

**The tempo of wageless work:
E. P. Thompson's time-sense at the edges of Rio de Janeiro**

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Abstract: This article puts E. P. Thompson's writings on time-sense in conversation with the temporality of work on a garbage dump in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. At this site, several thousand urban poor (*catadores*) collect recyclables for a living outside relations of wage labor. The lived experience of "woven time" on the dump, which combines labor with other activities of the everyday, has fashioned what these workers call "a different rhythm of life." Diverging from other temporalities of neoliberal capitalism, such as "ruptured time," woven time emerges as an important dimension of a life well lived, as conceived by *catadores*. Attention to the micro-temporalities of wageless work reveals how precarious forms of labor in contemporary capitalism constitute processes of subject-making that both parallel and diverge from the transition to wage labor that Thompson describes in his social history of capitalism.

Keywords: labor, waste, temporality, urban poverty, everyday life, subjectivity, Brazil

But if the purposive notation of time-use becomes less compulsive, then men might have to re-learn some of the arts of living lost in the industrial revolution: how to fill the interstices of their days with enriched, more leisurely, personal and social relations; how to break down once more the barriers between work and life.

—E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism"

When I asked Miguel¹ why his supervisor at a waste management company had fired him a few years back, he told me that it was because he was “restless” (*alterado*). Miguel worked the nightshift and during the dinner hour, he never stayed at work. Instead, he liked to go to a nearby bar that played popular dance music. He would drink his beer, dance, and eventually make his way back to work. One day, a company manager caught him “in the act,” as he put it, and fired him on the spot. “I always completed my assigned tasks,” Miguel recounted. “But it was considered a work disturbance, you know? That manager was always on everyone’s case.”

I first met Miguel on a garbage dump in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, where several thousand of Rio’s poor, known as *catadores*, collected recyclables for a living. Until its closure in June 2012, this dump served for over three decades as the primary waste disposal site for the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro and was considered the largest garbage dump in Latin America. Miguel began collecting on the dump in his early twenties, following a police crackdown on unlicensed street vendors in Rio’s train stations where he had long shined shoes and sold popsicles to commuters. After several years of collecting on the dump, Miguel heard that Queiroz Galvão—the company that had newly won a city bid to conduct the day-to-day operations of the dump—was hiring. He applied and got a job on the nightshift, wetting the dirt roads to keep the dust down and picking up debris that passing trucks scattered along the street that led to the dump. But within a few months, Miguel had lost his job and was back collecting on the dump. As Miguel saw it, he lost his job *not* because he was negligent in his work but rather, because he was “restless.”

I have often wondered what E. P. Thompson, who amassed in his histories an astounding collection of worker grievances, would have thought of Miguel’s story of restlessness. Writing

about a very different moment in the history of capitalism when industrial wage labor was in its infancy, Thompson documents a host of objections among workers in eighteenth-century England, including resentment toward the factory bell, the demand to maintain a regular pace of work, and the monotony of the work day (1963: 305-306). Such complaints appear throughout Thompson's magnum opus, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), but it is in his essay, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism" (1967), that Thompson devotes sustained analytical attention to issues concerning time. A historical account of the rise of clock time in English society from the seventeenth to early nineteenth century, Thompson's essay traces shifting perceptions of time in an era of profound economic change. Specifically, the numerous conflicts that Thompson chronicles between waged workers and their employers over fixed hours—disputes not unlike that between Miguel and his manager—lead him to see changing labor conditions as a primary source of new time-sense. That is, for Thompson, perceptions of time in capitalism cannot be understood apart from the lived experience of work.

This article places my ethnography of catadores in conversation with Thompson's writings on time-sense. I am similarly interested in the relationship between time and the lived experience of work. However, I explore this link here not to illuminate capitalism's origins but rather, to understand its contemporary evolutions. In recent years, increasing unemployment, underemployment, and job insecurity in post-industrial societies alongside the continuing expansion of informal labor, especially in cities of the global South, have led many to perceive a decline in the hegemony of wage labor (Denning 2010). Such changing labor conditions have furthermore generated a renewed theoretical interest in time, particularly in literature on post-Fordism, post-Socialism, precarity, and economic crisis. One need only scan the titles of major works on these issues, across the humanities and social sciences, to find a host of temporal

references: nostalgia, memory, hauntings, the past, the present, futures, prophecy, millennialism, punctuality, timeliness, and time itself.² Yet, as I discuss in more detail below, few of these studies focus on the actual experience of work—its duration, pace, frequency, sequence, synchronization, and interludes—as a source of new time-sense. If, as Thompson argues, the transition to wage labor in industrial capitalism gave rise to new temporalities, then we might ask how the transition to precarious forms of labor in contemporary capitalism is refashioning conceptions and experiences of time.

In what follows, I address this question by exploring the work experiences of *catadores* in relation to time. Garbage trucks unloaded on the dump twenty-four hours a day, enabling *catadores* to collect at any time of the day or night. They also worked outside relations of wage labor, collecting recyclables (plastics, paper, cardboard, or scrap metal) and selling this material to one of several dozen scrap dealers scattered throughout the neighborhood, called Jardim Gramacho, at the base of the dump. However, most *catadores* I came to know in Jardim Gramacho, like Miguel, had at least some experience with both waged and unwaged labor. The older generation of men, mainly migrants from the rural Northeast, had worked during their youth in the industrial zone surrounding Jardim Gramacho that boomed in the 1960s and 1970s until the decline of the steel and shipbuilding sectors in the 1980s initiated a larger process of deindustrialization in Rio de Janeiro (Ribeiro and Telles 2000). This period saw both the consolidation of democracy following Brazil's military dictatorship as well as the ushering in of neoliberal economic policies in the aftermath of Latin America's debt crisis—nicknamed Brazil's "lost decade" (Caldeira 2000). Neoliberal policies impacted Rio's poor from multiple angles, beyond the loss of jobs brought about by the deindustrialization of the city. For example, urban revitalization programs in Rio promoted the privatization of public space, thereby

preventing unlicensed street vendors from selling goods in highly visible areas of the city and contributing to the enclosure of Rio's "informal economies" (Oliveira 2008). Most of the youth, as well as the women, who collected on the dump had previously worked as ambulant vendors on trains, buses, commuter stops, streets, and beaches. Such work was often interspersed with stints of waged employment in the service sector, such as loading and unloading store delivery trucks or (for women) providing home care and domestic labor. Most *catadores* had therefore experienced, throughout their work histories, a range of work temporalities.

During the sixteen months of fieldwork during which I lived in Jardim Gramacho and collected alongside *catadores* on the dump, I was struck by the numerous temporal references that arose in conversations with *catadores*.³ Some of these, like Miguel's restlessness, indexed a bodily experience of time. Others, such as the *brequi*—a multivalent term used on the dump to signal various kinds of diversion—referred to a temporal practice. And still others, like allusions to a different "rhythm of life," captured a particular relationship to time. In the sections below, I place each of these expressions in dialogue with Thompson's writings on time-sense. In doing so, I seek to draw attention to contemporary shifts in labor conditions as a historical process with both connections and disjunctures to the rise of industrial wage labor with which Thompson was concerned. I also draw insights from Thompson's analysis of labor as a human experience that shapes perceptions, inner sensibilities, values, and desires. Ultimately, I argue that the work of *catadores* forges a temporality that I call "woven time," interlacing work with other dimensions of the everyday. Though woven time emerges from the grueling conditions of wageless work on the dump, it also constitutes what *catadores* perceive as a valued art of living.

Precarious times

It is perhaps unsurprising that time has emerged as a central concern in studies of precarious work and unemployment given that one of the defining features of post-Fordist labor is its irregular and uncertain temporalities. Whereas Fordism regimented time in the workday and work week and cemented the expectation of full-time, life-long employment (Muehlebach and Shoshan 2012), its afterlife has been associated with part-time, temporary, “flexible” forms of work or with no work at all. The lack of stable employment, especially among youth, has furthermore reshaped orientations to the future. Life stages are being delayed or altogether disrupted (Hansen 2005). Modernist narratives of time as linear progress towards an incrementally better future are becoming unsettled (Allison 2012; Jeffrey 2010). The present is increasingly felt as ongoing or suspended, as if one were simply treading water (Berlant 2011). Indeed, the very concept of precarity is often expressed as a relationship to time—caught between a nostalgic attachment to (Fordist) norms of the past and anxiety over uncertain futures.

Ethnographers interested in the experience of time in changing conditions of employment have emphasized the ways particular cultural and historical dynamics shape this experience. For example, the disruption of the notion of linear progress figures differently for Indian youth who were raised during postcolonial projects of “development” (Jeffrey 2010) than for Japanese citizens accustomed to the family-corporate relationship of the post-war period that fused gainful employment with investment in children as the next (more prosperous) generation (Allison 2012). Nonetheless, two interrelated themes cross-cut this ethnographic literature. The first concerns the impact of unemployment and underemployment on life trajectories. Without established work, young people (especially men) are unable to marry, move into their own home,

acquire certain commodities, or fulfill other desires and obligations associated with conceptions of adulthood in a particular context (Cole 2005; Hansen 2005). As a result, time is experienced as ruptured (Jeffrey 2010), stopped (Allison 2012), or at a standstill (Shoshan 2012). Secondly, ethnographic studies of time and precarious employment have often explored what it is that people do in these periods of suspended time. These everyday practices of managing excess time include drinking tea to “kill time” (Ralph 2008), obtaining consecutive university degrees to “just pass time” (Jeffrey 2010), and migrating to escape from boredom (Mains 2007).

I draw from these studies an emphasis on time as a site of novel cultural production. However, I am interested in temporalities, beyond those of ruptured or suspended time, that emerge in the actual experience of work performed in precarious conditions. Though seemingly resonant, Miguel’s restlessness that I describe above differs markedly from the waiting and boredom of unemployed youth. For one, Miguel becomes restless in the context of work, not in conditions of unemployment. Ethnographic accounts of a felt need to pass time have tended to focus on urban, educated, lower middle-class youth who are holding out for more desirable jobs. For Rio’s poor, precarious employment translates not into a state of idleness but rather into the pursuit of various forms of work, many of which are wageless or categorized as “informal.” This suggests that for many laboring poor in neoliberal capitalism, work itself continues to be a site in which temporalities are produced and fashioned.

It is for this reason that I find Thompson’s studies (1963; 1967) especially useful for the important theoretical work on time being done in anthropology today. First, his analysis draws attention to transformations in the experience of labor as an important, though not exclusive, source of new time-senses. Focusing primarily on eighteenth-century England, he examines a period when orientation to the clock was not yet fully formed among workers acclimating to

industrial wage labor. To the frustration of early industrialists, many workers engaged in other activities while “at work,” continued to observe customary holidays such as “Saint Monday,” and worked less often when wages increased. The penal code of an iron works factory, for example, included a list of pay deductions “for being at taverns, alehouses, coffee houses, breakfast, dinner, playing, sleeping, smoaking, singing, reading of news history, quarelling, contention, disputes or anything forreign to my business, any way loytering” (Thompson 1967: 81). Thompson interprets such conflicts as resulting from the co-existence of two different conceptions of time. Those new to wage labor, Thompson argues, were accustomed to the time-sense of task orientation, following “natural” rhythms like the tides or the day and night, attending to what seems necessary at a given moment, and rarely distinguishing between work and other dimensions of life. In contrast, the clock time of the factory was abstract, linear, and quantifiable, flowing independently of any particular activity.⁴ It enabled labor to be uniformly measured, a requirement for its commodification, and organized production by the decontextualized unit of the work day (Adam 1990: 112; Postone 1993: 212). As a result, “work,” the employer’s time, became a separate category from “life,” a worker’s own time (Thompson 1967: 61).

Several anthropologists and historians have critiqued Thompson’s distinction between task orientation and clock time for homogenizing and simplifying conceptions of time in non-capitalist societies and for failing to account for multiple temporalities, a point to which I return later in this article (see Glennie and Thrift 1996; Pickering 2004; Smith 1986; Whipp 1987). Here I want to highlight how Thompson, by tracing the process of “making” workers into waged employees, opens up questions as to how different conditions of work shape inner sensibilities, including notions of time. That is, Thompson’s history of industrial capitalism offers a

framework for bringing political economy and subjectivity under the same analytical lens. It points to the question of how labor configures modes of being in the world.

The following section considers this question in conditions outside of wage labor by exploring the pace, rhythms, and interludes of work on the dump. While literature on post-Fordism has illuminated orientations to time at the scale of years or the past-present-future, my analysis focuses more on the micro-temporalities of the day or even the hour. In Miguel's story, restlessness indexed a particular bodily experience of his work schedule as a waged employee. He found it difficult to remain still during his dinner break and to adhere to the rigid structure of the set hour. His experience suggests that rhythms on the dump cultivated, among *catadores*, a different feel for time.

A break

My work partner, Eva, and I had one last burlap sack to fill. Rather than carry cardboard from the spot where garbage had been dumped to the staging area where we had left our other three sacks, we decided to plop our last sack in the midst of the garbage. The unloading zone had moved earlier that morning, meaning that garbage trucks were now heading to the other side of the dump. Furthermore, the tractor had broken down, leaving the pile of remaining garbage undisturbed. The absence of vehicular traffic allowed us to work calmly and quickly in the hope of filling our last sack before the sweltry summer sun became unbearable.

“Come over!” shouted one of Eva's friends, Vidal. “Come and take a *brequi* [pronounced bráy-kee] with us. Leonel is making a big soup.”

There was still space in our burlap sack to squeeze in a few more kilos of cardboard, but Eva and I tied it up and headed over to the spot where Vidal was lounging with four other *catadores*.

“Here, take a seat on the living room sofa,” Vidal joked, as he greeted us, pointing to a wooden crate and an upside-down bucket. Mineiro was lying underneath a makeshift tent constructed out of a torn blue tarp extended between three sticks. Fabinho and Nico were each resting on large metal containers. Behind them, two faded beach umbrellas were strategically placed to shield the gathering spot from the late morning sun.

Mineiro began to fidget with a radio, making small adjustments to the tuning dial and bent antenna. Eventually, a rap song broke out from the static.

“Hey, Mineiro! Hey, sing us that rap, the ‘Rap from the Favela,’” Vidal prodded him. Instead, Mineiro broke into an impressive imitation of a famous DJ in Rio singing a popular *funk* song.

“You missed our dance last night!” Vidal laughed as he swung to Mineiro’s beat.

Leonel handed me an old butter container full of boiling soup. “See if the soup is good,” he said as he passed a second butter container to Eva. As I stirred the soup and waited for it to cool, I noticed that it contained cuts of beef and sausage as well as a variety of vegetables – tomatoes, potatoes, collard greens, onions, peppers, and carrots—all reclaimed from the waste around us. As we ate our soup, Eva asked Vidal if they could keep an eye on our sacks, since we would soon be moving to the new unloading zone.

“No problem,” Vidal told us. He then yelled over to Leonel to help him pull our last burlap sack over to the spot where we had left the others. When Vidal returned, he insisted that we have coffee before we started collecting again. He poured coffee into the cut-off bottom of a

clear plastic water bottle, a type of plastic called *crystal* or crystal in the jargon of the recycling industry. As he handed the cup to Eva, he joked that for us, he would only use “crystal” glasses. We sat there for a while, slowly sipping the sweet coffee.

Eventually Vidal announced, “I’m still going to get a move on today (*rolar*). Soon I’ll get to work. I’m going to hustle.”

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Though most *catadores* do not make such elaborate meals on the dump as Vidal and Leonel, I found the *brequi* to be a common part of the daily activities of *catadores*. The usage of *brequi* here is a unique linguistic invention of *catadores* in Jardim Gramacho. In general Brazilian Portuguese, this word, derived from the English homonyms “break” and “brake,” is used in the sense of a “coffee break” at a conference (written in English in an event program), in reference to “break dancing,” or to signify a car’s brakes. Among *catadores*, the word *brequi* referred instead to a wide range of objects including a cigarette, alcohol, a meal, a rented shack, and even a person. “Give me a *brequi* of a cigarette (*me da um brequi dum cigarro ai*)” was a request to bum a cigarette. “Did you rent a *brequi* down below?” (*vocês foram alugar um brequi la embaixo?*) was a way to ask others if they rented a shack at the base of the dump to have a place to wash up, change clothes, and rest after working. “He was a strong *brequi*” (*ele foi um brequi forte*) was used to describe a *catador* named Paulo who joked around a lot, sometimes sitting in the path of the tractor that flattens out the piles of unloaded garbage; he’d cross his legs, hold a newspaper in front of him, and shout at the tractor driver that he was a “pussy” (*babaca*). Though these usages can seem disparate, they all refer to some kind of diversion, fun, play, joking, and relaxation. The meal we shared together, as well as the entire experience of stopping collection and hanging out, was a *brequi*.

It might be tempting to think of the *brequi* as non-work time or the time of leisure. *Catadores* tended to shift between periods of greater rest and periods of intense collecting, reflected in Vidal's assertion that later that day, he would hustle. However, I found that a *brequi* often included aspects of work or occurred in the midst of collecting. As Eva and I shared a *brequi* with Vidal, Leonel, Mineiro, and Fabinho, we talked about how the unloading zone had moved, arranged for Vidal to watch over our sacks for us, and received a favor from Vidal and Leonel who carried our last heavy sack to the spot where the rest of our material was tied up, ready to load on the truck the following day. These were all important work-related tasks that enabled Eva and I to complete the four sacks we had been filling that morning and move on to the new unloading zone. There were also more subtle ways that the work of reclaiming objects from waste entered into our *brequi*. By tinkering with a radio to get it to play us a song, Mineiro was simultaneously repairing a piece of electronics that he most likely found in the garbage and intended either to use or resell. This kind of activity was common on the dump. Though *catadores* primarily collected recyclable materials, they would occasionally set aside clothing, shoes, household goods, and electronics to be mended or fixed and later used, exchanged, or sold. In addition to the radio, the entire "camp" where we lounged was literally composed of objects retrieved from the garbage, some of which—the large buckets and metal cans that served as stools, the plastic containers that held our soup, and the "crystal" bottles that we used for coffee—comprised part of the collected recyclables that these *catadores* would sell to scrap yards at the end of the day.

Moreover, *catadores* often engaged in activities associated with the *brequi*, such as gossiping or kicking around a soccer ball, alongside their work of reclaiming recyclables. I found—much to my consternation as a novice on the dump, fretfully trying to mind the trucks

and bulldozers while quickly discerning the materials before me—that most chitchat and banter among catadores occurred right in the midst of collecting. For a long time I struggled to keep up, unable to participate simultaneously in both the labor of collecting recyclables and the socializing around me. Spontaneous moments of diversion were also prevalent. For example, Rafaela, a transgendered *catador* (known in Brazil as a *travesti*) sometimes took advantage of being atop a scrap yard's flatbed truck while loading her material to perform a dance. This usually drew laughter and applause from surrounding catadores. Paulo, the jokester *catador* who performed pranks in the middle of the hectic unloading zone, also embodied such blurring of work and play. In short, it is not so much that the categories of work and leisure alternated more frequently on the dump but rather, that they dissolved.

Life rhythms

As I sought to understand the significance of the *brequi*, I kept returning to Thompson's claim that the transition to industrial wage labor brought forth a "new human nature," or what we might call now in anthropological terms, a new subjectivity (1967: 57). Thompson was interested not only in how the clock time of the factory disciplined workers but how this experience of work transformed the "*inward* apprehension of time" (57, emphasis mine). He responds to this inquiry by arguing that time—both inside and outside the workplace—became purposive in industrial capitalism. All time in life had to be used effectively or else, it was wasted. The internalization of clock time also generated new categories of everyday life, in particular the notion of leisure. This category arose out of the lived experience of a distinction between an employer's time (work) and a worker's own time (leisure). But even in leisure, time was to be put to use or consumed in directed ways that gave rise to the entertainment industries. In short,

for Thompson, clock time was not merely an externally-imposed form of labor discipline. Its effects reverberated beyond factory walls, reshaping inner states and ways of organizing the everyday.

Like the internalization of clock time in the factory, rhythms of work on the dump that emerged through the practice of the *brequi* were also deeply subject-forming. These rhythms could be seen as “reaching into the body” (Munn 1992; see also Bourdieu 1990). Miguel, for example, claimed not just that he felt restless but that he *was* restless, using the Portuguese “to be” form (*ser*) that suggests an ongoing or intrinsic quality or state. This restlessness furthermore emerged only *after* Miguel began working on the dump. As a young adult, Miguel enlisted in the army to fulfill what is obligatory military service in Brazil. He excelled in his fifteen months of service, finding favor with his sergeant who found him “hard-working” (*muito trabalhador*). When Miguel completed his duties, he was given an opportunity to enter the military police as a career but turned it down. “I lived at the foot of the *morro*,” Miguel explained, referring to one of Rio’s shantytowns controlled by drug traffickers and targeted by military police. “There was no way I could be a policeman. I knew everyone. We played ball together, soccer, had tournaments, that kind of thing. There was no way.”

After leaving the army, Miguel began working at a self-serve restaurant—a job that came with a signed worker ID (*carteira assinada*), a document guaranteeing the rights of a regularly employed worker in Brazil. As time went on, his responsibilities at the restaurant expanded from cleaning the dining room, to bussing tables, to serving drinks and desserts. Miguel liked the job but the restaurant eventually went under when the owner’s sons took over the business and ended up acquiring extensive debt. During this period of unemployment, Miguel’s sister and brother-in-law introduced him to the dump, first bringing him to Jardim Gramacho to work at night. In

those first few years, Miguel came and went from the dump. He worked for a furniture delivery service, a brewery, and the waste management company where Miguel took his extended dinner breaks. Yet none of these jobs seemed to last. “I left the dump maybe three or four times,” Miguel told me. “After that, I stayed for good.”

It might seem surprising that someone who once excelled in the structured regimen of the army and in a stable job with a signed worker ID would one day be fired from a job because he was restless. But *catadores* often attributed the kind of transformation Miguel experienced to the process of “adapting” to work on the dump. As I have written elsewhere (Millar 2014), this adaptation involved acclimating to the smells, methane gas, and other physical dimensions of working in and with garbage, as well as becoming habituated to the distinct qualities of labor on the dump. *Catadores* furthermore maintained that their adaptation to the dump changed them in ways that make it difficult to re-adapt to the conditions of wage labor, including its time demands. In relating his experience of waged employment, one *catador* told me that, “In a job like that, you have your shift and you have to clock in and out. And as *catadores*, we are used to a different rhythm of life (*outro ritmo da vida*) – to not having a work schedule – and we just don’t adapt.”

This reference to a rhythm *of life*, rather than of work, echoes E. P. Thompson’s observation that temporalities experienced in labor extend into other dimensions of life. The absence of a fixed work schedule not only allowed *catadores* to integrate work, play, meals, rest, and socializing while on the dump. It also enabled *catadores* to double-shift (*dobrar*)—that is, to collect all day and all night—in order to make additional income when needed or to leave Jardim Gramacho for several days to visit family in another part of the city. During my fieldwork in Jardim Gramacho, I gradually became accustomed to days rarely proceeding as planned.

Sometimes I would find that a *catador* who had invited me to come by their home to visit would be up collecting on the dump because an unexpected expense had arisen. On other days, work on the dump was interrupted by or combined with any number of other activities—the visit of a relative, a neighbor needing help repairing her house after a rainstorm, the caring of a sick child, resting from a party that went too late the previous night. In short, the *brequi* constituted not only a work temporality but also a particular mode of inhabiting the everyday.

I have come to think of these rhythms of *catadores* as woven time—a time-sense that diverges both from the clock time of industrial capitalism and from the ruptured time increasingly associated with post-Fordist and precarious employment. Unlike clock time, which regimented work and leisure, woven time threads activities together into a single tapestry of the everyday. In woven time, work and social life can alternate, as in the case of *catadores* who temporarily stop collecting to go visit family or friends outside Jardim Gramacho. But more commonly, work and other aspects of everyday life merge, occurring in the very same moment. Such moments make woven time a micro-temporality of the everyday at the scale of minutes, hours, and days. In this way, it differs from the ruptured time of post-Fordism that is oriented to the passing of years or generations. Moreover, if ruptured time suspends life trajectories, then woven time moves life along. It enables *catadores* to earn a living while attending to other demands and desires in their lives.

One of the most important contributions of Thompson's work is its attention to values and desires in workers' lives beyond the purely economic—a critique of both structuralist variants of Marxism as well as the emphasis that orthodox economic history placed on income-based standards of living. As Thompson documents extensively in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), most grievances among workers in eighteenth-century England did not

center on wages or “bread-and-butter” issues. Rather, they referenced the disruption of values, customs, and ways of living including “the discipline, monotony, hours and conditions of work” and a “loss of leisure and amenities” (203). He furthermore argues that workers expressed a sentimental attachment to “Merrie England” not because they believed material life was better prior to the industrial revolution but because they were nostalgic “for the pattern of work and leisure which obtained before the outer and inner disciplines of industrialism settled upon the working man” (359). The first struggles of factory workers, then, were struggles over work-life rhythms. Only later, after a long process of internalizing the time-sense of the clock, did workers begin to struggle *about* time—the length of the work day, overtime, and time and a half (1967: 86).

The affirmation of a different rhythm of life or Miguel’s claim that it was restlessness that led him back to the dump suggest that the woven time of catadores constitutes a valued work-life pattern. Catadores considered their ability to come and go from work to be one of the most important attributes of what they called the “good side of the dump” and a primary reason for why they continued to endure what were otherwise brutal work conditions. David Syring (2009), describing a similar work-life pattern called “the blended life” among indigenous Saraguro in Ecuador, explains how this rhythm invokes conceptions of “the good life.” Saraguro who have labored as migrant workers on factory farms in the United States distinguished between wage labor as time “suffered” and traditional farming as time “lived” (136). Much like the eighteenth-century workers in Thompson’s historical studies, the Saraguro’s reflections on time and well-being emerged in their transition from “traditional” ways of life to industrial wage labor. In the case of catadores, however, their valuing of woven time is born from the transition to wageless work.

Moreover, the valuing of woven time shows how there is a temporal dimension to conceptions of the good life. That is, how time is experienced cannot be understood apart from particular moral and cultural understandings of what constitutes a life well lived. Much has been written recently about normative conceptions of the good life in capitalism or rather, the ways these aspirations are unraveling in post-Fordist and neoliberal contexts (Berlant 2011). These (largely middle-class) fantasies of the good life hinge on notions of progress—the belief that a university education will lead later to a stable career or that each generation will be incrementally better-off. It makes sense, then, that time in these cases is experienced as ruptured or at a standstill. If the present is durative, it is precisely because (unrealized) visions of the good life are future-oriented. In contrast, woven time emerges from and enables a conception of the good life as realized in the unfolding of the everyday. The ability to fashion daily rhythms of work on their own terms (and on their own time) is an important aspect of living the good life, as imagined by *catadores*.

Of course, *catadores* are not the only ones who experience woven time or who see the ability to determine the flow of one's daily activities as a key dimension of living the good life. In a parenthetical aside in his essay on time-sense, Thompson (1967) mentions that the irregular work pattern that was common in England prior to the industrial revolution continues to exist among self-employed people, such as artists, writers, small farmers, and even students.⁵ This observation leads Thompson to wonder whether this pattern is “not a ‘natural’ human work-rhythm,” one that appears whenever people are “in control of their own working lives” (73). As self-employed workers, *catadores* certainly share in what Thompson sees as a common work rhythm in conditions outside of wage labor. Yet what sets *catadores* apart from these other examples of the self-employed is their relatively vulnerable class position in addition to the

harsh physical conditions in which they labor on the dump.⁶ For *catadores*, the ability to live according to woven time requires enduring the profound discomforts, difficulties, and risks entailed in the work of reclaiming material from garbage. This makes their valorization of woven time, captured in Miguel's restlessness, all the more powerful.

It is important to note, however, that woven time is not the only temporality that *catadores* experience. Given the vulnerable conditions of life in Rio's periphery, disruptions of the everyday commonly occur. Miguel, for example, lost all of his merchandise and earnings several times during police raids while hawking snacks at Rio's train stations in his early adolescence, prior to working on the dump. After each raid, he had to start over as a vendor. Eventually, he gave up. Time regimes are also produced at sites beyond those of labor. Along with other poor in Rio, *catadores* wait in long lines at understaffed health clinics, at branches of the federal bank [*Caixa Econômica*] that disburse state assistance, and at discount grocery stores where the queue weaves through narrow, crowded, fly-infested aisles.

These varied temporalities complicate Thompson's singular emphasis on labor as a source of time-sense. However, it is important not only to consider multiple temporalities but also the ways they interrelate. For example, though the temporality of waiting often serves as a technique of domination (Auyero 2012; Bourdieu 2000), its effects can vary depending on other relations of time. In his ethnographic account of development projects and demolitions in Ho Chi Minh City, Erik Harme (2013) shows how some residents facing eviction experience waiting as oppressive while others respond with indifference and even find ways to exploit temporal uncertainty for their own economic gain. What determines the response is the resident's relationship to productive activity; those (mostly men) with livelihood strategies that do not depend on fixed times and places are able to use the waiting of "eviction time" to their

advantage. In other words, “what one ‘does’ (for a living) conditions what one can “do” (with time)” (347).

Similarly, the woven time of *catadores* takes on special significance in relation to other temporalities shaping life in Rio’s periphery. *Catadores* work in harsh physical conditions on the dump. They collect material in sun and rain with no protection, breathe nauseating fumes of methane gas, and risk being injured or killed in the constant traffic of trucks and tractors. Given these conditions, how do we take seriously Miguel’s claim that it was restlessness that cost him his job and led him back to the dump? Or understand the *brequi* as one of the most valued social practices among *catadores*? In a context in which waiting and the everyday disruptions come to be expected among Rio’s poor, the woven time of the dump allows *catadores* to construct what Thompson calls an “art of living”—a rhythm of life forged beyond the time-discipline of wage labor. This is not to idealize the deeply precarious work of *catadores* but rather to consider how “the good life” is conceived and fashioned by those who seem to live beyond its bounds.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to return to the quotation from Thompson with which I began:

But if the purposive notation of time-use becomes less compulsive, then men might have to re-learn some of the arts of living lost in the industrial revolution: how to fill the interstices of their days with enriched, more leisurely, personal and social relations; how to break down once more the barriers between work and life (1967: 95).

In this part of his essay, Thompson is responding to concerns at the time he was writing that technological advancement and increased automation in the labor process might eventually lead to an excess of leisure time. Thompson replies to his contemporaries by reframing the issue. The problem, he argues, is not one of how to use or consume additional free hours but rather, how to develop a human capacity to experience and inhabit undirected time in meaningful ways.

Perhaps unsurprising for an historian, the solution he offers is to return to the past—to re-learn some of the temporal practices and sensibilities of pre-capitalist societies.

By presenting the issue as one of “re-learning” forgotten ways of life, Thompson could certainly be critiqued for bifurcating history into a before-and-after the industrial revolution as if all human temporal experience could be understood vis-à-vis this juncture. Nonetheless, Thompson’s reflection on what might happen to time-sense and ways of life under changing labor conditions is provocative. It opens up questions as to how political-economic change and modes of inhabiting the everyday interrelate. That is, how are forms of work, outside normative conceptions of capitalist wage labor, reshaping arts of living today? To slightly rephrase Thompson, the question is not one of how arts of living are being re-learned but rather, how they are being newly created.

The work temporalities of *catadores* offers one answer to this question. Working outside relations of wage labor, *catadores* are able to determine the tempo of their labor and to blend the act of collecting recyclables with rest, play, and social life—captured in the practice of the *brequi*. The lived experience of the *brequi*, which dissolves categories of work and non-work on the dump, cultivates a time-sense among *catadores* that I have called woven time. In contrast to the ruptured time of post-Fordism, woven time gives momentum to the everyday. It allows *catadores* to piece together dimensions of their lives in ways that makes sense to them and in

ways that are possible in what is otherwise a precarious existence in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro. But most importantly, woven time constitutes an art of living that *catadores* perceive as part of what makes life livable. That is, woven time is a “different rhythm of life” that *catadores*—much like the eighteenth-century English workers in Thompson’s histories—seek to retain.

Finally, the woven time of *catadores* suggests that labor continues to be an important source of time-sense in contemporary capitalism. Though there has been a great deal of important anthropological work on temporality in post-Fordist and neoliberal contexts, the lived experience of work has not figured prominently in these studies. This is in part because of a focus on unemployment or underemployment—the absence of work. However, work has not altogether disappeared but been transformed in the economic transitions of the past three decades. It is worth exploring, then, how shifts in the experience of work is shifting experiences of time and how both processes are potentially transforming arts of living. In doing so, there is much to learn from the writings of E. P. Thompson, whose reflections on time, work, and the everyday remind us that the experience of work is deeply entangled with ways of life and with questions of what it means to live well.

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Notes

1. Real names have been changed.
2. This literature is far too extensive to include here. For bibliographies with numerous titles bearing temporal references on Post-Fordism and Post-Socialism, respectively, see Muehlebach and Shoshan (2012) and Haukanes and Trnka (2011).
3. Research trips included 1-3 months in 2005, 2007, 2012 and a continuous year in 2008-2009.
4. Similar distinctions have been made between "appropriated time" and "quantitative time" (Lefebvre 2004) and between "lived time" and "time as formless duration" (Giddens 1981).
5. We could also include academics in this list, who are often able to determine their working hours outside of their teaching and administrative duties. For an explicit discussion of the time-sense of academics, see Syring 2009.

6. The work rhythms of catadores might also seem to resonate with the increasing breakdown of the divide between work and leisure in the creative or cultural industries, among freelancing designers, media workers, or other kinds of artistic entrepreneurs. However, in the latter case, this breakdown is often experienced as the takeover of life by work (such as producing content for social media in one's "free time" or enduring bouts of around-the-clock work) for the purposes of capital accumulation (Gill and Pratt 2008). In contrast, woven time often enabled catadores to limit work to what Thompson calls "observed necessity" (1967: 38). It was common, for example, for catadores to go work on the dump only when their previous earnings had run out.

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