# FCJ-023 On the Life and Deeds of San Precario, Patron Saint of Precarious Workers and Lives

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## Origins of San Precario

*Noi siamo la generazione post-socialista, la generazione del dopo guerra fredda, della fine delle burocrazie verticali e del controllo sull'informazione. Siamo un movimento globale e neuropeo, che porta avanti la rivoluzione democratica scaturita dal Sessantotto mondiale e lotta contro la distopia neoliberista oggi al culmine. Siamo ecoattivisti e mediattivisti, siamo i libertari della Rete e i metroradicali dello spazio urbano, siamo le mutazioni transgender del femminismo globale, siamo gli hacker del terribile reale. Siamo gli agitatori del precariato e gli insorti del cognitariato. Siamo anarcosindacalisti e postsocialisti. Siamo tutti migranti alla ricerca di una vita migliore. E non ci riconosciamo in voi, stratificazioni tetre e tetragone di ceti politici sconfitti già nel XX secolo. Non ci riconosciamo nella sinistra italyana.*

We are the post-socialist generation, the post-cold war generation, the end of vertical bureaucracies and of information control generation. We are a global and neuropean movement, which brings forward the democratic revolution started in 1968 and the struggle against the neoliberal dystopia at its peak today. We are eco-activists and media-activists, we are the libertarians of the Net and the metroradicals of urban spaces, we are the transgender mutations of global feminism, we are the hackers of the terrible real. We are the agitators of precariat and the insurgents of cognitariat. We are anarcho-unionists and post-socialist. We are all migrants looking for a better life. And we do not recognise ourselves in you, gloomy and tetragon layerings of political classes already defeated in the XX century. We do not recognise ourselves in the Italyan Left.

*Manifesto Bio/Pop del Precariato Metroradicale* [1]

Since February 2004 San Precario, patron saint of precarious, casualised, sessional, intermittent, temporary, flexible, project, freelance and fractional workers, has appeared in various Italian cities. The saint appears in public spaces on occasions of rallies, marches, interventions, demonstrations, film festivals, fashion parades, and, being a saint, processions. Often he performs miracles. Although the first appearances are recorded on 29 February 2004, San Precario has multiplied and materialised in different disguises. Equitable in his choices, San Precario does not privilege one category of precarious worker over another, and he can appear in supermarkets in urban peripheries, in bookstores or, glammed up, at the Venice Film Festival. San Precario is also transgender, and it has appeared also as a female saint. A "cult" has spread rapidly and has led to the development of a distinct and colorful iconography, hagiography and rituals. Appropriating the Italian Catholic tradition of carrying saint statues in processions in urban spaces, the cult of San Precario functions at the same time as détournement, as a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), as carnival. It is also a tactic to make visible issues arising from the increasing casualisation of the work force. At a different level it can be considered a site of mythopoetic production. The story of San Precario, its beginnings, transformations and spreading, is here brought into play to explore the current politics and poetics of precarity in Italy.

San Precario

Image by Chainworkers Crew (after a work by Chris Woods)

It is necessary here to stress that the words "precarious-precarity-precariat" are a linguistic innovation, which in the last year has spread from Italy and Spain to all the European networks engaged in a reflection on casualisation. Superseding the better known terms "flexibility-flexworker", the introduction of "precarious-precarity-precariat" marks the emergence of struggles that are constituent of a new terminology and new imaginary from which, in turn, new rights come to light. The Italian expression esercizio del comune, the exercise of that which is common, indicates multifaceted innovations in the production of political subjectivity, which appear not only as direct actions, but also as innovations created "in common" at a linguistic and symbolic level. The surfacing of a new terminology emphasises the centrality of communication in contemporary society, while at the same time stressing that each "new right" needs "a new language", because there is a new political subject voicing these rights.

San Precario functions as a rhetorical device to move into the public arena a critical awareness of the changes in conditions and forms of work, of the shift from permanent positions to casual (in Italian precario/a) modes of employment. This shift, common to other European countries, particularly France and Spain, acquires a traumatic quality in Italy, where il posto fisso, a permanent position, was one of the tenets of post-war imaginary. A full time, permanent position was indeed considered the typical form of employment. Against this canon a new bureaucratic definition had to be coined to describe the growing variety of casualised workers who could not fit in the category: i lavoratori atipici, non-typical workers. It is useful here to remember that in Italy there is no equivalent of the social security system as found in Australia and other countries. The gaps between the end of one contract and the beginning of another are simply periods of no income. Post-Fordist generations do not necessarily seek a permanent position. Similarly, they do not desire to be in a singular life-long position. On one hand they have assimilated the "refusal of work" of the 1970s movements, and on the other they have developed a concept of work centred on the notion of "free flexibility": flexibility freed from salary and capitalist control. In this sense one of San Precario's key requests is "flexicurity": a new form of welfare to protect workers without renouncing flexibility.

8 The casualisation of the workplace in Italy is not a recent phenomenon. In 1984 new legislation (legge 863) extended the possible application of part-time contracts, while other legislation (legge 56) in 1987 established the fixed term contract (Fumagalli, 2003). In 1997 Il pacchetto Treu (The Treu Package, named after the centre-left government minister for workplace relations at the time) introduced and normalised new typologies of temping, fixed terms, apprenticeships, professional development, and part-time contracts (Fumagalli, 2003). Although the legislation was promoted as an opening towards more flexible work conditions, and as a strategy to reduce unemployment, in practice il pacchetto Trau sanctioned the shift in the job market from continuing contracts to new forms of casualised contracts. In 2003 la legge Biagi or legge 30 (named after Marco Biagi, the professor at the University of Modena employed as a consultant by the Ministry for Welfare who was killed in Bologna by the Red Brigades, 19 March 2002) finally deregulated the job market. According to this legislation the job market would be managed through the development of private job agencies, including temping agencies. Unemployment benefit (a fiction at best) in the legge Biagi is connected to professional development and training. Apprenticeship and professional development constitute new forms of contracts, and the line between apprenticeship and work experience is blurred, opening up the possibility of employing at no cost high school and university students. One of the most tragicomic paragraphs of the guidelines to the legislation states that: 'those work experiences that cannot be considered work relations are to be included in the category of so-called apprenticeships, through which the young person becomes familiar with the workplace, develops skills and enables employers to appreciate her/ him' (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2004). The legge Biagi also provides a new taxonomy of flexible contract work: "part-time" contracts, "intermittent" work, job sharing, freelancing (lavoro a progetto), "occasional" work in the service and care industry (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2004). The rhetoric of flexibility is applied also to industrial relations. In a parallel fashion, as casualised employment replaces continuing contracts, individual agreements replace state awards (Fumagalli, 2003; Ferrara, 2004). [2]

9 The shared experience of casualisation, in its multiplicity of forms, gives rise to struggles which emphasise immaterial labour, biopolitical production and precarious conditions. These are recognised as intrinsic to social cooperation and as such they mark a departure from the 20th century political and unionist tradition of struggles based around collective bargaining. Immaterial labour in this context is not only to be interpreted as the post-Fordist and post-modern shift from jobs based in industry to jobs based in the service industry, namely producing communication, information and knowledge. Jobs based in the care industry, 'affect labor' according to Hardt, also produce immaterial goods, such as affect, social relations and desire (Lazzarato, 1996, 1997; Hardt, 1999a; Hardt and Negri, 2000). These jobs, as already indicated, constitute the largest typology of casualised, or to use a more poignant term, precarious labour. Senses of instability, peril and uncertainty coalesce around the notion of precarity. Indeed, according to a 2004 NIDL CGIL Associazione Nuovo Welfare's survey on typologies of "new work", 42.5% of casualised workers describe flexibility as synonymous with fewer rights, and 24.6% as a necessary evil. The impact of flexibility on life conditions is reflected in the fact that 35.8% of the respondents to the survey live

with their family, 32.5% with their partner, and only 12.7% live alone (NIDL CGIL Associazione Nuovo Welfare, 2004). Even more tellingly, 71.6% do not have children. The yo-yo hours and days typical of flexible employment also disrupt the conditions and environment of sociality and the possibility of constructing sociality itself (Chiara@CW, 2004).

10 Precarity becomes a modality of control over the life itself of the casualised workforce: its meaning blurs here with the English word precariousness, which refers to an ontological condition (Butler, 2004). In this sense it can also be read as an articulation of biopower, intended as the prerogative of a government's power to manage and control life from its interior (Foucault 1978: 135-45). Conversely, adopting Hardt's perspective, it is possible to consider biopower not exclusively from the sovereign standpoint "above" society, but also from the point of view of labour involved in biopolitical production from "below": 'By biopower I understand the potential of affective labor. Biopower is the power of creation of life; it is the production of collective subjectivities, sociality, society itself' (Hardt, 1999a: 98; see also Hardt, 1999b).

11 Immaterial labour, biopolitics and precarity become central in the construction of struggles, not only because they are funding elements of post-Fordist societies, but also because they are produced by and produce individual and shared forms of subjectivity. Maurizio Lazzarato describes a similar dynamic in a recent article on 'coordination' in the French movements (Lazzarato, 2004). Lazzarato argues that contemporary movements break away from socialist and communist traditions because they are articulated not according to contradiction but according to difference. Difference here does not mean absence of conflict, struggle or opposition, but a radical shift, articulated in the two asymmetrical terrains of 'refusal and constitution, destruction of what is unbearable and deployment of new possibilities' (Lazzarato, 2004: 107). The first terrain of refusal is expressed as the political movements' flight from institutional forms and the rules of politics. However, this oppositional character is accompanied by the constituent quality of the second terrain, where 'the individual and collective singularities which constitute the movements deploy a dynamic of subjectification, which is both a constitution of collective rights (droits collectifs) and a differential affirmation of expression and life's practices' (Lazzarato, 2004: 106).

12 Precarity and immaterial labour are brought together in the name chosen for the network of casualised workers, the Precogs. This neologism combines two essential qualities: precari/e + cognitari/e, precarious + cognizant. The name is appropriated from Philip K. Dick's story (Dick, 1989) and Spielberg's movie Minority Report (2002). As with the precogs in the story and the movie, trapped and immersed in a solution and seeing events that take place in the future, the precog network is characterised by strong and imaginative power, the expression of a collective intelligence. But as the life of the precogs in Minority Report is controlled and managed through the supply of nutrients, the name precog also alludes to the control of lives through the supply of flexible work and intermittent income. The Italian word governare, with its double meaning of "to govern" and "to feed", describes this dynamic well. Flexibility, and its deployment in the 31 different forms of contract work included in the legge Biagi, becomes then a control device of living labour. In this sense the typologies of fixed term contracts are the means through which workers are effectively policed. In Foucauldian terminology, they are modes of governmentality (Foucault, 1991: 102-103). However, the name, according both to Minority Report and to tradizione operaista, also signals the ability to see innovation, and to be immersed in it:

13 > Precognition is also that activity of the movement which enables us to anticipate the developments of both capital and biopolitical struggles. Although we are not workerist fundamentalists, we are still convinced that the expression of subjectivity through conflict precedes and determines the counter-trends of capital and power. (Globalproject, 2004b)

14 Similarly the struggles originating from the central issues of casualisation and flexibility are not simply pragmatic responses to sporadic events or concerns. On one hand numerous casualised workers exit traditional forms of political aggregation, such as parties and the three major unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL), to re-organise around oppositional struggles against precarity. On the other hand these struggles not only aim at putting forward a magna carta of proposals, but are also at the core of the production of political subjectivities. Thus the struggles and actions originating around precarity are characterised as constituent conflicts where the production of a common imagery plays a central role.

## Appearances and Disappearances of San Precario

*Milano, Coop supermarket, 29 February 2004*

*Shoppers don't quite understand why there is a procession at the deli counter of the supermarket. On closer inspection the statue of the saint is a bit odd. First, the saint is dressed a supermarket worker. Second, it has too many arms. Third, it holds a telephone, newspapers with job ads, and McDonald's chips. The statue is carried on sticks by a group of young people, and a priest, a friar and a nun are with them. There is even a cardinal. They distribute saint cards: San Precario is the name of this saint. Most people haven't heard of him. But then the young people say a miracle has happened and there is a 20% discount on shopping today. And with prices going up every month – prices have doubled since the euro was introduced – and the superannuation money being always the same, and the grandkids who cannot find a job for more than three months even if they went to university and studied law….*

The handbook *Comunicazione Guerriglia* defines cultural grammar as the system of rules and regulations that structure social interactions and relationships (Autonome a.f.r.i.k.a gruppe et al., 2001: 26). Far from being neutral, cultural grammar is the expression of specific power relations, and its rules play a role in the production and reproduction of the power relations themselves. Cultural grammar pervades the whole of society, and in this sense it cannot be separated from political practices. On the contrary, it is recognised that political practices are also articulated through cultural forms. Intervening in the cultural grammar of a specific place, time or situation can therefore lead to a change that is not only culturally but also politically subversive. In order to subvert a dominant cultural grammar it is in the first place necessary to understand it and to deconstruct it (Autonome a.f.r.i.k.a gruppee et al., 2001: 27-30).

To analyse the San Precario saga it is necessary to understand different and intersecting cultural grammars. At a macro level, one such grammar is given by the shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist system of production and its repercussions at a social and cultural level. More specifically, immaterial labour transfers the site of production into the spheres of communication, knowledge, information, affect and desire (Marazzi, 1999). The response therefore can only be articulated with interventions that mobilise communication, information, knowledge, affect and desires, and interventions, in other words at the symbolic and imaginary level.

San Precario also refers to the cultural grammar of popular religiosity. Other localised grammars, from the peculiar ones that govern supermarkets to the Venice Film Festival ministerial protocols, are deconstructed and détourned in specific apparitions.

The aesthetics of protest are therefore produced according to a post-Fordist blueprint. Characteristics of this blueprint include a flexible and variable production for niche markets, "just in time" stock management that delivers supplies only on request, the use of new technologies, multi-skilling of workers, emphasis on horizontal production processes, deterritorialisation, a shift from material to immaterial labour and to the production of communication, knowledge, information. The modes of activism used in the telling and performing of the life and deeds of San Precario mirror and appropriate through détournement these characteristics. Flexibility, deterritorialisation and horizontal relations are thus mirrored, and distorted, in the story and performances of San Precario.

The Italian expression 'non so a che santo votarmi' ('I don't know which saint to pray to') is used to express utter loss of any hope. According to popular religiosity and the Catholic religion, each saint in the calendar has a field of expertise and intervention. Some saints have multiple skills, others preside over diseases, others over professions. Saint Agata is the patron saint of breastfeeding mothers, Saint Gabriel of postal workers and diplomats, Saint Eustachio of hunters and gamekeepers, Saint Rita of unhappily married women and general desperate situations and so on. It is easy to imagine Italian casualised workers looking at each other and sighing after the end of yet another contract, 'I don't know which saint to pray to'. It is easy to imagine that after a while somebody came up with the idea that if none of the existing saints could help, a brand new saint should be specifically invented. San Precario was first conceived by a crew of Milanese activists, the Chainworkers, one of the groups sharing the Milanese space Reload. This space, in turn, is part of the constellation of groups that organised the 2004 Euro May Day parade, including the Milanese Critical Mass crew, which already had its own protector saint, Santa Graziella (Graziella being both a female name and the name of a basic type of bicycle). To give Santa Graziella a companion, the Chainworkers crew created a male saint (Romano, 2004): San Precario was born,

with all the traditional accessories of sainthood. It has statues (several and very different) to take on processions, iconographical attributes, a hagiography, a saint card, a prayer, and a field of expertise. It even had its own sanctuary, in a gazebo of the occupied beach of Lido di Venezia, Global Beach. Most importantly it has a growing number of followers.

22 From the beginning San Precario was imagined as a détournement of popular tradition. This tradition is at once appropriated in its formal aspects and subverted in its contents. San Precario's life, for instance, is narrated in the popular religious genre of the lives of saints, and it follows all the traditional formulaic developments. The story tells of a young man born in a rich family who, after studying "creative finance" and in search of an answer, goes to visit a man, Silviodoro (Goldensilvio) who through divine intervention had received enough money to found three television channels. On the way back he meets a group of people protesting against the closure of the farm where they worked. The sacked workers tell him they plan to migrate, as the only jobs available in the area are on short contracts and cannot guarantee a decent life. The story continues, with Precario wanting to test the truth of such an affirmation by working in a fast food tavern, then being refused a mortgage to buy a television, and finally converting to the precarious workers' cause (Globalproject Milano, 2004). San Precario's prayer, based on the Catholic Lord's prayer, asks for paid maternity leave, protection for commercial chain workers, call center operators, holiday, superannuation contributions, free services and income guarantees. [3]

23 Similarly San Precario comes with a product placement campaign including stickers and saint cards which subvertise religious saint cards. [4] San Precario's card was adapted by Chainworkers from the work of Canadian artist Chris Woods. On it, San Precario is represented wearing a uniform. The card includes the saint's attributes which, following traditional iconography, are also the signs of his martyrdom. They include income, housing, health, communication and transport. Another product is the table game Precariopoli, invented by Chainworkers, which subverts Monopoly by introducing the hurdles in a casual worker's life. [5]

24 It was decided that San Precario had to have his own celebration day and that the right day to celebrate the saint of precarity and casualisation was the 29th of February, a Sunday. This date has a double symbolic value: on one hand it is an "intermittent" date, occurring only every four years, on the other in 2004 it was a Sunday, a day that with casualisation has lost its connotations of rest and time off work to become just another working day. The first apparition of San Precario, scheduled in a supermarket COOP (a supermarket chain in North Italy) was meant to draw attention to the erosion of time for living, and to the transformation and normalisation of holidays like May Day and Sundays into working days. This normalisation, it was argued, also leads to the deterioration of social relationships and of the social fabric. Organised by the Chainworkers, performed and narrated by about twenty other groups, collectives and communities, the first apparition of San Precario was deployed according to the rules of religious processions. [6] A statue was carried in the streets, preceded by assorted clergy including a cardinal reciting prayers over a loudspeaker, and followed by pious people. This particular procession started at the social centre Reload, home of the Chainworkers, and involved a fake friar, a priest, a nun, a cardinal, and a sound system. It traversed the streets of Milan's periphery until it reached the supermarket COOP, where it continued through the aisles. Every now and then it would stop for collective prayers and collection of offerings. Devotees meanwhile distributed San Precario saint cards to shoppers, or used the cards to replace price tags (Reload Video Crew, 2004; Riot Generation Video, 2004).

25 In the Catholic tradition each saint is recognised by specific iconographic attributes, which generally refer to the saint's miracles or martyrdom. San Precario, in his first apparition, was represented wearing the uniform of supermarket employees. The statue had several arms, indicating the multiplicity of casual contracts and jobs, but also the necessary ability of the casual worker to develop multi-skilling and to juggle several jobs. The references to martyrdom are held in each hand, listing obliquely an array of typically precarious jobs: the job advertisements sections of newspapers, a bag of McDonald's chips, a telephone from a call centre.

26 Since 29 February 2004, San Precario has appeared numerous times in different locations, from Trieste in north-east Italy to Salerno in the south, from Bologna in the north to Rome, from Bari in the south-east to Venice. The apparitions have targeted specific workplaces with a high percentage of casualised workforces. A map of the apparitions roughly coincides with the map of casual

employment typologies: national and international chains such as McDonald's outlets and supermarkets; bookstores and libraries; temping agencies; and finally the Venice Film Festival, in honour of all the casualised workers in the film industry. San Precario does not belong to a specific location but appears in various places, sometimes simultaneously: 'the idea is to have several actions, different in theme and mode, happening simultaneously in different cities, or in different places of the same city' (Foti, 2004a). As a multi-skilled and multiply employed casualised worker, precariously teetering from one job to the next and often juggling several jobs at once, the saint has no fixed identity. San Precario is a floating signifier. Rather than being, the saint becomes, constructing lines of flight according to need, personal inclination and group affiliation.

27 We present as an example the event and the media campaign created and orchestrated by the Milanese crew Chainworkers in collaboration with casualised workers in the fashion industry, on the occasion of Milan Fashion Week on 26 February 2005. This event also marks the beginning of a transformation of San Precario and signals its ability to mutate "just in time" into a new imaginary. In Milan Fashion Week 2005, San Precario morphed into its anagram, Serpica Naro, an emerging and controversial Anglo-Japanese designer with her own book and a website that perfectly mimics the look and content of hundreds of other emerging designers' sites, down to the choice of typographical font, while the animation and sound of the site are reminiscent of the abbreviated, bite-size style of fashion television shows. Similarly the (invented) press-cuttings mirror the graphics of fashion and style magazines. Serpica also had a press office sending out inspired releases, and a head office in Tokyo. [7] A generic website, filtering information gleaned from the network of precarious workers in fashion media, promised "reserved" information for journalists who subscribed to the site.

28 Serpica Naro was born: a young, edgy designer; famous, we read in her biography, for the use of technological textiles and innovative cutting techniques. [8] She was registered with the official body that governs Fashion Week, la camera della moda, to take part in the 2005 shows. To give Serpica more presence, Chainworkers, operating within an expanding network of disgruntled casualised workers in the industry, also created a controversy on queer websites, accusing Serpica of having somewhat exploited the Japanese gay community by copying and commercialising their look after pretending to collaborate with them. [9] A similar operation, it was hinted, was about to be carried out in Milan, where Serpica wanted to show at Pergola (Chainworkers and other activist groups' headquarters) paying little rent money, and thus attracting San Precario's anger and a lot of media attention. The event itself – the fashion show – comprised eight models specifically designed for Serpica Naro on the theme of precarity and precarious work conditions, and was followed by a show of young designers, such as the British Conscious Fashion Week and the Catalan Yo Mango, who refuse to engage with the fashion system. [10] During the show it was announced that Serpica Naro does not exist, and the whole prank was revealed to the media, which duly reported the entire the story thus highlighting the issues of casualised work behind the glitter of Milan fashion week.

29 One of the key issues of precarity is the fragmented temporality of flexible employment. While working conditions are "flexible", "part-time", "casual", "temporary", so is the time frame of protest. San Precario's nomadic apparitions can be considered tactical, according to the now famous (but not in Italy) distinction made by Michel de Certeau between strategy and tactic. While a strategy operates from a proper or institutional space, tactics are located in improper spaces. 'A tactic', de Certeau argues, 'can only insinuate itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety' (de Certeau, 1988: xix). Likewise San Precario makes temporary incursions into the places of others: supermarkets, the Venice film festival, the catwalk, temping agencies, libraries. More importantly, de Certeau points out, whereas a strategy relies on space, a tactic depends mostly on time: 'it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing". Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities"' (de Certeau, 1988: xix). If the apparitions of San Precario are orchestrated tactically, what kind of time do they rely on to create opportunities? Part TAZ, part carnival, San Precario's apparitions are meant to be temporary and impermanent. In TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Hakim Bey advocates the "temporary" time of insurgence and uprising, against the "permanent" time of revolution (Bey, 1985: 97-102). An insurgence opens up possibilities, we could say it imagines lines of flight, to disappear and appear again in a different time and space as

soon as it is named, represented, or mediatised. Temporality is paired with invisibility as a tactic of resistance in front of the omnipresence of State control (Bey, 1985: 97-102). Intermittent temporality, like the one described by Bey, and a viral proliferation of events in different places is a tactical choice to exit and evacuate control. The imperial complexity of today's society can no longer be contrasted with a direct, antagonistic conflict. The disappearance of San Precario is in this sense as important as its appearance.

**Epoesis, Mythopoesis, Videopoesis**

30 So, does San Precario do something other than appearing to fleetingly subvert, maybe organise 20% off your shopping for the day, and disappear again in the familiar refuge of cultural activism? Is San Precario any different from the hundreds of actions of cultural jammers, subvertisers, artivists, hactivists, mediactivists and creactivists worldwide? What does San Precario do between one appearance and the next?

31 San Precario, as the apparition that rhyzomatically pops up in different cities wearing different faces to reclaim paid maternity leave, holidays and superannuation, operates tactically. But San Precario is also part of a wider political debate that brings together, as seen during its appearances at Euro May Day, diverse activist groups, networks and independent unions. One of the images used by another group, the Globalproject activists, to describe the way precarious workers are organised, is the archipelago, an environment made of 'islands in the net, connected by quick and colorful links….' (Globalproject Venezia, 2004). The archipelago is the mirror image of the decentralised production mechanism of post-industrial society and a post-Fordist system. The archipelago recalls Sterling's cyberpunk romance Islands in the Net (1956), where the islands are autonomous experiments in social cooperation and ways of living, linked by the Net. The archipelago of precarity is in the same way organised as a multiplicity of individuals, groups, and collectives linked up through intersecting networks:

32 > An archipelagos of rebel communities, stuck between forests of skyscrapers and metro-radical beaches, climbing plants and sea-stars, cactus and sails, inside Empire's map it defines an irregular perimeter like a dotted line, and each dot is sealed with the stamp H.S.L. Hic Sunt Leones [here there are lions, acronym used by Romans to describe uncolonised and uncolonisable territories] are those sites where power is evacuated, where women and men decided that Imperial Law, Government and Normativity have no value in their lives. (Globalproject Venezia, 2004)

33 The networks, in particular the Precog mailing list and Globalproject, play an important role in producing narr/actions. The centrality of networks reflects a general shift in the Italian movement towards a political praxis that produces and is produced through communication. The production of imagery, of a system of signification, becomes the constituent elements of political subjectivities and of communities.

34 The auto-organised islands or communities have distinct genealogies and political alignments. Although there are cross-overs and overlaps as individual activists traverse different nodes, each directing its actions and attention to specific issues. Communities congregate around precarity, communities as diverse as SexyShock post-feminists, the North-Eastern bio-unionists Invisibili, independent unions (sindacati di base), chainworkers, brainworkers, Globalproject activists, guerrilla communicators, and hackers' collectives. San Precario, although invented by the Chainworkers crew, is in this sense a common product and production.

35 As such San Precario is a mythopoetic figure: it narrates and performs a community into existence. The narration thus become narr/action, the ability and desire to create a sense of cohesion, based on shared histories and experiences which in turn became the starting point for continuing debates and for imagining new possibilities and events. Narrations in general become mythopoetic when, as in the description of Riot Generation Video, one of the islands producing videos in (and outside of) Globalproject, they are 'words that produce actions, and actions that produce words' (Ferraro, 2004).

36 Wu Ming 1, storyteller of the collective Wu Ming, previously known also as Luther Blisset, has dedicated much reflection to the notion of mythopoesis, and has defined it as:

37 > The social process of constructing myths, by which we do not mean "false stories", we mean stories that are told and shared, re-told and manipulated, by a vast and multifarious community, stories that may give shape to some kind of ritual, some sense of continuity between what we do and what

> other people did in the past. . the Italian social movements were able to emerge as multitudes of people describing themselves by an endless, lively flow of tales, using those tales as weapons in order to impose a new imagery from the grassroots. When we talk about "myths", we mean stories that are tangible, made of flesh, blood and shit. (Wu Ming, 2002)

38 The tangibility of these stories is also of interest here. Together with the general intellect producing the ideas around San Precario, there is the need to introduce another notion: that of the general body, as San Precario's saga is at the same time narrated and performed, or performed while narrated. The use of technologies such as video, radio, the net, websites, and sometimes satellite television, enables the narration of actions and events almost in real time. The label "mediactivist" acquires here a particular meaning, where media is only one of the possible forms of activism. Actions and events are created, constructed and acted out by the same people. Narrations, in short, are not a super-imposition after the event on some sort of pre-narrative condition, but are an integral part of political action. In this sense mythopoesis, which in this case we might call e-poesis or videopoesis, is tangible, made of flesh, blood and possibly shit.

39 Subjectivity is constituted also in bodily manner, not simply at a cognitive level. The intermittent time and fragmented space of demonstrations/actions/events/processions, what can be called a time of insurgency, produce a process of subjectification based on intercorporeality. Affect is central to this process. The idea of intercorporeality was originally inspired through notions of embodiment and flesh, namely through Merleau-Ponty (1968: 130-155). In recent times the Italian anthropologist Tamisari, in her work on dance and performance, explores a social and collective dimension of embodiment (1998: 274-286). What happens then in the intercorporeality of demonstrations? There is a need to recover the notion of empathy and, with Edith Stein, to argue that empathy and empathic acts can only happen in a bodily manner, through one's body (understood as the individual psycho-physical unity). The possibility of sensual empathy, or "a sensing-in" according to Stein (1989: 58), constitutes the experience not only of the other but also of the self. This sensual empathy, deployed as TAZ but already spilling out in other experiments, constitutes subjectivities and communities. This sensual empathy, perhaps, is the response to the precarity and precariousness not only of work but also of contemporary life.

## Authors' Biographies

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## Notes

[1] Il Manifesto Bio-Pop del Precariato Metroradicale was written collectively and posted to several discussion lists. This quotation is from the Globalproject broadsheet Il Fascino Indiscreto del Precariato, May 2004, 1.6.

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[2] According to the Italian Bureau of Statistics (ISTAT), in 2002 there were 31 different typologies of casualised work (lavoro atipico), with an increase of 68% since 1996 (Fumagalli, 2003). The 7 million casualised workers in Italy amount to the 27.1% of the total workforce: more than one worker in four is casualised (Foti, 2004c). Given these figures, the category of lavoratore atipico, precarious or flexworker, is not homogeneous and includes a multiplicity of jobs, forms of labour and degrees of "flexibility". There are casualised workers employed in the care and service industry – generally migrant workers, and casuals working in international and national chains such as McDonald's or supermarkets. There are fixed term university researchers and flexible entertainment industry workers. According to recent research by one of the major unions, CGIL,

70% of lavoratori atipici are women, 63.4% are under 35, 32.1% have a tertiary education degree and 52.2% a secondary education degree (NIDL CGIL Associazione Nuovo Welfare, 2004: 42-46). The jobs performed by lavoratori atipici follow the pattern of change described by Hardt and Negri with the terms “informatisation” and “immaterial labour”, as a migration of labour from industry to service jobs (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 285). Only 8.2% of precarious workers are manual labourers, whereas 31.3% are employed in clerical roles, 17.2% are freelancers, 15% are call center and switchboard operators (NIDL CGIL Associazione Nuovo Welfare, 2004: 47-48).

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[3] See https://www.euromayday.org/prop.html.

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[4] See https://www.euromayday.org/prop.html.

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[5] See https://www.euromayday.org/milano/precariopoli.html.

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[6] The following communities took part in the first appearance of San Precario: I Precari e le Precarie, CW, Reload, Bulk, Pop Lab, Collettivo Monzese, Collettivo Contro la Precarizzazione t. 28, Confederazione Cobas, CUB, Ambulatorio Medico Popolare, Cantiere, Casa Loca, PRK 251, Rete per il Reddito di Bologna, XXY, Torchiera, Baraonda (Romano, 2004).

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[7] See https://www.serpicanaro.com/press.

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[8] See https://www.serpicanaro.com/website/index.html.

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[9] See https://www.pornflakes.it.

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[10] See https://www.serpicanaro.com/press.

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**Sites**

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https://www.Globalproject.info

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