

Critique of method

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Mushroom at the end of the world

Imagine “first nature” to mean ecological relations (including humans) and “second nature” to refer to capitalist transformations of the environment. This usage—not the same as more popular versions—derives from William Cronon’s Nature’s Metropolis. My book then offers “third nature,” that is, what manages to live despite capitalism. To even notice third nature, we must evade assumptions that the future is that singular direction ahead. Like virtual particles in a quantum field, multiple futures pop in and out of possibility; third nature emerges within such temporal polyphony. (viii)

Any of our jobs could disappear with the next economic crisis. And it's not just that I might fear a spurt of new disasters: I find myself without the handrails of stories that tell where everyone is going and, also, why. Precarity once seemed the fate of the less fortunate. Now it seems that all our lives are precarious—even when, for the moment, our pockets are lined. In contrast to the mid-twentieth century, when poets and philosophers of the global north felt caged by too much stability, now many of us, north and south, confront the condition of trouble without end. (2)

Defining precarity

Precarity, that is, life
without the promise of
stability. (2)

Center or the exception?

We hear about precarity in the news every day. People lose their jobs or get angry because they never had them. Gorillas and river porpoises hover at the edge of extinction. Rising seas swamp whole Pacific islands. But most of the time we imagine such precarity to be an exception to how the world works. It's what "drops out" from the system. (20)

What if, as I'm suggesting, precarity is the condition of our time—or, to put it another way, what if our time is ripe for sensing precarity? What if precarity, indeterminacy, and what we imagine as trivial are the center of the systematicity we seek? (20)

*I'll admit it's hard for me to even say
this: there might not be a collective
happy ending. Then why bother
getting up in the morning? (21)*

List two promises of stability that someone (or something) has made to you.

How do we make a concept, again?

Thinking about concepts

- >> What makes a good concept?
- >> What are the limits of a concept?
- >> How does a concept focus us, and how does it blur our vision?