With Ken. To be destroyed, Davidmann presents a necessary investigation of a subject matter that, unless one has experienced it oneself, is profoundly difficult to understand. Highlighting photography’s preoccupation with surface, she reminds us that we can never pinpoint the emotional depths of such great need; yet her multiple investigations express the complexity contained in our relationships with ourselves and others. Although Ken. To be destroyed is a beautiful text, it leaves the reader wanting to see the work in person and experience these surfaces firsthand rather than mediated by the printed page. Davidmann tells readers that the work is one in progress, and, indeed, we are left with a degree of dissatisfaction appropriate to a compelling story not quite finished.¹

SUZANNE E. SZUCS is an artist and educator living in Rochester, Minnesota. For more information, visit www.suzanneszucs.com.

NOTE 1. Sara Davidmann’s digital archive of Ken. To be destroyed can be viewed at http://sara davidmann. com/ken.html.

Precarious Spaces: The Arts, Social and Organizational Change
Edited by Katarzyna Kosmala and Miguel Imas
Intellect, 2016
249 pp./$86.00 (hb)

Precarious Spaces: The Arts, Social and Organizational Change contributes to discussions about the power of art-informed interventions and artistic projects and how these seek to boost social and community transformations on different scales. Editors Katarzyna Kosmala and Miguel Imas focus on examples from socially and economically unstable and marginalized spaces, mainly in South America. This book fills significant gaps in both the arts and social sciences literatures in English concerning art-informed interventions in the Global South.

Each of the twelve chapters of Precarious Spaces discusses case studies and key concepts concerning precariousness, art-informed interventions, and social transformations. Coming from various academic fields ranging from the arts to sociology, the book’s contributors bring diverse perspectives to the conversation, and aim to create an interdisciplinary framework. Excerpting ideas from the writings of theorists such as Claire Bishop, Nicolas Bourriaud, Néstor García Canclini, Henri Lefebvre, and Gayatri Spivak, the contributors articulate the book’s theoretical and conceptual structure. Some of the concepts analyzed together with the examples of art-informed interventions are relational aesthetics, planetary autonomy, and precariousness. The examples included in Precarious Spaces are specific cases of community and social organization, alternative creative spaces, public art works, art exhibitions, photography-based research, publications, and media activism. In each chapter, the contributors provide information about particularities of both the interventions and the specific geopolitical contexts in which these projects take place.

Despite the welcome effort to gather cases from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Mexico, supplemented with comments about examples from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, the book lacks variety. The publication mainly focuses on the Brazilian context, specifically on the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, camps of indigenous Mbyá-Guarani, Fábricas Recuperadas (occupied factories), and media activism. The lack of variety prevents the editors from entirely accomplishing their intention of portraying socially and community-engaged art practices in South America and contrasting them with similar issues in the Global North.

In the book, the concept of “precarious spaces” refers to territories where physical, spatial, and social manifestations make evident the instability embedded in contemporary life—for instance, the factories occupied by workers in 2000, during Argentina’s financial crisis. This instability primarily caused by the neoliberal economic model is, in turn, what gave birth both to the book and to the art-informed interventions included in it. Based on the privatization of profits and the socialization of economic losses, the neoliberal model obstructs possibilities for the social and personal development of individuals within specific groups. As a result, devising social, cultural, economic, and political alternatives becomes vital to resist and overcome the precarious conditions of contemporary life.

Meanwhile, “art-informed interventions” refers to processes influenced by, but not specifically based in, the arts. Therefore, instead of presenting projects founded on the production of artistic objects, Precarious Spaces focuses on participatory practices applied as research methods and as interventional forms. In both cases, art is used in an effort to generate social and community changes. For instance, the Museum of Photography Lima (FOLi) developed an urban experiment during the First Biennial of Photography in Lima, Peru, in 2012. A public alternative space, FOLi Lab, was created from four shipping containers, and was designed to exhibit projects and to serve as a meeting point for dialogue, analysis, and research concerning photography. After the intervention, FOLi Lab had been visited by more than 45,000 people. Additionally, the museum collected information about attendees’ interests and perceptions about photography. By increasing community participation during the Biennial, FOLi Lab strengthened the relationship between the museum and the public.

Precarious Spaces, rather than being simply a catalog of successful and replicable art-based interventions, is instead an assortment of actions that challenge the logic of the neoliberal economic model. The volume demonstrates that precariousness and territories are systems in constant permutation, which cannot, therefore, be approached using predesigned recipes. Each precarious space is particular in its social organization, spatial configuration, and inhabitants’ interests and needs. Beyond emptiness and marginalization, the publication approaches precarious spaces as an arena of possibilities. In other words, this book invites artists, urban designers, social workers, activists, and academics to understand precariousness as a condition under which imagining other ways of living and fighting is both necessary and viable.

ALIX CAMACHO VARGAS is an artist; an MFA candidate in social practice at CUNY, Queens College; and co-founder and member of the editorial board of the Colombian journal on contemporary art (em_rgencia).