

On “Anxiety Culture”

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In our current world, everyone is likely to feel anxious in the face of a very broad spectrum of threats and dangers we are all exposed to, whether as a matter of fact or in latent expectation. This socially spread feeling of anxiety is due to the omnipresence of discussions on phenomena like earth warming, health hazards, unpredictable terrorist attacks, political instabilities and outbreaks of wars, uncontrollable migration waves, religious hostilities leading to violence, socio-economic inequalities, uncertain future of many people’s own living conditions and so on.

As a result, we live in a society affected by a kind of anxiety disorder which very often attains the individual, but is also summing up to a general mental state in the communities we live in. This is why ‘Anxiety Culture’ seems to be an appropriate notion to suggest an analytical perspective for a better understanding of and handling with the bigger social problems and precarious aspects of today’s living conditions.

Our contribution tries to show that there is a tradition of sociological theory building as well as some kind of public awareness which can be easily linked to the definition of this term as a successor of other analytical key notions for social, political and economic development like ‘risk society’ (Ulrich Beck ↷2015, using this term since the 1980s) or ‘liquid modernity’ (Zygmunt Bauman ↷2017, using this term at the beginning of this century). ‘Anxiety Culture’ can be seen as the attempt to describe what happens now when our world is in ‘metamorphosis’ (Beck, in his last posthumous publication of 2016) and all the established theories that are to explain current social change and the world’s imminent future prove to be failing.