" Practices within Precarity:
Youth, Informality, and Life Making in the Contemporary City "

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1 Introduction

What does it mean to work? This is a critical question in a time where the once conventional and truncated understanding of work, as equated with labor, no longer has much purchase on the efforts the majority of the world's people deploy in order to sustain even minimally viable existences. While work certainly does take the form of wage labor, it is also often not remunerated, sometimes acts as a compensation for the receipt of benefits and services which may not take monetary form, and often entails investments of time and energy in diverse activities that may eventually make individuals employable, but which are themselves neither compulsory nor volitional. The varying instantiations of globalized neoliberal operations cultivate the norm of instability, both in work and life in general (see Standing 2014). These are the conditions that generate the *precariat* as a class in the making. Not only do such individuals have limited access to steady jobs and professions, they also have limited access to any condition associated with stability—either in terms of employment, residence, or citizenship. Precarity is the active transformation of people and practices into a state of *non-existence*—rendering people and their lives invisible and irrelevant even if the fact of their presence endures (Santos 2001). Notions of the precariat also cut across clearly delineated criteria for the stratifications of class. Levels of education, while critical to accessing stability of livelihood, are no guarantee for it, as evidenced by the large numbers of well-educated individuals who will never find steady work. In many cities, residential areas designated as poor contain heterogeneous mixtures of educational levels, aspirations, and self-styling (Bayat 2012).

For urban youth, precarity unfolds into a sense that what they are aiming for may only be "five centimeters away" and if they are willing to try anything, take on any kind of debt or game, that they will be able to get what they want. In another context, Jane Guyer (2007) writes about this sentiment as the disappearance of the "near future", where step-by-step patient planning no longer is believed to be a practice that works. Rather, the realization of aspirations entails a process more like conversion or confidence-games—the willingness to suspend belief either in what a person has valued so far, or in terms of how they are known by others. Still, the apparent availability of the actualization of success, the fact that what youth want seems to be right in front of them, gives the actual outcomes of who succeeds or not an intensely arbitrary character. It does not matter how patient or smart you are, no matter how much you do the right thing, whether you actually succeed or not seems contingent upon other factors.

The following article explores the practices within precarity of young urban residents in five cities: Jakarta, Hyderabad, Abidjan, Athens and Berlin. For us, precarity describes a living situation defined by the residents' uncertainty about the availability of resources in the future and the scarcity of resources in the present.

What do young urbanites pay attention to when so many parameters and variables are potentially relevant, when the efficacy of normative protocols for pursuing livelihood diminishes in face of intensified arbitrariness, and when the technologies for evaluation seem so totalizing at the same time as any kind of stability appears more elusive? In cities where precarity refers to conditions of intensified uncertainty, the inability of any specific reading of conditions to take hold, and to fleetingness as the modality of instrumental action, what affective, conceptual and practical sensibilities do youth mobilize to operate within precarious conditions?

Labor sociologists in Western Europe associate the increasing precarization of work with the "dissolution" of a social safety net and a social infrastructure, which guarantees support, safety and social capital (Castel 1995; Dörre et al. 2013). Such structuralist approach easily denies possibilities of interventions and maneuvers of those affected by these changes – precarization becomes a symbol of social isolation, deprivation and status anxieties. Our work in these five cities suggests however that while the dissolution of the previously available stability guarantors may have triggered some processes of precarization, in some instances such guarantees were weak to begin with. Overall, the social worlds of the precariat are constantly evolving and restratezing, so much so that studying the social practices and emerging connections within the space of precarity can extend theories on social ties and sociability, and make new political possibilities visible. This then also adds to the agentic approach on the precariat in the developing world, which, opposite to the structuralist approach mentioned above, stresses the resourcefulness of the resourcelessness. Inspired by neoliberal development experiments, this perspective stabilizes the idea of the individual strategizing subject who creatively develops survival strategies in a life of dispossession (see De Soto 1989; Banerjee, Banerjee and Duflo 2011). Our comparative study embraces Guy Standing's idea of the precariat as a class in the making and looks at its social worlds, what may account for politics possible within specific structural resources. More precisely, we discuss the dynamics of socialities that are much less stable, fixed and which point to larger processes relating to

how the urban world operates today. This world demands that we go beyond concepts like reciprocity or dependency and rethink concepts like weak and strong ties. What is required is that we explore new forms of exchanges in the urban fabric. We employ expressions like crafting, detaching, harvesting and timing to indicate the spontaneous creation of resources as a side effect of the interaction and movements in the city itself.

2 Youth precarity across the globe

Young people living under precarious conditions engage with an urban world where instability is the norm. Cities are inherently instable and have to be seen as a thing in the making. "No matter how hard analysts and policymakers might try, practices of inhabiting the city are so diverse and change so quickly that they cannot easily be channeled into clearly defined uses of space and resources or patterns of social interactions"(Simone 2010, 3). This norm of instability organizes the urban world across the globe, and, although different in nature in each city, instability gives rise to practices that are comparable across cities in their logic of operation.

Our focus in this paper remains on the precarity of work. It is the sphere in which the norm of instability is cultivated, which creates uncertainties and the need to improvise. Further, we explore young people at work in particular, because while instability affects all, regardless of age, we believe that young people open a particular set of windows for us into emerging realities. Instability in the urban world affects first of all the forms of transition between life stages, or more precisely, the timing and duration of the passage to adulthood (Heinz 2009). The category of youth only exists within this context and within ideas of transition, and therefore is closely connected to the idea of a temporary, transitional category (one cannot always be young). As such, youth is not an universal category, but "a social status generated by the abstract sociological principle of generation" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005). The authors continue: "Youth […] are the historical offspring of modernity, […] an ideological formation which naturalized its own telos in a model of human development that casts 'youth' as both the essential precondition and the indefinite postponement of maturity." (19) There has been much debate on terminology that could best describe the forms of transitions (navigation, trajectories, pathways to mention prominent ones), ranging from focus on the structural constraints and conditions that shapes these, and those who stress the individual's agency in

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their passage (cf. Furlong 2009; Furlong, Woodman and Wyn 2011). Such conceptual uncertainties reflect that phases of transitions get stretched, and become less predictable. Young people's experiences do not anymore match (if they ever did) with what is considered to be a proper transition (i.e. Dalsgaard, Franch and Scott 2008). This refers, at least certainly very strongly in the context of Europe, to the matching of education and employment, as the "backbone for implementing one's aspiration and to coordinate participation in the spheres of family life, consumption and citizenship" (Heinz 2009, 3). In European and North American contexts, "transitions take longer to accomplish, [are] less likely to involve a linear movement from education to work and independent living with backtracking and mixing of statuses that were once distinct becoming ever more common" (Furlong 2009, 1).

Formal education, organized through schools, higher education institutions and professional training programs, is still considered by policy makers (and social scientists to a certain degree) as a facilitator and regulator of transition into the labor market, and with it, status and rights of citizens – across the globe. In Asia, child labor is a core concern of international organizations and guides their interventions. It is discussed together with the employability of youth through education and skills, acquired in private or public institutions, which shows that these are the expected sites for a successful youth transition to adulthood (i.e. Lim 2011). The formal education system in Cote d'Ivoire became one of the backbones of youth transitions during the colonial past, especially in Abidjan. The diversification of educational institutions, on the basis of the privatization of schools and disinvestment in public education, created expectations of success through better education and diplomas (cf. Proteau 1997; 2002). At the European level, social policy and youth policy also focus on investment in education and training, in order to make individuals fit better within the labor market. More and more young Europeans are in tertiary education in 2013 compared to 2008 (Eurostat 2015, 127) – yet their perspectives for employment fall short.

The perpetuation of temporariness, which is to permanently experience being "in transition to adulthood" creates the instability of not knowing which skills, jobs, training and connections you might need to achieve what your environment expects of you in order to become adult. The lack of an institutionalized form of transition creates spaces of informality with(in) which young urbanites operate.

This lack of effective institutionalized forms of transition not only has consequences on an experimental level of a subjective "uncertainty" and status anxieties, it also expresses and drives transformations in the politics of redistribution and the organization of the economy, or rather, the labor market. This refers to the relative decline in labor opportunities for decent work.

In East Asia or Africa, this relates to the growth of the so-called informal sector and activities of unpaid, unsecure and temporal work. Most work in East Asia takes place in enterprises of less than 200 workers, and these enterprises are responsible for 70% of all new job creation. Small-scale entrepreneurship is mostly driven by necessity, with only few opportunities for expansion. Less than 40% of workers in low and middle income East Asia are in wage labor, and with the exception of Malaysia, these figures do not exceed 50% even in the region's wealthiest countries (Packard and van Nguyen 2014).

Of Africa's 297 million workers only 20% are situated in wage employment, with 77% of the self-employed still working in agriculture. In Cote d'Ivoire for example, the cutback of employment opportunities in the public as well as the private sector has increased the demand for (inter)urban small scale commercial or artisanal activities. In a context of population growth, especially in the urban centers, this structural deficit of employment opportunities fueled ethno-cultural divides and conflictive competition among those working in these informal economies (see Dembélé 2009). Young urbanites are mostly affected by this employment crisis – in 2012, less than 50% of the 15 to 24 years old residents in Ivory Coast had an employment (Ngokwey 2013, 6), and living in Abidjan, holding an university degree and being a first-job seeker even increases the probability to belong to the group of the unemployed (Kouakou 2010; 2011). Responses of the government to this youth problem are focusing on the improvement of the youth's employability, by creating incentives for internships and self-employment (see Kouakou 2010).

In Europe, irregular employment, the increase of "in-work poverty", and the increase of work to labor (i.e. internships, supplement hours etc.) tell the same story, albeit in different guises. A workfare regime has replaced the welfare regime, with the guiding principle: any job is better than no job. Under this policy shift, a new "precariat" has emerged; people who work in low-paid, temporal and part-time jobs. The service sector is the arena in which most of such "in-work poverty" is produced. In Germany, the rate of young people in-work and at risk of

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poverty increased from 7% in 2005 to 11.3% in 2013, and is above the European average (EU27, 2013: 9.5%). Involuntary part-time employment, as a percentage of the total part-time employment for young people was 34.3% for EU27 in 2014 (Greece 75%, Germany 13.4%). These figures show that in addition to the unemployed youth in Europe[1], there is a growing group of young citizens who are formally trained but get stuck in an ongoing chain of short-term, low-paid and temporary employment.

The shift in relations of production described here – towards increasing "work-to-labor relations" (see Standing 2014, 969) – works together with economic development and the production of wealth on the one hand, and the reorganization of redistributive policies or, if not state-bound, the emergence of "distinctive relations of distribution" on the other (see ibid.).

In Asia and Africa, even if welfare policies remain largely marginal/ineffective, states rolled out and managed physical infrastructure, and deployed particular practices of rule. National and municipal projects of modernity, which sought to define and embody collective aspirations, as well as posit a sense of how people should live in cities and their responsibilities to each other, provided a critical framework through which decisions about legitimacy and eligibility were made. Regardless of their efficacy and the state's relative ability to actually administer urban life, the state was always a critical point of reference and a driver of domestic economies that provided opportunities for wage labor, even when many residents were marginalized by or disengaged from it. But as González de la Rocha (2007) points out for urban Latin America, the opportunities for autonomous economic activities are fading as financial and other resource inputs into these economies depended upon at least some household network members having access to wage employment. This is one aspect of what she sees as the "cumulative disadvantages" of increased exclusion for wage labor that has deleterious impacts on the capacities to maintain the social networks that are necessary elements of a wide range of small-scale economic initiatives. As wage sources become more fragile, household survival requires a widening of income sources, which in turn enlarges the number of people

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[1] In December 2014, the youth unemployment rate was 21.4% in the EU28 and 23.0% in the euro area, compared with 23.1% and 23.9% respectively in December 2013. In December 2014, the lowest rates were observed in Germany (7.2%), Austria (9.0%) and the Netherlands (9.6%), and the highest in Spain (51.4%), Greece (50.6% in October 2014), Croatia (44.8% in the fourth quarter 2014) and Italy (42.0%) (Eurostat).

attempting to derive income from various informal sector activities, thus lowering profit margins.

In Europe, the debate on precarization is closely linked to the decline and transformation of the welfare state and the restructuring of the (urban) economy in the context of de-industrialization and globalization. The "normality" against which the increase of uncertainty is held is the geo-historic Fordist regime of social production and reproduction (Lessenich 2012, 34). In this regime, the "normal working employment" (the standard form of labor that structures the labor market) is permanent, materially secured, protected by contract and the company-based workers' organization. Robert Castel describes the centrality of wage labor with the term "société salariale", which has faced increased difficulties since the 1990s onwards (1995, chapter VII and VIII). The basis of the model of social integration rested on the idea of infinite progress, which after the Second World War seemed to hold true for the Western European democracies. However, this promise of economic growth first showed cracks in the 1980s. Today, with the more recent finance crisis, the scars are only beginning to appear. In 2014, the average real GDP growth rate in Europe (EU28) was at 1.3%.

The precariousness of European youth needs to be seen in the context of the transformation of key institutions that have been (and still are, to some extent) central in the distribution of security and stability, which derives from normal employment relations. Consequently, young residents in European cities, living with the uncertainty about the direction their lives will take, can no longer make assumptions: these are times in which provisional actions are necessary. They might never achieve the positions of their parents, let alone be socially mobile (cf. Putnam 2015, Sennett 2006). Furthermore, currently young people may not even be sure that once they achieve a "status position" that this position is safe for the remainder of their career.

It is this configuration that we capture within the idea of a generic instability of contemporary urban life, spatially and materially heterogeneous environments with great densities of bodies, ways of doing things and a wide range of technical devices that put things into a plurality of different relationships—with different scope, degrees of visibility and duration.

3 Methods

This paper presents first empirical findings of the research project "Urbanizing Faith"[2]. The project teams of each city conducted in-depth interviews with young urbanites aged between 15 to 32 years. The interviewees were selected according to the principle of maximum contrast, in order to get a broad picture about urban youth in each city. The following analysis is based on at minimum 15 interviews per city[3] (121 interviews in total). The interview guide covered open questions on the young people's experience at work and during leisure time, at places of faith, in homes and neighborhoods. It also sought to map their daily routines. The focus of the conversation was on the young people's use and creation of resources, social ties and skills in their urban everyday life. The discussion of their practices was complemented by questions on their ideas and expectations for the upcoming years, their aspirations and plans to realize these. It is this combined consideration of everyday life together with future plans, which reveals how young people live and weave their faith in the city: the overall topic of the project.

This presentation of young people's practices within precarity, in five different cities, is an attempt to ground the debate on comparative urbanism in empirical work. This empirical focus is needed, as until now the debate has been shaped by a theoretical critique of the geographical hierarchies in theory production, and a call to reconsider the entities of comparison (what is comparable) and the conceptual lenses (what to compare). Colin McFarlane (2011) and Jennifer Robinson (2006, 2010) suggest ways for an urbanism beyond this North-South divide, pleading for unusual comparisons and comparison as a way of learning. This project takes these ideas seriously and aims to show – through a close reading of youth practices – that similar moves and motivations matter across cities that have normally been described as being too distinct to compare with each other. This does not mean that our analysis flattens out the different conditions, vectors and opportunity structures in each city. However, similar practices emerge in different cities, out of this need to create resources under conditions of uncertainty.

4 Practices within Precarity

Against the background of an increasing concern about precarization of young urban residents as a problem for social cohesion in cities, we want to show empirically how the precariousness of urban youth is the space of new socialities that we want to call "practices within precarity". In the following, we present four preliminary, but decisive aspects of an urban sociality, which contribute to the debate on precarization across the globe.

Four assumptions guide this presentation: 1. An attempt to confront precarity with the extension of possibilities, and on the basis of the idea being a self-fulfilling asset, also requires relational work that reconsiders the importance and kind of (in)stable relationships. (*crafting*) 2. The investment in formal knowledge/education does not guarantee access to resources – however, a kind of *sa-voir (voir = to see)* used in and emerging out of a given situation is crucial. (*detaching*) 3. Resources are not only exchanges between concrete actors and as result of institutionalized collaborations (be it through norms of reciprocity or contracts), but resources might be accessed as side-effects of more fluid encounters and the presence at the right site, at the right moment. (*harvesting*). 4. Time remains one of the resources to bargain with and to put into use – and the "right timing" one of the core questions for precarious youth. (*timing*)

4.1 Crafting

The capacity of individuals to resiliently become many different things has become standard operating procedure and, as such, individuals repeatedly experience the very conditions that constitute the presuppositions for human experience in general (Virno 2009). Of course, the relative absence of anchoring cultures, discourses, and norms does not open up complete freedom, and instead ushers in a flood of guidelines, instructions, pointers, expectations, and indicators whose applicability is for the moment, and then altered quickly. But this is why the *crafting* of performance is now so crucial. For it concedes the perceived inefficacy of planning and preparation but also wards off the temptation to pursue wholesale conversions of the self, and its preoccupations with millennial movements, trickery, or redemption. In crafting there is the recognition of a sought-for instrumentality, of the ability to accomplish something through

composition, through piecing together different styles, influences, and skills to gain access to specific opportunities.

Flora, 24, works for a Jakarta advertising company managing different campaigns. Her pay is not high but the job provides various benefits such as free lunch, leisure events, outings, discounted purchases and constant exposure to a plenitude of company promotions that enable discounted consumption. In addition she "curates" her own on-line clothing business. She had graduated in Visual Communications Design (major). She and her husband, a freelance graphic designer employed by various companies located in Singapore, have a significant disposable income for a couple their age. However, they live in a single 3x3 meter room, and everyday they eat at the cheapest food stalls, saving money for a project they have yet to imagine. But in our conversation, it was important for them not to get tied down to any particular vision of what they want to do because they felt it would foreclose opportunities that they did not yet have a sense of, and so crafted a particular capacity to be as *receptive as possible to whatever it is that we eventually decide to do*."

Also Prathama, living on the outskirts of Hyderabad, explained how she was always open to any kind of opportunities that presented themselves to her. The University where she had enrolled as a research scholar was at the other end of town. To save on commuting time and have the peace and quiet necessary for research, Prathama decided to live in the university hostel. Her mother moved to her maternal home along with her 3 children after her husband married another woman. With her income as a nurse she was able to support the education and upbringing of her children without becoming a burden on her brothers. Prathama was keenly aware of her mother's struggles to put her and her siblings through school after the separation and was wary of dependency on men. All her choices and decisions regarding her own education were directed by this sense of responsibility since she felt that the available resources should bring better opportunities for her younger brother and sister. Due to the lack of male presence in the family, she said that she had to take up certain duties that would typically be done by a man. Her alertness and quick thinking adds to the spontaneity of her decisions. She was always on the look out for new opportunities and avenues that might benefit her family and her, even if they were indirect. She took pride in doing things before someone else asked her to do it. Starting to do the groceries from a young age, and standing up for her brother were all part of that orientation. Even though Prathama's work and her

brother's career were in two different fields, she was constantly on the lookout for information related to her brother's field.

> I never say no, no matter what I am given. For example, I am a Hindu. I am not a very religious person. But yes. If someone gives me a bible, I will just take it. Once I tried to read when my grandfather was admitted to Osmania hospital; a lady gave me a Bible. Maybe she thought that I was upset. I tried to read it but I couldn't. I put it aside.

What kind of crafting this necessity of "being open" requires in terms of relational work is expressed elegantly by Paul, 25, who has lived in Berlin for a couple of years. He was born in Mozambique and got his A-level there, finally joining his mother in Berlin after several years of travelling between Portugal, England, and South Africa. During his travels, he learned from a friend that "it is good to listen carefully, whatever it is, and whatever it will be, and then you can see". Following this advice he learnt to accept anyone, while being friendly and open to any occasions of encounter: "Knowing each other never is a bad thing. Who knows, maybe your interlocutor is a millionaire!" All you have to do is be nice and authentic, and people will smile back and help you, explained Paul. This approach was useful during various accidental encounters in Berlin, which generated resources in terms of work, legal and financial support, as well as access to professional networks in the rap music scene in Berlin. The latter was important, as Paul wanted to pursue a career as a musician, a project he started in England while attending a music college.

This kind of openness to potential opportunities is also reflected in Bianco's life course. We met Bianco in Abidjan at his laundry service shop. He was 32 years old then, and had been involved in many different activities. He had worked as a shoeshine boy, got discovered by one of the clients for his linguistic felicity and was asked to act in an advertisement, which allowed him to pay his school fees and to study theatre acting, eventually earning a Master's degree. Although theatre companies and NGO's hired him from time to time, he was primarily earning his living with three jobs: as a bar keeper, taxi driver and with his laundry service. In his accumulation of professional experiences, the particular activities themselves were not the destination, or even a step on a ladder to another better job. Rather, through his activities, new opportunities presented themselves to him, although in completely different areas. In our interview, Bianco was very clear in his mind that he did not want to be a taxi driver, but wanted to start a business. When his girlfriend got the opportunity to buy a car, they started a taxi driver company.

Crafting can also mean to being open to piecing together different styles and skills. Sabine, 28, resident in Berlin, needs to navigate in formal settings, with institutionalized expectations and practices. For her, this meant to "break ranks". In her formal application to a professional training course as hairdresser, she added "individuality" and "courage" by handing in a hand written application:

> Sabine: I have to say, I thought they hadn't accepted my application […But they did] want to hire me. I […] asked myself what had been the reasons, because applications generally all look the same. And I thought, everyone was doing their application by computer and all their applications would look "perfect". And I was writing them by hand. […] I have a nice handwriting and so I am different from the others, that's how you get noticed. It all fitted together nicely how I did it. My boss asked himself who could be so courageous as to write by hand.
>
> I: And how did you get the idea?
>
> Sabine: Yes I thought, well everyone is doing it on the computer, and that is boring. If you write by hand, and they see that you have a nice handwriting, they analyze it and know exactly what kind of character you have. I just wanted to achieve something a little bit different. Why did she do it? I want to know why she has been so courageous...As everyone wrote with the computer, I just wanted to break ranks."

Sabine writing her application by hand can be seen as a practice of crafting, the re-composition of styles that formally do not fit together. At the same time, it also illustrates how Sabine pursues the idea of being "different" than her competitors, expressing individuality in her application. Crafting becomes a resource for convincing her future boss, and is thus part of Sabine's relationship work.

These youth of different social class backgrounds all attempt to compose themselves as highly individuated entities. Their stories reveal how important it is for this youth to express their willingness to put themselves at service, while presenting themselves as open, friendly and courageous. In doing so, they are prepared to catch new opportunities, even though they might, in the end, present themselves very differently than could be expected. While they embody many facets of the "neoliberal subject", they also accede to the impossibility to "go it alone", to resiliently roll with the punches in trajectories of continuous self-improvement. Rather, they attempt to craft particular insertions into a shifting urban fabric, on the one hand availing themselves to various opportunities that come their way, but on the other hand also

acting as instruments of conjunction, as hinges that vary the angles through which particular places, events, and opportunities in the city come together and also disappear from view.

4.2 Detaching

Individuals in precariousness sometimes make strong efforts to detach themselves from work or the prospects of work careers, where every detail of their performance will be scrutinized and assessed. Such efforts are infused with ambivalence as the absence of connectivity is reinforced, in so many ways, as the cessation of existence. Connectivity seems especially valued as, at least, the ability to share the burdens of multiple insecurities and estrangement. Concrete courses of action taken or imagined often involve individuals spreading themselves across disparate "projects" or engagements, hedging their bets, pluralizing possible destinations and sources of income. This requires the ability to see the bits and pieces, the connections and collaborations that are available and can be put to use creatively in a new, not institutionalized manner. Ideas of incremental learning (McFarlane 2011) describe these processes in which urban dwellers develop a sense for new opportunities through the observation and immersion into their urban environment.

Max, in his 30s, lives in Anono, Abidjan, with his parents. A couple of years ago, he found himself stuck, unable to find an internship that would have allowed him to obtain a diploma in accountancy. While looking for an internship, he had had the idea of following the young man that delivered the bread for his family every day. One morning Max approached the man during the delivery, and asked if he could help out. This moment marked the beginning of a collaboration wherein they divided the clients for the bread delivery service between themselves. Max's client list started growing. He could benefit from the work infrastructure the settled bread deliverer had already negotiated, like the deal between the latter and the bakery to buy the bread at a lower price. This allowed both to reselling the bread at the conventional price to their clients and make profit out of their service, which in itself was not paid. At a later stage, Max was able to do his accountancy internship at the bakery. He validated his diploma and was subsequently hired by the bakery to assist the management. The moment we met, he was working as bread delivery boy, management assistant and moreover had become trainee in a laundry store, a position offered to him by a friend from the church, with potential for Max to take over the laundry store in future.

Max's attention to his environment in a moment of lived impasse, his idea to follow the bread seller on his journey in the neighborhood, can be understood as the harvesting of momentum, of making instantaneous connections that are at his disposal in his environment. These practices are not used as a new professional activity, as a way to earn money, but as an activity with which he can dock in order to stay occupied and which he hijacks by following the bread delivery boy, until at one point the latter loses interest in selling bread and Max can fill in the gap, taking over his role and combining the learned routines of selling bread with his knowledge of accountancy, learned at school.

Here, young dwellers have to engage in detachment from expectations. Max started his account of the situation of youth in Abidjan with the claim that the youth of today had had a revolution of their minds, because they no longer felt ashamed to do activities that had previously been associated with strangers and immigrants.

> Today I understood that there isn't only this, sitting in an office, that will bring money – although well, it is true that money is not the goal, not the ultimate goal, but money nevertheless allows a certain level of well-being, it allows the realization of certain things: to be autonomous, to take charge, and obtain happiness. Today, I am trying to set up this system, this is why I try somehow to gain a little bit of enterprise experience, learning how to engage in enterprise for myself.

Max's account of a shift in orientation towards new forms of experiences, new (or better) knowledge that he had not focused on until that point, also resonates in Tim's hopes for the future. In more general terms, his ideas express the challenge to define which kinds of knowledge might be put to work to allow his entry into the circuit of production.

Tim is 20, and had grown up in a family of beekeepers in the Italian countryside. A year ago, after graduating from high school in Bologna, he came to Berlin to study German, and then to enroll in medical school in Germany. In addition to coursework at an international language school, he worked as a waiter in an Italian pizzeria. When we met, his plans had changed; he had chosen to focus on learning German, Romanian, Italian and French in Vienna, in order to be closer to his family in Italy. However, Tim's studies in linguistics did not necessarily bring him closer to his work goals. He did not know if he would be able to find work that would link to his studies, he explained to me. He liked to learn new languages, which he considered "his hobby". Maybe he would work as a waiter, or anything related to his linguistic skills, perhaps as correspondent in an international organization. Yet another possibility was to go back to

Italy, to work as a beekeeper. "I would love that," he repeated twice. Every time he visited his parents in Italy, he had worked with the bees, together with his father. To become a beekeeper seemed quite easy to Tim, as in his words, "I only need some manual competences and to learn from my father, who is beekeeper."

Tim is only one of many who juggles the different sites, forms, and uses of knowledge in relation to his integration in circuits of production. It is not necessarily formal education, which will position him here, but his *savoir-faire* to combine various skills learnt at school, university, parents and life. Yet, formal education might still prove relevant, even though in a different manner than foreseen by the formal education system (i.e. linguistic skills while working abroad). As discussed above, it is the re-combination and harvesting of knowledge, which prepares young people for the navigation through an uncertain future and increasing arbitrariness. Detaching oneself from the formal channels of knowledge acquisition and validation represents one central tool that youth deploy as a practice within precarity.

In Athens, Kathrine, 25 years old, also described her learning to detach from previously held ideas about her life course, specifically matching her educational training with permanent employment. She comes from Kalamata, a small city of the Peloponnese peninsula (a region in south Greece) and grew up in a middle class family. She had studied Greek literature and obtained her Master's degree in this subject. Since then, she had worked several part-time jobs, mainly in cafes, bars and taverns. When we met, her main occupation consisted of giving private Greek lessons to high school students, but at the same time, she was also working as a babysitter and waitress. Kathrine explained that the socio-economic crisis in Greece made her realize that she would never be able to have a permanent job as a teacher in a high school: "During the last years we have only seen layoffs in the public sector, this affects the education sector as well. I don't expect to find a permanent job at a public school for the next five, maybe ten years […]."

In a context of a general and abrupt crisis, detaching from expectations becomes particularly unsettling. Kathrine had to negotiate her exchange relations in a situation where any kind of remuneration is sought, and competition is high. Recently she was fired from the bar where she worked, because she demanded payment for overtime:

I will have to find a similar job as soon as possible. Beyond the money issue, I could never make

ends meet, only by giving lessons. Especially during the summer months the demand falls and it

is almost impossible to be able to plan for the future. For example, nothing reassures me that I

will be able to find enough students for the next season […] So maybe it sounds illogical, but

working at the bar twice a week provides me with some kind of security.

Given this situation of precariousness, having more than one string to your bow seems to be one way to remain settled. A way to make sense of the multiplicity of strands of engagements, the option to always be prepared to quit, or take whatever life presents to you, might consist of the creation of a kind of umbrella, which can keep you in line without pinning you down to a specific professional trajectory. This reflects 29-year-old actress Karo's situation, who is born and lives in Athens. Her parents were also actors and they ran a drama school in the center of the city. Karo had graduated from this drama school in 2006 and had been working in several jobs for the last ten years. All of her jobs had something in common in that they were somehow related to the theatre. As she underlined:

If you tell someone that you are an actor or actress they usually ask you, at what bar you are

working. Most on my colleagues have to work in one or two unrelated jobs, because ours are so

underpaid, if you get paid at all. For example, no one gets any money for the rehearsals of a

play. But I have decided not to work in a different field. That means that I try to find additional

part-time jobs, which all have to do with the theatre: for example I often work as

administration or technical stuff for the plays, or as a director's assistant. I have even translated

some plays. Until now I have been lucky enough to always find ways to make some extra

money.

For others, the umbrella is more a sense of being part of a collective movement without being connected to it as such. Thus, a sense of detachment may be found in the city's "floating populations", when floating describes the way youth, in particular, circulate through scores of jobs, cheap room rentals, neighborhoods, and styles of engagement. There are high school graduates and dropouts, tertiary students, members of fan clubs, gangs, organizations, self-organized interest groups, and roving packs. The large retail markets of Jakarta, such as Cempaka Putih, Cililitan, Pasar Pagi selling cheap mostly locally produced or finished clothing lines, employ thousands of young men and women. One can watching them pour out of these places at the 22:00 closing time, climbing into buses and onto motorcycles to go home. But home for these youth is enacted in varied scenarios and compositions with the aim to keep

rent under $25 a month—essential given that most of them make perhaps no more than $100 per month. They canvass the city, often looking for nothing in particular, often frequenting the 24/7 convenience stores where they can sit for hours with a coke and noodle soup and watch what other youth are up to. It is not that these youth are without aspirations, plans, or methods for pursuing specific trajectories. For example, YouTube is used constantly as a medium through which to learn new skills, such as those of the barista coffee, web designer, chef, sound mixer, hacker, or electrician. Rather, they do not conceive of any occupation as a destination, but simply something to pass through, as if the city were a proliferation of doors—devices that hinge rather the hedge futures, marking trajectories simultaneously connected and detached.

4.3 Harvesting

When access to resources and connections becomes unpredictable, then the ways in which actors organize their access might also bring to the surface modalities of practice that have not yet been extensively considered in the discussion of resource making in the city. The idea of harvesting challenges the idea that an individual's intentions determine the outcome, and that exchange and collaboration is closely linked to the existence of interpersonal (weak or strong) social ties. Harvesting differs from scavenging in that it is not so much the remainders themselves that are put to immediate and clear-cut uses, but rather the way in which they are bundled in ways that circumvent the usual expectations about exchange and collaboration. Collections of materials, the logistical operations of interventions or scams, contacts with police, or arranging places of convocation all require different actors, chains of command, and forms of communication and cooperation. Often times nothing is written down or secured, and as such, betrayals and manipulations are rife. Some harvesting merely gathers up what is available on a short-term, perhaps once only basis. At other times the practice attempts to implant seeds for other opportunities, but without guarantees of any clear results.

Sangam, 21 years old, hails from a small village in Karnataka, India. He speaks four languages and sells tea. After high school Sangam wanted to join the army but failed to gain entry, despite several attempts. At 16, he decided to find a 'normal' job but, unable to find one that paid well, he tried his luck in a few small towns and big cities before finally reaching Hyderabad. The moment we met, he worked as a chai-wallah (one who sells tea) at a local

Irani café. His workday started at 9 am when he collected his first flask of tea and a long cylindrical plastic bag of tiny paper cups from the restaurant. He then went his way up and down half a kilometre of a densely populated mixed neighborhood, made up of residential and commercial establishments and institutions. As he poured tea into the tiny cups for those who ask for it, his alert eyes darted about seeking prospective customers, he explained. He had, over time, identified spots where his services are likely to be in demand. Mostly these are commercial and institutional establishments that do not have an in-house arrangement for tea. He received a commission for each flask full that he sells. The more he walked and the more he poured, the more money he made. To guard his regular customers from other chai-wallahs the mild-mannered young man had taught himself to be aggressive when required. He did not enjoy this mundane work but was determined to continue with it until he had saved enough to set up a business of his own, back in his hometown.

Along his way, he kept a keen eye out for resourceful men who could put him through to a better job with a higher pay or skills that he could pick up easily and develop on his own, which would then help him start something by himself. Though an extremely tiresome job, Sangam used this act of walking up and down the road as a means to meet people for more work, investment opportunities and gathering other useful information.

29-year-old Rafael from Abidjan, elaborated yet another form of harvesting. He had finished his A-Levels and planned to attend university, but due to political crisis in the Ivory Coast, all university teaching stopped, and in this moment of "boredom" (his words), he started looking for a job. In his search for work, he passed a car wash in Abobo, a neighborhood in Abidjan, and asked if he could work there. In itself this interaction is not surprising. Yet, the way he then got into the business is quite revealing, as it is not the "application", but his presence and practice that got him the job. Rafael was successful, not because of any prior contacts to the owner of the car wash, but because he himself went inside and offered himself as their new employee, and in his own words: "started working, working, working". When the old employees left, the owner chose him for the vacancy and gave him the responsibility to manage the car wash. Rafael's story also tells us something about the importance of a capacity to know when, where and how to commit yourself to a continuous crafting of trust and reliability to your interlocutor – and when this commitment might foreclose the opportunities waiting for you.

The premise of showing initiative by offering your service and your ideas actively to others, or getting involved in social settings on your own, fits very much to modes of governing young futures that take shape in the different cities. Social policy of "activation" for unemployed citizen in Germany as well as labor policy in Cote d'Ivoire which confront the structural youth unemployment by funding "projects" initiated by young dwellers, are all embracing such an idea of the "active urban resident" who has to earn rights and the entitlement to resources, by bringing something on the table first. In this logic, citizen cannot simply come and ask for any kind of support (i.e. an employment), without anything to offer from their side.

André, 22 and living in Berlin, had a high school diploma, but no formal employment. His parents emigrated from Egypt to Sweden and then came to Germany when André was seven. He was involved in some form of business, and even though he remained quite vague about what this involved in concrete terms, he described how he could build social capital to access opportunities, specifically making money out of his talent – whether related to hip hop, rapping or as a footballer.

> If you are an open person – sociable, and talkative – you get into contact with people. You practice your hobby with these people, and they can see that you're having fun, you have fun with them, you are practicing with them (training) your hobby, […] that means they can help you, with contacts and connections to agencies. […] If they see that you're having fun, then one follows the other.

André "harvested" contacts that might bring him earning opportunities, by celebrating his pleasure of practicing, and keeping the activity explicitly as leisure and fun. Yet another practice of harvesting describes quite the opposite of these active plans: it is the refusal to stay, which sets young people free from the possibility of getting employed here and there, as the following example shows.

Haslo, 18, finished junior high but did not go to secondary school. He came to Jakarta at the age of 15 and found work in a restaurant, which was comfortable and paid well, but served pork, and as a devout Muslim the idea and the smell of which made him sick so he quit. Through an older brother he found work in one of Southeast Asia's textile and clothing markets, Tanah Abang, where he has worked for the past two years. Although in our interview, he expressed a desire to save enough money to open up a shop in his hometown, he largely conceded that for the conceivable future, Tanah Abang was the only place where a young man

without a diploma would be able to find work. He circulated through the market, never content with one specific location for very long, always looking for better deals. Many young men are in his situation, they have fairly stable work as sellers in stalls owned by others, but a large number never stay for very long, but they also never leave Tanah Abang. It is as if their decisions to quit produce a kind of void, a refuse that gets harvested.

These examples also show that timing is a crucial dimension to take into consideration – the moment when you push yourself forward and bring your ideas to the forefront, or when you would rather remain unseen, or express refusal. This will be discussed in the next section.

4.4 Timing

Across many of the interviews, young people expressed impatience in sticking with work and activities that did not quickly generate pay raises or open onto a more expansive set of opportunities. Sometimes this impatience is based on the recognition that employers can draw upon a large pool of potential labor and thus keep wages low for long periods of time. And so many youth feel the need to assess the concrete possibilities of advancement at an early stage, and then move on if they feel they are going to have to wait long periods of time for even the most minimal increments of salary increases.

Rarely did we encounter youth who felt that they desperately needed to hang on to whatever they had. More often we heard comments like Rifki's, a 23 year old air conditioning system repairperson in Jakarta, who said, "if you are going to make your move, you have to make it look like a move, like you mean business, instead of spending years playing nice." Or like Leslie, 25 years old Lebanese girl, who worked as financial manager in a Start-up company in Berlin, after graduating in her Master of Economics in Paris, and who seemed to never stand still – a diverse range of sport activities fill her time after work, and one new experience joins the other (from tango classes to theater workshops and modern dance courses). Her being with the city is lived as if she would, all time, already be almost gone again, while extracting the most of the cultural resources that the city offers to highly educated middle class immigrants like Leslie. She planned to leave but then thought loudly: "maybe in the end, I'll stay here, you know, but I never plan a lot and my plan is to leave. But I could get an amazing offer so I don't know. You never know what could happen."

On the flipside, *waiting* becomes a near-constant dimension in some people's lives, as well as a mode of captivation produced through specific aspirations and calculations. Ruth, 18, resident in Jakarta when we met, wanted to be a pastry chef, studied to be a pastry chef, got support and capital from her mother to market her own baking, and had had a variety of internships and part-time jobs in catering and kitchens. She was applying for further university training in special needs education because her mother had made this suggestion. She wanted to pursue this career and open up a pastry shop. While she waited for an acceptance to attend university, her real passion, being a pastry chef, hung in suspended animation. She clearly knew what it would take to move toward her career goal, and she "fell into" the requisite steps needed to realize this, largely with indifference. The passion consumed her as she had given up hanging out, having boyfriends, and other leisure pursuits in order to pursue this goal. But nothing was happening except waiting—even though things were concretely falling into place, Ruth did not feel she was moving closer or further away from this goal.

Vanessa, 30, with a diploma in architecture and resident in Athens, shared this feeling. Ten years older and several educational steps, jobs and struggles later, she "felt stuck". After completing a Master's degree she had been trying to find a job at an architectural office for a long time. She became disappointed by the difficulties she had been facing: "I couldn't find a job, I had to leave my own house and for a few months I was staying at friends. I considered myself as homeless for that period of my life and it was really difficult […]" In order to make a living, Vanessa decided to use her skills working as a graphic designer.

> During my architectural studies, I had often used some graphic design programs, you know Corel, Photoshop etc. So it wasn't difficult for me to create a portfolio and to seek a job in that field. I feel really lucky that I have a permanent job now and that I have my own house again […]. But at the same time I feel stuck in this situation. I mean, this wasn't what I studied and I can't imagine myself working on advertisement leaflets for the rest of my life. But I am really pessimistic about finding a job as an architect. I don't even have time to look for a better job at this point and sometimes I feel that the time is passing and I am not evolving in my life. Do you know that feeling? Not to see how to do the next step? It gets stressful when I think about it.

But waiting can also be experienced as a productive timespace, almost as a tool to advance in life. Similar to Ruth, 24 year old Daniel in Abidjan was also very clear about his professional ambitions for the future. We met him at the street corner behind a small desk and a sun

umbrella, where he and a friend sold phone credit to the neighbors and people on their way to work. Daniel had finished his *BTS*, a professional diploma which had allowed him to work as a bank agent, and he was explicit about the status this activity as credit seller has – for him, it was a way to kill the time between now and his future profession as bank agent. He was waiting for a call from the bank where he did his internship, to hire him. He did not know for how long he would have to wait – as he could not tell when they were going to call him. He sat behind his desk, smiling – we asked him if the wait proved to be frustrating, and he replied: "No, not at all. You mustn't be frustrated. You should never lose your ambitions, if you do so, it will never work, you will never get ahead." Different to Ruth in Jakarta and Vanessa in Athens, Daniel's waiting time was filled with expectations and the impression that his goal was just a second away – almost within reach.

In a similar way, some of the youth confront and assimilate their uncertain futures and precarious presence with the reference to a destiny that is outside of their control, like a divine force that will determine their choices, opportunities and prospective livelihoods. Rafael, the security guard in Anono, Abidjan, answered the question about his future by saying that it was "God who decides, you don't know it". The creation of such a mental limit can be seen as a way to live from day to day, and to wait what the next day will bring. The closure of future horizons does not necessarily refer to divinities. A similar glass ceiling can also be the lack of money, not only as an individual resource, but can also translate to more general terms – when there seems to be just nothing to aim for. In Greece, youth recall the current discourses on the economic crisis. Anna was 27 years old, had studied finance in a private institution, but was unemployed. She grew up in Athens, in a relatively deprived neighborhood in the western part of the city. Her father was a plumber, and was the only one with a job in their family at the moment of the interview. Anna also had a younger brother who was still studying mechanics at a technical institution. She clearly connected her future to the political and economic crisis of her country.

> We are a generation with low expectations, or put simply, with no expectations. We cannot plan our future in such an unstable political situation and I certainly can't answer to the question "where do you see yourself in five years?" Even when people ask me that question in job interviews, I don't know what to say, because I feel that it's not up to me […] Greece could be bankrupt in a few months and this will affect us all. I don't even know if I will continue to live here next year, or if I will have to immigrate to another country.

In addition to waiting and accelerating activities and plans, some of the young urbanites also try to sort themselves into the temporal order of welfare organizations that require punctuality to keep appointments. Nadja, 23 and living in Berlin, started an apprenticeship as a hairdresser in Frankfurt, Germany, which she never finished, deciding instead to leave her family and begin a new life in Berlin. She arrived in Berlin with nothing, except her relationship to her ex-boyfriend and the infrastructure of Berlin's welfare policy for young women who are "on the run". When we met, Nadja lived in a hostel for homeless women, and was desperate to find her own place. As she was in debt, her chances of finding a flat within the highly competitive housing market in Berlin were very low, as access to housing in the city is, among other formalities, dependent on being able to present prospective landlords with a sheet of paper that proves the tenant is "without any debts" (*SCHUFA Erklärung*). Nadja thought about starting to work as *anything*, but had difficulties in finding a job she could do without any professional qualification and which would not put her in danger of sexual harassment, which she was very sensitive to, due to experiences in the past. In this situation of precariousness, Nadja found her way through the city while "being disciplined" and "on time". This means respecting the appointments made by the debt counseling service, the social worker and the job center. She stressed the importance of discipline to punctuality. If she did not get up in time, she would lose everything and would have to live on the street. Thus, it is her insertion into a temporal order of the institutional setting in Berlin that allows her to harvest resources, even in a situation of very few means.

5 Conclusion

There was a long and difficult transition from an inability of radical autonomist politics of the 1960's onward to substantially address the problem of the subaltern, to an increased generalization of precarity. The demands of distributive justice are largely inapplicable since the conventional politics of divisions, while present, no longer apply to a pervasive sense of contextlessness in which individuals operate—life's generic instability. François Laruelle calls the generic that particular status of an object from which particular identities are subtracted (2008). In the notion of the generic, Laruelle offers a way to think beyond difference. The generic is an infrastructure outside the incessant need to divide things, outside the fundamental epistemological maneuvers that cut the world into specific existent conditions and then bring in the analytical tools needed to account for them. So even though in practice

we may need to continuously work with binaries and protocols of translation and politics, all the unruly details of everyday life can be directly manifested in concert without discrete identities or the need of an all-encompassing explanatory framework that ties all of those details together in specific ways.

By weaving the experiences of precarious youth in a number of cities together, we want to communicate something about young people being within the city – beyond the common divisions of the visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, or a divide between the informal and the formal. It challenges what Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible, "a system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (2006, 12, in Asher 2011). The present comparison, understood as a conversation between, and enjoinment of a broad range of different stories, questions research assumptions about conceptualization and the relation between concepts and the world. Following Deleuze (1994), we understand "concepts of things and the things themselves as entwined", which in the end, "leaves us with an always incomplete apprehension of the phenomena with residual intensities" (Robinson forthcoming). In this sense, the project wants to understand itself as "precarious", as it generates sensibilities for urban youth's operations, without claiming a new grand theory on practices within precarity and their variations across different cities. At the same time, it is an intervention, seeing the youth's movements and maneuvers as seismographs for larger processes and modes of operations - and in this sense as mediators of new political possibilities (beyond representation).

This does not mean to disarm the relevance of class, race and other kinds of differences, yet there is something more to see in this conversation between young urbanites in these five cities, namely the impossibility to predict what styles, techniques and steps will follow, and under which regularities. In other words, practices that youth deploy across specific urban settings are at one and the same time obdurately significant to how they conceptualize their future and increasingly irrelevant as singularities capable of manifesting distinctive trajectories of self and collective formation concern the sifting through and assembling of various details of everyday existence. These fragmented operations reflect a configuration of new forms of territoriality in global production networks, which require the seamless movement of primary materials and finished commodities through standardization, but also entail a process of

detachment of materials, social relations, and bodies from their embeddedness in specific locales. It is what we call a model of logistics (see Martin 2012; Martin 2013). This disembedding of particular nodes, transit and processing sites from the specificities of their relationships with particular locales of demographic compositions, social and economic histories and cultural practices requires an open-ended sense of how these sites, now acting as nodes, could be articulated in new and various ways. It is a process that reiterates the fundamental instability of interconnectivity, as well as a potential space through which disruptions and illicit uses might emerge – and thus requires capacities to anticipate instability and pre-empt interruptions (Martin 2012). These capacities can not only be described as a pre-given tool set from which actors develop strategies of practice. Instead, the operating model of logistics foregrounds practices of diffracted knowing (cf. Haraway 2004; Barad 2007; Kaiser and Thiele 2014) which are emergent in a given situation, a response to a condition of "situated multiplicity – the throwntogetherness of bodies, mass and matter, and of many uses and needs" (Amin 2006). No longer do youth consider a life course or the assembling of specific characters, careers, or missions, but rather piece together the various materials, images, and senses available in the immediate surrounds into order to prolong themselves across shortened time spans, discordant spaces and demands. Timing, detachment, harvesting, and crafting are not descriptive of patterns of livelihood per se; they do not shape coherent approaches to life. Rather, they are practices suited to details—suited to working with fragments of materials and experiences, converted into temporary instruments for shaping self-performance or wedging open other opportunities that may require revised stylizations of individual performance. The youth's making of livelihood might then be more a matter of becoming literate with-in their everyday lives in a situation of intensified arbitrariness, where the starting point can barely be the individual subject who calculates opportunities and optimizes possibilities on the basis of individual resources at their disposition.

Precarity, as a generalized state of contextlessness, is addressed with practices that, in the end, are inevitably ambivalent. Similar to the notion of the pharmakon—that which is both cure and poison—these practices may be adept at dissociating things and their purveyors from associations with place and convictions that seem to be going nowhere, but neither do they provide a context through which perspectives and planning might ensue. If precarity is the unavailability of stable contexts and clear divisions of time, morality, and categories of persons and justice, then these practices yield only temporary capacities to act without context or with

contexts only as momentary boundary markers, creating a sense of arrival and departure, now thoroughly entangled.

6 References

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