

EDITORIAL

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The interest in the relationship between precarity, intended as a socio-political and philosophical notion, and media culture is in a seemingly endless expansion. Publications and researches follow one another with the purpose of tracing the ways in which dynamics of exploitation, extraction, and marginalisation are displayed and depicted in contemporary cinema and television. Sometimes, the attention of these analyses is specifically centred on issues of representation, with interest in the peculiar traits of national and continental cultural outputs and artistic/thematic concerns. In other cases, the circulation and production or, more generally, the economic infrastructure defining media industries becomes the object of study and examination (for a combination of these two perspectives see, for instance, Burucúa and Sitnisky, 2018, pp. 1-15). These latter analyses aim to observe and map recent transformations in the sector and the ways in which these structural changes may highlight larger macroeconomic dynamics and trends. Cultural labour and industries, in fact, despite the common sense tendency to be marginalised to the border of the productive system, exactly for their extremely mobile and fluid nature (with a few major historical exceptions), are key case studies to be used for the understanding of a precarious economy.

One of the reasons that motivates the growing interest in precarity, even in media studies, is, in part, the desire to connect this concept to economic and social shifts that have taken place (not only in the West, as it is often argued see Gago, 2017, p. 37, p. 48, p. 92) in the last few decades and that we commonly associate with the neoliberal turn. Additionally, concepts such as *the precariat* (see Standing 2011, p. 6-13), or the discussion of the precarisation of labour and existence altogether (see Lorey 2015, pp. 1-15; Mezzadra and Nielson,

2019, p. 52, pp. 79-80; Mbembe, 2019, pp. 115-116) aim to find a *trait d'union* between a pre-existing literature and scientific debate about class structure and social divisions in capitalism and the discussion of its more recent facets. Therefore, addressing the specificity of the neoliberal economy does not erase or demote the power and effectiveness of pre-existing canons of socio-economic analysis. On the contrary, more and more we can witness the desire to reconcile analytical tools coming from the Marxist tradition, like class and labour power, with an intersectional approach to power dynamics and modes of subjectivation (see Ciccarelli, 2021, pp. 1-6; Jaffe, 2021, pp. 36-39, pp. 59-60). Classes and class divisions have not disappeared; indeed, we live in an age marked by a blatant and disgusting inequality of power and wealth, as demonstrated by the success of texts such as *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty (2014). Instead, what we have observed, and still are in the process of acknowledging, is a constant reconfiguration of labour in ways that shatter very stable and fixed ideas of class (in particular when not intended as a power relation or a relation to capital accumulation). However, what makes the notion of precarity particularly poignant and effective in travelling through a wide array of modes of existence in the contemporary world is exactly its intrinsic non-strict economic "reductionism". If ideas of labour, production, exploitation, and extraction rightly point at the necessity of a materialist paradigm to understand social dynamics, this same theoretical premise does not exclude the possibility to focus on other forms of marginalisation. The critical assessment of gender and sexuality, race and culture, ability/disability and now, more than ever, ecological forms of precarious existence are not separated issues, intervening in a secondary moment, adding nuances and colour to more central and defining "contradictions". They are, rather, invaluable instruments to better investigate and bring to light the different facets that define the strategies of contemporary capitalism and to unearth the anthropological modifications and shifts it entails. As a matter of fact, when reading one of Nancy Fraser's latest works, *Cannibal Capitalism* (2022) we have the sensation that this an interlayered approach also

allows a general rethinking of the history of capitalism as such (pp. 1-26). With a varied set of instruments, we become able to identify, as the famous scholar does, different forms of (productive and reproductive) labour and extraction, and ideas of citizenship or social roles, as foundational elements of capitalist anthropology. This may even invite us to recognise the intrinsic interdependence between precarity and the history of modern societies, observing the various developments of forms of lives across the previous centuries of human global civilisation. Racism and the gendered divisions of roles are not simply the external outcome of forms of internalised discriminations (as the liberal canon would argue) or the legacy of pre-modern mindsets. They exist as clear expressions of transforming social relations and hierarchies aiming to optimise and legitimise a particular state of affairs and grant the survival and persistence of a specific chain of valorisation. Cedric J. Robinson (2021, pp. 9-28) famously showed the centrality of slavery (and of the social assemblage connected with colonialism) for the stabilisation of a global market, while Silvia Federici, placed the construction of the mononuclear family (and related witch-hunts) at the core of "primitive accumulation" (2009, pp. 12-17). The attack on the common and on life expressed by these strategies, the precarisation of existence for the purpose of value extraction is what emerges as the unchanging tendency of capital (also reflected in many parts of Marx's work, 1993, pp. 690-712). In this sense, factory-based labour (which was thought to be the main focus of traditional critical focus) may be reframed and understood in the guise of a major historical phase of this ongoing history.

Of course, this reassessment of the past needs to be integrated with a polished and precise investigation of the most recent and unexpected ways in which capital reorganises itself. The expansion of an economy based on debt, the financialisation of the economy, with money circulation replacing the centrality of production, and the restructuring of waged labour as an activity based on performances, are all crucial dynamics to be carefully discussed and observed. In this way, thinking about the "general feminisation of the workforce" (for instance) does

not solely imply the recognition of transforming gender relations in the chain of productions (Ciccarelli 2021, pp. 52-53; Morini, 2010, pp. 9–10). These notions allow us to understand how forms of valorisation and exploitation, typical of women's labour (in particular those related to relationality and affectivity) have become essential features of contemporary work in a broad sense. The double-look to the past and present allows us, therefore, not to juxtapose practices and figures across the centuries; it rather highlights the ways in which care-work has strategically become one of the privileged sites for value extraction in the economy of precarity, producing a constant lessening of the hopes and expectations of a "good" and stable life in our society (with consequent lack of social mobility). Precarity is also related with pervasive forms of control and management of each individual and, naturally, with the ever growing relevance of digital and algorithmic capitalism. Online platforms, at once combine the ability to make every activity of users and consumers (or prosumers) valuable (so to ignite modes of vertical accumulation), and the monitoring of the effectiveness of worker's activity, with a related series of rewards and punishments to take place. Considering the despotic nature of this chain of command, it is vital to investigate the connection and strategic sympathy between these new and constantly moving economic trends and new forms of authoritarianism expanding across the globe, even in the heart of so-called "historical democracies".

Eclectic and open approaches are, therefore, necessary to give justice to a complex and unresolved story, so to come up with analytical tools capable of identifying these worrying changes and to figure ways to respond to them. Recently, the edited volume *Precarity in European Film* (Cuter, Kirsten, and Prenzel 2022, pp. ix-xv), by bringing together very different analytical perspectives on the topic, demonstrates the importance of keeping the definition of "precarity" out of strict sociological categorisations. In doing so, it emphasises the experimental nature of this concept and its ability to always be enriched and modified.

Following this theoretical premise, it is important to move on to another fundamental issue connected with the exploration of precarious lives within the shades and lights of moving images, asking ourselves what kind of roles and power they have in relation to the contextual infrastructure. Guido Kirsten, for instance, thinks about a tripartite structure defining the set of questions that define the analysis of the relationship between moving images of precarity. We can separate discussion about the poetics (or about recurring aesthetics features), concerning the impact (and "measurable" transformative aspects of particular films in their circulation and reception), and the discourses (or the ways they interact with larger social debates and hegemonic debates) that define the cinema of precarity (see 2022, pp. 1-12).

This special issue follows exactly this route by displaying the outcome and potentiality of heterogeneous approaches to the topic and by displaying several theoretical areas to be critically addressed with changing definitions of the notion of precarity. This volume consists of a collection of original essays that add to the scholarship on precarity, as well as to many other fields where different traditional (and even hybrid) subjects intersect. In their diversity, these texts allow us to expand our perception on filmmaking styles, the economic structure that underpins media, and films. While some authors resort to a more subjective approach, others are keen on bringing concrete stances into the light and enrich our perception about precarity while discussing films as inherently cultural objects.

We can find, for instance, invaluable contributions looking at the modes in which contemporary case studies (Sunny Yoon analyses globally renowned *Parasite* [기생충, Bong Joon-ho, 2019] highlight the transformation of mononuclear family into a precarious enterprise. Staying on the topic of representation and various forms of depiction of precarity, Sagar Krishna addresses Bollywood films for the ways of reproducing and revealing ideas and issues surrounding masculinity, their supposed functions and, possibly, critical weak points. Victoria

Fleming, moving from the well-known outputs of the work of Jacques Derrida and Mark Fisher investigates dynamics of haunting and lost futures in moving images about girlhood. Sex work, disability, and sexuality are at the centre of Sihan Wang's essay on the 'crip' invention of blind vision in the film *Blind Massage* (推拿, Ye Lou, 2014). On a more philosophical level, Elisa Cuter explores the notion of cognitariat and cultural labour, and their connection with precarious work, looking specifically at the processes of autofiction in all their ambiguities as presented in the film *Self-Criticism of a Bourgeois Dog* (*Selbstkritik eines bürgerlichen Hundes*, Radlmaier, 2017). Hugo Barata and Júlio Alves investigate the video installation *24 February 2022* in order to assess and evaluate the power of geolocated poor/precarious found images, assessing their usefulness in mapping the facets of late-capitalism and their existence as tools of resistance. Together with these essays concerned with the power and role of moving images, we have compelling contributions observing precarity within the film and media industries. Lucas Rossi Gervilla, on this same train of thought, evaluates the relationship between material and immaterial goods, looking at the disposability of images, spaces, and memories and puts them in relationship with the failures of modernity. Last but not least, we can observe the climate of uncertainty for new aspiring artists and the challenges coming with piracy for precarious film workers in contemporary Nigerian cinema through the quantitative and qualitative analysis of John Iwuh, Nicodemus Adai Patrick, and Dominic Fayenuwo.

To conclude the introduction of this rich special issue, however, we think it is necessary to add a further point of discussion: analysing discourses and the expression of social and philosophical concerns, examining the transformation of the industry and the ways in which particular filmmakers work in the context of the neoliberal economy, and paying attention to the style of singular media productions are not to be considered as "detached" scientific studies. The process of mapping the relationship between precarity and the moving image carries with it the radical assumption that film and media do

not simply represent the world; they exist in it, as part of it and interact, adapt or, at times, subvert and transform the reality surrounding them (see on this O'Shaughnessy 2022, pp. 8-10; Sticchi, 2021, p. 24). This further theoretical premise and assumption does not spur from a naive trust and belief in the transformative role of cinema and television, observed as privileged and indiscriminately powerful tools for political struggles and social renewal. On the contrary, this approach is a consequence of the ultimately materialist claim that images are essential parts of the social infrastructure; they exist, as Félix Guattari would argue (see 1995, pp. 1-30, pp. 90-92), as one of its always changing and moving flows and, like money and all other commodities, they circulate in ways that are partially determined by the exigency of the system to reproduce and renew itself. For this same reason, moving images cannot be considered innocent, pure, or detached; at the same time, they are not to be solely reduced to the status of inert products of the capitalist system. Within each frame, or in the shades of the complexity of sequences and of stories told with enticing ambiguity viewers can always find a space for critical renewal, for the discovery of worlds and forms of life they thought to be distant or alien to them and, in this encounter, recognise a common humanity. Moving images exist in the form of a promise and uninterrupted creation. Artistic expressions, in all their forms, highlights an endless craving for the generation of new perceptions of the world and, together with that, they remind us of an undying truth sounding more concrete than any vague and conciliating form of hope: that life itself can always be rethought and re-imagined. In order to do that, we must follow Mark Fisher's example and always contest and fight the idea that a current state of affairs, no matter how dire, oppressive, and unchangeable it may appear, is natural and inevitable (2009, p. 17).

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