

Prelude

Another Place

The sun shines brightly as you get out of the London tube station. You go down the stairs, out through the ticket gate and take a right. You walk past a small council estate with a few people leaning up against a fence whilst they are enjoying the sun and watching people go by. You take another turn and walk up the street where the hostel is located. The hostel is not a single building, but a collection of houses across the area. There are no signs to indicate it's a hostel – there is no reception and there are no permanent staff present at all times. Instead, when you first come to check in, you have to call a number and someone will come and meet you. You call the number and after 10 minutes a person from the hostel arrives. His name is Fabio and he is perhaps in his late twenties. He tells you that you are staying in another house up the road. You make your way there and Fabio lets you in. First, you have to sort out the formalities, so you go down to the common area where you are asked to pay the money for the first week. You pay, in cash, but you don't have the exact amount so you overpay and Fabio promises that you will get the change at another time. You get the Wi-Fi password and a set of keys to the front door and the bedroom you are staying in. Fabio then gets some bedsheets and takes you to your room. You are told that you can choose between any of the free beds. Then Fabio leaves.

You are alone. It is the middle of the day, but the room is dark because the curtains are closed and the small window doesn't let in much light. There are seven double bunk beds and three fridges in the room, and not much space in between it all. You choose the bottom bed in the corner and start to put the sheets on. There are small pieces of rotten food under the bed, the floor is pretty grim, and the bed you choose is squeaky. When you finish, you go down to the common room, where there are tables lined up and a sofa with a TV

in front of it. There is also an unattended but big garden at the back. Coming back to the room, you meet one person. You say hello and engage in some small talk, but then he has to go to bed because work is waiting in the morning. More people have arrived in the hostel. At first, you might get a small nod or nothing much at all. It is a new place that you are not yet part of. You are alone, a separate thing thrown into a world bound together through mutual chatter, smiles, heated discussions, shared cigarettes, and people moving like they somehow belong. You are reeling, and you can't see anything but walls, materials, and floating figures with nothing to hold on to.

Questions for Precarious Lives

Do you ever feel vulnerable? Do you ever feel like your, our, world is coming apart? That your life as you imagined it would be turned out to be messier and more complicated than it was supposed to? Do you have a sense that things always fall out of reach and out of your control? Is it perhaps your job that makes you feel like this? Was it supposed to be more secure? Give you more wealth? Did it promise to soothe your daily worries about how to survive? No more stress about bills, food and a roof over your head, and no more worries about whether your heart and head can survive the pressured intensities to make it through another day? Is it worth all of the living life that you sacrifice to it day after day? Or is it perhaps something else? Do you feel at home? Do you have a place where you belong? Where the quiet rhythms of life gently bring you together with new and old people you hold dear? Or has belonging become a chase? Is it never more than a horizon of possibilities that never seems to arrive no matter how hard you run, crawl, and drag yourself towards it? Is your home nothing but frail dreams in restless nights? Does the world seem to always be incomplete, fragile, and incomprehensible? If so, how do you survive and belong in such a precarious world? How do you make your way through a world characterised by multiplicity, messiness, fragility, distortions, incoherence, and instability? How do you make sense of it all? How do you even start to apprehend a world characterised by fractured truths, a shattered sense of belonging, and unrelenting pressures to work and survive it all?

This book does not try to provide definite answers to any or all of these questions, but it does try to navigate this precarious world by experimenting with precarious methods in the hope that it will allow us to ask these questions in ways that are more in tune with the

vulnerable and wrecked positions that they emerge from and seek to address.

To do this, the book experiments with precarious methods. This also means that the format of the book might look a little different from other academic books. There will, for example, not be an overall introduction and conclusion to hold on to. The book consists of three different parts that enact different methods to try to apprehend and write about life in precarious worlds. The three parts do not have to be read in consecutive order from beginning to end. The first part seeks to use traditional academic methods to provide a coherent analysis of precarious work and life in a London hostel. The second part provides a variety of scribbles to give a sense of an always messy, precarious and vulnerable research process. The third part experiments with more fragmented ways to apprehend something about life in unfolding precarious worlds. Where you prefer to start and how you relate the different parts to each other is something I prefer not to preconfigure and predetermine.

If you want to read about some of the background, motives, theories, and potential interpretations of this experiment with precarious methods, there is a Postscript and Q&A section at the end of the book. There I try to provide some of my perspectives on different aspects of precarious methods and the content of this book. However, these answers should not be seen as defining an imagined singular meaning of this book; instead, they are just my own, always changing attempts to make sense of precarious methods and the worlds filled with uncertainties, contradictions, and multiplicities that they seek to apprehend.