation of their concrete times, bodies and lives" (2015, 8). The point, of course, is that people should not have to be looking for scraps of livability in an ocean of unlivability, nor should they have to sacrifice time for sleep in order to buy food, pay rent or a student loan. As I

have argued before, and as Martineau argues with forceful clarity, because “time is measured and organised not by us, but by capital, not for us, but for capital”, “reclaiming human concrete times […] forms an integral part of the reclaiming of our lives and our world” (2015, 168).

Chapter V. Burnt-out World: Complete Exhaustion

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have characterised neoliberal capitalist temporalities and the way they impose on us an unlivable relationship to time. After developing a theoretical vocabulary and introducing the notions of temporality and temporal cartography, I argued in Chapter 1 that temporal cartographies can be conceived as distributions of the sensible (Rancière) that structure the ways in which we articulate time, space, action and utility. I also noted, drawing on Foucault's work, that time regimes become enforced through a variety of discourses, practices and disciplinary techniques. I then drew a focus on neoliberal capitalist temporalities, and sought to understand the manner in which they contribute to the experience of unlivability for people in different ways. Finding support in Crary and Rosa's theses, I concluded two central features of contemporary time regimes are *24/7 activity*, and *an ever-increasing pace*.

In Chapter 2, I showed how the rise of capitalism required the institution of time regimes based on the abstraction of time, and how, *vice versa*, these new temporal structures became hegemonic as capitalism developed into neoliberal capitalism. Understanding them as temporal cartographies built on the principles of rationalisation and efficiency, I was able to identify them as a constitutive feature of the neoliberal capitalist system, as that which allows it to stabilise dynamically. In Chapter 3, I looked at cases where an extremely accelerated work-pace and, often, overtime are imposed on workers at the expense of their own health and wellbeing. In Chapter 4, I traced the normative roots behind 24/7 temporalities to the Protestant work ethic, productivism, and neoliberal hustle culture to show that it is their ideological apparatuses what make these time regimes so hard to escape or resist. Towards the end of this chapter, I explained how the disciplinary paradigm and the achievement paradigm combine to push working subjects to accelerate their performance to the limits of their biological capacities.

Contemporary time regimes have arguably transformed not just the realm of work, which has been my main focus so far, but all areas of our lives. I would now like to address the consequences of these changes and their broader significance for our future and the future of all life on Earth. In order to do this, I come back to Hartmut Rosa, who proposes thinking of social

change along three core dimensions. In his study of social acceleration, Rosa does not fail to see the magnitude of the problems that it poses for our world. In fact, he sees what he calls "the three great crises of the present day" as a direct result of "the endless compulsion towards escalation" that characterises capitalism:

> An aimless, endless compulsion toward escalation ultimately leads to problematic, even dysfunctional or pathological, relationships to the world on the part of both subjects and society as a whole. This dysfunction can be observed in the three great crises of the present day: the environmental crisis, the crisis of democracy, and the psychological crisis (as manifested, for example, in ever-growing rates of burnout). The first indicates a disturbance in the relation between human beings and our non-human environment or nature, the second a disturbance in our relationship to the social world, and the third a pathological disorder in our subjective relation to the self. What is more, problematic relationships to the world are not only a consequence of acceleration and the compulsion to escalate in modern societies, but also their cause, so that we are dealing here with a self-reinforcing circular problem (2019, 17).

I fully subscribe to Rosa's diagnosis and consider important to recognise the seriousness of the issue given that, as he concludes, problematic relationships to the world (such as those held by people under temporal pressure) further perpetuate the acceleration trends that individuals are struggling with. This final chapter is therefore intended to serve as an assessment of the consequences of neoliberal capitalist time regimes and their persistence. Whilst I will bring the magnifying lens to specific phenomena such as, for instance, the consequences of overwork on health, the object of my critique is not just overwork or acceleration but, more generally, the entire time regime of which acceleration and the normalisation of overwork are but two aspects. When I speak of 'consequences' or 'impact', the reader should thus bear in mind that this refers to the combined effects of the different factors that *together* compose neoliberal capitalist temporalities. Let us now take a closer look at each of the crises identified by Rosa. We will start with the health crisis derived from stress and overwork, which has now become a problem confronting employers and policy-makers across the world.

1. Consequences of accelerated overwork on health

1.1. The impact of stress and overwork

As has become more and more evident, it is the combination of chronic stress and overwork what makes today's work culture so toxic and, literally, unlivable. Japan was the first country to learn this bitter lesson during the 1980s, when reports of blue-collar workers dropping dead started to emerge (John, 2017). This is when the term *karoshi*, meaning "death from overwork", first came to light: "by 2015 more than 2,000 suicides and 96 deaths and heart illnesses were linked to it. Campaigners put annual fatalities at 10,000" (*ibidem*). Japan has made efforts to curb *karoshi* by tightening its legislation on overtime and reducing workloads, but the problem has not disappeared. There are not enough sanctions on employers for non-compliance and, in addition, Japanese workers must still reckon with the weight of moral values and social norms. Working long hours is so applauded and well-respected in Japan that, as Dickinson reports, "even sleeping in public from exhaustion – called *inemuri* or 'sleeping while present' – can enhance your reputation at work" (2023). This shows how the moral value-system at the centre of a temporal cartography acts as a powerful "enforcement" mechanism itself. Alarmingly, *karoshi* has now spread to many other countries, most of which are still failing to recognise it as a social problem requiring legislation (Dickinson, 2023). Here, it is important to argue that even if long-term exposure to stress and high amounts of overwork do not immediately lead to death (understood as *karoshi*), they still lead to a variety of other health issues which greatly diminish a person's quality of life and can cause premature death.

The UK Health and Safety Executive defines work-related stress as: "The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work" (HSE, 2008). To help employers design risk assessments for work-related stress, the HSE has identified six key areas that can be sources of WRS:

- the demands of your job;
- your control over your work;
- the support you receive from managers and colleagues;
- your relationships at work;
- your role in the organisation;

- change and how it's managed" (ibidem).

The crucial aspect to note here is that all of these six areas are directly impacted by the temporal structures governing the workplace in question. If the workplace is structured around a productivist normative code, uses logistical rationality and strictly monitors worker outputs against time elapsed, then employees will have little control over their work and unreasonably high demands. At the organisational and supra-organisational level, a dynamic, competitive market forces companies to privilege their sales and monetary assets over their human resources, which they tend to see as disposable. This means that companies will often introduce rapid management changes, budget or personnel cuts to preserve their financial health. This can predictably cause work-related stress (WRS) for employees who then see their roles, relationships and responsibilities altered in unexpected ways. Finally, but no less significantly, the generalised time scarcity that affects most people on most workplaces is a large barrier that often prevents people from giving support to their colleagues. As the intersubjective constructs where collective projects are articulated, designed and carried out, time regimes determine the nature of the relationships that emerge within them. Thus, to the extent that a workplace is ruled by an unlivable temporality and by capitalist imperatives, its work environment will be marked by (self-)exploitation, unlivability and stress.

Among the top countries were overwork and WRS have become a large-scale health problem are Mexico, Singapore, China, Turkey, the US and the UK (Aristegui, 2019; John, 2017; Kobayashi and Middlemiss, 2009). Mexico, in particular, has been among the most overworked countries over the past decade, and was number one in last year's OECD's overwork ranking (World Population Review, 2024). Erika Villavicencio-Ayub deplores the normalisation of bad working conditions in Mexico over the past 20 years and affirms their impact on health is sweeping and, often, irreversible:

> An unhealthy diet; gastrointestinal disorders; increased coffee, alcohol and tobacco consumption, muscle pain, migraines; frequent illnesses; insomnia; mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety and neurosis; abstenteeism; distant interpersonal relationships […], are all consequences of those bad working conditions. […] According to the OCDE, 43 per cent of Mexicans suffers from work-related stress, being the country with the highest rate in the world; Mexicans are also those who work the most hours per week, but with the lowest productivity

indexes (2019, np; my translation).

As you may remember, Villavicencio's enumeration of ailments corresponds exactly to what Brennan terms bioderegulation (2003). Villavicencio describes two important vicious cycles in the passage above. The first one is the deterioration of social relationships due to work-related stress, where the increased distance with other people further hurts and isolates the stressed person. The other vicious cycle relates to the mismanagement of chronic stress, which, whilst detrimental in itself[20], also leads people "to adopt harmful habits in order to cope" (Dickinson, 2023, np). Kobayashi and Middlemiss place the same emphasis on the destructive role of stress, combined with working long hours. They argue this combination "affects people's private lives and […] can lead to stress-related illness such as: chronic fatigue, cancer and heart disease and increases the risk of accidents and injuries" (2009, 139). Most concerningly, the connection between work-related stress and fatal cardiovascular events has grown undeniable, with the ILO-WHO collaborative study being the most robust proof of the matter (Dickinson, 2023; Kivimaki, 2015; WHO, 2021).

An important aspect to underscore about the bioderegulation derived from work-related stress and overwork is that it takes place as a macro-process where various micro-processes aggravate each other. Because physical and mental health are intertwined, the deterioration of one also degrades the other, and viceversa (O'Sullivan, 2016). For example, being under constant workplace stress can provoke insomnia, which, among other things, affects mood, cognition, memory and digestion. Combined with low energy levels, these conditions make a person more likely to make mistakes or generate accidents at work, and less likely to invest time in making healthy food. A bad performance at work and poor nutrition, in turn, worsen physical symptoms and exacerbate a negative mental state. Stress and overwork thus damage the health of individuals in two ways: by altering their body chemistry, and by pushing them to an unhealthy lifestyle.

[20] Stress implies a heightened production of hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, whose persistence damages the body's circulatory system (Dickinson, 2023).

1.2. Burnout syndrome, a kind of neuronal violence

When the body stays in a state of bioderegulation for too long, under the pressure of constant deadlines and growing workloads, what was a tired but functioning body starts to experience burnout syndrome[21]. The World Health Organization has defined *burnout* as a syndrome that, like the above-mentioned conditions, also results from "chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed" and that is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
- reduced professional efficacy (WHO, 2019).

Although according to the WHO burnout "refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life", the phenomenon must be understood as stemming from the gigantic pressures of what Byung-Chul Han calls *achievement society*, pressures that indeed go beyond the professional realm and construe achievement in a much broader sense as an always incomplete life-project. Burnout thus designates the frontier of human functionality. The experience of it is well captured by Josh Cohen, who describes it as "the urge to shut down" altogether (2016).

Byung-Chul Han sees burnout and depression as two interrelated and unmistakably contemporary illnesses. More particularly, he understands them as the consequence of what he calls "neuronal violence":

> Neuronal violence does not proceed from system-foreign negativity. Instead, it is *systemic*—that is, system-immanent—violence. Depression, ADHD, and burnout syndrome point to excess positivity. Burnout syndrome occurs when the ego overheats, which follows from too

[21] The term *burnout* was coined by the psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in 1974 to characterise "the increasing number of cases he encountered of 'physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress'" (Cohen, 2016).

much of the Same (Han, 2015, 7).

Han's argument is that our late-modern societies produce an excess of positivity in the form of *too-much-of-the-Same*: overproduction, overachievement, and overcommunication (5). For him, positivity represents a very different kind of violence to that posed by the threat of the Other, the foreign or the virus, *i.e.* by negativity. Unlike the latter, he explains, the violence of positivity "does not deprive, it saturates; it does not exclude, it exhausts" (2015, 7). We can thus group under the label of neuronal violence burnout syndrome, work-related stress (WRS), anxiety (GAD) and depression. Albeit catalogued as separate mental illnesses, they share several symptoms and are *de facto* linked with each other (Khammissa *et al.*, 2022). Anxiety and depression also manifest as reactions to task overload, job insecurity and toxic work environments. In fact, burnout, anxiety and depression very often come in an indissociable bundle. As Cohen argues, "the relationship to stress and anxiety is crucial, for it distinguishes burnout from simple exhaustion" (2016). The fact that anxiety and depression are the world's most prevalent mental health disorders, with 301 and 280 million people respectively suffering from them in 2019, confirms Han's thesis about their epochal nature and Rosa's diagnosis of a "psychological crisis" (WHO, 2022).

Han maintains that because the psychic disorders of our time do not result from negativity, but from positivity, the traditional immunological framework[22] is incapable of accounting for them. He thus invites us to move beyond it and readjust our lens to the logics of the achievement society where we now live. According to Han, the link connecting achievement society with burnout is self-exploitation: "the achievement subject exploits itself until it burns out" (47). A twenty-first century phenomenon, auto-exploitation thus indexes for him a displacement away from the paradigm of external domination and into the paradigm where the subject is prey to its own compulsion to achieve and perform:

> The achievement-subject stands free from external instances of domination forcing it to work and exploiting it. It is subject to no one if not to itself. However, the absence of external domination does not abolish the structure of compulsion. It makes freedom and compulsion coincide. The achievement-subject gives itself over to freestanding compulsion ***in order to***

[22] *Id est*, the immunological scheme of inside and outside, Own and Other (Han, 7).

> ***maximize performance***. In this way, it exploits itself. Auto-exploitation is more efficient than allo-exploitation because a deceptive feeling of freedom accompanies it. The exploiter is simultaneously the exploited. Exploitation now occurs without domination. That is what makes self-exploitation so efficient. The capitalist system is switching from allo-exploitation to auto-exploitation ***in order to accelerate***. On the basis of the paradoxical freedom it holds, the achievement-subject is simultaneously perpetrator and victim, master and slave (49; my emphasis).

What deserves attention here is that, although Han says the achievement subject stands free from external instances of domination forcing it to work, he acknowledges that this same subject stands "under the injunction to achieve" (49). Han does not say there are no forms of power acting over the subject anymore, but that there has been a topological change of power with the advent of achievement society. Whereas the society of sovereignty was based upon exclusion and inhibition, the violence of achievement society manifests primarily as *inclusion* and *exhaustion* (48). The neoliberal subject must (*can* and *should*) do everything and get involved everywhere, for which it must act as fast as possible. Han's recasts the injunction to achieve as the duty "to maximise performance" or "to increase productivity". As we have established earlier, these are precisely the productivist imperatives that drive our capitalist societies and that normatively structure our relationship with the sensible world, with time and space. This is where it becomes evident that the subject is far from free: it is merely confronted with another configuration of power seeking to influence its conduct. It is worth noting that the replacement of exploitation by self-exploitation happens for the sake of *efficiency*, "in order [for the capitalist system] to accelerate" and, following Rosa, to dynamically stabilise.

Han's account is inaccurate in two respects. When he writes that there are no external forms of domination pushing subjects to overwork and that, therefore, the depressive human being is an *animal laborans* that self-exploits itself "voluntarily", Han is making a rather simplistic statement (10). This claim overlooks, first, the fact that today's landscape of induced precarity imposes various other kinds of pressure on neoliberal subjects that can certainly be viewed as "external". Secondly, his use of the word "voluntarily" eludes the nuance of the fact that the struggle for survival in the midst of unlivability *forces* subjects to *involuntarily consent* to a regime of overwork. There are millions of people today working until they burn out but not

because of "the freestanding compulsion" to maximise their performance. They overwork not out of a late-modern fixation on reaching always-higher goals, but rather out of sheer necessity. Although they may not have interiorised the cult to productivity or the idea that they are only worthy as human beings if and when they achieve something, the highly competitive labour market makes clear to them that not even a minimum wage can be earned without working overtime.

Burnout syndrome has come to notoriety due to the steep and relentless rise in cases that recent decades have seen across the globe. In 2022, the McKinsey Health Institute conducted a global survey of nearly 15,000 employees and 1,000 HR decision-makers in 15 countries. They found that, on average, a quarter of employees reported having burnout symptoms (2022). According to a 2017 report, burnout syndrome accounts for 8% of all occupational illnesses in the European Union (Lastovkova *et al.,* 2018). In Gallup's 2023 *State of the Global Workplace* report, 44% of respondents said they experienced a lot of stress the day prior, showing no change from the previous year (Taylor, 2023). Indeed, employee stress across various industries skyrocketed due to the pandemic but, as Gallup reports, employee stress has been rising for over a decade (2023). Importantly, other studies have also found women are more likely to report burnout than men, which is in concordance with the global gender-gap in leisure time we observed in Chapter 3. In particular, they are more likely to report work-related emotional and physical exhaustion, one aspect of burnout (Purvanova and Muros, 2010). Some academics also attribute this to the weight of traditional gender-roles on women that perform both paid work and unpaid social reproduction work (Taylor, 2023; *Artz, et. al.,* 2021).

These figures evidence how unsustainable contemporary demands on many workers really are. In a burnout case, one sees the body and the brain suddenly falling from the pace of an extreme job to an extreme standstill. As Cohen eloquently writes, burnout "occurs when we find ourselves taken over by this internal protest against all the demands assailing us from *within and without*, when the momentary resistance to picking up a glass becomes an ongoing state of mind" (Cohen, 2016). Cohen's account seems to recognise more clearly than Han's that the factors contributing to burnout include demands coming both from within and without.

Demographically, stress-derived mental health disorders have reached such alarming proportions that they have become a public health problem that is hindering productivity and costing a lot of money:

> According to the American Institute of Stress, job stress is estimated to cost US industry $300 billion annually […] Furthermore, the National Council on Compensation Insurance claims that 'the average cost of a mental stress claim is 52% higher than the average traumatic injury claim and such claims last 16 weeks longer than a physical injury claim'" (Kobayashi and Middlemiss, 2009, 139).

Likewise, the Health and Safety Executive in the UK estimates that 17.9 million working days were lost to stress, anxiety, or depression in 2019-2020, a figure that kept rising, despite the abating of the pandemic, up to 19.6 million working days in 2023 (2020; 2023). The World Health Organisation groups the various adverse factors that can contribute to a person developing a mental health disorder into three main categories: individual factors; social and economic circumstances; and environmental factors (2017). And although, indeed, every case results from a unique combination of factors, we should not underestimate the importance of the second and third categories, which include: low income and poverty, work-related stress, unemployment, discrimination, and social and gender inequalities (*ibidem*). In other words, individuals who are confronted with an unlivable environment are at a higher risk of developing a mental health disorder, which makes their own *lebenswelt* even more unbearable and their situation harder to escape.

Consistent exposure to acute stress and overwork not only erode physical and mental health in objective terms, but also inflict serious damage in subjective terms. The subjective nature of the wound caused by a mental health disorder becomes palpable in the fact that time is experienced differently. In the stages before burnout or depression, people feel confronted with a disjunctured, frenetic experience of the passing of time alongside feelings of being under constant pressure, trapped or overwhelmed. When depression or burnout are triggered, this then flips over into the opposite: time comes to a standstill (Thönes and Oberfeld D, 2015). Hartmut Rosa refers to these cases as "pathological slowdowns" and notes:

> recent research yields increasing support for the notion that depression and related disorders may appear as a pathological reaction to and withdrawal from the social pressure to accelerate. In phases of depression it often seems to the sick person that time stands still or turns into a toughened mass (2013, 84).

Han sees depression as a state preceding burnout: "it erupts at the moment when the achievement-subject is *no longer able to be able* [*nicht mehr können kann*]" (10). With this sharp formulation, Han shows how depression is a kind of violence that affects one at the most fundamental level of all: at the level of being capable of having the capacity to act. Depression is therefore the nullification of absolute potentiality, or potentiality to the second degree. Any kind of action, of doing, presupposes an ability to do. This ability could encompass material and bodily preconditions, knowledge, skills, willingness, etc. But, if there is no ability to be able (to do anything whatsoever) and there is no meaningful time elapsing, then this completely forecloses the field of action. It makes impossible any being-able-to-do, and thus, any actual doing. Depression and burnout destroy the ability to be able because, clinically, the depressed brain is unable to produce the necessary amount of specific neurotransmitters to function correctly and because, subjectively, nothing feels possible. Depression is like the cutting of a tree, but not from the branches, from the very base of the trunk. It hardly allows for the possibility of self-care, recovery and subsequent growth. This cutting is also, according to Han, a "being cut off from all relation and attachment" (43). I find quite relevant that this is in consonance with Rahel Jaeggi's definition of alienation as "a relation of relationlessness" to the world, which Rosa also incorporates into his own work (Rosa, 2019, 255). The isolating and alienating effect of burnout has broader societal repercussions, which takes us straight onto our next area of evaluation. Let us now look at the impact of social acceleration and of neoliberal capitalist temporalities on humans as (political) communities.

2. Consequences of the acceleration of social life and work on democratic politics

Neoliberal capitalist temporalities threaten not only individuals' health, livability, and access to "a life of flourishing" (Sayer, 2011), but also compromise our capacities to form communities

as well as endanger political life and action in society. In this section, I examine how contemporary time regimes dismantle the conditions of possibility for democratic politics on three main levels: the level of the material conditions and dispositions required for people to get actively involved in politics, the level of our ontological constitution as relational subjects, and the level of the socio-structural requirements for both institutional and protest politics to take place.

2.1. Work and the material conditions for engaging in politics

Marked by precarity, an ever-accelerating pace and immense physical and psychological demands, neoliberal capitalist work models (and their associated temporalities) are today mass-producing time scarcity and tiredness. This is the tiredness of the workers who, at the end of their workday have no more energy to interact with other persons, be they friends or family, and no energy on weekends to get involved in social activities. No energy either to think about what their own political views are, let alone participate in political debate or activism. It feels all beyond their embodied capacities. In material terms, thus, the fact that current working conditions leave workers little or no free time, and low energy stores, and that they must use those for minimal self-care practices, implies that they have no time nor energy left for participation in democratic politics. This is precisely one of the key points from which Honneth develops his critique of contemporary working conditions and the manner in which they have become divorced from democratic thought over the last 40 years. Thus, Honneth's main argument runs as follows:

> A flourishing democracy needs not only informed citizens: it also needs citizens who have the time, the energy and the mental space to participate in politics. Their jobs should not be so tiring that they cannot think about political events, and they should not pay so little that they cannot participate in political activities in their free time. The social conditions of work are therefore not an incidental accessory to a democratic way of life: they are essential to it (Polity Books, 2024).

Honneth advocates for "economic independence, intellectual and physical autonomy, reduction of strain and crushing boredom, sufficient free time" among various other criteria along which working conditions should be improved for "they no longer to stand counter to our democratic lifeworld but rather be a gateway to or a part of our democratic societies" (Polity Books, 2024; Honneth in Celikates *et al.*, 2023). He acknowledges that the individualisation, precarisation and digitalisation of work under late capitalism are three of the trends that most patently obstruct the reorganisation of working conditions and the division of labour so that working subjects can partake in political will-formation (*ibidem*).

At the psychological level, persistent states of tiredness affect not only a person's ability to participate in politics but, more fundamentally, to communicate. Byung-Chul Han contends that achievement society is dangerous not just because it is causing an avalanche of clinically diagnosed burnout cases, but because, more generally, it produces a solitary kind of tiredness; one which "has a separating and isolating effect" (31). To further develop his argument, Han retrieves Peter Handke's distinction between two types of tiredness: "I-tiredness" and "we-tiredness". Whereas the first one is a "divisive tiredness that strikes one mute and blind", the second one is relational: "As 'more of less of me', [it] opens a *between* by loosening the strictures of the ego" (Han, 31). Understanding it as an openness to the world and to the Other, Han affirms we-tiredness facilitates the emergence of a "community that needs no kinship" (34). Solitary tiredness, in contrast, is "violent because it destroys all that is common or shared, all proximity, and even language itself" (Han, 31). The consequence of an ego exhausted by excess positivity and ceaseless, redundant doing, I-tiredness culminates in a silent, almost catatonic, closure of the subject upon itself.

Handke speaks of a subject rendered mute by tiredness, whilst Rosa describes an alienated subject for whom it is the world which has become mute. In either case, they are referring to a lack of what Rosa calls *resonance* and to damage to our capacity to communicate. In Habermasian terms, this silence undermines our ability to sustain political deliberation over intersubjectively constructed lifeworlds. Solitary tiredness also seems to exist in a circular relationship with isolation: it produces isolation, and this creates more tiredness, more weariness of everything and everyone. The contemporary organisation of working conditions and labour

relations, hence, stands contrary to the bodily requirements, mental dispositions and time budgets required by working subjects to be able to actively participate in democratic processes.

2.2. Ontological individualism

In addition to the individualisation of work, which Honneth rightly connects to performance monitoring, neoliberal time regimes also subject us to atomisation as an ontological condition. In achievement society, greatness, success and finding meaning become individual, endless quests. But hardship and the frequent failure at those enterprises are also to be confronted alone. This is because, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, the modern thrust of individualisation "consists of transforming human identity from a 'given' into a 'task' and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance" (2000, 31). As we saw in Chapter 1, the fact that problems, responsibilities and blame all become individualised exacerbates unlivability (Butler, 2018; Brown, 2019). On the one hand, the individual is taught "everyone's life is full of risks which need to be confronted and fought alone" (Bauman, 35). On the other hand, because today achievement and stability are virtually unattainable, the neoliberal subject is bound to trying "harder and harder still" only to end up burning out (Bauman, 38). The neoliberal view that one is responsible for all of one's troubles, frustrations or failures obscures the vast landscape of structural obstacles to becoming a "good" individual, which as Butler reminds us, means above all being economically self-sufficient, free of debt. In reading Bauman, one finds that he, too, speaks of a gap, of a lack of congruence, between what is today expected of us, and what we can actually do: "A gap is growing between individuality as fate and individuality as the practical and realistic capacity for self-assertion" (34). Individuality-as-fate corresponds to the compulsory individualisation of modernity, which "consists in the establishment of a *de jure* autonomy (whether or not the *de facto* autonomy has been established as well)" (2000, 31-2). Modernity is therefore premised upon an individualistic ontology, which remains as strong a cornerstone as ever for today's achievement society.

The privileged place of the individual in achievement-oriented or productivist societies today is reflected in the time regimes that structure them: for the majority of workers, action prescribed in delimited time-spans is individual action. Wherever possible, teamwork in

professional settings is being replaced by asynchronous, collage-style work and less in-person interaction. Because time scarcity and tiredness are both widespread epidemics, socialisation falls to the bottom of people's priorities. Instead, "me-time" has become a personal luxury to defend from external demands and, understandably, to offset overwork, but is rarely balanced by an "us" quality-time. Over the past twenty years, there has been a steep decline in face-to-face socialisation, notably among teens, but "happening for all ages, for all ethnicities, and for all incomes" (Thompson, 2024; Twenge, 2023). While the rise of social media, smartphones and the pandemic were factors at play, scholars see a deeper underlying trend of loneliness, sadness and anxiety. The spending of time has therefore become individualised. In spatial terms, commentators have remarked on the disappearance or shrinking of what Oldenburg baptised as "third places" in cities, that is, on the lack of physical locations where people can meet, for little or no charge, to relax and connect (AlibsWrites, 2023). It is therefore not an overstatement to say that, by eroding the temporal and spatial conditions for social interaction, neoliberal capitalism is further individualising our experience of time and space.

The argument works both ways here: in upholding the neoliberal capitalist system, 24/7 temporalities sustain the false assumption that we are self-sufficient individuals. This assumption fuels the market, public policy and various global institutions. The prevalence of this partial understanding of us as individuals, in turn, reproduces the usual ways in which time and space are partitioned and assigned. Only politics as contestation of what is given, as *dissensus,* Rancière would say, can break this self-reinforcing loop. The question that arises here is what would it mean to transcend the ontological individualism of late modernity in temporal terms?

In *The Force of Nonviolence*, Butler dismounts the fiction of the individual at the origin of political theory by critiquing the phantasmatic scene of the State of Nature, where a man appears as an adult, self-sufficient being. Butler argues this scene of origins hides, or disavows, the radical dependency on others that characterises every human being from birth (45). Butler thus calls for a renewed and revalued notion of interdependency that can allow us to go beyond the individualistic ontology that entails endless conflict. She therefore presents us with a social ontology where those bonds of interdependency and our moral obligations come to the foreground. In my view, this relational ontology requires particular socio-temporal structures

that recuperate and celebrate interdependence. But consolidating such a temporal "infrastructure" requires rebuilding solidarity and trust first. Cooperatives and communitary living spaces provide good examples of how, through egalitarian distributions of responsibilities and temporal costs, it is possible for all members to benefit from the work of others and from a collective experience of meaningful time. Although the tasks or temporal costs of these projects cannot always be divided into precisely equivalent parts, the solidity of members' commitment and their moral inclination to reciprocate mean that those who contributed slightly less the first time will contribute slightly more the next time. Now, while the viability of reproducing these models of social cooperation on a broader scale remains compromised by existing legal, economic and geopolitical binds, it is possible and necessary to move beyond the narrow view according to which any time spent on a task not immediately linked to a future personal benefit is a waste of that time. Being able to envision other ways of distributing time, and being able to think of time beyond the public/ private divide, will be an indispensable step on the road to emancipation from neoliberal capitalist time regimes.

2.3. The erosion and bypassing of politics: systemic obstacles

On another level, neoliberal capitalist temporalities present a variety of systemic obstacles to the emergence of politics, political communities and political action. We could say that the entire realm of The Political, as Oliver Marchart understands it (2022), is being threatened by the rise of social acceleration and the prevalence of 24/7 temporalities. Marchart differentiates between politics of the "sedimented" kind, with which he refers to institutionalised governance practices, and 'reactivated' protest politics, which he understands as politics in the truly strict sense of the word (2022b, 129). In what follows, I show how the conditions of possibility for politics, in all of its forms and manifestations, are being compromised by the neoliberal capitalist colonisation of time.

Let us first come back to Hartmut Rosa, who argues that politics, understood as the institutionalised practices of "political will-formation, decision-making and decision-implementation in representative democratic systems", has its own "intrinsic temporalities" (2015, 254). On the one hand, these temporalities are dependent on the time-sensitive processes

of "transmission and translation" whereby emerging needs and interests are "aggregated and articulated, translated into political programs, channeled through political parties" into legislative processes and finally "implemented by the executive branch" (2015, 253). As Rosa notes, democratic systems appeared, up until recently, as superior to other competing models due to their ability to achieve the above in a "sensitive, fast and flexible way" (ibid). On the other hand, the temporalities of politics within the nation-state framework are also given by the institutionalised time structures that rule "the interaction between government and opposition (in parliamentary systems) or between executive and legislative (in presidential ones)"; these refer to speaking times, consultation cycles, question hours and voting modes among others and, as has been found, are "amazingly stable" (Rosa, 254). Rosa underlines that the successful shaping of society *in a democratic way* is premised on the fundamental assumption that the various phases of political governance (from will-formation to decision-implementation) "are compatible with the rhythm, tempo, duration and sequence of social developments" (252). In other words, that the temporal structures of institutional politics are synchronised with the pace of social change (*ibidem*). Yet, as Rosa convincingly argues, this presupposed temporal synchronisation between political and societal change is no longer maintained in our late-modern societies. The intrinsic temporalities of politics are far out of step with the speed at which social change is taking place:

> Hence the central specifically temporal difficulty of democratic politics proves to be the fact that a participatory and deliberative will formation that includes a broad democratic public is capable of being accelerated only to a very limited extent and under specific social conditions. The aggregation and articulation of collective interests and their implementation in democratic decision making has been and remains time intensive. For this reason democratic politics is very much exposed to the danger of desynchronization in the face of more acceleratable social and economic developments (2015, 254).

By *desynchronisation*, Rosa understands the failure of different social subsystems to couple, or synchronise, their intrinsic temporal structures with each other (2015, 260). Due to their innovation speed, the spheres of science, technology and economic development are the subsystems most evidently desynchronised with the "intrinsic temporality" of politics. Rosa therefore argues that because the intrinsic temporality of the political is "largely resistant to

acceleration", the undisputed role of politics as a pacesetter "has been lost" and is now occupied by the economy (2015, 262). Political time in late modernity, he affirms, "increasingly exhibit[s] a highly paradoxical structure" derived from a divergence of its time horizons and from an inverted relationship between its time resources and its time needs (*ibidem*).

Rosa identifies that political systems are often placed in a situation where "the time resources available for a political decision on taxes or regulation continually diminish" (2015, 263). This happens for three reasons: first, politics must try to "adapt itself to the accelerated rate of innovation in the relevant social spheres", given it cannot force those other subsystems to decelerate to its own pace (263). Secondly, the 'contraction of the present' increases not only the rate of innovation, but also the number and scope of social areas requiring political regulation, which implies that "the amount of time *per decision* available to the legislator or the politically responsible official sinks in inverse proportion to the rise in the number of decisions to be made" (264). Rosa relates this to the reconceptualisation of areas of social life that where formerly deemed to be "outside" of politics and which are now being shown as political, as a locus of dispute where often controversial decisions must be made. Thirdly, he writes, the 'contraction of the present' shortens the temporal range of what can be foreseen and assessed by political planning. This means that the life-span or validity of decisions and regulations has a closer expiry-date than before, and so problems are given merely temporary solutions that must then be reevaluated at short intervals, in light of the new circumstances that will have arisen.

In addition to the above kinds of external pressure on politics to go faster, Rosa makes clear that its paradoxical situation is further exacerbated by "a growing *inability to accelerate* and even a manifest *tendency of slowdown* in the way democratic politics operates" (264). This is due, again, to three primary factors. The first is the irreversibility or near-irreversibility of some of humanity's political decisions. In view of the enduring nature of decisions on, for instance, nuclear technology or genetic engineering, Rosa highlights the need for "more careful planning and information gathering" which, in turn, imply more time resources. Secondly, even when the range of a decision's effects is not larger, the uncertainty about the stability of the parameters upon which it was based also implies an increase in the amount of information and time required to make a rational decision (265). Unpredictable social change is being further accelerated by the neoliberal production of precarity and unlivability. For example, the cycle of accelerated

global consumption and production accelerates the climate crisis (see section 3.3 of this chapter), which in turn forces displaced peoples to migrate more frequently and in larger numbers. These migrations have various social and economic repercussions on entire geopolitical regions. Finally, the increasingly "pluralistic and postconventional" character of late modern society signifies that it is becoming more and more difficult to aggregate social interests into cohesive and articulate forms that can truly represent the many cultural, ethnic and religious groups that compose the body politic.

The accelerative pressures on the political system to regulate the other rapidly-changing social systems, added to the plurality and complexity of the matters upon which decisions must be made, has led to the relocation of political decision-making competences to other, faster systems that do not have the same democratic legitimacy (267). According to Rosa, some examples of this are the trends of juridification, privatisation, the preponderance of the executive power over the legislative, and outright deregulation (262). In concrete terms, this means that the deliberative processes that so fundamentally characterise politics are being increasingly replaced by fast-lane, often authoritary forms of decision-making.

Rosa finds that the political project of modernity is in fact tied to "certain speed limits of social change", above and below of which its democratic aspiration loses credibility (255). In other words, at the institutionalised, or "sedimented" level, modern politics does need some minimal stability: a maximum rate of social change. But, as Rosa's analysis demonstrates, social acceleration has eroded the temporal-structural conditions for that political project to be realistically possible today. We are left in the face of a "situational" politics, one "that no longer acts, but *reacts*" to the arising requirements of the situation (268). This problematises late modernity's claim to a reflexive politics that can consciously shape society and "move" in history. In order for contemporary institutional politics to regain its significance, it is therefore necessary to rehabilitate the democratic mechanisms and the concrete temporalities upon which it depends. This will require the creative design of new pathways for will-formation and interest articulation, as well as granting political institutions more information-processing power, whilst preserving transparency and avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy. It will also require taking more local responsibility for how things are run. It is certainly not an easy task, as the challenges of

desynchronisation are many and very real, but it is a call that can only be ignored at the greatest of risks.

2.4. Impact of social acceleration on protest politics

Alongside institutional, sedimented politics, "protest politics" (Marchart) are also being thwarted by the fast-pacedness of late capitalist temporalities. They are affronted insofar as those who protest – those who have a demand, a complaint or a claim to make— are finding it harder and harder to made themselves heard, and to retain the public's attention for longer than a day. But protest politics are not easily subdued, and those who protest know that it is precisely through the disruption of neoliberal capitalist time regimes that their political struggle can become effective, memorable, or major. As Lilja argues, the temporalities of protest are best captured by the figures of pause, rupture and suspension (2018). Thus, one of the chief strategies used by activists and social movements is the obstruction of public space and the accompanying disruption of public timetables. By blocking the street, the busy vehicle lanes, or the train station with their own bodies, the crowd of demonstrators brings into being a form of acting together that, as Butler writes, "opens up time and space outside and against the established architecture and temporality of the regime" (2015, 75). Rancière tells us, along the same lines, politics "consists in re-figuring space, that is in what is to be done, to be seen, and to be named in it" (118). But he does not, in that passage, emphasise that politics is just as much a re-figuring of time where the self-evidence of the dominant time-regime is questioned by the multiplicity of competing temporalities that thereby come to light. If the taking-place of politics signifies that, as Marchart posits, "the social world is suddenly perceived as contingent and conflictual" (2022b, 129), this becomes primarily tangible in the temporary *dis*configuration and *re*configuration of space and time that public assemblies effectuate as they protest.

The kindling of new, albeit transient, temporalities is therefore a fundamental element for political protest and for people to have a glimpse of an "outside" of capitalism. Protest politics, however, remain significantly challenged by the fierce forms of precarity and the 24/7 time regimes that leave people little or no time to get involved in politically dissenting movements. This is why protest and activist groups cannot easily find recruits with enough temporal resources to take part in the planning and execution of their collective forms of (direct or indirect) action.

Politics, thus, whether in its sedimented or its reactivated forms, is being simultaneously outpaced, pushed aside, and devalued by the tide of neoliberal capitalist time regimes.

3. The contribution of neoliberal capitalist temporalities to the ecological crisis

3.1. Ecology as politics

The environmental crisis that is currently unfolding is a systemic global problem that cannot be reduced to specific practices or types of practices that, if abolished, would make the problem vanish. Rather, this crisis denotes a more fundamental problem bearing on the kind of *relationships* we establish with other persons, other species and, more generally, with our world. We are still well inside the realm of politics here for, as Biset affirms, "politics is a particular way of declining the ontological question" (2016, 17). Politics, he writes,

> is a question that gives an account of how those relationships with others are configured in specific modes, under the forms of subordination or exclusion. […] [I]t is about understanding how a relationship with other humans is configured, how the meaning of a world is constituted, even in our relations with things, with nature, with oneself (*ibidem*; my translation).

Now, these relationships are today largely determined by the capitalist system, insofar as it remains the hegemonic form of social organisation across the globe. Cemented on the modern concept of property, capitalism "requires us to have a destructive relationship with the world", one where we feel entitled to "dispose of the world as we like and damage it if we so wish" (Redecker, 2020, 4). Thus, as Redecker notes, capitalism is built upon a politics of *dominion*, marked by relations of subordination and of exclusion where the power imbalance is often abused. Dominion is all the more destructive in its capitalist manifestation because it is combined with the logic of subsumption, of what Hardt and Negri call Empire, the ceaseless drive to incorporate the other, the alien into the sphere of the dominated. The rationality of dominion is apparent in every aspect of how we live: from the ways in which we build cities, to the criteria we use to decide who has a right to live in those cities, from the ways in which we grow food and travel, to how and where we dispose of our waste. But, as has become all too evident, the politics of capitalism have driven us to a psychological crisis, a political crisis, and an

environmental crisis (that can also be read as a political crisis in Biset's wider sense of the term). Together, I argue, these represent a gigantic crisis of livability from which humankind will not be able to emerge without profound structural changes that repudiate the capitalist *form-of-life* (Jaeggi, 2016) we have assumed as societies. As Jaeggi argues, capitalism is a *form-of life* that can be critiqued on the grounds of its dysfunctionality as much as on the "irrationality and wrongness" of its normative presuppositions (2016, 65).

Throughout this section, I demonstrate the manner in which neoliberal capitalist time regimes play a central role in producing and perpetuating the ecological crisis we face today. I start by emphasising the importance of correctly naming, and thereby framing, this crisis. Thus, I position myself alongside those scholars who see it as as a problem directly stemming from capitalism and from its associated temporalities. I then draw a closer focus onto what Gamble (2022) presents as capitalism's "socio-metabolic interaction with nature" and how the temporalities that rule this interaction reproduce specific types of violence against nature. In this sense, I contend we should not only regard the crisis as the product of the desynchronisation between two disconnected entities, but rather also as the reaction of nature to capitalism's forceful attempts to *impose* its own time regimes upon natural processes. Subsequently, I draw on the work of Moore and Patel to show how cheapening strategies are at the core of capitalism's socio-metabolic interaction with nature, and how they are both fuelling and fuelled by the phenomenon of social acceleration. I then provide some examples that illustrate how the four stages of the contemporary production and consumption cycle exhibit the cheapening rationality and the particular forms of violence through which capitalism seeks the temporal subjugation of nature. This brings me to the conclusion that capitalism's incurable short-termism is resulting in various forms of ecological damage, some of which are irreversible. Finally, I briefly discuss the consequences of these alterations and reflect on how the path to recovery has no shortcuts: true care takes time.

3.2. Naming the problem: the Capitalocene

Although the present climate crisis has no single origin, reasearch shows anthropogenic activity has had a determinant influence on the unprecedented changes in our planet's temperatures and natural cycles. For instance, already in 2014, Bindoff *et al.* attributed more than half of the "observed increase in global mean surface temperature (GMST) to the anthropogenic increase in greenhouse gas concentrations" (869 in Stocker *et al.*, 2013). They also found evidence that humans have influenced all the major components of the global climate system, including ice loss, atmospheric circulation, increased ocean warming, acidification, and sea levels (Bindoff *et al.* in Stocker *et al.,* 2013). A key driver is, of course, the continuing reliance of the global economy on fossil fuels, the primary source of global CO2 emissions, which reached a record high of 40.9 billion tonnes in 2023 (*Global Carbon Budget*, 2023). As has been widely predicted by various groups of scientists, the planet is currently on course for a temperature increase of at least 2.5 ºC degrees above preindustrial levels, a tipping point which, if surpassed, will have even more disastrous consequences for all life on Earth than we are already seeing (Carrington, 2024).

This is where talk of the Anthropocene usually comes in as an explanatory narrative. But, as Moore counters, this is problematic because it implies that all humans are equally responsible for the environmental damage under discussion, which is not the case. Speaking of the Anthropocene turns humanity into a homogeneous force counterposed to Nature, erases "the historico-geographical patterns of differentiation" within humanity, and ignores "the forces of capital and empire that have cohered with modern world history" (Moore, 2015, 174). It is precisely these kinds of erasures what we cannot afford at this critical juncture. Thus, refusing to attribute both the blame and the responsibility to Humanity as "an undifferentiated whole" I, like Moore, consider it much more accurate to speak of *the Capitalocene* (2015, 173). From the systematic plundering of natural resources by colonial settlers to today's overfishing practices, the expansion of capitalism has been systematically linked to a series of environmentally destructive practices, which it is not my intention here to detail. The point is recognising that it was the progressive transformation of the world order into a global capitalist system what has brought us to such a desperate state of affairs, where inequality now directly translates into unequal chances of surviving in a precarious and warming planet. Indeed, using Capitalocene instead of Anthropocene to qualify the present stage in history allows us to understand capitalism "not just as an economic system but as a way of organizing the relations between humans and the rest of nature" (Moore and Patel, 2017). It also debunks the myth according to which the environmental crisis is due to overpopulation; for, as

George Monbiot has fiercely argued, the *rate* at which *rich people consume* is a much more potent driver of the climate crisis than the rate at which poor people reproduce (2009).

This is not to say that we, citizens, laypeople in the age of globalised financial capitalism have no individual responsibility. Quite the contrary, we all consume resources, all pollute to a certain extent, and therefore all have some degree of responsibility. However, it is also important to underscore the *differential*—to borrow Butler's word again— degrees of responsibility that different populations have contracted towards the preservation of our natural ecosystems. As Watts, Monbiot and many others argue, it is actually those in extreme poverty who are and will continue to be the worst impacted by the climate catastrophe underway and who are the least to blame for it:

> The climate crisis will mean that average incomes will fall by almost a fifth within the next 26 years compared with what they would have been if there was no such crisis, according to a study that predicts the costs of damage will be six times higher than the price of limiting global heating to 2C. […] This will inflict crippling losses on almost every country, with a disproportionately severe impact on those least responsible for climate disruption, further worsening inequality (Watts, 2024).

I therefore underline, with Moore and Patel, that it is not all humans but rather some of them, particularly those who benefit from late capitalist entrepreneurship, who are inflicting a disproportionate damage on our biosphere. It is mildly encouraging to have heard at least some talk of reparations to those worst affected by climate events in the last COP24. However, given the lack of political will to make structural changes at a global level and the difficulty of apportioning sanctions, it remains uncertain whether these reparations will amount to more than mere promises.

3.3. The temporalities of capitalism's socio-metabolic interaction with nature

Capitalism, we have established, is a world-making and world-altering power that configures relations of being under the forms of subordination and exclusion to serve its own systemic

requirements. Being significantly determined by capitalism and its accompanying temporal logic, our "socio-metabolic interaction with nature", as Gamble terms it, is therefore fraught with the violence of capitalist dominion (2022, 1). This multifaceted violence against life has proven closely connected to the global ecological crisis we now face. What deserves a closer examination here is the manner in which this interaction is structured by capitalist temporalities and *how these contribute to capitalism's production of specific kinds of violence*, subsumption or destruction. Gamble defines the temporality[23] of this interaction as "the pace and rates, cycles and rhythms of the social appropriation and extraction of nature, the pace and rates […] at which we make use of (and therefore use up) finite natural resources in productive activity, and the quantities of time we allow for nature to regenerate and recover from appropriation and extraction" (2022, 1). The temporalities of this interaction also incorporate the time nature needs to decompose the various kinds of waste we cast out into the environment.

As Rosa has convincingly argued, the environmental crisis can be explained as a case of global pathological desynchronisation between "the economy" and "the ecological realm" (2013, 260). Indeed, there is an ever-widening gap between, on the one hand, the accelerating socio-metabolic temporalities of late capitalism and, on the other, the temporalities of what Moore and Patel call *the web of life*. While Rosa calls this gap desynchronisation, Gamble refers to it as a *temporal-ecological rift* (2022). It is crucial to highlight here that this is not a power-neutral split between two independent spheres, but rather a destructive, parasitical relationship where one of the "parts" (capitalism) depends on the other (nature) and seeks to subjugate it both temporally and spatially. In this sense, the severity of the environmental problem lies in that late capitalism is not just 'out of synch' with, but also suppressing what Rosa calls nature's "intrinsic biological temporalities (*biologischer Eigenzeiten*)" (2013, 30) and imposing, with unprecedented force, its own productivist temporalities. In agreement with this, Gamble argues capital uses "a strategy of *incisive temporal domination and control* of nature […] to subordinate biospherical temporalities to the temporal logic of capital so as to accelerate production" (2022, 6). Before we examine the forms the temporal subjugation of nature has taken, we need a deeper understanding of capitalism's socio-metabolic interaction with nature and the role of time within

[23] Whereas Gamble speaks of temporality in the singular, I prefer to allow for the possibility of multiple, even if coherent, capitalist temporalities.

it. I therefore briefly turn to Moore and Patel, who describe this interaction through the lens of *cheapness*.

3.4. The cheapening thesis

Moore and Patel argue that capitalism's signature is that is cheapens everything it comes across with, a cheapening of what they more broadly term *the web of life*. Cheapness, as they understand it, is

> a set of strategies to manage relations between capitalism and the web of life by temporarily fixing capitalism's crises. […] Cheap is a strategy, a practice, a violence that mobilizes all kinds of work – human and animal, botanical and geological – with as little compensation as possible (2017, 29).

Moore highlights the centrality of cheapening and appropriating strategies for capitalism's survival as a system. In particular, he argues the capitalist accumulation of surplus value hinges on the constant production of four key inputs: "low cost food, labor-power, energy and raw materials" (2015, 62). He makes clear this is only possible not just through capital's technical and organizational innovation but also, crucially, through the appropriation of "the unpaid work and energy 'of women, nature and colonies'. Absent massive streams of unpaid work / energy from the rest of nature […], the costs of production would rise, and accumulation would slow" (63). With this, Moore illuminates how capitalism's default mode of functioning has always been propped-up on the unacknowledged and unpaid work performed by some humans (conceived as less-than-humans), and by nature. We can think of cheapening here as that fundamental strategy through which capitalism secures its final moment of appropriation, which is the subsumption of life-making relations into the capitalist engine, into its "circuits of production and consumption, in which [these] relations come to have as low a price as possible. […] It's always a short-term strategy" (Moore, 29).

Crucially, what defines things as cheap is the "periodic, and radical, reduction in the socially necessary *labor-time*" to turn them into commodities (Moore, 63). Moore's observation makes tangible the link between cheapening strategies and social acceleration, which, as Rosa has

demonstrated, is a constitutive trait of any kind of capitalism. Let us formulate more clearly this link. Because, from the capitalist standpoint, time is money and money is time, "as low a price as possible" is to be understood both in *temporal* and *economic* terms; they are interchangeable. The advantage of cheapening strategies is that they enable a reduction in production costs *and* the accelerated accumulation of profit. This translates into extracting the largest amount of yields from "things" or people with the least amount of work, input and compensation (economic benefit), *as fast as possible*, and with the shortest waiting times in between extractions (temporal benefits). This is the reasoning behind the cultivating, tilling and spraying of the soil all year round, behind the huge jets of petrol permanently gushing out of the ground (never mind the leaks, the gas flaring or the accidental explosions). But, of course, large yields cannot be obtained like this forever. As Moore emphasises, this only works in the *short-term*. There is no organism or ecosystem that can endure uninterrupted labour or exploitation without falling ill or dying, without then requiring *greater* costs to rehabilitate it, something to which I will return.

We have identified how cheapening strategies are fundamental for capitalism to satisfy the specific temporal-structural requirements that derive from its need of constant acceleration and growth. We have also recognised, with Moore and Patel, that capitalism hides from view the extent to which the unpaid work performed by nature and some humans is a central part of its conditions of reproduction. What I cannot stress enough is that these conditions of reproduction have very specific *temporal restrictions*, which cannot be bypassed without incurring in severe costs. My intention here is to underline how the apparent cleverness of cheapness is an illusion, a capitalist fabulation that sooner or later collapses, revealing the truly exorbitant cost of what were merely short-term gains. Because its accelerating speed is dictated by capitalism's temporal imperatives, the contemporary production and consumption cycle appears as a privileged locus of observation for the dynamics of this desynchronisation. I now proceed to show how cheapening strategies, always working from a short-term productivist approach, mark capitalism's socio-metabolic interaction with the web of life at all four main stages of this cycle.

i. Cheap extraction and production

Let us come back to what Moore calls the Cheap Four: low-cost food, energy, labor-power, and raw materials. Together, they compose the substructure upon which the rest of the economy is

built and, as such, capitalism needs to extract them in great quantities, all the time. The problem here is, again, one of desynchronisation between, on the one hand, the broader temporalities which natural ecosystems need to function as organic wholes, and the extremely accelerated pace at which resources and crops are grown and extracted from them. I am using *extraction* here in the ample sense of the term, to encompass reaping, gleaning, and drawing out. My argument is that the acceleration of the entire production cycle, driven by a productivist logic intent on procuring cheap goods, becomes evident from the very first stages of the process: growth and extraction. Thus, acceleration now permeates most, if not all, forms of extraction to such a pernicious extent that the frequency of extraction itself is damaging the sources from which cheap food, energy, labour and resources are obtained, thereby marring the possibility of future extractions. From a temporal perspective, there are two main cheapening approaches to extraction which have now become dominant across various industries and which are sometimes used in tandem. The first approach, which I call the exhaustive approach, is simply performing repeated extractions as often as possible, until the source is completely exhausted. The second approach consists in using some kind of technology to alter the source of the desired substance so that it produces more of it in less time. I find that the traditional agri-business approach to the soil and to farm animals provides two of the most illustrative cases of cheap extraction today.

A) Soil degradation

Although a variety of new forms of agriculture have been developed in recent decades, modern industrial agriculture remains largely dependent on a combination of unsustainable practices that have significantly contributed to land degradation and soil erosion in many parts of the globe. The causes of land degradation are both natural and anthropogenic, but the impact of human activity has recently become so detrimental that it is now exacerbating the land's vulnerability to natural erosion processes. Alongside deforestation, urban and tourism development, heavy industry and mining, unsustainable farm practices are a key driver of land degradation and desertification. "The primary causes of soil erosion due to poor farm management are excessive fertilization or irrigation, conventional tillage, monocropping, [and] overgrazing", among others (Cherlinka, 2022). Monocropping (which gained ascendancy with the monopolisation of the food market by transnational companies) is a clear example of the exhaustive approach whereby the soil is required to provide over and over the same nutrients for the same crop without enough

recovery time to replenish itself. Another crucial factor for soil degeneration is the use of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides, which kill the soil microorganisms that make it fertile in the first place. But "the more tilling is done, the weaker the soil gets, and the more farmers feel compelled to use chemical spraying. This is the vicious cycle of industrial agriculture" (Tickell and Harrell Tickell, 2020). Genetic modification has also been brought into this violent agricultural stratagem as a way to make crops resistant to the toxic chemicals regularly sprayed on them (*ibidem*). Thus, the development of pesticides during the twentieth-century wartime periods became integrated with mechanical tillage, monocropping and genetic modification into a powerful agricultural infrastructure designed to artificially increase short-term yields without greatly increasing costs. The problem, predictably, is that this now globally dominant approach to food growing "is undermining the very ecology we're dependent upon" (Creque in Tickell and Harrel Tickell, 2020). The above-mentioned practices are not only responsible for the degradation of the land, the contamination of soil and water by chemicals, and the ensuing carcinogenic threats this may pose to living organisms but, more alarmingly, they also lead to mass desertification. Although degraded land is a concern in itself, desertifying land is even more alarming on a global scale because it denotes the escape of previously sequestered greenhouse gases back into the atmosphere. To summarise, by using aggressive methods to ensure the maximisation of cheap crop production in the short-term, conventional capitalist agriculture is depleting the soil on which it relies and fast reducing its chances of obtaining healthy crops in the future. Because desertification is tightly linked to climate change and biodiversity loss, the damage it causes locally has broad repercussions on a global scale:

> The loss of soil properties can produce poverty and force people to abandon their impoverished land. Political instability, migration and conflicts are often common traits of countries and regions affected by desertification. All these elements participate in a downward spiral of desertification that is potentially the most threatening ecosystem change affecting the livelihoods of the poor and overall human wellbeing. Globally, the United Nations estimates that the livelihoods of more than 1 billion people in some 100 countries are at some level of risk linked to the effects of desertification (Rossi, 2020).

The outpacing of the soil's natural recovery tempos is Gamble's archetypal example of *a temporal-ecological rift* (134). He uses this concept to designate a contradiction between

capitalist temporalities and the temporalities that nature requires for its sustainable reproduction. Gamble argues too that the number and magnitude of the rifts[24] that have recently been created is the result of capital's intensified efforts at subsuming nature's temporalities and, reciprocally, of nature's reinvigorated resistance to these attempts. The notion of *temporal-ecological rift* is in consonance with the notions of *bioderegulation* and *desynchronisation* proposed by Brennan (2002) and Rosa (2013) respectively. It also fits with my theorisation of *unlivability*, for what all these terms have in common is the allusion to a break, a fracture, or a being out-of-phase. The incompatibility of life and livability with rifts makes all the more sense when we recognise how the design of all living organisms is based upon the idea of flows: energy, nutrients, substance exchanges are all the subject of flows. Health, livability and resilience thus prove reliant on well-functioning joints, bridges, and communication pathways, but also, fundamentally, they require the persistence of *synchronised time frames* for these exchanges to take place. The next example will show us how, by artificially accelerating natural processes, a single industry can generate multiple temporal-ecological rifts.

B) Dairy cows

With its blind pursuit of better methods to optimise the mass production of cheap milk, the dairy industry is now adding another layer of problems to our already strained global ecology. In his sobering documentary *The Milk System,* Andreas Pichler (2017) shows how the multi-billion dollar dairy industry is underpinned by a productivist rationality according to which cows are nothing but a milk production engine, one whose productivity has been and must continue to be steadily optimised through an array of technologies. It is worth noting that the system's aim is increasing production as much as *productivity*, which is an intrinsically temporal indicator, defined as a cow's ability to produce an *x* amount of milk within a given timespan. Cows' ability to produce milk was first enhanced through selective breeding and then genetic modification

[24] As presented by Gamble, the concept of temporal-ecological rift can be used in the abstract, macroscopical sense of a global ecological crisis, but also the in the sense of a particular, smaller-scale disjuncture, therefore making it possible to speak of multiple coexisting rifts.

(Ritter *et al.*, 2019). Gene editing has also been used to make them more resistant to stress and disease. Just as it happened with the meat industry, the *modus operandi* of the dairy industry underwent a shift in both qualitative and quantitative terms. In many countries, small family-owned farms were displaced by large, industrial factory-farms that developed infrastructure and management methods suited to handle hundreds of cows. Cows' diet was also modified to increase their milk production: two-thirds of industrial dairy cows' feed is now composed of soya and corn, which are often grown at the expense of rainforest ecosystems and whose nitrogen load makes cow manure an even worse contaminer of local groundwater and waterways (Pichler, 2017). Cows are constantly inseminated, giving birth to one calf a year, so that their milk supply goes uninterrupted. "Under natural circumstances, lactating cows usually produce about one gallon of milk each day, or three to four liters. However, due to genetic manipulation and artificial high-protein diets, cows today produce 20 to 25 liters (~6-7 gallons) a day, or 22,000 pounds of milk each year" (New Roots, 2021). This represents an increase in productivity of over 650%. In some cases, antibiotics and hormones function as an extra layer of human intervention to ensure this production rate is maintained (PETA, 2018).

It is important, at this stage, to remember how both the care and the destruction of the web of life are temporal matters. The sixfold enhancement of modern cows' milk production was only possible through the combination of the two production-and-extraction modalities I identified earlier. Through hormones, genetic modification, antibiotics, and diet, the *alterational* modality modifies the cow's entire metabolism and, particularly, its behaviour *in time*. It turns the cow into nothing but a milk-producing machine: "They have to pump over 20,000 litres of blood through their udders every day, an energy-sapping task" (Pichler, 2017). In parallel, the *exhaustive* modality manifests here in the constant inseminating of cows, no sooner have they given birth, and in their milking several times a day. In other words, milk producers were only able to make this colossal leap in productivity by meddling with, and completely subverting, the natural time frames or bio-temporal structures that normally govern a cow's life cycle.

A normal dairy cow "could easily live to the age of 20, but the average lifespan of a high-producing animal doesn't even top 5" (Pichler, 2017). Because producing milk is both a time- and energy-intensive task, it is not just milk that is being squeezed out of cows, but their very

life(time). They die early for three main *temporally-mediated* reasons: sheer stress and exhaustion, a farm-related illness (such as mastitis, foot rot or lameness), or they are sent to slaughter when their milk production drops, around their fifth year of life. The sources of chronic stress to which they are subjected are many: stress caused by the constant insemination and state of pregnancy, distress for having their calves taken away one to three days after their birth, stress from having to spend their entire lives indoors, sometimes unable to sit or lie down due to crowded and unhygienic conditions (PETA, 2018). The unlivability of cows is therefore temporally determined: the stressors and the illnesses could be prevented if another, more compassionate time regime organised milk production. Instead, like over-cultivated soil, cows are given virtually no recovery time (nor space). Although they are at the base of the dairy industry, they are not conceived or treated as sentient beings deserving care; quite the contrary, they are seen as disposable. If a cow is infertile or gets too ill, it is sent to slaughter, if a new-born calf is male, it is sent to slaughter. The animal is of value only if and as long as it can produce milk, but fast, and lots of it. Cows are therefore killed by the new modalities of production and extraction that penetrate them and strip them of the time and the space they once had to live. Their sudden collapse at the barn lays bare the gross incongruity between the 24/7 temporalities that late capitalism imposes on the web of life and the temporalities demanded by all living beings for their own minimal recovery from the unpaid work they are forced to perform.

This bioderegulation not only takes place at the level of the individual cow specimens, but rather also entrains various other temporal-ecological rifts. There is, clearly, the desynchronisation between the amount of calves being born due to insemination, and capital's refusal to spend economic and temporal resources on raising them, which is why they are sent to slaughter. There is also a discrepancy between the alleged demand for milk in markets, the ability of farmers to grow cow feed, and the actual ability of cows to produce a certain amount of milk per day, or per week. This leads to an over-exploitation of cows that drives them to what can only be termed burnout. Then, that demand tuns out to be less than projected, and farmers end up dumping thousands of gallons of milk every year, to this very day (Hirsch, 2023). Finally, there is the above-mentioned desynchronisation between the pace at which cow manure is produced, and the pace at which the ecosystem can degrade it. Thus, the temporal stress or unlivability under which cows live also manifests, more generally, in the planet's inability cope

with the environmental impact of the dairy industry, which ranges from air, water and soil pollution to the sacrificing of forests to "shadow fodder fields" (Pichler, 2017).

ii. The fast-pacedness of consumption

Due to its vastness and heterogeneity, the field of consumption remains one of the most complex ones to assess and address in relation to the ecological crisis. It is clear, however, that today's consumption trends, marked by a rising demand for cheap goods and a faster consumption pace, are ecologically problematic. Cheaps goods are almost by default polluting and unsustainable, and a faster consumption pace means putting more strain on the ecosystems and supply chains that enable production. Because production and consumption are geared together in feedback loops, the speed of the latter often regulates the speed of the former.

The first problem has its roots in the fact that poverty and precarity create populations who are dependent on the availability of cheap products, such as cheap milk and meat, cheap fuel, wood and plastic. In other words, cheap labor, one of the Cheap Four, is itself dependent on the other Cheap Three for its own subsistence and social reproduction. This implies that the entire economy is premised upon an anti-ecological model, where sustainable, ethically produced and 'ecofriendly' products remain a luxury that very few can afford.

Regarding the increase in the pace of consumption, there are many factors at play, but a noteworthy one is that, among people who are not in extreme poverty, many have been socialised into a consumerist lifestyle according to which one needs no further justification for buying a commodity other than the fact that one wants it. Thus, the creation of artificial needs, in conjunction with the manufacturing strategy of planned obsolescence and the marketing strategy of perceived obsolescence, are three key tactics through which late capitalism accelerates global consumption among the upper and middle classes.

Now, in order for these consumption trends to slow down and veer towards sustainability, policy changes need to be implemented at the systemic level by governments and supranational institutions. One cannot blame nor fully responsibilise individual consumers for participating in unsustainable consumption dynamics that are simultaneously being promoted, lobbied for and defended at the global economic level. Indeed, part of the very problem is that there are large

numbers of ordinary people who have no affordable alternative but to buy cheap food in order not to starve; no alternative but to sell street food in plastic or styrofoam pots to make a living.

Those at the forefront of cheap goods-production argue for their ability to enable a fast-moving society. For instance, many still believe that it is only through the use of cheap petrol-based products that people can keep up with the accelerated pace of our late capitalist world. While fossil fuels represent the standard basis for efficient transport, plastic is everywhere used because its lightness allows more goods to be transported in one trip. The same is thought of fast, industrialised, disposably-packaged and read-to-go food, for the global labour force needs to be fed quickly so they can promptly resume their work, if they have paused to eat at all. Yet the truth is that, at this stage, both fossil fuels and plastic are replaceable. Alternative forms of energy and mobility have been emerging for decades, and there is budding research on various ecologically harmless organic and synthetic membranes that could replace plastic. There is also a large number of creative projects that have already found efficient water depollution and desalinisation techniques (Neeves, 2020). But the political will to propell these initiatives, to fund this research, to perhaps subsidise prototypes, is lacking. The arena of consumption has some potential insofar as consumers can put pressure on markets and become product-developers themselves in favour of slower, environmentally conscious commodities and forms of life. But it is also as citizens demanding infrastructural changes that their governments should listen to them. Their demands should involve tighter legislation not just on the substances and materials that companies are allowed to use and to sell, but also legislation concerning the manner in which these are extracted from nature and discarded back into it. Likewise, citizens should demand that the industries with the largest environmental impact, namely, the agricultural, livestock and energy sectors, make the transition to cleaner and more sustainable practices in the form of a mandatory structural shift.

iii. Cheap waste disposal

Indissociably linked to all of the above, is the problem of trash. The unprecedented rate at which it is being daily produced is but the corollary of the pace of the entire production and consumption chain. A corollary which most people just put in a bag and forget about.

> The world generates 2.01 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste annually, with at least 33 percent of that—extremely conservatively—not managed in an environmentally safe manner. Worldwide, waste generated per person per day averages 0.74 kilogram but ranges widely, from 0.11 to 4.54 kilograms. Though they only account for 16 percent of the world's population, high-income countries generate about 34 percent, or 683 million tonnes, of the world's waste (World Bank, 2018).

This reconfirms Monbiot's argument that it is consumerism in wealthy countries, and not the population rise in poor countries, what has a worse impact on the environment (2009). Although landfills "reduce the amount of waste that makes it into the environment and prevent disease transmission", they still have a significant environmental and social impact (Vasarhelyi, 2021). They produce massive amounts of methane, and their creation implies the destruction of wildlife habitats. In addition, landfills have been found to pose various threats "to the health of those who live and work" around them and who, generally, are in a socially disadvantaged position "to oppose the placement of these facilities" (*ibidem*). This entire scenario is further complicated by the fact that we have entered the era of extremely long-lived waste and toxicity:

> [C]omplete depollution (eliminating pollutants in an area) and effective remediation (reversing or stopping environmental harm) are impossible for many wastes. Wastes characterized by slow decomposition or strong molecular bonds such as nuclear waste, plastics, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and orbital debris, among others, pose an acute challenge to the very concept of depollution and remediation (Gray-Cosgrove *et al*, 2015).

In other words, scholars have now realised that, due to their extreme longevity, hazardous substances produced today will continue to cause harm no matter where they are moved", or how they are contained, across a range of temporal scales (Gray-Cosgrove *et al*., 2015).

Because having to degrade toxic waste places another strain on already depleted ecosystems and every form of life within them, this again brings to the fore the temporal nature of the tension between our immediate needs and behaviours as globalised societies, and the risks that these may pose to all forms of life in the future. Deplorably, the uneven distribution of geopolitical power means that vulnerable populations are disproportionately exposed not just to regular waste but also to toxic waste: "It is often Indigenous groups, racial minorities, and low-income groups

that are disproportionately affected not only by the immediate effects of waste and pollution […] but also by the longue durée of persistent waste and pollution" (Gray-Cosgrove, *et al.*, 2015, 3). This unequal exposure comes within the remit of what Butler and Athanasiou call the differential allocation of precarity and socially assigned disposability (2013). Some scholars conceive of the harmful effects of toxic substances as a "slow violence" (Nixon, 2011) or a "slow disaster" (Levine, 1982) that can take years, or several generations to manifest. Scientists have now established various correlations between exposure of both animals and humans to toxic substances and the risk of developing diseases, malformations or transgenic effects. Thus framed, the capitalist economy's decisions on what materials to use, how often to use them, and how to discard them prove inescapably tied to momentous questions on ethics and social justice. So far, however, the global economic system has done nothing but privilege materials that provide short-term gains but long-term issues, and timesaving disposal methods over ecologically responsible waste-treatment. This is an area where thorough legal regulation is required. As recent literature on remediation emphasises, we will also need to develop inevitably time-consuming practices such as stewardship and permanent care models in order to take full responsibility for our toxic and long-lived waste and avoid causing irreversible harm to future generations (Gray-Cosgrove *et al*., 2015).

4. On the wreckage of the biosphere's temporalities

Nature has a myriad of micro- and macro-temporalities. Throughout its evolutionary path, every living species has developed particular bio-temporal structures for its own generational reproduction. Thus, each species has specific temporal patterns (speeds, rhythms, cycles, sequences and time-windows) for feeding, migrating, mating and breeding. But these patterns developed in relation to the rhythms of the Earth (day-night cycle), moon (tide movements) and sun (changing seasons), as well as ecosystem-specific temporalities. The change from winter to spring, for instance, triggers the migration of countless species across the globe. "Billions of birds flock to distant breeding grounds", while "ocean giants travel thousands of miles in search of food", but "to succeed, all of these heroic journeys must be timed to perfection" (Lown, 2024). Some amphibians and reptiles have tight time frames to complete their breeding cycles before

the water in forest ponds evaporates. The camouflage of animals is season-oriented too, such as that of white-furred rabbits in the tundra. All microorganisms, flora, and fauna have developed metabolic forms of synchrony with the Earth's cycles. Thus, the many rhythms of life have become interwoven across millennia with geological and meteorological cycles into a thick fabric of planetary temporalities that sustain each other in a delicate balance.

Humanity, too, has interacted with and become a part of this temporal fabric for thousands of years. But since the advent of capitalism, this equilibrium was disturbed, so much so that it is now lost. The question remains whether it can be regained. Moore and Patel note that given capitalists' tendency to treat the ocean as both a "storage facility for the seafood we have yet to catch and sinkhole for the detritus we produce on land", "the balance of food and trash will soon tip" (29). If there is one thing we should all be concerned about is irreversible tipping points (Lenton, 2013). They also affirm that capitalism thrives not by destroying natures but by putting natures to work – as cheaply as possible" (2017, 26). Capitalism certainly kills nature, but it does so in its distinctively shrewd, exploitative, pain-causing way. And here's the gravity of the matter: because everything is interconnected or interlocked, the damage is hard to contain.

The four seasons have lost their distinctiveness, blurring into the randomness of the weather. Because snow melts long before the fur of rabbits changes back to brown, they become an easier prey. The erratic and unpredictable length of the seasons is altering plant growth, blooming periods, pollination, migration times and destinations. And if one species dies, ten more go on to die. As Haraway writes, we have reached an inflection point where the threat is "major system collapse after major system collapse" (2016, 100).

I have endeavoured to show how capitalism's socio-metabolic temporalities of extraction, production, consumption and disposal are tearing apart the time-frames the web of life needs to produce and renew its resources, to recover before being fertile again, and to degrade the increasingly time-resistant forms of hazardous waste some populations produce. Not only are capitalist temporalities preventing us from regaining the balance, they are taking us further and further away from it, exacerbating the global ecological crisis. More specifically, what I have sought to foreground is how the late capitalist combination of cheapening, acceleration and

temporal domination strategies is a key driver of environmental and biospherical destruction. These strategies do not just bioderegulate some animals or disadjust small ecosystems: through the qualitative and quantitative changes they bring about, they they are effectively unraveling the fabric of temporalities that holds all ecosystems together. Through the new and different forms of temporal violence it deploys, neoliberal capitalism is therefore disassembling the planet's ecological and meteorological systems.

Concluding reflections

Like a hurricane, late capitalist acceleration pulls us into the vortex of mass consumption and the economy of disposable goods. From inside its productivist rationality, we cannot see an alternative form-of-life, and we believe we cannot afford to slow down. Of course, when we ourselves are burnt-out, scavenging for a 10-minute lunch break, or struggling to survive in precarity, it becomes almost commonsensical to do what everyone does: use disposable goods, use the car, order plastic-packaged food home, throw all of it away in the same bag, *etcetera*. But the fact that we are burnt-out should awaken us to the truth that what we cannot afford is to *not* slow down.

As Butler has emphasised, we exist with and depend on others: other people, and other species. Thus, if we want livability for all back on our horizon, we cannot continue dismantling the temporal foundations upon which Earth's different lifeforms (us included) rely. Averting further damage and recovering our planet will require us to radically change our socio-metabolic, poietic and political relationship with the various species we share the Earth with. We therefore need to escape the accelerationist and cheapening pull as individuals, as corporations and as societies, and take the time, as Haraway urges us, to make kin: "We need to make kin symchthonically, sympoetically. Who and whatever we are, we need to make-with—become-with, compose-with—the earth-bound" (2016, 102). This implies including and respecting the diversity of temporalities upon/through which life on Earth builds itself. There is no shortcut: sustainability takes time. Nurturing, caring for, tending to, composting, all these verbs we need

back on our vocabulary are time-intensive; but in the long-term they are timesaving, for they preserve the equilibrium. Only this will allow us all to endure.

Conclusion

This thesis has developed a comprehensive understanding of neoliberal capitalist time regimes, the forms in which they exert power over us and the reasons why they are so pernicious for human lives, for political life, and for all Life on our planet. A key focal point was to trace the manner in which contemporary space-time distributions, and the productivist normative code that cathects them, combine with the neoliberal production of precarity to produce temporal unlivability and unlivability, more broadly understood. I conclude that in the context of late capitalist temporalities the production of unlivability takes place in many ways and at different levels.

At the level of workers' health and, more generally, human wellbeing, temporally driven unlivability signifies chronic stress and time scarcity for many people in industrialised countries. It also designates the subjection of workers from all parts of the world to systematic time pressure, overtime, and the lack of sufficient pauses or recovery intervals. As we established in Chapter 3, the acceleration of work is directly connected to the creation of new forms of labour precarity that overlap with older, exacerbated ones. We also confirmed that work-related stress affects people's health in pervasive ways. No matter how qualitatively different experiences of overwork and poor sleep may be, no matter the motivations or economic situation of the working subjects, the phenomenon of consistent overwork is generating a global health problem of stress-derived illnesses and karoshi. As Kobayashi and Middlemiss have argued, this requires the development of *ad hoc* legislation and juridical instruments to sanction non-compliant employers.

24/7 time regimes also damage the health of societies as complex, multi-systemic organisms with democratic capacities. As part of neoliberal modes of governmentality, these time regimes do so, first, by inducing precarity and perpetuating structural inequalities. The most obvious ones are class, race, gender and (dis)ability disparities. In addition, the temporal cartographies that today regulate the sphere of labour according to a productivist normative code deprive workers of the time and energy to actively engage in political participation. On a broader scale, as Rosa contends, the desynchronisation phenomena derived from social acceleration undermine the temporal-structural preconditions that make democratic politics possible. This refers to the

intrinsic temporalities of collective will-formation, of iterative decision-making processes, as well as the time-frames required for legislation and implementation. These are all compromised by contemporary time partitions and the outpacing of institutionalised politics by other, faster subsystems.

These crises are mirrored at the planetary level in the destruction of the biosphere's temporalities, whose interweaving holds living organisms and ecosystems together. As I argued in Chapter 5, this is the result of cheapening, acceleration and temporal domination strategies, the forms of temporal violence that mark late capitalism's socio-metabolic relationship with nature. In the midst of largely deregulated globalised capitalism, the rhythms of the extraction, production, consumption and disposal cycle have done nothing but continuously accelerate with already disastrous consequences for many species on Earth. As many others argue, the fate of our planet's flora and fauna is tied to ours, and *vice versa*. Abandoning nature to the temporal violence of late capitalism is a suicidal act.

Rosa refers to the above-mentioned impasses as "the three great crises of the present day". I instead characterise them as one overarching crisis of livability. This is because one cannot have a thriving democratic society without healthy individuals and a robust natural environment. Because livability is a matter of both time and interdependence, the psychological, the political and the ecological crises need to be addressed simultaneously: the solution of one overlaps with solving the other two.

The most difficult question is how we overcome this crisis. I propose granting more care and attention to the relationship between working hours, work pace and workers' physical and psychological wellbeing. Awareness of this link, and of the benefits of schemes such as the 4-day workweek, should guide future policy-making. This implies a rethinking of the entire category of work, of its meanings and its place in our social world. As working subjects, we need to unlearn the productivist ethos by practicing collective forms of refusal of unfair workloads and work shifts. We must recognise too the value of all the small acts of resistance through which people dismiss the imposition of abstract time distributions and privilege, instead, the concrete temporalities of what is most immediate to them.

In the same way, we must revise our modes of social functioning in light of the fact that the political solvency and the democratic potential of a society sink in inverse proportion to the acceleration of its pace of life. We must therefore recognise that some areas of social life, and certain social subsystems (for example, the juridico-political sphere, and public healthcare systems) require regulatory protection against extreme social acceleration. Addressing the macro-ecological crisis requires radically restructuring the economy along a postgrowth model while repairing our relationship with nature. Abolishing the accelerative, short-termist approach to resource extraction and disposal is a fundamental step in this process, as will be the passing of thorough, ideally supranational legislation to secure social and environmental responsibility from both states and corporations. As Martineau eloquently writes, time remains a dialectical process under capitalism, where "the tendency to commodify time" never fully conquers "the irreducible substratum of 'multiple' concrete temporalities that make up the social fabric" (8). In this sense, it is crucial to realise that the processes of temporal commodification, temporal mapping and policing are not fixed but are rather dynamic cartographies where temporal partitions are constantly drawn and re-drawn. This opens the possibility for similarly dynamic, adaptable forms of resistance to the imposition of neoliberal capitalist time regimes.

I close by returning to my Rancièrean conceptualisation of contemporary space-time distributions as an instance of *the police*. Within this framework, *the police* refers to forms of domination that rely on the partitioning of our entire perceptual universe and on the allocation of functions within this sensorium according to the logics of entitlement by birth or wealth. *The police* is also characterised by leaving no place for any void. Every subject, every space, and every interval of time must be attached to a norm, to a form of being, saying and doing. I advocate for cultivating precisely such voids in relation to time: a sort of vacant, uncharted, improvisational time; a residual time that is not correlated to specific tasks and valorisation processes, nor assigned to individuals categorised on the basis of their socio-economic status or credit score. This echoes the idea of 'a time without qualities', that Baraitser retrieves from Steven Wright:

'Might one not think of public time', he asks, 'as carving out breathing spots, intervals,

> transitory breaches in the very core of collective existence, time slots still unfettered by moral or political discipline?' (129). Wright's interest is in cracks in otherwise seamless time. If time now has various capitalized qualities then what is a time without qualities? What is a time that is 'available', 'an undisciplined time, a public time whose ideological and moral density is tolerably low' (130)? These intervals would constitute the equivalent to the strange in-between spatial zones in and around cities – derelict sites, empty parking lots, those bedraggled non-spaces before the city peters out. Wright wants to know what the temporal equivalence might be to these 'vague terrains', what vague time might feel like, a time between public and private time that remains indistinct (Baraitser, 2017, 10).

"Carving out" low-density, vague time here appears as a kind of temporal deterritorialisation that proves fundamental for resisting and moving beyond neoliberal capitalism, which also means, crucially, protecting the future of democracy. Neoliberal capitalism responds to the logic of what Rancière calls the police and, at other times, the *arkhê*, which legitimates domination according to differences in birth, wealth or other socially determined entitlements, and which exerts domination through the institution of space-time partitions (2010, 50). Breaking with the hegemonic order of neoliberal capitalism, thus, requires politics as an intervention and "a deviation from the normal order of things" that is also, intrinsically, a deviation from the usual way of partitioning and allocating time and space. Now, because true democracy is "the very institution of politics itself", striving for it, no matter how difficult it proves, represents our best chance at livability (Rancière, 2010, 49). A time without qualities would be both the result and desideratum of democratic politics understood in this way. As Baraitser argues, a public time 'without qualities',

> unqualified and unquantified, is the very condition of the possibility of democracy, of a sharing of public life (130). We might then say that what we need is to understand how we come to share time; an issue of generationality, of lateral as well as vertical relations, and of the propping up of institutions and practices that make such relations viable (Baraitser, 2017, 10).

I would only add that we should broaden this political injunction to share time not just with other humans, but with all the living beings who share this planet. Their struggle for livability is ours.

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Appendix

In terms of the inevitable limitations of statistical data, we must clearly acknowledge the fact that class and sometimes gender differences remain hidden beneath national averages, as well as percentages of migrant workers, or local differences between rural and urban areas. But since methodological nationalism is still the framework within which most reliable large-scale studies tend to be conducted, and meta-analyses are then based on these national datasets, this seems to be an inevitable shortcoming that would affect any chosen variable. Although these are national averages, they can still provide useful information about general trends that can then allow us to make comparisons between countries and continents. Finally, while those the variables of a) GDP per capita, b) hours slept, and c) hours worked could also be used in the search for measures of quality of life or happiness, that is not my purpose. If I were to do so, I would need to include many other datasets including people's self-reporting on life-satisfaction, happiness, mental health, and the time they spend socialising. My purpose here is not to issue a global inventory of the criteria needed for people to live the most fulfilled lives. My aim in presenting these studies is to identify the ways in which unlivability is reflected in statistical data; to flag its irregular distribution across the world; and, finally, to denounce it as a global problem with wide-ranging implications.

i. Sleep vs annual GDP

Chart 1. Source: Matt McLean / Sleep Cycle / IMF / The Economist, retrieved from Fleming, 2019. "Which countries get the most sleep – and how much do we really need?"

Before engaging with this chart, I consider it necessary to acknowledge its major shortcoming: it includes a limited number of countries because the sleep data was gleaned from an app called Sleep Cycle. This means that the selection of participants for this study required that they have a smartphone through which they can register their sleep patterns on the app. This is why the data disproportionately represents countries from the Global North, while the poorest countries from the Global South are absent from the survey. Due to this insufficiency, I only use this chart as a broad indicative resource.

In spite of not being exhaustive, the Chart 1 does reveal a pattern: countries tend to cluster alongside others belonging to the same 'geopolitical continent'. By using the phrase 'geopolitical continent' I seek to differentiate, for example, North America from Latin America, and Western Europe from Eastern Europe. Thus, the economic disparity between these blocks is reflected in the number of hours slept. In Western Europe, for instance, the annual GDP oscillates between $41,000 and $70,000, and the average number of hours slept is around 7 hours and 22 minutes. For Eastern Europe, the GDP is between $10,000 and $40,000, and the average time slept is closer to 7 hours and 10 minutes.

The Latin-American cluster is also cohesive, but with a much lower annual GDP that only ranges between $12,000 and $24,000, and with the time spent in bed being between 6 hours 45 minutes and 7 hours. Meanwhile, the US and Canada are further up and right in the chart, with the rest of Europe and Oceania, benefitting from over 7 hours and 15 minutes, and earning $48 to $58,000 per year.

The Middle East and Africa are put together in the same category and completely underrepresented, so not much can be fairly deducted, but it is worth noting that the Middle East in particular is disaggregated across the chart. As for the other African countries that are not included, one can conjecture, based on the position of Morocco, South Africa and Egypt, that they are probably also in the lowest GDP band, which does not go beyond $20,000. However, not enough data is available to draw any conclusions about how much sleep different African nations get.

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, there is the case of Asia. In terms of income, countries are dispersed across the entire spectrum, and yet, in terms of sleep, no Asian country sleeps more than 7 hours per night, excepting China. As Sean Fleming notes in his analysis of this chart for the *World Economic Forum*, "not all developed economies rest well; South Korea and Japan are the world's worst countries when it comes to getting a good night's sleep. The problem of sleeplessness in Japan is well-documented, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of karoshi – death caused by lack of sleep" (2019).

New Zealand and Luxembourg are fortunate exceptions in relation to the rest of the globe inasmuch as they sleep 7 hours 40 minutes (NZ is the country that sleeps the most) and 7 hours 22 minutes respectively, and earn $38,000 and over $100,000 (Luxembourg is the country that earns the most per capita).

ii. Historical change in hours worked per year, by country

In 2013, Charlie Giattino, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser published a monographic entry titled "Working Hours" in the *Our World in Data* platform, which they revised again in 2020. From their meta-analytic research, they conclude that

> average working hours have declined dramatically for workers in early-industrialized economies over the last 150 years. In 1870, workers in most of these countries worked more than 3,000 hours annually — equivalent to a grueling 60–70 hours each week for 50 weeks per year. But we see that today those extreme working hours have been roughly cut in half. In Germany, for example, annual working hours decreased by nearly 60% — from 3,284 hours in 1870 to 1,354 hours in 2017 — and in the UK the decrease was around 40%. Before this revolution in working hours people worked as many hours between January and July as we work today in an entire year (Giattino *et. al*., 2020).

Chart 2. Working hours in 1870

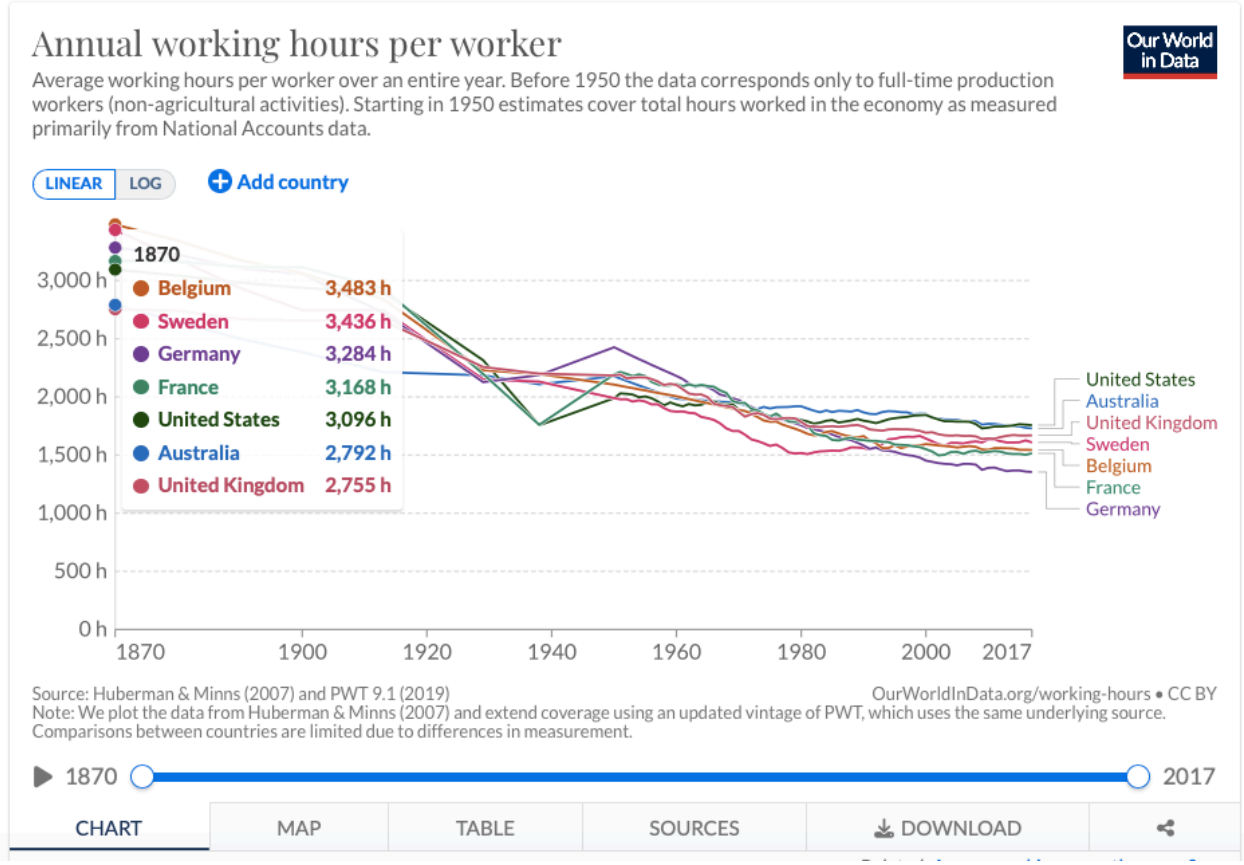


Chart 3. Working hours in 2017

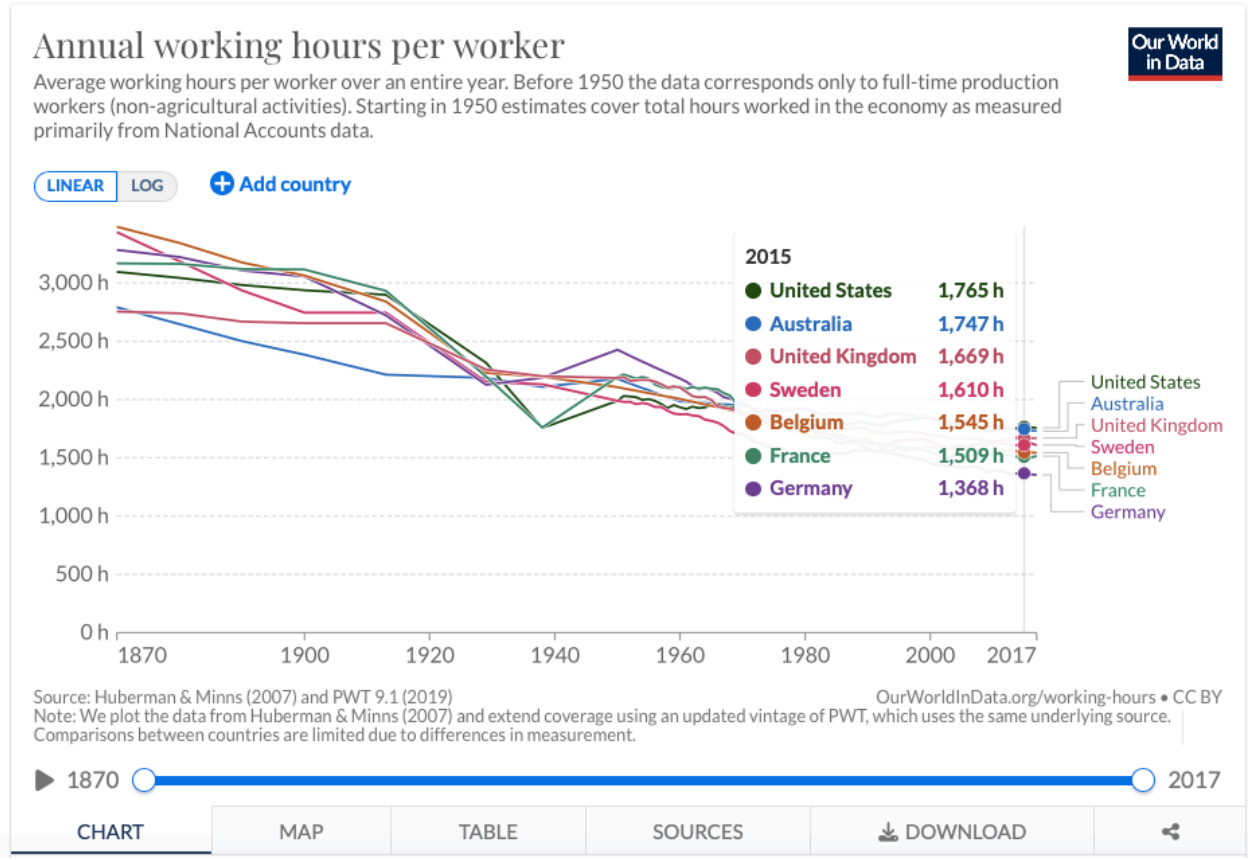
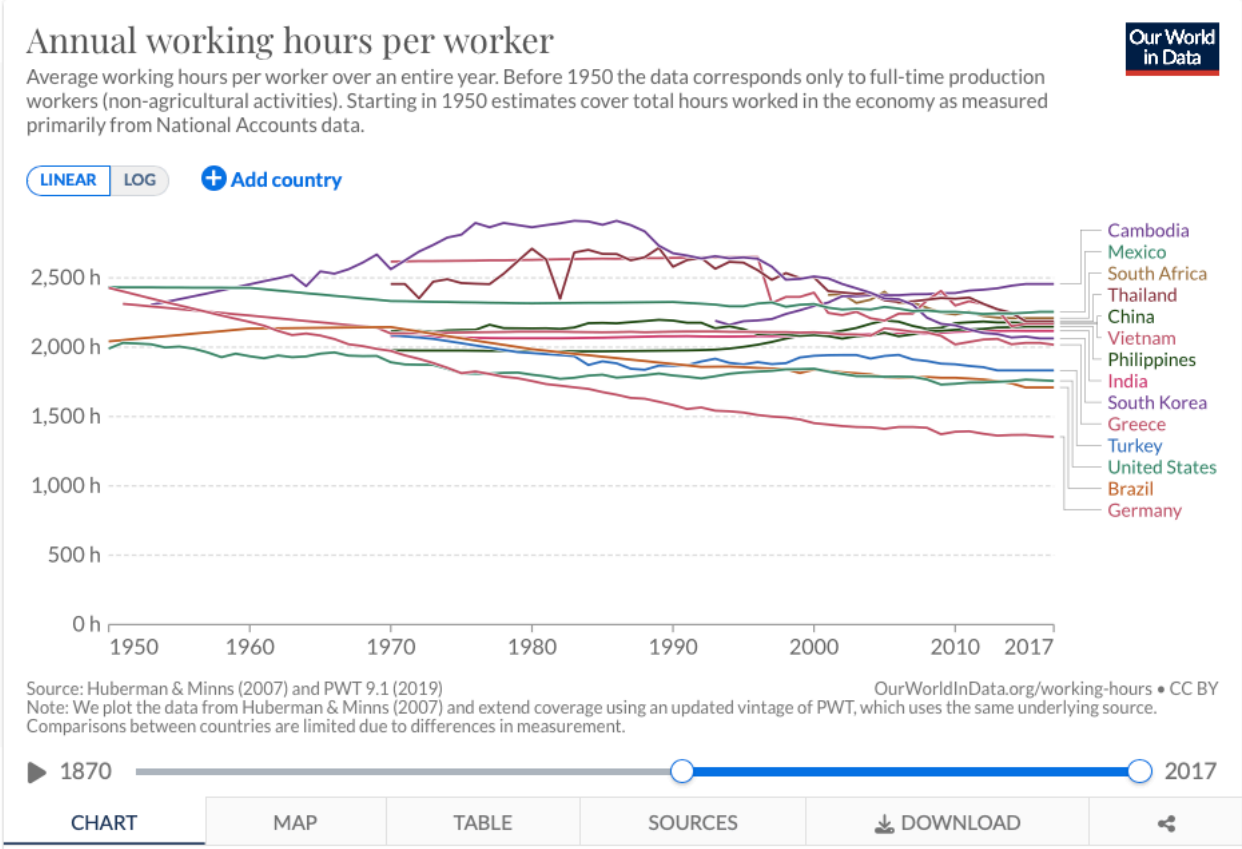


Chart 4. Poor countries between 1950 and 2017

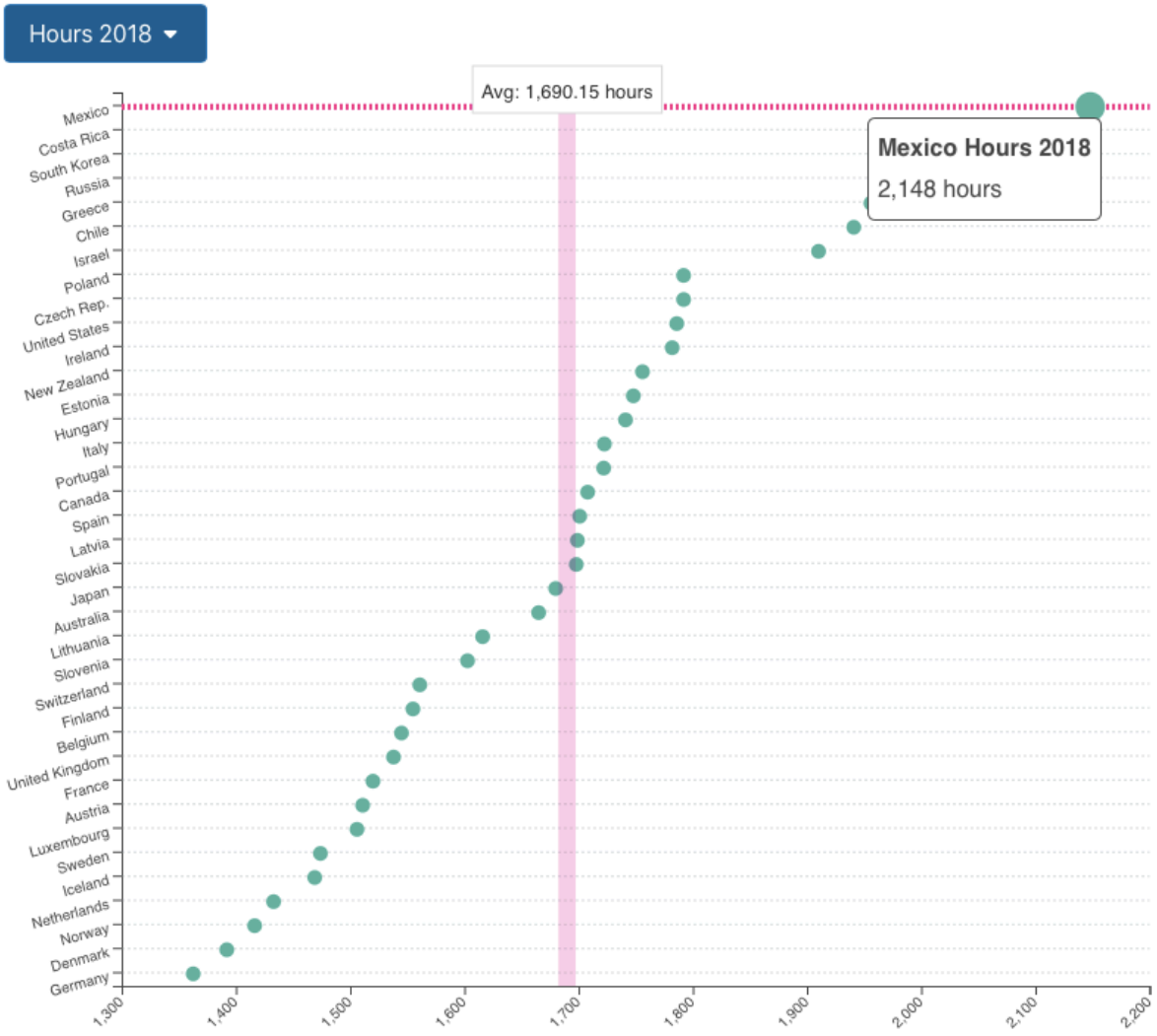


Giattino and his coauthors note that, while for some countries, "working hours have continued their steep historical decline", in other countries

> we see an inverted U-shaped pattern. In South Korea, for example, hours rose dramatically between 1950 and 1980 before falling again since the mid 1980s. And in other countries we see no recent declines — in China, for example, hours actually rose in the 1990s and early 2000s before leveling off in recent years (2020).

The OECD conducts similar studies every year, where the average annual hours worked are defined "as the total number of hours actually worked per year divided by the average number of people in employment per year. [They] include regular work hours of full-time, part-time and part-year workers, paid and unpaid overtime" (OECD, 2018).

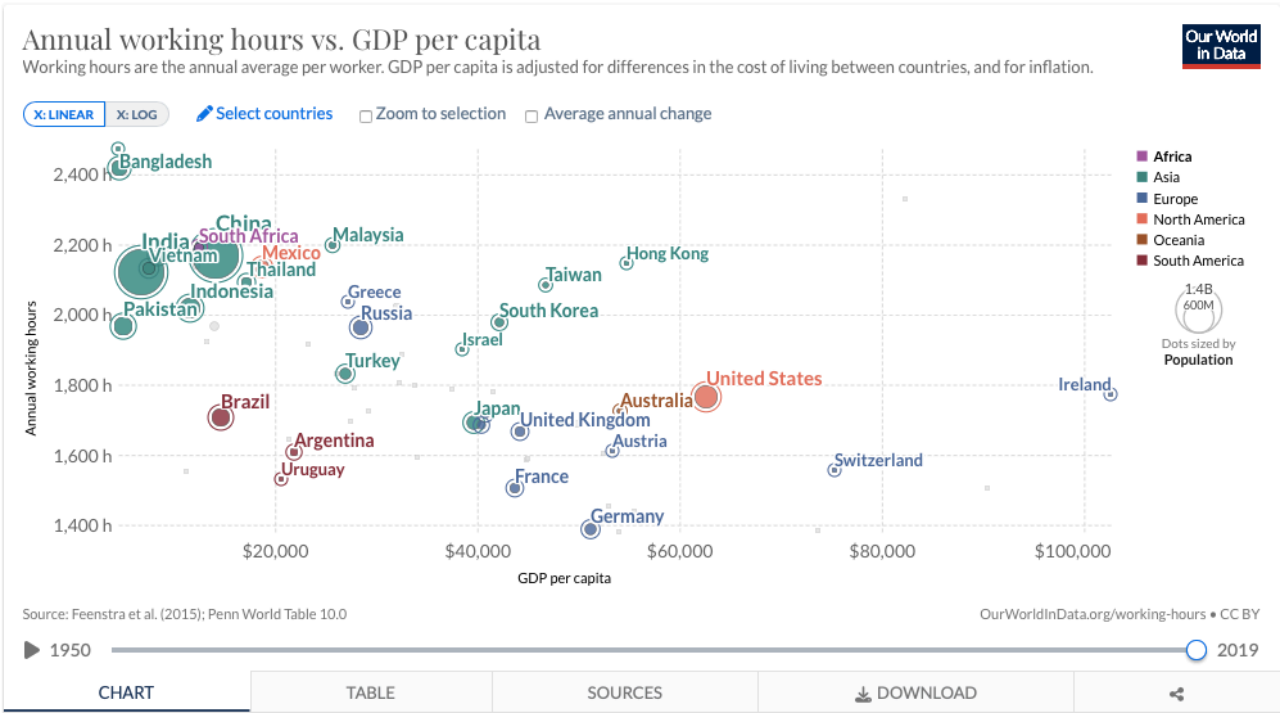
Chart 5. OECD - Most overworked countries



Although only 38 countries are members of the OECD, their chart is a useful visual representation of the large breach that still exists between how much wealthy nations work per capita every year, and how much poorer countries from the Global South do. Thus, in 2018, Mexicans worked 2,148 hours whilst Germans only worked 1,362 hours. The results of the 2021 edition of this study proved to be almost identical.

The disparity between the Global North and the South becomes even more blatant in a chart that measures GDP per capita against the number of working hours per year:

Map 6. Working hours vs GDP



Here, the magnitude of the dots indicates each country's population size; their position along the x-axis indexes their GDP per capita, while the y-axis registers the number of hours worked per year. This data is part of the latest Penn World Table, which makes it one of the most complete datasets available today[25]. The information from the chart can also be visualised as a table, which I have inserted in the following page. Given that we have already looked at the historic variation of working hours throughout the century, for the above chart and its associated table (below) I only selected the data for 2019.

[25] PWT version 10.0 is a database with information on relative levels of income, output, input and productivity, covering 183 countries between 1950 and 2019 (University of Groningen, 2021).

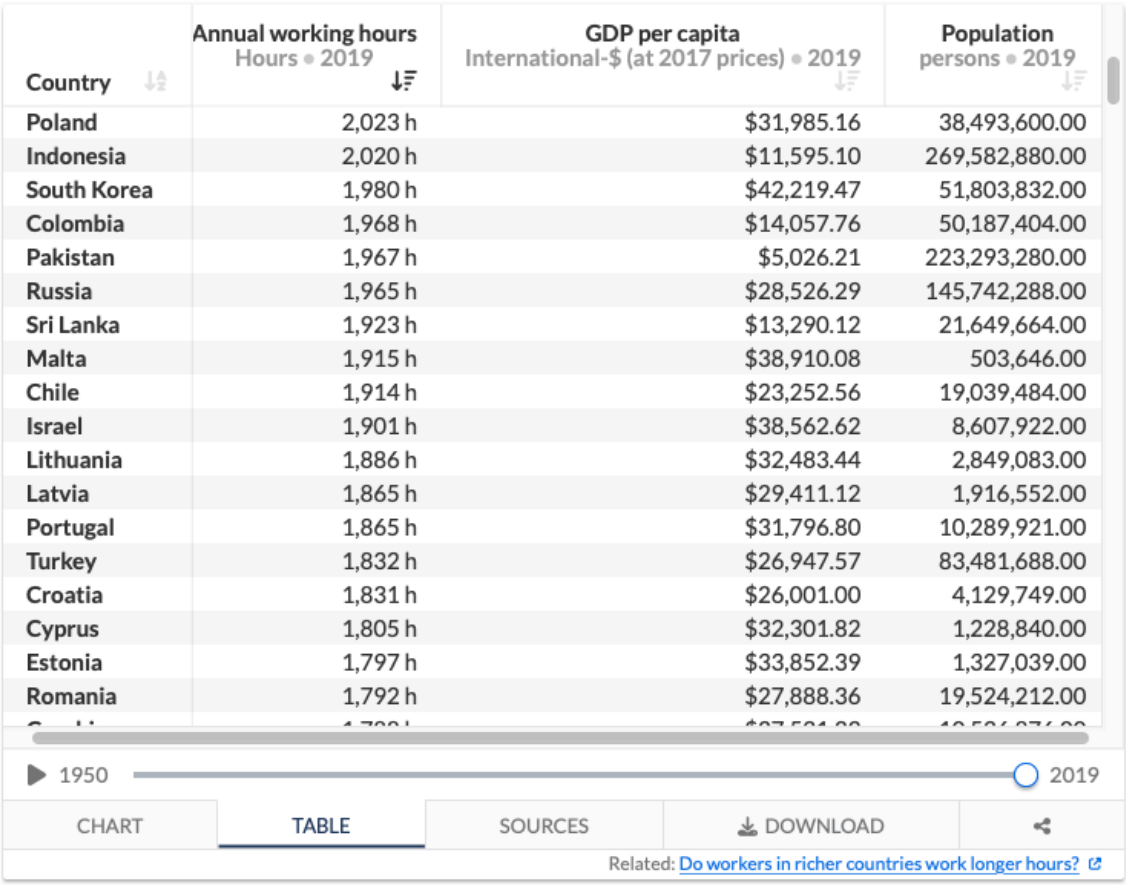
Table 7, in two blocks. Annual working hours, annual GDP and population.
Source: Feenstra, R. C., Inklaar, R. and Timmer, M.P. (2015), "The Next Generation of the Penn World Table". American Economic Review, 105(10), 3150-3182. Retrieved from Giattino, *et al.*, 2020.

Country	Annual working hours Hours • 2019	GDP per capita International-$ (at 2017 prices) • 2019	Population 2019
Cambodia	2,475 h	$4,500.05	16,486,542.00
Myanmar	2,447 h	$5,153.37	54,045,422.00
Bangladesh	2,419 h	$4,658.01	163,046,173.00
Singapore	2,330 h	$82,336.34	5,804,343.00
Malaysia	2,197 h	$25,735.31	31,949,789.00
South Africa	2,191 h	$12,536.13	58,558,267.00
China	2,169 h	$14,128.81	1,433,783,692.00
Philippines	2,168 h	$8,448.53	108,116,622.00
Hong Kong	2,148 h	$54,810.02	7,436,157.00
Dominican Republic	2,142 h	$17,926.74	10,738,957.00
Peru	2,140 h	$12,236.71	32,510,462.00
Mexico	2,137 h	$18,736.53	127,575,529.00
Vietnam	2,132 h	$7,506.82	96,462,108.00
India	2,123 h	$6,711.38	1,366,417,756.00
Thailand	2,093 h	$17,116.31	69,625,581.00
Taiwan	2,085 h	$46,761.25	23,773,881.00
Costa Rica	2,069 h	$18,522.18	5,047,561.00
Greece	2,036 h	$27,201.49	10,473,452.00
Poland	2.023 h	$31.985.16	37.887.771.00

1950 2019

CHART TABLE SOURCES DOWNLOAD

Related: Do workers in richer countries work longer hours?



Country	Annual working hours Hours • 2019	GDP per capita International-$ (at 2017 prices) • 2019	Population persons • 2019
Poland	2,023 h	$31,985.16	38,493,600.00
Indonesia	2,020 h	$11,595.10	269,582,880.00
South Korea	1,980 h	$42,219.47	51,803,832.00
Colombia	1,968 h	$14,057.76	50,187,404.00
Pakistan	1,967 h	$5,026.21	223,293,280.00
Russia	1,965 h	$28,526.29	145,742,288.00
Sri Lanka	1,923 h	$13,290.12	21,649,664.00
Malta	1,915 h	$38,910.08	503,646.00
Chile	1,914 h	$23,252.56	19,039,484.00
Israel	1,901 h	$38,562.62	8,607,922.00
Lithuania	1,886 h	$32,483.44	2,849,083.00
Latvia	1,865 h	$29,411.12	1,916,552.00
Portugal	1,865 h	$31,796.80	10,289,921.00
Turkey	1,832 h	$26,947.57	83,481,688.00
Croatia	1,831 h	$26,001.00	4,129,749.00
Cyprus	1,805 h	$32,301.82	1,228,840.00
Estonia	1,797 h	$33,852.39	1,327,039.00
Romania	1,792 h	$27,888.36	19,524,212.00

Out of the top 20 most overworked countries, 12 are Asian countries (with the top 5 being Southeast Asian), 4 are Latin American, 1 is African and 2 are East European. A few numbers stand out: China and India, with populations of 1,433 and 1,300 million respectively are countries that work over 2,100 hours per year. Other large countries in the top 15 are Bangladesh (163 million), the Philippines (108 million) and Mexico (127 million), which are also working between 2,100 and 2,400 hours per year.

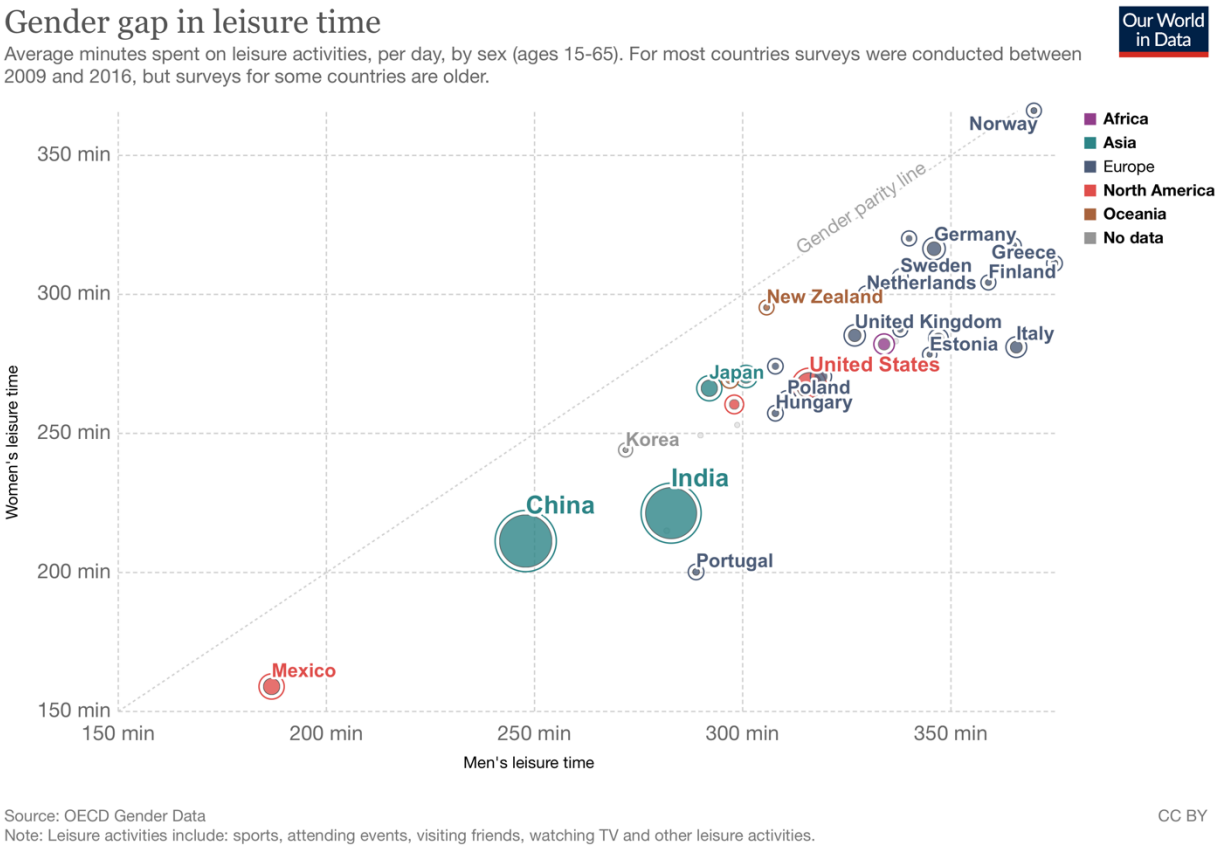
As concerns the GDP in the top 20, the figure that contrasts with all the others is the Singaporean income of $82,336, followed only from afar by that of Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. After the top 20, more Latin American and East European nations start to appear on the ranking, but no wealthy nations from the Global North.

Of course, handling the sleep data is always complicated. Although, according to the Sleep Cycle graph, it is South Korea, Japan and Saudi Arabia where people sleep the least, it is probable

that *de facto*, the top-ranked countries in Table 7 (from Cambodia to Taiwan) get just as little rest. I would go as far as to argue that even those sleep times are overestimated, since they are mere averages and only based on the data provided by people with enough of a budget and an interest in tracking (perhaps with the intention of improving) the amount and quality of their sleep. My argument is that because these are the countries where the majority of sweatshops and mass-production factories lie, *i.e.,* where people have the most precarious working and living conditions, they will not have a smartphone and will not be included in any kind of sleep-app metrics.

iii. Gender gap in leisure time

Chart 8.



Here, again, Mexico is one of the worst-off countries. This is no surprise given Mexican culture is still very much dominated by patriarchal values, as its long-lasting and ongoing problem of femicides demonstrates (Lozano, 2022). In Mexico, the amount of leisure time people have is scarce, and from that scarce amount, men enjoy close to 280 minutes whereas women only have 155 minutes per day. Other countries where the gap is very pronounced are Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain. Unsurprisingly, in rich and educated countries (notably, in Scandinavian nations) the gender gap is small, and both genders have over 300 minutes per day to socialise, engage in sports, attend cultural events, do hobbies, or simply rest and do nothing.