



**Gender
& Precarity
in contemporary Italy**

**LABOR,
VALUE,
SOCIAL REPRODUCTION**

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Gender and Precarities

an audio-visual lecture on Gender and Precarity in Contemporary Italy

keywords: Labor, gender, Italian feminism, precarity, social reproduction



MINI- BIO

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currently lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley in Gender and Women's Studies.

She recently edited a book on precarity and gender in contemporary Europe , and she is working on a project on xenophobia in Italy and displacement of Roma (Gypsies) in Kosovo. Her next book is an analysis of contemporary Asian-American artists in California, through the lens of gender and post-coloniality.

Gender and Precarities

BASIC PREMISES:

Precarity is a constitutive aspect of life and identity

Not just a type of contract

It's an existential condition,

different according to gender

shared especially among young women, migrants & poor people

Emergence of the discourse & movement regarding precarity

one of the newest movements shaping politics in Europe

Gender and Precarities

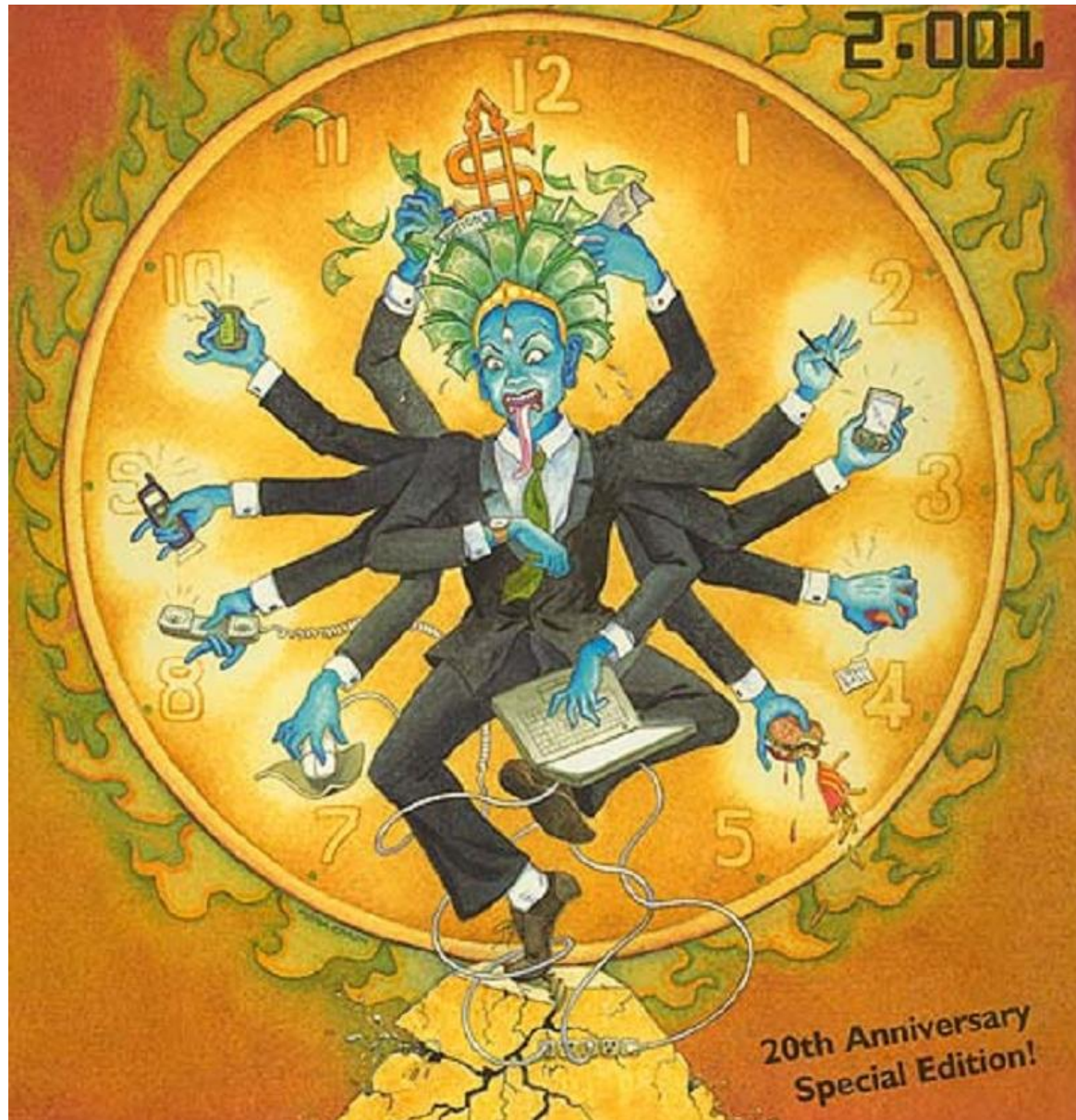
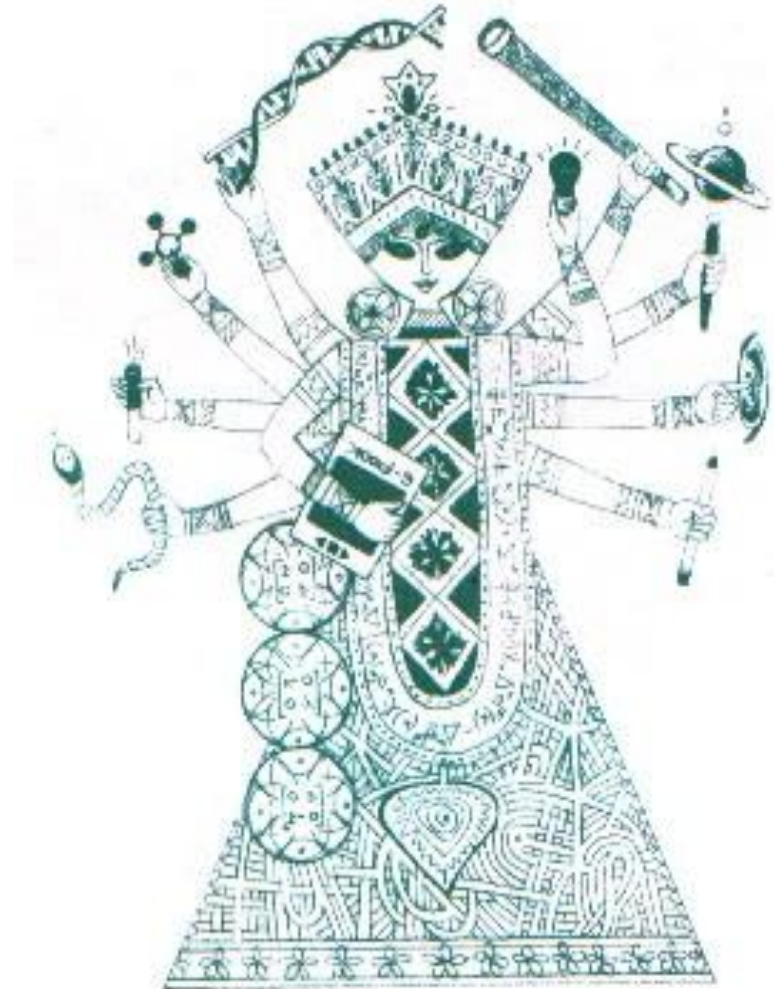


Image courtesy of the artist, Mona Caron, originally designed for Processed World magazine

Gender and Precarities:

juggling precarious work, unstable relationships, uncertain future scenarios and conflicting social values





Issues of time and space

la génération précaire

lives in economic insecurity
works off-hours
& needs to be mobile for the
“rapidly shifting job markets”

yet the dominant institutions in
Italy have not
incorporated
speed & flexibility in Italy

Gender and Precarities

Post industrial markets,
pre industrial institutions and values



**the imperative of flexibility
clashes with
particularly persistent
elements of ITALIAN society**

- o Traditional family values
- o Strict gender & age roles to be respected
- o New forms of family arrangements are feared and rejected

Gender and Precarities

Only recent attention to gender difference given in the political and academic debates on precarity (mainly in Europe)

This allowed to make the connection with affective & reproductive issues
Raised in the 1970ies by radical autonomist feminists

useful angle to address **citizenship** & **social welfare**,
immigration & **de-industrialization**



Different Precarities and the decline in life standards



The younger generation faces a lethal mix of **temp work** & reduction & **privatization of social services** for children & elderly

Consequently middle-class families are squeezed and respond by mobilizing all **human & financial resources** to maintain an **average living standard**.

Different Precarities

A major effect of precarity is that young adults & elderly members live in the same household



MORE burden for
adult Italian
women



Especially
“the sandwich generation” in their 50ies or 60ies

Different Precarities:

Social reproduction for the the precarious generation

temp work

forces women to juggle material
& affective labour
with little recognition of such
efforts



In the 1970ies, many
feminists also struggled
To juggle work and care
but with a different
set of resources, and with more
state welfare support, later
eroded in the late 1980ies

Madonna del latte in customer-care center, Italian artist unknown

Different Precarities

2007-2012 old issues re-emerge and sparked new dialogues & alliances across feminist generations

especially

- the double shift/ care work and domestic work

Even if there are obvious differences between the post-war boom & today's de-industrialization, in terms of

✓ **education**

✓ **autonomy**

✓ **security**

All these aspects present unresolved contradictions in today's Italy

Gender and Precarities

Importance of Communication Strategies



In the last 10 years,
networks of young
Feminists have discussed
and “appropriated”
precarity
inverting its negative
connotations
with humor & provoking
images

Gender and Precarity

Need to network resources and overcome shame and isolation:

- Develop new concepts and theories to express these contradictions
- *shamework* is the sociological category that we wish to point to and break free from today (Borrowed from A. R. Hochschild, *The commercialization of intimate life: notes from home and work*, 2003)
- definition: the amount of efforts, emotional work and time dedicated to hide, or render legible, and acceptable the lack of qualities taken for granted by a group we belong to

Gender and Precarity

contradictory scenarios: Precarity/flexibility means

- marriage
- stable work, retirement
- access to a mortgages
- Buying a house

VS

- Perception of increased freedom and independence
(all options are open)

All sacred steps to adulthood::People younger than 40 in Italy can no longer live

BUT

the social pressure is still there for them

BUT

increased limitation welfare
more poverty

Dilemmas of Precarity

- i.e.: the intellectual, creative work environment is not necessarily more welcoming to women than others
- the economically stable, educated middle-class learns to live by lower standards

REACTIONS AND RESPONSES

- the family and career options lead to saying yes to everything (work and family responsibilities)

RESPONSES TO Precarity/flexibility

*We can't say no to work,
we can't be choosy.. But our work is de-
valued*

*Social reproduction is taken for granted:
we are stuck in the "retreat" to the family
model*

*yet we are able to live with short term
plans and a great deal of future
uncertainties*



contradictions

saying yes to any job,

not distinguishing anymore work from leisure

means

- *constant pressure and instability*
- *high stress levels & frustration*
- *persisting sense of shame and isolation*
- *all with major effects on our health*





- Politics of intersectionality::
- considering multiple intergenerational and inter-ethnic exploitation
- multiple political subjectivity
- refusing to engage in single-issue identity politics
- performing both gendered care roles & intellectual labor
- creativity and lifelong learning
- openness vs. stability
- enthusiasm for an unpredictable, precarious life