



The Third Class: Artisans of the world, unite?

De derde klasse: Ambachtslieden uit alle landen, verenigt u?

Thesis

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CONTENTS

List of Tables			
List of Figures			
English summary Dutch summary			
			Preface
Introduction	1		
Establishing the ideal type: artisan labor	12		
Departing from the ideal type	17		
Why the artisanat matters	20		
Chapter 1 – Conceptualizing the artisanat	25		
Modern memes of artisan labor	28		
The Artisanat as a Class	32		
The second micro-level of economy: Labor units	36		
An antonym for dominance: Self-direction	41		
Means of production: capital and patrimony	45		
Degrees of autonomy	53		
Subsumption	59		
Changing class positions	65		
Hierarchies	72		
Accumulation and equilibration	75		
Artisans and markets	79		
Artisan-based economies: Social landscapes of autonomy	82		
Chapter 2 – The artisan condition throughout			
the modern economy	8 -		

Land-based labor	85
Processing and manufacturing labor	100
Labor of circulation	107
Services	118
Creative economies	125
The professions	134
Civil servants: 'positions', not workshops	142
Autonomy and the corporate labor unit	145
Consumption	151
Artisan-based industries?	167
Conclusion: An awkward class-in-itself	174
Chapter 3 – The motive(s) of work	177
Cycles of improvement: Expanded subsistence vs. profit	180
Materializing motivation: Assetization vs. patrimonialization	197
Individuality and the embedding of self-interest	211
A 'balances' approach to study motivation(s) in autonomous labor	217
Conclusions	238
Chapter 4: Democratic markets and	
dynamic equilibration	243
Competition in mixed markets	244
Compromise in mixed value chains	254
Transformation: Seizing opportunities for democratic markets	258
Dynamic equilibration: Effective limits to inequality?	267
Conclusions	287
Bibliography	297
Bibliography Publications as part of this PhD project About the Author	297 340

LIST OF TABLES

1.1	Memes associated with the term 'artisan' and, more broadly, the presence/possibility of autonomous labor	29
1.2	Five layers of patrimony relevant to artisan labor	50
1.3	Factors that contrive to shape the artisan character (or degree thereof) of labor.	55
1.4	Examples of contemporary trends and agendas with centripetal and centrifugal outcomes	77
2.1	The dialectics between autonomy in the generation of incomes (production labor) and autonomy in the generation of utilities (consumption labor)	153
2.2	Patterns and objectives of consumer cooperation in a mixed economy	159
3.1	Conceiving and coding objects and ideas for subsistence or exploitation: Comparing the asset and patrimony forms	209
3.2	Some of the balances in artisan labor and household organization found across sectors	219
4.1	Market ideal-types in a three-class ontology	260

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1	Dynamic relationships within a three-class model	11
1.2	Visualizing class trajectories	66
3.1	The expansion of subsistence raises the profit minimum	187
3.2	The artisan condition as a complex array of contextual, yet individually-struck balances at various interfaces.	235
4.1	Balance sheets of capitalist (left) and artisan (right) price formation	246

SUMMARY

This dissertation proposes a class theory of non-capitalism, aiming to connect a variety of labor formations and (re-)productive processes that have so far remained epistemically scattered and disenfranchised. In contemporary diverse economies (Gibson-Graham 2008), autonomous and semi-autonomous labor abounds, yet the concepts developed to underline its merits and potentials rarely travel across economic sectors. Here lies a significant advantage for capital in its attempts to organize and capture socio-political imaginaries. While political economists and economic anthropologists can rely on a veritable analytical arsenal to help them render particular exploitative practices intelligible in general, integrative terms, non-exploitative practices often languish - both epistemically and politically - in the particularities of their sectoral, organizational, bioregional and/or cultural expression. The integrative terms offered by class theories of capitalism, in other words, are lacking for non-capitalism, imposing unnecessary boundaries for the rich empirical insights, organizational recipes and political tactics developed by non-exploitative labor formations everywhere.

To remedy this epistemic inequality, this thesis assembles a common analytical language of non-exploitative labor. At the core lies an analysis of the *artisanat* as a general class of labor, at the level of proletariat and capital. As an antonym to the proletarian condition, and to dependency relations more generally, we analyze the *artisan condition* as the unfolding of labor processes in relative autonomy, providing *livelihoods* rather than jobs. Artisans aim at *subsistence* rather than profit or wage, and conceive of the means of production as *patrimony* rather than capital or assets. They form agglomerations (rather than accumulations) of property and rights, and rely on commons (rather than incorporation) to facilitate economies of scale. Shifts in class dynamics and degrees of exploitation are defined by accumulation and *equilibration*, respectively. Where artisan livelihoods

have proven resilient, we can speak of *dynamic equilibration* in non-capitalist markets.

In employing these concepts on a variety of sectoral and national contexts, non-capitalist experiences in both central and peripheral spaces of the world economy are connected, often bridging the boundaries of 'development' studies. At the same time, recent advances in the field – in particular the life-work of Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, James Scott and other scholars of the peasantry – are transposed into broader, ongoing discussions held around the concepts of degrowth, postcoloniality, distributive justice and deliberative politics.

SAMENVATTING

Dit proefschrift beschrijft een klassentheorie van niet-kapitalisme om een verband te leggen tussen diverse arbeidsformaties en (re-)productieve processen die tot nu toe in epistemologisch opzicht versnipperd en losgekoppeld waren. In hedendaagse gediversifieerde economieën (Gibson-Graham 2008) is er een overvloed aan autonome semiautonome arbeid, maar de concepten die zijn ontwikkeld om de pluspunten en het potentieel daarvan te benadrukken, worden zelden in alle economische sectoren toegepast. Het begrip kapitaal biedt veel meer mogelijkheden om sociaal-politieke denkbeelden tot uitdrukking te brengen. Politiek-economen en economisch-antropologen beschikken over een rijk analytisch arsenaal om bepaalde uitbuitingspraktijken te vertalen in algemene, allesomvattende termen. Praktijken waarbij geen sprake is van uitbuiting worden echter vaak zowel in epistemologisch als politiek opzicht slechts uitgedrukt in specifiek sectorale, organisatorische, bioregionale en/of culturele termen. De allesomvattende termen uit klassentheorieën van kapitalisme ontbreken dus voor niet-kapitalisme. Dit levert onnodige beperkingen op voor de verspreiding van de diepgaande empirische inzichten, organisatorische recepten en politieke tactieken die overal zijn ontwikkeld door arbeidsformaties waarin geen sprake is van uitbuiting.

Om deze epistemologische ongelijkheid op te heffen, is in dit proefschrift een gemeenschappelijke terminologie ontwikkeld voor arbeid waarin geen sprake is van uitbuiting. Een analyse van de *ambachtelijke sector* als een algemene arbeidsklasse, op het niveau van proletariaat en kapitaal, staat hierbij centraal. Als tegenhanger van het proletariaat, en van afhankelijkheidsrelaties in het algemeen, wordt de *ambachtelijke sector* opgevat als een plaats waarin arbeidsprocessen zich relatief autonoom ontwikkelen en die middelen van bestaan oplevert in plaats van banen.

Ambachtslieden streven eerder naar bestaanszekerheid dan naar winst of loon, en beschouwen productiemiddelen eerder als erfgoed dan als kapitaal of bezit. Zij bundelen eigendom en rechten (in plaats van die te accumuleren), en maken gebruik van gemeenschappelijk bezit (in plaats van inlijving) om schaalvoordelen te realiseren. Verschuivingen in klassendynamiek en mate van uitbuiting worden gedefinieerd door respectievelijk accumuleren en equilibreren. Bij ambachtelijke bestaansmiddelen die veerkrachtig zijn gebleken kunnen we spreken van dynamisch equilibreren in niet-kapitalistische markten.

Door deze begrippen toe te passen in diverse sectoren en landen worden niet-kapitalistische ervaringen in zowel de centrale als perifere delen van de wereldeconomie met elkaar in verband gebracht. Op deze wijze kunnen vaak de grenzen van 'ontwikkelings'onderzoek worden overbrugd. Tegelijkertijd worden recente ontwikkelingen op het vakgebied – met name het levenswerk van Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, James Scott en andere wetenschappers die onderzoek doen naar de boerenstand – in een breder kader geplaatst en opgenomen in het debat over ontgroei, postkolonialiteit, distributieve rechtvaardigheid en deliberatieve politiek.

PREFACE

Though not an empirical study in the classical sense, this thesis is very much grounded in three places: The Hague in The Netherlands, Havana in Cuba, and the North German city of Oldenburg. Each of these three sites found its own way to present me with a research problem to which I found no convincing answer in the literature. Over time, the peculiar questions raised by each place have merged into a research agenda, a first synthesis of which is presented in this thesis.

The Hague: A global peasant (movement)

The Oxford Dictionary still refers to the peasantry as "smallholders and agricultural labourers of low social status (chiefly in historical use or with reference to subsistence farming in poorer countries)" (Lexico, 2021). Though peasants constitute the largest socio-economic formation in the contemporary world, they are also the most misunderstood, belittled and neglected. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when many of the major semantic and theoretical building blocks we use to make sense of this world were published, the peasantry fielded an even more striking majority both of numbers and of pluralities of thought, little of which found its way into cosmopolitan views of the means and ends of humanity. This distance between the lived realities of peasants on the one hand, their scarce reflection (or outright misrepresentation) in the social sciences and the major political currents of the last centuries was, arguably, one of the defining choices made during the semantic construction of 'modernity'. Undoing this marginalization of rural livelihoods, ways of being and belonging, and of the non-capitalist practice they have proudly carried on into this hyper-capitalist present, has thus become one of the key tasks in searching what may lie beyond capitalism.

Contemporary peasant and agrarian studies have taken on this difficult task of representing peasants in their own right, while existing institutionally and semantically within the urban, cosmopolitan world of the social sciences, whose very foundation depended on 'othering' the peasantry. It seeks to explain and compare peasants' realities and demands in terms that could make 'peasantness' tangible to urban populations and policy-makers, but also as a way to connect peasant movements across languages, nation-states, cultures and other boundaries. Around the peasantry idea we now hold a maturing conceptual and epistemic toolbox to delineate how peasants work, how they internalize and adapt technologies, how they innovate, how they contest capital, how they compromise with capital, how they link ecological and social motives with economic ones, how they cooperate and agglomerate, when and why they differentiate or not, what peasant-driven rural development looks like and how it can be deepened, among other elements. Applications of that toolbox are increasingly bridging the North-South divide, thanks in large part to the synthesizing work of Jan Douwe van der Ploeg. As readers with a background in the field will be able to appreciate, this thesis in many places builds on the concepts and epistemic connections proposed by him.

It is thus unsurprising that the resolve for this PhD project was ignited and kept alive at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, a research and graduate studies institute that has long played an important role in this project of re-signification. It houses the immensely successful *Journal of Peasant Studies* since 2009 under the direction of Saturnino "Jun" Borras, as well as the *Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies* (ICAS) community. In 2013-2014, still during my M.A. studies at the institute, two conferences under the name *Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue*, were organized at Yale and the ISS, that assembled most of the scholars and activists (or both) that have shaped the field since the 1980s and whose work is cited here – among others the late Teodor Shanin, James Scott, Henry Bernstein, Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael, as well as many younger scholars whose courage and resolve had a great impact on my own research.

Is it not fascinating that the peasantry concept – once a tool for marginalization – is now being used to empower and synthesize the

experiences and demands of such a great diversity of people, working in a variety of sectors: small and medium farmers, fisherfolk, food processing workers, forest dwellers, as well as the many mixed rural livelihoods and their indigenous and endogenous epistemologies? That peasant movements converge as La Via Campesina rather than as appendices of urban movements on the left and right? Peasant studies in the last decades has accompanied the creation of a common language through which the largest, most silenced and marginalized social formation on the globe could build solidarity based on objective commonalities and across the boundaries of modernity's 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983). The peasantry project, in other words, has the scope of the working-class project of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is conceived in such a way, however, that we can apply its terms and demands only in rural and periurban areas. Though definitions of 'urban' vary (Angel et al. 2018), it is safe to say that we are seeing rapid and accelerating urbanization in most countries.

The political demands of peasant movements and their close allies now represent one of the principal clusters of radical political practice. Calls to de-assetize land through land reform touch at the heart of capital's claim to own and instrumentalize life's essentials, from healthcare and shelter to music and knowledge, water and soil. The food sovereignty agenda challenges the commodification of food and culinary culture in ways that touch the legal and epistemic roots of commodification itself: It is hard to imagine food sovereignty in the absence of a broader set of sovereignties and individual rights of access to deliberation, knowledge, energy, as well as commons construction far beyond the village green. Agroecology, in turn, may serve as a toolset for farm-level sustainability transitions, yet it is part and parcel of a broader re-conception of human-nature interactions on a landscape level. The emerging political program developed and embodied by radical rural movements thus requires the formation of lasting alliances with urban movements, for it aims at changing national and international laws and tendencies that go far beyond the confines of agriculture. In other words, their success hinges on moving from synthesizing answers to the question "What is the peasantry?" to tackling the question "What is the peasantry part of?"

In a sense, this is an exercise of theorization from the 'margins'. When we discuss peasant livelihoods, we make daily use of a series of concepts and possibilities that are recognized much less frequently in other sectors: Deand re-peasantization denote the idea that class positions are contingent and fluid, and that non-capitalist producers can often outcompete capitalist ones in the provision of essential products and ecosystems. The ongoing study and practice of different types of land reform is one of few examples where large-scale *de*-accumulation (what I call *equilibration*, the balancing of assets among a population, which, ontologically, turns *capital* into *patrimony* – means of subsistence) has therefore remained an actionable demand for small-producer movements.

Here lies the first research problem behind this thesis: To extend the peasantry idea and analytical toolbox in non-agrarian terms and to 'think outwards' from the specificity of peasant production and solidarity. Can the peasantry frame of concepts be generalized, allowing us to break the confines of agriculture and the rural-urban barrier that is so central to contemporary mechanisms to divide-and-rule? If peasant movements are re-kindling ideas of peasant-driven and -led rural development and agrarian sovereignty, who else is either developing similar ideas, or might benefit from them, in other sectors?

Havana: Subversive labor and the infrapolitics of an indecipherable transition

Since 2012, Havana and Cuba's Western provinces have been my primary 'home' and research site. This led to a peculiar kind of 'split reality'. While my teachers and peers in Europe showed me how to politicize all aspects of life, to analyze critically, to consider alternatives and organize to claim them, my mind was often pre-occupied with the exact opposite conundrum: Building a life in a country where spaces for organized politics have long been closed. This political vacuum, while most visible in the many provisions made to disarm, marginalize or exile political dissent, extends to the organization of labor and markets, where it aims to prevent dissent from the economic plan. As of December 2020, 78% of the Cuban

workforce still works full time for public entities and collective farms (ONEI 2021, p. 178), while most of the self-employed remainder has farreaching obligations to the state. Discussions about the circumstances of labor are largely quelled, as are debates on 'who gets what' – *the* big question of political economy. On the surface, the state is omnipresent and all-powerful, and regime continuity since 1959 is high not only on a personal level, but also on a discursive and institutional level.

Below the surface, however, everyday life, labor and exchange unfold as a constant, manifold subversion of state planning. While the state clutches to its powers to represent life in its territory, it often has strikingly little power over how that life unfolds, beyond the façade. Within the formal structures, markets and institutions scripted from above, we thus experience a complete 'alternate reality' of informal relations. Black markets outweigh official markets for many essential products, as do markets for access to public services, from legal representation to education and healthcare. Cubans routinely privatize assets they can access at their state jobs. The whole normative glue of society has been transformed as a result: as part of 'la lucha' ('the struggle' of living), Cuban society has widely accepted norms on when theft from the state is legitimate, and when it is not. While the state maintains stubborn control of the economy's legal, institutional and discursive façade, its powers over economic *practice* are strikingly limited.

This resonates with findings in China and Vietnam, as well as the Soviet Union (Tria Kerkvliet 2005, Scott 1990, Katsenelinboigen 1977). In settings where formal political enunciations and struggles are usurped by a central power, work and livelihood creation take over many of their functions through unorganized, everyday resistance – Scott calls it *infrapolitics*. In the case of Cuba, we can observe how the country's social contract is renegotiated through individual acts of labor allocation and the construction of niche markets. Cuba has been enveloped in a transition away from state planning for at least three decades, yet with the tools and terminology at hand this transition has remained largely indecipherable – it leads nowhere that we can name. Cuba may thus serve as an example where practices often resumed under 'the margins' – informal economy, spontaneous

privatization, labor and tax evasion – have slowly taken over much of an entire economy, while our capacity to understand them has not increased sufficiently to follow that motion and see the margins as bearers of a new, pre-legal reality.

What to make of this gridlock? In the case of Cuba, two views are applied ad nauseum: Both 'camps' view the bottom-up transition essentially as proto-capitalist practice. In the New York Times, Cubans are commended for their engagement in black markets and subversive labor, for it shows that they already think and act like capitalists - a country of microentrepreneurs waiting to be freed from their bureaucratic shackles (Cave 2012). Where self-directed labor emerges, in other words, it is directly associated with the motives of capitalism: competition, profit-making, exploiting workers and limiting taxation. The leading opposition newspaper Diario de Cuba recently heralded that self-employment, both legal and illegal, "will reinvent capitalism with the help of foreign investments, including assistance from Cuban exiles" (Álvarez Quiñones 2019). Predictably, the Cuban Communist Party preaches the opposite discourse, yet on the same grounds: Self-directed labor, be it formalized self-employment or legal informal activity, is branded as socialist society's 'danger zone': A space where capital relations re-emerge, perverting minds and taking advantage of crises. Only where state enterprises and command-labor have failed repeatedly to cover essential needs, a tightlycontrolled self-employment sector may be allowed to subsist: Necessary evils for a society whose supposed advance towards communism is temporarily halted by a mixture of domestic indiscipline and external threats and sanctions. In either case, autonomy is trapped between an epistemic rock and a hard place.

Here lies one of the key epistemic tasks taken on by dissidents: Finding ways to re-signify (and thus legitimize and normalize) spaces and practices of autonomous labor outside of the capital-vs.-state dichotomy. In other words: Working against state capital and the nomenklatura, while avoiding to work in favor of private capital. That predicament has been a central con-text for dissidents in all post-communist transitions. In conversations with friends in Havana and the Diaspora, it also dawned that the unclear

epistemic place of autonomy not only dictates uncertainties for Cuba's transition away from the Soviet model of governance and planning. It also allowed that model to be implemented in the first place, giving an authoritarian leader the chance to re-brand the total usurpation and militarization of political power, public space, economic resources and cultural imagination as 'constructing socialism'. Fidel Castro and other strongmen around the globe have found loopholes in the language of anticapitalism which allowed autonomy and emancipation to be restricted rather than enhanced, postponed to an ill-defined future. These loopholes need to be filled conclusively and convincingly.

Cubans are incredibly busy 'walking the talk' in this matter. The sheer weight of their everyday resistance hints at a larger transformation in waiting, a transition-from-below that carves patrimonies and commons out of some of the state's assets, while demanding accountability on the remainder. To whoever is willing to listen, Cubans already express an undertheorized vision that goes beyond the stagnant narrative of being between a rock (state capitalism) and a hard place (private capitalism). As many of us everywhere, they want neither uniforms nor suits to exploit them. I hope that this work may offer some concepts and connections of utility in this regard.

Oldenburg: New artisans and struggles for autonomy in advanced capitalism

The third prompt for this inquiry derives from the mundane experience of growing up in – and coming to terms with – life in the quietly blooming German university town of Oldenburg. In many ways, my home town is a miniature wonderland of the absurd prosperity of the 'imperial lifestyle' (I.L.A. Kollektiv, 2017). Broadening access to consumption patterns long reserved for a small upper class has fundamentally changed the debates around anti-capitalist practice: From awe at the immense productivity of industrial capitalism – which fueled struggles to re-direct its fruits and powers over nature to better uses; to disillusion with many of these very fruits and powers. As its multiple crisis converge, capitalism seems to have

lost its acumen to inspire even many of its fiercest critics. Visions of a better future that used to build *on* the structures and achievements of capitalism, are 'in transit' – epistemically – to spaces and motives that lie (and perhaps always lied) outside of it.

In this context, narratives are emerging of the new 'artisans': a loose denominator applied to individuals and groups intending to build more autonomous livelihoods, to extricate their work processes from capital relations as much as possible. Small Tante Emma (grocery) stores are rediscovered and founded as an anti-thesis to faceless, corporate retail and supermarketization. Small, diversified farms, likewise, offer a productive (indeed, a work-based) way out of the corporate food regime. Repair technicians and neighborhood bicycle mechanics extend the life of existing goods, allowing their clients to avoid planned obsolescence cycles. Calls for a more inclusive city focus on reserving more spaces and privileges for these and other labor processes. A fabric of non-capitalist practices (Gibson-Graham 2008) has been spun through this city and the surrounding landscape. In this fabric, direct action strategies increasingly fuse with a more mundane, everyday world of non-capitalist labor, valuation and exchange. Like many other cities and regions, Oldenburg is buzzing with such individual and collaborative initiatives, including small and micro-businesses, cooperatives, non-profit and municipal service companies, and a significant share of the population works and exchanges largely within such non-capitalist economies. If something defines my generation's approach to radical politics, it appears to be the recognition – and desire - to 'take the road of labor' to arrive at politics, to ground the exceedingly overwhelming problems we face in direct interactions between our hands and the things we touch to make a living: be it soil, fabric, wood, the face of a building, bodies in our care, or a socio-political discussion in which we intervene as knowledge intermediaries or 'artisans of culture'.

One may find convenience in critiquing just how privileged many of these efforts are, how they benefit from citizenship capital, middle-class securities, and from unequal terms of trade. Are calls to re-artisanize labor simply expressions of the 'new spirit of capitalism' (Munro & O'Kane 2021, 2017), or is there more to them? In more practical terms, how do we

distinguish between 'false' or naive autonomies backed by systemic inequality, and 'real' autonomies that actually work to reduce or outmaneuver inequality? Whether or not it is successful, the discourse around labor artisanization is attempting to fill an undeniable political void. In Germany, capital and proletarian labor are largely gridlocked in a narrow struggle for dividends from an unsustainable economy, each increasingly detached from its many 'externalities' by international borders. Few would see this dynamic - which so thoroughly defined the 20th century – as *the* site of systemic innovation of the kind (and scope) needed in the 21st century. This means that many aspects of the 'labor question' beg to be reformulated: From the fruits of labor, attention has shifted to the mechanisms of labor. From autonomy in consumption, in making public and private life decisions, it shifts to autonomy in production, in making work-life decisions. From growth it shifts to sufficiency, and re-discovers ideas of subsistence - often in the context of degrowth. From 'good jobs' it shifts to 'good work' and sustainable livelihoods, a quest that is increasingly situated outside of capitalist firms, capital-controlled markets and capital-governed labor markets that induce mobility, flexibility, frequent workplace changes and credit-fueled education and self-improvement. From plotting different routes towards the 'take-over' of the means of production, it shifts to their re-conception.

As everywhere in the 'Global North', we can follow the twists and turns of this scramble to re-invent anti-capitalism in a post-industrial, post-proletarian context. This is an epistemological challenge as much as it is a challenge for politics. It means struggling with capital's incursions into ever new dimensions of life and society, while at the same time imagining bits and pieces of a non-capitalist (and, on the way there, less-capitalist) life and society (Barca 2019). E. P. Thompson wrote 55 years ago that the artisan *origins* of the working class must be rescued from the 'enormous condescension of posterity' (1966, 12). So, what about artisan continuities and even new elements of 'artisan labor'? They are next in line to be rescued.

What this thesis is not

This work discusses possible elements of an analytical framework (a 'toolset') that I hope will be of utility for the type of question(s) raised above. Its overarching idea is very simple: depart from the concepts we use every day to understand capitalism, and find a similarly concise, direct and integrated language to understand its opposite. In this regard, Chakrabarthi et al. (2016, p. 278) have posed the following questions:

One, how do we reconceptualize capital's outside? Two, post–Hardt and Negri's theorization in Empire, is there an outside anymore? Three, is precapital the outside? Or is noncapital the outside? Or is it neither?

By focusing on these questions, this text is decidedly not a study of contemporary capitalism. My intention in focusing on lived and potential autonomies is not to brush over or somehow counter the study of dependency. Even less is it an intent at marginalizing the experience and voices of those whose lives are most consumed, limited, or cut short, by crushing dependency relations. Rather, I believe that integrating capital and non-capital in a fluid model of class can enrich the study of capitalism, for two reasons: On the one hand, capitalism has a shape (and its varieties have different shapes in practice) that can only be precisely delineated by tracing its limits. To argue that capitalism almost completely defines peoples' lives in multiple ways is often frighteningly correct while at the same time being remarkably imprecise and positively dispiriting. What exactly capitalism defines, and how, can be much better studied and communicated if we also ask what aspects of life remain undefined by it, and how that autonomy is achieved and reproduced. On the other hand, direct conceptual opposites within the same epistemology (e.g., exploitation and non-exploitation, accumulation and equilibration) increase the fluidity between critique and practice, between unmasking and undoing capitalism, between 'dark anthropology' and the 'anthropology of the good' (Ortner 2016). It makes little sense, in other words, to criticize capital in one conceptual universe and maintain a completely different, unrelated terminology (or even several such thoughtsystems) to study alternatives to capital. The simplicity of seeing all those alternatives as 'varieties of non-capital' can catalyze their fusion.

Accordingly, this thesis is not directly based on any of the intellectual traditions from which it could, perhaps, be derived. The Political Ecology research group at the ISS is home to a diverse community of scholars and PhD researchers whose work expands and adds to the literature on food sovereignty and peasant agency, while also combining it with neighboring frameworks, including analytical Marxism, anarchist and autonomist traditions, degrowth and commoning, as well as decolonial and pluriversal epistemologies. All of these approaches have left a deep mark on my thinking. Notwithstanding the individual quirks of its author, most ideas in this thesis can be derived from several epistemic communities that I believe follow common ethical roots (most importantly, the will to critique and overcome exploitation). Tracing these possible genealogies, however, is not the object of this work. Rather than situate my argument entirely in one intellectual tradition (e.g., in the debates on reforming analytical Marxism, or as an attempt to reconcile anarchism and class), the objective was to make it readable from multiple directions. Counting the reader as a 'knowledge artisan' (Brew et al. 2018), who will presumably re-consider the problematique of this thesis from his/her own position, amending or discarding the particular approaches and terms presented here, hopefully this act of incitement will come to fruition.

Finally, the thesis is not a case study of artisan labor and politics in either of the three sites described above. The peculiarities of Cuba's political economy, of Oldenburg's cushioned prosperity, and of the peasant condition in an urbanizing world (in the form of empirically-based case studies), would have distracted the discussion from the broader argument this thesis attempts to make. What is needed, and presented in this thesis, is an integrated view on capital's other, applicable and insightful in each of the three sites – and many others.

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Max Spoor guided this PhD project out of his well-deserved retirement at the ISS, and he is the sole reason why I never completely lost the intention to finish it, nor the intention to start a longer commitment through it. Even when far away in Havana or Barcelona, I could count on Max to knock on my door, invite me for tea or dinner, share experiences from his colorful academic and personal trajectory, and to make sure I had the will and means to accomplish this project. During the second half of this PhD journey, Oane Visser has allowed me to weave the conditions of my personal life back into the challenges, marvels and contradictions of academia. Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, besides being the key inspiration for this thesis, also made sure to generously share his courage and imagination with me. I could not imagine a better supervisory team for this thesis.

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In the end, however, the potential of writing lies squarely in the agony it causes the writer. Without Beate and Dieter I would have given up long before beginning, never developing any kind of sustained interest to subject myself to that agony, let alone be kindled and sometimes entranced by it. Without Claudia, I would have lacked the mental stability to stick with a long, tedious research project, and the mental *instability* to reengage that project in new ways, being challenged – and rightly so – on so many fronts and with rivalling stubbornness. And without Camilo, who has grown from a mere idea to a real person and whose questions and ideas

humble mine every day, these years would have been a much more spiritless affair with abstraction.

Havana, 6. April 2022

INTRODUCTION

Capital functions – and therefore is – only when and where it succeeds in making labor depend on it. It must create, through appeals or by force, a web of dependency relations that makes workers and consumers participate in its designs. In this quest we find the greatest force behind the overwhelming social and ecological transformations of the last centuries, and the principle around which capitalism reproduces, adapts and spreads. And we find the basic promise of political economy – to understand how and why the capital relation works in different settings, and how its advance impacts different groups of people in different places and times. Yet, what do we make of those instances where the capital relation *fails* to spread, to adapt, even to reproduce? What if a worker (or a consumer, for that matter) escapes that grand solicitation to 'enter the ranks' of industry, by making continual, creative use of their own agency and leeway? What do we call these subjects who resist their own in-corporation (or: proletarianization), and what terminology do we use to describe, in all the detail it deserves, the entirely different web of exigencies and priorities that organizes their labor? Where capital fails to engulf us in designs that ensure a flow of profit, what function or rationale is it losing ground to?

Gibson-Graham argue that the first step to making capitalism contingent (i.e., an option among many instead of an inevitable force) is precisely to make visible and palpable the many other economic modes that are already practiced beside it (1996, 2008). A "rich narrative" of diverse, differentiated economies "could undermine the capitalocentric imaginary; and [...] function as part of the imaginative infrastructure for cultivating alternative economic subjects and practices" (2003, p. 9). This embracing of contingency reverberates in many research agendas. For the Austrian rural historian Ernst Langthaler, it "nourishes doubts in the structural-functionalist (grand) narrative of [...] 'structural change', in which the

agency of peasant actors vis-à-vis the political-economic driving powers tends to be underexposed or simply ignored". Rather than hypothesizing the conventional wisdom of "a crossroads between accumulation and proletarianization, between 'growth or demise'", Langthaler – like many others – commits to closely "follow the economic actors on their manifold trajectories" (2012, p. 279, own translation). Gibson-Graham have called this approach 'thick description and weak theory'.¹

One outcome of this ethnographic turn is that critical scholars have indeed become more adept at "produc[ing] a discourse of economic difference" (Gibson-Graham 2008, p. 3) – "a world where many worlds fit", at least in theory. In this process, a variety of non-capitalist economic practices and imaginaries – many of them previously marginalized – are being included within a pluralist experiential 'universe' of diverse economic practices (*ibid.*, pp. 2–6, cf. Kothari *et al.* 2019, Reiter 2018). Another outcome, however, is that a discourse of *difference* – predictably – is failing to make the many contemporary answers and alternatives to capitalism coterminous/collingual, which would allow them to act concertedly. Non-capitalism is understood and practiced through a language of particularity, while capitalism itself (and our understanding of it) continues to integrate around what is very much a 'strong theory' to which building blocks are

[&]quot;[A] weak theory of diverse economies opens to [...] a myriad of other motivating forces [...] including, to name just some, trust, care, sharing, reciprocity, cooperation, divestiture, future orientation, collective agreement, coercion, bondage, thrift, guilt, love, community pressure, equity, self-exploitation, solidarity, distributive justice, stewardship, spiritual connection, and environmental and social justice. It is in the apprehension of these multiple determinations that ethnographic thick description comes into its own and leads the way toward rethinking the economy." (Gibson-Graham 2014, p. S151). For the authors, "thick description' of diverse economic practices can be combined with a weak theory of 'large issues', 'epistemology', and 'revolution' to produce a performative rethinking of economy centered on the well-being of people and the planet (ibid., p. S147).

² One of the rallying cries of the neo-zapatista uprising in Chiapas, widely adapted by postdevelopment, degrowth, transmodern and post-capitalist movements, cf. Escobar 2015.

added over time. A vast literature records and analyses the economic and extra-economic struggles, past and present, between an analytically integral *capital*,³ following the ever-same core rationale (profit) across countries, sectors, cultures and epochs, and antagonists whose rationale and actions are described in case-specific terms and therefore seen as disperse (or *particularized*) in time and space. This epistemic choice – to fight an integrated adversary with colorful manifoldness – has arguably become a constitutive facet of contemporary anti-capitalism, as well as the critical academia that accompanies it.

When an international company trawls for fish near traditional fishing villages, or a mall threatens family-owned stores on Main Street, or farmers around growing cities are evicted to build apartment buildings, we understand that the 'attack' is, in its logical essence, repetitive in its variants. This understanding recurs when we study how large corporate clinics compete with small, physician-owned practices, how chemical corporations seek to make their products 'indispensable' to 'food security', when studying the institution of plantation economies through land grabs or the encroachment of platform-mediated exchanges (as 'algorithmic capitalism') into the domestic realm. Capital in its various forms struggles to impose a social relation that allows a surplus to be produced and appropriated, whether by economic or extra-economic means, whether by taking direct or indirect control of production, whether by suppressing competition or by beguiling it, whether by 'opening up' markets or by closing market participation, and so forth. Capital's flexible strength appears to lie precisely in its ability to combine strong theory (the overarching justifications that normalize exploitation, property and inequality, entrenching them in jurisprudence and culture) and thick description (the pulsating ability to enact these theories in ever-changing

³ Capital as a social force is expressly and categorically defined as variations of the same function and rationale, i.e., a noun with varying adjectives, e.g., 'finance', 'industrial', 'social', 'cultural', 'algorithmic' or even 'state' capital.

variations, describing new forms of accumulation, new products and technologies, new memetic signifiers and new cooptations of resistance).

The general ontological frame of capitalism is applied in ever new ways and situations, both by capitalists and by their critics. In each of these examples, and in millions of others, we distinguish one or another variation of capital expressing its ever-same set of priorities in accordance with the specific conditions it finds (local society, cultural factors, political alliances etc.). We also distinguish one or another expression of proletarian labor – dependent workers who execute the tasks assigned to them: Manning the trawlers, stocking the malls, following treatment procedures in the clinics, overseeing machines in pesticide plants, working the fields for plantation owners and cleaning after Airbnb customers. Like capital, the working class is studied through the prism of a generalizing ontology - a set of classinnate priorities that recur across sectors and epochs. Without this allusion to an objective sameness, the working-class project would not have achieved the degree of concerted expression and action that led to revolutions and a period of class compromise throughout the 20th century. In capital and 'the working class' we see two actors who each follow their respective logic across a vast array of cases, and we generalize that each constitutes a class. Their complex, dynamic relationship is what we call capitalism.

Yet, there is always also a 'third agent' present in each study – the local fisherfolk pushed out of their traditional fishing grounds, the shop owners threatened by urban re-zoning, the peri-urban family farms displaced by exploding cities, the physicians opting for self-employment, and the peasants usurped by plantations. If we are to put them in the same room, as we often do with capitalists or proletarians from different times, places and cultures, their only commonality seems to be their opposition to becoming part of the capital relation. Other than this entirely passive

commonality (being threatened by the same historical force),⁴ we cannot generalize much about what they represent, what they want, and how they attempt to get it. Their 'defense' – the priorities and agendas they follow when confronting capitalism – is particularized, and we do not pursue a common language and terminology for different expressions of it. Some non-capitalist workers appear to be against globalization, others are true globalists themselves, some are indigenous or post-colonial subjects, others metropolitan citizens, some lead or yearn for traditional lives and labor, others rely extensively on modern technologies, and while some earn (and require) little money for their lifestyles, others are thoroughly embedded in the modern exchange of goods and services.

The premise of this dissertation is that we can, and should, nonetheless attempt to see as many commonalities in what these 'third actors' do, believe, want and therefore represent, as we see in the many incarnations of capital and proletariat. Rather than studying the many forms of non-exploitation practiced in contemporary mixed economies⁵ as particular expressions of competing logics to capitalism, in other words, we should

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⁴ Marxist economic anthropology has long connected expressions of 'non-capitalism' around this passive characteristic of 'outsideness', i.e., of existing (and perhaps resisting) outside the forcefully instituting present:

[&]quot;[A]lthough positing the impossibility for capitalism to survive without an external world, [it] can do without the study of what lies outside capitalism itself. Other modes of production are reduced to a distant horizon of capitalism, one which is constantly pushed back by its forward march" (Rey 1973, p. 28, translated in Chevalier 1983, p. 91).

⁵ With this term we refer to economies in which several logics or modes of production not only coexist in parallel, but interlink in complex ways. In principle, this includes all contemporary economies, including countries where one economy has full backing by the State. In Cuba, for example, an ubiquitous, integrated command economy is nonetheless competing with significant black and grey markets (Thiemann & Mare 2021). What matters from a class perspective is not which actors are 'mixing' (e.g., state agencies, small businesses, corporations, non-profit agencies etc.) but which *logics*, most importantly to what degree profit and subsistence logics (see chapter 3) compete.

pursue a framework capable of understanding all instances of non-capitalism as an integrated whole. 'Strong theory' is needed more than ever make this happen, particularly so that findings and strategies communicable can travel across sectoral and cultural boundaries. This dissertation aims to conduce and provoke discussions on possible directions for such a 'strong theory' of non-capitalism. It argues that almost all of that 'universe' of non- and post-capitalist practice and theory actually rests on a common principle: Self-direction. This sphere of self-directed activities extends through distinct economies and across a multitude of institutional arrangements. While self-direction is very much present in what Shanin (1990, pp. 90–92) terms 'expolary economies', it is by no means restricted to 'the margins' of global economic activity. Rather, it can be seen in all sectors and modes of labor mobilization, though of course to varying degrees and behind many façades (cf. Frey 1997).

For roughly 150 years, the basic premise of political economy has been that the latter two antagonistic classes – capital and proletarian labor – ought to be seen and studied as the principal agents of the 'modern' economy. The struggle between these two class formations was proclaimed the decisive subject of study and political praxis. This text makes the argument that a third class – the *artisanat* – has been unduly neglected and marginalized. While everyone talked about the exploited and the exploiters of the world, too little attention has been given to those that neither exploit, nor are exploited, and we know too little about those parts of our economic lives that lie outside of capitalism. ⁶

One academic discipline that has dealt extensively with this question is the field of rural and agrarian studies. Here, the 'third agents' – *peasants*, farm families and similar rural livelihoods – are ever-present in discussions on the trajectories and prospects of rural societies. Theoretical approximations, first and foremost the *peasantry* concept itself, serve to

⁶ 'Exploitation' refers to the ability of one individual to receive some of the fruits of another's labor, relying on coercive or non-coercive means, and exempting pro-active and voluntary donations or assistance in solidarity.

connect millions of rural livelihoods through a single terminology across sectors of the rural economy (agriculture, animal husbandry, processing, trades, retail...), countries and cultural frames of reference. This common framework has facilitated debates on the peasantry's socioeconomic composition, its politics and potential vis-à-vis capitalism, which are held between researchers and activists from different schools of thought and political currents. Some of have argued that peasant farms are inherently non-capitalist, managed instead via a system of economic, ethical and social balances that is re-calibrated over time to adapt to changing circumstances imposed by nature, but also by markets, elites and institutions – "a script defined within and by the peasant family" itself (van der Ploeg 2013a).7 Seminal works by Netting and Ellis showed how this peasant condition produces rational and sustainable businesses, while Scott and Tria Kerkvliet made the intricate processes of social coordination and 'everyday politics' that connect peasant livelihoods (often across sectors) visible (Scott 1976, Ellis 1993, Netting 1993, Tria Kerkvliet 2005). They all provide evidence for a much more basic finding: Peasants, as 'third agents', are able to capture spaces and construct markets while distantiating themselves from dependency relations. They do so by achieving control over the primary means of their production, horizontal cooperation, slow accumulation of patrimony, input substitution and reliance on the commons (van der Ploeg 2013a). In a way, given that an estimated 2.05-2.79 billion people rely on the non-wage livelihoods provided by the world's 410-520 million family farms (Woodhill et al. 2020, pp. 13-14.),8 the re-

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⁷ van der Ploeg (2013a) assembles a detailed picture of these peasant farm balances in current political and technological landscapes. See Chayanov (1966b) for the original theory, which, in the context of Soviet state-making in the 1920s, predates many of the 'modern' incursions of capital into the rural sphere.

⁸ The ILO estimates that 26% of the global workforce is engaged in agriculture, not counting family labour (International Labor Organization 2020). In this context, both estimates represent conservative figures: In counting only smallholders, landless labourers who use the peasantry framework to claim a self-directed farming livelihood are left out. Missing is also the informal family labor on small and medium farms that rarely makes it into employment

emergence of the peasantry as a political-economic framework has catapulted us forward roughly one-third of the way to a uniform theory of the 'third class'.

How do these approximations of the peasantry compare with theories on the economic reasoning of small-scale non-capitalist labor units in other sectors? In the final paragraph of a paper on re-peasantization tendencies in the European periphery, van der Ploeg suggests that we "recognize that the 'peasant principle' operates in large domains of society – domains that stretch far beyond agriculture and the countryside", and that we seek to make our concepts for the peasantry 'travel' into these sectors and collide with concepts and theories discussed there. "What I propose, then, is to drastically go beyond the artificial boundaries between town and countryside, and between agriculture and the rest of the economy. What we have to do is, I believe, to explore uncapturedness, the struggle for autonomy and the creation of non-controllability wherever they emerge" (van der Ploeg 2005, n.p.).

Indeed, as this text seeks to show, a renewed interest in 'third agents', who limit their exposure to exploitative relations, is visible in many research disciplines, and it forms part of broad changes in social and economic philosophy. Throughout the 20th century, the imperative of labor incorporation featured prominently in the pre-dominant ideologies of a globalizing West. It was foundational to liberal modernization theory, to communist ideals of scientific planning in proletarian economies, to corporatist ideals of the welfare state, and to the technology-based productivity 'revolutions' promoted in development politics and mainstream development studies (Gilman 2003, Arnason 2000, Jessop 1991, Cullather 2004). In each case, proletarianizing labor and extending the

statistics, as well as a variety of rural non-farming occupations often included in conceptualizations of the peasantry (pastoralists, artisanal food processors, fisherfolk, artisanal miners and forest-based livelihoods). Advocates of the peasantry concept have argued that it applies to 40% of the global population, living in 1.2 billion small farm households (McMichael 2012, van der Ploeg 2008).

reach of scientific and managerial direction over production processes was seen as a pre-condition for progress, achievable either through direct incorporation (wage-employment in large firms or collectives), or through the subsumption of formally-independent small businesses in larger value and information chains.

As this unholy alliance wanes, so grows, quite naturally, our antipodal interest in the determinants of resilience, adaptation and continuity in small, tightly-knit labor units. By building on the conceptual frames presented by Gibson-Graham (2008), Harvey (2006) and Polanyi (1944), as well as many other paths endogenous to specific disciplines and sectors, a growing literature analyses experiences of autonomous labor as a form of resistance to capitalism. Connections between these sectoral experiences, however, are only rarely made, resulting in parallel, but separate, lines of investigation and struggle. It is time to systematically connect these bodies of work, and to promote the 'traveling' of concepts, questions and answers between them. To achieve such a common language, self-directed labor must be conceived as a class-in-itself – the *artisanat*.

Much has been written about the limits of class analysis as a means to decipher and structure the increasingly complex array of economic and social conditions that shape our life-histories (Wright 1989, Kalb 1997, Gibson-Graham *et al.* 2001). Indeed, the classical capital-labor relationship of the industrial age - on which class theory was built and tested - has splintered into a broad field of diverse arrangements and greyscales. Perhaps more importantly, scholars increasingly chose to abstain from the clumsy simplifications and categorizations of Cold War social science, in favor of more multifaceted, anthropological analyses. The roots of today's 'crisis of class' as an analytical and political variable, however, lie much deeper, in a conscious, political decision made by the founders of this intellectual tradition. Marx and many of his radical contemporaries believed that proletarian workers were potent political agents: intellectually and physically mobile, easily freed from traditions, from the specificities of place and the yoke of the soil. In order to underline the struggle of the proletariat, i.e., of dependent labor, as the decisive political agenda for a better future, class theorists made far-reaching choices to not

acknowledge self-directed labor and self-direction as an extensive reality, a widespread demand, and a potential path to emancipation.9 Complex socio-economic realities were forcefully distilled into a dialectic of domination (capital) and dependency ('labor'). These were essentially choices of political-linguistic strategy. In establishing the focus on capital and proletarian labor as the primary constituents of the 'modern' class system – leading to a 'binary system' of thought on class – we were always left with a fairly large residual, which was footnoted away as regressive 'remnants' of previous class systems, or as minorities that would eventually be submerged under the interests of capital. This political judgment, made and enshrined at the foundation of class theory, has limited its analytical force as a means to make sense of complex socioeconomic realities and formations. It has also dragged class theory – often quite needlessly – along the ups and downs of the proletarian socialist project, 10 from its early dynamism to institutionalization and, since the mid-1950s, to a leisurely demise and the necessary opening to new ideas.

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⁹ We could speak of an example of *salience bias*, wherein a theoretical representation of reality is based on occurrences that are perceived as remarkable and novel, while scarcely including other occurrences (and populations) perceived as unremarkable.

Though most of the revolutions that enacted interpretations of class theory during the 20th century were based on successful mobilisations of the peasantry (e.g., in Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba), the project behind these revolutions was always proletarianization and central planning. Peasants were the 'muscle' that brought avantguardist parties into positions of power, but these parties did not follow a peasant logic of development (Scott 1977, 1979).

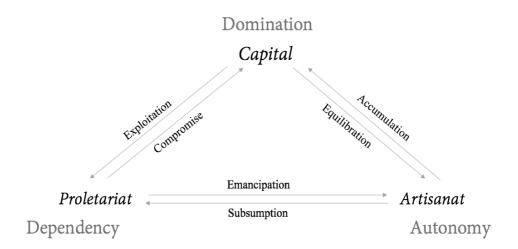


Figure 1.1: Dynamic relationships within a three-class model

Fixing the inbuilt partiality of Marxian class theory means developing the partial, antagonistic dialectics between capital and proletariat, domination and dependency, into a less normative, more anthropological 'trialectics' a three-poled class system - through which the manifold experiences of dependency, autonomy and dominance that characterize, in different variations, every workplace, every 'job' or livelihood, every household and all social and economic constellations beyond them, become visible, structurable and universally comparable. Power, if not total (which it never is) is at any time a three-fold affair: It is applied, it impacts, and it is contested or eluded. To assess the extent and dynamics of dominance and capitalism, we need to research the extent and counter-dynamics of autonomy and artisanism. To the degree that hierarchies are incomplete, even where that degree is small, we find in these experiences of autonomy anything from valves of discontent and everyday resistance – 'small arms fire in the class war' (Scott 1985, p. 22) – to far-reaching alternative scripts, associations, markets and institutions. Figure 1 condenses a model of class relations that integrates a systematic interest in processes of exploitation, accumulation and subsumption with an equally systematic study of its counter-movements: Processes of equilibration, compromise and emancipation. Besides conducing accurate analysis, this three-poled understanding of class relations avails political readings of a given context,

both negatively (what dominates us and how?) and positively (what emancipates us and how?; cf. Ortner 2016). In many cases, class analysis still lacks this fluid transition from the analysis of domination to an exposition of its inverse. Class theory gave us the possibility to conceive millions of individual exploitative relations in a universal and solidarity-inducing manner – a 'strong' or *grand theory* of inequality, based in a categorical critique of exploitation. It has not, so far, allowed us to conceive all non-exploitative relations and labor processes as part of a common logic and class position – an equally strong theory of non-exploitation or autonomy.

Establishing the ideal type: artisan labor

At the basis of this thesis thus lies the following thought experiment: What if we conceived class not as variations and reformulations of the dialectical relationship between capital and labor, but instead as variations in a trialectics between domination, dependency and autonomy? Each is represented by an archetype ('the' capitalist, proletarian and artisan), though in practice these three 'primary colors' of class mix into a variety of formations. All economic relations derive from three primary motives of labor: Profit, wage and subsistence. All class positions in any given economy are thus deducible from them. Like the primary colors, they blend into an infinite number of distinct realities. While dependency imbues labor with a proletarian character, practicing dominance over others makes it capitalist (supervisory and extractive). The artisan condition of labor, in turn, rests on the possibility and necessity to self-direct one's labor – the practice of autonomy. Individuals encounter an ever-changing variety of economic, social, technological and cultural circumstances, and in conscious and subconscious processes make decisions over how to make and maintain a living. To do so, they enter or leave relations of dependency, find new ways of dominating the labor of others and extract value from it, or follow paths that do neither - labor as/under autonomy. Although each individual experiences all three conditions over time, most are (and usually understand themselves to be) significantly subsumed under the experience and logic of one pole - either a full-time, dependent job, or some form of capital that yields a significant profit or interest, or an artisan livelihood or business.

Positing an 'artisan class' aims to better represent the 'third primary color' of political economy: non-exploitative economic relations based on the union of property and labor." The artisan class (or artisanat) is thus defined, as any other class, by its relationship to the means of production, and by how it utilizes these means to produce. If the proletariat comprises all those individuals who are excluded from control over the determinants of their labor processes – hence it can only exist with an 'other' of capital owners and managers - the artisan class is characterized by the inverse relationship: Artisans have control over or effective access to the means of their production and are thus in a position to self-direct their labor. The artisan condition thus represents the inverse of the 'double-free' character of proletarian labor ('freed' of control over the means of production, and thus 'free' to sell one's labor to the highest bidder). The artisanat is the class which innately opposes "the process which divorces the producer from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour" (Marx 1976, p. 874) and will engage in economic and political cooperation to do so.

By comparing and combining experiences across sectors and regions, we can show that this scattered, often unassuming struggle to devise and safeguard spaces in which an *artisan mode of production* can compete and reproduce represents an important stream of anti-capitalism in the past and present. Many different occupations and currents converge in the quest to achieve a high(er) degree of control over the goals and techniques of one's labor. Through political action, economic association as well as everyday forms of struggle, they seek to establish and safeguard economic and cultural institutions that are capable of reproducing the equality of access and the cooperative institutions needed to allow self-directed labor

¹¹ Peasant mobilizations often claim that 'The soil belongs to those who work it', the basic premise of any peasant-based politics of land. Recently, urban activism demanded that 'the city belong to those who live it' and those who make it colorful and livable, i.e., tenants, small businesses and local associations.

in small units to compete with bigger economic actors. This artisan agenda of struggle clearly diverges from any anti-capitalism that struggles to gain control over means of production with the aim of nationalizing or collectivizing them under the control of a political or technocratic vanguard. Rather, the objective of artisan politics is to place *and maintain* control in the hands of individual producers, their cooperative institutions and allies. This artisan logic "aims at and materializes as the creation and development of a self-controlled and self-managed resource base" (van der Ploeg 2008, p. 23). To do so, the artisan labor unit (usually a family business or a similar small affective unit) seeks to constantly reproduce its capability to make autonomous decisions (its response-ability) in a changing landscape.

Every economic activity can be performed in an artisan mode. From a class perspective, what matters is not how an activity is performed (e.g., the extent of machinery use), but under what class condition – What are the social relations of property, access and control that orchestrate economic activity and its remuneration? If the capitalist mode of production is fundamentally characterised by the separation of capital and labor, leading to a contradiction between their respective interests, the artisan mode of production is marked by their integration. Hence, artisan production is not materialized over time as *capital* in the Marxian sense – as surplus-seeking and commodifying. Rather, artisans see the means of production as *patrimony*, a category that seamlessly includes physical as well as social and ecological assets, as well as knowledge (van der Ploeg 2013a).¹² Correspondingly, while proletarian labor is most characteristically governed by the *exchange values* of labor (wage remuneration), artisan

¹² In agrarian studies, where the extensive co-dependency between classical 'capital' (machinery, irrigation works and buildings) and ecological assets (e.g., soil life, beneficial insect populations, or the genes of a good line of stallions or boars) is more visible than in other sectors, the term *patrimony* has come to signify all means of production (except for labor) that the worker or household orchestrates in order to produce. Even social assets, such as hereditary membership in an irrigation society or good standing within a cooperative or village community, is subsumed under this term.

labor both builds and depends on a variety of valuation mechanisms, expressed in a self-defined set of priorities and interests that the artisan labor unit equilibrates in constant response to external conditions.¹³

In short, the labour process, the use and development of patrimony and, especially, the relations between patrimony and labour are not governed by general capital-labour relations. They might be affected by such relations, but they are not directly shaped and reshaped ('determined') by them. The development of the production process might even go against the logics entailed in these general capital-labour relations, just as it might go against the bounded rationalities of the different arenas within which these general relations are embedded (e.g., the markets for labour [or] capital [...]) (van der Ploeg 2013a, pp. 29–31).

Individual artisan businesses that participate in markets designed and broadly controlled by bigger, corporate actors remain subject to imposed laws of exchange, even if they may 'buffer' the effects of these laws on themselves. This is the case for many contract farms, insurance agents or online marketplace vendors, among others. When they create niches, however, they begin rewriting these laws, and carving out spaces that are not solely dominated by the capitalist logic of accumulation and/or profit. In Marx's terms, they are successfully struggling against a variety of ways capital seeks to *subsume* them.

Reviving the figure of the artisan in this manner is a double attempt to bring class theory back into the anthropology of non-capitalist practices, while bringing the experiences and worldviews developed through these practices back into the broader study of class and class relations. In reencountering self-directed work through class theory, we can better avoid moral, ethical and political judgments and juxtapositions in the debate on post-capitalist work and society. In most of the discourses that idealize

¹³ van der Ploeg uses the analogy of an ever-changing "script defined within and by" the labor unit, which underlines the fluidity and extensive agency contained in artisan decision-making (van der Ploeg 2013a, p. 25).

practices of 'artisan economy' or 'craft economy' in the de-industrializing Global North, political economy is sidelined by affective and moral concepts of 'worthy' work and 'ethical' products (Munro & McKane 2017, 2021). As a result, such discourses often confuse 'entrepreneurs' and 'artisans', and focus on techniques or even aesthetics rather than social relations. For Wallace, the movement of 'neo-artisanship' in metropolitan counter-cultures is driven by lifestyle identity, not class. It represents a convergence of disperse groups who each consider themselves 'masters of craft', among them "gin distillers, new generation barbers, butchers and cocktail bartenders" (2019, p. 955). This universe of metropolitan countercultural businesses is united by a 'neo-bohemian' (Lloyd 2010) life-style, and "provision [of] the goods and services of style, taste, and living well to urban dwellers" (Scott 2017, p. 61). In Cannon's study of Portland's emerging 'artisan economy', as in Wallace's data from London, the analysis is restricted to high-end, low-volume products ("[t]he price set by the artisan reflects the high-quality nature of product", Cannon 2009, p. 59; cf. Leissle 2017). Their actions, consequently, are largely geared at justifying these higher prices to the lucky few who can choose to pay them. In Cannon's definition, "the artisan's products are handmade and individually unique", and their work and networks represent the "antithesis of the modern economy" (2009, p. 60).

If resumed as such, the artisan economy is framed in privilege, restrained in small middle-class, largely urban bubbles in the Global North (cf. Guthman 2003), and almost irrelevant to the broader questions of how the world's population is/will be feeding, clothing, housing and employing itself (cf. Bernstein 2010, Woodhouse 2010). Campbell (2005) argues that craft consumption in the richest countries often acts as a post-modern form of 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen 2009), a situation where unique hand-made products 'beat' mass-produced ones for status. These consumption choices rarely represent a profound interest in, or preference for, the life and work of artisans. Here we see parallels with what Charles Robert Ashbee, one of the founders of the Arts & Crafts movement active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, described in hindsight as "a great social movement" turning into "a narrow and tiresome little [designers'] aristocracy working with high skill for the very rich" (Kaplan, in Krugh 2014,

p. 286). The door for capital to re-internalize contemporary critiques of alienation is wide open.

A class analysis must transcend such a moral-aesthetical (and in many ways exclusive and limiting) vision of the artisanat and by design invite the contradictions and challenges apparent in artisan labor past and present. It seeks to unravel the many positive and negative attributes attached to the term, as well as de-historicize it, in order to concentrate on an analytical core: A basic, in itself neutral, condition of labor and subsistence.

Departing from the ideal type

In doing so, it quickly dawns that the archetypal artisan worker, a 'lord of his own' who organizes his work entirely in self-direction, is as rare as the archetypal proletarian, who, if theory were correct, would be completely and utterly passive in life and labor, and the archetypal capitalist, who engages in no productive work whatsoever and never experiences dependency on other market actors, the state or even on his own workers. Class analysis inevitably takes place in the overlapping 'grey areas' where, just like the three primary colors mingle to form our visual universe, the three basic conditions of labor transform the bare physical earth into a complex social and political universe. Consequently, we cannot visualize artisan formations of labor by extracting them from the wider economy; only in their very interrelations with other economic actors can we find the mechanisms that grant and reproduce autonomy over time. Artisans maintain their class position of relative autonomy by devising changing sets of compromises, and it is precisely the processes by which they decide where, when and with whom to compromise, what market forces to submit to and which ones to resist, that express their agency and individuality. The everyday experience of autonomy is not 'doing as one pleases', but being able to pro- and react.

As a result, small labor units with a certain degree of autonomy, such as family farms, crafts and trades workshops, independent retail shops, music bands, physician's practices, independent architects, bed and breakfasts,

small food processors, truckers, taxi drivers, research groups and restaurants, are highly heterogenous within and across political boundaries, regulatory frames as well as cultural and natural environments. Their position in social structures is constantly renegotiated through cultural and technological change, and they develop individual responses to changes in power structures that surround them. This panorama of compromises results in "a confusing and highly diversified mix" (van der Ploeg 2008, p. 18) of modes of production with varying degrees of surplus extraction – *the* characteristic of contemporary diverse economies. Much of that diversity is the direct result of the different compromises taken by semi-autonomous producers vis-à-vis capital. In adverse conditions, some artisans enter dependency relations with up- or downstream corporations, others specialize or raise quality in order to reproduce autonomy, while still others 'expand to subsist' on entrepreneurial paths. Instead of digging up a small number of highly autonomous producers and branding them as islands of resistance to capitalism, this dissertation seeks to show that all of us practice, defend, fight for, reproduce and re-imagine autonomous and self-directed labor in one or another way, to varying degrees and at different times. Autonomy and individuality in labor are deeply human endeavors, which we find in all organizational arrangements of labor - whether as an escape valve in more hierarchical labor units, or as a dearly celebrated way of life on the other end of the spectrum.

Van der Ploeg argues that the incredible variety of mechanisms that support, safeguard or augment autonomy "often exist as practices without theoretical representation" (2008, p. 19). The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, generations of political economists, when confronted with complex economies made up of a confusing mix of class relations, have tended to emphasize the menace of novel dependency mechanisms, which tend to take on a greater scale and visibility (amplified by capital's propaganda and advertisement efforts) than the scattered mechanisms of autonomy. Capital's agenda and potential to integrate economic realities across vast areas, its wish to represent the 'upcoming', the 'modern', the 'most efficient' mode of production was mirrored in how we studied modern economies. In the process, complex realities were resumed as different varieties of

capitalism or, at least, different roads to capitalism. Autonomy, on the other hand, is a timeless, extremely fractured, endogenous and often 'quiet', matter-of-factly practice. While capital relations (both dependency and dominance) push to disconnect economic decision-making from locality, natural environment, culture, society and aesthetics (Polanyi 1944, Habermas 1984), the practice of self-direction takes place *in the individual* and transports all of their thoughts and allegiances to the fore. The resulting heterogeneity *in practice* has deterred realizations of artisans' commonalities *in logic* both in the political and in the academic sphere.

Secondly, besides this theoretical 'baggage', we also have to deal with existing colloquial images and notions associated with the term 'artisan', from the romanticizing to the condescending. Within the myth of modernity, memetic tropes are needed to denominate those who 'still make things with their hands' because they are unable or unwilling to use 'up-to-date' technological and organizational means. These subjects are to be found in 'pre-modern' landscapes marred with poverty and traditionalism, and can survive modernization only in insignificant niches as high-end producers of luxury items (Leissle 2017), and around tourist magnets, selling trivial hand-made souvenirs. In this popular view, a book about 'artisans in the 21st century' would be expected to tell the tales of bearded coffee-roasting hipsters, traditional blade-smiths, of 'the last basket weaver in Devon', and of a cluster of similar skills that vacationing members of industrial society may choose to maintain as walking museums.

Yet, the reference to artistry is not insignificant. The relative autonomy of the artisan, as well as their attachment to a particular profession and place, allows them to conduct their labor as a lifelong process of adjustment and re-invention of workflows, tools and products. Viewing peasant farmers as the most capable class to realize 'the art of farming' (van der Ploeg 2013a), i.e., to cultivate farming as a responsive, flexible, and thus sustainable process, corresponds to this perspective of autonomous production. And indeed, the original meaning of the term *artisan* (from the Italian *artigiano*, which again derives from the Latin *artitus*) relates it to *art*, proposing that artisans are applying artistic (as opposed to *mechanistic*) principles to

production processes, and that their occupations are commonly respected to require significant artistry. ¹⁴ The origins of the artisanat as a delimited social formation are to be found in the rift in *skill* between laborers (typically slaves) and self-directed workers or artisans.

Why the artisanat matters

Whatever does not spring from a man's free choice, or is only the result of instruction and guidance, does not enter into his very being, but still remains alien to his true nature; he does not perform it with truly human energies, but merely with mechanical exactness (von Humboldt 1969, p. 28).

Proletarians may excel at their labor, yet to the degree that they rely on commands to formulate it, they are continuously stifled in their development as humans. Self-directed endeavors may take place outside of work-hours, through hobbies or sports, yet the best, and by far the widest 'arena' for the emergence of the individual as a social citizen is the workplace and its nodes of social relations with the wider world. Individual development under proletarian conditions means 'selling one's labor, then being', while under the artisan condition it means 'being through labor'. Arendt paints this emergence as a lifelong trial-and-error process of conscientization, self-assertion and the development of beliefs, skills and relationships.

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice.

This "disclosure of 'who' in contradistinction to 'what' somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide"

¹⁴ In French, notably, the term 'artisan'/'artisanat' is still widely used to designate the trades in general, similar to the German 'Handwerk'.

can thrive during self-directed work, while the process is largely on hold when we engage in tasks commanded by a superior (Arendt 1998, p. 179). Organizing labor into large-scale, capital-dominated units means "utilizing [and developing] only the smallest part of man's potential capabilities, it sentences the great majority of workers to spending their working lives in a way which contains no worthy challenge, no stimulus to self-perfection, no chance of development, no element of Beauty, Truth, Goodness" (Schumacher 1979, p. 41). In many ways, this is, to use Schumacher's wording, the real sentence of capital's destruction of environments and stratification of people: The fact that such an enormous number of workers are giving most of their life to enact it, to destroy and divide, and to anxiously waste away as humans in the process. For Arendt, "the greatness of Max Weber's discovery about the origins of capitalism lay precisely in his demonstration that an enormous, strictly mundane activity is possible without any care for or enjoyment of the world whatsoever" (Arendt 1998, p. 254). Graeber (2018) refers to 'bullshit jobs', yet in the contemporary labor market - where ecologically destructive or socially repressive tasks abound - it may already be a privilege to engage in labor that is merely meaningless.

While the Marxian class-based worldview has been highly capable of provoking and catalyzing dissent with capital, it has failed at organizing disengagement from capitalism. This is because, in Marxism, the 'Other' of capital is also capital's dependent, and as a matter of 'laws of history' must remain so. The solution, hence, lies not in diminishing the importance and reach of capital, but in accelerating that importance so far that it comes to constitute the principal social conflict on a global scale, and then resolving that conflict by 'taking over' the means of production neatly concentrated by capital. This premise has recently been re-affirmed around the term 'accelerationism' (Mackay & Aenessian 2017). Like earlier proponents of historically-deterministic models of anti-capitalism, accelerationists "insist [...] that the only radical political response to capitalism is not to protest, disrupt, or critique, nor to await its demise at the hands of its own contradictions, but to accelerate its uprooting, alienating, decoding, abstractive tendencies" (*ibid.*, p. 4). The historical force of capitalism is seen as strong enough to prevail over people's search for non-capitalism

('turning back the tides of history'). Focusing on artisan economies would thus be a distraction from the greater question of how capitalism's enormous disruptive force can be steered towards the best-possible outcomes. We may accompany capitalism's creative-destructive path, but ought not resolve to "folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism" (Williams & Srnicek 2013, p. 143). Though this accelerationist current represents an extreme, more nihilist version of this premise, the contradiction between awe at the capabilities introduced by capitalism and agony at its destructiveness is broadly constituent of binary models of class.

This dissertation advocates strongly to separate class studies from determinist readings of history and politics. Class theory has some of the strongest, most far-reaching affordances in the social sciences. The exercise of class-ifying humans and their interpersonal relations and inequalities is - rightly - associated with some of the darkest hours of the 20th century. Ever present is the "deployment of Marxist categories for the vulgar purpose of suppressing freedom" by many governments and movements, and their "cynical application [...] to the twisting of minds and the breaking of bodies" (Judt 2009, p. 135). Rather than trying to 'save' Marx's valuable insights into the systematic, structural nature of exploitation from the unwelcome baggage of real-socialist forms of systematic exploitation and violence, we need to find the fundamental theoretical fault that allowed his class theory to be so seamlessly exploited by cruel dictatorship, and which connects Marx's own purges of the 1st International (most notably at the Hague Congress in 1872, when the so-called 'mutualists' were expelled by the 'statists') to the later tendency of avant-gardist governments and movements to commit to large-scale purges, social engineering and political cleansing (Mann 1999, p. 37-40). The affordance for this (mis)use of the Marxian canon (which is never conclusively resolved by its many partial detractions and revisions) lies in the fundamental decision to leave out (and thus silence) the very class which embodies equality, emancipation and structural nonviolence.

As such, this dissertation does not primarily aim to persuade the reader to advocate for artisan production. Rather, the objective is to let the artisanat

be seen as a third class. It presents no political program, focusing instead on an analytical program that could place artisan labor on an equal footing with the two classes (and their many variations) constitutive of capitalism. Discussions on the future of artisan production can only be held if we have a framework available to analyze its agents and their labor, and if we acknowledge a research interest in their continued presence. ¹⁵ To do so, the following chapters develop a series of terms and concepts through which the many scattered experiences and expressions of the artisanat can be analyzed comparatively. This does not mean formulating a theory of artisan labor 'from square one'. Inspired by the idea of 'travelling concepts' (Bal & Marx-MacDonald 2002), the dissertation travels through a variety of sectoral literatures to recover existing and hidden parts of an artisan class theory, bringing these literatures into communication in the process. The first chapter focuses on deriving a series of basic terms and definitions that serve to integrate experiences across disciplinary boundaries. In the second chapter, we move through all major sectors of contemporary economies, aiming to assemble the many economic agents that engage in artisan-like forms of production across a diverse set of sectoral and regional conditions. In doing so, we hope that the reader may acquire a condensed impression of the primary issues faced by autonomous and autonomy-seeking workers in today's complex, mixed economies. Chapter 3 enquires about the motives of artisan labor, forms of valuation and forms of patrimony. Chapter 4, finally, looks at how artisans participate in mixed markets and value chains, and how, where possible, they (re-)design markets and institutions in favor of autonomy.

¹⁵ Of course "devoting academic attention" to non-capitalist economic practices also means "making them visible as potential objects of policy and politics" (Gibson-Graham 2008, p. 620). The opposite is true for research agendas that focus entirely on capitalism as their object of study: "their performative effect is to interfere with [...], to deny legitimacy to the diverse economies that are already here, and to close down the open futures that are waiting to be performatively enacted" (*ibid.*, pp. 619–20).

CHAPTER 1 - CONCEPTUALIZING THE ARTISANAT

The fundamental argument of this dissertation concerns the benefits of conceptualizing a third root class. A 'root class', in borrowing this form of classification from informatics, is a category that is not derived from another. While the critique of contemporary economic relations knows dozens of class categories, all of them are directly or indirectly derived from the capital-labor relation and the dialectical games between two basic positions: dominance and dependency, or capital and labor. A first group of class categories fills the space 'between labor and capital' (Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich 1979) and the paths taken by specific labor formations in order to participate in domination, improving both their share of the surplus and their indispensability to capital. These include conceptions of a managerial-professional class (ibid., pp. 5-45), the white-collar salariat, the aspirational class (Currid-Halkett 2017), and discussions about new forms of laborism and labor aristocracy in global value chains (Wright 2000). A second group denotes different forms and scales of capital, from smaller, personalized holdings by the 'petit-bourgeois', via medium-scale family and entrepreneurial firms (e.g., in the German variety of capitalism, cf. Lehrer & Celo 2016), towards depersonalized and/or deterritorialized extractive mechanisms in finance, algorithmic and genomic capitalism (Fichtner et al. 2017, Srnicek 2017, Peters 2012). A third group focuses on the 'how' of capital, i.e., on how different capital formations extract surplus either through productive means (industrial capital), idle means (rentier class, landlord class, platform capital), extraeconomic means (vagabond capital, privatization, resource grabbing; Katz 2001, Harvey 2003, Borras & Franco 2012), or by capturing the state and/or public spaces (nomenklatura, military-industrial complex, surveillance capitalism), among others. A fourth group focuses on capitalism's margins and the dynamics between exclusion and reproduction: From the precariat, migrant labor and 'gig work', to semi-proletarians and informal workers, and finally to the 'reserve armies' of labor in slums and rural areas (Standing 2015, Munck 2013, Harriss 2006, Pajnik 2016). In each case,

political economists are concerned first and foremost with how relations of domination and dependency materialize across core and peripheral spaces, and how they change over time.¹⁶

Henning & Agarwala differentiate contemporary class theorists into *lumpers* and *splitters*:

How many classes are there? Where are the boundaries? As often, there are lumpers and splitters. Karl Marx boldly lumped layers of stratification together into two classes: bourgeois and proletarian. Dividing society into two megagroups (the exploiter and the exploited) creates "classes" of great heterogeneity but periodic subjective reality [...]. If giant classes are to act politically, coalitions across subgroups must be hammered out (2006, pp. 338–9).

Splitters, in turn, argue that the complexity of post-Fordist, globally-interrelated societies requires more nuanced, multisided differentiations, resulting in dozens of precisely-defined class positions and formations as expressions of multi-sided stratification. While the authors¹⁷ clearly have a point, they are missing that class theory essentially represents a two-step approach: In the first step of 'basic research' into class, or *class ontology*, we discuss how to view complex realities in an ethically-meaningful and congruent manner. In doing so, we devise axiomatic class positions from which to triangulate, to 'expand inwards': From the clearly-identifiable outliers of the class system, whose lives are most strikingly imbued with one of the three colors of class (utmost dependency, dominating wealth, and singular autonomy) towards the 'messy middle' where colors mix and remain in constant negotiation. We do not live in a world of proletarians, capitalists and artisans, but in a world where complex power dynamics and

intermediary categories.

¹⁶ Even Weberian critiques (and their reconciliation with Marxism in Bourdieu) rely on positioning social groups along a binary class scale – albeit using a greater number of conceptual indicators (e.g., prestige/honor, power, education, manners) to do so, and albeit developing a greater number of

¹⁷ As well as Grusky & Sørensen (1998), who criticize 'the big class assumption'.

institutions place people unequally in each of the three positions, or parts thereof, over the course of their life - and indeed their everyday. Only by making axiomatic distinctions are we primed to move purposefully in that overwhelming reality – to dissect with a purpose. This second step is where axioms are replaced by concrete analysis, resulting in a second layer of class often referred to as *class analysis*. Without class ontology we cannot practice meaningful class analysis; without lumping there are no meaningful axes along which to split. The main weight of this dissertation lies in the former sphere. In exploring changes to class ontology, new paths are opened for class analysis that dissects reality in accordance with a new purpose – inclusion of experiences and demands of autonomy.

The third root class, in order to connect to a rich historical (and largely dormant) thread of its study and representation, is referred to as the *artisanry* or *artisanat*. This chapter introduces a conceptual framework through which the continuity and adaptation of self-directed labor can be analyzed. It lays out a string of basic terms and definitions to which the later chapters refer and add nuance. In doing so, the idea is not to dissect complex societies directly into artisans, proletarians and capitalists, but to expand the surface on which they are dissected, from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional panel. As ideal types, the three classes are ontological signposts between which messy realities can be oriented in order to relate them to/around an ethical axiom – in the case of class: The fundamental meaning and nature of exploitation. The artisanat is not a previously unseen 'third reality' – an exercise of analytical lumping, but a third pole from which unseen aspects of reality (including particular class positions more or less close to the artisan ideal type) can be triangulated.

¹⁸ The distinction between *basic* and *applied* research into social relations may be useful here; cf. Gulbrandsen & Kyvik 2010.

Modern memes of artisan labor

Before moving towards an understanding of the artisanat as a class, it is necessary to look at the baggage we may be carrying along with us. Artisans are extensively Othered in modern economic theories and conceptions of development, but only rarely studied *as themselves*. As a result, normative conceptions of artisan labor abound even in the absence of a comprehensive theory of the artisanat. To be open and curious about such a theory, we must thus understand, and dispose of, a number of a priori assumptions about the term 'artisan'.

A neutral treatment of contemporary artisan labor is generally obstructed by entrenched 'memes' about what non-capitalist or artisan labor supposedly looks like. Memes refer to 'units of cultural transmission' by way of imitation (Dawkins 1989, p. 192). They are bits of information that, although once born as rational abstractions within a specific context, continue to be passed on from one generation to the next, and one context to the other, long after their original context has ceased to be relevant. Memes, though "initially shaped by the mind" as a response to life-experiences, quickly "turn around and begin to shape minds" in how to respond to experiences they have not made yet (Csikszentmihalyi 1993, p. 120). The study of memes thus seeks to capture the relative inertia of ideas and conceptualizations which, in the absence of a conscious thought-effort on the part of the incoming generation, are carried on by simple imitation.

In the case of artisan labor, this inertia concerns what Brenner called "the suffocating orthodoxies of Marxist evolutionary theory" (1977, p. 90), and the equally suffocating "stages of growth" of modernization theory (Rostow 1960). Both of these interrelated systems of historical determination permeated academic and public ontologies over many decades and in so profound ways that even extensive critiques in the last decades have not completely undone their inertia (Callinicos 1985). Most of our ideas about the artisanat, in other words, derive directly or indirectly from theoretical and political currents intent on minimizing its presence and/or importance.

Meme	Effect
Artisans as 'traditional'/'pre-modern' workers	Replicates the dichotomy of modernity and traditionalism, of the 'ways of the past' and those of the future. The effect of this meme is to render the ambit of artisan labor insignificant both in economic and in cultural terms.
Artisans as 'petit- bourgeois'	Here, artisan labor is rendered <i>politically</i> insignificant and – with one word – reduced to an add-on to the capitalist development process.
Artisans as 'entrepreneurs'	From a very different angle, we here find the most important way to subsume artisans under the 'naturalness' of capitalist logic.
Artisans as 'dying out'	Applies the above dichotomy and linearizes history, carrying this marginalization of artisan labor into our expectations of the future. Why engage in, or study, or advocate for, activities and communities that are bound to disappear <i>anyway</i> ?
Artisans as occupants of 'residual spaces'	Argues that artisans occupy primarily spaces with so little profitability that capital simply has no interest in outcompeting them. Hides instances where artisan labor competes successfully.
Artisans as sub- contractors of capital	Frames dependency relations as absolute rather than relative/gradual in order to make complex realities fit simpler class theories. Usually, these refer to capitalism as an all-encompassing reality within which no meaningful autonomy can be observed. ¹⁹
Artisans as high- end, low-volume niche producers	Greatly reduces the area of sight, leaving us with a smaller sub-group of independent activity that is easily held of scarce importance for the 'general economy'.

Table 1.1: Memes associated with the term 'artisan' and, more broadly, the presence/possibility of autonomous labor

Each of these classifications of independent labor emerged within the thought-systems developed in response to the rapid expansion of capitalism and mass social dynamics during the second half of the 'long 19th century' (1848 to 1914). 20 Within these thought-systems they constituted rational, logically consistent parts-and-parcels of critique, and elements of juxtaposition against which passionate hopes and ambitions for change were arranged. Independent labor in this context could hardly be understood to constitute one of the three root classes of political economy, for its perceived importance in relation to the other two, and the capital relation binding them together, was indeed minuscule. In this time of great hopes and ideals, conceding the artisanat an equal position in class systems (which are none other than qualified classificatory abstractions) would have been outlandish. As these thought-systems reached unprecedented dominance over the intellectual and political life of the 'short twentieth century' (1914 to 1989, Hobsbawm 1994), a serious revisiting of artisan labor remained implausible. The memetic generalizations that reduced autonomous labor to a position of insignificance and backwardness could be inferred from the predominant ideologies in East, West and South, and they could, at the same time, be deduced from the far-reaching economic and social changes that occurred as these ideologies began to determine powerful state's policies and abstentions (e.g., reductions in the number of small farms, firms and shops, capital-induced economic growth, rural decline, and proud proletarianism in the welfare-state's burgeoning cities). Even scholars or activists who painted a rare positive picture of artisan labor and communities navigated within the established dichotomy

¹⁹ At a recent conference, the author asked a crowd of political economists – all of whom hold professional livelihoods and intellectual lives that certainly transcend the logic of capitalism – whether they figured their lives to be *largely* or *completely* determined by capital. Many confidently choose the latter adverb, despite being (with significant pride, one may add) living examples of the limits to capitalist economy, participants in the exercise of non-capitalist motives and modes of labor organisation.

²⁰ Term coined by Hobsbawm (1962, 1975, 1987) in reference to the Soviet historian Ilya Ehrenburg.

between 'modernity' on the one hand and 'pre-modern' agents and customs that ought to be 'restored' to benefit it (e.g., Bernstein 1899, Wrench 1939).

When the demise of communism and the emergence of themes such as sustainability, individuality and 'the good life' led a wider public to question these thought-systems, the figure of the artisan had already been minimized for various generations, allowing much of this memetic baggage to persist *in general*, even as it was now more routinely challenged and replaced *in particular*. In other words, today there is great interest in artisan-like ways of working in each particular sector, but this has not resulted in a general re-appraisal or re-conceptualization across sectors. As a result, many of the sectoral research agendas and political campaigns are stuck in a semantics of class that works to confuse and obstruct the very messages about independent producers they have developed, while others believe to have 'moved on' from class altogether.

The contemporary literature on entrepreneurship, which emerged in the 1980s on the basis of Austrian School economics, seeks to portray small business as the perpetual nursery of new capitalist trends and waves of commodification. To achieve this, it re-packages the whole artisan class ambit under a new (and equally foreign) framework derived from procapitalist economic theory and values. More importantly than this academic classification is the fact that 'entrepreneurialism' seeks to induce a self-perception of being 'nascent capitalists' in small business owners and farmers, and thereby strip (or 'liberate') them of all non-capitalist tendencies and balances through which they may conceive their work and their social position. In principle, the entrepreneurship literature is aware of the "observed dichotomy of growth- and independence-oriented new ventures" (Douglas 2013, p. 633), i.e., divergent ambitions of growth and autonomy, yet it fails to meet these two ambitions on an equal footing. Schoar (2010) and Sridharan et al. (2014) take this fallacy one step further introducing terms like 'subsistence entrepreneur' 'transformative subsistence entrepreneur'. The entrepreneurship literature shows little interest for autonomy-inclined small businesses that contradict its findings. It studies small businesses not for what they are, but for what their owners (in some cases) aspire to become. Finally, it does

not problematize the fact that one individual's 'successful' entrepreneurship minimizes another's 'successful' autonomy.

The Artisanat as a Class

Can autonomy be studied from a class angle – the very angle through which its expressions have long been relegated to the margins of political economy? Or, conversely: Why does class remain a worthy choice as *the* fundamental angle of analysis when looking at the complex social interactions and aspirations of the 21st century? Undeniably, the retreat of communist and radical socialist politics over the last decades has augmented skepticism of class theory, many aspects of which are associated with this multi-faceted failure. Here, however, lies a chance to re-capture class from the ideological, and to test a priori assertions made in support of a bygone era of proletarian-vanguardism (Bottero 2004). The aim of various authors has been to re-establish class as a politically neutral concept that contributes to anthropological nuance as much as it allows for generalization and solidarity. According to Kalb (1997, p. 3), this perception and relevance of class

[...] presupposes that human interests (broadly conceived) simply and realistically begin with the ways in which people (of both sexes)

²¹ As Arendt writes, "the end of a tradition does not necessarily mean that traditional concepts have lost their power over the minds of men. On the contrary, it sometimes seems that this power of well-worn notions and categories becomes more tyrannical as the tradition loses its living force and as the memory of its beginning recedes" (1961, p. 26). Rather than seeing contemporary social critique as having outgrown its origins in a two-class eschatology, as having overcome the limitations of basing each and every theme on the explicit conception of modernity as capitalist-proletarian dialectics, this original dialectical frame remains in the collective subconscious of unquestioned rituals and notions. Undeniably, Marx's original two-class theory forms a crucial part of the 'childhood memory' of political economy and social activism. Its original choices are very much intact in our increasingly complex re-conceptualizations.

try to secure their livelihoods by performing their daily work. It emphatically claims that work is never just the act of earning a living, but rather the social and cultural crux around which whole ways of life become organized and maintained. Class, in addition, assumes that work, survival, and reproduction are what bring people together in the first place. It argues that from the daily necessity to secure a living arise specific and complex patterns of social labor, which in turn underpin – and are maintained by – specific forms of civilization and appropriation. [...] Class points, at the same moment, to people's intentional efforts to make the best of their world as well as to their unchosen need to find the friction-ridden alignments to do so. Thus, it dynamizes culture and deinstitutionalizes power.

The study of class has thus made an anthropological turn, enabling us to move more freely between the macro-politics of class formations and the everyday and micro-politics that propel them (Tria Kerkvliet 2009, Hobson & Seabrooke 2007). At the same time, more versatile conceptions of class have resulted from the cultural/sociological turn, which widens the scope of class frameworks from the economic realm (ownership of means of production, workplace relations, formal subsumption etc.) into all processes of social hierarchy. Bourdieu's theory of stratification sharpens our perception of class by making the concept itself travel across disciplines and sectors - from the study of workplace and market relations into inquiries on education, taste, and other social spheres that all constitute "different areas of practice" within a grand game of socio-economic advancement and loss (Bourdieu 1984, p. 175). Class, then, is the outcome of the individual's efforts to obtain and combine different forms of property - ownership of labor-enhancing machinery, educational titles, gender, experiences and skills, membership of institutions and clubs, criminal history (or lack thereof), determination, social reputation, beauty, citizenship, ethnicity, credit score etc. All of these properties and qualities (and combinations thereof) can act as capital, that is, they can be the reason(s) that enable their holder to exploit others. Class, if it were to be quantified, would in all cases be a complex array of different properties and qualities held by an individual, and never a reduced measurement of only one property or quality (e.g., financial resources). It is the combination of these properties and qualities that "define[s ...] agents' objective location within a social structure, which in turn generate[s] a set of interests that govern those agents' social action" (Chibber 2017, p. 29-30).

Autonomy refers to a position of self-sufficiency – not in the sense that the artisan produces what she²² consumes (private or autarchic selfsufficiency), but in the sense that through her particular way of participating in society and economy, she produces as much value as she ends up obtaining (reciprocal self-sufficiency).23 In the three-class framework, there are two possible ideal-type scenarios at which nonexploitation occurs on such a wide scale that it comes to define a society: (1) A utopia where positions of dominance are reformed in a way that they renounce exploitation, or are inhibited from practicing it by the dependent class (equal outcomes despite unequal resource access); and (2) a utopia where dominance and exploitation are resolved (equal outcomes grounded in equal resource access). In both cases, exploitation is absent, but class is not. In fact, class relations in each scenario are highly organized and dynamic. In the first scenario, ever-evolving practices are required to maintain the promised benevolence of a capital-holding elite (typically based on state monopolies of power), which will tend to seek opportunities

²² Throughout the text, male, female and nonbinary pronouns are used at random. With few exceptions (most notably capitalists), the populations and mechanisms referred to are gender-neutral.

²³ In a further step, other parts of nature would have to be included into this calculation. The problem, of course, is that while we have well-developed theories of human equality – that is, the worth of all humans is equal – we have no such theory that attempts to assign relative values to different sub-sectors of nature: humans, trees, mammals, small invertebrates, climatic conditions, soil, water, and so forth. Some variables with this logic are already in use, such as 'footprint' values for specific foods, 'virtual water' values for products ranging from a t-shirt to a household appliance or car, and the increasingly complex system of carbon measurements and valuation. See Burdon (2010, 2011) for a bold attempt at weighing different sub-sectors of nature in jurisprudence.

to use its capital for personal and limited interests.²⁴ In the second scenario, artisan individuals and groups will never cease to coordinate, build institutions and reform them such that they continually override the tendency for differentiation.

Where does the artisanat stand in relation to the 'working class'? From the three-class model, two answers to this question can be proposed: First, that the 'working class' refers to the proletariat alone, in which case it would miss a very significant cross-section of those members of society who can only afford subsistence by working. Historically, many proletarian-vanguardist parties and intellectuals have taken this path, leading to political backlash from artisans, a type of class conflict that always plays into the hands of capital. More recently, important attempts have been made to re-connect this conception of 'the working class' – which appears to have lost its vanguardist acumen – with other parts of 'the working classes', or the 'classes of labor' (Bernstein 2010). A second, very different, answer results if 'the working class' is conceived as composing both proletarians and artisans in a kind of solidarity-from-below against exploitation. Workers-as-artisans and workers-as-proletarians have more

²⁴ Leopold Kohr's "power theory of aggression" (Kohr 1978, pp. 25–54), though initially confined to international relations, describes this tendency in its simplest form. Kohr wrote his seminal The Breakdown of Nations in the postwar era (it was first published in 1957), when intellectuals tried to make sense of the convergence of extreme violence across the ideological spectrum. For Kohr, violence (including, in our case, economic violence, i.e., 'exploitation') happens first and foremost 'because it can': Where significant power differential exist between one individual and another, one group and another, or one state and another, they make the use of violence possible and, in Kohr's argument, statistically likely. That some individuals, groups or states make less use of their power than others is, in that sense, already an observation of secondary importance. In each individual case (be it the likelihood of violence in a marital relation or the likelihood of war or subjection between two states). behavioral variance is certainly significant. Depending on the mindset of the partners/state leaders involved, power differentials may be rescinded or capitalized on. The more of these observations are added over time, however, the more the scale of power differentials and the scale of applied violence will tend to converge.

in common – as a class, not as individuals – than either has with capital owners. Their struggles are complementary and mutually-beneficial: The more proletarians fight for higher pay and better benefits, the more they help their artisan counterparts outcompete capitalist firms. In practice, this alliance can, of course, only be fruitful if mechanisms exist to directly convert jobs in capitalist firms into artisan livelihoods. Blocking such conversions (see section on *equilibration*) is thus a central component of pro-capitalist institutions and policies, and a central feature of capital's divide-and-rule.

The second micro-level of economy: Labor units

The artisanat forms a richly-textured associational layer between the individual on the one hand, and meso-scale institutions and markets on the other. With the term 'labor unit', we refer to the social nodes at which one or various individuals bundle their work processes, resources and expectations in order to achieve certain productive or reproductive objectives. Both businesses and households can thus be studied as labor units. In some cases, their members and objectives overlap so far that a productive business and a household form a combined labor unit, rather than two separate ones. In others, we find a pronounced division between the objectives, strategies and identities of labor within the household unit, and of marketed labor that supports that household. Furthermore, individuals often participate in various labor units at a time, which may include secondary businesses, civil society associations, religious communities, extended family/clan commitments or even seasonal units such as the military reserves.²⁵ Some of these are long-lasting, others are

²⁵ Though we could focus on *units of production*, it is preferable to take a step back and focus on *labor* and labor units more broadly. Reproductive labor, as well as labor that is non-productive or destructive yet nonetheless influences social relations and norms, are thus included. One example of non-productive labor are honorific societies, which serve to distribute what Bourdieu calls the capital of 'distinction' that upholds certain sectoral as well as broader societal hierarchies. Examples of destructive labor are found in inter-human conflict

created on an ad hoc, short-term, basis (e.g., volunteer work groups for specific projects). From a class perspective, nonetheless, it is clear that some labor units (and the arrangements therein) have a vastly greater impact on our lives than others, and that the two central functions of labor across cultures are making a living (*livelihood*) and house-holding. The time and effort spent in relation to these two primary functions tend to strongly outweigh that spent on other (secondary) functions. Other parts and sites of human life tend to refer back to the respective individuals' conditions of livelihood and household. This dissertation thus focuses on these two functions, while referring more briefly to a number of secondary functions and the struggles between dependency and autonomy that take place around them. It also touches on some sectors, such as the performing arts, where artisan livelihoods tend to be based on various labor units at once, many of them project-based and short-term.

The 'labor unit' concept – and, more generally, the ontological focus on this second micro-level of analysis that mediates between individual and wider economy – was introduced by Alexander Chayanov in *On the theory of non-capitalist systems* (1966a). His aim was to describe the social bond that defines "peasant and artisan family labour units" without recurring to the "conceptual systems of an economics adapted to capitalist society": Wage, capital, commodity market and profit (*ibid.*, p. 5). He argued that an application of such concepts to whole societies – rather than specific markets and sectors – would unavoidably lead to misrepresentations of those markets, production units and products in which at least one of these foundational concepts is lacking, be it the wage nature of labor, a profit expectation in its application, the commodity form of the product or service created, simple exchange valuation in its market, or the separation of capital and labor.

Labor units are the immediate socio-economic molecules whose composition, bonds, decisions and actions embody the possibilities and

and war (e.g., Lüdtke 2006), as well as labor that destroys certain ecosystems in order to make resources more accessible for human exploitation.

tendencies of the wider social-economic system in which they find themselves. Labor units thus represent the threshold at which an *inner dynamic*, made up of the practices, expectations, disagreements, resources, values and skills of workers as individual humans, meets an *outer dynamic* of social norms, economic systematics (most importantly the price of different goods and resources), and natural landscapes and constraints. This confrontation takes place as negotiation, rather than determination, and labor units self-govern within, and in relation to, the constraints they face. ²⁶ To do so, they employ the resources, skills and ideas they own or have access to. The size and productivity of this portfolio of autonomously held resources, skills and ideas is the principal factor determining each labor unit's insertion within the wider economy, i.e., its place in the three-class model.

What mobilizes and ties labor together in such units? Capitalist labor units are based on an exploitative compromise (Wright 2000) – typically the sale of labor against some form of remuneration. Artisan labor units are affective; their members congregate for motives beyond a wage (or more broadly: beyond a commodified expression of value). These motives can include long-term ties like family or friendship, but also professional appreciation, common experiences and struggles, in short: Labor units are formed based on social, political and/or cultural agreements over the meaning and place of labor. Though early theories (including Chayanov's) focused on the empirically prevalent family ties, recent literature has extended the definition of the peasant labor unit to include small non-family collectives of various formats. Some of these labor unit formats are rather popular within contemporary peasant movements in the North (Meyerhoff *et al.* 2012) and South (Wittman 2009, Wolford 2005).

This approach as *negotiation* rather than *determination* is owed to van der Ploeg's treatise of the Chayanovian approach to peasant studies, which he frames around this very question: "Central to the Chayanovian approach is the observation that although the peasant unit of production is conditioned and affected by the capitalist context in which it is operating, it is not directly governed by it" (2013a, p. 5).

Instead of relying on traditional idea(l)s of the blood-tie as the primordial bond behind the social organization of artisan labor, an inclusive view is needed to understand and conceptually integrate the many analogues to 'the family': the small collective of friends or business partners, the unit formed by master-apprentice relations, and the one-person 'self-employed' labor unit, to name the most important examples. New as well as continuing non-family forms of collective labor mobilization, such as bottom-up collectives (Pulfer & Lips 2010, Leder et al. 2019), villages (Wittman 2009), and clans (Dietler & Herbich 2001) are brought back to our attention. Each labor unit design holds advantages and disadvantages for its members both with regard to the unfolding of internal dynamics (e.g., bundling skills and resources among more partners, juxtaposed with greater flexibility for single-worker units) and in the way that it translates external relations to which the labor unit is subaltern (e.g., taxation regimes, ability to sell a greater variety of goods/greater batches, stability against threats). These designs are highly sector-specific and will be treated in more detail in the next chapter.

In the artisan sphere, each individual's principal social and economic units (the household and the business) are intensely intertwined²⁷ – if not physically, then in terms of the balances and objectives individuals maintain for both their 'private' and 'professional' lives. These interrelations between the social and the economic, however, can take on many forms, depending on the labor unit's membership and its priorities. Artisan labor units are the instruments of their workers, who seek to materialize their ideals through labor, under the circumstances given. What these ideals are, and how the worker(s) at hand pursue them differ as much as humans themselves differ.

²⁷ One anecdotal case where this interrelation becomes very apparent is the treatment of unplanned closing days of family-run stores. On one occasion, the author found a shop owner's handwritten note that taped to the establishment's door, announcing that "the store remains closed today because I am cremating my mother".

The reader familiar with Chayanov's work will have found that we use his concept here with a number of adaptations and additions, owed to more recent debates not foretold by his publications in the early 1920s:

- 1. Labor units are not necessarily family-based, and the intricate combination of business and family should not be defined as archetype or norm of artisan economy.
- 2. The molecular form of labor, i.e., labor units as more or less dynamic (and more or less autonomous) intermediaries between the individual work/mind and the broader economy and society, continue to exist in all economic systems and spaces, including capitalist relations (Gibson-Graham 2008). This is because relations of dominance and dependency are at all times incomplete, and that degree of incompleteness is mirrored in concrete negotiations within and around the labor unit.
- 3. The social relations within labor units can themselves contain capitalist elements, such as patriarchic decision-making patterns, alongside horizontal relations or non-capitalist hierarchies based on skill, seniority or respect.²⁸

When we study labor units, we approach class relations at an anthropological scale, acknowledging the significance of bottom-up, subaltern agency.²⁹ The sheer diversity of intentions and arrangements found at this scale must force class theory out of its roots in determinism. For Leszek Kołakowski, part of the appeal of Marx's dialectical straightjacket was (and continues to be) the sensation of intellect-power that comes with "having one key to open all doors, one universally applicable explanation for everything, an instrument that makes it possible to master all of history and economics without actually having to study either" (2002: 45). From a researcher's perspective, the central commitment

²⁸ See section on *Hierarchies* below.

²⁹ Ayoob (2002) refers to this perspective as 'subaltern realism', following Spivak's call for social scientists to 'learn from below' (1988).

is thus to show genuine interest in labor units as comparatively small but plentiful and diverse socio-economic nodes as significant sources of gravity and spaces of negotiation, while maintaining the study and critique of wider social and economic relations and the enormous gravity they exert on all individuals.

An antonym for dominance: Self-direction

The classic Marxist typology of labor and labor units focuses on a critical study of surplus value. It tracks where the value created through labor accrues, who organizes that chain of value distribution and appropriation (and how), and who influences the process of valuation itself (price, as well as the tilts, obstacles and subsidies of the playing field on which they develop). It thus explains the labor process from the outside in: Beginning with data on social relations that surround labor, and moving inwards (usually by deduction) into analyses of the labor processes that unfold under these circumstances. Though not always intended, directionality establishes a cause-effect relationship, with broad observations and interpretations, most of them at the national and increasingly also global level, being translated into people's concrete lives in a manner that privileges deduction over induction. This mixture between a 'strong theory' of dominance and comparatively 'weak theories' of autonomy thus paved a 'fast lane' for meta-structural determinism, often replacing the meta-physical determinism of competing ontologies. It informs us, first and foremost, about the dominance that certain out-ofreach processes exert within our lives, and in the process relegates many attempts at understanding existing and potential alternatives - with the exception of revolutionary (meta-structural) change.

The three-class model affirms the study of structural and top-down factors that severely reduce the leeway that individual workers or labor units have when organizing their labor. Yet it recognizes an equally omnipresent (and at all times significant) subject of study in the bottom-up processes of labor *self-direction*, the realm of economic decision-making through which workers counteract or at least negotiate broader trends and influences. The

focus of political economy research thus shifts (or rather: extends) from determination to negotiation, and from dominance to (unequal) compromise and everyday resistance – a shift we believe has already been produced in many disciplines that study specific economic sectors (Wright 2000, White & Wijava 2021, Bernstein 2010). Autonomy – this perpetually 'awkward' remainder of political economy - is thus included as a constituent element of all its objects of study. Of course, this is far from prescribing a unidirectional focus on autonomous action and bottom-up dynamics, as is the case in some right-libertarian theories that affirm capitalism (or libertarian anarchism) as a systematic expression of individual autonomy (Chartier & Johnson 2021). Nor should it lead to similarly unconvincing attempts to overlay utopian theories of classlessness - and the primacy of direct action over organization - onto complex realities which clearly require both. Our way forward lies in finding an ontological balance between dependency and autonomy that adequately represents their relationships in people's lives, while making (or at least offering) amends that could elicit everyday as well as more organized, long-term struggles to increase the latter.

After this anticipation of misuse, let us define the realm of self-direction over the labor process, and see what limits and what completes it. With *self-direction* or *autonomous activity*, we refer to the human mind's potential to generate a constant flow of objectives, methods and propulsion for the activities performed by the body, as well as to find, review, adapt and thereby ameliorate such objectives, methods and propulsion in its relationships with others and the world. For Sennett (2008, p. 9), this process unfolds as "a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking", between direction and execution ('trial and error'), which establishes "a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding". Autonomy is not a state, but a continual practice, a process through which individuals adapt to the natural and social conditions of their life.³⁰ It differs from the most

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³⁰ Kant reserves the concept of autonomy for actions (and lives) that are based on a high moral standard (Shell 2009, Sensen 2012). Frankfurt, in turn, argues that humans are autonomous only if and when our 'essential character' succeeds in imprinting itself into our actions (1999, p. 132). Autonomy as

common notion of 'freedom' (as *unconstrained* agency) in that autonomous practice ('self-direction') acknowledges the constraints of nature and society, yet operates as a countermovement to exploitative hierarchies between individuals.

It is through the practice of self-direction that artisan labor has profound effects on those who perform it. The need to make frequent, informed and significant decisions about how to shape one's work process, what markets to engage and how, and how to collaborate, make self-directed labor an act (or at least attempt) of individual evolution. Here we are thus looking at the primary mechanism that "cultivate[s] different [...] economic subjects—subjects of capacity rather than debility, subjects whose range of economic identifications exceeds the capitalist order" (Gibson-Graham 2003, p. 58).

Conceptualizing autonomy in this broad way, it also becomes clear that simple self-employment as defined by today's tax agencies can, as a legalistic binary measure, only hint at the extent of actual artisan labor. The World Bank found 29% of the world's workforce to be self-employed either alone, with a small number of partners, or in a cooperative (Gindling & Newhouse 2014), while the ILO estimates that "around 45 per cent of employed persons worldwide are own-account workers or contributing family workers, with men much more likely to be among the former and women among the latter" (Gomis *et al.* 2020, p. 34). However, part of this number is so-called 'dependent self-employment', from contract farmers to freelancers who depend primarily on a single client – a system of labor

referred to here, however, is not a moral quality in the Kantian sense, nor does it have to spring from the willpower wielded by a person's 'true self' – the utopian, elusive concepts humans have of their 'better selves' (Bittner 2002, pp. 216–220, 225). We do not contend that all autonomous action is inherently superior, or closer to the agent's 'heart' or 'soul'. The business of murder, for example, can be practiced in an autonomous manner (by lone wolf assassins), it can take place in grey areas (as in the semi-hierarchical practices of criminal and mercenary gangs), and it can take place as heavily proletarianized labor (military labor, see Lüdtke 2006).

organization often instituted by companies to circumvent labor laws and collective bargaining, as well as re-order risk and debt in the value chain (Román *et al.* 2011, McMichael 2013). In that sense, the legally self-employed are found all over the typology, from positions of strong subsumption to capital to positions of proud artisanship. Attempts to measure or otherwise abstract autonomy must focus on the objective conditions of labor, not its formal inscription or subjective perception.

Autonomous spaces may be crafted proactively, inspired by the ideals of those who craft them. In these cases, workers can "think of their businesses as laboratories of ideas and new practices, spaces where they are [primarily] creative and innovative" (Boldrini et al. 2011, p. 25). More often, however, their creation is motivated by artisans' (and aspiring artisans') maneuvering against economic, ecological and social circumstances and changes that threaten to impose dependency relations on them.³¹ These maneuvers and innovations are not necessarily re-active in time, as threats are often perceived long before they materialize. They are, however, reactive in that they reflect on conditions imposed by a bigger power, and seek ways to anticipate the consequences, redesign their livelihood to evade them, or at least ameliorate their impact through compromise. Whether in a specific situation that 'bigger power' is a comprehensive shift in the market, a change in social relations, a new law by the central state or a change in climate - the procedure is the same. Most artisans are in a constant inner conversation through which they digest and adapt to the various circumstantial developments (from climate change to tax law change) that provide the ever-changing context for their livelihoods.

Social scenes wherein labor is predominantly self-directed are thus characterized by a blurring of the boundaries between 'work' and 'life'. It is harder to distinguish in time between work and leisure, spatially between workplace and home, intellectually between the 'work mind' (instrumental

³¹ For van der Ploeg, "[...] the struggle for autonomy [...] takes place in a context characterized by dependency relations, marginalization and deprivation." (2008, p. 23)

thought) and the individual's 'private mind' (ideals, values, but also quirks and mental idiosyncrasies), qualitatively between work and play, and instrumentally between professional identity and politics. In many cases, such distinctions are altogether dismissed, and replaced by elements of artisan culture (symbols, motives, virtues etc.) that cherish the fluidity between work and life.

Self-direction is the common mechanism – the mode of decision-making – through which a never-ending plurality of artisan and semi-artisan labor processes can be understood as *homologous* – as unfolding as expressions of the same (social) position. Artisans make frequent decisions about their work, some in individual autonomy, others in the ambit of interdependence and shared autonomy within labor units. To make these decisions, they rely on understanding their work (and that of others they interact with) through a complex set of values, incentives and necessities that form a web of intrinsic, use and exchange values fine-tuned by the worker. Chapter 4 delves into how these different modes of valuation interact to form the personal motives for artisan work.

Means of production: capital vs. patrimony

Autonomy, once achieved, is neither guarded in a vault, nor does it evaporate into thin air, which leaves us with the question of how a potential for autonomous labor materializes, how such a potential is maintained over time, and how it contracts or expands. Autonomy is neither a financeable asset like capital, nor is it an experiential, momentary and thus fleeting episode or string of episodes. It materializes in the resource base that an artisan labor unit controls and operates (van der Ploeg 2008, p. 23), and it develops and decays with that resource base as well as the workers' talent and knowledge in using it.

The artisan condition creates, and is sustained by, two unique forms of property: Property at the individual and labor-unit level (patrimony) and property at the communal or societal level (commons). We define

patrimony³² as the means and spaces of production over which individual artisans hold long-term property or usufruct rights,³³ while the commons are auxiliary means and spaces of production held and managed in support of artisan labor, either by groups of associated artisans or by institutions organized as stewards. Both of these forms of property cannot exist unless there is artisan labor defining and creating it, reproducing it over time both in its physical shape and its social meaning and organization, and requiring it for its subsistence. While each individual's relative access to capital is what positions them on the dominance-dependency scale, access to patrimony and commons is the game-changing capability that allows us to leave that scale and build positions of relative autonomy. The antonym of capital, in other words, is not 'no capital' or 'socialized/state capital', but either patrimony or commons, or (more commonly) a mixture of these two categories. A long-term utopian concept such as the 'dissolution of property' relations is not necessary to think of an antonym for capital, nor is it representative of contemporary and historical instances and spaces of non-capitalist property, or property that fulfills a social function.

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³² Chayanov refers to the private share of peasants' resource base as 'family capital', but van der Ploeg (2013a, pp. 24–32) proposes to distinguish its terminology more categorically from the economics of capitalism, using the term 'patrimony' instead. This resonates with Marxist political economy, which reserves the term 'capital' for profit-seeking ownership of resources. As said above, it is also necessary to depart from a family-focused view of peasant and artisan production which would marginalize other relations of affection and mutuality that are foundational to artisan labor units.

³³ An example of a livelihood-defining usufruct right in urban settings is given by Batréau & Bonnet's study of street food vendors in Bangkok's Soi Rangnam street (2016, p. 37): "Since the monthly fee is negligible and revenue potential is high, vending spots are extremely profitable. Vendors have a strong incentive to keep a registered location as long as they can, and to pass it to their kin. When vendors retire, they look for someone in the family to take over the business. A couple selling grilled meat explained that they had given up their factory jobs when their aging aunt could not work in the street anymore. Her spot was so valuable that it was enough to motivate a radical career change for the couple."

In addition to the primary material means of production (land, buildings, tools), artisans rely heavily on social means (often more so than larger enterprises), including physical commons, legal-administrative commons and cultural-technological commons.³⁴ These social means, together with the indivisible secondary material means of production, such as air and water, are the reason why artisans are, and have always been, strongly engaged in associational and political action. Access to these social means, which by their very constitution require coordination between many producers and users, is the Achilles heel of artisanism. Water, air and climate cycles are, with few exceptions, too large in scale for individual labor units to guarantee their own access individually (Fleischman et al. 2014). The same is true for knowledge and innovation, as well as land- and cityscapes (Radywyl & Biggs 2013) and public goods such as infrastructure, public trust in product safety, and security. Resilience to negative eventualities (such as environmental catastrophes, but also personal tragedies such as fires and accidents) are another group of productive means that require extensive coordination - insurance and redistributive schemes, or the maintenance of reciprocal moralities.

Social means of production can be privately-held and -commodified, or they can be organized as commons, with state entities oscillating between the two ideal types depending on the power dynamics enshrined in concrete regulatory practices.³⁵ A large part of the challenge of artisan production is thus associational rather than private in nature: Governing the commons required to maintain spaces of autonomy (Ostrom 2010, 1990). The push for a re-invigoration of the commons should be

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³⁴ C. H. Douglas argued that this 'common cultural heritage' of techniques, practices and knowledges (which represents the labor of previous generations) constitutes a crucial and inherently *social* factor of production (Burkitt & Hutchinson 1994, p. 21).

³⁵ If an artisan unit spends half of its labor time engaging in or paying others to file its tax and insurance forms, write grant requests or provide accountancy to please state agencies or insurance companies (as is common for contemporary self-employed in medicine or culture), this time largely discounts from its artisan character.

understood as the wish to maintain the very conditions for present and future artisan labor and production. The commons' broader significance thus lies the fact that they encourage the artisan characteristics of production processes, by organizing the provision of social means of production that artisan units cannot control themselves. Many farmers now need to make more money to access the privatized (or nationalized) commons (seeds, water, patented agronomic and engineering knowledge, land) as means of production than is required for their household's reproduction. Artisanism would see these cases as an artificial bloating of the economy, which reflects the theory that peasants practice "a form of self-sufficiency (or self-provisioning) that is not related (...) to the family consumption of food, but to the operation of the farm unit as a whole" (van der Ploeg 2008, p. 30) onto the artisan class in general. On a conceptual level, terms like 'social patrimony' or 'associational patrimony' should be used to distinguish collective and associational arrangements that protect artisan livelihoods from other arrangements that protect members' profits - social capital.³⁶

The factors of production in artisan economy (and its analogies in capitalist economics) are thus as follows: Patrimony (analogue to *capital goods* and including *land*), artisan labor (analogue to *entrepreneurship* and *human capital*), commons (analogue to *infrastructure*), and hired labor as part of demographic and learning cycles (analogue to *labor*). At the pivotal moment where a value is created or made available through labor, we find the classical Marxian categories of *nature* (from which all value is derived), labor power (through which all value is transformed into useful forms and objects), and two categories yielded by the worker in order to expand or specialize her labor power: tools and skill.

³⁶ Such a distinction would have helped during the critical debates over social capital theory held in several disciplines in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which arguably were driven by confusion between the two forms of sociallyheld property and rights. From a class perspective, 'social capital' appears to be a great misnomer that, in itself, invites much of the confusion it ended up generating.

The size and composition of individually-controlled patrimonies are strongly connected to the life cycle of their owners. Phases in a worker's life, such as the various forms and sequences of learning (tertiary education, apprenticeship, internships etc.), interstices between work- and family life (e.g., parenthood, investment in household home), the demographic cycles that define key home-workplace workflows, responsibilities and the availability of family labor, and finally different orders given to later life, from the zenith of skill and experience to retirement and the renewal of commitment to a patrimony by the incoming generation, all affect the patrimonies controlled by individuals and labor units in a variety of ways. These two central layers of patrimony construction, and the struggle to maintain and adapt the economic potential contained on these layers, are thus characterized by a degree of volatility that broader patrimonies (associational, societal and universal) aim to soften. Their sustainability depends on the careful transmission of skill, knowledge and rights between generations. Approaches such as Nussbaum and Sen's capabilities concept (Nussbaum 2003) or the sustainable livelihoods paradigm (Chambers & Conway 1992) are useful to understanding how patrimonies at the 'core' of artisan activity - smallscale, independent individuals and the labor units they congregate in - are maintained and constructed.

	Layers of patrimony	Layers of assets
1. individual	Skills; capabilities; intra-household equalities	Rent-or dividend-generating property; scarce titles and memberships; class-specific <i>habitus</i> ; intra-household hierarchies
2. labor-unit	Most physical means of production (land, machinery, workshops, homes)	Machinery; patents; access to exclusive markets
3. associational	Democratic market institutions and skill regimes; cooperatives; local commons	Capital market institutions; lobbying access of industrial associations; industrial skill regimes
4. socialized	State guarantees and programs for equal individual capabilities; equality-enhancing infrastructures	Exclusive citizenship rights; legal codes of capital and executive guarantees to enforce them; 'infrastructures of empire' (Cowen 2020, Aouragh & Chakravartty 2016)
5. universalized	Open knowledge and data; global commons	Legal codes of capital in international courts of arbitration (Pistor 2020)

Table 1.2: Five layers of patrimony relevant to artisan labor

Patrimonies on each of the five layers are, of course, highly interdependent, marking the need for structural approaches in political economy to complement the focus on individual capabilities and livelihoods proposed by Nussbaum and others. For a market gardener to maintain the (seemingly simple) capability to put the same tomato seed in the ground year after year, access to that seed must at the same time be universalized (absence of patents), socialized (common cultivar descriptions), and it must be reinforced by associational action to produce and exchange the seeds, while forming and maintaining markets on which the resulting

tomato fruit may be sold at a price that warrants planting it in the first place. Meanwhile, labor-unit level access to the land and tools for cultivation must be maintained. On the level of the individual gardener, knowledge about the cultivar, growing conditions, seed treatment, etc. must be maintained, improved and, if necessary, transferred, as must the broader context of mental and physical health. Only if all these conditions are met by the existence of appropriate patrimonies on each layer, planting the seed is feasible in an economic context (hobby gardening of course has fewer requirements).

In the study of means of artisan production, three major axes are of interest: A resource base's depth or quality, its resilience, and its agglomeration in space. With 'depth' we refer to how a specific resource base primes the labor utilizing it: How many external dependencies are 'programmed' into the resource base, and how do these dependencies impact the potential for self-direction? A deep, secure resource base allows a labor unit to operate on/with it in radical autonomy, while a more narrow, uncertain resource base will lead to relatively less autonomy and more time and effort spent on maintaining, and paying for, access to additional production factors. In various sectors we find the idea of a 'minimum quantity' of patrimony and commons that – as long as it is used wisely – allows a household's sustenance through relatively self-directed labor. This approach is also contained in the term 'livelihood'³⁷ and the livelihoods approach to development.

In human rights law, these concepts have been picked up and are leading to debates around how to institutionalize the so-called 'second generation' of human rights (rights to housing, food, health care, social security and

³⁷ In Chambers and Conway's classic definition, "a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living". In addition, they coined the qualitative concept of sustainable livelihoods, which refers to a combination of patrimony and commons which, in addition to the above, "can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation" (1992, p. 6).

fair employment). While the responsibility for the implementation of these rights has long been connected with the overall performance of capital-driven economic growth, as well as the regulatory and redistributive efforts of the nation state, international development cooperation and charity, the systematic failure to implement some of these rights thusly has led to renewed interest, from a legal perspective, in auxiliary rights that distribute spaces, not outcomes, of development and focus on the household's self-propulsion. During his tenure as UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food (2008–2014), Olivier de Schutter has called to implement the basic human right to food not through food aid, but via a *right to land* (agrarian reform) and ambitious farming support and extension programs, given that 70% of the world's hungry are land-poor peasants and landless agricultural workers (2010, pp. 304–306). At least in the rural setting, this comes very close to a *livelihood right*, or a right to obtain the inputs for a dignified life from one's own autonomous labor.

The resilience dimension of patrimony and commons is equally important. A sustainable or cross-generational resource base represents an array of resources (buildings, machines, knowledges, client relationships, recipes, memberships, social reputations etc.) that combine to reproduce and adapt an autonomous work process over a long time period, and which is eventually handed down or sold to the next owner/steward. Where the reproduction of artisan livelihoods is threatened, we often search for fragilities vis-a-vis natural disasters or market fluctuations. Since the 19th century, however, livelihood resilience is primarily limited by sociocultural factors and expectations, which constitute what we may call capital-induced 'disruptive progress' (vis-a-vis evolutionary progress). With disruptive progress we refer to technological and social changes that are fast and massive enough to outpace the means and efforts of artisans or semi-artisans to adapt or 'update' their resource bases - buying new machines, entering new markets, developing new recipes and learning new skills. A central argument from an artisan perspective is that most of this perceived progress - and the indicators commonly used to measure it - are essentially self-referential: Where capital aims to disrupt existing forms of labor in order to incorporate them into capitalist relations, progress (such as GDP growth and material consumption) will be measured as identical

with capitalist incorporation and commodification. Chapter 3 will investigate these themes historically.

Finally, the number of patrimonies sustained in a given economic and social space (a village, an economic sector in a defined region, or a whole country) directly correlates with the number of positions of autonomy that are available for its population. For the most part, positions of autonomy are built into specific physical and legal landscapes in specific numbers, even though thrifty individuals may develop additional artisan livelihoods. If a national law mandates a minimum of 20 hours of obligatory, one-onone driving instruction, and employing some other publicly-available data, one can calculate the potential number of livelihoods provided for driving instructors in that country. Similarly, a mathematical approach is possible to understand how a projected landscape transformation will affect the number of potential livelihoods engrained in it, as in shifts from dairy farming to orchards and market gardens. To approach landscapes as an element of social design, the basic question is not only how much labor a landscape sustains, but also how the landscape co-defines (and is itself defined by) the social nature of that labor, including its artisan or proletarian character.

Degrees of autonomy

Until now, this chapter has focused on creating a framework of ideal-typical definitions. The following sections begin to colonize the grey areas between ideal class types and the mixed class relations where almost all 'actually-existing' economic relations are located. The study (and practice) of autonomy requires continuous, seamless interrelation of objective conditions (structuralism) with that of subjective negotiation and agency (the realm of *personality* and interpersonal variance).

A labor unit's objective potential for artisanness is the degree to which the means of production, including auxiliary and supporting means such as knowledge, legal liberties and infrastructure, can objectively be accessed and combined by the labor unit. This need not be through direct control

by ownership; instead, it can in part be operationalized as effective access to commons or usufruct resources. What matters is not ownership on paper, but effective access, as well as the power to maintain that access over time (which may or may not be furthered by on-paper ownership of the resource, see Ribot & Peluso 2003).

Yet, humans do not simply perform (or even recognize) their objective potential for self-directed labor. Some leave parts of it at the roadside for a variety of reasons, while many of those who do develop a self-direction potential over time do so 'against the odds' and/or 'against the grain'. There are subjective processes that allow individuals, over time, to create or ameliorate objective conditions. A vision of contemporary Man as a largely passive inhabitant of 'capitalist societies' cannot account for this variance, nor can it comprehensively elicit people to search for it in their own lives through the activation of individual and collective agency. Intrinsic and extrinsic capabilities (agency and structure) come together wherever artisan units succeed in shaping their production processes responsively and artistically. Table 1.3 groups the factors that shape the class condition of labor processes, accounting for both objective conditions and subjective, personal characteristics and efforts through which each worker (and each labor unit) negotiate their objective surroundings over time.

	Objective	Subjective
Nature	Resource scarcity and abundance, landscape elements, climate/weather	Conceptions of nature and landscape, adaptation to/of nature
Society	Norms, property structures, legal-administrative conditions	Conceptions of society, expected projections; Abilities and will to transcend/rebel against norms
Personality	Relevant skills & experience, imposed/accepted identities	Chosen identities & interpersonal variance: Problem-solving abilities, imagination, audacity, self-confidence, responsibility (or lack thereof)

Table 1.3: Factors that contrive to shape the artisan character (or degree thereof) of labor.

This also means that every structural (objective) potential for self-direction - for example a sufficient endowment of space, tools and licenses to perform a specific self-directed livelihood - must be 'activated' by the individual holding it, who must summon and maintain sufficient will to self-direct and take responsibility over their work in order to 'trump' proletarian options for subsistence (i.e., selling one's labor rather than directing it). Labor units that access most or all means of their production may, nonetheless, decide to delegate many tasks of structuring their internal work processes to corporations or states. This results in a situation where labor self-direction is obstructed for personal and cultural reasons, even though material conditions for it exist. Capital can orchestrate the subsumption of decision-making power, as in many contract farming arrangements, or in the imposition of highly specific product standards by corporate buyers (McMichael 2013). The resulting subject represents an ideal-type contractor, whose labor is completely subsumed under capital, while the means of his production (and the associated loans, risks etc.) are

the worker's responsibility. Such forms of subsumption are, in one or another form, found in all sectors (see next section).

Yet, also sheer poverty can effectively eliminate a worker's choices altogether, thus making his nominal capability to self-direct meaningless. Such a labor unit's operations may just as well be controlled by 'dull compulsion' (Marx's shorthand description of the economic life of proletarians).³⁸ Whether that 'dull compulsion' originates in a capitalcontrolled market structure is secondary from the position of the worker, though of course it is consequential for political strategies. Here also lies the main difference between our concept of artisan labor as removed from such compulsion (be it induced by nature or by society) and the entrenched archetype of the peasant as constantly besieged by famine, or "permanently up to the neck in water" due to a mixture of low productivity and exploitation (Tawney 1966, endorsed in Scott 1976, pp. 1-7).39 In fact, the more the threat of famine or bankruptcy defines the operation of a farm or another artisan unit,40 the less its workers find themselves in the 'artisan condition', and the more they will do to rebound to it. During the agrarian colonization of Ireland after the 1801 Acts of Union, Irish tenant farmers and sharecroppers were relegated to ever smaller parcels, over which they enjoyed progressively less tenure security and paid higher rents. Autonomy plummeted as poverty conditions rose, epitomized by the fact that cultivational diversity was reduced until only one choice was left to most

³⁸ Some translations of Capital, Volume 1, use the adjective *dull*, others *silent*: "The silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker. Direct extra-economic force is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases. In the ordinary run of things, the worker can be left to the 'natural laws of production', i.e., it is possible to rely on his dependence on capital, which springs from the conditions of production themselves, and is guaranteed in perpetuity by them" (Marx 1990, p. 899).

³⁹ Bernstein carries this line on in Marxist terms when proposing that "the term 'peasant' usually signifies household farming organized for simple reproduction, notably to supply its own food ('subsistence')" (2010, p. 3 emphasis added).

 $^{^{\}rm 40}$ i.e., of X options to produce all but one would lead to hunger or bankruptcy.

tenants: the potato. The degree of peasantness both of Irish agriculture as a whole, and of most individual rural households in particular, decreased as a result, a process that culminated in the Great Famine in 1845-52 and a century-long period of mass emigration and rural decline. British capital and its intermediaries were thus responsible for two interlocking limitations to peasant autonomy: Growing surplus extraction through rent increases (capitalist dynamics proper), and the broader construction of poverty that accompanied them (Handy 2009, Vanhaute 2011).

In such extreme cases, the labor unit operates on a script written by external conditions, which overwrites whatever formal procedural autonomy it may hold. Instead of defining poverty in terms of exchange value (money earned/available per day or month), an artisan perspective sees poverty as the condition where missing patrimony and savings as well as the existence of negative feedback loops practically eliminate a worker's leeway to self-direct her labor. This perspective has suited peasant theory, and suits artisan theory. Without leeway, self-direction is empty. *Gaining* leeway, then, is the perpetual quest that forms the core of the 'artisan principle' of emancipation.

As we said above, the artisan's unrestrictedness is never complete, but significant enough to define her outlook. Limited wage labor practices may exist within artisan labor units without challenging the unit's fundamentally artisan character, and limited labor markets are present in all artisan-based economies. On the one hand this may take place as livelihood diversification on the part of artisans engaging in secondary occupations, on the other as contracting outside (typically *wage*) labor for some tasks. In an artisan labor unit, however, a clear emphasis is on labor by those who control the enterprise. Chayanov makes a similar argument for peasant agriculture, within which "we can distinguish between the family labor farm type and the half-labor farm (farmer unit), which uses paid labor in addition to family labor power, but not to such an extent as to give the farm a capitalist character" (Chayanov 1966a, p. 22). As artisan sectors develop and require more complex skill horizons, this limited presence of wage labor is often institutionalized within cycles of knowledge transmission. Apprenticeship is but the first of these institutions – in many

sectors a three- or four-year stint as an apprentice is insufficient to confidently found a self-directed enterprise, hence journeymen set out to refine and broaden their skills. Where wage labor is seen as a permanent solution, however, the artisan unit tends towards a petit-bourgeois position – labor exploitation is institutionalized, albeit on a small scale.

This discussion corresponds to the idea that there are 'degrees of peasantness', a concept first proposed by Toledo (1995) and further developed by van der Ploeg:

In ideal-typical terms, there are clear and fundamental differences; but in real-life situations there are – alongside clear empirical expressions of these ideal types – extended grey zones that link such expressions and at the same time demonstrate the gradual nature of these linkages. In these grey zones one encounters degrees of peasantness that are far from being theoretically irrelevant. Indeed, they characterize arenas in which, over time, important fluctuations occur with respect to de- and repeasantization (2008, pp. 36, cf. 137–8).

Finally, while we must recognize the partial nature and constant renegotiation of all artisan and semi-artisan livelihoods, the same is true for all other forms of labor. We always see instances and degrees of artisan labor and self-sufficiency in the reality of all workers whose primary condition is proletarian. For these workers who are in a dependent position within capitalism for most of their productive time, the presence of a residual of artisan labor is often vital to cope with this capitalist presence in their lives. Some well-documented spheres of self-direction in proletarian communities include food self-provisioning, self-repairing, voluntary and charitable labor, and the labor and social relations involved in hobbies. These activities are increasingly referred to as 'quiet' practices of autonomy or sovereignty, which may or may not interlink with more organized quests (Smith & Jehlička 2013, Visser *et al.* 2015, Jehlička *et al.* 2019). Visser (2021) refers to 'subtle peasantness'.

It should be noted that this is not a *normative* typology, and that autonomous labor is an ideal type, not necessarily an ideal. Increases in

individual control over the means of production and self-direction are not always a positive change. The ideal-type that enjoys complete sovereignty over its production most likely does not exist, and most likely should not exist. Hygienic regulations and quality standards, for example, limit the options of producers. There is a complex politics surrounding each of these limitations, but arguments in favor of specific restrictions at times outweigh those against. The artisan class is not situated at the extreme point of the scale, but within a range of positions of significant individual or small collective sovereignty; enough for workers to creatively navigate existing restrictions and pressures, rather than succumbing to them. Economic lives, across the class spectrum, are always complex realities of negotiation that escape Manichean worldviews.

Subsumption

This leads us to another theoretical background in the study of artisan labor – Marx's theory of subsumption. Subsumption refers to "the processes through which labour is incorporated into capitalist development projects" (London 1997, p. 269), or more generally the ways through which capital subordinates labor without, or besides, the use of direct violence. Marx considered four major forms of subsumption: Formal subsumption refers to the establishment of wage-labor relations in labor units whose means of production are owned by someone other than the worker(s). Real subsumption considers how after a certain point, the establishment of many particular ('firm-level') wage-labor relations lead to a general (sectoral or 'society-level') compulsion to enter into such labor contracts – one may call this the shift from particular experiences of exploitation to a societal experience of exploitation, as expressed by a nation-wide expected rate of profit (Marx 1990, pp. 1020–39). Hybrid subsumption refers to the extraction of surplus from formally independent producers, either in commercial relations ('capital margins' in commercial transactions between a capital-controlled entity and an artisan producer) or in loan/debt relations (Szadkowski 2016, pp. 20-21). Ideal subsumption describes how nominally independent producers in so-called 'capitalist societies' mimic the dominant categories of value and organize their work in ways that lead to their incorporation in capital-controlled metabolisms (*ibid.*, pp. 22–23).

The interplay between formal and real subsumption is both fairly straightforward, and of little interest in the study of artisan labor. The concepts of hybrid and ideal subsumption, however, are both a key instrument and – at times – a potent menace to such research. Both remind us that there are indirect ways that "the work of these [artisan] producers is productive for capital" (Cruz Meléndez 2011, p. 9), the former in exchange-economic terms, and the latter in cultural terms. Yet, theories of subsumption have also served as a signifier for the supposedly all-encompassing nature of contemporary capitalist relations. Already the word 'subsumed' paints a vivid picture of powerlessness, lack of agency, and thus insignificance, and even adding 'partial' or 'incomplete' serves little to de-mystify that implicit message. If we are all subsumed under the interests of capital in one or another way, why place emphasis on the study of autonomy?

At the same time, most research in political economy has completely reserved the discursive power to 'subsume' to the supposedly all-powerful current of capitalist development, while all other economies are reduced to the ability to 'resist'. We never speak of the ways that capital itself is 'subsumed' under the agendas of other economic actors or formations, or the fact that many of its activities are driven by a frantic resistance to adverse conditions, fierce competition from other modes of production, and the negative effects of market and regulatory changes; in short, by the same set of external determinants that artisans face. Where this set of determinants favors capitalist over artisan production, we can recognize a design that is historically, regionally and sectorally *specific*, not a *generalizable* pattern.

In that sense, the discussion of subsumption crystallizes the discussion on whether significant artisan relations of production continue to exist, but holds that discussion from the hypothesis that they do not. The quest to prove that hypothesis has resulted in generalizations based on selective data. If the theory of subsumption is employed in an a priori manner, it

represents one of the very mechanisms by which artisan labor is rendered insignificant as an independent agent in political economy. The outcome of such memetic treatment is that works on specific formations of independent producers often state in their introduction, i.e., before discussing any empirical findings, that as a general rule "direct producers [artisans and peasants], who own the objective and subjective conditions of their labor, immersed in capitalist society adopt (and behave based on) a rationality that is not product of their own work process, but which corresponds to the logic of the capitalist work process" (Cruz Meléndez 2011, p. 11). Where subsumption takes place, it is never complete, and to call it the defining factor behind an artisans' work process will always mask the complexity of decision-making and work culture in, and between, artisan labor units. Hence the power of subsumption theory to induce prejudiced looks at artisan labor.

If, however, subsumption is researched carefully and with an open mind, it represents a valuable tool for understanding how artisans negotiate, and are affected by, adverse conditions. This is an endeavor that necessarily takes place in anthropological dimensions, where we can trace artisan dependencies beyond formal structures and price differentials, and into the complex field of culture. In doing so lies a great chance, and a great danger: While allowing class analysis to understand the better-hidden dependency relations, as well as the cultural instruments used to impose and maintain them, anthropological studies of subsumption dynamics can also lead to more partial, localized and subjective evidence on what constitutes dependency, and what autonomy. It is impossible to comprehensively grasp the innumerable ways in which we depend on norms, traditions, rituals, languages and codes that impose patterns on our actions, to understand how each of these norms are formed, who benefits from them and how, and to draw exact lines between what actions constitute agency, and what constitute repetition.

This fact, and the need to accept it with a degree of humility, makes it difficult and ill-advised to seek an a priori exclusion of *entrepreneurial*

small businesses from the broad sphere of artisan activity.⁴¹ Van der Ploeg urges that on the same conceptual level where peasants are separated from proletarians and capitalist farmers, "we need a strategic way of distinguishing the peasant from the agricultural entrepreneur". The aim is to ascertain that there is a

theoretical difference perceived [and] attributed, for example, to a Brazilian poseiro family composed of father, three sons and two uncles, owning and working 1500 hectares of highly mechanized soya, and another, probably neighbouring, sem terra family of father, mother and three children who work 15ha of poor land with fruits, vegetables and some cows in a settlement on recently occupied land (2008, p. 22).

Yet, it is only by simplifying the *poseiro*, by stating that their actions are 'completely guided by the market', that they can be seamlessly censored away as subordinates and abettors of capital. More often than not, this censorship masks the fact that the real inequalities between artisans are also an internal matter – a failure of (semi-)artisans to equilibrate their access to key resources, typically based on deep rifts between different social formations of artisans in the same sector. In the case of the *poseiro* and *sem terra*, the tragedy lies in unequal land access between (semi-)artisans, a state of affairs that accentuates the richer peasants' entrepreneurial outlook (the tendency to subsume their operations under capital-driven agricultural input and output markets), as well as their poorer neighbors' choice of more diverse crops and markets.

The same is true for rifts between better- and worse-off proletarians, with a historically-proven potential to sabotage collective bargaining and solidarity. The factory foreman, who trades better pay for additional responsibility and pressure, does not overcome her proletarian condition – she negotiates it. So does the entrepreneurial farmer, who navigates the

⁴¹ See Niska *et al.* (2012) for a dedicated analyses of how this debate is held in rural studies and in reference to the policy environment of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union.

sweeping changes in down- and upstream markets by giving up a part of her autonomy, taking on credit for machinery, renting additional land and applying techniques and chemical packages that make such a farming style possible. However politically strategic it may be to distinguish between a corporatized 'proletarian aristocracy' and a 'real working class', or between 'subsumed entrepreneurs' and 'real artisans', this path inhibits the fundamental transformative potential of class: to create solidarity between formations of workers whom circumstances disorient or pit against each other, but who, in essence, find themselves in varieties of the same condition. Instead, existing and potential divisions should be acknowledged as internal as much as external matters – as different strategies in dealing with a hostile environment that have as much to do with good and bad luck than with predisposition and culture, and that are better bridged by cooperation than deepened by hostility.

In another article, van der Ploeg makes a more neutral distinction which focuses on the circumstances of production, thus distinguishing between capitalist agriculture ("all the resources, including the labour force, are commodified"), entrepreneurial agriculture ("far-reaching commoditization of the main resources, but not of the labour force"), and *peasant agriculture* ("low levels of commoditization of the main resources") (van der Ploeg 2014, p. 1004). In other words, the adoption of entrepreneurial styles by artisan labor units takes them further into grey areas or transitional stages between classes. This is the case when entrepreneurial small businesses earn a premium from their privileged inclusion in value chains that run on exploiting labor downstream. Yet, entrepreneurship is not in itself a term grounded in class relations, and much of the literature defines it in class-inclusive terms: as "the creation of new enterprise" (be it small or large), "carrying out new combinations", or business foundation "driven by perception of opportunity, rather than resources currently controlled" (Low & MacMillan 1988, p. 140–141). These are of course practices and processes which have taken place in the artisanry forever. Even if we see entrepreneurship as an individual's 'road to capital', attesting thus that the individual innovates only in order to satisfy her wish to create a product or labor process which could catapult her into a position of dominance over the labor of others, we have to

consider that most self-styled entrepreneurial activity (and most of those styled as entrepreneurs by the literature) will remain small, largely artisan businesses, and most that grow do so primarily because of the circumstances they face (incentives to growth, precarities of staying small) rather than some innate entrepreneurial trait.

Entrepreneurial interpretations of a given artisan condition tend to look to compromises rather than self-sufficiencies. This strategical outlook may certainly yield from disinterest in the negative effects of the production processes and value chains that entrepreneurial small businesses adopt. In other situations, however, it may simply boil down to a realistic evaluation of the business's circumstances, perhaps dotted with a lack of boldness and courage to search for alternative solutions. This tendency often leads to semi-artisan positions in which dependency on input or product market actors is accentuated, while the labor unit internalizes a greater degree of capital and market-based logics in its internal dynamics (ideal subsumption); among others specialization, externalization of costs, expansion on credit, mechanization and manipulative advertisement. Success of such units often leads not to relaxation, but to expansion which, eventually, can see the unit drift out of the artisan sphere altogether. In other cases, however, compromises and an increase in dependency. This is especially the case when the effects can be foreseen and are stable, as is the case with low-interest bank loans taken on by artisans in stable economies - do not alter the general orbit of the labor unit.

Schumpeter, in *The Theory of Economic Development*, makes sure to always distinguish between *capitalist* and *entrepreneurial* qualities and intentions behind the formation of a new business. He insists on this differentiation even for cases of entrepreneurship by capitalists, i.e., when the two qualities and intentions were united in the same individual or board. In most cases, however, capital takes a passive part in entrepreneurship, typically by lending/investing money (banks, shareholders) to the actual entrepreneur (Schumpeter 1949, pp. 137–8). Capital, in other words, seeks to extract a rent/surplus from entrepreneurial activity in much the same ways it seeks to exploit other forms or moments of labor. *Artisan entrepreneurship* – the confluence of autonomy and innovation – could

thus be defined as the successful attempt to avoid capital's attempt to obtain an interest from innovative labor. Gerber (2014) highlights the role of credit relations in the ideal subsumption of nominally independent producers, including in the world system's periphery. Where capital obtains this interest by acting as a risk-bearer for the entrepreneur (or any business founder) – the road for artisan entrepreneurship is (and has been for millennia) to find alternative risk-bearers who do not claim a material interest in the business. This is achieved by using community resources and state/institutional lending and incentive programs (Mazzucato 2013), as well as relying on family and friends for interest-free loans. Likewise, the risk must be minimized to levels that can be stemmed by these non-capitalist risk-bearers. Pooling the risk of many ventures – the practice of non-profit banks and credit unions – will result in what we might call *non-capitalist credit* and define as the institutionalized service of risk-bearing, sold at rates that directly mirror the risk itself.

Changing class positions

Though broader, cumulative class structures tend to be rigid and slow to change, at the ethnographic scale of economic atoms and molecules changes in class position are both frequent and significant. The three-class model thus serves not only to distinguish class positions, but also offers a way to visualize class trajectories, both as life histories and as future projections. Objective changes in the regulatory environment, market conditions and prices around the labor unit on the one hand, and the unit's responses, expectations and pro-actions on the other, will draw a unique class trajectory. We may follow, for example, the class position of a small farm unit (x), controlling some means of production (land, water) but dependent on the corporate buyer for others (fertilizers, seed), as the price of its primary product increases from a low point (x1). While price pressure loosens, the farm unit gains capabilities to move from a single-marketdetermined farm operation (using all land and time for the primary, standardized cash crop) towards using some of its resources autonomously (to diversify production, cut the working day etc. (x2)). With some of those

freed resources, the unit might invest in lowering input dependency and thus improve its position against the buyer, gaining power to self-direct (x₃). The farm unit hereby develops significantly from a subsumed position within capitalism towards an artisan condition of significant autonomy.

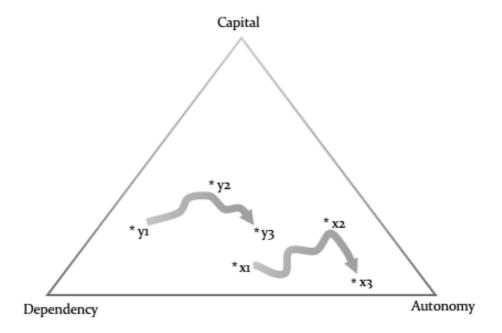


Figure 1.2: Visualizing class trajectories

Similarly, the trajectory drawn by a proletarian worker's reduction of the work week from 40 hours (y1) to 25 hours (y2) can be visualized. As wage work decreases, self-directed work processes in the household, hobbies, clubs etc. become more prominent parts of the work week, which is reflected in a shift in class position. Although these additional work processes likely rely on self-controlled means of production, the worker's subsistence still depends primarily on her first job and the dependency relation it entails. In many contemporary cases of work week reduction in post-industrial countries, however, workers also make use of the benefits of 'citizenship capital' (Bauder 2008). The opportunity to obtain a rich material lifestyle on ever fewer working hours is, at least in part, enabled by what we might call a 'personal dividend' from inter-national asymmetries. Higher wages in the richest economies are not only the

product of higher productivity, but also the result disadvantaging terms of trade (Kalm 2020).⁴² This has led to a more or less far-reaching *embourgeoisement* of both proletarian and artisan class positions in core countries, accompanied by the proletarianization of artisan labor on the periphery. The opportunity for some groups of workers in the capitalist world system to decrease their work week, yet maintain a relatively high level of consumption, is thus an expression of 'participatory domination' over labor performed elsewhere *as much as* it is a push for autonomy. From a non-class angle, the benefits obtained from the former often look the same as the benefits obtained through the latter. Sometimes, the word 'autonomy' is mis-used in this context, referring to the often-immense personal gains and privileges capitalism offers some formations of skilled workers. While in itself misleading, this use of the term also opens the doors for an even more preposterous reading of the 'autonomies' capitalism

⁴² Not to be confused with Milanovic's concept of 'citizenship rent', which looks at the *privilege* of being born or established in one or another country (2015). The difference between *exploitation* and *privilege* is that the latter does not in and of itself entail a loss on someone else's part. Many of the life conditions that are commonly framed as privilege(s) indeed rely on continual exploitation, or accumulated past exploitation, yet others are the result of the dedication, hard work and intelligent design of individuals who bequeathed them onto their children (personal heritage) or compatriots (societal heritage). When researching the causalities behind a privilege, we typically face a more or less inextricable mixture of legitimate and illegitimate factors. Not surprisingly, any past attempt to eradicate privileges in a wholesale fashion – without making efforts to extricate illegitimate privileges from legitimate ones - has resulted in lamentable as well as agreeable losses. On the one hand, the destruction of institutions and practices that ensured the functioning of social spaces and services, even though they were not yet enjoyed by all. On the other, the destruction of institutions that sustained privilege by exploitation. Confounding the two has, more often than not, led to a socialization of poverty. This contrasts with more surgical, 'evolutionary' attempts to socialize capabilities that were once a privilege of few: In other words, the socialization of privilege, and the search for solutions that prove capable of decoupling a privilege (be it the opportunity to go to university, to own one's home, to be treated as equal by all members of society, etc.) from the need to exploit in order to obtain it.

affords the holders of capital. Autonomy, if it is to have any meaning for political economists, must refer not to the outcomes of socio-economic relations, but to the conditions under which they unfold (or not). While holding capital, individually or collectively, produces monetary *dividends* and/or non-monetary *privileges*, these are extracted from others: Apples that fall away from the tree. Only where apples land underneath the tree that grows them can we call the kinetic conditions surrounding the fruit's fall 'autonomy'.

An equally (perhaps more) significant shift would thus occur, from a class perspective, if the worker who reduced his work week were to also reduce his material consumption of goods provided by exploitative value chains, and re-direct the remaining consumption towards alternative markets based on a more equitable distribution of value among value chain participants (y3). A semi-proletarian working 25-hour workweeks would thus present us with very different class positions, depending on how he spends the remaining time and money. As an even simpler example of cause and effect, imagine a worker who quits smoking (a consumption item that in most countries is exclusively sold by capitalist conglomerates), perceives that this saves him 2 hours/week in wages, and decides to cut two hours/week of (over-)work. These connections between labor and household economies are theorized in the sub-section 'Consumption' in the next chapter.

Visualizing the artisan and capitalist characters of economic activity as such also allows us to more easily locate and compare different hybrid structures. We hope that this may assist in the prioritization of class hybridity (grey areas of class) both in research and in discourse, especially vis-á-vis dichotomic lenses. Chayanov's family farming economics were built on the ideal-type situation where labor is fixed (by family size and composition), while the objective of organization is to bring "all other factors of production in an optimal relationship to this fixed element" (Chayanov 1966b, p. 92). The question today, however, is usually about the relative extent and conditions of dependent labor, of 'time sold' and employed according to the buyer's priorities, versus the extent and conditions of artisan labor, or 'time kept' and employed according to our

own or collaborative priorities. The terms of competition between the two forms are constantly re-negotiated. In his critical appraisal of Chayanov, Netting notes that a certain hybridity of the Chayanovian ideal-type, influenced by labor hiring as well as wage-earning opportunities, would be a more adequate empirical basis for theory-building (Netting 1993). The same holds true in all sectors of artisan activity: Many artisans will hire a limited amount of labor from outside their labor unit, and while this can certainly shift them towards a petty-capitalist approach to production, there are also a variety of 'normal' moments of labor hiring within an artisan mode of production. Even individuals who project their life around a perceived opportunity to build a self-directed small business will initially prefer working as dependent laborers while they acquire the necessary skills and contacts for self-directed work (apprenticeship). They will found or take over a patrimony only when they are ready to manage it sustainably.

In small business formations it is common for a dependent journeyman, young doctor or cook in a trade, medical or food service business to consider opening their own to become an artisan. And, of course, for that artisan to then weigh different strategies, some of which might effectively make them contract-bound 'self-employed proletarians'. At the same time, someone who started a cafe as an artisan owner may contemplate using a good year's propulsion to become a small capitalist, by employing some people to do most of the work and collect a half-absentee profit. There is more fluidity, second jobs, changing incomes, frequent hiring and being dependency/autonomy-creating hired, frequent negotiation over arrangements, and even small regulatory changes can have immense importance at this ethnographic scale. Even a restaurant's menu changes can significantly change its class relations by having to shift suppliers, buy (or avoid buying) new machinery on credit, and so forth.

The lethargy of class relations and immobility between being 'on top' and 'at the bottom', naturally tends to be more pronounced in economies or sectors characterized by greater inequality and larger business size. Small-scale capitalism, or anything that would closely fit this ideal type, on the other hand, is a relatively rare phenomenon. Where capitals are small, compromises between autonomy and dependency abound. Roseberry

argues that the class position(s) of small farm households shift constantly with trends in down- and upstream markets, new state policies, farming styles, knowledge, access to resources, social contacts and, rather importantly: the weather. For him, "peasant and proletarian are ever changing qualities" (1989, p. 69). To a degree, most artisans do exploit, just like most capitalists do work, and most proletarians self-direct (cf. Frey 1997):

- Artisans become capitalists with the degree, and the conditions under which, they employ others. They become proletarians with the degree that they are dominated by other market actors, who in doing so become capitalist.
- 2. Proletarians become artisans with the degree of autonomy from capital they enjoy. They become capitalists with the degree that they outcompete artisans with their labor, i.e., they are using for their personal good (employment, wage increases) the dominant position of the company that exploits them. The firm, besides being a capital of its owners, thus takes on a function as jointly-held capital of its workforce an organizational and material structure that permits both owners and workers to enjoy privilege vis-a-vis other market actors, or other markets.
- 3. Capitalists become proletarians with their degree of embeddedness in the market, and rising inevitability of 'going with the market' that thereby envelopes their decisions. Usually, higher-up capitalists benefit from the creation of such markets, leading to an effective subsumption of small and medium capitals by bigger capitals with a market-organizing or gatekeeping position, using a mixture of subcontracting, price-squeezing and debt-interest mechanisms. On the other hand, capitalists become artisans with the degree of autonomy their employees enjoy: Think of higher administrators in universities who are officially power-holders over rather large enterprises, yet face very effective limits to this power due to the high degree of autonomy safeguarded by academic regulations. Directors of cooperatives may serve as another example. To the degree that group (self-)regulations undermine their capabilities to

make decisions over their workers and apprehend the value they produce, the labor of direction becomes just another gear in a collaborative effort. In this sense, workers' rights laws and regulations, where effectively implemented, work to limit the capitalist character of firms, even if they remain in private hands.

Many small businesses can thus be more adequately described as semi-artisan, semi-capitalist. To paint a common example in the construction trades: A roofing company with two owners who each work 50 hours, only 10 of which are 'unproductive' supervision of other employees, and 40 are actual roofing work. Meanwhile they also employ three journeymen and two apprentices for 40 hours each. Some of them can expect reasonably to become a master-owner during the first decade of their careers, but at least one will likely remain a dependent employee until retirement. What do we make of this? To codify cases in these extensive grey areas, in other words to understand and contrast the degree and dynamics of exploitation, dependency and autonomy of the individual workers, we can follow a number of lead questions, which represent the discussions on fairness and exploitation that are commonly held in semi-artisan units:

- a. How different are the earnings, and do they correspond to differences in risk?
- b. Is the income difference justified by experience and the transaction costs of skill transfer?
- c. To what degree are wage-earning employees really dependent workers in this constellation? Do they make independent decisions frequently? Are there long-term friendships that imbue the relationship between workers more than formal positions as owners and workers?
- d. To what degree may this really be a cooperative business in which each worker's productivity (based on skills, licenses, seniority etc.) determines her share of earnings?

Where available, quantitative data on incomes and work hours can also give insights into the labor unit's class structure:

- a. A simple coefficient of formal labor *types*: Hours of wage labor + hours of supervision labor, divided by hours of autonomous labor. In the above example, the outcome is a value of 110/40 = 2,75.
- b. An overview of incomes/hour, and possible explanatory variables, such as differences in labor productivity explained by skill and experience, but also responsibility for the labor unit and financial risk.

Hierarchies

Freedom, for Hannah Arendt, should be understood

negatively as not being ruled or ruling, and positively as a space [...] in which each man moves among his peers. Without those who are my equals, there is no freedom, which is why the man who rules over others—and for that very reason is different from them on principle—is indeed a happier and more enviable man than those over whom he rules, but he is not one whit freer. He too moves in a sphere in which there is no freedom whatever (Arendt 2005: 117–8).

Throughout the following chapters we show that the difference between artisan and capitalist conditions of labor is strongly correlated to a business's size (the number of worker-hours performed within it). At the same time, we find considerable variation within size groups. Autonomy, in other words, should not be predicted from the size of a labor unit, or as a direct outcome of 'human scale' economics (Schumacher 1973). While big businesses are almost inevitably based primarily on a capital relation (larger cooperatives and non-profit firms being potential, albeit partial exceptions), small businesses can be just as exploitative. Even the archetypal affection-based labor unit, the two-person, marriage-based household labor unit, can be exploitative if a culture of unequal power relations within the marriage have allowed rights and responsibilities over both persons' labor to accumulate in the hands of one partner. Patriarchal

norms limit, to the degree that they actualize an accumulation of decisionmaking powers in the hands of one member of the labor unit, the business's artisan character (Friedmann 1986). The crucial question to ask here is not whether one or another household overcomes the potential inequalities between partners through some higher equalizing source (love, solidarity or the more powerful partner's wish to be 'a good partner' and not abuse of unequal power endowments), but whether the economic designs and cultural patterns applied throughout thousands or millions of households create or prevent such power differentials in the first place. This includes: Legal ownership of household patrimony, decision-making patterns in intra-household labor processes, power over household surpluses and incomes, and the social projection and participation of household members in institutions. Nzegwu's study of women's rights in traditional Igbo society, for example, shows that it is the effective design of each household into male and female patrimonies and labor processes that work together (or not) like a cooperative of autonomous units. This cultural arrangement safeguards women's autonomy over incomes and purchases, as well as their active participation in social processes and politics (Nzegwu 1995, cf. Deere & Doss 2006).

Of course, different types of hierarchy should be distinguished here. A worker may cede power voluntarily to another, as when an inexperienced worker cedes it to another whose skills she respects and seeks to learn from, or when two workers decide to each concentrate and/or specialize in one aspect of their common venture. In the latter case, each is ceding decision-making power over the respective others' 'department' while also continuing to 'help out' in the other's department under her instructions. Sennett defines this social space (which he terms the *workshop*) as follows:

[A] productive space in which people deal face-to-face with issues of authority. This austere definition focuses not only on who commands and who obeys in work but also on skills as a source of the legitimacy of command or the dignity of obedience. In a workshop, the skills of the master can earn him or her the right to command, and learning from and absorbing those skills can dignify the apprentice or journeyman's obedience. [...] In craftsmanship there must be a

superior who sets standards and who trains. In the workshop, inequalities of skill and experience become face-to-face issues. The successful workshop will establish legitimate authority in the flesh, not in rights or duties set down on paper (2008, p. 54).

Though it captures the ambivalence of hierarchy, Sennett's definition does not get to what, from a class perspective, would be the grain of distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' hierarchies: Good hierarchies are constructed under the final objective of increasing the workers' autonomy, either by following a temporal division of labor ('You lead the business today, while I learn how to do it tomorrow') or by instituting a spatial division of labor ('You concentrate on the animals, while I concentrate on the cheesemaking'). Of course, the details of such informal contracts are important: The relative size and drudgery of each worker's part, the position it gives him with respect to other parts, and so on.

When considering economic freedoms, the most momentous of these freedoms is quite certainly the freedom to freely exercise a craft or profession upon having learnt it. Master-journeyman relations and the contextual factors that shape them are thus the principal arena of variation and struggle in the anthropology of economics. This is the case independent of whether the titles 'master' and 'journeyman' are used (in most contemporary economies they are not). The question to be asked is whether a worker who holds the skill and experience necessary to independently produce and market a good or service can realistically establish an independent business based on that aptitude. In other words: Does a social process override personal aptitude, thus pushing some workers towards proletarian employment rather than self-directed work? Capitalism comes about when certain masters (or others who hold neither the skill nor the experience to make a product) accomplish the complex feat of perpetuating journeymanship for some of their contemporaries. While apprenticeships often represent a period of significant sacrifice, they end relatively quickly and are broadly justified by the importance of knowledge transfer. Journeyman-master relations, however, are extremely variable. In many contexts and sectors, most journeymen have no chance of becoming masters in their own right.

Hierarchies within economic units are primarily conditioned by whether the wider economy affords journeymen (whether they are salaried physicians or agricultural laborers) the opportunity to start on their own. If that opportunity is omnipresent, masters or other capital-holders are structurally inhibited in their attempts to exploit dependent labor – to a degree that labor laws can complement, but hardly reproduce. Sectors where this is the case are still characterized by the lowest rates of formal subsumption observable in contemporary economies (examples in the following chapter). Capital relations based on formal dependent employment are, in these cases, reduced or nearly absent.

Accumulation and equilibration

The main requirement for maintaining non-capitalist economies in a given sector or territory is the establishment of protections from social differentiation, i.e., the inhibition of accumulatory mechanisms. Governance that dynamically reproduces an artisan mode of production is thus essentially a 'governance of size'. The political logic of the artisan class and its allies is to counteract and, where necessary, reverse accumulation of power over the means of production. Analogous to capital's premise of accumulation, with its infinite manifestations from patriarchy to corporate economy and national culture thus lies a second root premise of equilibration. Equilibration aims to achieve and reproduce a resilient fabric of balanced powers. Through a process that is at times agonistic, at times compromising, at times institutional, in other words through eclectic means of negotiation and struggle, an equilibrational agenda attempts to increase the autonomy of individuals and of those small-scale collectives they choose to congregate in (households, small labor units, collectives etc.). This resembles the 'peasant principle' of radical agrarian populism, which van der Ploeg defines as the "active and goal-oriented involvement [through which] the peasant condition will progressively unfold" as a "many sided negation of Empire" (van der Ploeg 2008, p. 276).

Nonetheless, with ever-mounting interest in 'accumulation by dispossession', new forms of 'primitive accumulation', critiques of 'socialist accumulation' and

'global capitalist accumulation', 43 much less effort has been expended to analyze the different forms of equilibration. The more systematic the study of trends of accumulation has become, the less we acknowledge counteracting trends, projects and agendas of equilibration. We might call this the 'Stockholm syndrome' of political economy: the more political economists have studied, with a mixture of awe and critique, the powerful processes of capitalist accumulation, the less we have been capable of perceiving, theorizing and imagining livelihoods that are not utterly controlled (or otherwise doomed) by it, and cultural and political processes that might sustain such uncapturedness. Yet, trends of accumulation and social differentiation always face a counter-project. The nature of these countermovements (Polanyi 1944) tends to broadly combine three strategies: a) open and covert resistance to accumulation projects and processes where they take place (i.e., land grabs, entrance of supermarket chains, corporate housing developments etc.); b) equilibration, i.e., carving artisan units out of capitalist ones or developing new niches (land reform, squatting etc.); and c) the installation of norms and institutions that impede bottom-up social differentiation.

⁴³ Bernstein (2013, p. 18) asks: "Is there any busier notion at the moment [in critical development studies] than that of primitive accumulation (and its analogues and extensions)?"

	equilibration	accumulation
primitive	Resistance of the 3^{rd} kind: Creating new niches and markets for the products of self-directed labor (Ye et al. 2019)	Deskilling and replacement of household labor by purchased products and services
by dispossession	Dispossession of latifundio estates, designation of commons	Land grabbing (Borras & Franco 2012); intellectual property rights (Kloppenburg 2012); carbon economies (Böhm <i>et al.</i> 2012); green/blue grabbing (Benjaminsen & Bryceson 2012)
by institution- alization	Institutionalized privileges for small/local labor units	Excessive market entry standards/regulations for SMEs Institutionalized privileges for (multinational) corporations
socialist	Worker-controlled nationalization; Dismantling trusts and other structures of unfair competition; Dissolution of patents and privileges	Centralizing nationalization; Primitive socialist accumulation and command economy (Lebowitz 2012); Bureaucratic control (Guattari & Negri 2010)
post-communist	Mass giveaway privatization; Privatization into the commons	Privatization within elites
by incorporation	Improving labor conditions and benefits in large, unionized firms;	Control of local SMEs by national/global capital flows or hedge funds
by expansion/ growth	Expanded reproduction of artisan labor units	Capital-driven economic growth

	equilibration	accumulation
by division of labor	(Economic) cell division, often accompanied by agglomeration; Specialization driven by deepening skills and knowledge	Labor deskilling; Subjection of labor to the rhythm of robots/automated workflows
nationalist/ globalist	Backing for economic and social rights/capabilities by/within international institutions; Global public goods (Deneulin & Townsend 2007)	Erosion of local economies Unequal international capital flows, taxation and jurisdiction (Pistor 2020)
by localization/ human-scale	Maintenance/reinvigoration of local small businesses (Bloemmen <i>et al</i> 2015, Blanchard <i>et al</i> . 2012); Deliberative democracy	Maintenance/reinvigoration of feudal hierarchies and locally- institutionalized inequalities
platform	Market commons as cooperative monopolies (Scholz & Schneider 2016, Borkin 2019)	Platform capitalism (Langley & Leyshon 2017, Srnicek 2017, Birch & Muniesa 2020)
illegal	Crimes of everyday resistance (Tria Kerkvliet 2005; Software piracy etc. that broaden internet and telecomm. access	Organized crime networks; Capture of electoral politics and representative institutions
unproductive	Low labor productivity of some traditional artisan work processes (e.g., Haberl et al. 2011, p. 5, on the impossibility of a 'return to traditional agriculture'); Traditional producers' resistance to new environmental standards	Growth & supremacy of unproductive labor in contemporary U.S. economy (Rotta 2018, Mohun 2014)

Table 1.4: Examples of contemporary trends and agendas with centripetal and centrifugal outcomes

The work of Teodor Shanin (1972, 1990) represents an intriguing opening in this ontological direction. Shanin makes a case to more closely connect the study of what he calls 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' power shifts, respectively. Centrifugal trends and forces work to distribute capabilities outwards, from (power) centers to margins and peripheries, while centripetal forces accumulate them inwards. Processes of technological or social change, hence, have certain innate centripetal or centrifugal affordances, but their ultimate impact on power (im)balances depends on the concrete dynamics of implementation.

Finally, while accumulation may take place as a single, identifiable act or process, it often develops a dynamic of its own, wherein various interlinked processes (changes in regulation, techniques, culture, marketing, factor prices etc.) combine to form self-referential loops of capitalization of patrimonies and commons, commodification of products and services, and proletarianization of labor. In such cases, we refer to the dynamics of accumulation, or dynamic accumulation. Similarly, equilibration may constitute a one-time act or a single process, such as a land reform or the breaking of a monopoly trust. Yet, it may also be dynamic, whenever cultural, social, political and legal institutions, as well as skill regimes, production techniques, ecological and geographical patterns, and property relations, work together to maintain a relative balance between economic agents. Chapter 4 develops these concepts further and provides evidence for different equilibration regimes and institutions, many of which go largely unnoticed in discussions that look at accumulation as a one-way street.

Artisans and markets

Is there a particular way markets are engaged by workers subjected to the artisan condition? Understanding artisans' behavior towards and within markets requires that we follow two fundamental shifts in the framing of markets themselves. First, market exchange as a basic human activity must be separated and relocated from theories that equate markets with capitalism. This allows us to see markets in the true plural, not as manifold

adaptations of capitalism, but as expressions of any motive humans might hold for impersonal exchange - including reciprocity and solidarity. As Ellen Meiksins Wood writes, capitalism is portrayed "at the very least [as] a natural extension of the acts of exchange on which human communities have relied since time immemorial to supply the necessities they cannot produce for themselves. All that is needed to bring about capitalism, apparently, is for such processes of exchange to expand [...]. Yet, looked at more closely, capitalism [...] is a very specific social form", a specific form of exchange, and a specific social organization of markets (2012, p. 49). Instead of universalistic attempts to define the (archetypical/ideal) 'capitalist market', we increasingly study specific subsets of market design principles that enable a relative expansion of the capital relation and the two classes implicated in it within markets populated, in most cases, by multiple agents with divergent interests. To the degree that capital dominates markets, the social and economic interactions in and around these markets enact "a double exclusion, the exclusiveness of property rights and the exclusion of a large part of the population from property" (Therborn 1987, p. 240).

Second, we must break out of the dichotomy between market exchange and 'market societies' on the one hand, and non-market associational life on the other. Rather than conceptualizing markets as contradictory and dialectical with 'non-market factors', sustainable practices of resource and labor allocation tend to proceed through dynamic links between both spheres. Where these bonds are broken (which was, in large part, the aim of both epoch-defining projects of the 20th century – state-administered socialism⁴⁴ and limited-liability capitalism), feedback loops decay and resources begin to be misdirected. Contemporary capital accumulation indeed largely takes place in the vacuum left by missing bonds between practices of social deliberation and the markets where they might be

⁴⁴ While Communist Parties in power severed many of these bonds in their societies, they unwillingly instituted pervasive 'alternative' markets for loyalty and positions within the totalitarian state, as well as omnipresent black and grey markets for scarce goods and services.

applied. Polanyi understood this state as the *disembedded* unfolding of markets, contrasting it with a theory of socially-*embedded* markets that are structured through social deliberation rather than vested interest (Polanyi 1944, Meiksins Wood 1995, ch. 1).

Artisan life and labor takes place at this market-society nexus, and is both protected and transformed through it. Artisans participate in existing markets, in the creation of new markets and products, and in debates and actions over how markets could be reformed in their favor. They negotiate sales and service contracts with other market actors, a process that overwhelmingly takes place in a context of 'economic liberties': Choosing between suppliers and/or buyers, locating, moving, processing and branding goods independently, as long as public regulations are respected. In this context, their primary (objective) concern as a class is in power relations within markets, not the 'overcoming' of markets and the market mechanism overall. In that sense, the question to what degree peasants and other artisan formations 'depend on markets' is important, but less so than the question what kind of markets they depend on. The former question – i.e., whether a peasant family has "the ability to withdraw from the market and take advantage of the use value of land and its products" (Vergara-Camus & Kay 2017, p. 246) - is increasingly irrelevant in societies with complex divisions of labor. Yet even in (now largely historical) settings where peasants may have directly produced the majority of the value they consumed, they always also rely on markets formed within villages, and between peasants and artisans in other sectors. What matters is the socioinstitutional design of these markets, as well as the cultural dynamics at play (which are often cast into written or unwritten laws). whether exchanges taking place in these specific markets adds to, or subtracts from, the autonomy generated by a worker's own patrimony and labor.

While artisans are almost never simply self-sufficient as individuals, and the focus on 'community' self-sufficiency tends to mask inequalities of access (i.e., capital relations) within communities, the degree of an individual's self-sufficiency in the production and maintenance of key reproductive functions (shelter, food, basic furniture, cooking and heating fuel etc.) nonetheless has a significant impact on how artisans participate

in markets in their quest to fulfill other functions. When artisans work towards higher levels of self-sufficiency, e.g., by building their own shelter, growing own food, fixing their own tools or doing their own accounting, or when they diversify their labor into various productive processes aimed at different markets, the fundamental economic aim pursued is 'selective market engagement' (Kay 2008, pp. 928-30). This consists of dynamizing the position of the small production unit in order to circumvent, or at least complement, exploitative relations as larger powers form and decay in different value chains, and while public agencies and institutions in- or decrease their effectiveness (and will) in curbing such powers. Practices of self-sufficiency should thus be understood as intimately entangled with practices of production for markets, not as ontologically separate from them. All artisans – and to varying degrees all of us – develop practices of self-sufficiency (limiting exposure to certain markets) that increase their autonomy when participating in other product and labor markets. Cooking meals or washing clothes at home, in that sense, follows the same principle of selective (or *curated*) market engagement as more 'radical' exhibitions such as self-manufacturing tools, building one's own home, or homesteading for food.

Artisan-based economies: Social landscapes of autonomy

Before delving into the specificities of different sectors, one last broader definition must be added to our framework. This definition deals precisely with situations where public institutions and/or cultural dynamics have successfully curbed the formation of capital relations in a definable area – be it a specific sector of economic activity in a given area, or the interplay of various sectors. Where many economic units with the above broad characteristics of 'artisanness' exist side by side and interact socially and economically in a complex and creative manner, we can speak of *artisan-based economies*. 'Economies', in this case, refer not to complete national economic systems, but to sub-systems in specific sectors and markets, following Gibson-Graham's 'diverse economies' framework (2008, pp. 614–18). Chapter 2 provides a variety of examples.

Artisan-based economies are defined by a relative subordination of motives and practices of domination under practices and motives of autonomy. We should expect this to be based on intention, rather than accident. Typically, artisan-based economies are the outcome of decades or even centuries of accrued political deliberation, action and regulation. Where a significant number of artisan labor units interact in a way that their respective position of autonomy is safeguarded and evolved, we can speak of an artisan 'classfor-itself', and of a proper artisan form(at) of politics.

An artisan-based economy does not refer to a state of universal selfemployment, with as many labor units as working-age individuals. In most cases, we find one such unit for every 5-10 population, depending on the dependency ratio, the workforce employed by public entities (based on the principle of subsidiarity⁴⁵), the ratio of people opting out of the responsibility to (co-)lead a labor unit, the amount and drudgery of learning required to (co-)lead an artisan business,46 the seasonality of labor, technological complexity of work processes and, finally, the dominant type of labor units (individual, family or small collective). The latter determine the number of owners per business, ranging from one (individual) to ten or more (small collectives). Of course, the manageability of collective businesses decreases with their size, leading sooner or later to the internal differentiation of essentially capitalist and proletarian roles.⁴⁷ In the coming chapters, many examples of (semi-)artisan economies are discussed and we hope that commonalities between such cases will become clear.

⁴⁵ The subsidiarity principle holds that larger units should only perform social and economic functions that cannot be effectively performed by smaller ones.

⁴⁶ Medical students, for example, often refer to significant parts of their education as 'drudgery'. The drudgery-benefit equilibrium, and the fact that each individual will navigate it distinctly, is also a fixture in skill formation.

⁴⁷ See Meyers (2005) for a differentiated perspective on the potentials of medium-sized collective labor units to maintain an equitable distribution of power, and Weitzman (1985) for a utopian model of a 'profit-sharing economy' of equitable remuneration in large units.

While it is impossible to give a number of artisan workers in today's global economies, primarily because it is hard to agree on where exactly to draw the line between artisan, proletarian and capitalist realities of labor, at least 40 to 60 per cent of the global working population find themselves within the ambit of micro-contestation between autonomy and its others, i.e., in the grey areas of class sketched above. Those firmly entrenched in a proletarian or capitalist position may well be in the minority. Most of that contestation, however, takes place in mixed economies: Capitalist enterprise always co-habits, to various degrees, with other forms and motives of labor performed by households, public agencies, volunteers, non-capitalist businesses participating in a variety of personal, communal, national and even global schemes to provide specific goods and services without profit (Gibson-Graham 2008, p. 616).

Capital relations affect most artisan labor in a variety of ways, and proper 'sanctuaries' for artisan activity are uncommon. Though examples of such sanctuaries could be used to define the 'artisan condition' in utopian terms, doing so tends to drain theories of autonomy of practical relevance. The 'normal' artisan condition is indeed to be found in a more or less uninterrupted struggle with greater powers, with relative gains and relative losses. That struggle, we propose, is a significant everyday experience for most of the human population today, and at any time in history we may study. In line with Gibson-Graham's call to understand class as process rather than definitive groupings (1992, pp. 113-114), we propose to see different variants and degrees of non-exploitative/artisan production as inter-connected parts of an encompassing process of non-exploitation. Processes of autonomy (or 'artisanness') co-create complex socio-economic relations through unique mixtures with a second fundamental set of processes: the processes of creating, reproducing and profiting from capital. The image of 'the artisan' employed in this theory, hence, is meant to be taken both literally – as concrete individuals whose socio-economic relations embody the artisan condition - and figuratively as an image we may attach to a positive theory of labor that connects and emboldens us in new ways.

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PUBLICATIONS AS PART OF THIS PHD PROJECT

- "Conditional freedoms: Non-state labor in Cuba between institutional de-legitimization and civic recognition." (with Claudia Mare, 2022). *Journal of Latin American Studies*, forthcoming.
- "Economías Múltiples y Resistencia Cotidiana En Cuba: Una Transición Desde Abajo." (with Claudia Mare, 2021). Pp. 200–223 in Políticas sociales y reforma institucional en la Cuba pos-COVID, edited by B. Hoffmann. Opladen, Berlin & Toronto: Barbara Budrich.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louis Thiemann studied International Politics, History and Development Studies, at Jacobs University Bremen and the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. My research converses between alternative and subaltern development practices in the ,South' and post-capitalist politics in the ,North'.



Since 2012, a large part of my work has focused on making sense of post-socialist Cuba, and the multiple transitions taking place within in. With Claudia Mare, I write about the many forms of resistance woven into the subaltern fabric of Cubans' everyday life and work. With Max Spoor, I follow Cuba's staggering food import dependency into the concrete limitations faced by peasant farms. Through initiatives such as the *Foro Cubano* (based at Sergio Arboleda University, Bogotá) and the *Food Monitor Programme* (a critical food sovereignty watchdog), I participate in the many important discussions held in Cuba's civil society. More recently, my work has interrogated the coloniality of international academic discussions on Cuba and the lives Cubans lead. To this end, I contributed a chapter on "Greenwashing the Revolution" to a forthcoming book on the *Mythology of the Cuban Revolution* (edited by Sergio Angel & Claudia Mare).

When in Europe, my interests revolve around socio-ecological transitions, post-growth and cooperativism. In this context, my aim is to locate (and connect) existing practices, principles and discourses of non-capitalist labor, some of which tend to be overlooked. Inspired by the work of Leopold Kohr, as well as the Cuban experience of regressive power being rooted in progressive discourses, I am interested in multi-polar, distributive and diverse pathways, institutions and cultures.