

## Late-Capitalist Reasoning and the Foreclosure of Disagreement

**JUAN M. DEL NIDO**, 2022, *Taxis vs. Uber: Courts, Markets, and Technology in Buenos Aires*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 238 pp., ISBN 9781503629677

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Juan M. del Nido's *Taxis vs. Uber* takes as its subject the conflict between the taxi industry, Uber, the judicial system, and the middle classes that supported Uber's arrival in Buenos Aires in 2016. Del Nido explores the middle class's rhetorical strategies to dismiss and pathologize arguments supporting the taxi industry's interests. To do so, he marshals over a year of fieldwork with taxi drivers, exchanges with fellow middle-class *porteños*, news media, social media campaigns, and court documents. He argues that these logical and affective strategies, which he calls "postpolitical reasoning," exemplify late capitalism's resources for foreclosing disagreement.

Three central concepts—*distribution of the sensible*, *Peronism*, and *postpolitical reasoning*—guide the narrative. The distribution of the sensible, from philosopher Jacques Rancière, allocates how people and institutions "can rightfully and meaningfully participate in ... the social life they share" (6). Importantly, a distribution of the sensible delimits the visible from the invisible, speech from noise. This means that some people and institutions do not count, even if they are physically, formally, or institutionally present. *Taxis vs. Uber* deals with two competing distributions of the sensible: Peronism and the postpolitical.

Peronism, named after populist mid-century president Juan Domingo Perón, is strongly associated with trade unionism, cavalier economic policy, and political opportunism in the Argentinian political imagination. Peronism "cuts to the chase, less worried about due process or ideological integrity than about outcomes and realpolitik" (45-46). Most of del Nido's middle-class interlocutors conflate the taxi industry with the perceived self-interest of union

leaders and, more generally, an inexorable Peronist aptitude for getting one's agenda into the public sphere at whatever cost.

Enter the postpolitical. In contrast to Rancière, del Nido focusses on the nonexpert sensemaking of ordinary people, in this case middle-class Argentines who eschew the excesses of Perón and his successors, the Kirchners, as "too political." To do so, they draw on "logics, rhetorics, and affects" to create "a common experience where a certain kind of disagreement is foreclosed," namely, challenges from the courts and taxi industry to the consumer's right to choose and the virtue of economic competition (8). The conflict's "tangle of law, materialities, and ideologies" is subsequently reduced to a rhetorical binary: taxis versus Uber (98).

The book is divided into two sections. The first focusses on the political economy of the taxi industry and, to a lesser but important extent, middle-class perceptions of the industry. Chapter 1 explores the regulation of the taxi industry through licenses. The regulation, inspired by a passenger's murder, was led by Peronist "Big Man" and taxi union leader Omar Viviani, whose opportunism and astuteness made the middle class despair of Uber ever coming to Buenos Aires. Chapter 2 focusses on the union-led professionalization and fitness examinations of taxi drivers, which are ineffective in countering middle-class claims of the taxi industry's unruliness. Chapter 3 examines taxi transactions and the mutual suspicion between drivers and passengers. That passengers felt victimized and powerless laid the groundwork for middle-class support of Uber.

The day that Uber arrived in Buenos Aires, the taxi industry took the company to court on the basis of unfair competition. The second half of the book comprises five chapters that focus on the middle class's rhetoric supporting Uber and writing off not only the claims of the taxi industry but the juridico-political order to which the industry appealed. Chapter 4 explores the argument that Uber's rightful place was not a political question to be solved institutionally, but a moral one based on the people's right to have free economic choice. Chapter 5 examines Uber's role as a "stranger king": an outside ruler whose alterity residents (the middle class) hope will help them solve a problem with an insider (the taxi industry) they can't otherwise manage. Chapter 6, the most dense and theoretical, describes how Uber posits an order of economic axioms like efficiency, demand, and market price. This order is only understandable through Uber's user interface and cannot be verified, only accepted or rejected. It turns a political problem into a subjective one in which "the consumer ... is the ultimate site of the truth that counts" (134). Chapter 7 deals with the court's failed attempt to limit Uber's operations, which proved to the middle class that Uber could not be contained by the existing juridico-political order. Instead, the only rightful way forward was to work with Uber instead

of against it. The final chapter examines how Mauricio Macri's postpolitical platform was part of a middle-class temporalization in which infrastructural and economic collapse were, like the political "excesses" of the taxi industry, part of a path to future betterment. In response, the taxi industry engaged in "indexical reflexivity." Through civility and insistence on legality, they tried to distance themselves from the political, Peronist past that the middle class categorically rejected.

A strength of the book is its detailed treatment of economic tropes associated with neoliberalism, a term which in some ways is losing explanatory precision. Del Nido traces the origins of the virtue of competition, the righteousness of individual choice, and the "natural forces" of economic development to late-nineteenth-century neoclassical philosophers, who borrowed the language of physics to give these ideas legitimacy and an impression of irrefutability (9). While these concepts supported the Enlightenment-era peasants' revolts, they also created a rhetorical infrastructure that insulates individual experience, consumption, and economic competition from any other political considerations.

As del Nido remarks in the conclusion, the book's focus on contemporary modes of disagreement helps us to understand the "near-fanatical obsession" with popular participation in politics, the glorification of the average person's experience, and how these orientations have changed the way we argue about economics, pandemics, and immigration policies (206). Furthermore, academics lack a "grammar" to deal with popular legitimacy's power to completely dismiss competing claims (207). However, perhaps a grammar of argumentation isn't needed so much as a certain kind of attention, an ability to stay with the trouble, similarly to how one is meant to help loved ones leave a cult (Haraway 2016). Along these lines, del Nido's account exemplifies his commitment to reserve judgement and the ethnographic commitment to understand others. The middle-class *porteños* whom he frequently and tenaciously debates are most empathetically portrayed in Chapter 8, where he narrates the political, economic, and infrastructural disasters of the Kirchner era, which are compounded by Argentines' gall that they used to "count" internationally but are becoming ever poorer and underdeveloped (15). Regarding the taxi drivers, we come to understand, alongside their hustle, their vulnerabilities and frustrations regarding passengers in Chapter 3, as well as the helplessness of conforming to middle-class logics, only to be written off again, in Chapter 8.

One of del Nido's goals is to trace "how affects contribute to generating the categories of postpolitical reasoning" (9). The term hardly appears in the text, however. Unlike the deliberate omission of "neoliberalism," this absence is not explained, and it is one of the rare themes that is not explicitly theorized. This choice is a lingering question. Does affect function

here as a catch-all for the many contradictory and/or deeply felt elements of late-capitalist reasoning, such as “common sense” and “*sinceramiento*”?

*Taxis vs. Uber* was occasionally challenging in its grammatical and theoretical density, but the effort was well rewarded. Overall, this is an impressive contribution to analyses of the origins and consequences of late-capitalist rhetoric, everyday ethics, and how societal affects and discourses attach themselves to new technology.

Works Cited:

Haraway, Donna Jeanne, 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham: Duke University Press.

**Bronwyn Frey** is a PhD Candidate in Sociocultural Anthropology at the University of Toronto and a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt University Berlin. Her dissertation, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, examines app-based courier work in Berlin. Her research interests lie at the intersection of labour process theory, datafication, and financial markets.



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