

PROLOGUE

The cultural heartbeat of Anxiousness

In the first volume of this series, Agatha Frischmuth explored the concept of *Inertia/Nichtstun* as an expression of Modernity's underlying vocation. Drawing on the theoretical work of Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin, while seeking empirical evidence in the literary characters created by European canonic authors, Frischmuth's study is a case in point of the significant role played by Cultural Studies and its German counterpart *Kulturwissenschaften* in reaffirming the close relationship, fascination (or need) that European culture has had with privative language. Whether manifested through inertia, darkness, ignorance, apathy, melancholy, fear, void, vacuum, angst, terror, infection, illness, absence or death, the discourse of negation has inspired generations of scholars and provided methodological approaches to the study of culture, as recently Lars Koch traced in epistemological dimension of Angst.

A similar engagement with negative discourse allows the present volume to be read as a sequel to *Nichtstun*. The *Discovery of Anxiousness* is an empirical and theoretical study to the seemingly privative character of Anxiousness. Anxiousness is here chosen as a translation of the Portuguese word *ânsias* (also spelled *ancias* throughout the baroque period). Empirically, this research is grounded in a historical and hermeneutic analysis of early modern sources, many of them in manuscript form and understudied by historians of ideas. One factor of this academic neglect may relay on its seemingly pious genre. The formulaic nature of many of the life-writings and the assumed hagiographic nature of the accounts of virtuous or extraordinary women, contributed to academic scholarship focused on their textual and literary apparatus, oftentimes at expense of a critical engagement with a wider body of Christian philosophy. The *Discovery of Anxiousness* aims, therefore, to embed the empirical findings derived from these historical research, in the wider questions arising from contemporary debates on subjectivity.

This approach is not unfamiliar to Cultural Studies. Michel de Certeau's theoretical project culminated on the *La Fable Mystique* (transl. The Mystic Fable) serve as a source of inspiration and reference throughout this study. His analysis of early modern mystical experiences in a plethora of registers, expanded his scholarly im-

pact beyond history of Christianity into historiography, philosophy of culture and historical ethnology. Simultaneously, several feminist Caroline Walker Bynum, with *Jesus as a Mother* and *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* brought devotional texts to the forefront of academic history of Christianity. A decade later, Alison Weber's analyses of Teresa of Ávila's rhetoric strategies is as important as Grace Jantzen's philosophical reappraisal of the same gendered experienced. Recently, the cultural investigation on mystical discourse breaks through Eurocentric traditions, as Nancy van Deusen has shown with her work on recollection and embodiment practices in the Colonial America or Saba Mahmood methodological engagement with contemporary feminist Islamic devotional practices. Their restorative and inclusive project, claiming a sexualised, gendered, intersectional and diverse commitment within the specific canons, serve both as models and interlocutors in this book.

The Discovery of Anxiousness acknowledges and builds upon these academic genealogies, while also adding to that equation a still unexplored vector – the Portuguese and Lusophone sources, through the voices of Joana de Jesus and her religious communities. This intellectual legacy renders possible a discovery of Anxiousness, a category distinct from Anxiety, Angst, Lack or Need, which are embedded in a purely negative tradition. In a visionary and cataphatic narrative of her life, Joana de Jesus develops a conceptual vocabulary affirmatively different from her predecessors and direct sources.¹ Anxiousness persistently and qualitatively permeates the public narrative, manifesting as both the cause and product of the mystical connection with God. As the argument of this book unfolds, Anxiousness emerges as an embodied concept, intricately woven in the broader discourses of presence and Sehnsucht, while reclaiming the profound sense of a 'discovery': an entity waiting to be that is there to be unveiled, revealed, and thrown into the world.

1 Cfr McGinn, Bernard, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain (1500–1650)*, *Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, (vol. 6, Herder & Herder 2017) pp. 391–393.