



Brunella Casalini, "Care of the self and subjectivity in precarious neoliberal societies"

Author : Maria Chiara Pievatolo

Date : 19 April 2019

The word "precarity" derives from the Latin *prex, precis*, meaning request or prayer. The Latin *precarius*, used both as a religious and juridical term, meant "obtained by prayer," as a favor, in an asymmetrical relationship of dependency, and thus was always revocable, with no guarantee of lasting over time. Through an extension of its original meaning, "precarious" has come to mean something that is uncertain or insecure. Since the end of the 1980s, the term precarity has been used to describe the new social insecurity experienced by many in "precarious work," meaning work that is "uncertain, unstable, and insecure, and in which employees bear the risks of work (as opposed to business or the government) and receive limited social benefits and statutory entitlements".

According to Brunella Casalini, neoliberal individuals are invited to think themselves as free, or, better, as free entrepreneurs of themselves. However, being owners and developers of ourselves is not the same as [being our own masters](#). In a competitive environment the entrepreneurial self is engaged in a never ending struggle to remain in the winning side of a zero sum game in which there are no longer horizontal relationships of exchange, but only winners and losers. Here precarity has become a general regime, "a hegemonic mode of being governed and governing ourselves". "Self-care" and care of others are not absent: they need, however, to be conceived as an investment, justified as such and pursued in terms of profit or as a means to add value to one's human capital.

For this reasons the owners of themselves are, at the same time, their own exploited slaves – precarious workers praying for mercy in a merciless world whose very atomization makes it impossible to organize a critical, collective resistance.

Cynicism, depression, burnout and exhaustion are the inevitable outcomes of such a situation, but it would be mistaken to treat them as medical questions: they are public feelings and critical resources. The question is only how to make them political. The illness, indeed, is not individual: it is systemic.

Brunella Casalini, [Care of the self and subjectivity in precarious neoliberal societies](#)