

Introduction

When I tell people my research topic is panic, there is surprise, followed by assumptions. People assume I am writing about a certain moment in cultural history, or that I am writing a clinical paper. And it's not that I am not—these things are inescapable, and I too am enmeshed in the business of staying alive in inhospitable times—it's just that my explorations of panic are not delimited by these boundaries. Panic, by its very nature, is excessive. It floods and drowns. It burns and suffocates. It breaches, peaks, falls away and bubbles under. Panic has currently attained a certain valence due to the fact that we are living through a pandemic and surviving the rolling global “slow emergencies”,¹ or “slow violences”² of ecocide and late Capitalism that peak spectacularly one after the other then fall away, bubble under. We learn to live with these ongoing states of “attritional lethality”,³ as environmentalist and literary scholar Rob Nixon calls them, and these are “somatised” in the “cellular domain...moving through the tissue, blood, and bones of combatants and noncombatants alike, moving through as well the living body of the land”.⁴ Cultural-political geographer Ben Anderson draws our attention to the cloaking of these “slow emergencies”—the way we look away, even as they become deeply embedded in the cells of the state and the human—when he says that “... slow emergencies are often rendered imperceptible as events, even as they emerge, surface and are endured as a series of palpable bodily and psychic effects”.⁵

This state of survival is our baseline, it is our normal-for-now, it is our just-fine, it is what we have become used to. I can say that since I began this project, panic has become more widely understood and accepted as a feature of our social, cultural and psychic lives, in part because it has touched huge sectors of the population during the Covid-19

¹ Ben Anderson et al., "Slow emergencies: Temporality and the racialized biopolitics of emergency governance," *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 4 (2020): 621-39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519849263>.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0309132519849263>.

² Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2011).

³ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Anderson et al., "Slow emergencies: Temporality and the racialized biopolitics of emergency governance," 631.

pandemic. The disconnection from community that arises with mandated isolation breeds fear and anxiety, the dark precursors to panic. It also makes great subject matter for podcasts and miniseries and online workshop fodder for neurobiologists, somatic practitioners and wellness gurus. Everybody is traumatised, everybody is anxious, everybody is isolated. It used to be that if I spoke about panic, the majority of people had no experiences of it, and my descriptions of its effects elicited a lack of understanding and often scepticism rather than empathy. Most people don't live under conditions that are perpetually traumatic, and so find it difficult to empathise, because trauma doesn't touch them on a daily basis. Warzones, sites of occupation and military massacres seem far away. Climate change is not imminent enough (when will it be?) to create the kind of anxiety that fosters a mobilised urgency. Bushfires are forgotten, floods are "just a bit of rain", "pristine" nature and the wilderness as concepts are still available for consumption by those who have access to the outdoors, and we all have air conditioning in our nuclear-familied homes. We have homes. We have states, we have nations. While these things signal safety for some, in truth these demarcations are increasingly destabilised, and the top-down governance of marginalised communities increases in response. There are those who benefit from these hierarchies of power, but for those who are on the receiving end of the top-down trickle-down, they are breeding grounds for existential anxiety and panic.

I have lived with panic as a near-constant companion since I was a young child. I didn't have a language for it then and I still struggle to find one now. In a way this is the Gordian knot of this project. As a child my self-soothing space was a corner with a book. Here, I found a way to downregulate the onslaught of affective, emotional and sensory information arriving with every waking moment. This act of childhood self-isolated reading while others played marked my difference, and my difference stoked my retreat and separation. Being deeply aware, always, of imminent annihilation—death and beyond—makes being fully in my life difficult and painful. For those of us who experience debilitating panic there is never a settling, a normalisation. We live in a perpetual condition of existential precarity, and it touches us daily, hour by hour, minute by minute. This precarity might be due to an awareness of the material conditions arising from living under a late Capitalism rife with poverty, ecocide, domestic violence and rape culture, queer and transphobia, war, marginalisation, the violence of white supremacy, or it might be due to navigating a relentless tide of extreme affect unleashed by perpetual traumatic triggers, both situated and global.

Thursday, December 02, 2004
posted by t0xxx @ 6:19 PM 0 comments

panic attack

I die and I die and I die. My heart rolls over and over. My stomach clutches in fright. I'm swallowing fear—gorging on it—swallowing more, pushing it down, a force feeding, past my heart, into my stomach. I stumble to the toilet and shit out the fear. This is the first, the only time, I have been to the brink of death and back. No, the hundredth, the thousandth, but always the first and only.

Night closes in. The void returns. Mind detaches, time accelerates or slows down, which is it? At the brink, which peaks over and over again, there is nothing—just this room, these rooms, the strangeness of these rooms. Are they rooms? What is outside this unknowable space? Other houses, streets, people? What are these things? This shapeless nightmare amplifies, recedes, amplifies, recedes...

In the morning, I go down the pier, where all the morning people walk with purposeful strides, dogs, smiles and hellos. This little finger of land built from man's detritus to serve as a promenade and an artificial bank for a lagoon is my nemesis/challenge. This precarious land bridge bookended by the safety of my home and the terrible beautiful ocean. In the middle I vacillate, look back at my home, my safety, perched on the hill, and wonder whether I should pass the point of no return. My stomach flips like the big mullet in the middle of the lagoon that launches itself out of the water and flops on its back. The briny smell rouses me like smelling salts. The sun warms my cold cold skin. These things bring me back to myself and I walk on, as if I am normal. I wonder how many of the people I pass are imploding quietly. My face gives nothing away.

Performance is my forte. Panic is my interruption.

This was (not) the first time, this was (not) the only time.

That diary entry was my daily life for decades and it often still is. I have countless entries across that period. They are effortful, reaching towards an experience that is so much a part of my every cell but so elusive to writing or speaking. Being inside panic and panic being inside me wraps me up in a terrifying comforter. It is difficult to see what constitutes that panic when it is the lens through which I perceive everything.

I have lived for a lifetime with multiple mental health diagnoses, slipping and sliding between the axes of diagnosis that are the primary tool of the DSM⁶ for categorising mental health disorders. The DSM is updated regularly, collapsing definitions or creating new ones. What was once a pathology might disappear entirely in a subsequent version. A great example of this is homosexuality which no longer exists as a diagnostic category. The sadness of this is that many people suffered greatly due to the codification of their sexuality as deviant. Diagnostic evolution leads to experimental pharmacological interventions and over-coded governance of the neurodivergent subject. Many suffer. I wear abandoned diagnoses like old skins, vestigial.

This slipping between axes also offers an opportunity to escape the psychiatric-industrial-complex trajectory of diagnosis and subsequent institutional intervention and instead develop a complex politics of panic arising from a phenomenally layered understanding of what happens to bodies and subjectivities in the event of a panic attack.

Beside Our Selves: Panic as Unbecoming is an exploration of the experience of panic as an existential process—of subjective disintegration and “being-towards-death”.⁷ That is, of living with a constant conscious awareness of human finitude and how this affects perception and our way of being in and simultaneously of the world. Without awareness of finitude, a human cannot live an “authentic” existence. This concept of being-towards-death was developed by philosopher and nazi Martin Heidegger in the text *Being and*

⁶ DSM refers to all editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the official international manual developed and published by the American Psychiatric Association. I refer to the *DSM* as a fallible text given its cultural hegemony and lack of engagement with socio-cultural context in neurodivergence. Personally, I also find it untrustworthy due to its successive attempts to codify subjective experiences in the service of pharmaceutical invention and legal consequence.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 294.

*Time*⁸ and while I feel close to this concept in the context of my daily lived experience, I disavow Heidegger's politics and prefer to find thoughtful approaches to living-with death and subjective disintegration in the works of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari—who use the notion of “becoming”⁹ to discuss the never-ending rhizomatic processes of existence—and also in the works of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, who suggests that “perishment” is essential for newness or novelty to emerge.¹⁰ These are concepts of expanding vitalism, reaching ever-outward, that I work with daily in my battle to find generative agency through alarm, threat and disintegration.

I have invited panic into this research so that panic and I can find a way to be together, so our relationship can be a two-way street, rather than a one-way annihilation. Because everything I experience—all my actions, perceptions, all my struggle—are contingent upon my negotiations with panic. All other explorations travel alongside this relationship. This is enlightening, illuminating—which is strange to say about something so bleak, but panic shines a searchlight on existential concerns. And so, for me, it is a starting point to also explore affective states, the phenomenology of panic, the precarity of subjectivity, existential uncertainty and perception.

Creative production provides me with a way to think with panic. It is a philosophical thinkingdoing space for problem-solving, for exploring experiences in a non-linguistic space, especially things which elude articulation in the same way that panic does. I am carving out a safe space for us to be together and have, together, a conversation about perception, subjectivity and agency.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The concept of “becoming” weaves through many of the texts that Deleuze and Guattari have written, together and alone. In particular, this concept is fleshed out in the book *A Thousand Plateaus*. Simply put, they argue that all form, content and matter is in a state of constant flux, and all energies and intensities are mobile, on the move. Even death is just another becoming, albeit not in human form. They indicate that becoming is a tendency towards change and apply the terms “reterritorialisation” and “deterritorialisation” to states of becoming, or “lines of flight”. These tendencies might operate as a tendency towards concretisation or dissolution. It's also important to note that in this schema, all things are simultaneously de- and re-territorialising

¹⁰ Alfred North Whitehead applies the term “perishing” or “perceptual perishing” to speak of a kind of becoming. For Whitehead, we are always perishing, but the past exists in the present as “objective immortality”, or memory!

The story of my panic's birth, the birth that speaks and respeaks endlessly—*always the first time, always the only time*—is documented in the diaries I have kept along the way. Entries, of course, tell only part of the story of panic. Panic is also a symptom of what sociologist, writer and cultural theorist Jackie Orr calls the “shifting historical networks of power”¹¹ that “partially construct the very object they promise to explain and control”.¹² In my case, the symptoms were produced and controlled in a finely choreographed balance by the same institutions that were creating the diagnostic categories and tools to treat them, “doubling as both object and method”.¹³ Diagnosis, institutionalisation and pharmaco-intervention were tools of control. The panic itself, while disruptive and painful, does not arise from nothing. The networks of power which produce the panicked subject act behind the scenes in a hidden archive beneath all the stories of losing breath, shuddering, flailing, moaning, trembling, disappearing. Panic is the event horizon, the point at which the body escapes disciplined subjectivity to shimmer and flicker in the periphery, a scotoma, dis/connected, oceanic, beautiful, terrifying.

Over time I have come to conceptualise my panic as an entity, a twinning of my body, a shimmer-double, a constant companion. Panic, the creep living in your crawlspace keeping all hours, the absence that is always a palpable presence. This is a life lived at a distance from myself. Once I came across an account by a man in his 60s—I cannot remember where, but it stuck with me always—who described his experience of being alive: “I will go to my grave feeling I have lived my life in a dream”. It is hard to come to more succinct and affective distillation of what it is like to live alongside panic. It is because this description of what I would now term dissociation rang so true to me that the simple phrase has stayed with me always, through all the diagnoses, through all the counselling, through all the medication, through all the intervention. It encapsulates so well the phenomenology of panic and its aftermath—the strangeness, the distance, the reaching, the dissolution, the confusion, the uncanniness, the difference in register. The feeling of never truly waking up to participate, of always being unreachable.

¹¹ Jackie Orr, *Panic Diaries: A Genealogy of Panic Disorder* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 10.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Since panic is always immanent to the subject,¹⁴ and we are always becoming-with panic, any study of it cannot be a linear before-and-after exploration. A panic attack catapults one into a future of subjective death, disrupting all relations in the social, psychic, temporal and material realms, and then it slingshots you into an aftermath of a present you were never present for. There is an intra-action of all these realms, existentially. One cannot fall without the other being affected. Fellow panic-sufferer Orr points to this non-linear *chronos*-chaos when she calls panic a “temporal disorder”¹⁵ in which all the “somatic signs point to the psychic certainty that death has arrived already”.¹⁶ This certainty gives way to a temporality that is practiced in the “killing fields of manufactured time”.¹⁷ Non-panic *chronos* is framed as a linear arrow, with each second dying under our tongue as we travel fatally towards death. Panic *chronos* lets us peek into a timescape which is fluid and travels in many different directions simultaneously. We find this under the earth, and deep in geological formations. We also travel with time, fluidly, in the eventscape of panic.

Nomenclature is a problem for this project, since “panic” as a concept is polyvalent, existing within clinical terminology, critical cultural theory and everyday vernacular. We are all “in a panic” now and again, but the experience of that differs vastly from person to person. Humans choose experiences that dissolve subjectivity all the time, but the difference with a panic attack is that it is not a choice. Panic is a random beast with a habit of seizing and shaking the life out of you. Philosopher and writer Magdalena Gorska writes that panic attacks reconfigure the onto-epistemologies of the “horizon of your life” and the way “time comes to matter”.¹⁸ Gorska, when referring to the work of physicist and philosopher Karen Barad, notes that the “spacetimemattering”¹⁹ of the “here-and-now” are exploded by the forces of panic. Spacetimemattering produces material-cultural worlds through quantum entanglement—that is: the entanglement of time with space and matter; through the intra-actions between human and nonhuman; and the continuous mutation of

¹⁴ Panic is always part of my embodied experience, even when I am not in panic. It is part of world, my body and my body in the world.

¹⁵ Orr, *Panic Diaries: A Genealogy of Panic Disorder*, 280.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Magdalena Gorska, “Breathing Matters” (Linköping University, 2016), 236-37, <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A930676&dswid=-1520> (683).

¹⁹ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 179.

all forms of becoming and unravelling. You are rearranged, if you like, in the unruly cellular domain as well as throughout the multitudinous assemblages you are part of.

The shape and vibration of an experiment

In order to understand my panic and its intra-actions, I have entered into an experiment of learning its shapes, its origins and its affects. Barad and Gorska make clear that panic is relational, that it takes its particular qualities from the realm of the socio-political, as well as from situated knowledges of the entangled universe. My laboratory for unravelling these learnings is situated and somatic. I am my research domain and I am its subject. My body in the performance space is my laboratory and the performance is the “living experiment [in which] affective influences can be introduced to strengthen and stimulate affective responses”.²⁰ Throughout the research I *call in* or *call on* my panicked body to situate my explorations using a variety of investigative methodologies under the umbrella of Arts-Based Research. Arts-Based Research (ABR) is not a fixed category, and definitions and approaches proliferate. I will use the definition from author and research design scholar Patricia Leavy which defines ABR as follows:

ABR practices are a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during any or all phases of research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation. These emerging tools adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address research questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practice are intertwined.²¹

When I call in or on my panic, it is in the service of data collection and analysis, as a situated researcher-body. My body is the site of research and experimentation, panic is the event, and the affective data is communicated through poetic enquiry, affective performance and autotheory. The processes of extracting meaning from and then embodying the affective resonance of the panic experience through performance are complicated and experimental, since the object of research is very close to me, is me.

²⁰ Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, "Introduction," in *Affective Methodologies*, ed. Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 18.

²¹ Patricia Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2020), ix.

Experimentation is kin to failure, and failure is kin to discovery. Failure is a necessary step towards the acquisition of new knowledges. Thinking with perishment/perishing and becoming is useful for understanding failure not as death but as discovery. Attempting to make a faithful record of a panic attack, no matter how familiar you are with panic, is bound to fail, and it is this failure that gestures towards the study of panic's affect. The failure is not a stopping point on the way to the accurate and faithful recording of a panic attack, it is the panic, it *is* the attack, it contains all we need to know about panic. If speaking or writing panic is not possible, it is because the affect of the event is so strong. The pen shudders in the hand, the fingers become clumsy on the keyboard, and the tongue—normally nimble enough to skilfully dart about inside the mouth creating shapes for sounding—loses its fitness for speaking ordinary language. All these failures are heroic renditions of an event, or as queer theorist Jack Halberstam suggest, “a refusal of the norm, an indifference to assimilation and a route to other ways of being in the world.”²²

The affective space of the panicked body, as Airek Beauchamp writes in the essay “Live Through This: Sonic Affect, Queerness, and the Trembling Body”, is the “vibrational space that is both bodily memory and anticipation”,²³ an experience of the uncanny²⁴ coupled with the anticipation of a million deaths all imminent in that instant, an instant that pulses and never ends. While Beauchamp is writing specifically about sonic affect and queer bodies, I find these ideas relevant and resonant for my situatedness, since my queerness and my panic are not unrelated. Beauchamp says in the same work that “[m]arginalized bodies produce marginalized sounds to communicate things that escape language”.²⁵ I look to the panicked body which is always on the edge—even of itself—and is thus generative of a vocalic register that is always falling out of language. The vocabulary of the panic body is comprised of sighs, moans, wails, silences, sobs, tongue

²² "Embrace Queer Failure," Jack Halberstam, 2012, accessed 2021, <http://www.jackhalberstam.com/2012/05/>.

²³ Airek Beauchamp, "Live through This: Sonic Affect, Queerness, and the Trembling Body" Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman ed. *Sounding Out!*, Department of English, General Literature & Rhetoric, September 14th, 2015, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/09/14/sonic-tremblings-sound-affect-queer-body/>.

²⁴ I am using uncanny here to refer to something very familiar and yet unknown, unknowable. Sigmund Freud first drew our attentions to “the uncanny” in 1919 in an essay of the same name. Freud used the German word “unheimlich”, literally meaning un-homely, to explain the notion of the uncanny; that which is not cosy, comfortable, safe, and yet familiar nonetheless.

²⁵ Beauchamp Live through This: Sonic Affect, Queerness, and the Trembling Body

twisters, glottal plosives and other sounds that fall outside of what we recognise as speech. Beauchamp refers to these marginalized sounds as “sonic tremblings”, a series of “shimmers and impulses” that pass through marginalised bodies speaking “without definitive vocabulary, syntax, or grammar.”²⁶ In this project, I have mobilised Beauchamp’s idea of the sonic tremble as “!ictic! vocalities”, teasing out the very particular rhythm of panic’s voice, the prosody of panic.

*!ictic! from ictus—rhythm, stroke, seizure, blow
!ictic! vocalities tremble shake stutter moan howl
the !ictic! body jerks shivers freezes flies falls*

When I call on the panic body through performance—acting, re-enacting or channelling the familiar mouth and body shapes, gestures and soundings that open a portal to panic—I am inviting it in to have a conversation with me, to partner with me in this project of affective exploration and communication. Across the course of my candidature I created a series of events dealing directly with linguistics and vocalities as site for exploring the phenomenology of panic. In 2016 and 2017 I presented a series of performed lectures over a number of venues: Performing Arts Forum in France; at the symposium *Lire Pour Faire*, Sorbonne, Paris; at Humboldt University in Berlin; and under the title *The Expanse of a Dead Open Mouth* at the Queensland School of Continental Philosophy (QSCP) in Brisbane. I discuss the *Lire Pour Faire* event and the performance *The Expanse of a Dead Open Mouth* in more detail later, and there you will find a link that will lead you to video documentation of the QSCP event. At one point during the lecture I “call in” a panic attack, which is a precarious moment for myself and for an audience with expectations of a linear and coherent presentation. The well put-together academic subject disappears, and the boundaries between academic research and embodied experience become blurred. During the panic channelling, the space between presenter and viewers becomes charged with an affective resonance that is unpredictable. Afterwards there are questions about whether my panic attack was “real”, which prompts discussions regarding performativity and authenticity, though it is clear that the effect travels, regardless. It is through these experimental performances that I become aware of the power of this affective method in communicating affective and ineffable states.

²⁶ Ibid.

By performing panic within the institution and situating the researcher as the site, I disrupt the notion that sites of research are necessarily institutional, and that empirical research happens only within a particular academic framework. The embodiment of the event becomes the way in which the world reveals itself, answers back, enters into conversation, is affecting and affected. Somewhere between embodiment, subjectivity and theory there is a way to alchemise and amplify my personal experience of panic—an extreme affective state—to make it glow and vibrate, to glimmer, to explore how panic can produce itself as something other than my very personal devastation. How my panic can become knowledge in a way that “transcends solely subjective accounts (Knudsen and Stage 2015) of affect.”²⁷ These performances grapple with the challenge of speaking the unspeakable and navigating lived experience while in the grip of extreme affect. The challenge here is to find the voice that speaks the world as perceived through the destabilising and yet revelatory lens of panic and its siblings.

I have also performed works germane to my field of research across sites as varied as warehouses, galleries, theatres and pubs. These performances all begin with the panicked body, and what I can glean from it in situ, either in the grip of extreme panic (such as I might experience when flying), or with the long-term effects of living with panic day to day.

Syntactical chaos and *!ictic!* methodologies

In panic, the gross and subtle materialities of the body are constantly in motion, following lines of flight exerted with varying degrees of intensity, shuddering with the energetic blows that panic metes out. The self is perpetually furling, inwardly and outwardly, infinitely doubling. Unmaking and remaking itself. Philosopher John Protevi notes that “drastic episodes of rage and fear are de-subjectivizing”, triggering an “evacuation of the subject” such that “automatic responses take over”.²⁸ The body in the grip of these flows becomes an *!ictic!* body, speaking the prosody of panic through its frantic vocabulary. The mouth still opens and closes, the hands still gesture, and the feet still move, but all of

²⁷ Knudsen and Stage, “Introduction,” 5.

²⁸ John Protevi, “Deleuze and Wexler: Thinking Brain, Body, and Affect in Social Context,” in *Cognitive Architecture: From Bio-Politics to Noo-Politics; Architecture & Mind In the Age of Communication and Information*, ed. Deborah Hauptmann and Warren Neidich (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010), 180.

these happen with more flailing, more jerking, more shuddering. The *lactic!* body expresses the affective language of panic which bypasses ordinary syntax and the speech/hearing binary and instead passes from “body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise).”²⁹ Affect scholars Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth write that affect can be found “in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves.”³⁰ It’s the “body doing its best without me”, as writer Samuel Beckett says,³¹ or as Protevi puts it, “[t]he body...as a self-preserving agent capable [only] of emergency action...a bodyagent without a self-conscious subject.”³²

In *Affective Methodologies*, affect scholars Britta T Knudsen and Carsten Stage draw attention to the “split” in theories of emotion and affect studies.³³ The split is roughly focussed on whether the mind and body register affect collectively, or separately and differently. One example of the latter is whether language as a product of the mind, is considered capable of expressing affects. The feminist scholar of affect Sara Ahmed applies the terms “emotion” and “affect” interchangeably, asserting that both are personal and contained by signification. For philosopher Brian Massumi, “emotions” are the discursive dimension of affects, or the “socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience” and affects are pre-personal, extra-discursive and non-conscious intensities.³⁴ Massumi suggests that affect hits the body first (that untidy cellular domain), followed by the cognition—at which time the discursive capacities can make sense, linguistically, of the event—and that therefore “affect is beyond language categorization”.³⁵ Critics of Massumi’s theories point to the problematic Cartesian dichotomies of mind and body that they believe are inherent in his work, asserting instead

²⁹ Gregory J. Seigworth Melissa Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregory J. Seigworth Melissa Gregg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Samuel Beckett, “From an Abandoned Work,” in *Six Residua* (London: John Calder, 1978), 21.

³² John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 46.

³³ Knudsen and Stage, “Introduction,” 4.

³⁴ Brian Massumi, “Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique* The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II., no. 31 (1995): 88-89, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354446>.

³⁵ Knudsen and Stage, “Introduction,” 4.

that language is capable of expressing affect, rather than affect exceeding, preceding, or being on a different “track” to language.³⁶

While there are differences in theories of how affects work upon bodies, there is a general agreement that affect operates socially—as intensities that circulate within sociality, among, between and through bodies, objects and communities. Affect is generated in a whole of world relational space, where all bodies, objects and beings are affecting and affected. While I am critical of theories that create dichotomies of mind/matter, biological/cultural and so on, I also know, through experience, what happens to me when the extreme desubjectivising affect of panic seizes me. In the grip of panic, I become non-verbal. Just leg jitters and arms levitating and balloon hands and swallowing swallowing swallowing all the words. I have, in this moment, no capacity to faithfully record my experience of the event. Later I can recall it and tell the story of it if requested by those who witnessed me losing my grip on the present moment. People like flight attendants, fellow passengers, health workers, and family members. It is easy to say, “my skin is prickling”, “my heart is racing”, “my palms are sweaty”. It takes only instrumental measurement to verify these things in degrees. The existential experience of the world in panic, however, overwhelms my capacity to speak of it sensibly, discursively, and is impossible to measure.

Therefore, in order to convey more than “fact” and instead set up an affective resonance with an audience and with those who want to understand the intensities of these moments of coming undone, I need to employ a linguistics of equivalency—or an affective linguistics. *I felt my head coming off, my jaw locked, I shivered deep inside, the end is here, nigh, I am already dead.* What is the sound of a head coming off? Lockjaw? An internal tremor? The walking dead? These things I grapple with in this work in the attempt to arrive at a vocality that contains all these unspeakable experiences.

Transmission of this affective data requires experimentation in order to find a “[l]inguistic expression [that] can resonate with and amplify intensity at the price of making itself functionally redundant”.³⁷ Words that follow each other sensibly are no use here. The transmission of affect between bodies happens through the “senseless stammerings” of

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 86.

what Orr would call in *Panic Diaries* a “prolific, knowing speech of unreason”.³⁸ Orr suggests that “unreason” historically resides *within* reason, as a speech *with* and *of* reason, and has been a meaningful way of exchanging knowledge. This historical speech of unreason—in contemporary times—is considered the speech of the “mad” and reviled as senseless stammerings. The purpose of my experimentation is to find the sense in the senseless, the reason in the unreason.

The written and embodied performance of !ictic! vocalities unleashes a “creative contagion” that travels back and forth between the text and its audience, revealing the knowings in the breath, the pulse, the heartbeat, the sweat, the lump in the throat, the flutter in the gut. For me the knowing speech of unreason takes the form of the kind of poetic experimentation found in this thesis and in the works documented in the online component of this project—the singing, excessive vowelling, stuttering, un-writing and other forms of marginalised communication. The use of poetic experimentation is germane to the act of finding language and finding form for the intensities of this experience, in order to “make a sliver of experience more vivid and more richly patterned than wilful analysis could”.³⁹ Poetic enquiry and experimental performance (all part of the field of autotheory) are tools that are mutable enough to delve into the unspeakable and the unwritable, and act as affective vehicles for the communication of the intensities of impulse that grip a panicked body.

Recording panic in the moment means I need to extend the duration of a panic attack in order to wrap words around it. To try to grab the rapid cycling experiences that are passing through me as the event explodes in waves all over my body and out through the top of my head into the nowhere. This is rarely successful, since, panic is always already extra-textual and also, it’s really uncomfortable to remain there. When I am in the grip of panic overwhelm, all I want is to not be there any more. When I am in panic, I am always projecting beyond it, to the moment when it is over, or the moment that I no longer exist, whichever takes me first. My hands cannot keep up with the speed of the affects that I am in the grip of. My thoughts fly before they become words and exit the body as truncated speech.

³⁸ Orr, *Panic Diaries: A Genealogy of Panic Disorder*, 1.

³⁹ Marta Figlerowicz, "Affect Theory Dossier: An Introduction," *Qui Parle* 20, no. 2 (2012). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/quiparle.20.2.0003>.

*panic nonsense, written on a plane into my notepad, shaking with adrenal tremors
trying to write out my panic, or catch it on the fly and contain it in text*

flying flying =i =~~W~~,

will sleep deprived =i the unappealing

i will see how

formula >>> i can see

>and > and have.

Just got ><i >>

formula Just

<<>>flying

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Speculative Grappling

It's important to state that this project has a speculative aspect in that it is an attempt to know the unknowable and to communicate that unknowability through poetic enquiry, vocal experimentation and affective performance. And this is done in an effort to attune to the fragility that exists in all things. As I have intimated above, the messiness of panic inspires and requires an intersectional approach and multiple methodologies—not delimited but working together as a non-hierarchical machine, grounded in what philosopher Magdalena Gorska calls “corpo-affective” processes. These are bodily and affective processes “that articulate...the operations of corpomateriality and affect as intra-actively constitutive and differencing”.⁴⁰ I understand this to mean that the body as a

⁴⁰ M. Juelskjær, Plauborg, H., & Adrian, S.W., "Dialogue With Magdalena Gorska," in *Dialogues on Agential Realism: Engaging in Worldings through Research Practice* (Oxon and New York: Routledge,

socio-political, cultural entity is co-constituted by (in this case) the affective and the corporeal, always reliant on differencing as a mode of dynamically establishing boundaries and also exceeding them. Intra-action implies an entanglement of the ontological, the epistemological, the social, and the political. Gorska's corpo-affective materiality arises from an onto-epistemological framework such as that developed by physicist and philosopher Karen Barad—that is, an integrated theory of knowing-being that Barad calls “agential realism”. Agential realism, as a transdisciplinary engagement, “entails a rethinking of fundamental concepts that support [...] binary thinking, including the notions of matter, discourse, causality, agency, power, identity, embodiment, objectivity, space, and time...Everything we do matters, and matters in its specificity, because knowledge production contributes to producing realities.”⁴¹ What Gorska refers to as the corpo-affective work begins with the materiality of knowing, both in my case, and in the case of Gorska's work *Breathing Matters*. Gorska also lives with panic and anxiety and in this work, she explores how it transformed her understanding of her political situatedness. She explains this as discovering “a new way of being, a new form of politics...the politics of vulnerability.”⁴² Vulnerability is, as Gorska points out, non-normative in relation to the performance of productive human lives, and yet is at the core of politics, if we consider the precarious conditions that affect many people, and how this creates striations in systems of governance.

Coming to grips with this knowing-being requires fortitude and persistence. To be in it and to know it is to be simultaneously inside and outside of it. Panic is micro-situated. Not only is it situated in a body that exists within social, cultural and political specificities, but that body never knows itself from moment to moment. Panic always comes to the body fresh; it is always forever new. It changes the body every time it attends. It is always the first time; it is always the only time one has had this experience. So, across a lifetime, each panic attack is the only panic attack. Each panic attack creates a new body, a new subjectivity. A million million separate, new and unique panics across a lifetime. Bodies within bodies within bodies. This is the ontology of panic.

2020), 35.

⁴¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 26.

⁴² Juelskjær, "Dialogue With Magdalena Gorska," 38.

When I refer to this as a work of speculation, I am speaking about grappling, about wrestling with the experience of panic to crack it open and extract data, about knowing the unknowable, because one has never known this before: *this time it's different, I've never felt this before*. The phenomenology of panic arises from a sense in which, as the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty has noted, the world only exists in relation to the perceptual body whereby “[t]he body is our general means of having a world”⁴³. The body perceives the world, is of the world, and looks back upon the body from the world. This creates a feedback loop, a mirror turned in on itself in infinite regression. This complexity of perception is a conundrum which is foregrounded through the experience of panic. Panic shatters the mirror. One of the most powerful fundamental experiences of panic is annihilation of subjectivity, and consequently the body in which it is situated. In this way, panic has a great impact upon perception and therefore upon the world. If there is no body, there is no world.

Another aspect of the work that is speculative is the idea of mining panic for joy and agency. After reading some sections of my writing claiming that panic gives you access to new sight, a way to see differently, a friend who is a trauma therapist responded that if any of her clients read that they would say I was speaking from a place of privilege, and that what I was suggesting was impossible and ridiculous. I agreed, because I understand this from experience. It is more of a wish, an aspiration, a line thrown out into the future along which to pull myself. I want to make very clear from the outset that any suggestion on my part that panic is a welcome gift is purely speculative, because quite frankly, I have never made friends with panic, though it is my constant companion, and we reach out towards one another every waking minute, in constant motion. Reaching, pushing, moving towards and away, always in each other's orbit.

I also want to make clear that speculation is an important aspect of my personal survival and it is a methodology I employ daily. To aspire and to speculate is to strive to break away from an interminable, predictable, inexorable futurity and to, instead, live in what sociologists Alex Wilkie et al. call an “eventful temporality”⁴⁴ full of unpredictability, contingency and surprise. Speculation exceeds future planning, indeed, exceeds the idea

⁴³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 146.

⁴⁴ A. Wilkie, Savransky, M., & Rosengarten, M. eds., *Speculative Research: The Lure of Possible Futures*, 1 ed. (Routledge, 2017), 7.

of futurity altogether. More than, for example, a plan to be well, speculation is a dream of joy in a temporal eventspace. I don't need to "be well" to experience joy, rather this dream of joy transforms all possible presents and all possible futures towards a "plurality of the present...out of which unexpected events may erupt, and alternative futures may be created".⁴⁵

Self-talk

Earlier in this chapter I referred briefly to ABR as an appropriate methodology for mobilising experimental poetics and performance as research tools. Given that this is, in part, a thesis of life-writing, or writing the self through the body and all its entanglements, I want to explore the theoretical methods underpinning the conceptual and methodological frameworks of auto- or self-writing, from autoethnography through to autotheory, which, I find, ultimately provides a broad and mobile container for many forms of critical life-writing.

As a container, autotheory provides an investigative modality to attune to my selves and their lived experiences across time with critical thought, philosophical enquiry, deep engagement, empathy, grief and joy. The autotheoretical, as discussed by writer and theoretician Lauren Fournier, uses personal anecdotes or embodied experiences as the "primary material for generating theory, foregrounding disclosure and ambivalence as that which enhances critical rigour and relevance".⁴⁶ A definition arrived at by Fournier is "a term that describes a self-conscious way of engaging with theory—as a discourse, frame, or mode of thinking and practice—alongside lived experience and subjective embodiment."⁴⁷ Autotheory recognises that the subjectivity of the researcher is necessarily entwined in the process of research and allows embodied experience and its methods—which I will note as autoethnography, autobiography, auto- and anti-pathography—to push further into theory

⁴⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁶ Lauren Fournier, "Auto-Theory as an Emerging Mode of Feminist Practice Across Media" (*Lives Outside the Lines: a Symposium in Honour of Marlene Kadar*, Centre for Feminist Research, York University, Toronto, The International Auto/Biography Association, 2017).

⁴⁷ Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2021), 7.

and for theory to get closer to embodied experience, affecting and being affected by. Autotheory is a way to be-with the selves I am unearthing, unwrapping. To be-with these selves and ask questions of them, to listen and respond in affective kind. In this case, I privilege my experiences as a way of knowing and interpreting the world, and as a way to situate and politicise a life's story.

Autopathography is a term coined by G. Thomas Couser⁴⁸ to describe narratives written by people experiencing illness in a variety of manifestations. By using their own words to communicate their experience, rather than being written about by the medical-industrial complex, people living in "disordered" bodies resist institutionalisation. This resistance implies an "anti", hence, an autopathography is inherently an antipathography, or is inherently against institutional pathologisation, against the binary of "ordered" and "disordered". This act of taking control of the narrative does a number of things, including critically addressing the pathologisation of a person's condition. In addition, it necessarily "investigates its cultural construction and, crucially, offers an attempt to re-claim the writer's alienated body."⁴⁹ I find a great tension as a person living with pathologised ways of being in the world between claiming my "disorder" and resisting institutional pathologisation. Often, I have a tendency to fall into medicalised ways of speaking about myself, not because I embrace the narrative of pathologisation, but simply in order to articulate the existential challenges I face daily to people who will better accept an institutionalised description of my state, as opposed to a personalised narrative.

Autoethnography as a method of life-writing is self-reflexive, foregrounding the entanglement of the researcher/author in the research process, acknowledging that there is no self which is separate from its socio-cultural context, and that the process of writing the self is also a process of writing others and constructing a world. Autoethnography is critical of any ethnography which separates the researcher from the field of research, proposing that the researcher is always bleeding into the territory. Sociologist and educator Norman K. Denzin critiques the ethnographic practice which privileges "the researcher over the subject, method over subject matter, and maintain[s] commitments to

⁴⁸ G. Thomas Couser, "Recovering bodies: Illness, disability, and life writing," in *On the Literary Nonfiction of Nancy Mairs: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Susannah B. Mintz Merri Lisa Johnson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 133.

⁴⁹ R. Kusek, "'To Seize the Copyright in Myself.," *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis* 9, no. 3 (2014). www.ejournals.eu/Studia-Litteraria.

outmoded conceptions of validity, truth, and generalizability.⁵⁰ The author who coined the term, Carolyn Ellis, provides a personal definition of autoethnography.

For most of us, autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defences, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be.⁵¹

Observing ourselves observing brings us up close to the research process, brings us into the research process, in a mode of self-reflexivity which is important to most critical methods of ethnographic research. Acknowledgement of our personal inherent biases, and the way situated positionality impacts research outcomes leads to a nuanced reading, eschewing all pre-existing assumptions. My panic generates a lifeworld with a situated politics of vulnerability which inflects my way of being in the world and what kind of world it is.

Autoethnography is the critical point from which countless self-reflexive research forms have unfurled.

Critical autoethnography arose, in part, as a critique of the notion of a fixed “self” that is central to autoethnography. Critical autoethnography goes beyond purely subjective accounts to consider subjectivity itself—how the self is co-constituted by lived experience as a part of broader socio-political and cultural fields. As with autoethnography, critical autoethnography is a non-linear method of life-writing and it is full of contradictions. Autoethnographers Robin Boylorn and Mark Orbe offer the following as a partial definition: “Critical autoethnography allows for critical self-reflexivity and cultural commentary to examine embodied experiences, relational encounters, and intercultural conundrums. It moves beyond simply documenting an experience to deconstructing it

⁵⁰ Norman K Denzin, "The Many Faces of Emotionality," in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, ed. M. Flaherty C. Ellis (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 20.

⁵¹ Carolyn Ellis, "Preface," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Tony E. Adams Stacy Holman Jones, Carolyn Ellis (London: Routledge, 2013).

through theorization and critical analysis."⁵²

Further to this critique, I'd like to add that "auto" implies the existence of a fixed "self" from which it is possible to reflect. In my case, and perhaps in all cases, the self is made and made again—and for me, each event of panic alters the self. The researcher-subject is always enquiring into a new subject from a new research position. In general humans cleave tightly to a tacit belief in the idea of a fixed self in a fixed world, bracketed by social convention and the banal everyday structures that allow us to carry on, and shore up our fierce belief in what philosopher Anthony Giddens would call "ontological security"⁵³ in order to stay alive in the face of certain death. The notion of ontological security speaks to the way we create safe structures that order our daily lives in order to keep chaos at bay. Giddens suggests that this "chaos is not just disorganisation, but the loss of a sense of the very reality of things and of other persons."⁵⁴ And, I would suggest, it is a loss of our selves.

So, with these methods and philosophies informing and influencing this work, this thesis represents an exploration of ontological vulnerability, of fragility, of fear and of carrying on and of how to understand and represent these challenges through creative practice. It is an unpacking of the experience of knowing from the body-in-the-world, of seeing that which cannot be unseen, and of giving voice to the unspeakable, of tearing the veil of the Real in two, of reckoning with death on a daily basis, and experiencing this reckoning many times over. This is a storytelling. It is a story of already being at the moment of your death as you imagine the moment of your death. It is a story of dreaming difference. It is a story of subjects under late Capitalism, since that is our overarching system of control, and of the networks of power that create anxious subjects.

Lines of fright

⁵² Robin M. Boylorn and Mark P. Orbe, "Introduction: Critical Autoethnography as Method of Choice/Choosing Critical Autoethnography," in *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life*, ed. R.M. Boylorn and M.P. Orbe (Routledge, 2020), 6.

⁵³ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 36.

As I have noted, this thesis is comprised of a number of interrelated parts. You are currently reading an exegetical text, a PDF document, which situates the performances I have made within an academic, philosophical, and ekphrastic context. This is woven through with excerpts of scripts, experimental scraps, poems and diary entries. Connected to this via links is a dynamic website, an artwork in form and function, and a container or repository of documentation and object ephemerae from the performance experiments I undertook throughout my candidature. These parts are interrelated, offering multiple ways of reading.

I have detailed some approaches, methodologies and experiments I employed in this conglomerate born of affect, experiment and critical thought. This multiplicity of creative approaches is reflected in the form—which is not friendly to linearity or the arrow of time and has a number of fractured parts that can be experienced in a parallel mode, or as lines of fight, flight and freeze.⁵⁵

Each chapter in this thesis responds critically, thematically and/or ekphrastically to a performance I have created for this research, or to a performance I have experienced. I am drawing out a thread from the tangle of my lived experience and weaving a container from it, in order to give the philosophical, subjective and creative meanings a form. The thesis is reliant on entanglement. The thesis is sporadically interrupted by poetic experiments and autotheoretical interjections, some with script and score excerpts, which can be found on the website that is a sibling to this thesis. These interventions occur throughout, and correlate conceptually to !ctic! and affective attacks on logic and coherence, as is appropriate in a work on panic. At any point in the reading of the thesis, there are opportunities to jump into the accompanying website to watch a video document, explore a blog, consider an artist's book or experience a soundscape.

⁵⁵ Fight, flight and freeze is the terminology used to describe the body's physiological responses to threat. In recent times the fourth "F" has been added, which is fawn—attempting appease or pacify the threat as a means of surviving it. We pass through these states on the way into, or out of, panic. I also draw an abstract and poetic line between these clinical terms and Deleuze and Guattari's terminology "lines of flight", which refers to the tendency towards change and becoming, and potentially death. Lines of flight can vary in intensity and speed, and I think of panic as a wild line of flight.

The thesis, as a whole, is more of a spiral than an arc, working from the outside in—and within this mother-spiral the chapters themselves contain spirals of their own. Spiralling allows us to return and return again, to look at the same territory from different perspectives across time and space. Spiralling allows me to go deeper and deeper into an experience, down to a quivering cellular level, or to go way, way out, to a cosmological perspective. Revisiting the same territory over and over again adds complexity to the understanding of the phenomenology of panic. “Spiralling” or “spinning out” is an experience common to those who experience out-of-control flights of extreme affect—whether anger, sadness, or, as is the case here—panic.

The interruptions act as exit points, which all circle back to the work eventually.

In Chapter 1, *How Does Your Data Glow?*, I present the methods I am working with to explore my research field. As noted, I am working broadly—as broadly as possible—in the field of ABR in order to capture the soft and ephemeral emic data⁵⁶ which is generated through the performance and writing experiments I have developed and presented across the term of my candidature and beyond. The express purpose of this is to extrapolate meaning from the affective panic events I have grappled with across a lifetime. The term “emic”, paired with the term “etic”, was originally coined by linguist and anthropologist Kenneth L. Pike in 1954,⁵⁷ and taken from the terms “phonemic” and “phonetic”, as Pike notes, in “...response to the need to include nonverbal behaviour in linguistic description”⁵⁸. Pike uses the example of riding a bicycle to explain this notion: the rider knows they can ride a bike—this is a feeling and a doing thing—the rider has an insider understanding of the feelingness and doingness of bike riding. To explain this from an outsider perspective—how, for example, the muscles work to move the bike through space—a language of analysis must be applied, and this is an outsider language. The insider perspective is very specific to that rider, and that rider only. It is not a universal experience—and is therefore emic data. Etic data can be reproduced faithfully via

⁵⁶ Julian Murchison, *Ethnography Essentials : Designing, Conducting, and Presenting Your Research* (Hoboken, UNITED STATES: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2010).
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uwsau/detail.action?docID=477815>.

⁵⁷ Kenneth L Pike, "Cultural relativism in relation to constraints on world view—an emic perspective," *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* 59, no. 2 (1988).

⁵⁸ *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*, vol. 7, ed. Kenneth Pike Thomas N. Headland, Marvin Harris, *Frontiers of Anthropology*, (Sage Publications Inc., 1990).

quantitative measures, but emic data can only be produced from a situated standpoint, and maybe only once—the experience may change each time.⁵⁹

Cultural anthropologist Julian M. Murchison very specifically uses the term “emic” to refer to the “insider perspective” and “etic” to refer to the analytical “outsider” perspective⁶⁰. The term “emic” has become useful in qualitative methodologies to allow for perspectives which are not considered empirical and differ from any “objective” reality. The emic approach could be considered through a phenomenological lens, foregrounding embodied and subjective perceptions of the research field. In this work I am using “emic” to indicate the situatedness of my research, namely, my own body. I am both researcher and research subject. This is not without its complications, and I come even to my own experience with inherent bias and many kinds of privilege which I attempt to mitigate by creating and remaining in uncomfortable situations. This allows me to gather as much data as I can that is not inflected by an overly objective and intellectualised perception of events. Arts Educator Elliot W. Eisner states in his 1997 essay on alternative forms of data representation that “...we like our knowledge solid and our data hard”⁶¹. I refer to emic datasets as soft, ephemeral, yielding and unfixed as a deliberate contrast to the hard data of “verifiable truths”. Hard data has “led us away from an experiential conception of understanding”⁶² in favour of building empires of knowledge, concretised, fixed and unwavering—no matter how destabilised the times in which we live.

Elliott W. Eisner also coined the term “arts-based research” in 1993, and many permutations of the term, all with their particular nuance, have been applied to this category of practice-led research since. I prefer Eisner’s term for its broadness—it creates an umbrella which allows a mess of methods to huddle beneath it, all playing their part. ABR privileges emergence as an integral part of the research process, valuing the

⁵⁹ Lauri Haapanen and Ville JE Manninen, "Etic and emic data production methods in the study of journalistic work practices: A systematic literature review," *Journalism* 0, no. 0, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211016997>.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/14648849211016997>.

⁶⁰ Murchison, *Ethnography Essentials : Designing, Conducting, and Presenting Your Research*.

⁶¹ Elliot W. Eisner, "The Promise and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation," *Educational Researcher* 26, no. 6 (1997): 7, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X026006004>.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0013189X026006004>.

⁶² Ibid.

“intellectual chaos”⁶³ of not-knowing, in order to remain open to the intersubjectivity of the making process. This marks a departure from qualitative methods which view these periods of chaos as something to pass through in order to get results.⁶⁴ Periods of mess and chaos in arts-based research are ongoing and may even be an end in themselves. Arts-based research invites, rather than tries to tame, the “spontaneous and unknown”⁶⁵. The experimental, poetic and autotheoretical are all methods for “writ[ing] toward what we don’t understand”.⁶⁶

Grappling with this writing towards the ambiguous is an important methodology in coming to grips with knowing panic. Panic is micro-situated. Not only in a body which exists within social, cultural and political specificities, but in that body that never knows itself from moment to moment. This is precarious ground to research into and out of, and it takes belief to keep you there, in the murk out of which meaning might grow. Thus, muddling might also be methodologically aligned with the grappling.

One of the core values of ABR resides in the aspect of intersubjectivity, that is, in valuing all participants as “full, equal collaborators”.⁶⁷ This may seem odd to say in a work that utilises an autoethnographic paradigm, but to extrapolate further on the question of who or what can be a collaborator, I would say that there are a multiplicity of selves interrelating, that these selves exist in the social, and the stories of these participants ride on the breath. These selves and their stories exist within a quality of light and sound—everchanging—and the affect that arises from these multiple relations is shared with the audience, which circulates that arising affect. All these human and non-human objects are collaborators in the production of this affective work. We can never produce in isolation.

⁶³ Anita Hunter et al., "Making Meaning: The Creative Component in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Health Research* 12, no. 3 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129119964>.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/104973202129119964>.

⁶⁴ Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, 18.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁶ Patti Lather, *Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts Towards a Doubled Science*., ed. Lenore Langsdorf, Suny Series in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 40.

⁶⁷ Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, 26.

ABR “developed in a transdisciplinary methods environment in which disciplinary methodological and theoretical borders were crossed, blurred and expanded”⁶⁸ The topic of panic, with its wild lines of flight and flight, requires a methodological approach that is responsive to a complex, highly situated and fluid research environment. ABR, with its emphasis on a synergy between form and content, is the most appropriate research methodology for this work.

I also approach my research by bower-birding and cherry-picking, with the most joyful aspects of those activities engaged. In their paper on bricolage as an organising principle, researcher Jay Deagon outlined a methodological approach based upon the behaviours of the male satin bower bird:⁶⁹ engaging, selecting, focusing, refining, defining and weaving. The most precious. The bluest.

Bower-birding resonates in the work of post-qualitative educational researcher Maggie McClure, who speaks of going where the data glows.⁷⁰ A glow or a glimmer draws you towards something precious, perhaps, in amongst the dross of material. You don’t yet know that it is precious, it exists in the space of not-knowing, and acts upon you to draw you towards a possibility. That possibility you then identify, unpack, begin to feel and understand, and weave precisely into the fabric of knowing.

Following the flows of affect is another core method in this work, with a view to generating an affective body of work. Cultural researchers and affect scholars Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage in *Affective Methodologies* propose a raft of approaches towards the exploration of affective processes in relation to empirical study and propose a number of strategies for an “affective method,” as follows:

- 1) asking research questions and formulating research agendas relating to affective processes, for
- 2) collecting or producing embodied data and for

⁶⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁹ Jay Deagon, "Through the eyes of a satin bowerbird," *Victorian Journal of Home Economics* 54, no. 1 (2015).

⁷⁰ Maggie MacLure, "The Offence of Theory," *Journal of Education Policy* 25, no. 2 (2010): 282, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930903462316>.

3) making sense of this data in order to produce academic knowledge.⁷¹

They emphasise the importance of a research agenda with a “strong situational specificity”,⁷² in order to get close to the happening of the social world, and to grasp the “messiness, ephemerality and unpredictability of social life”.⁷³ The challenge they identify is “how to develop and account for methodologies that enable cultural researchers to investigate affective processes in relation to a certain empirical study... how to perform empirically grounded affect research”.⁷⁴

In Chapter 2, *The Shimmer Body*, I introduce the concept of the “shimmer body” and explore the production of this phenomena via “subjective evacuation” and as a response to desubjectivising the affect of panic. I develop the notion of the shimmer body as a spectral companion, birthed as a result of this desubjectivising event, and unpack some of the situated conditions which favour this evacuation and this “becoming beside ourselves”⁷⁵. I also explore the relationship of the shimmer body to the integrated self and ontological security, as discussed by philosophers Dylan Trigg,⁷⁶ (Trigg 2017) Havi Carel(Carel 2013)⁷⁷ and Anthony Giddens⁷⁸. In order to place panic in a historical, and socio-political context, I trace some mental health, religious and institutional contexts in which panic has been constituted. Using the work of Brian Rotman, I look at how, in networked times, we operate in a realm of multiplicity, as a necessity of life under Capitalism. We are secured, validated and coded across multiple platforms. Against this I counterpose institutional requirements of subjective governance systems to integrate as a single autonomous “I”, and how this points to the privileging of unity, integration and authenticity over dissolution and multiplication. This paradoxical governance of subjectivity—simultaneously distributing identities to use for data-driven algorithmic

⁷¹ Knudsen and Stage, "Introduction," 1.

⁷² Ibid., 5.

⁷³ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁵ Brian Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts and Distributed Human Being* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁷⁶ Dylan Trigg, *Topophobia: A Phenomenology Of Anxiety* (New York, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

⁷⁷ Havi Carel, "Bodily Doubt," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 20, no. 7-8 (2013).
<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/imp/jcs/2013/00000020/F0020007/art00009>.

⁷⁸ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*.

purposes and insisting on an integrated digital footprint for identification purposes—feeds into Orr's unpacking of "shifting, historical networks of power" and the governance and construction of social identities.⁷⁹ The term "dissociation" is applied quite extensively in this chapter as an approximation of dissolution and multiplicity, and also as a response to and feature of panic states. Dissociation is discussed as a kind of break from the integral self, a portal to the production of the shimmer body. I use the historical case of Jeanne Frere to demonstrate the ways in which dissociation has been demonised by church and state across time. Carel and Trigg both discuss the precarity of a unified self and "bodily security" through the lens of phobia and chronic illness. Using their notions of "formlessness"⁸⁰ and loss of faith in the body, I discuss panic as a kind of "ontological meltdown", destabilising temporality, dissolving cohesion and creating disorderly self-narratives. I also use the concept of "becoming", as mobilised by Deleuze and Guattari, to highlight and celebrate some of the agential aspects of dissolution over unity, while also acknowledging the very real difficulties of living with high anxiety, panic and dissociation in a constantly spiralling way. One of the most important agential aspects of becoming is the tendency towards change and transformation over stasis and institutionalisation. I use personal accounts and poetic exploration to further unpack these tensions.

All of this is a precursor to the idea of the shimmer. A shimmer is in constant motion. During a panic attack I experience a kind of pulsing, a kind of vibration, especially when I have been living in a rapid cycling pattern of hope-hopelessness/high anxiety-panic/dissolution-integration. A falling apart/coming together, an out of focus/in focus shimmer. In panic and its extensive affects there is constant movement between calm and panic, integrated and dissolved, retreat and attack, shut down and unfurling. The shimmer, by its very nature is a becoming, unceasing, restless and unresolved. I explore some of the cultural sites of the shimmer and its powers of evocation.

Chapter 3, *!ictic! Vocalities* is broken into two parts: *Exiting Language: !ictic! Vocalities and the Remainder*, an autotheoretical and poetic exploration of the voice impacted by the seizure of panic attacks; and *Panic Opera*, an exegetical text of an experimental operatic performance titled *Vocal Womb* by composer and opera singer Eve Klein.⁸¹ This

⁷⁹ Orr, *Panic Diaries: A Genealogy of Panic Disorder*, 10.

⁸⁰ Dylan Trigg, "The Aesthetics of Anxiety" (paper presented at the The Berkeley Conference on Precarious Aesthetics, UC Berkeley, October 15-17 2015).

⁸¹ Eve Klein, "Vocal Womb," (Mona Foma, Hobart, Tasmania, 2018).

performance took place at the event *Mona Foma* in Tasmania in 2018. Klein created two arias based on creative texts. One—*mMouth hHouse pPanic cCathedral*—was written by me in 2017,⁸² and the other— excerpted from *All The Beginnings, A Queer Autobiography of the Body*—was written by Quinn Eades in 2015⁸³. The arias were performed underground in a multi-media installation environment.

This section introduces the concept of !ictic! vocalities. !ictic! is from the Latin *ictus*, referring in text or prosody to “rhythmical or metrical stress”. In pathological terms, it has a meaning of “a blow” or “a stroke”, and also “a seizure”.⁸⁴ The ictal phase of a tonic-clonic seizure is the period of time from the first signs of a seizure to the end of the seizure activity. I reframe the term to refer to the kinds of vocalities produced during a panic attack, which in my personal experience is a kind of seizure, happening out of the blue, a blow. The movements of the mouth, the flow of air through the vocal cords, the tightness of the larynx are all changed in the event of a panic attack, affecting speech, language and voicing. The resulting prosody of panicked vocalities I refer to as !ictic!. The connection between these two types of voicing—the !ictic! and the operatic—is that their relationship to language and voice is marginal. To unpack this further I refer to philosopher of language, linguist Jean-Jacque Lercerle’s work on the remainder⁸⁵; literary and cultural theorist Steve Connor’s work on the breath and the production of a “body double”⁸⁶ birthed via the voice; and philosopher, psychoanalyst, cultural theorist Mladen Dolar’s work on the post-linguistic capacities of singing.

Accompanying these essays is a collaborative constraint-based text written as performance by Quinn Eades and myself while watching Eve perform our texts at the *MonaFoma* festival in Hobart in 2018. Synchronously or in turn, we wrote back to the performance, a meta-textual meditation on the operatic rendering of our poems, feeding back into the installation as a participatory element.

⁸² Virginia Barratt, "mMouth hHouse pPanic cCathedral," ed. Cordite Poetry Review, *Queer Modes: New Australian Poetry* (Cordite Poetry Review, 2017).

⁸³ Quinn Eades, "All the Beginnings: A Queer Autobiography of the Body" (2015).

⁸⁴ "Online Etymology Dictionary," <https://www.etymonline.com/word/ictus>.

⁸⁵ Jean-Jacques Lercerle, *The Violence of Language* (London, USA and Canada: Routledge, 1990).

⁸⁶ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 35.

In Chapter 4, *Geotrauma: Entanglement, Rupture, Equanimity*, I introduce the idea of geotrauma, and the circulation of affective atmospheres between and in excess of bodies and the world. I am using the term geotrauma to explore how we are entangled in a rolling continuum of a “nested series of traumas”⁸⁷ existing across social, environmental and structural contexts. The individual is already born into the continuum, not separate from it, in a cosmological sense. Philosopher Reza Negarestani’s understanding of geotrauma embraces “everything from geology and microbial evolution to human biology and vocalisation, reinterpreting Earth-history as a series of nested traumas of which human subjectivity is the symptom.”⁸⁸

The phenomenology of the “bodyworld”—a conceptual assemblage that refers to the entanglement of the non-human and the human—is mobilised here to point out that there are no “pure” spaces. That nature is undelimited, as is the world of machines, the world of commerce, and the worlds of the human and the non-human. All are enmeshed in sticky, barbed and inextricable ways. Wounds inflicted on the earth are also wrought on the collective body. This relationality was formative for me becoming a panicked subjectivity,

I was born into a complex web of power relations on stolen land in bucolic surrounds in a world always on the brink of global war, or at least in ever-present fear of it. Mushroom clouds, locust plagues, drought, lamb birthing blood on my father’s hands, severed sheep’s heads and my mother’s garden are all entangled in a world in which the conditions for my existential precarity already existed. Thus, my panic arises out of the bodyworld assemblage. The performance and installation work, “RUPTURE”, created collaboratively with Jessie Boylan and Linda Dement, is ekphrastically invoked here. By textually igniting the affect of the immersive event of the performance, I engage the inextricability of the social, the geological, the cosmological and the biological.

Chapter 5, *The Body as Laboratory: Performing Affect*, also contains an ekphrastic text entitled “Flow State: Interruption”, looking at a collaborative work developed and presented with Francesca da Rimini that blurs the boundaries between doing and thinking, between performance and writing, between words and the world.

⁸⁷ Reza Negarestani, “On the Revolutionary Earth” (Dark Materialism Conference, Flett Lecture Theatre, Natural History Museum, London, 2011).

⁸⁸ Robin Mackay, “Nick Land: An Experiment in Inhumanism,” Robin Mackay ed. *Robin Mackay*, 2012, <http://readthis.wtf/writing/nick-land-an-experiment-in-inhumanism/>.

In this chapter I explore performance and performativity and introduce the idea of “sympoiesis”,⁸⁹ a term coined by Mary Beth Dempster and used also by Donna Haraway to discuss open systems of production that apply across disciplines as diverse as biology and performance. I introduce the idea of arbitrary demarcations between disciplines through the work of Lorne Dwight Conquergood, ethnographer, human rights activist and performance studies theorist, and the performance ethnographer D. Soyini Madison. Della Pollock furthers the discussion of the intersection of disciplines through her unpacking of the coperformance of language and experience.⁹⁰ Revisiting autotheory, especially through the work of women of colour, feminists and other marginalised communities, I emphasise the notion of this form as a praxis in motion that invites experimentality and blurs boundaries, especially between lived experience, creative experimentation, politics and theory.

In the context of the work of these theorists I situate this non-standard thesis—one that was always already in excess of “writing”, and which does not conform to rigid taxonomies. I look at a series of performances I presented in a variety of academic environments and explore what happens when I take writing into the space of performance, and performance into the space of writing.

This non-standard, co-constituted project of entangled thinkingdoing begins and ends with my body in the world, and what panic reveals about this relationship. Panic, as a strong affective force, tears at the fabric of perception to reveal the structures underpinning ontological security and/or vulnerability as precarious, unfixed and unformed. To speak my lived experience of this knowing, I need to exit the languagebody, which is itself a product of systemic control and inherently biased towards institutional notions of stability, productivity, and linearity. I situate my enquiry in the gap between the skin and the word, finding there a generative space to explore what panic can do, as a counter-productive agential force.

⁸⁹ Dempster, "Sympoietic and autopoietic systems: A new distinction for self-organizing systems."

⁹⁰ Della Pollock, "Performing Writing," in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 81.