

13 Corpo-Affective Politics of Anxious Breathing

On the Agential Force of Bodies and Affects in Vulnerable Protest

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Often, when anxiety is invoked as a lived experience, it is framed as an individual problem: a problem that usually leads to stigmatisation through interpellation of failure, weakness and shame. This chapter aims to offer a different understanding of anxiety.¹ But this anxiety is not one. It has heterogenous enactments, heterogenous articulations and heterogenous effects in relation to specific intersectional and geo-political operations of power. Moreover, such enactments, articulations and effects are often imperceptible and hard to comprehend both to those who do and those who do not experience anxiety. This is where art has been a powerful metaboliser and articulator of affect, its power and its dissent to specific cultural, social, economic and political environments in which an embodied and affective living is situated.

In this chapter, I therefore turn to the music video *Big Girls Cry* (Sia, 2015) that, in my reading, articulates the forcefulness of anxiety. Following the video's enactment of anxiety and its resonances with my own experiences of anxious living, I articulate my situated understanding of corpomaterial and affective dynamics of anxiety in order to argue for their understanding as a political force of protest. A form of protest that, I believe, needs to nuance critical queer feminist imaginaries and practices of resistance, which are still dominated by locating political agency in a traditional understanding of protest, such as demonstrations, prides, occupations of spaces or political organisation and participation. Recognising corpomaterial and affective forcefulness as political is necessary to further develop critical queer feminist resistances which are otherwise exclusionary of those whose corpomaterial and affective ways of living limit possibilities of 'showing up' within conventional forms of protest. It is important to engage also with forms of politics that are not organised and do not take place on the streets, for politics that take place in quotidian bodily and affective ways of living.

In order to do so, I first explain how my engagement with the video is enacted. Then I develop a dispersed autoethnographic analysis, which provides an account of my anxiety-situated engagement with the video. Finally, I offer a situated theorisation of anxiety that articulates its forcefulness in terms of politics of ambivalence. Ambivalence is central to this politics as it is crucial not to simply glorify anxiety as a political force. Anxiety is not simply affirmative because of the forcefulness of dissent it enacts. Its corpomaterial and affective daily metabolisations are ambivalent. They are immobilising in their painful forcefulness while also activating in their forceful refusal.

Emergence of Resonance

Sia is an Australian songwriter and a musician whose work predominantly addresses mental health struggles. While she came up as an independent musician, in 2014 she gained more mainstream recognition for the single *Chandelier* (2014). Her work is well known for evocative music, lyrics and music videos. In this chapter, I discuss Sia's music video *Big Girls Cry* (2015) and focus on the audio-visual dimension of the affective concert her work offers.

I do so because, for me, Sia's music exceeds its lyrical components. The carefully curated videos—that she co-directs—overflow beyond lyrics. The lyrics give a direction but the sonic and visual aspect of her work spills beyond this directionality. The sonic and visual intensity invokes resonances with the viewer/listener—or rather entrant, as defined by Wibke Straube (2014)²—and connects on a level of situated resonance. Resonance is situated in specific corpomaterial and affective—or rather corpo-affective,³ as I call it—vibrances of the entrant and the music video. In my case, the situated resonance with the music video takes place through anxious breathing: through shallow inhalations and exhalations, holding breath and barely exhaling, rapid deep contractions of diaphragm, tensing muscles, contortion of limbs, painful tension in the jaw, affective flashbacks and simultaneous dissociative impulses that emerge in the moments of audio-visual intensity.

This type of resonance—through which I invoke the anxious affect that is at the centre of this chapter—is a moment of co-constitution that is not driven by intentionality of the artist or the entrant, but rather is enacted through intra-active⁴ (Barad, 2007) vibrancy that constitutes the two: a vibrancy in which the audio-visual material and the entrant are intra-actively constitutive and transformative. The music video obtains encounter-situated depth, meaning and resonance through vibrancy with specific corpomaterial and affective situatedness of the entrant. So does the entrant's corpomaterial and affective intensity emerge through the intra-active encounter. We co-become. In that sense, neither music video nor entrant are entities independent of each other (a pre-existing *relata*, in line with Barad (2007)). While it may seem that the music video has a fixed form (i.e. its formal content is always the same when the video is played), its meaning, interpellation and resonance form throughout the situated encounter. A material-semiotic situated and dispersed intertextuality⁵ takes place. This process of resonant creation is situated in the specificity of the video's intensity intra-actively enacted with the entrant's momentary affective existence and an impulse of relating. Simultaneously, this temporarily, materially and affectively situated process is also located in a dispersed political 'context' that shapes its form, meaning, intensity and resonance or dissonance. Such dispersed context is not a background to the encounter but is rather constitutive of it. For example, the broader personal (e.g. one's lifelong corpo-affective existence), cultural, societal, economic and geopolitical relationalities also constitute the video's meaningfulness, the entrant's engagement and the situated character of the viewing/listening event of interpellation and meaning-making. In that sense, it is a powerful intertextual *and* intersectional event. It is within such an understanding of my relation with the audio-visual dimension of Sia's video that the following analysis is developed.

Artistic Articulation of the Power of Affect

The music video *Big Girls Cry* is directed by Sia and Daniel Askill, and choreographed by Ryan Heffington. The video consists of a performance by American dancer Maddie Ziegler, who is dressed only in a flesh-coloured leotard and a blond wig, and is performing against simple black background. With only gestures and facial expressions, Ziegler enacts a powerful roller-coaster of anxious forces. In its breath-taking intensity the video, I believe, can be read as a specific artistic articulation of the power of affect: a power where breath and affect critically matter for feminist politics. Sara Ahmed's words become a motto here, as they articulate the urgency of aspirational breathing, critical analysis of suffocation and breath-full imagination:

the struggle for a breathable life is the struggle for queers to have space to breathe. Having space to breathe, or being able to breathe freely is . . . an aspiration. With breath comes imagination. With breath comes possibility. If queer politics is about freedom, it might simply mean the freedom to breathe.

(Ahmed, 2010, p. 120)

Sia's video speaks to the corpomaterial and affective suffocation of anxious living in current neoliberal and unjust times that call for politics of breathability: a living that is often devalued through individualisation and pathologisation, and which still stays on the margins of the queer feminist political imagination. In my own anxiety-situated reading, the video is an artistic articulation of the power of affect—of the power of anxiety.

In the opening scene (Figure 13.1), a beige-toned body appears against the black background. It emerges from a depth of darkness, looking directly into camera, breathing shallowly, almost imperceptibly. The breath captures, resonates with my own shallow breathing; the eyes interpellate; the slowly developing music calls in; the tension grows: the performer's deflated body; the stillness of her breathing; her facial expression of resignation. They signal that something is to come; it is already here; it is coming. Tension in my chest deepens. Inhale abruptly, yet deeply. Exhale. The hidden life of anxious becoming becomes visually articulated, at least for me, right here, right now, through different privileges and lacks thereof that constitute my specific resonance, a relation that can be dissonant for others whose anxious living is situated in different racial, gendered, social, cultural or geopolitical intersections.

Here it comes (Figure 13.2). Breathing in. Intensifying sound. A hit, a wave, an explosion of pressure. The performer's hand is taking her face into its fingers. It moves the face abruptly in unexpected directions. The terrified expression in the performer's

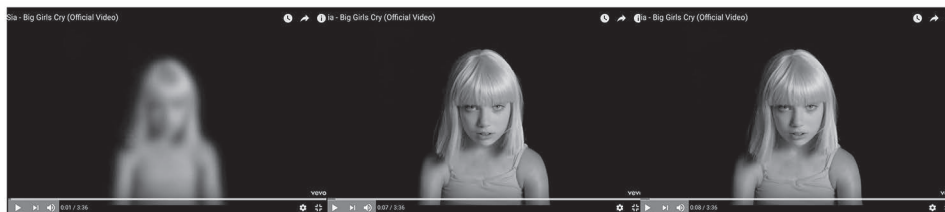


Figure 13.1 Screenshot of Sia, *Big Girls Cry*, 2015, caption of YouTube video



Figure 13.2 Screenshot of Sia, *Big Girls Cry*, 2015, caption of YouTube video

eyes is simultaneously knowledge-full of what is to come and not knowing what is coming. The singer's breath, grating against vocal cords, develops a deep, smoky, painful yet comforting shade of sound. The words—however beautiful—don't speak to me here. A different conceptual, corpomaterial and affective plateau becomes articulate for me: articulates me. The voice, the piano, the drums, the synthesisers, the body emerging from darkness and enunciating the depth of this darkness are what lures me in. They speak of anxiety, of (my) ongoing struggle to live, of (my) attempts to take control while living out of control in durations of suffocation, in practices of self-shaming, self-silencing and hiding.

The vicious fight of lips, eyes, teeth, swinging hair and hands signify the whooshing while sedimenting anxiety and its sweeping power. The horrid shifts from contorted smiles to dreadful fear enact ongoing daily processes of living in corpo-affective tottering and haunting thoughts. They take place simultaneously, with attempts to 'straighten out the face' and fix it into being presentable, into being a 'proper human

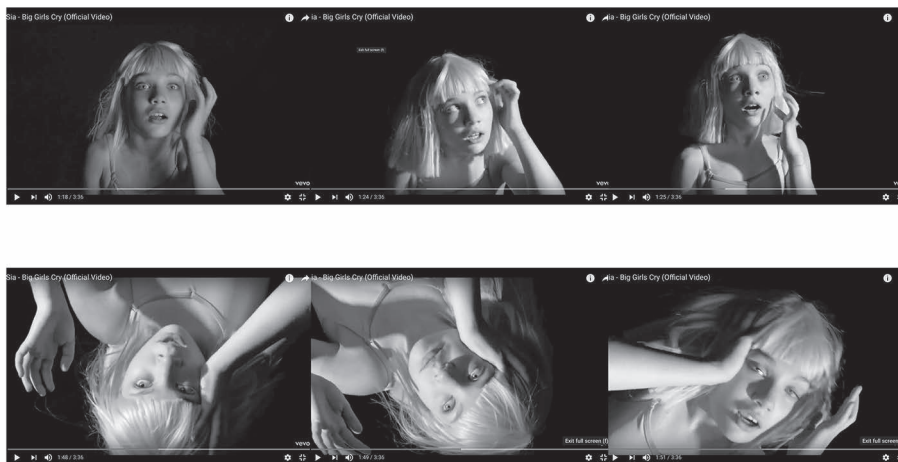


Figure 13.3 Screenshot of Sia, *Big Girls Cry*, 2015, caption of YouTube video

subject'. Their persistence is knotted-in with the forces of social norms and expectations, with the wounding attachments to life and to desired, while also refused, normativity. The normativity enacts a cruelly optimistic promise, that while anxious living is suffocating, corpo-affectively normative life can be breathable.

The performer pinches herself, fixes the face, moulds it in hands, forces a smile which is almost convincing, only if the eyes weren't slightly off. How much can you (I) withstand? How far can an optimistic belief take you (me)? How long, how intensely, how can you (I) live on through the painful cruelty of the promise that in itself, as Lauren Berlant (2011) makes clear, is never meant to be fulfilled? The cruel optimism of normativity demands complicity. This is where the moment of queer feminist criticality and politicisation becomes forcefully present (for me). But wait. Not yet. How much can you (I) withstand? Here it comes again.

A hint, a tide, an expansion of pressure (Figure 13.3).

The slow release of a hand floating away only to come back and punch harder; the duration of extreme affective intensification while the body is floating and swirling in the air; the sound voicing words in short, punchy pokes. The video (I/we) articulate the temporality of anxious tides; of living in a bouncing dynamic along the continuum from feeling better to feeling worse; of desire for a break, of hoping to move on, yet falling right in again.

Here we go again (Figure 13.4). Inhale. Hands appear from behind the performer. Stop. Like overpowering thoughts of darkness, the hands are taking the performer (me) into spaces of deadly despair and terror. Simultaneously, they are pushing to continue living; continue living a corpo-affectively normative life; continue living 'life as usual' while swimming in the sea of suffocation, silencing and social alienation. Shifting between invisible suffocation, gasping for breath, tears of desperation, silent screams, disassociation and compulsively swallowing medication while self-pinching articulate the acuteness and dis/orienting (Ahmed, 2006) daily negotiations of the bodily and affective vulnerability of living in un/liveability.



Figure 13.4 Screenshot of Sia, *Big Girls Cry*, 2015, caption of YouTube video

By now you (I) get used to it (Figure 13.5). ‘Life as usual’ is not only about suffocation of normativity but also about a suffocation of getting used to the tormenting sound of the (my) voice, deep vibration that the material–semiotic–affective soundscape (of my thoughts) creates in a subject. The suffocation is deadly. It grasps you (me), it holds you (me) in its grip, it brings you (me) to places of disappearance, of wanting to jump out of ones (my) own skin, of wanting to stop, of wanting to not be.

Breathe in only to start the roller-coaster all over again, with even more intensity, self-shaming, self-blaming and disassociation that push the anxious forces away briefly in order to explode again and break space and time apart.

Here we go again.

depth of darkness, imperceptibility, shallow breathing, interpellation of normativity, deflation, stillness, whooshing, resignation, tension;

BREATHE IN

intensification, a hit, a wave, an explosion, grating, duration, sedimentation, sweeping;

BREATHE IN

contortion, wounding, desire, refusal, optimism, suffocation, breathing;

BREATHE IN

withstanding, intensity, cruelty, complicity, criticality;

BREATHE IN

a hint, a tide, an expansion;

BREATHE IN

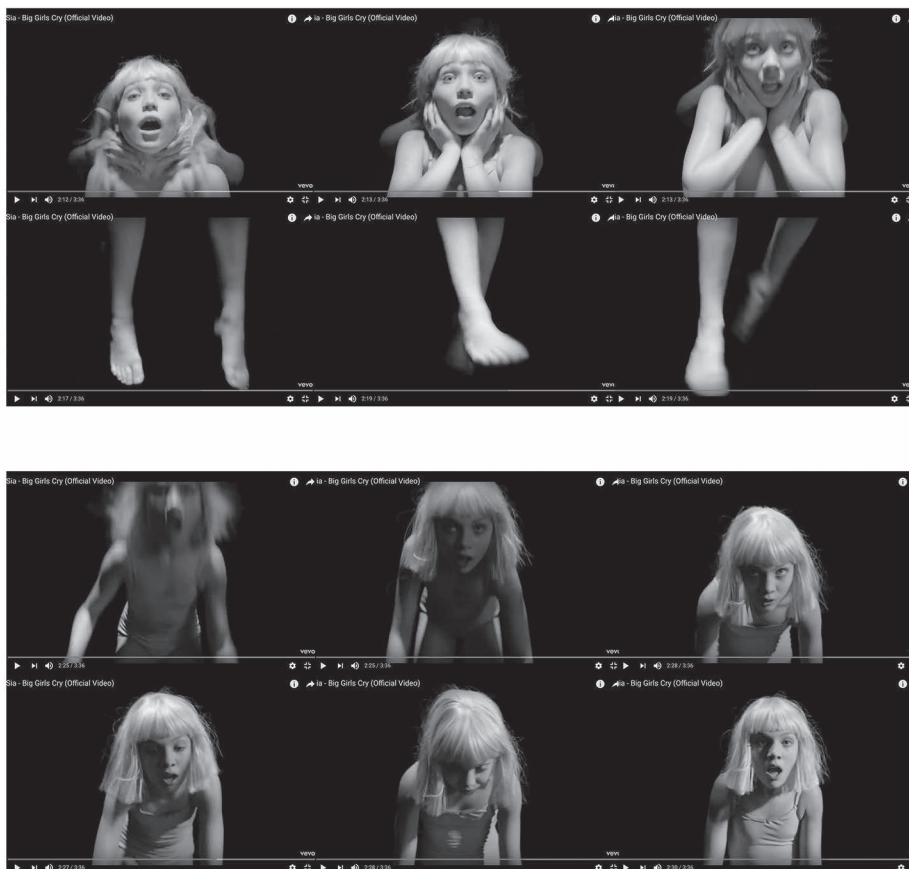


Figure 13.5 Screenshot of Sia, *Big Girls Cry*, 2015, caption of YouTube video

floating, swirling, punching, poking;
 BREATHE IN
 hoping and falling;
 BREATHE IN
 continuing, gasping, screaming, swallowing;
 BREATHE IN
 how much more; how much longer can you (I) withstand?

Anxious Politicisation

Living in anxious suffocation is exhausting, isolating and (in my case) often imperceptible. Why should this ghostly appearance of suffocating anxious breath matter? Why should it matter for critical queer feminist politics?

Mainstream Western discourses—such as therapeutic, neurological or pop-cultural—delimit anxious dynamics in a contrasting manner to what is normatively considered a ‘proper human subjectivity’, delineated within Western and colonial universalised

notions of the Man and humanity (Wynter, 2003; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). This normative notion of subjectivity operates in a biopolitical (Foucault, 2003) and necropolitical (Mbembe, 2003) manner. It articulates how a (my) normative society values and privileges certain forms of human subjectivity and embodiment in relation to particular concepts of (white, male, heterosexual, Western) humanness, worthiness, well-being, success, health, happiness etc. These same notions lead to disregard, and stigmatisation of diverse forms of affective and physical vulnerability such as physical, cognitive, neurological or affective disability and health. These ways of living are then understood as subjective problems and/or inadequacies, and/or signs of weaknesses, failure, not being able to 'deal with life' or not being strong enough, good enough or determined enough.

If vulnerable dynamics of anxiety are recognised and accepted within these frameworks; they often become yet another part of neoliberal commodification of corpo-affective life, a part of a booming well-being industry, and are subject to neoliberal discourses of productivity. In such practices of commodification, monetarisation and discourses of productivity, anxieties are often tolerated as only temporary 'phases of not doing well', reactions to difficult life events or vulnerabilities to be quickly overcome through specific, individualised therapeutic practices and medication. While therapeutic and medical practices can be central to one's survival, their neoliberal side effects include rejection of vulnerable ways of living where anxiety is seen only as an unproductive force, a trouble that is to be put aside to 'go on' with one's life. Within such delimitations, it is then common to either blame yourself or blame your body. 'My brain chemistry is fucking with me', [said someone close to me once]; 'I just need to learn not to trust my brain, take distance. . . . Now I know that all that happens is not true'.

But is it not?

In the daily negotiations of anxieties, one might struggle to believe in the validity of what is happening to oneself and in the significance and relevance of such dynamics. Often, these states of being need to be narrated through specific discourses—such as mentioned mainstream discourses but also alternative ones such as activist and artistic—in order to become intelligible at all, not to mention accepted as relevant or politically significant. Sia's video is one such articulation. In its specificity, it speaks to my situated experience of anxious living. The anxiety I engage here is shaped through my situated choreography of an anxious self.

But it is important to keep in mind that different intensities, temporalities, embodiments and intersectional positions tell different stories of anxieties. Anxiety is not a universal, uncontextual experience. As Jose Muñoz points out, when writing about depression, affect is 'not one' and is shaped through a specific affective 'stance' (2006, p. 676), or as I would say, intersectional situated and dispersed positioning. Such affective life is not merely individual. It is constituted also through structural operations of power, inequalities and processes of privileging and de-privileging. In those processes, it is hegemonically normative forms of subjectivities, types of bodies, types of economic and geopolitical existence that are privileged while those who do not fit into the narrowly defined hegemonic understandings are politically, socially, culturally, symbolically and materially positioned on the margins. For example, the mere ability to attend to affective suffocation, to be able to pay therapeutic attention to it, to allow it to semiotise one's experience, is shaped by structural affordances. To allow yourself to be vulnerable, to (afford to) see a doctor, to obtain medication (or not)

are matters of intersectional situatedness and dispersal within local and global power relations. Such positionality also enacts diverse ways of (not) coping and living and dying with anxieties.

Some bodies, therefore, can breathe more smoothly, and some can breathe less. For some, suffocating or hyperventilating are extraordinary matters, while for others they are commonplace matters of structural operations of power. The diverse processes of anxious breathing are—importantly—both individual and structural. For some, anxious living may lead to a loss or transformation of privilege while it simultaneously articulates another privilege: a privilege that enables recognition of and work with anxiety's persistence (as in my case). For others, the transformation of privilege (the movement from having non-anxious to having an anxious living) may nevertheless not enable a possibility of such recognition and work due to their intersectional situated and dispersed positioning, i.e. situated cultural, gendered, racialised and geopolitically specific context of living. And for many others, anxious breathing may be a condition of living from the first breath onwards. A mere ability to recognise, name and deal with anxieties is, therefore, a matter of power dynamics, of processes of intersectional privileging, de-privileging and marginalisation that materialise in differential ways and with differential effects.

To reiterate, this intersectional, situated character of anxiety and its dispersal in relation to differential cultural, social, geopolitical relations, articulates non-universality of affect; and it shows the importance of quotidian, individual and structural enactment (and analysis) of affect. Moreover, it also articulates a political potentiality of affect for critical queer feminist politics. In the discussion of Sia's video, I aimed to invoke such non-universality, an entanglement of quotidian, individual and structural enactments of affect, and political problems anxieties open up. I also wanted to sparkle a dis/resonance with the reader while articulating my way of anxious living. The articulation of anxious dynamics in the above autoethnographic corpo-affective analysis, especially the constant insistence on inhalation, hoped to invoke suffocating corpo-affective anxious breathlessness in a reader who felt interpellated to co-breathe the written text. This way the specific understanding of anxiety that saturates this chapter also delineates affordances and limitations of my analysis. And it also hints towards my situated understanding of political relevance of anxious living.

But contemporary approaches to political agency locate political actions within forms of protest that are often detrimental to and exclusive of vulnerable forms of existence. Political agency is usually identified in actions such as demonstrations, occupations of spaces, political participation. Even when resistance is understood in relation to vulnerability, protest is conceptualised predominantly in relation to collective presence (Butler, 2009, 2004). But the mere possibility of engagement in most conventional forms of political actions can be restricted by bodily and affective vulnerability. This is why it is crucial to develop a critical queer feminist understanding of politics that incorporates the agential significance of quotidian corpo-affective agencies as forces that also enact political resistance. In that sense, striving for breath and for breathable lives is a matter not only of acts of and aspirations for change in a 'traditional' sense—which prioritises 'showing up' in as a literally physical and/or energetic presence and involvement—but also recognition of differential forms of political practices. In doing so, an analysis of resistance needs to focus not only on how bodies and affects act *in* politics but also how they *enact* politics in a quotidian manner; how they articulate how embodiment and subjectivity, individual situatedness and power

structures intra-actively relate and are enacted in quotidian practices of living and dying.

This is precisely a moment when work of Franz Fanon speaks loudly. In *A Dying Colonialism* (1965), Fanon makes an explicit connection between political character of situatedly dispersed enactment of embodiment, subjectivity and power relations. He argues that ‘there is not occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other . . . the individual’s breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing’ (1965, p. 65). Fanon’s notion of *combat breathing* articulates the suffocating, corpo-affective operations of social power relations. As Perera and Pugliese put it, combat breathing ‘names the mobilization of the . . . subject’s life energies merely in order to continue to live, to breathe and to survive the exercise of state violence’ (2011, p. 1). Combat breathing articulates how governmental, colonial, capitalist, racist and gendered norms—to name only a few here—are embodied and affective. It articulates how individuals are compressed, as Fanon terms it, to ‘target bodies’, which are disposable in a necropolitical sense. Bodies whose ‘energies are fully committed merely to surviving; [“the notion of target bodies” articulates how] the logic of state violence is predicated on ensuring that the subject cannot begin to expand their energies in resisting, contesting or subverting the power’ (Perera and Pugliese, 2011, p. 2).

Fanon discussed combat breathing already in 1965 in relation to the French colonisation of Algeria. Combat breathing relates closely to colonial and imperial violence and to bio- and necropolitical processes of dehumanisation. It is, therefore, a leap to transpose this specific concept into anxious breathing that is marked by my (and Sia’s video) privilegisation through whiteness and Western-ness (operational in my case through my epistemic canon and the Western European academic positionality that I currently hold despite/while being Eastern European). I make this leap here because I hear a resonance between Fanon’s criticism of colonial dehumanisation and dehumanisation that takes place through normative effects of bodily and affective ableism as well as intersectional processes of discrimination within the Western normative and hierarchising discourses of the ‘proper human subjectivity’. For example, such discourses are vital political matters of the contemporary deadly operations of structural racism, in the contemporary expanding fortification processes of Europe, and in the suffocating effects of privilegisation and de-privilegisation of whose lives (do not) matter and what ways of living (do not) matter. While recognition and attending to anxiety is to some degree a white Western privilege, differential operations of global power relations also have global suffocating and anxiety producing effects. These effects carry different names, different ways of relating to it (or not), and this difference is significant—it is precisely the non-universalising and situatedly dispersed operation of difference that makes affect significant in differential manner.

For me, combat breathing becomes a tool for understanding corpo-affective materialisations and enactments of contemporary structural operations of power as I focus on the Western social norms enacted in the specificity of my (and Sia’s video) anxious living. Simultaneously, it is important to keep in mind that power operates in a differential manner that cannot be reduced into claims of sameness, which overlook differential structural power relations. The anxious living discussed here bears resonances but also dissonances with anxious existences that are intersectionally positioned differently⁶.

Quotidian, Individual and Structural Politics of Anxieties

Thus, what kind of politics do anxieties articulate? I would like to argue that anxieties articulate specific quotidian politics that are individual and structural. Politics where embodiment, affect and power are mutually constitutive. Politics where quotidian practices of breathing are a way of living in vulnerability, or rather a vulnerable living. Politics that do not take place only on the streets or in forms of organised governmentality but also in everyday bodily and affective practices. Such practices are both individual and collective. While they may often (but not always) take place in physical isolation, they can also create collectivities.⁷

The significance of affective dynamics has already been articulated in the existing body of feminist affect scholarship, exemplified in works of such scholars as Ann Cvetkovich (2003, 2012), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), Sara Ahmed (2004, 2010), Sianne Ngai (2007), Heather Love (2009), Laurent Berlant (2011) and Jack Halberstam (2011). Its political relevance has been also addressed by activist groups such as *Public Feelings* or *Feel Tank Chicago* and art projects such as *The Alphabet of Feeling Bad* (Michalski, 2012) or *An Unhappy Archive* (Michalski and Baumann, 2014). Those authors have shown how different affects such as depression, normative ideals of happiness, affective attachments, shame, trauma and failure are a part of the operations of power. Ann Cvetkovich, for example, argues that depression is a 'manifestation of forms of biopower that produce life and death not only by targeting populations but also more insidiously by making people feel small, worthless, hopeless' (2012, p. 13). Affect became recognised as a valuable *response* to the dynamics of social power relations, and as a manifestation of diverse oppressive structures such as racism, classism, colonialism, heteronormativity, gender normativity, sexism and ableism.

But, additionally, I would like to argue that affective dynamics are also *more than just reactions, manifestations and responses* to social conditions. Anxieties are also material and affective *enactments of and challenges to* contemporary power relations that are enacted individually and structurally. Anxieties transform dynamics of living by enacting a break and necessitating change. In such a way, they enact specific materialisations, productions as much as transformations and alternatives to the dominant social norms and power relations. But, as transformative forces, they are also often very painful, unbearable and undesirable. They are not alternatives in an ideational sense of desired ways of being. And, simultaneously, in their painfulness they break the norms apart. Such a break is terrifying but also opens potentialities of being otherwise.

The political potentialities of anxieties are, therefore, not easy, happy and optimistic in themselves or for the sake of being alternatives, but they are enactments of different directionalities. They enact change in the form of radical disruption, immobility and rejection of the normative pressure of being a corpo-affective subject of the neoliberal political, social and cultural economy. They claim what it means to be a human-embodied subject in a differential way. In their suffocating forcefulness, they are also articulations of the necessity to take space, to take a breath and to live a breathable life. They are murky forms of political resistance. As Jack Halberstam points out, 'alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal' (2011, p. 2). And although imagining lives otherwise involves engaging with the ambivalence of mutual constitution of

immobility and potentiality and of painfulness and empowerment, it is such *ambivalence* that I believe is at the core of critical queer feminist corpo-affective politics—politics which enact ruptures, transformations and negotiations of hegemonic norms of embodiment and subjectivity.

I would, therefore, like to underline that the political potential of anxieties for social justice—that is, strived for in critical queer feminist thinking and activism—is not, in my opinion, in simply embracing them as phenomena of resistance. Their political importance is in the dynamics of the complex and ambivalent articulations they open up by the ways they break worlds apart and demand change. Political interventions of vulnerability are not in simple acceptance of the failure to achieve the norm—even though social and individual acceptance and recognition are important on yet another ‘level’ of their political potentiality—but in the recognition of the political power such failure enacts in *calling out* individual and systemic intersectional operations of power relations and in *calling in* (Trần, n.d.) for affinities through similarities and differences.

Such ambivalent politics call for social, cultural, geopolitical and paradigmatic changes as well as for daily changes of living. They call for approaches in which politics and change do not idealise resistive phenomena but work with their simultaneous potentiality and unbearable, painfulness and undesirability. Simultaneously, to come back to my earlier points, such politics cannot be generalised and universalised. They are always situated in their particularly intersectional enactments and they are dispersed in the structural patterns of the operations of intersectional power relations.

Conclusion

What I have striven to articulate in this chapter is a significance of corpo-affective intensities and dynamics of anxiety, not merely as non-normative ways of living but also as forms of political agency; an agency that is not simply residing in a subject’s intentionality, but that is enacted through bodily and affective metabolisation of power-full intersectional ways of living. Such agency is of an ambivalent character—its non-normativity and the refusal it enacts by breaking worlds apart are a political force of demanding life otherwise; simultaneously, the painfulness of living in suffocation makes such politics not only difficult to sustain but also difficult to cherish. And this ambivalence is precisely what is at the core of the critical feminist corpo-affective politics I have tried to articulate at this chapter—politics where aspiration for change is painful while hopeful, debilitating while enabling, immobilising while activating practice. Such political practice materialises in a quotidian, individual and structural manner; and in an intersectionally situated and dispersed manner. Such politics are always provisional, under constant negotiation. In such politics, processes of privileging and marginalising matter and shift as part of the dynamic coalitional and separatist vulnerable social justice work: work that builds temporary affinities and separations based on specific interventions rather than identities.

Notes

1. Parts of this chapter have been previously published in *Breathing Matters* (Górska, 2016).
2. Straube (2014, pp. 63–65) introduces the notion of an entrant in order to overcome conventional occularcentric terms such as spectator, viewer or audience. The concept attends to multisensorial, corpomaterial and affective dimensions of cinematic experience and articulates engagement of an entrant and a film as an intra-active process of co-becoming.

3. The notion of corpo-affectivity is developed in *Breathing Matters* (Górska, 2016) in order to articulate that corpomateriality and affectivity are intra-actively constitutive and differential. The intra-active aspect of the term—the insistence on their co-constitution without assuming corpomateriality or affect as pre-existing relata—highlights how affect is embodied materially and how material embodiment is affective. The hyphen indicates their simultaneous differentiability in order not to collapse the two into sameness and homogenise their specificities.
4. My analysis is informed by Barad's agential realist approach, which offers a quantum physics-based understanding of relationality. A common understanding of relationality is grounded in an *interactive* causality. In such an approach, atomistically understood entities pre-exist relations and hold their individual characteristics and properties before they relate with other entities (or relata as Barad calls them). But, drawing on quantum physics, Barad problematises such an understanding of causality and develops a neological concept of intra-action to articulate a different form of relationality. It is through agentially intra-active process—rather than through the meeting of pre-existing entities—that phenomena are constituted. In such an approach

relations are not secondarily derived from independently existing 'relata', but rather the mutual ontological dependence of 'relata'—the relationon—is the ontological primitive. . . . relata only exist *within* phenomena as a result of specific intra-actions (i.e. there are no independent relata, only relata-within-relations).

(Barad, 2003, p. 815; italics in original)

It is such an understanding of relationality that informs my engagement with Sia's video and my conceptualisation of anxiety as a political force. For my further elaboration on agential realism, its other aspects and relation to power and politics, see *Breathing Matters* (Górska, 2016).

5. The notion of intertextuality was developed by Julia Kristeva (1984). While Kristeva offered its semiotic understanding, I work with the concept as material-semiotic (Górska, 2016).
6. See, for example, Muñoz's critique of the white character of depression discourse and his argument for necessity to recognise and analyse differential, minoritarian, enactment of affect in relation to race and how it relates to 'a larger collective mapping of self and other' (Muñoz, 2006, p. 679).
7. See, for example, *A Public Feelings Project* discussed by Ann Cvetkovich (2012).

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