

Anxious and Precarious

Literature & Aesthetics, open-access journal at the University of Sydney

Deadline: Oct 31, 2022

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Call for Papers

Anxious and Precarious: Entanglements of Affect and Labor in Contemporary Culture

As the ongoing pandemic has made it palpable, anxieties can turn into pervasive affects with detrimental effects on the psychological well-being of the individual. To be anxious is to be on edge, not only psychologically, but also ontologically and existentially; or to use Heidegger's terms, it is to be in a state of "groundless floating" (1996). Ranging from general anxiety, PTSD, OCD, and phobias to the simple sentiment of being out of sort, anxieties operate as harbingers of imminent disruptions. Often linked with the concept of "disorder", anxieties are mostly mentioned in a context that frames personal and socio-economic behavioral patterns in terms of pathology, normality, and abnormality, which implicitly refer to normative views of what constitutes a "good life". It is no coincidence that anxiety, as a heightened state of insecurity and being-alarmed, has been on the rise, because radical transformations of the welfare state and the labor market have made those normative visions of a good life increasingly unattainable, producing a state of "cruel optimism" (Berlant, 2011). Accordingly, anxiety is intrinsically related to the narratives that shape our understanding of why a vision of the good life is at risk, as it is often induced by the actual risk or the imagined threat of losing a (relatively) stable status. It is against this background that Guy Standing (2011), for instance, sees anxiety as fundamental to the precariat's state of being, while public intellectuals and writers like Ilija Trojanow (2017) identify continuous "Angst" as a dominant affect in present-day economies. In addition to its entanglement with labor and affect, anxiety has been a driving force for a myriad of extensional writers, such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, and Dostoevsky, for whom anxiety would be a kind of "neuroexistentialist" mode of being (Caruso & Flanagan 2018). Next to existentialism, anxiety has also become an integral thread in recent phenomenological approaches to a life worth living (Wills 2008; Trigg 2017; Bergo 2021).

Due to the entanglement of economic developments and affective ecologies, anxiety has become a recurrent theme in theoretical descriptions as well as in cultural representations of precarious work, too. It is no coincidence that recent volumes on representations of precarity (Korte & Regard 2014; Hogg & Simonsen 2021; Rys & Philipsen 2021) highlight affect and anxiety as leitmotifs. Exactly because labor is one of the main instruments to realize visions of a good, fulfilled life, representations of themes like risk, unemployment, social regression, precarization, etc., are particularly well-suited to explore the affective ecologies of the present.

Considering the kaleidoscopic manifestations of anxiety in history and its pertinence to our present time, this call for abstract inquires: How do literature and visual culture position anxiety in

relation to work and affect? How can anxiety unfold or occlude a specific discourse of precarity? In which way can texts and images become the conduit of mitigating or exacerbating anxiety? What types and figures of anxiety are mediated and with what narratives, rhetoric, and metaphorical means? What forms of (waning) agency and solidarity are connected with the imaginary of anxiety? To what extent can new media technologies conduce, repress, or even transfigure everyday anxieties?

Amongst many possible approaches towards anxiety and precarity in literary studies and visual culture, article proposals may focus on, but are not limited to:

- Contemporary representations of the Uncanny (unheimlich)
- Ontological menace
- Existential restlessness
- Phenomenology of unease
- Precarity and precariousness
- Anxiety and labor
- (Visual) narratology, voice, and anxiety
- Representations of anxiety as (de-)normalization
- Status anxiety and social regression
- Malaise and melancholy
- Edginess and inquietude
- Affective uncertainties
- COVID-19 anxiety syndrome
- Narrative and visual representations of different types of anxiety and phobias (e.g. social anxiety, OCD, PTSD, panic disorders, agoraphobia, claustrophobia, tropophobia, algophobia, anthropophobia, atelophobia, atychiphobia, autophobia, etc.)

Such topics and related questions will be addressed in a thematic issue of the peer-reviewed and open-access journal *Literature & Aesthetics* at the University of Sydney. To see the other volumes of the journal, see <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/LA/index>

We warmly invite scholars of visual culture & literary studies to submit a 200-word article proposal and a short biography to both editors: s.a.shobeiri@hum.leidenuniv.nl & michiel.rys@kuleuven.be. A selected number of contributors will be invited to write a full article of 5000-6000 words in 2023.

Deadlines:

Abstract submission: October 31st, 2022

Communication of acceptance: November 30th, 2022

Full-article submission: April 30th, 2023

Publication of the volume: October 2023

Should you have any questions regarding the CFP, feel free to contact the editors.

Ali Shobeiri & Michiel Rys (the editors)

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