

Precarious by design-My Preface for Silvio Lorusso's Entreprenariat

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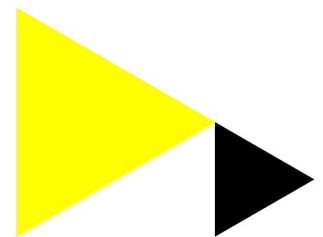
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I am proud to present the preface I wrote for Silvio Lorusso's book, which came out in November 2018, in Italian, published by Krisis Publishing in Brescia, Italy. [Here](#) is the link if you want to know more about this title and order it. This is critical design theory at its best—Made in Europe. The text is loosely based on earlier postings on his [Entreprecariat](#) blog, which is part of this website.

Precarious by Design — Preface by Geert Lovink

“Ma Lei non sa cos'è un uomo medio? È un mostro, un pericoloso delinquente, conformista, colonialista, razzista, schiavista, qualunque.”
Pier Paolo Pasolini, La Ricotta

We can't just have a life, we are condemned to design it. This is Silvio Lorusso's programmatic statement. Benetton's colourful 90s photography of global misery has become a daily reality. Slums are flooded by designer clothes and footwear. Versace refugees are no longer rarities. Envy and competition have turned us into subjects of an aesthetic conspiracy that is impossible to escape. We're going for the lifestyle of the rich and famous. The ordinary is no longer enough. We, the 99%, claim the exclusive lifestyle of the 1%. This is the aspiration of planet H&M.

The McLuhanesque programmatic “Help beautify junk yards” is now a global reality. Gone are the days when Bauhaus design was supposed to lift the daily lives of the working class. We've past the point of design as an extra layer, aimed to assist the hand and the eye. Design is no longer a pedagogic discipline that intends to uplift the taste of the ‘normies’ in order to give their daily lives sense and purpose.

Much like the pre-torn and bleached denim, all our desired commodities have already been used, touched, altered, mixed, liked and shared before we purchase them. We're pre-consumed. With the radical distribution of funky lifestyles comes the loss of semiology. There is no control anymore of meaning. Brands can mean anything for anyone. This is precarity of the sign.

In *Entreprecariat* Silvio Lorusso confronts us with our beautified mess that is no longer an accident or a tragic sign of a never-ending decay but an integral part of the overall layout. Today's design culture is an expression of our intense prototype lives. We, the exhausted class, want so much, we are the experience junkies, yet make remarkable little transformative progress. Our precarious state has become perpetual.

When we confront ourselves with sci-fi precarity—that strange techno-reality ahead of us—the first association that comes to mind is the conformist 1950s. Sure, we wished we lived in a *Blade Runner* movie, but our reality more resembles a Victor Hugo novel or a Douglas Sirk film in which the hyper-real takes command. Boredom, anxiety and despair are the unfortunate default. That's 'real existing precarity,' comparable to 'real existing socialism' in the outgoing Cold War period. Casual precarity, everywhere you look. The terror of comfort drives us mad. The flatness of it all is contrasted, and accelerated, by the occasional modernism IKEA style that, in theory, should cheer us up and comfort us, but in the end only provoke us to this inner revolt against this manufactured reality. What's to be done with workers that have nothing to lose but their Ray-Ban sun glasses? We can't wait for Godot, not even for a split second. No matter how desperate the situation, the uprising simply won't happen. At best we attend a festival, expand our minds and body—and return to the void.

In *The Courage of Hopelessness* from 2017 Slavoj Žižek writes about the antagonism that is generated between the precariat and the traditional working class. He writes: "One would have expected that the increasing exploitation would also strengthen workers' resistance, but it renders resistance even more difficult." The main reason for this, according to Žižek, is ideological: "precarious work is presented (and up to a point even effectively experienced) as a new form of freedom." For Žižek precarious workers are similar to consumers that are constantly confronted with the 'freedom of choice'. We are becoming curators of our own life.

As Euronomade warns in their 2017 [statement](#) on platform capitalism, "we are in the presence of a protean composition of living labour, where a non-qualified worker works side-by-side with an 'innovation professional', all within a highly urbanized metropolitan landscape." Some are more precarious than others. This is not merely measured in objective terms. Being precarious is a state of mind, a 'psycho-class consciousness' turned identity politics. This subcultural experiences then opens the possibility to sympathize with the 'real' Others. Euronomade observes "that the contemporary press often evokes the appearance of millennials, the digital natives educated and grown up with internet, together with migrants with a high-level education." Precarity can easily be read as postmodern brand, a thousand flows of video clips, Insta stories and tweets that peacefully co-exist side by side, in a tolerant metropolitan setting that promotes multiculturalism as a way to tactically avoid talking about the hard facts of income

disparity and segregation. But after we wake up, under the spell of last night's party, the depressing reality hits us hard.

There are multiple pre-histories of our condition. For instance, the evolution of precarious capitalism was only possible because advertising perfected messaging that forced people to see themselves as problems—to be solved by purchasing goods and services. Social media designs have moved into a post-thing economy of virtual services and experiential consumerism that relies on the usually unpaid but occasionally monetized “first-person industrial complex.” No precarity without subjectivity. No precarity outside of the virtual: everything is possible, fluid, inside out, driven by political choices. The diminished expectations clashes with the pinkness of it all, the ecstasy of the event, the fireworks of the spectacle and the rush of the encounter. Precarity as an open and free lifestyle is getting stuck in it a never-ending series of failures. Projects either fell through or never got finished. Life feels like an endless row of proposals. Why not enjoy the spectacle of the shitstorm, shake up the liberal elite that has humiliated you up to the point of crying, breaking down and burning-out?

It can be dangerous to go beyond good and evil and play with the alt-right route for once, vote for a trash party and enjoy the spectacle of this rotten world coming to an end. There is another resistance out there, which is reactionary and is homogeneous. This is when a precarity 2.0 can turn ugly. Ready or not, this is the subjective shipwreck we're facing. Vulnerable groups can easily be hijacked. Right-wing populism is entering the creative precarious class much faster than we would like admit.

Let's confront ourselves with the limitations of the precarity discourse itself. We very well can describe, map, visualize—and design—our misery. But without a subjective position this strategy turns out to be a trap. All we do is decorate an enlightened dead-end street. Like in a depression, there is no way out. No doubt, precarity is a precise description of what's the case, it is our general condition. Yet, despite all the flexibility and ever-changing styles and modes of production, what lacks is the collective design of a subjectivity that would overcome permanent insecurity. What type of a figure could replace and supersede San Precario? We need to move on and define the post-precarious situation, jump over our shadows, and start from there.