Book Review

Review of Eklundh, Emmy, Andreja Zevnik, and Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet, eds. 2017. *Politics of Anxiety*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield. 250pp. Paperback. US\$41.95. ISBN: 9781783489909.

Erin Gibbs Van Brunschot

University of Calgary, Canada
begibbsv@ucalgary.ca

Nightly news, social media feeds, and everyday conversations are sources of anxiety that pervade our individual, social, and political worlds. Recently, we hear of increasing tensions between the United States and North Korea, for example, or texts sent in error alerting the public of incoming ballistic missiles. The anxiety produced by such events permeates all of society, from individual psyches to institutional, state, and global entities. While anxiety is not a new phenomenon, anxiety has increasingly become a tool that can be used for political purposes and political ends. *Politics of Anxiety*, a collection edited by Emmy Eklundh, Andreja Zevnik, and Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet focuses on how anxiety today is different from political uncertainty and how the logic of anxiety may help to unravel and reveal aspects of contemporary politics.

The editors divide the contributions into three main parts: Part I, *Politicising Anxiety*; Part II, *Security: Control*; and Part III, *Resistance: Reclaiming*. Part IV, *Epilogue*, concludes the volume. The editors' introduction to the collection explains that anxiety has replaced risk as the primary "logic of operation" through which individuals, corporations, and governments operate. Unlike the logic of risk and the risk society, which anticipates a particular type of future depending upon the actions taken today, with anticipation based on fear, the editors explain that anxiety is instead the outcome of recognizing that given the gravity of immediate threats and the realization that institutions do not know how to offer security, there may be no future. There are two primary logics of anxiety—the logic of security and the logic of resistance. The logic of security is premised on, as the editors note, "the excessive present." By this they mean that anxiety fuels the notion that present threats need only to be identified and will reveal themselves if appropriate efforts are made today to reveal them. An example is the analysis of big data and the idea that threats can be identified if enough data is gathered and manipulated. The often unreachable quest is to secure the present in order to secure a particular kind of future. At the same time, anxiety is also characterised by a logic of resistance. The logic of resistance works as the public begins to recognize and appreciate that governing bodies do not know how to provide security, nor can they even identify threats in the first place. From this recognition the seeds of resistance may be planted and may provide opportunity to use anxiety to resist government involvement, creating new understandings of the present through protest and "delegitimi[zing] the political elites" (9).

Part I, *Politicising Anxiety*, begins with an examination of the theoretical underpinnings of what anxiety is and how it is significant for political and social life. The chapter by Burgess provides a fascinating examination of the Lacanian psychoanalytic conception of anxiety and how the new age of anxiety "alters

the traditional equation of danger and protection” through our inability to identify the “reality of danger” (18). When the object of danger is unknown, anxiety is heightened due to this inaccessibility. If, or how, we identify whether danger is real is how politics become part of the debate and the “unresolved economy of struggle” (21). Tavares Furtado’s chapter draws on the notion of “un-resolvability” by considering the language of trauma. He explains that the notion of incomprehensibility that has been increasingly paired with traumatic experiences is significant in that a traumatic experience “exposes the volatility and precariousness of existence” and undermines the “fictitious façade of security” (42). When we experience trauma, there is a break with the reality that we have known and the resulting incomprehensibility—that there exists a reality that we do not and cannot know—bolsters anxiety.

The next section of the collection (Part II) focuses on the first logic of anxiety, security, and control. Neocleous’ contribution suggests that there is an endless “security war,” meaning that we are permanently and universally seeking ways to satisfy our desire for security. People seek ways to deal with anxiety through preparation and planning to be resilient in the face of disaster. Key to our preparedness orientation, for Neocleous, is a focus on resilience which leads us away from political struggle. Resilience has the effect of ensuring that things stay the same. Guittet and Brion consider the concept of suspicion and how suspicion is “the active ingredient” in our quest for security and our blurring of the lines between “rationality and panic” and “anticipation and anxiety.” Suspicion undergirds surveillance, where we are always “watchers and suspects at the same time” (84). Guittet and Brion explain that suspicion sustains risk displacement through the “imperative of referral” (91), which means that situations (or people) identified as possibly threatening are not dealt with by only one approach or agency but rather multiple others are involved which has the effect of redistributing responsibility for containing identified threats. Liability is cultivated when suspicion is fed and results in a context where precaution blurs the line between rationality with panic. The last contribution in Part II is by Baran who focuses on organizations that wish to position themselves as resistant and resilient to external threat. Central to his argument is the delegation of authority for the identification of threats, decisions, and responses to identified threats, and communication in the face of such threats. Using pandemics as a means to illustrate these three aspects of threat, Baran demonstrates the complexity associated with how and when responsibility is assumed in “circumstances of uncertainty,” especially with respect to state and local actors.

Part III, *Resistance: Reclaiming*, focussing on the second logic of anxiety, begins with a piece by Rossi that focuses on the rise of far-right parties in Europe and the responses to these parties by mainstream neo-liberal politics. Specifically, Rossi argues that anxiety is best understood as a political practice through which both mainstream neo-liberalism and far-right parties mutually constitute a logic of security. Using the crisis in Italy during the 1990s as an illustration, Rossi explains that “anxiety is articulated through a triple temporality, in which the present is the result of an interweaving of past and future” (127). Because anxiety does not have a fixed object, political parties are able to use anxiety as a conduit to channel fear of the past and anticipation of the future. When there is no fixed object, anxiety enables the exceptional to become normal—“the emergency [is] always in the process of re-emerging” (131). In the next chapter, Cossarini explains that although emotions have tended to be seen as “enemies of reason” (144), emotions are central to the ways in which anxiety is channeled. He describes “the precariat,” an increasingly larger global class position that is “condemned to face the constant precariousness of “unknown unknowns,” and [is] exposed to chronic uncertainty” (147). This exposure, Cossarini argues, may lead to a variety of emotional responses and form the basis of political engagement and resistance. Indignation, for example, may be used to encourage collective action, while anger may also motivate political action through questioning the legitimacy of power. The last chapter of Part III by Wilson focuses on the case of Jeffrey Sachs to illuminate that the neoliberal project—setting free a reality that has been obscured by “the bureaucratic undergrowth of the interventionist state” (166)—is, for some, a form of “neo-liberal neurosis.” For Wilson, this means that the goal to remove all barriers from capitalist social relations “paradoxically intensifies the very contradictions of capitalism” (177) that it hopes to shield itself from.

The final chapter of the book, Part IV *Epilogue*, concludes with a piece by Dillon who considers anxiety and baroque politics. Dillon explains, through at times dense prose, that both finite and infinite

possibilities exist within a “complex baroque artifact.” Both leaders and modern governments suffer anxiety due to the marginalized “courage of truth,” “wherein “interest” vies irreconcilably with truth” (201). Dillon concludes by noting that sovereigns can never know enough to fully secure themselves or those they govern ensuring that security remains elusive.

This collection of essays is the result of a 2014 conference on *Politics in Times of Anxiety* led by the book's editors, Eklundh, Guittet, and Zevnik. The editors' introductory chapter effectively provides a roadmap and means by which to distinguish how to link the contributions together as the connections might not be otherwise particularly obvious. Together, however, much new light is shed on anxiety and how it may be used politically and why it is an important political concept. Perhaps the greatest take-aways from the collection are twofold and are broadly applicable beyond the context of politics: first, Rossi's framing of anxiety as a triple temporal threat, noting anxiety as handily wrapping up the past, present, and future into an inescapable uncertainty; and second, the recognition that what we do not know is as important a (political) tool as what we do know (or think we know). While the collection provides no definitive answers, nor can or should it, the volume's contributions collectively highlight the complexity of anxiety regardless of the context in which anxiety seems bound to prevail. Regardless of whether one is specifically interested in politics, this collection has a great deal to offer all social scientists and provides a great deal of insight into what is likely to remain an anxious future.