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To Change the World: On Industrious Modernity

Our times are marked by a *pessimism of the intellect and an optimism of the will*, to use an old quote that Leftists sometimes throw around. Our intellectual pessimism manifests itself in the fact that no one seems to have a serious alternative to our present predicament. Our wilful optimism means that, despite the absence of alternatives, there is a general desire for change.

To *Change the World* has become the motto of a new generation. University-educated knowledge workers are toiling away in start-ups and social enterprises; working in peer production projects and on new crypto ventures that they hope will have an impact beyond the, often elusive, prospect of economic gain. Even when they work in corporate careers, the hope is that their efforts will contribute to some overall transformation. From the downright fraudulent (as when the desire for change is appropriated in slogans of corporate organizations whose aims are far from progressive), via the sometimes silly (like Post-it workshops) to the sincere and earnest toil of many, to be a *Changemaker* has become a common aspiration.¹

Clearly, the world needs changing. Virtually all serious observers agree that if we go on like this, the future will be grim. But what to change the world into? As of yet, nobody has envisioned a viable alternative to a social model in

what appears to be terminal decline, much less any realistic strategy for confronting an ecological crisis of potentially game-changing dimensions.

Industrial modernity – the experience of modernity that prevailed until around the mid-1970s – also valued change. Indeed, change has been at the core of the modern experience ever since it came around. In his classic work, with the appropriate title, borrowed from Marx and Engel’s Communist Manifesto, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman, the perhaps most famous theorist of modernity, described this condition as one of constant flux: ‘To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.’ The difference is that in industrial modernity, change came with a blueprint; there was a plan for the future, and everyone knew more or less what they were striving for (communism, liberal democracy, national sovereignty, etc.). Today this sense of direction has been lost: we are left with change itself, as something of an empty signifier. We have no idea what this change will lead to or what the resulting future might look like. Yet, for a wide range of people – much wider than the strata of middle-class knowledge workers for whom the label ‘Changemakers’ was originally designed – there is no doubt that change is necessary.²

In part the difficulty in imagining a direction for change results from a virtually complete colonization of the imaginary on the part of commercial culture, and the concomitant decline of politics and what used to be called the ‘Public Sphere’, a condition that Mark Fisher has called ‘capitalist realism’ and which I explore further in the next chapter.³ In part, it results from the radical nature of the ecological crisis ahead: a true singularity in the proper sense of the term, something for which all bets are off, and that we cannot see beyond. But perhaps another reason why we cannot imagine a different future is because it is still early days.

Indeed, to want to change the world without knowing exactly into what is not a historically new condition. It is a feature of what I call *industrious* modernity, a kind of modern experience that has been with us in the past. It

accompanied the transition *to* industrial capitalism in the West (and possibly marked other parts of the pre-industrial world as well). Industrious modernity was the experience of the European long sixteenth century (and, to some extent, of the medieval commercial revolution that preceded it). It was the experience of an emerging urban civil society organized around guilds and fraternities and built around new ideas of justice and freedom; of the ‘many-headed hydra’ of soldiers, sailors, beggars, convicts and other outcasts from a crumbling feudal order who, along with the new commoners, challenged ingrained notions of hierarchy and privilege. Starting with the sixteenth-century German peasant wars, the Protestants united these diverse experiences into a common movement for ‘change’ that came to dominate the emerging political scene in northern Europe and the colonial United States. According to Max Weber, the Protestants ushered in industrial modernity through their sheer industriousness, their hard work and self-sacrifice. They strove to improve themselves and the world around them, without really knowing what they wanted to achieve. Instead, their striving was clouded in the mystical concept of a ‘divine calling’. Like us, they had only a very vague idea of where they were headed, and they might not have liked the results of their strivings, had they come to know them. They were simply not able to see the future that they were in the process of making. Now a similar experience of industrious modernity is affirming itself again, as the ‘iron cage’ of industrial modernity is falling apart.⁴

To some extent, the return of industrious modernity is a cultural fact. It is the result of the successive dismantling of the Grand Narratives that marked industrial modernity, like communism, liberal democracy or the affluent consumer society, along with the social movements that they inspired. When there are no great schemes left to give direction, the only way to give political or at least civic significance to one’s life is to try to change one’s own circumstance, or at the most to do good and to have an impact in some abstract and generic sense. But industrious modernity is also supported by a particular material condition. Life in industrial modernity might have been alienating and boring, a life for *specialists without minds, pleasure-seekers without heart*, as Weber wrote in the concluding pages on his essay on *The Protestant*

Ethic. But at least people's existential security was in some sense shielded. You could toil on in your corporate job faithful that, somehow, in the grand scheme of things, what you did made a difference and contributed to a greater cause. When these grand narratives have evaporated, the 'bullshit' nature of many corporate jobs reveals itself. Indeed, David Graeber, who coined the term, suggests that around 40 per cent of workers in middle management jobs like PR, human resources, brand managers or financial consultants 'feel their jobs are pointless'. Many people now escape such careers if they can, sensing that a bullshit job will not allow them to make the kind of change they desire, or even realize their own ambitions. In addition, a growing number of people are cast out from corporate careers, because of redundancies, because what they do has been outsourced and they are forced to go freelance, or because they were never able to get on the first rung of the ladder in the first place, despite an expensive university degree. To these outcasts the existential threats of a precarious existence have to be faced head on. Industrious modernity is the experience of people who face insecurity without the shield of a corporate organization and ever less of a protective welfare state; people who have to eke out an existence in the middle, between the destitute reality of employment and the safety of a stable career. To 'Change the World' is the politics – or the political unconscious perhaps – of such precarity. It is a way of convincing yourself, rightly or wrongly, that you are doing something valuable and that your life has meaning. The protestant sects that Weber wrote about worked much in the same way.⁵

And this industrious condition is becoming ever more *common*. Indeed, something similar has always been part of the modern experience for ordinary people. Even in the organized societies of industrial modernity, many operated outside of regulated labour markets or secure careers. Think of the family restaurants and small boarding houses that proliferated in European working-class neighbourhoods until quite recently; food carts on the streets of Singapore or Mumbai; the *magliari* from Naples who travelled quite undisturbed between Paris and Berlin peddling knock-off textiles in the middle of World War II, and of course the informal economy offering sometimes illicit goods and services. In the

conclusion to his magnum opus on the history of capitalism in the West, Fernand Braudel marvelled at the fact that despite almost half a millennium of increasingly sophisticated capitalist institutions, there remained 'a sort of lower layer of the economy', a competitive economy different from what he considered 'true capitalism'. This industrious economy – small-scale, flexible and semi-formal – has remained more prevalent in some places, like India or Southern Italy, but it was never entirely eradicated even in the highly organized societies of northern Europe or the US. Now such small-scale, labour-intensive enterprise is becoming an option for a wider range of actors.⁶

The disappearance of stable industrial jobs in the West (and increasingly also in Asia as factories automate) and the transformation of the countryside in Africa and South America due to land grabbing and climate change, is pushing a generation of people out of traditional life forms. Many of them migrate, often not simply out of necessity but also because they feel that they deserve a better life for themselves and their families. Indeed, the dream of a better life has probably never been as widespread and tangible as it is now, as the features of a life lived with the latest iPhone in hand are visible on the cheap screens that have become ubiquitous even in the poorest of households. They try their luck in booming megacities that are unable to absorb them within an official labour market that is itself contracting. They attempt to make the hazardous journey into Europe, the US or some other part of the 'homeland' of industrial modernity. For most, an entrepreneurial solution remains the only viable alternative to slave-like labour conditions in textile sweatshops or in the tomato fields of Southern Italy, or risky careers at the entry level of the criminal economy. For most, the aspiration is to set up your own business, to be your own man (or woman), to create a life that is a little better, a little more dignified and a little more meaningful.

The real novelty is that such popular industrious entrepreneurs are now increasingly joined by middle-class university graduates, who historically used to prefer stable employment to the vagaries of entrepreneurship. Such knowledge worker entrepreneurship is often a necessity. But it is also often a choice. To many, the bullshit nature of a corporate job

becomes obvious after a few years and the aspiration is to do something else that is more fulfilling, creative or simply freer. To many, the ethical and existential imperative to change the world finds its expression in business and entrepreneurship. These tendencies will probably become even more pronounced in the future as automation and economic contraction combine to make corporate careers, whether middle-class or proletarian, even rarer to come by.

Capitalist restructuring has moved the industrious economy from the margins into the centre. Ever more the production of goods and services and, increasingly, innovation – at least of the adaptive, piecemeal variety – is relegated to small-scale labour-intensive companies. Already in the 1980s the automobile and electronics industry started to outsource component manufacturing to small labour-intensive factories, mostly located in what used to be the ‘periphery’ of the world economy. Corporate services followed suit. Today, the platform economy is creating new transport and delivery services organized in the form of a multitude of formally autonomous enterprises, often one-man operations, and the innovation needed to adapt digital technologies to new market niches is outsourced to thousands of start-ups.

However, the affirmation of the industrious sector is also due to the new commons that have resulted from the digitalization and globalization of capitalist production and culture, along with the affirmation of a number of alternatives like Free/Open Source Software or Peer Production communities. These new commons make it easier and cheaper to organize complex business operations. Start-ups can be created on the cheap, cheap electronics can be imported and distributed on European and African popular markets though the complex coordination of a multitude of small-scale producers and intermediaries. Like the commons that supported the ‘petty commodity producers’ that built an emerging market society in the European Middle Ages, the new digital commons have substantially empowered contemporary industrious entrepreneurship. The industrious economy is not equipped to engage in genuinely disruptive innovation; it is not the place where nuclear fusion or quantum computing will come from. It is, however, very good, often better than the corporate giants that remain from the industrial age, to adapt existing

technological solutions to popular needs and new market niches. It is perhaps possible that new commonly available technologies like blockchains and similar distributed ledgers, or plug-and-play software for data mining will render this small-scale industrious economy even more innovative in this sense. At the horizon we might see dodgy back-alley entrepreneurs churning out genetically modified tomato seeds fit to survive in the altered conditions of the Anthropocene.

The return of industrious relations of production, of petty commodity production albeit in a high-tech version, has been driven by capitalist restructuring. But it is also driving such restructuring. And it is already driving a substantial transformation in the nature of digital capitalism. Platform capitalism, the dominance of consumer-oriented platforms like Uber, Facebook or Amazon along with platform labour markets like Fiverr or 99d can be understood as a strategy that aims at containing and controlling a multitude of small-scale enterprises by owning the markets that they operate on and taxing the transactions that they engage in. Indeed, since the 1980s, the institutional structure of today’s platforms have evolved as a way of controlling extended corporate supply chains. Current plans for the industrial internet, or Industry 4.0, aim at extending such control by centralizing data gathered from a vast multitude of acts of production and consumption across national economies. As I will suggest later in the book, we might see an extension of this platform paradigm into a model of capitalism that combines mass entrepreneurship at the bottom, with top-down despotic control exercised via algorithms and big data.

However, industrious modernity also points beyond capitalism in important respects. Like the ‘civic economy’ of fourteenth-century Franciscans, today’s petty producers imagine a decentralized market economy marked by transparency and relative equality. A world where economic action remains embedded in moral and civic responsibility; where ‘value sovereignty’ allows you to stay on the market while being true to your ethical aspirations. Whether and in what form such an industrious economy might survive remains an open question. It is, however, quite certain that the onset of the Anthropocene will accelerate the current crisis of industrial capitalism, just like the ecological crisis

of the fourteenth century broke the backbone of feudalism. The accumulation of dysfunctionalities that will most likely mark the future of capitalism will open up new spaces for a decentralized industrious economy to affirm itself and grow more attractive as it addresses a large range of popular needs and provides the new forms of innovation needed, much like the crisis of feudalism in the fourteenth century provided a space in which the guilds and the commons-based market economy that they supported could grow. Maybe such a decentralized industrious economy might become capable of deploying state power in its own interest, maybe inventing radically new political forms along the way. Perhaps it will take the form of an informally regulated global bazaar economy operating out of the back alleys of the global planet of slums, building new life in the ruins. The latter might be the most likely scenario (and it seems the one towards which the intellectual pessimism of contemporary social theorists is converging).⁷

The return of industrious relations of production in a digitally empowered version is possibly the most important contradiction that marks contemporary capitalism, and it will be a crucial source of that system's future evolution or, perhaps, transformation. This book is an attempt to sketch out the emerging features of the contemporary condition of 'industrious modernity' and to speculate on its role in the coming transition, at least in the relatively short-run perspective of the immediate future of digital capitalism we know it. The aim is not to promote a singular Great Idea, nor to offer any hope for future redemption, but rather to attempt a *realistic* sociological analysis of how contemporary developments might pan out.

The argument is divided into four chapters. The next chapter, 'The Crisis of Digital Capitalism', sets the stage and provides background (it also defines some basic concepts like 'capitalism'). The chapter deals with the present sense of stasis and our consequent inability to imagine a future that is different from the present. The premise here is that far from delivering a technological fix, digital technologies have been used to conserve the essential features of an industrial modernity in more or less permanent crisis. With this in mind, I have taken inspiration in the late Mark Fisher's essay

on 'Capitalist Realism'. It succinctly spells out and dissects a condition where, as Frederic Jameson originally remarked, 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to see the end of capitalism'. My contribution rests with an attempt to understand why this is the case. How did the economic and social forces unleashed in the nineteenth-century Great Transformation subsequently turn in upon themselves to create a situation where, to once again use Mark Fisher's words, 'culture persists without the new' and even 'the young are no longer capable of producing surprises'?⁸ How did digital technologies, once so pregnant with hopes of social and economic transformation, end up preserving, and sometimes reinforcing, the status quo? To make sense of this I present a (very short) story of the development, consolidation and crisis of industrial *capitalism*.

The development and successive decline of industrial capitalism has also generated two elements that are now pointing beyond it, towards a different kind of modernity. First, the 'real subsumption' of potentially all social relations, the networking and inclusion of life itself as a potential source of value within a 'bio-capitalism' that operates on a global scale, has realized new global commons in the form of skills, symbolic and cognitive resources and freely available technologies and platforms. These commons are ever more used in ways that evade or contrast with the logic of industrial capitalism. Second, the decline of industrial capitalism has created a growing reserve army of underemployed and highly skilled individuals who are using these new commons in order to realize a different kind of modernity, with their own life projects as well as with wider 'communities' in mind.

The long stasis of industrial capitalism has led to growing rates of passivity and depression. Mental illness and opiate addiction are both on the rise. Exclusion and lack of prospects feed the many millenarian movements driven by religious or political extremism that are proliferating in today's 'age of anger'.⁹ At the same time, however, we are witnessing a new wave of entrepreneurial activity around the world, particularly among younger people for whom a start-up or a small business venture has become a possible response to a tighter labour market that offers fewer opportunities as well as to a social condition that offers little hope and few

alternatives. Chapter 3, ‘The Industrious Economy’, provides an impressionistic survey of this multifaceted world: the start-ups and hipster businesses that proliferate in big cities; the small agricultural enterprises that mark the countryside of Southern Europe (as well as many Asian countries); the business archipelagos that have formed around Free or Open Source Software; blockchain technologies and other new digital commons; and the rise of the self-employed that has become a characteristic of Western labour markets. Alongside these, we have the dense networks of small-scale traders that constitute the ‘pirate modernity’ or ‘globalization from below’ that provide access to consumer goods to the poorer parts of the world’s population that large capitalist companies have forgotten about long ago.

This industrious economy tends to be labour intensive and capital poor. Earnings tend to be low and motivations are wider than the strictly economic, like being creative, realizing oneself or simply finding a more dignified or less boring life. As Braudel pointed out, this economy is located in the middle, in between the Great Exchange of financial capital and the *longue durée* of everyday life; between the power of capital and the drudgery of labour. This middle layer is populated by downwardly mobile knowledge workers unable to reproduce the privileged class position of their parents, and of upwardly mobile people from popular backgrounds, like the urban migrant who puts up a cell phone repair store and becomes an employer. Whether privileged or proletarian in origin, these actors are converging into a new middle class or petty bourgeoisie, which is becoming the carrying stratum of a new industrious modernity. Increasingly they have come to share a similar world view and material condition.

But the industrious economy is also in the middle in the sense of being in the midst of life. Industrious modernity is an expression of an economic reality that remains embedded in social relations, where economic rationality is not completely separated from the value rationality of everyday life. This can be a matter of traditional value horizons, however revamped, as in the case of the Senegalese traders who peddle knock-off bags on the streets of Southern Europe while acting as part of a transnational community held together by common faith and with strong communitarian obligations. It can be a

matter of communities constructed anew, as in the case of the many co-working spaces that work hard to make members feel part of something grander and more meaningful, or the many blockchain ventures that take the form of co-living experiments, combining work with affective and relational life.

The diverse expressions of this industrious economy are converging around a common economic ethic, marked by a common emphasis on the need or even obligation to change the world through enterprise. I suggest that the story behind this is more complex than what common references to an all-pervasive neoliberal ideology might suggest. True, entrepreneurship has become a new pop-cultural icon by means of numerous television shows and self-help manuals of the Oprah Winfrey variety. It has also been inculcated in the younger generation by means of a thorough socialization in the realities of neoliberal existence, where you are made to think of yourself as an entrepreneur who is inclined to take risks and maximize the value of one’s assets. But entrepreneurship is not simply something that is hammered into the heads of the young by teachers, social workers and career counsellors. It is also something that is embraced by a large number of people, a far larger number, arguably, than those who still engage in politics in the classic, twentieth-century sense of the term. For these people, entrepreneurship is not simply an economic activity. It also comes with a vision of social transformation. For some, this is simply a matter of improving their own lives or those of their family or friends. For many, however, entrepreneurship remains the only viable way to ‘change the world’ or ‘make a difference’. Entrepreneurship has become the perhaps most widespread manifestation of what Hannah Arendt called ‘action’, the civic activity that ever since Aristotle has distinguished ‘man’ as a political animal. It has taken over from politics as the main field in which such action can unfold in the pragmatic everyday of ‘actually doing something’. At the very least, it has become a way to acquire what sociologist Anthony Giddens has called ‘ontological security’, a sense that one’s life has meaning and makes sense.¹⁰

Indeed, today’s industrious modernity is very similar to the modernity brought forth by Weber’s Protestants. Like today’s

industrious entrepreneurs, the members of seventeenth-century puritan sects were cast out or had fled a collapsing feudal society. Like today's industrious entrepreneurs, they found themselves in an expanding market society for which there was no direction, no historical precedent. Like today, they invented the idea of work as a calling as a way to make sense of this condition. (As we shall see, this idea has antecedents that go further back, at least to the millennial movements of the eleventh century that rose out of the first contradictions of feudalism.) Indeed, there is a clear genealogy that connects key elements of the contemporary industrious ethic, like in the notion of work as guided by some sort of 'calling' or the doctrine of 'disruptive innovation' to the magical thinking of, in particular, American Protestantism.

Chapter 4, 'Industrious Capitalism', takes a closer look at how the conditions for the contemporary industrious economy have emerged out of the last decades of 'post-Fordist' restructuring. In particular, I point at the rise of an 'immaterial' service economy, the globalization of production (both material and immaterial; in fact the two tend to converge in the digital economy) and the growth of new planetary commons. The chapter goes on to examine the capitalist responses to the industriousness that results from these developments, in the form of the start-up/venture capital system and its product, an economy of platform 'unicorns'. The conclusion is that far from realizing the full potential of the digital technologies that stand at the heart of the new industriousness, the current capitalist response tends to standardize innovation and stifle economic growth. Overall, it is a conservative response, not particularly suited to valorizing the potential of the new relations of production that have been unleashed by digital connectivity. (My contribution to contemporary debates on 'digital labour' would thus be to suggest that the main problem is not that Facebook exploits its users, but that it does not exploit them very efficiently.) Possibly a Chinese cycle of accumulation, combining mass entrepreneurship and platform governance with a coherent strategy for social and economic development might prove a more efficient solution, at least in the short run. The chapter ends by examining the social and economic models that are emerging from the industrious economy itself: from experiments in platform

cooperatives, via new guild-like organizations and peer production projects. The survey suggests that rather than alternatives to markets and exchange (as many of the more ideologically conscious of these alternatives claim to be), the cooperative or 'commonist' part of the industrious economy instead promotes a new kind of civic economy where small-scale market exchange is embedded in communitarian values. Similar to early modern notions of a civic economy, proponents of *commonism* imagine a society built on simple commodity exchange between roughly egalitarian actors who remain true to their value horizons. To date, few of these initiatives are able to sustain themselves economically (with the exception, perhaps of the alternative food economy). Most remain dependent on the 'true' capitalist economy or on state funding in some form. However, technological and institutional innovation is proceeding and already in 2018, the world of blockchain ventures has managed to create a substantial autonomous circuit of venture capital. Whether or not this crypto-economy is sustainable, it represents a tangible alternative to the official venture capital system: a non-capitalist market for capital, in effect.

Overall, this is not an optimistic book. Unlike influential thinkers like Paul Mason or Jeremy Rifkin, I do not suggest that the present developments in the digital economy will make us stumble, almost inadvertently, into communism. Nor do I think that the contemporary crisis – of capitalism or of the environment – will kick new life into old social movements and that these will somehow take over and take control, bringing us back to the safety and direction of industrial modernity once again.¹¹ In the final chapter, 'A New Industrious Revolution?', I will instead propose that the decline of feudalism can offer an alternative historical parallel with which to make sense of the present situation. In the social sciences, as well as in radical politics, we are used to modelling our ideas on the events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and we are used to thinking of social change as revolutionary. In many ways, however, our times look more like the fourteenth century. Capitalism is going through a period of what I call 're-feudalization', where it is becoming less able to valorize the productive potential that it has realized. This leads to growing polarization of wealth

and higher levels of exploitation. The serfs of yesteryear fled the countryside or were pushed out by processes of enclosure and land reclamations. In the cities they engaged in industrious commercial activity using common skills and resources. They went on to form guilds and corporations that not only protected them from market fluctuations, but also provided new common resources and a new sense of identity and purpose. These institutions and the new life-forms that they supported grew to become an increasingly attractive alternative as the crisis of feudalism deepened. The environmental disasters of the fourteenth century brought that crisis to bear and essentially broke the backbone of the old feudal order. What followed was a period of conflicts, wars and rebellions, as well as new possibilities. Religious and social movements proliferated and new economic and political models emerged. Gradually a new politics took shape, which was able to usher in modernity as we have come to know it. Beneath these grand events there was the *longue durée* of purposeful, sometimes passionate, labour-intensive enterprise, of what contemporary economic historians (mostly referring to the later period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) have come to call an 'industrious revolution'. Industriousness, however, is not revolutionary, it is a matter of incremental piecemeal change that takes place within a social model that appears to be unaltered at the surface, until it bursts through in the spectacular events that we associate with the origins of modernity.

In early modern Europe, capitalism could eventually break through and reshape the world in its image. This 'Great Divergence' by means of which capitalist Europe took off on a spectacular trajectory of economic growth and world conquest depended on a number of conditions – interstate competition that allowed capitalist interests to expand, a new energy paradigm, a world open to colonization and conquest – most of which are not present today. Above all, there is no 'spatial fix', no further expansion that can solve the present crisis and allow capitalist accumulation to go on. This points at a fundamental difference in relation to the European early modern experience; rather than evolving, capitalism is likely to become increasingly conservative and, for a variety of reasons, less relevant to a growing number of people. It looks

like the system might contract, rather than expand. The likely outcome is a gradual but accelerating collapse, as systemic dysfunctionalities, ecological disasters and increasing costs related to resource scarcity overlap. In this drawn-out period of systemic collapse, industrious modernity might provide the blueprint for a different social model, able to survive, and perhaps even prosper, in the 'capitalist ruins' left behind.

Notes

Chapter 1: To Change the World: On Industrious Modernity

- 1 The quote appears in various versions in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, along with the sensation, which many of us share today, that the 'Old is dying, but the new cannot yet be born'; see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith), New York: International Publishers, 1971. The term 'Changemakers' was introduced and trademarked by the Ashoka Foundation in 2010, see <https://trademarks.justia.com/779/24/changemakers-77924088.html> and <https://www.changemakers.com/>. On Changemakers as an identity, see Carolina Bandinelli and Adam Arvidsson, 'Brand yourself a ChangeMaker', *Journal of Macromarketing*, 33(1), 2013, pp. 67–71.
- 2 Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982, p. 15. Modernity is admittedly a vague term. Berman uses it to designate a particular mode of experiencing the world. I use it as a 'sensitizing concept'; a tool to think with that does not so much designate or refer to a precisely defined 'thing' as much as it opens up a point of view. On how the future lost its directions, see Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*, London: Verso, 2013; and, earlier, Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity?* London: Sage, 1992.
- 3 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* London: Zero Books, 2009.
- 4 Although he stays away from explicit 'value judgements', the last part of the essay on *The Protestant Ethic* suggests that Weber did not think that the Protestants would have liked it in the iron cage of industrial modernity that they contributed to build; see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Capitalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [1904–5]. On the many-headed hydra, see Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000. The origins of notions of civil society in the 'commercial revolution' of medieval Europe will be discussed in further detail in chapter 5.
- 5 See David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018. On the puritan sects as an answer to precarity, see Michael Waltzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965, pp. 308–16.
- 6 Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century. Vol III. The Perspective of the World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1984, p. 630.
- 7 For examples of such neo-apocalyptic social thought, see Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015; and Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- 8 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, op. cit., p. 3.
- 9 Pankaj Mishra, *The Age of Anger*, London: Penguin, 2017. On depression and soaring rates of drug addiction in the UK, see Nicola Slawson, 'Young Britons have never been unhappier', *The Guardian*, 5 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/05/young-people-have-never-been-unhappier-research-suggests> (accessed 8 May 2018).
- 10 According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, the rate of 'early stage entrepreneurial activity' (i.e., having started a business in the last three years) ranges from 16.8 per cent in 'factor-driven economies' (i.e. what used to be known as 'developing economies') to 9.1 per cent in 'innovation-driven' (i.e. 'developed') economies. Depending on the contexts, between one tenth and on eighth of the people aged 18–64 are engaged in early-stage entrepreneurial activity. Between 67 and 58 per cent perceive entrepreneurship to be a 'good career choice'; see Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2016–17, pp. 18–22,

available at <https://www.gemconsortium.org/report> (accessed 8 May 2018). On action, see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958. On ‘ontological security’, see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- 11 Paul Mason, *Postcapitalism: A Guide to our Future*, London: Macmillan, 2016; Jeremy Rifkin, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society: The Internet of Things, the Collaborative Commons, and the Eclipse of Capitalism*, London: St. Martin’s Press, 2014.