

Call for Papers:

Workshop

Is there a Ubiquity of Precarity?
Media, aesthetic and political perspectives on a contested phenomenon

Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, 3-5. July 2025

Organized by Sebastian Lederle (Bauhaus-University Weimar)

The generic term precarization encompasses various theoretical approaches and sometimes highly heterogeneous phenomena. Precarious are employment contracts as well as future prospects, gender attributions as well as stock prices, personal intimate relationships as well as social media profiles, micropolitical arrangements in small groups as well as hegemonic large formations of a society or political institutions. There seems to be nothing that cannot be said to be affected in one way or another by insecurity, uncertainty and ambiguity, and not to be dependent in one way or another on conflicting and contested interpretations and conceptions. Precariousness is not just one scientific category among others, but the point at which life in late modernity crosses itself in its many perspectives, overlaps itself, and eludes any kind of unambiguous and final safeguarding. The fact that precarity can be found everywhere, at all times and in every life to a certain degree makes it an ontological as well as a historical-empirical, methodical as well as a concrete operator. Even precarity itself is a contested concept, status and articulation. This is what makes it so attractive as a contemporary concept: precarity is, whether hidden or open, ubiquitous.

According to the thesis of the workshop, precariousness is first experienced by those who are placed under uncertain, media, political and aesthetic conditions of becoming a subject and relating to the world as a world of becoming. The question of what it means to live in a world in which precarity has become ubiquitous cannot be answered without considering its medial, infrastructural forms of presentation and its modes of appearance, which are tangibly reflected in the field of aesthetics and make it appear as being contested in itself. There is no demarcation between the medial, the aesthetic and the political that is not open, contingent and contested – and that sees itself as already challenged by other perspectives, precisely from its own perspective.

Precarization can be viewed not only from the perspective of political science and social theory, but also from a media-anthropological and aesthetic perspective. Media and technology are then not mere instruments or aids for humans, but, according to a media-philosophical thesis, they produce “the” human being as a point of attribution in the first place. To be human means to be produced in this way, whereby practices of self-addressing as human always already make use of media, political and aesthetic operations and movements, that are beyond an anthropocentric scope, so that we can speak here of an irreducible “anthropomediality”. In this, the term “anthropos” in the term “anthropomediality” is structurally precariously formulated, because it is always only conceivable as a respective relatum as part of a relation, that cannot be fixed or finally ascribed to an essence or regulating norm. The guiding intuition of the workshop is that this state of affairs fundamentally points to precarious modes of existence. The main thematic perspectives of “aesthetics”, “mediality” and “politics” are devoted to such an interdisciplinary exploration of the ubiquity of the precarious.

What can be termed the aesthetics of the precarious becomes evident not least with regard to the question of the extent to which aesthetic practices, techniques and the associated processes of

attribution and evaluation not only thematically engage with precarity, but have also become precarious in an operative sense: How can knowledge of the aesthetic – in contrast to the medial and the political – be justified, if the previous criteria, standards and routines themselves exhibit a precarious status and must be repeatedly renegotiated? Can aesthetic knowledge only be asserted and maintained if it already proves to be permeated or marked by mediality and the political, that is, only has something to say if it keeps an eye on its own precarity as the precarity of the others (and vice versa)? Precarity goes beyond a mere social and political category, in that it also concerns the foundations of the human relationship to the self and the world. The point of a media-philosophical and aesthetic concept of precarity therefore lies in not only localizing the contingency and the interminable contestability of ascribed statuses in the theories of the political, but also in expanding them in a media-materialistic and aesthetic way. Precarity is, according to this, the current *modus operandi* of the aesthetic. It is no longer possible to speak about precarity independently of who is positioned by it, how and in what respect from a medial and aesthetic perspective.

Insofar as precarity is always also associated with a weakened, gradualized and, in liminal cases, even paradoxically erased access to the world, the talk of the ubiquity of the precarious does not point to a uniform sameness, but refers to precarity as a relational phenomenon, state, structure, process or event that is, in a certain sense, affected by itself. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the articulation of precarity and the forms of experience associated with it, if it is not understood solely as a socio-economic category that is primarily researched by sociologists, requires a perspective that urgently needs forms of non-propositional or non-discursive knowledge in order to articulate in particular, phenomena of passivity, events of the losing subjectivity, control, authorship of thinking, acting, speaking and imagining, intermediate states such as tiredness, of aimlessly walking around, of digressing or of weakness, withdrawal, erasure and neutralization

Connected to this is the question of what role the arts (or the knowledge of the arts) play in how precarity is re-presented, and who is considered and perceived as precarious. Not least, what it means to be precarious, to whom one is to be counted as precarious, and to be able to articulate one's own precarity at all as such, is itself contested in a non-trivial sense. Is there a *potentia precaria* or does the *conditio precaria* consist precisely in the fact that it is only indirectly noticeable in its effects and in what and whom it destabilizes and undermines? If this is the case, however, it must be considered how it can be grasped and put onto display at all.

This would then be a question of the specific mediality and aesthetics of the precarious: One is never just precarious and insists on it, as it were – and yet precariousness lacks direct visibility, in which it manifests itself directly and tangibly when normalized frames of reference fail: weakness is something other than just the failure of physical and mental strength, tiredness is something other than the supposedly transparent waking consciousness and the temporary extinction of the self in sleep.

Topics, problems and questions that can be addressed in presentations include:

- What happens when we abandon the “human being” as a fundamental category and instead focus on the technical-medial constitution of “human”, “subjectivity” or “personhood” and its fraying into diverse media milieus?
- On the basis of which concrete phenomena can precarity be represented and, in particular, the fact taken into account that the phenomenon of the precarious always also lies in the questioning of its very accessibility and phenomenality? How does precarity reveal itself, for example, in sleep, in weakness, in digression, in taking detours, in vulnerable exposure, etc., as something through which these phenomena can not only be made identifiable, but

which irreversibly marks them as precarious modes of existence, states, structures and processes? What kind of marking is being marked as precarious? How is precarity made describable and how do descriptions of the precarious negotiate their descriptive power, which always distorts the phenomenon of precarity – without necessarily intending to do so?

- Which discursive authorizations determine who is intelligible as a human being at all and who is not? What role do materiality and processes of embodiment play in this? What does it mean to recognize someone in their vulnerability and precarity and thus fundamentally in its human frailty? What does this mean for further concepts such as vulnerability, ethics and politics of care, as well as processes of de-humanization?
- How is the boundary between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic drawn when the demarcation itself becomes precarious, and this is negotiated independently of any categorical separation? What does it mean for aesthetic practices, techniques and forms of experience when a constant reference to non-aesthetic zones and areas is present in them, as something that finds its way into the aesthetic itself? How does aesthetic experience change when it reflects, represents and questions its political, socio-economic and material situatedness as part of its own mode of experience?
- What is the relationship between nature, technology and culture when the boundaries between them have always been blurred and they have inseparably mixed, hybridized, intermingled and contaminated? What does it mean to think of this transition between nature, technology and culture not as dialectically reconcilable, but as precarious, endangered, volatile and unstable? What does a nature that has become precarious mean for the human world? What role does the concept of adaptation and self-preservation play when nature, in the sense of a natural basis for humans and as something all-encompassing, literally becomes precarious?
- What impact has precarity on and in the realm of the sensual, of corporeality and materiality? What erasures, one-sidedness and distortions occur through precarity in the access to the world? Can precarious persons or groups express their precarity directly or is there always a concurrent manifestation of precarity which eludes a direct representation? How to address this indirect way of being affected by precarity without speaking in the name of it resp. others? How to testify to precarity?
- How does someone who is precarious know this? Do you need any discursive legitimation to be precarious? Is there even a correct way to ascribe precarity or live precariously? Who decides on this and how is it decided who is precarious and thus also has the paradoxical non-chance of being perceived as precarious by others and of being considered precarious before others?
- What semantic, cultural, political and conceptual layers are at work between a legal status, political theology and precarity? What does it mean to have a status or to lose one? Which ideas of status understood as paradisiacal calm, state power resp. sovereignty or imputation of legal-moral personhood still play a (latent or explicit) role today when it is said that someone or something is in a precarious state?
- How are precarity, sovereignty and security related? What is the normative, ethical and political orientation of the attribution of a precarious status? What would it mean to not be precarious (anymore)? Which phantasms of calm, standstill, control, predictability and temporality are involved in the desires to flee or to resolve precarity? Why is a state of a pure absence of precarity a source for and motor of arts and aesthetic experience in a broader sense?

- How does medialization participate in political processes beyond their instrumental function? How do medial operations and effects contribute to politicizations or mark precarity not only as an attribution of status to groups and persons, but also as something that is produced and made in an operative sense? Why are operations of being made precarious of political relevance, even if these are not about political representation?
- Can precarity be subjectivized in a neoliberal way and appropriated by the respective actors as a strategic and competitive resource? Is risk management and prediction the present form of neoliberal regimes of controlling and governing precarity?
- How do precarity, negativity, complexity, contingency and securitization conceptually relate to each other?

However, proposals that pursue **other topics, concepts and focuses are also very welcome!**

Proposals in English of no longer than **one page** should include **an abstract and a short CV**.

For further information regarding travel and accommodation and other questions, please contact the workshop organizer (Sebastian Lederle). An application for funding of the conference has been submitted. If approved, travel and accommodation costs can be covered within the usual range.

Please send your abstracts to: Sebastian Lederle - sebastian.lederle@uni-weimar.de

Deadline: February 24, 2025.

Notification of acceptance: End of February 2025.