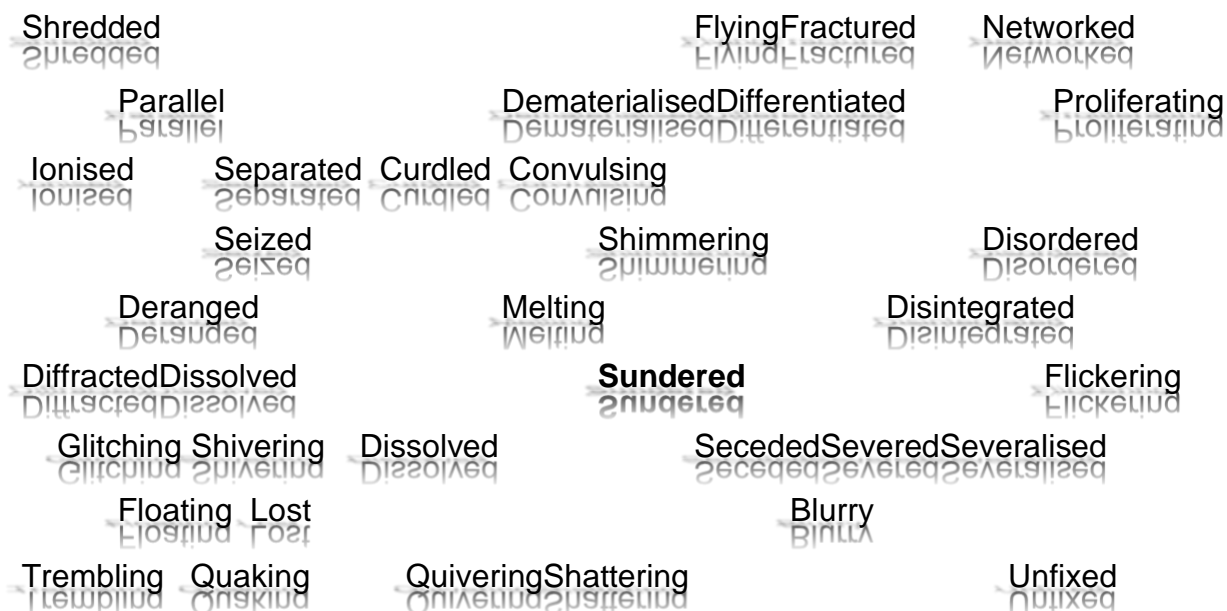# Chapter 2: The Shimmer Body

And yet there it was, ghost of things present, faint pulsation of the real; at times like the glow on the surface of the universe, at others the dark outline of a world dazzled by there being nothing but its own presence.

—Brian Rotman, *Aura*[1]

Where is that I, the I that seizes in panic? The I that is like silt in a river—shifting, particles shimmering, rearranging, conglomerating, collapsing. The I that is the water that moves the silt along, like the water in the Heraclitus River. Never the same river twice. I am, and I am not. The I that is the body that weeps a rivulet into a stream becoming river becoming ocean, catchpools harbouring the detritus of selfhood in spiralling whirlpools. Ever returning—the same and yet not the same—the form uncannily like me, but the accretions different. These different forms/selves beginning again and again, constantly fracturing and dissolving, never resting. Which is the self that experiences? How many ways can a body be?

Shredded   FlyingFractured   Networked

    Parallel   DematerialisedDifferentiated   Proliferating

Ionised   Separated Curdled Convulsing

    Seized   Shimmering   Disordered

   Deranged   Melting   Disintegrated

DiffractedDissolved   **Sundered**   Flickering

  Glitching Shivering Dissolved   SecededSeveredSeveralised

   Floating Lost   Blurry

Trembling Quaking   QuiveringShattering   Unfixed

Philosopher and phenomenologist Dylan Trigg uses the term "topophobia" to address a broad range of spatial phobias and anxieties about place.[2] In the preface of his book that takes this term as its title, Trigg uses a displaced first-person perspective to tell a story of

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[1] Brian Rotman, "Aura," *River City* 20, no. 2 (2000).

[2] Trigg, *Topophobia: A Phenomenology Of Anxiety*, xiii.

a person with a fear of crossing bridges (gephyrophobia) attempting to cross the Pont Marie in Paris on foot, and the existential nausea, vertigo and dissociation that arises during that long journey. The attempt to cross this bridge has become a "ritual" and ritual requires repetition: returning to the same place, performing the same gestures, hoping for a familiar outcome, a desired outcome, even a transformation. At the threshold of the ritual—in Trigg's account the ritual is the bridge crossing— "your body emits a series of sensations and movements, which, despite being familiar to you, still mark the possibility of a trauma yet to be written into your flesh".[3] Trigg refers to the ritual enactment as a kind of infatuation whereby the bridge, the body, and the attempt to cross it come together to create or even re-make a sense of self.

I was immediately thrown into a bodily memory of ontological meltdown[4] as I read the story. My own panics shimmered across time, each one playing out in the same way. Familiar and yet filled with the potential for a new, unknown yet anticipated trauma. I understand this sense of returning to the site of the panic (which is embodied, and spatial), and I wonder who I would be without it. The sense of familiarity is almost comforting, despite the physical and affective discomfort of seeing the ritual through. The term ritual connotes a far more intentional embarking than the often sudden and quite violent arrival of panic—and yet there is a similar sense of return. To me, returning to the site of the self's undoing (through panic) is always so familiar, and yet utterly strange at the same time. Most certainly it is a way of knowing the self, through the undoing of everything that seems reliable, solid, safe and through drawing attention to that which is usually tacit.

Sociologist, psychologist and political philosopher Anthony Giddens refers to the tacit nature of "practical consciousness", or ontological certainty as "non-conscious".[5] These non-conscious aspects of self-reflexivity are kept in the back of the mind but can be pulled forward into a conscious and discursive space if necessary. This foregrounding might be

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[3] Ibid.

[4] I use the term "ontological meltdown" to refer to the dissolution of the sense of self and everything that constitutes a "self" (including the phenomenological world, the social world and the ecological milieu) that occurs during a panic attack. This is in contrast to "ontological security" and is an extreme version of existential awareness and anxiety. I also apply its inherent qualities of combustion, shapelessness and fluidity to melt down the binary of cohesion and dissolution,

[5] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 36.

triggered in a crisis, for example, which can happen at an individual or at a collective, global level. In both cases the threat is existential and as such, as Giddens writes, the "sense of ontological security is likely to come under immediate strain".[6] Usually the awareness of existential threat is sequestered, bracketed and non-conscious. This sequestering keeps our nervous system downregulated—it would be impossible to function in the day-to-day if we were in a constant awareness of this threat. In terms of global crises, the direct threat to security is often physically distant, which assists in the sequestering of crisis awareness. Direct personal threats, however, bring the awareness of our precarity into sharp focus, throwing us into states of existential anxiety and sometimes panic. If these threats are numerous, they can lead to rolling panic. For a person who lives with rolling panic, in a constant state of emergency, day-to-day functionality is at most an aspiration.

Trigg demonstrates through his story of the Pont Marie— the bridge is a compelling and metaphorically potent site for an exploration of the tacit, and the breaking of the ontologically secure boundary. And it shows that existential threats are everywhere: bridges come in many forms. They are sites of passage between non-conscious thought[7] and revelation, between security and chaos, between the conscious awareness of the self in and of the world. These bridges offer unsafe passage to and through the precarious. My bridges are physical and conceptual, and all involve thresholds and liminality. One can dissolve and reconstitute many times in a single crossing. In Trigg's account, the subject has a sense of security until setting foot upon the bridge, at which time a complex array of co-relations set in motion anxieties and threats to existential coherence. The bridge, the crosser and their milieu create the conditions for vulnerability.

A List of Unsafe Passages:

car, bus, train to anywhere
a path in a forest, the way forward and back obscured by trees
an elevator, unless it is glass
all airplanes

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[6] Ibid., 185.

[7] Anthony Giddens uses the term "non-conscious thought" to refer to reflexive consciousness that is held in the back of the mind when functioning on a practical day-to-day level. For example, we don't consciously consider how to place the foot on the ground while walking but could bring it to mind if needed.

long hallways lined by doors and no windows
a doorway to uncertainty
between here and there
shopping aisle, especially lit by fluorescent lights
waking up
falling asleep
the space between the inhale and the exhale
the space between heartbeats
a lifespan
a book chapter
a panic attack which is threshold, liminality and crisis

Panic attacks, from one perspective, result from our becoming-awareness of a disjuncture between ontological security and doubt, form and formlessness, trust and faithlessness. They shatter a person's sense of being "all together", unified, whole and knowable. This can happen over and over. Many times, in a single day. Many times, in a single hour. The losses stack up.

It is in this borderland between ontological security and ontological meltdown that my own subjectivity shimmers. Once a subject has lingered here. in this liminal space of vulnerability, on the shared threshold of cohesion and dissolution, then ontological security is no longer a certainty, no longer unthought, taken-for-granted. It is something one can only strive to attain, if indeed it is desirable at all. The persistence of panic creates a stuttering space between these states of security and meltdown, a rollercoaster which cycles rapidly between high anxiety and panic, or a resting state of incipient panic. The experience is accompanied by a kind of pulsing of consciousness and perception, a here/not here vibration, a crisis of flight from the body, a dissociation of mind. This constant motion, with its varying speeds and intensities, is a blur, a switch, static, shimmer.

If I have been living through a time of rapid-cycling hope-hopelessness/anxiety-panic/dissolution-integration, then this falling apart/coming together, out of focus/in focus shimmer takes spectral form beyond my body, in excess of my body. During these hard times I began to conceptualise of a spectral companion, and for the purposes of this research project I created the term *shimmer body* to discuss this spectre.

I have concretised this experience through many rehearsals across a lifetime: I have manifested the shimmer body as a constant companion.

I have made myself a shimmer body…

This is the first time, this is the only timethisisthefirsttimethisistheonlytime
No no, the hundredth time, the millionth, it is time without number
Never the first time, never the only time
But always the first, the only time
Returning, returning, returning
Never home
But home, made strange

Every pain
Every joy
Every sigh

Time and time again
Once more again

The shimmer body arose for me across time, beginning as a whisperglint, a glimmer, a peripheral flash. I have always used simple words to explain what's happening for me in the moment of a panic, conserving language. Words like "I don't know where I am" or "where am I?" or "what is this thing?". I always knew I went somewhere, and I always knew that I was either snatched or simply disappeared, and that this could happen at any moment, unbidden. Panic was just waiting in the wings to annihilate me, again and again. The shimmer body bloomed, if you like, took form in the wings, and became a companion. I felt I should never forget the panic, or else I would forget how to meet it. The repetition of subjective annihilation, or ego-death, is never palatable—but to forget is terrifying.

Between Certainty and Doubt, Between the Familiar and the New

I find resonance in the works of phenomenologist of somatic illness and author Havi Carel, who proposes the terms "bodily certainty" and its corollary "bodily doubt"[8] to discuss existential feelings and knowledges. For Carel, bodily certainty is a state of being that creates the illusion of a coherent and cohesive sense of self in order that a human can function in the world as-it-is, with its requirements for integrity and a linear chronology. Carel suggests that bodily certainty is "more than a proposition…it is a bodily feeling…of being comfortable, in control of one's body, having a sense of familiarity and continuity with respect to one's body. [It is a] tacit existential feeling of…normalcy [that] underlies our everyday activities and actions".[9] This sense of normalcy is something we take for granted, it is tacit, and goes unnoticed. In fact, attention is the very thing which undoes certainty and throws it into doubt, or destabilises this normalcy. We only notice the machine if it rattles, not when it hums.

Furthermore, Carel writes that this certainty is unjustifiable, but we are nevertheless unable to reject the belief. We rely on the belief, because it is essential to our continued functioning in the face of extraordinary precarity. We may stop breathing at any moment. We may be cast into homelessness because we cannot function the way that a capitalist system demands. We may be a victim of a random act of violence or of ecocide in a flash flood or fire. None of these is unlikely, but we keep breathing without monitoring the inhale and the exhale, we trust in the safety of "home", we distance ourselves from acts of war, we go to work, we make our art, we tell each other our thoughts.

The corollary of this experience of bodily certainty is bodily doubt.[10] Carel directly opposes certainty with doubt, though they are more enmeshed than opposed, and they are reliant upon one another. Bodily certainty is called to attention only through its breakdown, which gives rise to doubt. This breakdown can come about through any number of events or interruptions, including somatic and mental disorders. Carel argues that there are degrees or intensities of bodily doubt. She differentiates between what one might call a very normal bodily failure—one that doesn't break through the certainty and tip it into doubt—with more overwhelming, intense or transformative experiences. Bodily certainty has some wriggle room. You can trip over and right yourself without losing your

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[8] Carel, "Bodily Doubt," 4.

[9] Ibid., 6.

[10] Ibid.

sense of self. You can drop an object you were holding onto and not lose your sense of self.

But a panic attack, however, or a long-term injury or other intense somatic event, can modify our sense of self, our sense of the world, and the sense of ourselves in the world. It can bring about a "loss of continuity, loss of transparency, and loss of faith in one's embodied existence." Carel argues that "bodily doubt is a disruption of one's most fundamental sense of being in the world, giving rise to an experience of unreality, estrangement and detachment".[11] Critically, Carel also makes the claim that panic attacks do not give rise to bodily doubt due to panic's "situational inappropriateness", and its association with "false beliefs".[12] As a person who has lived through countless panic attacks, I can say with certainty that panic attacks, which exist in a stretched temporality, modify a sense of self in the precise ways Carel describes and that panic, in all ways, is an appropriate response to existential conditions.

Jackie Orr suggests that panic warps our perception when she says that "panic is, in part, a temporal disorder".[13] A panic attack occurs outside of the regular march of time, outside of *chronos.* A panic attack is slow and fast simultaneously, is past and future in circularity, is return and return again to the first, the only, the last time. A panic attack seizes quickly but slows down time as it amplifies. It allows us to travel forward to the moment of our own death and look back on ourselves experiencing our own annihilation. Each sharp instant is a tome. As Orr makes clear, in the event of a panic attack, "all the breath-taking somatic signs point to the psychic certainty that death has already arrived".[14] And so we are stretching towards that moment, but also living in the past/future when death has already occurred; we are "in death's aftershocks".[15]

Giddens uses a similar categorisation to Carel to discuss the production of a sense of self. He refers to a sense of bodily certainty as "ontological security" and bodily doubt as "existential anxiety".[16] Ontological security is the smooth humming of the machine, the

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[11] Ibid., 2.

[12] Ibid., 8.

[13] Orr, *Panic Diaries: A Genealogy of Panic Disorder*, 280.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 40.

day-to-day operations we trust. Day-to-dayness is our safe space, compartmentalised or "bracketed" off from the chaotic, the unknown, the lost. Existential anxiety, by contrast, is the chaos that lurks—never far away—within that day-to-day. Drowning is always contained as a possibility within floating, smothering within respiration, annihilation within preservation, care, maintenance. For Giddens, a secure sense of self all comes down to trust—basic trust—which is established in early childhood by primary caretakers, and their efforts to create a framework of routines and relationships that is essential to a robust sense of self.[17] Carel notes that the breakdown of certainty "can descend at any moment…[it] invades the normal sense of things, the everyday…[and] reveals the extent of our vulnerability, which is normally masked".[18] This loss of certainty "often leaves a permanent mark on the person experiencing it".[19]

My Dad would sometimes pack a bag and put on his fancy shoes, polished. He placed one foot on my Mum's dresser stool to tie his laces and then the other. He usually wore a battered hat and muddy boots, so this was a signal that things were not as per usual. On these occasions, when I asked my Dad where he was going, he would say one of two things: "Timbuktu" or "Back of the black stump". I had no idea where either of these places were, except that they seemed faraway or non-existent. The fact that these places were clearly fabrications made me not trust him, and triggered feelings of insecurity. Why would he lie? Because he is going away and never coming back. This dislodged a part of me that trusted. I would creep into my Mum and Dad's bedroom after dark to make sure they were still there, that they hadn't abandoned us. Sometimes I would curl up under their bed, to keep an eye on them and make sure they weren't running away. I only existed in relationship to them, and my world was described by the routines they established: my world didn't exist, without them, and neither did I. It was a fragile time, and an impressionable one. The wound of abandonment instils precarity that abides always.

Trigg also refers to this loss of trust in the body, resulting from a breakdown of the body's capacities, its integrity as a continuum, and also its relations to the world.[20] These ways of

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[17] Ibid., 3.

[18] Carel, "Bodily Doubt," 7.

[19] Ibid., 8.

[20] Dylan Trigg, "Phenomenological Dimensions of the Anxious Body: Trust and Form(lessness)" (The Phenomenology and Embodiment of Anxiety, The University of Memphis, March 28, 2015 2015).

being are necessary to support the security and certainty that concern Carel and Giddens. For Trigg, anxiety arises from formlessness—a formlessness in which the body's boundaries become blurred, stretched, transgressed, such that the self is pushing against its demarcations (Trigg)and exceeding them. Personally, I am not certain whether anxiety gives rise to formlessness or formlessness gives way to anxiety, or if this is a feedback loop, triggered in either direction. In my experience, the awareness of becoming formless and its associated anxieties can amplify in intensity until I experience a subjective break, dissociating in a critical moment of intense affective assault. Trigg describes it thus:

> Your body gains the quality of being distinct from your sense of self. The perception of a Cartesian dualism intervenes, even though in ontological terms, you remain one and the same thing with your body. From an experiential angle, however, your body becomes an "it," an anonymous zone of matter occupying a world divergent from your own. It perceives, it thinks, it feels—and it does so irrespective of your own standing in the world.[21]

The self breaking away from the body represents to me the spontaneous birthing of the shimmer body, a self ghastly and ghostly, my body "doing its best without me"[22] This act of reaching to escape velocity—perhaps travelling on a whisper, perhaps on a scream—is a terrifying way to leap out of, or evacuate the oppression of, embodied confinement, out of sedentary space, into the crackling, electrifying, shimmering otherwhere.

Building on Trigg's analysis, I find further support for the notion of subjective evacuation in the event of a panic attack in the writings of John Protevi. Writing on political affect, Protevi refers to extreme affects such as rage and panic at an individuated level, noting that these are both "de-subjectivizing and decontextualizing…and that drastic cases of rage and panic cause the subject to drop out (as in a blind rage) or be reduced to a helpless spectator (as in a freezing or fleeing panic)".[23] He notes that the resulting de-subjectivised person operates as "a body agent without a self-conscious subject".[24]

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[21] Trigg, "The Aesthetics of Anxiety."

[22] Beckett, "From an Abandoned Work," 21.

[23] Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic*, 45.

[24] Protevi, "Deleuze and Wexler: Thinking Brain, Body, and Affect in Social Context."

There is a lot of tension in this moment of de-subjectivisation. There is a strong resistance to the dropping out, but it is so effortful to maintain a hold on the self, that ultimately it shakes free and flies up or out, hovering and shimmering. This embodied/subjective split or separation doesn't make much intellectual sense to me but I can only be true to my experience, and I experience this out-of-bodyness in the event of extreme panic. I think there is a place for this experience of subjective evacuation as more than a simple mind/body split, and this place is the shimmer space which is full of motion.

Shimmering, hyphenation, escape

In the *Affect Theory Reader*, Gregg and Seigworth take the title of their introductory essay "Inventory of Shimmers"[25] from philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes and place it at the heart of their theories of affect. They contend that affect is neutral—that is, eluding polarities—and that it proceeds with neither beginning nor end, shifting through "shimmering gradations of intensities".[26] My understanding of this is that as I exist as a receiver and a transmitter, and that I am never empty of affect. A cessation of affect I would understand as complete deterritorialisation, a concept I am applying from Deleuze and Guattari.[27] This could also be understood as death. Gregg and Seigworth refer to the "blooming intervals"[28] in which intensities are continually divulged in the supple relations between a world's or a body's interleavings—what Barthes refers to as the "shimmering field of the body, insofar as it changes, goes through changes".[29] As our conditions change—socially, materially, culturally—we are subject to varying intensities of affective resonance. As a body, I am always under the influence of affect. Affect is like the body's weather: it happens upon us. Barthes' shimmer arises out of a calm neutrality and is a

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[25] Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers."

[26] Ibid., 11.

[27] "Deterritorialisation" and "reterritorialisation" are part of the process that Deleuze and Guattari call "becoming", in which, in existence, there is never a point where one "becomes" but only a tendency towards change or stasis. Stasis can be understood as death.

[28] Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 10.

[29] Roland Barthes, *The Neutral Lecture Course at the College de France 1977-1978*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 73.

hyperconscious awareness of the "affective minimal"[30] and the "extreme changeability of affective moments, a rapid modification, into shimmer".[31] Kathleen Stewart echoes this attention to the minutiae and nuance of affect when she refers to "[a] sharpening of attention to the expressivity of something coming into existence".[32] Everything blooms, everything arrives, everything pulses.

In my experience, the event of de-subjectivising is not just a chaotic and potentially violent event, but also a moment of blooming realisation that we are always in excess of ourselves. This is mostly a hidden knowledge, something we keep secret from ourselves in order to carry on. How unwieldy, managing this excess. Knowing it every moment, keeping an eye on it, scooping it up to pour back into the body bag. In the moment that I vomit myself out, there is a simultaneous and extreme wish to instantiate trust and to embed the self back within the boundaried space of the body. It's hard to just go with the affective flows, but if you can, there are instants of reintegration before things fly apart again, like taking a breath when you are drowning. Everything moves at a dizzying pace, though pace is relative. This ongoing motion of subjective evacuation and reintegration, this never-ending crossing of the bridge, back and forth, is a shimmer and a blur.

The extensive and intensive movement, this escape of the subject from the body (or the body from the subject? Which one ejects?) towards a shimmering otherwhere calls to mind the Deleuze and Guattari's concept (or raft of interconnected concepts) of the "plane of consistency" which is "permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles"[33] Variously called the "body without organs" and also the "plane of immanence", the plane of consistency connotes a tendency towards change, and is enmeshed with the notion of "becoming", also a core philosophical concept *A Thousand Plateaus.* All things in existence, according to these ideas, are on the move from one state to another—in a state of becoming. All things are in a constant process of "deterritorialisation" and "reterritorialisation", as we might see in the case of silt at the bottom of a river that

[30] Ibid., 101.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Kathleen Stewart, "Worlding Refrains," in *Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregory J. Seigworth Melissa Gregg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

[33] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 40.

aggregates to become sandstone which becomes the building blocks of a grand building, and gradually, through contact with the elements, finds its way back to the river. Stasis is death—or absolute deterritorialisation—but even death is not stasis, given that rot is very much alive. As living things, we are naturally unfixed, and contain everything we have ever been and the potential for everything (be)coming.[34] All is immanent and energetic. A fictional character co-opted by Deleuze and Guattari from physician and author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—Professor Challenger—whispers, at the end of a rather chaotic passage in *A Thousand Plateaus*, "[I]t is by headlong flight that things progress, and signs proliferate. Panic is creation."[35] Professor Challenger imparts this important piece of information on the way to absolute deterritorialisation via various morphing and terrifying forms. Panic, with its inherently wild and destabilising energies, is a vector for the creation of novelty. This is terrifying and auspicious simultaneously. I can see, and have experienced, how panic can be a breeding ground for change, but in the moment, it is a difficult opportunity to grasp. A speculative tactic to live in the shimmering otherwhere, and to take its lessons to heart is, perhaps, to learn to fly.

A shimmer implies the presence of light, and brilliance and the glitter exist in the shimmer body. I think this is an important aspect of the potentiality of panic. Panic is more than the body's transformation into a jerking meat puppet, operating on chemical flows and shot through with affective, electric intensities and currents. The illuminating aspect of panic is its capacity to shine a light on the world-as-it-is, and therein lies panic's potential as an agent of change. Insight can turn urgency into agency.

Cultural theorist, anthropologist and author Deborah Bird Rose shares the Aboriginal concept of the "shimmer of life"[36] that she was introduced to by the Gurindji[37] people of the Northern Territory. Through a blooming, meandering evocation of the rhythmic pulses of the whole of the coordinated, Rose brings to our attention the shimmer arising from multispecies entanglement. Quoting anthropologist Howard Morphy, Rose discusses the

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[34] Ibid., 39-75.

[35] Ibid., 73.

[36] Deborah Bird Rose, "Shimmer: When All You Love is Being Trashed," in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, ed. Heather Swanson Anna Tsing, Elaine Gan, Nils Bubandt (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2014), 51.

[37] The Gurindji people are the sovereign owners of the Victoria Rivers region of the Northern Territory. Their land borders the land of the Walpiri people.

word "*bir'yun*",[38] which can be interpreted as shimmering or brilliance. One way that *bir'yun* is mobilised is through the practice of crosshatching in painting, on canvas and on bodies, whereby crosshatching on sacred painting—and the tension between the rough background painting and the crosshatching—brings the *bir'yun* into being and invokes Ancestral power. The two fields, background and foreground, require one another to shimmer, to glitter, to flicker, to become bright. Without dull there could not be bright. It is a "relationship and encounter"[39], across nature and culture. Shimmer can bring vitality to desiccation, flatness, dullness; and the ancestral power within this cultural context celebrates the shimmering vitality. The production of the shimmer body in my research relies on a similar tension, on pulsing, vibration, the birthing of a noumenal[40] energy through a flickering between foreground and background, between light and water, between dissolution and unity. In my speculative proposition, it is this shimmer which brings productive energy into a space which is often institutionally dampened. Shimmering can be usefully deployed to evoke powerful knowledges, and create an anti-institutional unstuckness across time, to make the panicked body strategically effective and politically resistant. It can generate vitality; it is productive in its capacity to escape linearity.

This chapter began with the idea of the bridge, as a structure that represents all kinds of crossings—spatial, cultural, social, existential. The bridge is a space of transformation, dissolution, blooming, liminality. I imagine, typographically, a hyphen as a bridge between any number of unfixed possibilities. The panicked subject exists in hyphenated space, and it is here that subjectivity flickers and shimmers, deterritorialising and reterritorialising endlessly. The hyphens of mind-body, material-mental, certainty-doubt, disaster-fortune, form-formless connect the "visible and the invisible, the tangible and the intangible, while marking the area of passage or transition from one state to another, the transit between absence and presence, myself as I was and the other."[41]

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[38] H. Morphy, "From Dull to Brilliant: The Aesthetics of Spiritual Power Among the Yolngu," *Man* 24, no. 1 (1989), https://doi.org/10.2307/2802545.

[39] Rose, "Shimmer: When All You Love is Being Trashed," 94.

[40] The shimmer is noumenal in the Kantian sense of being unknowable, although we are aware of its existence. Ancestral energy may be unknowable to a while settler and yet it is phenomenal and an object of direct knowing to First Nations people.

[41] Y Van Dyk, "Hyphenated—Living: Between Longing and Belonging" (Aukland University of Technology, 2005), 28.

In hyphenated shimmer space I am multiple mes—becoming-swarm, becoming-pack, becoming-other. The hyphen is a bridge across time, a two-way footbridge, trafficking between before and after. It is the limen, the space between, and we can dwell here, on this hyphen, for who knows how long? It is the instant, and it has no width nor breadth nor height. The hyphen is held fast, simultaneously instantiating and collapsing the structure it gives access to.

The hyphen mobilises and nurtures the shimmer, for across the hyphen is unending movement, back and forth, flicker flicker flicker shimmer.

Virtuality, Multiplicity, Integrity

In *Becoming Beside Ourselves* mathematician and philosopher Brian Rotman proposes the idea of "a self distributed and in excess of unity"[42] a parallel human living multiply, becoming "plural 'I's, able to be beside ourselves in ways we're only just starting to recognize and feel the need to narrate."[43] As "para-humans" we can narrate our stories between, within and without our selves—indeed we must—because we are not one. There is no single integral narrative and our selves' stories may conflict or augment. There may be various tenses, timescales, genders, beings. We wander together, sometimes touching the outside, sometimes but not always aware of each other, and sometimes apart. We activate and perpetually reorganise these selves as required when we come into contact with other assemblages, such as workplaces or governance agencies or social spaces. These selves, when mobilised, serve to protect us, legitimate us, connect us with other assemblages, to resist assimilation, to disappear, rage, fall apart, and be a part of.

We are mobile constellations.

As Deleuze and Guattari put it, an assemblage is a *"*constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow—selected, organized, stratified—in such a way as to

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[42] Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts and Distributed Human Being*, 103.

[43] Ibid., 105.

converge…artificially and naturally; an assemblage, in this sense, is a veritable invention."[44]

<div align="right">

"I" is a constellation.

We are a veritable invention.

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An invention with some apparent tenacity and coherence, when viewed from a certain angle, and when required, but which may fall apart when mobilised from a different angle.

<div align="right">

"I" may fall apart

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When I put on my human suit and plug into the machines of production[45], I appear to be a well-put-together semblance of a social and labouring body, contributing to the smooth running of the whole. I can mobilise this self—which some people and agents know as the single integral entity coded Virginia: worker—when required to function in a specific milieu, such as a place of work. We can call this Virginia a territory,[46] and maybe we can call this territory the "labour body". This specific territory, the "labour body", only exists in relationship with capitalist modes of production and concepts of use and value. For example, when I go to work at the yoga studio, my labour body is reliant upon the spatial delimitations of the studio, my relationship with the practice of yoga, my mental and physical health on any given day, my relationship with the hierarchy of workers in the studio. This constellation which is briefly concretised through a momentary alignment of conditions, is shaky at best, a precarious assemblage that can dissolve in an instant, depending upon conditions and relations. For example, when I exit this self in the event of

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[44] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 406.

[45] I am using the term "machines of production" here in a sense which is both Marxian and Deleuzian—and also poetic. Taking Capitalism as my milieu, I become part of an assemblage—the workplace—as soon as I "clock on", and this assemblage is also connected to a larger system of production and so on. I am a part of this huge system, or machine, in that I am not separate from it, I am plugged in, enmeshed. Marx's machines were constitutive of consciousness. Working in the earth means my sweat is on the vegetables that I eat. I have a complex set of relations to the food I eat. Factory farming a chicken alienates us from the being that is the chicken, and our relationship with the processes of growing and nurturing that chicken. Deleuze does not make a distinction between nature and machines. All is nature, all is machine, some processes enable transformation, some promote stratification.

[46] Jennifer Daryl Slack and Macgregor Wise, *Culture and Technology, A Primer*, 2 ed. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc. , 2015).

a panic attack, I am no longer a viable labour body, but I am not nothing. In this space of dissolution, or "deterritorialisation", there is not nothing, there can never be nothing. There is transformation, "becoming", or "reterritorialisation". As one territory dissolves, another arises. This flow of arising and dissolving never ends. This constellation of selves is socially complex and entangled in myriad relationships that are intrinsic and extrinsic. Philosopher Manuel de Landa uses the example of a parent/child relationship, one that comes about through filial association, as an example of an intrinsic relationship—but if that parent figure and child figure were to form a political alliance, for example, the relationship would transform into an extrinsic relationship.[47] I think about the intra-personal relationships between my selves as intrinsic filial relations, while simultaneously being enmeshed in multiple extrinsic relations.

> *I am a constellation*
> *I am an invention*
> *I am a wave, perpetually rising and falling*

Deleuze and Guattari speak more specifically about how this multiplicity of selves relates to the idea of assemblages when they speak about becoming-animal and about packs.[48] Deleuze and Guattari would call this move away from a singular fixed idea of the human towards "becoming-animal"—living as a pack, a school, a swarm.[49] As such we are rippling forever outwards and inwards. As human animals we live in packs but also as packs, experiencing multiplicities of selves that are restless, always on the move, in conflict with one another, always breaking down.

Becoming-animal is a process of flight away from molar individuation towards a molecular constellation that is always on the move. There is no singular wolf, or rat. Molar individuation is a domesticated, governed state, is kept in check, or is dead. Yet even in death, there is becoming. "Write like a rat!"[50] they say! To write like a rat, or a pack of rats—for a rat is always a pack—is to never write alone, it is to scrounge, to survive on crumbs, to be reviled, to seek what is necessary for survival in cracks and crevasses, to

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[47] Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, Speculative Materialism, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 2016).

[48] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 26-39.

[49] Ibid., 239-43.

[50] Ibid., 240.

die in knotty packs by poison or drowning or trap. And to escape. Escape velocity is achieved through high-intensity flight. The panicked body flies. When the extreme affect of panic hits a body, the body shatters like a mirror, and all its parts shimmer in the blinding light of a million refractions. The panicked body shimmers, is as impossible to catch as light, is becoming imperceptible. The exploded shards become a pack of rats, flying. The panicked body is always doubled (doubled doubled) vision. Panic is a pack of intensities, reaching escape velocity.

I am entangled tails, a knotty constellation.
I am a rat, baring its teeth, grimacing, gnawing away at words, flying in a swarm, landing upon the corpse (the body doing its best without…), finding an affinity with the shimmer, in view, out of view, imperceptible.

The shimmer evades capture but abides.

Rotman approaches the notion of multiplicity and proliferation through his concept of the "para-self"[51] which he also refers to as the "para-human"—the self living beside itself. He suggests that the emergence of the para-self correlates with the emergence of digital cultures and networked media, at which time the molar entity of the alphabet gives way to a "trans-alphabetic ecology of ubiquitous and interactive, networked media".[52] Rotman positions the alphabet and its characters in a law of "sequence, succession, concatenation, juxtaposition, and ordering along a one-dimensional line",[53] and as a "collection of indivisible phonemes that bear no relation to each other and, being meaningless…have no links to anything outside themselves…confining their combination and mode of relationality to one-dimensional serial juxtaposition".[54] Rotman proposes that the para-human, the I becoming beside itself, exits this alphabetic seriality which is "intrinsically antagonistic to parallel processes" becoming a "psyche that is at once porous, heterotopic, distributed and pluralized, permeated by emergent collectivities, crisscrossed by networks of voices, messages, images, and virtual effects, and confronted by avatars and simulacra of itself." [55] Time leaps, and beyond the promise of

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[51] Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts and Distributed Human Being*, 9.

[52] Ibid., 5.

[53] Ibid., 94.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 134.

parallel processing and interactive networked media, we now live as algorithmic aggregates of code, dynamic creatures grazing on our digital habits that feed and produce desire.

In networked times, as Rotman suggests, we operate in a realm of multiplicity as a necessity of life. Heads in the clouds, cached selves partitioned on numerous remote servers, we proliferate. We have multiple logins and passkeys secured by mothers' maiden names and dead pets, we hive ourselves off into dating selves, professional selves, activist selves, flaming selves and gaming selves. The hanging, blinking cursor is the portal to this expansion. Fingers hover above the keyboard "on the brink of I"[56],a click away from dissolution. We face the portal full of all the fear, the excitement, the confusion, the joy, the surprise, and the panic of finding oneself multiplied, coming apart at the seams, parallel and beside our selves. This hanging and vertiginous moment—out of time—is not so much an event, but an event-scape, a slow perpetual reveal as we become aware of our becoming. As we become aware of the multitude we have always been and which is constantly unfurling, unfurling. Inside or outside, the house of the self is so many rooms, so many caves, and inside these are more rooms and caves in a tessellated, spiralling, reflective and möbius patterning. Moving between and through these self-rooms is overwhelming to consider. It's nauseating. Breathtaking.

Simultaneous to this unfurling of "I"s that propagate as a result of "distributed cognition",[57] networked times simultaneously privilege and govern subjective integrity. Technologies of verification operate on a telos of authenticity and coalescence, hand in hand with platforms of surveillance Capitalism. The authentic self is the holy grail of surveillance Capitalism, the "real" person with a "real" name at the keyboard whose data can be

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[56] Rotman here quotes the installation artist Helen Chadwick's writings in *Enfleshings*, an accompaniment to her exhibition *On Mutability* at the Tate Gallery in London in 1989: "What if dangerous fluids were to spill out, displacing logic, refuting a coherent narrative, into a landscape on the brink of I." Chadwick's images of bodies were seen as recuperative of female abjection, using micro and macro images to explore the boundaries of the body, and their leakage.

[57] Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts and Distributed Human Being*; Merlin Donald, "The slow process: A hypothetical cognitive adaptation for distributed cognitive networks," *Journal of Physiology-Paris* 101, no. 4 (2007/07/01/ 2007), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jphysparis.2007.11.006. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0928425707000563.

monetised, who can be divided into desires. Identity forking[58] is dangerous and destabilising to the gatekeepers of individuated, governable, commodifiable units of bodies. So many "I"s doing who knows what, and in what time and which identity is identity zero? So, while networked space might seem like the natural ectogenetic womb of the "alter", lending itself to all the pleasures of invention, including the birthing of new selves, the drive to unify subjectivities in the name of infosecurity and Capitalism is paramount. In networked space, as in social space, unity and authenticity is rewarded by unlocked access to followers, targeted opportunities for influencing (advertising), and "likes" that enable wider distribution of your sanctioned message. Dissolution or multiplication is penalised by invisibility, isolation, "shadow-banning" and deletion of accounts. Alternative online spaces such as Constanza Eliana Chinea's Anti-Oppression Social Club[59] resist this gatekeeping in order to create "safer spaces" for users to carry on activist work, to be frank about mental health issues, to produce and administer sex work, to connect with other gender diverse people, to freely use words that on a monolithic platform might be a ban flag for the algorithm, such as "white", "resistance", "abolition", "abortion", "supremacy", "trans", sex work".[60]

The 1990s offered many opportunities for me and my 20th-century border-brinking cohort to experience ourselves as multiple, partial, provisional. To experiment with the idea of the "para-human". [61] As the internet expanded to include educational institutions and other non-military agents into its webby map, we fingertip-toed across the virtual brink into the nascent worlding of "cyberspace". This was the beginning of the networked civilian. At the same time as this compelling new world was opening up, I was working on a prototype computer game called *All New Gen* with VNS Matrix[62], a creative partnership of

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[58] "Forking" is a blockchain term, meaning that a linear, trustable history forks and becomes what is impossible—a second history—and while it's a problem to have two versions of history, the blockchain works it out, and it becomes the way that the blockchain diversifies and creates novelty. I am using it here to say "we have many different selves on the internet"

[59] https://anti-oppression-social-club.mn.co/

[60] Activists who might be doing the work of dismantling white supremacy use terms such as "yt", "wh*te", seggswork etc. to avoid being flagged by the algorithm and banned. Of course, the algorithm learns, so this is always a fluid situation.

[61] Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts and Distributed Human Being*.

[62] VNS Matrix, a collective of artists—variously identified—are acknowledged as having coined the term "cyberfeminism" in an act of joint emergence with global others. VNS Matrix formed in 1991 and created works that interrogated the relationship between gender and technology. They formally split in 1997 but

cyberfeminist activists and artists from Adelaide that formed in 1991. Our protagonist Gen, an intelligent mist, is on a mission to overthrow Big Daddy Mainframe and his sidekicks, to seize control of the joystick and drive it with a feminist bent. The work took us to many places in the interests of test-driving the promises of the new world disorder. We began to unfurl into our multiplicity, test our wings, shake ourselves out into uncommon shapes. For me, an agoraphobic panic merchant, the modem-song in my heart signalled safety, a worlding where I could be expansive, where I could connect with others who were also stuck in their bodies and in their homes. Reality became a groundless concept, became coterminous and fuzzy with virtuality, and the limit of worlds was as far and deep as thought. Through a textual interface, before the ether got images, we explored the peeling away of selves as avatars, fleshing them in data, dressing them in text and sending them across the virtual divide ahead of the pack to test-drive the promises of the virtual. In these multi-user domains (MUDs and MOOs[63]), freed from geolocation and shimmering in cyberspace, these forked selves transmitted affective data to the body-in-the-world in interactive feedback loops. Kathryn N. Hayles would call this dynamic space of human-machine interaction "intermediation"[64], arguing for a co-evolution of body and machine, subjectivity and technology, creativity and code in an "open-ended recursivity with one another".[65] This "interlocking cognitive system"[66] carved out a rich space for emergent subjectivities. Our nascent avatar-selves were "a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities"[67] and each multiplicity, then, its own threshold. I drove my para-selves AbjectAnhedonie-AnomiePrecious-SyntacticalChaosSubjectObject, t0xic_Honey, and Monstrous_Gorgeous across glitching datascapes, playing in the scrolling forever with spectral friends who emerged from the datamist, materialising through code, connected to their person-in-the-world by dynamic electricity, streaming from fingertip to fingertip. In the floating worlds, the hanging gardens

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have continued to occasionally collaborate into the 21st Century. https://vnsmatrix.net

[63] MOO refers to "MUD", Object Oriented. A MUD is a multi-user domain, or dungeon. MUDs were a precursor to contemporary massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs). Object Oriented refers to the type of programming these virtual domains use to organise their databases. I was a netizen of LambdaMOO, founded by Pavel Curtis of Xerox Parc.

[64] Hayles, N. Katherine. "Intermediation: The Pursuit of a Vision." *New Literary History* 38, no. 1 (2007): 99–125. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057991.

[65] N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[66] Manuel Portela, "The Machine in the Text, and the Text in the Machine," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (2010). http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/4/1/000087/000087.html.

[67] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 249.

of cyberspace, we became acephalic or polycephalic entities, "autonomous agents interacting recursively with one another and [our] environments",[68] occupying many places at once, unfurling without scaffolding from multiple centres, our selves were becoming space.

These subjectivity-expanding and -exploding forays were perceptually taxing. While working on the VNS Matrix projects, I was teaching myself 3D-modelling, creating impossible objects that were simultaneously infinitely small and infinitely large, and negotiating notional topological coordinates in stretchy space. The ground/grid of the workspace receded to a vanishing point, and simultaneously exceeded the screen, capturing my embodied self in its lines of light, making me part of the doubled infinity, dissolving me into uncountable points on vectors. This dissolution of my integral self has been a feature of my panic states since I was a child, but the work was so engrossing that I stayed with it past my limits and fell often and deeply into states of fugue, dissociation and panic. My already precarious sense of ontological security was challenged, and I switched and glitched in the real/virtual split, perpetually dissolving and re-integrating in a rapid cycling pattern of panic/high anxiety/panic. Dissociated, multiplied, forever caught in a loop of deterritorialising/reterritorialising, I was not quite able to become data and flow,[69] and was never ever again able to live the fiction of unity. When the screen signalled no carrier, the uplink to my expanded self was severed, my hands became cold, I became still and small. My heart began to beat again only when the modem sang its birdsong and my consciousness once again became oceanic in the dataflow.

It seems strange, then, that this space that triggered my ontological vulnerability and dissociation was also the "place" I mobilised as a support network when dissociative anxiety and panic was overwhelming. I used the internet as a way to leave my house and connect with others when I couldn't physically leave the house. The usenet groups alt.support.depression and alt.support.anxiety-panic and the mailing list madgrrls[70] described the borders of my world. I was able to leave my house in safety, leaving my body behind, and find my place amongst the spectral code-clad "consumers/survivors/ex-

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[68] Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer*, 7.

[69] Flow is a term used in psychology to refer to complete absorption in a task, such that everything, including time and space, falls away. I also use flow to refer to the Deleuzian flights and intensities associated with deterritorialisation.

[70] http://members.optusnet.com.au/~madgrrls/

patients"[71] who were all seeking ameliorating healing connection in a world full of "collateral disconnections".[72] For the people who frequented these sites, relationship and connection was key, and the joint emergence of shared meaning was facilitated through networked communications. It is clear to me now that it was not just the fact of "cyberspace" itself that was triggering, but how we mobilised it. Dissociation in cyberspace was a relational concept. The body in the world is a relational concept.

Pull yourselves together

In a world that privileges and imposes unity, it is hard to find joy in dissolution. Unity is considered necessary for the smooth functioning of the individual and, by extension, the society and its machines of production. In order to be able to lock on, to plug in, we need to attend to the task of unification, to create a shape that is compatible with the machine. A multiplicity is incompatible with the machine which requires single-minded dedication and action. A multiplicity is inherently incapable of practical deliberation because executive function is distributed and the mind is a "disunified jumble of unrelated atomistic beliefs".[73] According to Christine Koorsgarde, to act is to unify and to unify is to act.[74] The prevailing directive here is to "pull yourself(selves) together".

Put on your human suit and turn to face the machine

This is a directive I have been issued countless times when in the grip of becoming beside my selves. "Pull yourself together!" speaks to the selves that are peeling away, shedding, dripping from the walls, hanging in the air, covering everyone in a mess they will not see for fear of coming apart themselves. To pull one (or many) selves together means not just to be an autonomous agent, but to be a good moral person. Suggesting that to be anything other than together is not good, and this is borne out by the

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[71] The consumers/survivors/ex-patient (csx) movement arose in the 1960s from the civil rights movement in response to abuses perpetrated by the mental health system, also referred to colloquially as the mental death system. It was a diverse group whose main aims were advocacy and reform.

[72] "The Madgrrls List," 1988, accessed November 7th 2018, http://www.peoplewho.org/readingroom/jbmti.htm. Please note this site is no longer active

[73] Christine M. Korsgaard, *Self-constitution agency, identity, and integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 67.

[74] Ibid., 125.

overarching narratives of the pathologisation of multiplicity we find in clinical literature and case studies across history. The existence of the DSM itself is evidence that the American Psychiatric Association believes in a categorical brokenness in people that needs fixing, that there is one way to be OK, one way to be appropriately human. In the historical case of Jeanne Fery that follows later in this chapter, I explore the demonisation of multiplicity by the church, the overarching institution governing mental health (or possession) in the sixteenth Century.

Suddenly the proposition of "I" seems implausible, or just, unthinkable. Unsayable. We have reached the point where, as Rotman suggests, "it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves...We have been aided, inspired, multiplied"[75] And yet, for those of us plagued by unrelenting panic, it feels necessary to drive this machine towards unity if there is to be any semblance of control, any capacity to function in the empirical world, the quotidian, knowable world. This drive to unify is ambivalent, and feels also like a betrayal, since there is a gift in the dissolution, that is clear. The gift that keeps on giving but is hard to take because the reach is far and frightening. The gift is one of expansion and extension, of seeing farther than you could see before. It is a painful seeing, beyond the visual. It feels like the end of all things, and indeed is the end of all things as we know them.

The gift is one of seeing as a river sees, or as the sky sees, or as a star, or the forest floor. Of seeing as "all eye" like the brittlestar[76], or with no eyes like mud. This seeing expands and collapses, is breathtakingly vast or close, claustrophobic, inescapable. You see yourself ragged, fallingflying, fucked and fallible, rotting and machinic. You see, suddenly, all the machines at once, and the infinite regression/proliferation of connection that is the realm of machines and assemblages. You see all these things simultaneously. Synthesis is not possible. Seeing becomes structural, in its capacity to perceive the systemic formations that underlie appearance, the invisible hoardings, scaffolding, lines of

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[75] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3.

[76] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 369-75. Barad describes the unique optical characteristics of the brittlestar thus: "Brittlestars don't have eyes; they are eyes. It is not merely the case that the brittlestar's visual system is embodied; its very being is a visualizing apparatus. The brittlestar is a living, breathing, metamorphosing optical system."

flight that appearances hide but hint at. You see things "as they are" rather than "as they seem". This seeing beyond the ocular is a direct knowing in the Kantian sense.[77]

now I remember standing outside at Blair Athol Station, west of nowhere, in the noumenal night, with my head flung back to fix my eye on a star, keeping both the horizon and the star in my field of vision, watching the earth turn. Standing there on the earth that seemed to me flat, and like a plate about to break so precarious was its spin, I disappeared into the eye of the infinity storm, "a mid-point between nothing and everything…suspended between the two gulfs of the infinite and the void. "

I felt alone in all the world, family beyond reach, flying up, out, into the void without a name. I was pure sensation, a flood of icy terror, a head coming off, a planet falling through space on fire. Every which way there were lines passing through me. Inside out I turned. As above, so below. As the cosmos, so the interior universe. I am becoming the everything, vibrating in neverending expansion and collapse. I am the star and the star is me. I am a million million points of light above and below. I hold the cosmos in my terrified heart, and it explodes all over my body. How many nerve endings do I have? How many stars are in the cosmos? There is nothing between me and the milky way, no–beyond that! Oh, but what is beyond the stars? I am fallingflying up into the neverwhere, the elsewhen, and it is blowing my mind.

The task at hand here is to turn em/urgency into agency, to embrace the emergent. To take this double-edged gift of seeing with grace and revel in the revolt of the monadic "I". It is a challenge to embrace multiplicity and find a way to drive it through a world that privileges unity. I cannot say that I have accomplished this feat, or that I welcome the chance to deterritorialise recklessly,[78] against my will or otherwise. I mobilise speculation as a tool towards this end, skating around on the thin ice on a thousand plateaus, a

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[77] This is a reference to the noumenal, which is a perception beyond phenomenal knowing. Though the noumenon is unknowable, we know it exists, simply because if we deny the noumenal, then we accept that there is nothing beyond the phenomenal world. It is possible that certain states of perception grant you access to the noumenal world. I am suggesting that panic is one of these states.

[78] Deleuze and Guattari urge those who experiment with deterritorialisation as a praxis for newness, transformation, or experience to do so carefully, and always retain a grip, even if small, on the integrity of the structural. A radical and reckless deterritorialisation (experimentation with drugs might be an example of such) could led to utter deterritorialisation, and there is no coming back from that.

knapsack full of abstract signs on my back, avoiding the descent into the icy abyss from which there is no return, admiring the lines of flight I describe on the inscrutable surface. There is a way, here, if only I can decipher the asemic marks.

Panic is both a response to, and a means by which, multiplicity proliferates. While we are always already multiple, this ontological splintering only comes to light in the event of a calamity, an attack on the smooth running of the quotidian, a flip-switch that casts the normal in a ghastly light like the ominous pall of an annihilating force speeding our way. Panic reveals what is already inherent in being, but which we usually keep hidden from ourselves in order to do our bit to the keep the machines of production ticking over. Trigg suggests that "far from a radical departure from the world of 'normality', agoraphobia seems to me an amplification of facets of life that are already implicit in experience more generally." We call attention to what is usually tacit, to the "bodily basis of being a self".[79] This shattering of our ontological security forces us to pay attention to the "knocks by which a motor lets it be known that it is not working properly"[80] Once noticed, it is hard to unsee the insecurity of our existential condition. Harder still to embrace it and mobilise it as agency. The institutionally appropriate response to this falling into parts is to "pull yourself together!".

Pathogenic vectors

Across history the idea of subjective multiplicity has generally been considered deviant or pathological by the authorities presiding over moral and mental fitness, whether they be doctors or priests. Multiplicity is rarely celebrated outside of specific cultural or ritual settings such as transcendental dance, ceremonies involving psychoactive plants, extreme body modification practices and so on. These celebratory invocations of multiplicity, seen through an institutional lens, are either outlawed practices or considered deviant according to the DSM system of classification. The DSM has updated and restructured its taxonomic approach to nomenclature and diagnosis across time according to a number of factors including new available empirical research and the usability of the text for institutions, clinicians, researchers, and I would add

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[79] Dylan Trigg, "Confessions of an Agoraphobic Victim," *The White Review* (2012). https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/confessions-of-an-agoraphobic-victim/.

[80] Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), 76.

pharmacologists. There are three main types of dissociative disorders identified in the current and fifth edition of the DSM: Dissociative Amnesia (DA), Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) and Derealisation/Depersonalisation Disorder (DPDRD). These are characterised by, according to the DSM, "a disruption of and/or discontinuity in the normal integration of consciousness, memory, identity, emotion, perception, body representation, motor control, and behaviour. Dissociative symptoms can potentially disrupt every area of psychological functioning."[81] While these might share a taxonomic class, there are some significant difference between these experiences. In the case of DID, which used to be called Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) there is a distinct experience of compartmentalisation, splitting or detachment, in which there are multiple selves operating, often with no knowledge of each other and the selves' actions. Less a dissociation and more of a split. DPDRD is an experience of disconnection from the self or the world, which can give rise to feelings of detachment but there is rarely amnesia or compartmentalisation. Though terminology has changed over time, and with each edition of the DSM, dissociation is fairly broadly considered a maladaptive and unhealthy response to trauma. The DSM's approach to a "cure" is overwhelmingly the integration of multiplicity into identity zero, the original, authentic "I".

will the real subject please step forward.

The phenomenology of dissociation and its significance exceeds this clinical application and has wide cultural specificity and value as a way to access experiences that are not prescribed by the quotidian normativity of chronological existence. Fundamentally, dissociation is without value. Every person who dissociates—and that is every person—dissociates differently. Some welcome it, while for others it is dreadful.

Personally, I experience profound dissociation through DPDRD as a result of ever-present high-level anxiety and panic which keeps me in a state of bodily and existential hypervigilance and consequent emotional numbing. Resources and attention are turned towards behavioural mechanisms in order to facilitate fight, flight, freeze or fawn responses. This experience can, for some people, be very temporary, perhaps for the

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[81] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-V*, 5 ed. (American Psychiatric Publishing, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787.x08_Dissociative_Disorders.

duration of a panic attack. In my case, I am detached to the point of feeling like I am not an active participant in my own life, I am "out there" and I can't reach myself. I am emotionally numbed to the point of experiencing anhedonia (a complete lack of joy). My body is doing its best without me. Maybe it is the shimmer body speaking, maybe it is my meat body, it is hard to tell.

I speculate, philosophically, in order to mine this subjective experience for points of escape, access, or agency.

Artist Vernon Reed uses Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical proposal of schizoanalysis to discuss the connections between cyberspace, multiplicity and "mental illness",[82] specifically Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Schizoanalysis is a term expounded upon by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*,[83] and was explored extensively by Guattari himself. Schizoanalysis arrives in opposition to a monadic psychoanalysis, particularly Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, which they see as a monadic force transmitting dominant authoritarian normative social models. Schizoanalysis emphasises the "skhizein"—the split, break, rupture—with this model. Rather than perceiving of dissociation as maladaptive, Reed proposes that dissociation is adaptive, and can act "as a ground for more fully realized being".[84] Foreshadowing Rotman, Reed proposed that in order to function in cyberspace, humans need to be enabled for parallel processing. He suggests that DID provides a paradigm for achieving this, but a DID not geared towards the totalising unification imposed by top-down interventionist approaches which bear the hallmark of "the moral and psychological despotism of Modernism."[85] Instead, he proposes that humans can benefit from having multiple "apperceptive centers"[86] running serially, managing our ever-expanding information bandwidth. In terms of speculative

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[82] Vernon Reed, "The Legion Project: a Model for Distributed Subjectivity in Cyberspace, Based on Dissociative Identity Disorder" (University of Texas, nd.), https://www.vernonreed.com/LegionWeb/Writing/THESIS.htm.

[83] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of MInnesota Press, 1983), 283-383.

[84] Reed, "The Legion Project: a Model for Distributed Subjectivity in Cyberspace, Based on Dissociative Identity Disorder."

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

practice, I have found community and ease within the expansive halls of "cyberspace", but a 1990s version of cyberspace that was not so prescribed and passcoded.

The term dissociation has a long and controversial history in psychiatry as a maladaptive response to trauma. Among clinicians there is no single definition of dissociation as a disorder, and no consensus as to its underlying cause. It was identified as a class of disorders in the third edition of the DSM in 1980. Prior to this, it was part of a class of disorders called "hysterical neuroses". Indeed, the term hysteria has long been associated with the wide array of presentations often termed dissociative. French philosopher and hypnotist Pierre Janet, who is also considered to be the founder of modern psychology, is acknowledged as coining the term "dissociation" and theorising the connection between trauma and dissociation.[87]

Of course, the cluster of experiences known today as dissociation existed before psychology existed and exist only in and of themselves as a category within a codified institutional context. If we take the DSM as our exemplar and guide, DID did not exist until 1980—and yet the mental health industry routinely uses retrospective diagnosis to discuss historical cases of disease, including those involving subjective multiplicity. The sixteenth-century case of Jeanne Fery, a Dominican Nun who chronicled her own experiences of possession, is considered by clinicians to be the earliest case in which Dissociative Identity Disorder could be "diagnosed retrospectively with confidence".[88] At the time she was considered possessed by both harmful and helpful spirits with whom she developed complex relationships. She was repeatedly exorcised by an Archbishop, eventually being "healed" through these ministrations and returned to her integrated self, no longer "doubled".[89] Retrospective diagnosis is widely practiced. The DSM itself is based on this notion. It is a dynamic tool, reframing experience according to the mores of a particular historical and cultural moment. Called by its critics "anachronistic diagnosis", it is problematic because it doesn't take into account cultural historical specificity, or

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[87] Onno van der Hart and Rutger Horst, "The dissociation theory of Pierre Janet," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 2, no. 4 (1989/10/01 1989): 3, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00974598. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00974598.

[88] R Lierens Onno van der Hart, J Goodwin, "Jeanne Fery: A Sixteen Century Case of Dissociative Identity Disorder " *The Journal of Psychohistory* 24, no. 1 (1996).

[89] "*dédoublement de la personnalité*" or doubling of the personality was a term introduced in the 1800s to refer to "double consciousness", the historical precursor to Dissociative Identity Disorder.

anomalous cases, or the transformation of viruses over time. Diagnosis is inherently anachronistic in that all diagnoses "are constructed by physicians who are acting in the midst of their society with all the influences from their social environment, including religion, culture, science, and technologies…to suit the needs of the patient, family, and society".[90]

I personally have been diagnosed across the course of a lifetime as suffering from phobic anxiety disorder, temporal lobe epilepsy, schizophrenia, and panic and anxiety disorder, co-morbid with this and that, depending upon time, institutional oversight and circumstance. Today, I do not know what I would be diagnosed with and prefer to gauge myself by and for myself from moment to moment, day by day. I would probably call myself something more like "existentially sensitive" and use diagnosis not as a way to "fix" a broken self, but as a poetic portal to ways of thinking about subjectivity, focus, systemic upregulation, social co-regulation, energy and capacity for connection.

Panic Merchant

There may be a tipping point where the wonder and pleasure of dissociation becomes frightening and painful. Sometimes we summon it for pleasurable or painful reasons. Sometimes it is background noise which breaks through into the foreground many times in an hour. When I practice yoga, I will often find myself stretched out across time and space, my body no longer bound by its edges and no longer entirely under my control, not entirely my own. My hands, which I placed on my abdomen, folded into one another, feel as if they are by my sides, palms open, face-up. In these flyaway moments I experience myself as being more than my body, more than a single, unified body-in-a-bag. More than one. More. I am simultaneously on my mat and above my mat and these mes are connected and yet separate, they flow into one another, a möbius strip of energy travelling between them unceasingly. A sudden awareness that my body has escaped the subject, that I am more than one, will give me a fright and I will fall with a startle, back into

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[90] Osamu Muramoto, "Retrospective diagnosis of a famous historical figure: ontological, epistemic, and ethical considerations," *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine* 9, no. 1 (2014): 13, https://doi.org/10.1186/1747-5341-9-10.

the body-in-the-world, on the mat. This experience is neither good nor bad. It is my daily practice. It is my safe space to become more.

On another day I might

Dissociate while driving through a tunnel on the way home
micro-sleeping the relentless highway.
The tunnel is unavoidable, I swallow all the air
in the no-stopping lane. There is no stopping it,
      the slamming into the wall.
Arriving by collision, I go before.
In the shadow car I go before and collide before I collide.

Dissociate while running along the road as soon as I pass the white marker.
The end of home.
I stop in the middle of a blizzard of leaves, dancing in the sudden hot wind.
      Close my eyes.
Nature's abstraction performs distance, wilderness, estrangement.
In the smoke haze, in the finch frenzy, in the snapping whipbird call, in the hot still breeze,
in the glittering glittering green.
      There i fall apart and together in grace.

Dissociate while shopping in Coles, anxious but hungry.
Lose myself under blinking fluorescent lights, onoffonoff.
The cold peripheral flicker sends a shutdown signal to my brain,
leaving me in emergency mode
      frozen in the frozen goods aisle

Dissociate while travelling with my lover
I can no longer drive with no hands on the wheel.
I am in the passenger seat. There is a windshield. I can't breathe.
I open the door and hover above the highway that is speeding past underfoot.
      I am suspended between worlds.

As I step out of the car I intend to leave my selves behind, sloughed like a reptilian skin, my history encoded in the epidermal sheath draped across the passenger seat.   You could read me and weep.

Dissociate while being in the day, any day, every day, now, tomorrow, yesterday, always.

There is no careful destratification! There is only a blow by blow by blow, a seizure, and line of flight set free without careful consideration on a bright day, on a blue day, on a day when the sun is in your eyes, on a day unlike any other, on a day, just a day, a day when you walked from here to there in the mundane way we walk from here to there, in the middle of the sunshine, in the middle of a sentence, in the middle of a word.

Dissociation is hostile to unity: it is the opposite of association. It is separating out, not coming together, compartmentalising rather than coalescing, it is extensive, but it is also intensive. It is the subject becoming hyper-aware that there is a knock in the machine. Rather than the smooth rustle of Barthes' machine that is working well, there is a rattle of parts, gesturing towards a machine fault. Perhaps the machine as we know it will stop working altogether? This rattle of parts foreshadows the death rattle. Breath stops flowing smoothly, and instead crackles wetly, gags and gurgles. The machine as we know it will most certainly stop. The subject will flee the body. Something else we have not eyes to see will emerge.

Ahhhhh! This is what it will be like.
This is what it is like.
I am existing at the moment of my death.
I already dead.
I am the walking dead.
A panic merchant death walking.

She is preparing for sleep, and suddenly she is at the end of her life, looking back on the remembering before sleep, and the imagining of remembering, looking many ways simultaneously, like a beacon rotating. She exists in all these instances simultaneously, and will be here always, shimmering across time.