Leila Michelle Vaziri

The Theatre of Anxiety

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The Theatre of Anxiety

Border Crossings in 21st-Century British Theatre

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Endorsements

"This is an ambitious and far-reaching thesis which investigates the potentials of the lens of anxiety as a way of interrogating narrative and aesthetic trends in British Theatre in the twenty-first century. Vaziri does not merely draw on, and apply, different conceptions of anxiety, but is confident to compare, contrast and challenge in order to carve and refine her own definitions of the term. This for me is the quality of the work, that while being both robust and rigorous in its argumentation, it is also expansive and ambitious enough to leave the reader further work to do, and will inspire, I'm sure, other scholars to pick up the conclusions and run with them."

Liz Tomlin, Professor in Theatre and Performance,
University of Glasgow, UK

"Through her theoretically sophisticated and analytically adroit interpretive skills, Leila M. Vaziri illuminates the topic of anxiety in contemporary theatre to great effect. *The Theatre of Anxiety* is a welcome addition to contemporary theatre scholarship, in its expansion of the scope of intellectual engagement available in the field and its generation of a much deeper understanding of anxiety. In its scrutiny of eight contemporary plays, including those by Caryl Churchill, Zinnie Harris, and Thomas Eccleshare, the book offers is a fresh and critical intervention that scrutinises theatre's capacity to reflect and shape our understandings of anxiety, and is likely to inspire new work in this area."

Siân Adiseshiah, Professor of Literature, Politics and Performance,
Loughborough University, UK

"Leila M. Vaziri's *The Theatre of Anxiety* explores the phenomenology of anxiety as a timely lens on contemporary British theatre. Drawing on a range of theoretical sources from Husserl to Sara Ahmed, the text balances careful rigor and sensitive attention to eight recent works of theatre. In doing so, it serves as a model of engaged scholarship as well as witness to how art participates in the collective navigation of these challenging times."

Russell J. Duvernoy, Associate Professor of Philosophy,
King's University College of Western University, Canada

For my mother, in loving memory.

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Contents

1 Introduction: Anxieties in the Twenty-First Century

Anxiety is one of the most powerful and private feelings: as a sign of our recognition of our own vulnerability, it is an inevitable part of our existence. Simultaneously, anxiety can also be shared among large groups of people and entire generations. Such anxieties are then often related to broader social or political phenomena that are perceived to threaten both individual existence and the entire way of life of a society. Characterised by an ambiguous nature, anxiety can stimulate and paralyse – sometimes, paradoxically, at the same time.[1] Anxiety brings together a vast range of phenomena and combines physical and emotional symptoms as well as personal and public spheres (Koch 1). Especially in our fast moving and globalized world, feelings of fear and anxiety have become ubiquitous and we often feel threatened and overwhelmed by the multiple environmental, political and social crises we are facing simultaneously. This struggle with anxiety is, of course, not entirely new: "[t]he history of mankind," writes psychologist Fritz Riemann, "illustrates our never-ending efforts to govern anxiety, to allay, to overcome or to confine it" (7). While in the Global North – which is the focus of this book – the majority of people no longer experience a tangible struggle for day-to-day survival, we now fear pollution, terror attacks, unemployment and other abstract matters.[2] In her study on *Fear: A Cultural History*, Joanna Bourke describes life at the turn of the twenty-first century as

> characterised by [...] nebulous anxiety states, focusing on fatigued environments of flesh and fellowship. Cancer and crime, pain and pollution: these fears isolate us. The acceleration of rates of change and the fact that threats seem to be everywhere – in the earth, air and sun – is bewildering. The fact that many of these risks are invisible and global also makes them more frightening because they are impossible to manage or avoid. Notions of 'trust' become old-fashioned as each individual or small community struggles to make some kind of sense of their fearful surroundings. (293)

Therefore, it is not surprising that anxiety and related sensations like fear or angst and underlying conditions like precariousness are currently much discussed approaches to understanding our coexistence. Especially in times when climate

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1 This paradox is described in detail in Dietmar Goltschnigg's anthology *Angst: Lähmender Stillstand und Motor des Fortschritts.*

2 This is not to say that there is not a – steadily growing – group of people in the Global North who are facing such a struggle for daily survival in times of a cost of living crisis such as the one (post-)austerity, post-Brexit, post-Covid Britain is facing at the moment (P. Butler).

change, political and social crises and several wars are permanently on the news, anxiety is a phenomenon that is ubiquitously present and can be encountered not just in news reports, but also in advertisements, the entertainment industry, stock market movements, social media and many other places.

Because anxiety seems to engulf us everywhere, on the streets, in political debates and in very private settings, it is little wonder that it has also increasingly made its way onto British theatre stages. As can be seen in plays by well-known playwrights such as Caryl Churchill and relative newcomers such as Thomas Eccleshare, in plays that premiered at Fringe theatres or festivals, like Stef Smith's *Girl in the Machine*, as well as in plays that have been produced on stages all over the world, like Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*, anxiety has become a pervasive factor in many theatre productions and plays written in the UK over the last decade or so. Correspondingly, Trish Reid observes a preponderance of dystopian motifs in twenty-first-century British Drama with a special focus on the near future. The group of plays she describes – many of which will also be analysed in this study – "serves as a revealing index to the anxieties of our time" ("Near-Future" 73). While she primarily focuses on near-future dystopian plays, the focus of this project is much broader in connecting contemporary anxiety and drama.

The aim of this book is then to discuss the interplay of theatre and anxiety on both the thematic and aesthetic level. In the following, I would like to argue that a strand of contemporary theatre has come to prominence in recent years that combines topics of social, ecological, technological and pandemic importance with investigations into the philosophical and aesthetic implications of anxiety. To highlight anxiety's crucial thematic and aesthetic role in these plays, I call this strand of contemporary theatre the *theatre of anxiety*. In this context, anxiety is understood as it has been defined by Sara Ahmed: as the accumulation of several objects, foregrounding the act of gathering that consequently overwhelms the subject. These gathered and often fearful objects may then be of a private or political nature, or perhaps in them the private and the political are always already merged. Their political and social contexts, the thematic sites of anxiety in theatre, constitute one focus of my analysis. But this book also wants to centrally discuss the philosophical questions and aesthetic configurations of anxiety in contemporary theatre. For this reason, the phenomenology of anxiety and how it comes to bear on the theatre is a second focal point. The ways in which anxiety is experienced necessarily impact on its representation: typically, the experience of anxiety entails a sense of being overwhelmed at the multitude of fearful objects one is confronted with, a crossing of several borders in time and space, including a distorted notion of temporality that anticipates disastrous outcomes that will have been impossible to avert and the breakdown of language – anxiety is difficult, if not impossible, to put into words.

While stagings of anxiety frequently rely on a combination of these features, the latter point in particular means that the representation of anxiety itself is fraught with difficulty. For this reason, representing other sensations with a similar phenomenology, like pain and disgust, as an affective/aesthetic displacement often allows for an indirect access to anxiety. The aim of this book is then to describe the political, philosophical and aesthetic potentials of what I call the theatre of anxiety. All of this will be put to the test in exemplary readings of a number of contemporary British plays that will show that contemporary drama and performance both aesthetically and thematically reflect and comment on global crises and catastrophes through the lens of anxiety as a feeling that 'colours' the perception of and reaction to these social and political conditions.

1.1 Configurations of Anxiety

Given this central role of anxiety in the current academic and political debate, the aim of my book is to look into the interplay of theatre and anxiety. In my approach I combine phenomenological philosophy, in particular its discussion of negative emotions, and drama studies. However, before turning to my own analysis of anxiety, a first attempt at defining anxiety and a brief overview of the history of anxiety in philosophy, psychology and sociology seems necessary, in order to outline different notions and difficulties of anxiety and its definitions – an overview that is, however, only able to provide a snapshot of the long history of fear and anxiety.[3]

In *Anxiety*, Stanley Rachman describes anxiety as "one of the most troubling and pervasive emotions" (1). Combining physical, mental and social aspects, anxiety "is a tense unsettling anticipation of a threatening but formless event" (23)

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[3] As far as a historical perspective on anxiety is concerned, Bourke states that anxiety is not a popular topic amongst historians, primarily because of "problems of nomenclature" (6). She further explains: "[w]as what people in the 1970s called 'fear' the same thing as it was in the 1870s? Probably not. Or, more accurately, many historians feel that they have no way of knowing" (6). The historical approach to anxiety thus faces the same problems theatre faces when trying to put anxiety on stage and page: how does one describe an emotion that is characterised as a state of nothingness, in which language often fails? While theatre circumvents this problem through aesthetic means (see chapter 3), for historians this might be done through the things fear and anxiety leave behind: "[f]ear acquires meaning though cultural language and rites. Analysis of these 'texts' allows historians to pursue fluctuations in the nature of 'fear' as the emotion is rendered visible in language and symbol. Emotions enter the historical archive only to the extent to which they transcend the insularity of individual psychological experience and present the self in the public realm" (7).

that might be accompanied by symptoms like palpitations or a rush of adrenaline. While there is no universally accepted definition of anxiety and the word can have different connotations, "ranging from dread to endeavour to eagerness" (7), it often depends on the field of study how anxiety is understood.[4] Definitions of anxiety often contrast it with fear: while both terms are frequently used interchangeably –"[t]here is no distinct transition from fear to anxiety, and at times it is not possible to distinguish between the two" (5) –, they can be separated, for instance by looking at their causes and duration (23; see also Lazarus-Mainka and Siebeneick 14 – 15).[5] In many cases it is easier to define fear, which has a clearly identifiable cause and takes place in shorter periods of time, as it mostly disappears when the perceived threat vanishes. Fear is thus often believed to be limited in time and space.[6] While fear can sometimes be perceived as positive and even actively sought out, for instance when doing dangerous sports (7), anxiety is perceived as a solely negative emotion.[7] As Rachman observes, anxiety is typically vague in its scope, which makes it all the more grating an experience:

> When feeling *anxious*, the person has difficulty in identifying the cause of the uneasy tension or the nature of the anticipated event or disaster. [...] In its purest form, anxiety is diffuse, objectless, unpleasant and persistent. Unlike fear, it is not so obviously determined. Usually it is unpredictable and uncontrollable. [...] Anxiety tends to be shapeless, grating along at a lower level of intensity; its onset and offset are difficult to time, and it lacks clear borders. Anxiety is not a lesser and pale form of fear; and in many instances, it is more difficult to

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4 As anxiety is difficult to grasp, its meaning has shifted throughout time. For this reason Silvan Tomkins, for instance, eschews the term 'anxiety' altogether and uses the word 'terror' instead, arguing "that the original meaning of the word [anxiety] has suffered such attenuation that we propose that the intense form of fear now known as anxiety be replaced by the word *terror,* which has not yet lost its affective connotation. We have so debased the word *anxiety* that it has in the extreme case become equivalent in meaning to the word *wish,* as in the usages 'he is anxious to see that play' or 'he is anxious to please'" (932). While it is true that there is a tendency in everyday language towards broadening the meaning of particularly the adjectival form 'anxious,' Tomkins in this manner seems to dismiss a long tradition of philosophical and psychological research into anxiety.
5 Similarly, the borders between normal or clinical cases of anxiety are often blurred "and the distinction between what is normal and abnormal rests on clinical judgments of severity, frequency of occurrence, persistence over time, and degree of distress and impairment in functioning" (Craske and Stein 3048).
6 Fears can be rational and irrational, where irrational fears can transcend to become phobias (Rachman 3).
7 The term anxiety has its origin in "the Greek root *angh*, which means tightness or constriction" (Rachman 7; see also Coe 8) which is also the root of 'anger' or 'anguish.'

tolerate than fear. It is unpleasant, unsettling, persistent, pervasive, and draining. Intense and prolonged anxiety can be disabling and even destructive. (3–4)[8]

Anxiety is then an extremely complex emotion that is not only uncontrollable, unpredictable, draining and seemingly objectless but it also often shifts various borders in space and time. At the same time, anxiety's proximity to fear also links it to other sensations like dread, panic, horror or terror.[9] For instance, Bourke declares that "[a]nger, disgust, hatred and horror all contain elements of fear. Jealousy may be understood as fear of losing one's partner, guilt may be fear of God's punishment; shame may be fear of humiliation" (8).[10] It seems thus that the very definition of anxiety is already a border crossing in and of itself. Thus, while fear and anxiety are different sensations and have different underlying causes, in everyday language they are often used interchangeably, which means that "[i]t is easier to distinguish between fear and anxiety in theory than in practice" (Rachman 5).

This proximity of fear and anxiety can also be seen in the understanding of anxiety as a conglomerate of too many (fearful) objects that are gathered and that overwhelm the subject. During this state of excess, the subject is thus not able to focus on any single object and, overpowered by the multitude of objects, feels as if in a state of nothingness (see chapter 2.1). This understanding of anxiety can be traced in concepts of anxiety from fields like philosophy, psychology and sociology, beginning in the nineteenth century, which marks a starting point in an ever increasing philosophical and psychological interest in anxiety.[11] The im-

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8 Unless stated otherwise, emphases are in the original.

9 Eugenie Brinkema begins her book *Life-Destroying Diagrams*, with a long list of bodily sensations linked to the experience of horror: "*a bristling, shaking, trembling; a shuddering; being roughed up, excited, stimulated by, moved by the terrible, the dreadful, from intense (& painful) feelings of fear, loathing, disgust, this icy unease, what chills all spines (a symptom; a sign), piercing and roiling shivers & unsteady movements (cf. the gestural recoil of abhorrence), a frisson, a thrill (some shock); even what sickens to tell (*horribile dictu: *opposite of miraculous, what wastes lovely wonder) or is revolting, or detestable, each nervous ascent of each rigid raised pilus, rippling skin and bloomy plain*" (1). Interestingly, Brinkema here links horror with fear, disgust and pain. The connection of the latter three sensations with anxiety is central to phenomenological accounts of anxiety and will be analysed in more detail below.

10 However, this does not mean that all emotions, feelings and sensations are the same. While Aurel Kolnai, for instance, differentiates between disgust and fear, he also clearly distinguishes them from anger and hate, which are non-intentional and spontaneous. "Fear and disgust are in contrast genuine 'reactions'; they are to some extent and according to their intention 'appropriate' responses to disturbing influences" (32). Kolnai links sensations like hate and anger to bodily reactions, where, for example, fear and disgust are more strongly visceral than anger and hate.

11 As Bourke outlines, the (cultural) understanding of fear and anxiety changed over time (3; see also Tait, *Forms of Emotion* 11). While the term anxiety to describe a condition that is distinct from

portance of anxiety in philosophy steadily increased in the nineteenth century, among other works with Søren Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*.[12] Kierkegaard not only distinguishes fear from anxiety but also describes anxiety as unfocused fear (41) and connects anxiety to freedom and a sense of nothingness. By giving anxiety an ontic foundation, his work is influential for a philosophical understanding of anxiety until today. One of the most prominent accounts of fear and anxiety, however, stems from Martin Heidegger, for whom anxiety is a mood which shows our existence as a whole.[13] By exposing humans to nothingness, anxiety reveals a radical and undisguised form of Being. For Heidegger, anxiety is an ontological condition that not only makes fear and other moods besides anxiety possible but that also reveals the inner workings of Being in-the-world, which is something that will be explained in more detail in chapter 2.1. Meanwhile, Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, which is a response to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, understands anxiety as (the burden of) freedom and of different possibilities to choose from – for him, "it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom" (29).[14] While there are several passages in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* that describe instances of fear and anxiety (for instance the fear of the other in his chapter on being-for-others (259 – 70)), it is the connection between anxiety and freedom in particular that proves of interest to my approach, since

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fear in that it is a free-floating negative anticipation of something dreadful is relatively new and has its beginning in nineteenth-century psychoanalysis, anxiety might have been analysed as early as the fourth century CE, for instance by Hippocrates (Crocq) and was often referred to with terms like 'threat,' 'anguish' or even 'melancholia' (Bergo 3). Anxiety can also be traced back to Plato's *Symposium*, "where Aristophanes recounts the myth of Androgyn, condemned to an ongoing state of agitation, or *erōs*, in quest of its lost complement" (3), as well as in Spinoza's *Ethics* and Pascal's *Thoughts* (Brencio 299). It is then little wonder that, as Bettina Bergo observes, "[a] search for the origins of anxiety, even if we do not consult the burgeoning, popular psychological literature in which it appears as a medicatable disorder, takes us across eras, figures, and disciplines." (3). Furthermore, as Bernhard Waldenfels remarks, the terms fear and anxiety are used interchangeably up until and including Hegel's work. Afterwards, fear and anxiety are distinctly differentiated (114). For a detailed analysis of the philosophical history of anxiety, starting with Immanuel Kant, see Bergo.

12 For an analysis of anxiety from a theological perspective, including Kierkegaard's, see Dietz.

13 As David Coe humorously observes, "[t]he role of primordial Angst in Heidegger's early mature period has been misunderstood by many, abused by some, but *essentially* grasped by none save Heidegger – all of which may account for why he abandoned primordial Angst as an explicit theme for further investigation after 1929" (90). Although the following study cannot give a profound analysis of Heidegger's understanding of anxiety, his Angst interpretation is nonetheless important for the understanding of anxiety in this study.

14 Thus, Sartre combines Kierkegaard's definition of anxiety as "what one lacks" in relation to freedom and Heidegger's notion of anxiety "as the apprehension of nothingness" (Sartre 29).

it already anticipates some of the aspects of anxiety that are revisited in the following chapters on Ahmed's understanding of anxiety.

Similar to Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Sartre distinguishes fear from anxiety/anguish: both are distinguished "in that fear is fear of beings in the world whereas anguish is anguish before myself" (29). This distinction of fear and anxiety does not primarily focus on an object – which is either operating from the outside or inside – but it also shifts the attention to a subject and its ability to react to this object. This shift is crucial for an understanding of Ahmed's concept of anxiety, as for her it is the sticking together of objects that cause anxiety and not the objects per se that do so (see chapter 2.1). Sartre further explains: "[a] situation provokes fear if there is a possibility of my life being changed from without; my being provokes anguish to the extent that I distrust myself and my own reactions in that situation" (29). To avoid this situation of anguish, the subject starts to reflect and think of its possibilities – all of which are highly hypothetical at this point. The subject becomes increasingly aware of its freedom to act in several ways. Here Sartre alleges the example of the vertigo, where the subject stands on a cliff edge and feels "anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over" (29).[15] I imagine myself falling down the precipice and the person I see is (my future) me and at the same time not me. This limbo between being and not being represents a state of nothingness. "It is through my horror that I am carried toward the future, and the horror nihilates itself in that it constitutes the futures as possible. Anguish is precisely my consciousness of being my own future, in the mode of not-being" (32).[16] Throwing myself over the precipice is a possibility and nothing can stop me from doing it besides myself.[17]

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15 In order to not be constantly aware of this freedom to choose and thus feel anxiety, the subject uses avoidance techniques to flee this disposition, for instance by its firm belief that it is not free. The subject is not denying anxiety, but rather establishing an inauthentic attitude towards it (as opposed to an authentic attitude in which the urge to flee the magnitude of decisions is resisted). Here, Sartre describes the example of a waiter who is trying to 'act' like a good waiter is supposed to and who re-enacts studied mechanisms (like an actor in a play). As Sartre writes, he "plays with his condition in order to *realize* it" (59). "There are," Sartre continues, "indeed many precautions to imprison a man in what he is, as if we lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition" (59). Transferred to the subject, the subject tries to be the best possible waiter to convince others and itself that this is the purpose of life. At the same time, the subject is fleeing from its freedom and anxiety to choose from a variety of occupations. In other words, the subject lives in a set of values which influence its behaviour and the possibility of not living up to them can cause anxiety. Nevertheless, the subject cannot flee, hide from or avoid anxiety: "we cannot overcome anguish, for we *are* anguish" (43).
16 This is an example of anguish in the face of the future. Sartre also names an example of anguish in the face of the past, namely the example of the gambler. A man addicted to gambling, who

While Ahmed's approach differs from Sartre's in that she does not focus on the state of limbo between being and not being, her account of anxiety also focuses on the subject's approach to objects and on the future. Ahmed characterises anxiety as the act of gathering and accumulating objects that might be painful in the future – similar to hypothetically falling down a precipice. In general, Ahmed, coming from a sociological background, refines the differentiation between fear and anxiety established by Kierkegaard and combines it with ideas by Freud, Heidegger and other philosophers (64 – 68). Her work is therefore an excellent starting point to characterise and define the theatre of anxiety. Furthermore, her understanding of anxiety as an impalpable conglomerate of objects and possibilities might also explain why different fields of research define anxiety in different ways.

This is, at times, even the case within one field of research. In psychology and psychoanalysis, for instance, there are various different concepts of anxiety, ranging from object anxiety to neurotic anxiety, state- and trait anxiety, to relatively new concepts like social anxiety disorder, health anxiety disorders or general anxiety disorder.[18] Correspondingly, Sigmund Freud assesses that "anxiety is not a simple thing to grasp" (*Problem of Anxiety* 69). Freud's own central distinction is between object anxiety and neurotic anxiety.[19] Object anxiety, which Freud links to fear, has its source in the external world as the perception of a potential threat or danger. If object anxiety is continuously felt, it evolves into neurotic anxiety, which is a product of internal impulses and repressions and is therefore not con-

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has already lost a huge sum of his fortune, decides not to gamble again. The next day, nonetheless, when he sits at the card table, he is in a conflict between his resolution and his desires. He is thus in a state of indecision, of anxiety, which separates the gambling from himself. To not gamble again, he must feel the fear of losing everything again, as he did the day before, which he usually cannot feel sitting at the card table and thus starts to gamble again. Thus, anxiety separates myself from my object, which is my past (not gambling) self (32 – 34). In this book's chapter on anxiety and temporality (2.2) the focus will, however, primarily be on anxiety in the face of the future.

17 "Fortunately," as Sartre continues, "these motives in their turn, from the sole fact that they are motives of a possibility, present themselves as ineffective, as non-determinant" (32). In addition to the anguish, we feel a counter-anguish, which brings us in a state of non-decision, which in turn demands a decision. In most cases we then leave the precipice and continue our way. This feeling of nothingness, which can act as a foundation for our freedom, is, in Sartre's words, "made-to-be by the human being in his relation with himself" (34).

18 For a history of anxiety from a psychological perspective see also Horwitz.

19 Besides object and neurotic anxiety, Freud also describes a type of anxiety that might nowadays be called phobia. "These phobias are not inherently irrational, in that the fear is not entirely groundless, but if it is excessive or inappropriate, then it qualifies for the term phobia" (Rachman 69). Freud further identifies traumatic anxiety (a psychic state of helplessness due to overwhelming tensions) and signal anxiety (repeating a traumatized state) (Brencio 299).

sciously perceived.[20] The transition from object anxiety into neurotic anxiety can thus be subtle. Neurotic anxiety, which for Freud is a character trait, is characterised by "a general apprehensiveness – 'free-floating' anxiety" (Rachman 70; see Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 332). As Rachman explains, "[p]eople who constantly experience this 'expectant dread' are tormented and always anticipate the worst outcomes" (69) – which resembles the notion of anxiety as a mood in the Husserlian sense (see chapter 2.1).[21]

With the evolution of psychology as a scientific discipline, a shift of focus away from universally experienced feelings of anxiety towards individuals with clinical anxiety disorders can be traced. Psychologists like Fritz Riemann change the scope of the analysis of anxiety to a psychic, emotional and ontogenetic conception. For Riemann, "[a]nxiety always arises when we find ourselves in a situation with which we cannot cope or cannot cope with yet" (9). In some cases, especially when the experience of anxiety becomes too intense and/or endures for too long or when anxiety overpowers during infancy – as children do not have sufficient defence mechanisms – we are vulnerable. Thus, anxieties can either paralyse us or make us active, depending on whether we suppress them (e.g. by developing phobias) or whether we (try to) overcome them. In modern psychology, anxiety can be analysed from affective, motivational, behavioural and physiological perspectives (McReynolds 37). In this, the understanding of anxiety is often strongly influenced by neurobiology. Joseph LeDoux, for instance, describes a model of two roads to

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20 In *Hemmung, Symptom und Angst*, Freud further elaborates on neurotic anxiety as a symptom of unconscious conflicts. In his observations on fear and anxiety, Freud famously refers to the 'little Hans case,' which is also mentioned by Ahmed in her discussion of fear and anxiety (*Cultural Politics* 66). In short, four-year-old Hans was afraid of horses and everything that was related to them. For Freud, this fear of horses was a repressed fear of his father and desire for his mother and thus a symptom of his Oedipus complex and castration anxiety (*Hemmung* 27–42). However, Rachman criticises the focus on this single case as a basis from which to derive a general concept of fear and anxiety as highly unscientific. Furthermore, Freud saw the boy only once and the whole communication "was almost entirely third-hand, and the reporter [his father] was a central figure emotionally involved in the case" (Rachman 71).

21 In general, Freud challenges the Cartesian mind-body dualism as for him (normal and pathological) anxiety "spanned consciousness and unconsciousness; it could originate either neurologically or socially (trauma); it disturbed, diminished, and yet protected both organism and psyche under traumatogenic conditions" (Bergo 22). Furthermore, according to Freud, during states of anxiety a subject experiences the reproduction of the trauma of birth. For him, anxiety in infants happens either during loneliness, darkness or because of the replacement of the mother with a stranger. Central to anxiety is therefore separation. Even the first, primal anxiety of birth is connected to the separation from the mother. Thereafter, the infant believes itself in a danger situation whenever disconnected from the mother due to privation and non-gratification of its needs (Freud, *Problem of Anxiety*).

fear[22] and David Sheehan has established a theory of two kinds of anxiety, namely exogenous and endogenous anxiety,[23] which once again shifts the focus of anxiety away from a public emotion towards a neurological condition.

Psychology's distinction between fear and anxiety is, however, often different from philosophy's definition. For psychologist Caroll E. Izard, "[f]ear is not the same as anxiety. It is a separate and distinct emotion, worthy of its own separate category, [while] anxiety is a combination or pattern of emotions that includes fear but that also includes other emotions" (282). From a psychological perspective, then, fear and anxiety can be distinguished as follows:

> Fear is a primitive alarm in response to present danger, characterized by strong arousal and action tendencies. By contrast, anxiety seems best characterized as a future-orientated emotion, characterized by perceptions of uncontrollability and unpredictability over potentially aversive events and a rapid shift in attention to the focus of potentially dangerous events or one's own affective response to these events. (Barlow 104)

From a psychological perspective, anxiety can thus also be defined as the perception of future threats caused by potentially dangerous events and/or a lack in protective mechanisms to avert these events from happening. Notably, David Barlow writes here about *events* (in the plural), which echoes the notion of anxiety as a multiplicity of objects. He goes on to describe anxiety as "a negative feedback cycle characterized to varying degrees by a sense of both internal and external events proceeding in an unpredictable, uncontrollable fashion, accompanied by a supportive physiology and increasingly well-established patterns of brain activation" that rest on "a number of cognitive biases reflecting hypervigilance for threat and danger" (103). It is this hypervigilance for threat and danger, then, that connects Barlow's psychological approach to anxiety with Ahmed's approach as a "gathering of more and more objects until [the state of anxiety] overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (*Cultural Politics* 66). In either case the subject experiences cognitive and emotional overload that influences its bearing in and towards the world.

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22 There are two roads to fear – either via the amygdala or via the cerebral cortex. When a threat is registered, the fast route via the amygdala "prepares the nervous system for a fight-or-flight reaction rooted in evolutionary biology [...]. In twice that length of the time the same information is conveyed to the cortex [...]. If there is no actual danger, the cortex signals to the amygdala, and the nervous system calms down" (Plamper 2).
23 While exogenous anxiety is a natural reaction to a dangerous situation, "endogenous anxiety appears to arise from within one's own body, and is what is usually called a panic attack" (Plutchik 342).

While psychology especially focuses on anxiety from an individual perspective, looking at anxiety from a sociological perspective might further clarify anxiety in the interpersonal sphere. Although classical sociology has not explicitly focused on the concept of anxiety, there is ample research on insecurities, stress and the experience of class systems in general (which can all imply feelings of anxiety). What makes anxiety an interesting subject for sociology are the social conditions and the distribution of wealth, which can be connected to insecurities, isolation and, consequently, fears and anxiety. Karl Marx, for instance, describes the exploitation of the working class and the concomitant alienation and loss of identity and Max Weber, who was particularly interested in the sociology of religion and economic sociology, postulated that especially the Calvinist doctrine leads to feelings of anxiety and inner loneliness, which thereafter results in an increase in economic development due to a stronger need for materialistic things and an increased inclination towards self-enslavement (Wilkinson 2; see also Ahrens 47–51). Freud's theories have thus not just been highly influential on psychology, but also on the works of sociologists and philosophers like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Erich Fromm. Fromm, for instance, finds that in the age of industrial capitalism, with high occurrences of isolation and low self-esteem in the working class, the freedom to freely think and act is often seen as a burden, which makes individuals more vulnerable to anxiety. Furthermore, the introduction of capitalist labour, personal prestige and social recognition are more than ever linked to work and employment, with the fear of unemployment as a major factor fuelling (existential) anxieties (Wilkinson 3). Looking at the differentiation between fear and anxiety, sociologist Iain Wilkinson suggests that "[a]nxiety feeds upon the unknown elements of our fears" (20). Wilkinson defines anxiety as the temporal state in which the sense of not knowing how to keep harm away deeply upsets and overwhelms a subject. In chapter four, I will focus on the reasons for interpersonal, global anxieties in much greater detail and mainly rely on the works of Zygmunt Bauman, who sees anxiety as one of the driving forces in what he calls "liquid modernity." He postulates that instead of living in a free and self-determined society, global populations are vulnerable, heteronomous and governed by forces beyond their control (*Liquid Fear* 97). The dangers that cause fear and anxiety can be found as threatening body and possessions, social order (security of livelihood) or social hierarchy and identity.

Such anxiety in the form of the anticipation of a threat directed at one's body, possessions and identity – which is also the kind of anxiety that will be analysed in more detail in the theatre of anxiety – can also be quite prominently traced as a result of social and political developments in the United Kingdom in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While the British population must face the same global crises all other societies are anxious about – at present, for example,

the aftermath of Covid-19, the wars in Ukraine or Palestine or the climate catastrophe,[24] amongst many other topics (for a more excessive list see Dunant and Porter) –, the UK is additionally affected by the long-lasting aftermath of Thatcherism,[25] the austerity politics of the 2010s and Brexit.[26] After a number of cuts to social welfare by Margaret Thatcher's governments and a period of consolidation in the years of the Blair and Brown governments of the late 1990s and 2000s, the newly elected coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats embarked upon a politics of austerity in 2010 as an answer to the 2008 global financial crisis. Aiming to reduce the British spending deficit while protecting business interests, austerity politics led to a second round of defunding what was left of the social welfare state whose impacts continue to be felt today, although conservative politicians have repeatedly declared an end to austerity (Jordan).[27] In general, the gulf between the rich and the poor has widened, the living conditions of the working class worsened, the average debt of households risen and homeownership declined. At the same time, essential services like the police force or the NHS lack funding, people are increasingly dependent on private-run food banks, there is not enough staff to care for the elderly – a group that is steadily increasing in the British population –, museums, sports facilities, libraries and other social meeting places are closing and the national parks are likewise victim to financial cuts. Meanwhile, during the 2010s crime rates and mental health issues increased (Toynbee and Walker). The austerity measures thus hit the weakest in society the hardest: children and adolescents, elderly people, the unemployed, disabled people or migrants and asylum seekers (Montgomery and Baglioni 469; Weale). In the culture sector, they also led to a drastic underfunding of the arts, including theatres and

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24 According to a 2021 study, climate change is a topic that is anxiety-inducing for all ages and classes in the British population (Helm).

25 Although Margaret Thatcher was prime minister from 1979–1990, her politics continue to have an impact on British society even today. In general, "Thatcherism has been described as an ideological project that set out to radically re-cast the relationship between labor and capital between the state, society, and the individual" (Scott-Samuel et al. 54). Thatcher's political agenda of deregulation, privatisation, the curtailment of labour rights and drastic cuts to the welfare state (54–55) may be seen as the starting point for the present-day insecurities and economic anxiety experienced by many in the British middle and working classes. The downside of a politics of individualism that cuts back on social security is – little surprising – increased isolation and insecurity, and hence anxiety.

26 It might be no coincidence then, given this multitude of crises, that the *National Phobics* Society was rebranded in 2008 and is now called *Anxiety UK* (www.anxietyuk.org.uk/).

27 One example is the impact on life expectancy, which "for the first time in a century [...] has stopped growing and for women in poor areas actually fallen" (Toynbee and Walker).

drama venues across Britain (Harrison). Austerity measures in the 2010s then continued a policy that started with Thatcher: "[t]he Conservatives' pitch in 2010 had been repairing 'broken Britain', but its cracks were widened by an austerity that was neither necessary nor inevitable but resulted from ideological choices" (Toynbee and Walker).[28]

Britain's decision to leave the European Union has further increased this sense of insecurity and anxiety and divided the nation. The vote to leave the EU was reached without a clear plan for the structure of Brexit and post-Brexit relations with the EU in place and led to the UK having five different prime ministers in just over six years from 2016–2022. It resulted in a general atmosphere of uncertainty over how the new deal with the EU will and already does impact the British population. Dominic Raab, former Brexit secretary, confessed that Brexit will very likely damage the British economy (Hardinges). As of June 2024,

> Brexit's consequences are now part and parcel of our layered crises. It features in the cost of living crisis – it has driven up inflation, accounting for a third of food-price inflation since 2019, according to an LSE paper. It lurks in the labour market, where higher immigration from outside the EU has not plugged a shortfall of hundreds of thousands of EU workers. It holds back growth, clobbering small businesses and choking bigger ones desperate for labour. (Malik)

As can be seen from newspaper articles like this one, the negative economic impact and multiple crises associated with Brexit and austerity politics have created a negative atmosphere surrounding the issue in the public. Despite polls showing widespread regret over Brexit among voters (Colchester, Luhnow and Mitchell; Leith; E. Smith), this may be a reason why the major political parties have remained silent over the issue (Ganesh; Lewis).

The economic downturn and negative atmosphere surrounding Brexit and austerity measures are also reflected in the increase of anxiety rates in the British population. During Britain's ongoing cost of living emergency, which has been exacerbated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war on Ukraine, the *Guardian* launched a new series of articles called "The heat or eat diaries," which give an insight into some of the most precarious living conditions in the UK. One of the diary entries starts with: "In my freezing house, gripped by fear, I scrawl 'things can get better' on a chalkboard. I escape, ashamed, to the comfort of my friends' warm homes. Even then, anxiety stalks me: I know I could end up home-

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28 This trend is unlikely to stop either, as the British Conservatives by and large find no fault in Thatcherism or austerity politics. Thus, Rishi Sunak, the Prime Minister at the time of writing this, has declared himself "the heir to Margaret Thatcher" (Sunak).

less" (Marin). Reports like this one reveal how the abstract sociological causes for anxiety can become reality in wide parts of a population and how anxiety is connected to and connects various different topics linked to the loss of bodily integrity and possessions, social order or social hierarchy and identity.[29]

A particularly important role in the socio-political proliferation of ever new anxieties falls to the media (Altheide, *Creating Fear*). The connection between media consumption and anxiety is not new. In the 1950s, for instance, a sense of ecological anxiety began to spread, mostly due to the atomic age and the permanent threat of nuclear annihilation in the Cold War, a risk whose media publicity also led to shared anxiety over it (Lavery and Finburgh 28; see also R. May 3–4). The role of the press to report about various kinds of threats then steadily increased and reached a climax in the war on terror. As Andy Beckett observed in 2004, it was the susceptibility to other anxieties in the 1990s (like the millennium bug or genetically modified food) that prepared the population for an increasing amount of stories on topics that were potentially harmful in the future: "The press became accustomed to publishing scare stories and not retracting them; politicians became accustomed to responding to supposed threats rather than questioning them; the public became accustomed to the idea that some sort of apocalypse might be just around the corner" (Beckett).[30]

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29 The connection between Brexit and anxiety has been analysed in more detail in a study that "explores the association between the Brexit vote and the relative anxiety levels of various sectors of the UK population: the UK born, EU migrants, and non-EU migrants" (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 81). The scientists conducting this research conclude that "[a]fter the Brexit vote, EU migrants reported high levels of anxiety at a rate that was 1.8 percentage points lower than the UK born; this suggests economic rather than social anxiety, given that the UK born were losing access to EU opportunities. The reduction in anxiety for EU migrants was marked in regions with greater support to remain in the EU, suggesting its importance in reducing their social uncertainty and therefore anxiety" (81) and thus suggest that political decisions do influence the level of anxiety in different sectors of a population.

30 Frank Furedi offers a different reading of the relationship between the media and anxiety. For him, "the relation between the media and culture emphasizes the element of interaction through which people's fears are expressed and crystallized. This analysis leads to the conclusion that the argument 'it's the fault of the media' is both simplistic and misplaced. Our analysis rejects the one-dimensional interpretations of the media, which indict this institution for being responsible for creating a climate of fear. There are of course instances when the media literally invents scare stories with which to entertain its audience. However, the culture of fear is not reducible to the confusing consequences of hysterical tabloid headlines – on the contrary, the media itself is to a significant extent the bearer of pre-existing attitudes and values that inform society's ideas about emotions such as fear" (*How Fear Works* 19). However, I would argue that what does seem to play a more important role is the constant availability of 24/7 news media coverage, brought to us through a variety of channels, from 'old-fashioned' print media and TV to social media and

The almost ubiquitous presence of media coverage of threatening events and our increased media consumption may then be seen as instrumental in piling up the conglomerate of fearful objects encountered in anxiety.[31] If anxiety is caused by an accumulation of more and more objects, then the consumption of news – which is itself a conglomerate of often fearful events – suggests ever new aspects to be anxious about. Susan Sontag describes this phenomenon in more detail: "[p]arked in front of the little screens – television, computer, palmtop – we can surf to images and brief reports of disasters throughout the world. It seems as if there is a greater quantity of such news than before. This is probably an illusion. It's just that the spread of news is 'everywhere'" (116). While for Sontag this is particularly connected to the documentation of wars, this phenomenon can be found in all aspects that might cause fear and anxiety. The omnipresence of news is then connected to the increasing perception of negative images and information in general:

> Our sense of reality is altered as we become more oriented to the visual, which in the case of crime and crisis reporting becomes all too familiar, anticipated, and quickly merged with hundreds of other images intertwined from movies, news reports, documentaries, as well as numerous urban legends stressing mayhem, conflict and danger – and fear about the potential risks that engulf our personal and social horizons. (Altheide, *Terrorism* 30)

Thus, the media have their share in creating a world that is *perceived* as increasingly dangerous and anxiety-inducing. The anticipation of danger described by David L. Altheide and the accumulation of such dangers reflects then the phenomenology of anxiety, as will be shown in more detail in this study.

The consequences of this connection between media consumption and anxiety are manifold. While for Sontag responses to the flood of information and gory images range from "compassion, or indignation, [to] titillation, or approval" (18), I would add two other possible reactions to the list: fear and anxiety. The continuous consumption of these images and reports are connected to what can be termed "political anxiety" (Paterson) or the politics of fear (Altheide, *Terrorism* 3) – both of which are connected to the overwhelming effect the news can have on individuals. These two types of political anxiety may not only lead to people avoid-

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push notices on our mobile phones, which makes it difficult not to be aware of certain anxiety-inducing events, like, for example climate change or the war in Ukraine. It is thus not necessarily the way in which such information is reported (although that may, of course, also play a role in fuelling anxiety) but rather the conglomerate of anxiety-inducing topics that merge together and with which the public is incessantly bombarded.

31 This might also be connected to widespread social media usage. As a 2019 study revealed, the social media age leads to a general increase in feelings of anxiety in the young (Booth).

ing watching the news or being no longer politically active (Toff and Kleis Nielsen), but it can also be utilised for political agendas. "In the realm of political action, for example, socio-political anxiety can paralyse the subject by exposing it to great, unknown, unpredictable dangers, which in turn make the subject more prone to guidance and control" (Zevnik 237). Especially in connection with global catastrophes, like wars, "[t]he mass media are the most important source of information and social control because they have helped make fear a part of our life, our language, and our point of view" (Altheide, *Terrorism* 2). Anxiety can then be instrumentalised for political agitation across the political spectrum.[32] Naomi Klein describes this as "information wars," a situation "[w]hen people feel they can't trust anything they read or view" and in which "authoritarians of all stripes rejoice. Why? Because without trusted information, they get to create their own facts, and use them to change reality" ("Tuesday"). Brexit is a case in point. In the UK, parts of the media, especially the right-leaning tabloid press, have long been vociferous in their opposition to the EU and in the run-up to the referendum published stories designed to fuel anxieties like rising unemployment or the collapse of the welfare state and link them to the EU (Startin 316) – which may have been a significant factor in the Brexit vote. Brexit, on the other hand, has so far not led to the sunny uplands promised by its propagators, but rather to another economic downturn with attendant new fears and anxiety. The result is a negative feedback loop of self-reinforcing anxieties fuelled by media coverage.

Overall, then, as this short overview has shown, anxiety has been and continues to be of interest to philosophy, psychology, sociology and politics. In philosophy, a new focus on anxiety that differentiates anxiety and fear emerges in the nineteenth century and is central to the work of Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre, among others. Together with Edmund Husserl (see chapter 2), they lay the foundations for my interpretation of Sara Ahmed's understanding of anxiety as a conglomerate of fearful objects that my analysis of the theatre of anxiety is centrally based on. In psychology we can see a shift away from anxiety as a general term to

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32 For Altheide, the election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States was the "result of intended and unintended consequences of a decade of propaganda and information manipulation about threats, fear, and strategies for political victory" (*Terrorism* 2). While this approach might not have been new, what was different during his presidential campaign was the use of social media channels "that were instantaneous, visual, and personal" (*Terrorism* 2). The advantage of social media, when it comes to very private emotions like anxiety, is that through algorithms the news and advertising that are shown are personalised and can directly target each individual anxiety (see also chapter 6.1). However, it is important to note that not all uses of social media are negative. Social activism, like the Black Lives Matter movement has profited immensely from social media (Maqbool).

anxiety as an individual concept while in sociology it is the precariousness of modern times that can create anxiety. The precariousness of the current (political) situation in the UK – caused by austerity, Brexit and a number of global crises like the climate catastrophe or the Covid-19 pandemic – is then also the reason why this study focuses on the British society: it has proven to be fertile ground for the theatre of anxiety.

1.2 The Theatre of Anxiety

Contemporary theatre is a genre that has shown itself to be particularly able to portray the complex connection between anxiety in the private and the public life.[33] It can be viewed as an art form that illustrates the way emotions, including anxiety, shape and are shaped by the private and especially the public sphere. After all, theatre has the ability to influence the public sphere and "contributes to formulating what we understand as reality" (Martin 120). Similarly, Jill Dolan suggests that theatre and politics belong together and that social actions can be influenced by emotions evoked by theatrical performances (10). One possible reason for this is the way drama can directly engage with contemporary political issues: "The presence of an audience already lends drama a potential for political statement that is difficult to achieve in the novel, and the element of live performance also makes the drama inherently more difficult to censor than the novel and other printed genres. Much modern drama has, in fact, been highly political" (Booker 301). This is also the case for the plays that are grouped into what I call the theatre of anxiety. While for Patrick Duggan, it is live performance and an aesthetics of what he calls "dis-ease" that can "offer a means with which to attend to both discourses and politics of fear and anxiety and the effacement of reality with complexity" (40), my approach will rather turn to the dramatic text to investigate the different configurations of anxiety and their impact on private and public spheres.[34]

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33 Anxiety can of course also be depicted in other artforms or genres. Visual art, for instance, is another genre that has frequently tried to capture the essence of anxiety. The paintings by Edvard Munch – for instance his 1894 painting titled *Anxiety* – may serve as examples, just like contemporary art exhibitions, such as the 2022 exhibition by Wolfgang Tillmans titled *To Look Without Fear* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (see also Furedi, *Culture of Fear* viii).

34 Duggan's article "Unsettling the Audience: Affective 'dis-ease' and the Politics of Fear and Anxiety in Contemporary Performance" (2017) uses the term "dis-ease" to describe an enduring state of living in the world under the pressure of constant threat and emergency. Duggan argues that contemporary performance (his examples are Greg Wohead's *The Ted Bundy Project* and Action Hero's

Placing a scholarly focus on the impact of a feeling like anxiety on contemporary theatre and drama of course is ultimately part of the "affective turn" in the humanities and social sciences from the 2000s onwards (Clough and Halley; see also Leys).[35] This turn is evidenced by the multitude of publications in the last fifteen years that place their focus squarely on affect and emotions.[36] Consequently, there has also been a growing number of recent publications on affects, feelings and emotions in contemporary theatre and drama studies in the last couple of years that clearly indicates that the field is following this broader trend in the humanities and social sciences, including two very recent monographs by Peta Tait (*Theory for Theatre Studies: Emotion* (2021); *Forms of Emotion: Human to Non-human in Drama, Theatre and Contemporary Performance* (2022)) and an edited collection on *Affects in 21st-Century British Theatre: Exploring Feeling on Page and Stage* by Mireia Aragay, Cristina Delgado-García and Martin Middeke.[37] Despite this increased interest in affects and emotions, there seem to be, to date, no monographs systematically outlining the shift to anxiety in twenty-first-century British drama that is the scope of this study.

Nevertheless, there are two recent publications specifically on contemporary theatre and anxiety as well as several others on topics related to anxiety that in many ways prepare the ground for what I hope to show in this book. In their recent anthology on *Twenty-First Century Anxieties: Dys/Utopian Spaces and Contexts in Contemporary British Theatre*, Merle Tönnies and Eckart Voigts put a focus on the intersection of the utopian with the dystopian and of anxiety with anger and

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installation *Extraordinary Rendition*) offers ways to understand the politics of fear and anxiety as well as current concepts of feeling.

35 Although my approach here is not based in affect theory in the narrow sense (see below), it can be situated within the broader paradigm of the "turn to the emotions" identified, for instance, by Leys (434). Despite the often unclear distinction between affect, emotion, feeling, sensation and similar terms, the shift in focus towards feeling and bodily sensations remains a force of influence on this study as well as on the humanities in general.

36 Some of the most important publications in the wider field are Patricia Clough and Jean Halley's *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007), Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth's *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), as well as Donald Wehrs and Thomas Blake's *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* (2017). Important recent research in literary studies includes edited collections by Stephen Ahern and Alex Houen.

37 These are just the most recent publications in the field. Their list of precursors includes Erin Hurley's *Theatre & Feeling* (2010) and her edited collection *Theatres of Affect: New Essays on Canadian Theatre* (2014), Martin Welton's *Feeling Theatre* (2012), a special section on "Affect/Performance/Politics," edited by Hurley and Sara Warner, in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (2012), as well as a number of works that specifically focus on affects in performance (for example, Thompson; Shaughnessy; Diamond, Varney and Amich; for a more comprehensive overview of recent publications in the field, see also Aragay, Delgado-García and Middeke 2–3).

hope.[38] Despite a strong interest in anxiety, it is "the intersections between genres, forms or modes of dystopian and utopian [that] can be taken to run through [the] volume as a central motif" (Tönnies and Voigts 3). Vicky Angelaki's article, for instance, focuses on the intersection of climate and social crises in her analysis of "disruptive spatial representations" ("Environment, Virus, Dystopia" 44) in contemporary theatre. She focuses on the theatrical audience and shows how the apocalyptic scenarios she analyses can somewhat paradoxically be rendered hopeful. Similarly, Trish Reid sees utopian potential in the juxtaposition of neoliberal anxieties and the frustration with the realist mode of representation in her contribution ("Dramaturgies"). While in this collection the utopian aspects fade into the background at the end of the contributions and the focus rather lies on the dystopian aspects, for instance in Peter Paul Schnierer's juxtaposition of hell and the dystopian genre in contemporary drama (201–08), the anthology generally emphasises the connection of anxiety and dys/utopian spaces and is thus different in its approach to the present study which focuses on the way the phenomenology of anxiety must impact on its dramatic representation.

Furthermore, a 2019 special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, edited by Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, James McKenzie and Daniel Schäbler, focuses on *Fear and anxiety in contemporary drama and performance.* In this context, for instance, Dorothee Birke writes about homelessness and associated affective and social implications as well as emotional states of crisis and anxiety. The contribution by Marlena Tronicke examines how theatre locations can work in tandem with text and performance to evoke fear and anxiety, using Tanika Gupta's *Lions and Tigers* as an example. Tronicke shows that Gupta's play explores terrorism and vulnerability through means of closeness – especially of the audience to the stage and each other. Trish Reid's article in the special issue is important because it provides a framework for the analysis of near-future dystopian plays, which she sees as a "revealing index to the anxieties of our time" ("Near-Future" 73). In this regard she argues that especially the disruption of home and identity, together with threats from the outside world, are at the heart of these plays. A key part of her article is her taxonomy of dystopia in contemporary British drama, which I intend to follow and refine. Reid identifies a "dystopian turn in contemporary drama," which she sees as "symptomatic of a particular structure of feeling" in Raymond Williams's sense because it "evidences a profound and dispersed anxiety about the neoliberal present" (77). I will include several plays addressed by Reid in my study, like Harris's *How to Hold Your Breath* or McDowall's *X.* Reid's

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38 Likewise, Veronica Hollinger connects eco-anxiety with utopian thought, in her case with a focus on twenty-first-century Anglo-American science fiction stories.

grouping of contemporary dystopian plays according to Williams's distinction of dystopian narratives also forms the basis of the way in which I have categorised the plays here (see below).

Besides those two collected editions, there are various anthologies and monographs that focus on topics more or less directly related to (representations of) anxiety in contemporary drama of which I will give a brief and in no way complete overview in the following. One such related topic, which has received some scholarly attention in recent years, is economic, political or personal precarity, as precarious states of existence are frequently tied up with the experience of anxiety.[39] Thus, Martin Middeke and Mireia Aragay's collection of essays *Of Precariousness: Vulnerabilities, Responsibilities, Communities in 21st-Century British Drama and Theatre*, which focuses on present-day vulnerabilities and political, social and economic configurations of precariousness, anticipates some of the issues of this study. In a similar vein, Marissia Fragkou's monograph *Ecologies of Precarity in Twenty-First Century Theatre* (2019) approaches precariousness through the ecological crisis. In general, experiencing any kind of crisis is bound to induce anxiety, which is why the large number of recent publications on the link between contemporary drama and crisis is highly relevant to my study of anxiety and corroborates the notion that anxiety is gaining an increasingly prominent presence on the contemporary stage. One example of this recent focus on crisis is the essay collection *Crisis, Representation and Resilience* (2022), edited by Clare Wallace, Clara Escoda, Enric Monforte and José Ramón Prado-Pérez, which, at its very beginning, names a conglomerate of different crises that might be causes for anxiety to then set out to analyse them through the lens of contemporary theatre (1). Other recent edited collections on contemporary British theatre and crisis are Maria Delgado and Caridad Svich's *Theatre in Crisis? Performance Manifestos for a New Century* (2002) and Patrick Duggan and Lisa Peschel's *Performing (for) Survival: Theatre, Crisis, Extremity* (2016). Monographs on the connection between theatre and crisis include Dom O'Hanlon's *Theatre in Times of Crisis: 20 Scenes for the Stage in Troubled Times* (2020) and Vicky Angelaki's *Social and Political Theatre in 21ˢᵗ-Century Britain: Staging Crisis* (2017). Finally, there is the 2020 *JCDE* Special Issue on *Theatre of Crisis*, edited by Nassim Winnie Balestrini, Leopold Lippert and Maria Löschnigg, which likewise focuses on the many contemporary crises, with an emphasis on the climate crisis. Questions of ecology and its manifold crises – a central source of anxiety in the twenty-first century – are then the sole focus of another special

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39 For a comprehensive overview of some of the topics mentioned in connection with British new writing, like Thatcher's legacy, see also Aleks Sierz's *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today* and the introduction to *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights*, edited by Martin Middeke, Peter Paul Schnierer and Aleks Sierz.

issue, edited by Martin Middeke and Martin Riedelsheimer with the title *Co-Muta-bility, Nodes, and the Mesh: Critical Theatre Ecologies* (2022; see chapter 5.1). Other topics that are related to anxiety in contemporary theatre and to the various political, economic or social areas in which anxiety can manifest itself can be found in monographs on British drama and globalisation (Rebellato, *Globalization*; Attinger), on contemporary war drama (Boll, *War Plays*; Finburgh Delijani), on theatre and terror (de Waal; Bharucha) or performance and surveillance (Hall, Monahan and Reeves; Morrison, *Discipline*), on contemporary theatre and death (Pankratz) and on other, more distantly related sensations, like *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia* (Wald) or *Sublime Drama* (Baraniecka).

Anxiety and fear are addressed in a variety of articles that deal with topics ranging from the war on terror (Hughes, "Theatre") or theatre and mental health (Venn) to the analysis of how to generate the feeling of fear in a live theatre production (Grima). However, there is as yet no publication that solely focuses on contemporary theatre and anxiety to the extent this project does. For this reason, the clarification of different notions of anxiety, including the way in which contemporary drama reflects on them, and establishing an overview of the different facets of the theatre of anxiety will be at the centre of this book.

Given that what I call the theatre of anxiety is a twenty-first-century phenomenon, the question must be asked how it is related to other earlier strands in theatre. Amongst the various terms that describe different styles of new writing – from the 1950s until now – the three that are perhaps closest to the theatre of anxiety are the Theatre of the Absurd, postdramatic theatre and in-yer-face theatre.[40]

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[40] Another form of theatre that can be connected to anxiety is the French *théâtre de la cruauté* or *Theatre of Cruelty* associated with Antonin Artaud. In his analysis of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, Daniel Johnston suggests that Artaud is expressing existential anxiety in his theatre, referring to Heidegger and his understanding of anxiety, Being-towards-death and authenticity. For Artaud, the term 'cruelty' does not necessarily refer to a negative sensation but the redirection of power, similar to Heidegger's notion of anxiety and its connection to authenticity: "just as he sought to smash artistic sensibilities and conventions, so too did he think such an encounter could smash stale social customs and superficial etiquette" (Johnston 113). According to Artaud, theatre establishes a connection with the audience on a deeper level than can be expressed with language and words alone. Furthermore, in Artaud's work as well as in Heidegger's, the distinction between self and world is evaluated. Both understand the distractions of the surrounding world (including language and discourse) as obstacles to becoming an authentic existence, which, for Artaud, "can be achieved through the material truth of performance" (Johnston 116) and for Heidegger, by choosing to be an authentic Being as experienced in anxiety. Furthermore, for both Heidegger and Artaud the essence of Being can be revealed through feelings of anxiety and the uncanny. "The Theatre of Cruelty can be seen as an authentic 'Being -towards-death' in response to uncanniness" (123) and by doing so reveal Dasein itself. As Johnston summarises: "In a sense, Artaud's theatre is incomprehensible in so far it cannot be encapsulated by ordinary

The connection between the Theatre of the Absurd and anxiety has been established by Martin Esslin, who coined the term 'Theatre of the Absurd' himself, as for him it "can merely present, in anxiety or with derision, an individual human being's intuition of the ultimate realities as he experiences them; the fruits of one man's descent into the depths of his personality, his dreams, fantasies, and nightmares" (353).[41] What is important for the Theatre of the Absurd is to portray the human condition – or rather the "metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition" (5) – and its senselessness "by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought" (6) in both content and form. It thus expresses the "radical devaluation of language" (7), although at the same time language plays an important role in bringing about this state of absurdity and contradiction. In a way, representations of anxiety in the Theatre of the Absurd reflect the situation of anxiety in one particular given moment that is, as it were, frozen in time – a split second of paralysis and inability to understand the individual situation or the "ultimate reality" of an individual's condition (351). This is then underpinned by humour, parody and satire. While the Theatre of the Absurd is also to some extent invested in staging anxiety, its aesthetic means are quite different from those of the theatre of anxiety (see chapter 3) and it does not address the causes of anxiety and seeks to link them to different global crises. The key difference is perhaps that while the Theatre of the Absurd takes place in the exact moment of anxiety (in other words, when it is too late already), the theatre of anxiety occurs one step ear-

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expression: his project can be thought of as a search for a new language of Being from the point of view of a deep ontological Anxiety" (110). However, this kind of theatre was primarily based in France and, apart from perhaps director Peter Brook's 1964 RSC performance of *Marat/Sade*, not a leading trend in the UK. Further, the focus of this form of theatre is on an ontological and existential anxiety, while the focus of the theatre of anxiety is rather on anxieties on an ontic level.

41 Carl Lavery and Clare Finburgh focus on another connection between the Theatre of the Absurd and anxiety, namely environmental anxiety, when they juxtapose Esslin's theory with ecological concepts. The relevance of the Theatre of the Absurd in twenty-first-century society "is found in the Theatre of the Absurd's ability to express an emergent sense of ecological and environmental anxiety that today has become so palpable and potentially catastrophic" (1). Their central claim is that "the Theatre of the Absurd articulates an important ecological shift in human perception" (1). It is no surprise that this shift coincided with the period of absurdist theatre – in the 1940s and 1950s – as this was the time when new fears of nuclear attacks, atomic bombs and pesticides emerged and "the development of consumer capitalism led to an increasingly privatization of social life, while intensifying the exploitation of the Earth's natural resources for the purposes of 'growth.'" (2). It is also no surprise it took fifty years to make this connection, as the consequences of these environmental actions only materialise throughout time: "the significance of absurdist theatre is yet to be grasped" (1).

lier, when the individual is about to enter this state of anxiety, overwhelmed by the conglomerate of objects that might cause pain in the future (see also chapter 2.3).

Since the theatre of anxiety often draws on an aesthetics that shows conglomerates of shattered and incoherent objects that might cause pain in the future, it shares some qualities with postdramatic theatre. Hans-Thies Lehmann has aptly described postdramatic theatre as "a photography taken some time after the explosion of a huge celestial object" (44). The photograph shows the different parts of the theatre – from theatrical time and space to the acting body – as autonomous, isolated and coexisting. "They form new connections and relations, thus making the New in fact readable as a re-arrangement of the Old" (44). Postdramatic theatre is, like the theatre of anxiety, not a movement but an umbrella term to denote various characteristic features like the (near) absence of dramatic action, the replacement of a single continuous plot with multiple, disconnected episodes, the decline of the concept of character, the use of modern media in performance or the general emphasis on the material situation of performance and stage. In short, the paralinguistic dimension, voices and intonation, rhythm, speed and slowness of speech, sexual and gendered auditive information, gesture and the expressivity of body language in general is often more important for postdramatic theatre than the dramatic text itself, prompting Lehmann to state that "[e]ven if words undoubtedly remain a very strong theatrical element, the reality of the written page is for the study room, not for the theatre. The latter deals with space, light, bodies, sound and music as much as and more so than with text" (37). This then distinguishes postdramatic theatre from my more text-centred conception of the theatre of anxiety, whose conglomerate of anxiety-inducing objects moreover is not so much the end of grand narratives but rather a symptom of the complex relation between various political, ecological and technological topics and anxiety.

Lastly, a comparison of in-yer-face theatre and the theatre of anxiety seems important, not least because in-yer-face theatre, just like the theatre of anxiety, "forces us to look at ideas and feelings we would normally avoid because they are too painful, too frightening, too unpleasant or too acute. We avoid them for good reason – what they have to tell us is bad news: they remind us of the awful things human beings are capable of, and of the limits of our self-control" (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face* 6). However, the way this is achieved in the theatre of anxiety differs in many respects from in-yer-face theatre. What is characteristic of the latter is its confrontational style, its sense of shock: "the language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each another, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent" (4). It disrupts the sense of safety the audience might feel in an auditorium or, as Aleks Sierz has famously written, it "takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message" (4); in the theatre of anxiety, vio-

lence is usually presented in a less direct manner. While the in-yer-face theatre also reacts to British politics (Sierz, "Stories" 25 – 26), it does so indirectly. What both in-yer-face theatre and the theatre of anxiety have in common is that neither is a school of writing or a movement. Sierz's metaphor for the in-yer-face theatre as "an arena which can be inhabited or merely crossed" (*After In-Yer-Face* 370; see also *In-Yer-Face* 248 – 49) seems fitting for the theatre of anxiety as well, because its aesthetics can be used and implemented by very different styles of theatre and in very different forms, ranging from eco-drama (chapter 5.2 and. 5.3) and metatheatre (chapter 4.2.3 and 4.3.3) to sublime drama (chapter 6.2.3) and even hints at the Theatre of the Absurd (chapter 5.3.2). Maybe, then, the theatre of anxiety is the continuation of the "thoughtful new normal" (*After In-Yer-Face* 369) Sierz finds in the post-9/11 new writing, as at its heart is the connection of thinking/mind (the accumulation of objects must take place in the mind) and feeling (body) that is characteristic for anxiety.

Since 2010, a remarkable number of plays have focussed on topics connected to anxiety. Broaching anxiety in various nuances and frequently set in the near future, these plays turn to topics like pollution, politics of fear, the negative impacts of new technologies, social discord or the effects of rampant consumerism, amongst others. There are then plenty of plays that this book could cover. Adaptions of novels, like Neil Bartlett's *The Plague* (2017) and partially autobiographical plays, like Arinzé Kene's *Misty* (2018), will not be included to ensure comparability. Similarly, plays by American playwrights, like Jennifer Haley's *The Nether* (2014), or German authors, like René Pollesch's *Geht es dir gut?* (2022), as well as plays written before 2010, like Simon Stephens's *Pornography* (2008), will not be included either. There still are many other plays that fit the four broad topics covered in this study – although these categories are no closed groups as such – that are not included, although they address issues similar to those of the plays I intend to discuss. Plays that represent fear and anxiety fuelled by political and social problems are for instance Joe Penhall's *The Constituent* (2024), Mike Bartlett's *Bull* (2013) and *Game* (2015), Philip Ridley's *Radiant Vermin* (2015) and Steven Hevey's *We Know Where You Live* (2015), which focus on gentrification, Cordelia Lynn's *One for Sorrow* (2018) and Stuart Slade's *BU21* (2016), which both look at terrorism, Alexander Zeldin's *Beyond Caring* (2015) and Emma Adams's *Animals* (2015), which both thematise the welfare state, or Rory Mullarkey's *The Wolf From the Door* (2014) and *Pity* (2018), the latter of which has been described by Aleks Sierz as exploring "the ramifications of our contemporary age of anxiety and austerity" ("*Pity*"). Eco-drama, per se, is a part of contemporary theatre that is thriving and that is often connected to anxiety. Some notable plays in this category amongst many others are Dawn King's *The Trials* (2022), Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* (2010), Tanya Ronder's *Fuck the Polar Bears* (2015), Duncan Mac-

millan's *Lungs* (2011), *The Contingency Plan* by Steve Waters (2009), *A Play for the Living in a Time of Extinction* by Miranda Rose Hall (2023) and Chris Rapley and Duncan Macmillan's *2071* (2014) as well as Stephen Emmott and Katie Mitchell's production of *Ten Billion* (2013). There is also a variety of plays that address surveillance and the age of technology in combination with anxiety, like E. V. Crowe's *The Sewing Group* or Lindsey Ferrentino's *Ugly Lies the Bone* (2015), Lauren Gunderson's *Anthropology* (2023), Tim Price's *Teh Internet Is Serious Business* [sic] (2014) or Richard Bean's *Great Britain* (2014). Finally, an as yet relatively small group is comprised of plays that look into pandemics, plagues and viruses, like Tajinder Singh Hayer's *North Country* (2016) – a topic that might become more prominent in the theatre in the foreseeable future. The eight plays that will be analysed in more detail in the following have been chosen from this wide range of plays because they are particularly suitable to illustrate the wider theoretical notions of my study. In my analysis of these eight plays, I will demonstrate how thematic, contextual and aesthetic nuances in contemporary drama work together to form the theatre of anxiety.

As far as the dramatic genre of the plays this study focuses on is concerned, the preponderance of near-future dystopias is striking. This can be seen as a response to fear and anxiety being constituted as "anticipated pain in the future" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 65). In its typical construction of alternative realities that end with the destruction of the world, the genre of near-future dystopia thus brings together both the temporal and physical aspect of anxiety. In the theatre of anxiety, representations of the future are often accompanied by an altered world and/or destruction, either of moral standards, civilisation, ecosystems or the world in general – regardless of what started the underlying conflict. In general, the plays then consider the destruction of such foundations of life: war, illness, pollution and lack of democracy are portrayed as well as complications with technical progress and artificial intelligence, inequalities in the distribution of wealth, the dissolution of social bonds and struggles for societal progress. The characters in the plays are exposed to several threats and terrors throughout the plays, making Ahmed's definition of anxiety as a conglomerate of several objects of fear very fitting. However, what differs throughout the plays is the way the citizens react to the events around them – ranging from resignation, to scapegoating, insanity and even murder. To give further structure to the heterogeneous plays that can be described as theatre of anxiety, I draw on Raymond Williams's distinction of dystopian fiction and follow Trish Reid ("Near-Future") in dividing such plays into four categories, based on the source of anxiety:

(a) the hell, in which a more wretched kind of life is described as existing elsewhere;
(b) the externally altered world, in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought about by an unlooked-for or uncontrollable natural event;
(c) the willed transformation, in which a new but less happy kind of life has been brought about by social degeneration, by the emergence or reemergence of harmful kinds of social order, or by the unforeseen yet disastrous consequences of an effort at social improvement;
(d) the technological transformation, in which the conditions of life have been worsened by technical development. (Williams 204)

Using Williams's classification as reference point in the structuring of this study, I have adapted his framework to reflect the core themes to be found in the theatre of anxiety. While the overall structure of this thesis follows Williams's distinction of dystopian fiction, I combine Williams's categories with Bauman's description of anxiety-inducing threats which are fronts on which we fight "against the superior forces of nature, against the inborn weakness of our bodies, and against the dangers emanating from the aggression of other people" (*Liquid Fear* 129). The chapters that present detailed analyses of anxiety in contemporary theatre follow this pattern, where chapter four looks at dangers from other people, chapter five from nature and chapter seven from one's own body and mind. Chapter six, which focuses on surveillance and the technology that makes it possible, completes the list. These different categories do not function as closed groups but rather have semi-permeable borders that connect them to each other. At the same time, this list is not closed, as topics like environmental displacement, nearly all forms of discrimination, the crumbling welfare state, consumerism, the crumbling education system, terrorist attacks and the war on terror, war in general, religion and conspiracy theories, the increasing ineffectuality of antibiotics and so on could have been easily included.

My main methodology, besides a text-based hermeneutics, is phenomenology. The reason for this is the way in which we experience anxiety itself, and especially its complex temporality. During anxiety, the subject anticipates future threats and pain. While anxiety produces physical symptoms (like heart palpitations) that take place in the present, its mental component is always related to the future. This orientation towards the future requires cognitive processes – a subject can only be anxious about something that is *known* to be fearful. The sensation in the present is a physical and mental reaction to what the subject thinks is about to/might happen. This is the reason why this study turns to phenomenology, which combines different kinds of sensations (visual, tactic, kinaesthetic, etc.) with cognition. Husserl's phenomenology focuses on the engagement of a body with an outside world through sensations and feelings and at the same time turns to meaning, intentionality and consciousness. Anxiety is, as I argue throughout this book, a mood in the Husserlian sense and as such influences the perception of the outside world.

This distinguishes anxiety from affects in the strict sense used by affect theorists like Brian Massumi, who describes affects as impersonal intensities that are non-cognitive and must be strictly distinguished from emotions (28).[42] For "the new affect theorists" like Massumi, "action and behavior are held to be determined by affective dispositions that are independent of consciousness and the mind's control" (Leys 443). This view of affects is clearly at odds with the phenomenology of anxiety that makes the strict separation of mind and body or emotion and affect impossible.[43] After all, anxiety is precisely caused by "consciousness and the mind's control," or perhaps rather lack of control, whereas affect takes place "below the threshold of consciousness and cognition" (443). Therefore, according to this distinction, anxiety cannot be affective in Massumi's sense. This approach is in accordance with Ahmed who is likewise "quite critical [...] of some of the ways in which affect and emotion have been defined as very distinct and clear" ("Affect/Emotion" 97) and often avoids the term affect altogether, defining it "as part of what emotions do" (97).

When it comes to the description of anxiety, I will use the terms emotion, affect, feeling and other related notions interchangeably, while the term that describes the nature of anxiety most accurately is mood.[44] In not differentiating between these different terms, I, again, follow Ahmed who likewise sees the distinction between terms like affect and emotion as an act of differentiation that does not "correspond[] to a natural distinction that exists in the world" ("Affect/Emotion" 98).[45] For Ahmed, the distinction between affect and emotion "can only be analytic," (*Cultural Politics* 6) as "bodily sensation, emotion and thought" cannot be "'experienced' as distinct realms of human 'experience'" (6). This analytic act

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42 As Aragay, Delgado-García and Middeke note, Massumi has adapted his positions in his later work towards a more relational understanding of affect (5; see also Stanley 102).

43 Such dualism is further cast into doubt by "twenty-first-century empirical studies [that] reveal how subtle, mutually modifying interconnecting neural communication among diverse brain areas affects conjoined physical and mental activity" (Wehrs 2).

44 Peta Tait, for instance, differentiates between emotions, emotional feelings, moods and affects and combines them all "under the general label of 'emotion' by combining sensation and sensate visceral responses with affect and recognizing emotional feeling to accommodate personal psychology" (*Forms of Emotion* 10). However, even for her "[m]ultiple concepts – emotions, emotional feeling, sensation (sensate feeling), affect, mood and passion – are in wide use but with varied application and inconsistent definition" (10). She further admits that "[t]heir usage can be confusing" (10).

45 Ahmed explains this with the example of an egg: "[y]ou can break an egg to separate the yolk from the white, but you have to separate what is not separate. Separation is an activity, not a noun" ("Affect/Emotion" 98). Therefore, separating affect from emotion is an activity in itself.

of separation between affect and emotion is not useful when outlining a general concept of anxiety and thus is not the prime focus of this study.

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The most important proposition of this book is that there is a trend in contemporary theatre to react to pervasive social and cultural anxiety in the twenty-first century. In this theatre of anxiety, the aesthetics of (stagings of) anxiety reflects the phenomenological understanding of anxiety as a conglomerate of fearful objects, while the topics that give anxiety its stage chime in with various sociological and philosophical theories that likewise investigate overwhelming concepts: whether it is the states of liquid modernity and liquid fear diagnosed by Bauman, the vast spatio-temporal dimensions of the ecological catastrophe, which can be seen for instance in Timothy Morton's hyperobjects, the ubiquity of surveillance strategies or the contagious nature of diseases that transfers itself to anxiety, all these dispositions lead to a sense of anxiety as excessive. Its manifestation in contemporary theatre as a conglomerate of objects that might cause pain in the future is at the core of what I call the theatre of anxiety.

In order to explain both the thematic and aesthetic configurations of anxiety in such plays, a closer look at how we experience anxiety is necessary. For this reason, chapter two provides an overview of the phenomenology of anxiety and demonstrates the different ways and difficulties in representing this aversive emotion on page and stage. Ahmed's notion that anxiety must be thought of as a conglomerate of (fearful) objects is important for this work as it distinguishes anxiety from fear and makes clear why many of the qualities of fear also apply to anxiety. In order to understand the difference between fear and anxiety it is also essential to look at the position/condition of the object. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* Ahmed argues that fear does not have an object per se but is rather linked to an object that passes by. As the object in fear is only passing by, it can never reach the subject and therefore, such an encounter can never render the original fear harmless. As Ahmed explains, "[f]ear responds to what is approaching rather than already here. It is the futurity of fear which makes it possible that the object of fear, rather than arriving, might pass us by" (*Cultural Politics* 65). Thus, although fear is directed towards one possible fearful object, the subject can never get hold of this object and thus overcome its fear. Anxiety, on the other hand, consists of several (possibly fearful) objects that are so manifold that the subject is not able to concentrate on any single one of these fearful objects. For Ahmed, what induces anxiety is then the accumulation or conglomeration of these objects rather than the objects per se. She writes: "the detachment from a given object allows anxiety to accumulate through gathering more and more objects, until it overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (66). Hence, the anxiety a subject feels is

not directed towards any concrete single object but rather consists of a conglomerate of objects that could potentially cause pain.

At this point, it should be stressed that my understanding of the phenomenology of anxiety via Ahmed differs from Martin Heidegger's. In anxiety, I argue, the subject encounters nothingness not, as Heidegger suggests, because there is no object, but rather because there are too many objects and thus the subject is overwhelmed by this state. The reason why the subject feels this lack of an object, or nothingness, does not lie in the absence of objects (as Heidegger says) but in the accumulating of too many objects. This understanding of anxiety as a conglomerate of objects is based on an ontic experience and therefore may prove more fitting for the analysis of anxiety in a medium like drama and theatre than Heidegger's ontological understanding of anxiety. However, as Ahmed's focus is on the instrumentalization of fear for political reasons, the analysis of the phenomenology of fear and anxiety only takes up a small part in her book. For a more detailed analysis of the ontic experiences of anxiety it is thus important to widen the scope and consult other phenomenological approaches to moods and emotions, in particular Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Although Heidegger is greatly influenced by Husserl, I hope to provide a phenomenological understanding of anxiety based on Husserl that is different from Heidegger's, even though both notions of anxiety have a similar outcome: they lead to a state in which the object of anxiety is unclear. In my reading of Husserl, anxiety is a mood that colours all objects in the fore- and background in a fearful mood, even if the object that originally caused it is no longer present. Anxiety is therefore the accumulation of (too) many (fearful) objects, not a lack of such objects. As they accumulate, they become almost indistinguishable, or perhaps rather, it seems as if they are so enmeshed that there is no beginning or end to them. Thus, there is no clear border between these different fearful objects that impress upon the anxious individual, which represents the first border crossing that is associated with anxiety.

As the subject in anxiety cannot focus on any single object, the resulting multitude of objects can neither be processed nor expressed verbally, which means that (linguistic) representations of anxiety are particularly challenging. Husserl in this context argues that anxiety is pre-verbal, which means that it is a state that cannot be adequately expressed in words, rendering a representation of anxiety on stage and page difficult. Because of this inexpressibility of anxiety, attempts at representing anxiety on stage and page have instead involved sensations that have a similar phenomenological structure. Most importantly, the phenomenological structure of fear/anxiety is strikingly similar to that of pain and disgust/abjection. These two sensations are much more physical/visual and thus can help stage fear and anxiety without recourse to language. The connection between anxiety and

pain becomes clear from Ahmed's definition of fear "as an anticipated pain in the future" (*Cultural Politics* 65) – anxiety consequently would be a conglomeration of many such anticipated pains. Moreover, pain has a physical component (e.g. through wounds) that is lacking in anxiety and that more readily lends itself to stage representation (however problematic such representations might be). Furthermore, pain, similar to fear and anxiety, is connected to withdrawal and avoidance behaviours as a reaction to the crossing of physical or mental borders as the cause of pain. Likewise, disgust and abjection are defence mechanisms that just like anxiety cross various (physical and mental) borders and that trigger different kinds of avoidance behaviour. Similar to anxiety, in disgust, the subject is "affected by what one has rejected" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 86) and thus the subject not only shows withdrawal symptoms, but also creates a border object that is itself again disgusting. Because of their structural similarities and because the border object that is created in order to shield oneself from the abject is itself disgusting and visible (e.g. vomit), abjection and disgust can be used to visualise anxiety. Both pain and disgust/abjection transgress borders: the border of the body in pain and the disgusting border object itself. It is then through border crossings that pain and disgust come into being and thus through border crossings that anxiety can be represented.

Besides its constitution as a conglomerate of fearful objects and close relation to pain and disgust, anxiety also possesses a characteristic temporality that impacts on its conceptualisation as well as on its dramatisation. At the core of this temporality is the interplay between present and future: although the physical sensation of anxiety (like heart palpitations or a rush of adrenaline) is felt in the present, as Ahmed argues, anxiety is always directed at a pain that might materialise in the future. Its temporality is therefore necessarily oriented towards the future. This has been elaborated on by Bernhard Waldenfels: for Waldenfels, anxiety is a state in which the subject fears a painful event in the future that happens so unexpectedly and fast that it becomes the past without the subject being able to prevent it or prepare for it. In other words, the temporal orientation of anxiety combines the present with the future anterior – it will always have been too late to prepare for the advent of what we dread, which is why we feel anxious in the present. This leads to a liquid feeling of time and crosses the border between present and future. Thus, in anxiety, a state that resembles the phenomenology of pain and disgust/abjection, the subject gathers an immeasurable amount of objects that overwhelm it, objects that might prove to be painful in the future and that will have approached too fast for the subject to react to them.

The more concrete implications of this phenomenology of anxiety for the theatre are discussed in chapter three, which focuses on the aesthetics of the theatre of anxiety. While anxiety is inherently inexpressible, its phenomenological struc-

ture can still be emulated in dramatic texts.[46] Of course, the overabundance of fearful objects that is typical of the experience of anxiety can also be found in the theatre of anxiety, which frequently features an excess of objects, events and topics that coincide and relentlessly challenge the protagonists. At the same time, the inexpressibility of anxiety often involves the breakdown of speech, for instance when characters lack the means to communicate their pain and anxiety, and the temporality of anxiety is mirrored in the structure of the plays, most prominently in the prevalence of near-future dystopias. Besides this, anxiety can also be displaced by other emotions, like disgust/abjection and pain, that show similar phenomenological structures to fear/anxiety but that can be physically represented on stage through wounds and blood or disgust-eliciting objects like rotting corpses. What seems clear is that in all these cases the theatrical aesthetics of anxiety reflects the phenomenology of anxiety.

These theoretical considerations are then followed by exemplary readings of eight plays that are representative of the different thematic and aesthetic manifestations of anxiety in contemporary British drama that address a range of social and political challenges to twenty-first-century society. The analyses of the plays are grouped into four chapters – on plays that primarily look at anxiety from a political, ecological and technological perspective, as well as in the light of pandemics and viruses – followed by a coda on the connection of anxiety with hope. These categories are not monolithic and topics the plays address often overlap with topics from the other categories – if anxiety is thought of as a conglomerate of different objects, this naturally evades a clear distinction between the categories. Nevertheless, the distinction into the thematic groups covered by chapters 4–7 proves helpful in covering a whole array of themes and topics that are affected by anxiety. To avoid repeating the same aspects of anxiety, each of these chapters will then form a thematic unit and will focus on one specific aspect of anxiety that is exemplified in the plays discussed there: chapter four focuses on social and political anxiety that is accompanied by isolation and (often economic) uncertainty. Chapter five addresses ecological catastrophes and highlights the paralysis and inaction that follows anxiety. Chapter six covers surveillance technology and the interplay of desired security and lack of control that such technology thrives off and that itself is closely connected to anxiety. Chapter seven investigates anxiety as a contagious phenomenon and focuses on illness and pandemics as well as on practices of scapegoating that are closely connected to anxiety whenever it is reduced to mere

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46 While the same is the case for performance, my focus will be on the dramatic text and I will only occasionally consider performance practice.

fear by picking one object out of the conglomerate of objects and attributing negative qualities to it.

The case studies are thus divided into three longer and one shorter chapter. In chapter four, the phenomenological approach to anxiety will be complemented with Bauman's understanding of 'liquid fear' – which, as I argue, could also be termed 'liquid anxiety.' A reading of Bauman's theory against the notion of risk society proposed by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens then illustrates not only how the conglomerate of fearful objects shapes our understanding of political and social crises, but also the feeling of uncertainty this conglomerate evokes and how anxiety can further isolate individuals. My first case study, Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* (2016), combines anxiety in the private and the public sphere by focusing on four elderly women that are affected by various kinds of anxieties. Ostensibly meeting to talk about their insecurities and the political uncertainties, the women are nonetheless isolated in their worries. The different stories that are told in the play show how the women try to cope with their uncertainty and isolation by storytelling. Yet, these stories cannot counteract the fear, anxiety and insecurity the characters experience and only shift these emotions towards other, more outward emotions, like rage. While Churchill's play broaches anxiety through the language of its protagonists, Zinnie Harris's *How to Hold Your Breath* (2015) represents it through its storyworld. Depicting a world that is affected by the consequences of what Bauman describes as negative globalisation, the play portrays a conglomerate of fearful situations that pile up and leave the protagonists isolated. Hurting, disgusted and devoid of any real help, the characters experience a tour-de-force through the relentless politics of Western capitalist societies.

The focus of chapter five lies on ecological catastrophe as a catalyst for anxiety. Its argument revolves around a phenomenological similarity in the way ecological catastrophe and anxiety are experienced: both take place on such vast scales that they evade a clear cognitive understanding. This chapter also describes how anxiety can paralyze the subject and inhibit meaningful action, replacing it, for instance, with quick fixes which only repair collateral damage but do not seek any long-lasting change. Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* (2016) is the first eco-drama that is analysed in this context. Kirkwood's play makes use of the metonymic connection of hyperobjects and anxiety in order to stage humans' reaction to natural catastrophes. By placing radioactivity centre stage, the play not only puts the dramatic focus on a hyperobject but through this hyperobject, it can also make anxiety more tangible. This enmeshment of hyperobject and anxiety is then not only the reason for the characters' subliminal anxiety, but also leads to their paralysis and inaction in the face of ever new (climate) catastrophes. The second case study in this chapter, Thomas Eccleshare's *Pastoral* (2013), showcases the arbitrariness of the nature/culture divide. The play focuses on various kinds of border

crossings – for instance by making nature an actant that actively shifts the arbitrary borders the human characters created – and leaves its protagonists trapped in a hostile environment. These border crossings are then accompanied by pain, disgust and, most prominently, anxiety. While the characters are estranged from nature and this new 'natural' environment, they rely on old habits for survival – a coping strategy that proves futile, especially for Arthur and Moll. In a similar manner, the genre of the play, which can be described as a pastoral dystopia, leads to the clash of an old poetic mode and a dystopian (near) future that likewise reveals that nature is no longer a blissful retreat but itself a source of anxiety.

The next chapter, chapter six, focuses on the connection between anxiety and surveillance technology and links anxiety with notions like the panopticon, surveillant assemblage, big data, data doubles and cyborgs. This chapter discusses how both anxiety and surveillance interfere with a sense of security and create (the feeling of) a lack of control. A reading of Alistair McDowall's *X* (2016) focuses on the aesthetic dimension of anxiety, technology and surveillance, especially in connection with the sublime. In the play the characters oscillate between a longing for security and total lack of control. While the play's setting on an abandoned space station is anxiety-inducing and the characters are confronted with pain, disgust and anxiety on various occasions, the crew members also employ various mechanisms to tackle their anxiety – all of which ultimately fail. Meanwhile, the political dimension of surveillance and anxiety is central to my discussion of Stef Smith's *Girl in the Machine* (2017), where, in a first step, technological progress is depicted as opening near-infinite possibilities to tackle anxiety, but, in a second step, is shown to only create ever new sources of anxiety. By utilising surveillance techniques that instil a sense of security in the individual and collect vast amounts of data, private companies and the government alike capitalise on anxiety. *Girl in the Machine* is then also a warning against the political instrumentalization of anxiety.

Chapter seven continues this interrogation of the way anxiety can be politically instrumentalised and focuses on anxiety's contagious nature. Outbreaks of viruses or plagues coincide with a rise in scapegoating. This chapter addresses how, in an attempt to tackle anxiety, its multi-layered nature is reduced to fear, where all negative feelings are projected onto one single object (the scapegoat), neglecting the complex structure that led to anxiety. The interplay of anxiety and diseases is discussed in readings of Dawn King's *Foxfinder* (2011) and Stef Smith's *Human Animals* (2016). In King's play, foxes are not only nearly extinct but also constructed as the (albeit imagined) enemy all anxious feelings are projected onto – a mechanism that distracts from the totalitarian regime in the play that utilizes the spread of fear and anxiety for its own purposes. In *Human Animals*, the spreading of a virus likewise originates from animals. However, similar to *Foxfind-*

er, the only virus that can be measured takes place in the mind, as uncertainty, misinformation and anxiety spread uncontrollably and consume the characters in the play. Both plays then not only show how anxiety can be contagious but also how its complex nature is simplified by picking a scapegoat and directing all anxious moods towards it – albeit this cannot contain anxiety in the long run.

Finally, a brief conclusion returns to the main arguments of the previous chapters and asks what comes after anxiety. Although anxiety is primarily a negative emotion, this book ends on a more hopeful note and comments on the ways in which anxiety is related to hope. Despite everything, anxiety can be a constructive force if it is understood well and may lead to appropriate reactions.

2 The Phenomenology of Anxiety

When asked whether they have encountered anxiety and fear during their life, most people will answer yes. Yet, when asked to describe these feelings, the answer is less clear. While some might describe physical symptoms, like palpitations or a rapid heartbeat, others might describe objects and situations that induce anxiety on a personal level. None of these descriptions, however, come even close to the mental state of anxiety. This is further complicated as the symptoms of anxiety are typically not visible and hence difficult to represent, whether in everyday language or in literature. For a discussion of stagings of anxiety, this raises a number of questions: if anxiety is a personal feeling that is hardly visible to an outside person, how do readers/the audience of a play become aware of this anxiety? Conversely, how can a stage play, which is necessarily limited to the level of showing and speaking, portray (and so externalise) anxiety? In other words, what textual forms or formal techniques exist that may create the impression in a reader or in the audience that what is staged before them is anxiety? To answer these questions, it is necessary to analyse anxiety as a phenomenon in its totality. So far, this has been done primarily by psychoanalysts and philosophers. In the following, my focus will be on the latter and I will outline a phenomenological understanding of anxiety which, I suggest, is particularly fruitful for the discussion of stagings of anxiety.

In general, philosophy and theatre have similar underlying structures that start with a general question or disturbing event, followed by (counter)arguments, followed by a (open or closed) conclusion or resolution (Johnston 14). However, as Tom Stern pointedly observes, "philosophical investigations of theatre, drama and acting have been conspicuous in their absence from mainstream discussions of aesthetics and the philosophy of art, at least until the last few years" (1) – with perhaps the notable exceptions of Aristotle and Hegel. As both focus on action, orientation, consciousness and repetition, phenomenology, as a branch of philosophy, and theatre have many things in common:

> Phenomenology considers our experience and any understanding of it to be located in actions that acquire meaning though repetition, and can thus be said to imagine a world that is fundamentally performative. The world must be *done* in order to be experienced. The repetition of socially conditioned and located perceptions produce a world that can in turn be further transformed by acts of performance that address and disrupt the action of perception. (Bleeker, Foley Sherman and Nedelkopoulou 8)

While there already is extensive work on the connection between phenomenology and performance/dancing (Bacon; Bleeker, Foley Sherman and Nedelkopoulou;

Cull and Lagaay; Fraleigh; Franko; Kozel; Levy; Sheets-Johnstone; Rayner; Roach; Rozik; Tassi; Wilshire), not many academic works specifically focus on (Husserlian) phenomenology and the dramatic text (including, but not focusing on performance). This theoretical gap has been addressed by David Kornhaber and Martin Middeke, who observe "that in recent theatre and performance studies theatre and drama have been de-privileged in favour of performance and that, moreover, the democratic impact of performance appears to be higher than that of the text, [which] seems a little one-sided to us" (1).[47] In trying to address this theoretical gap, I would like to focus on the dramatic text and show that the perception of emotions like fear and anxiety in the theatre of anxiety and in phenomenology have similar underlying structures: such acts of perception may involve the crossing of various boundaries, including the destruction of language and communication, connect present, future and future anterior and induce pain and disgust.

Anxiety is a multidimensional emotion that can take place in body and mind, space as well as time. Accordingly, the phenomenology of anxiety is complex. Building on work by Edmund Husserl, Sara Ahmed, Bernhard Waldenfels, Julia Kristeva and Aurel Kolnai, among others, three pertinent qualities of anxiety can be identified: firstly, anxiety is a conglomerate of fears, of too many fearful objects raining down on the subject all at once and overwhelming it. Secondly, anxiety possesses a typical temporal structure of fearful anticipation, where future events are anticipated as painful and permanently impending on the subject, who has no adequate means to prevent them from materialising. Thirdly, anxiety is closely connected to pain and disgust/abjection. While pain displays the breaching of the body boundary, in disgust and abjection a border object is created in order for the subject to distance itself from the object that induces disgust/abjection. This crossing of boundaries is what makes pain and disgust similar in their phenomenological structure to anxiety, whose conglomerate of fearful objects and temporal dismay both cross various mental borders. These three dimensions of anxiety, pertaining to its spatial and temporal orientation, as well as to its conceptual and perceptual extension, are at the core of the phenomenology of anxiety – and consequently must also impact the way anxiety can be staged (see chapter 3). For this reason, in the following all three dimensions will be further scrutinised.

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47 Kornhaber and Middeke continue that "[t]ext, dramatic form, theatre, and performance contain an incommensurable substratum that necessarily turns interpreting texts and watching plays into all in all incalculable and fluid activities" (1), a notion that already anticipates the multidimensionality that is necessary for a portrayal of anxiety.

2.1 Anxiety as a Conglomerate of (Fearful) Objects

To conduct a structural analysis of anxiety, which will then be transferred to contemporary drama, it is important not just to differentiate anxiety from fear, but to connect both aversive emotions and show their relationship and interconnectedness. Anxiety and fear are two sensations that are often mentioned together. While some use both terms interchangeably (Kolnai 36), others use one term in place of the other (from a phenomenological perspective, Bauman's term 'liquid fear' had better be called 'liquid anxiety,' as I argue in chapter 4.1).[48] Martin Heidegger, however, clearly distinguishes both fear and anxiety.[49] "Anxiety is basically different from fear. We become afraid in the face of this or that particular being that threatens us in this or that particular respect" ("Metaphysics" 50). Heidegger continues that anxiety is different from fear because it has no object – it is anxiety for our sake, for our whole being, which explains his ontological interest in anxiety. As he explains, "[t]he indeterminateness of that in the face of which and for which we become anxious is no mere lack of determination but rather the essential impossibility of determining it" (51). It follows that anxiety cannot be determined and, in this indeterminacy, resembles the feeling of something uncanny. When feeling uncanny, we do not specifically know this something – it is our whole existence which feels uncanny. The same is the case for anxiety: "We 'hover' in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. [...] In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Da-sein is all that is still there" (32; see also Overgaard 29). Consequently, only in anxiety, which can be seen as a basic *Befindlichkeit*[50] (mood), do we encounter the nothing and through it, ex-

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48 Bourke, for instance, argues that, from a historical perspective, the differentiation between fear and anxiety is not always fruitful. She claims that "what is a fear for one individual or group may be an anxiety for another" (190) and continues that "[t]he distinction between the two states is defined according to the stimulus, but what is an 'immediate and objective' threat for one group may simply be an 'anticipated and subjective' threat for another group" (190).

49 While in the following I use the term *anxiety* when referring to the ontological phenomenological understanding of this emotion, some authors avoid translating the term and simply refer to it as (primordial) *Angst.* This has to do with different connotations of the term *Angst* in German, which are lacking in the word *anxiety* and which are sometimes closer to the English words *dread, anguish* or *malaise* (Coe 2–3). However, as the term *anxiety* comes closest to the original meaning and since the focus of the following discussion is specifically on anxiety, I decided to follow the translation of *Being and Time* (2010) and use *anxiety* throughout.

50 The English translation of the German word *Befindlichkeit* causes several problems, as most English equivalents do not express all meanings of the German original. Some suggestions are: state of mind, mood, affectedness, frame of mind, disposition and situatedness. In the following,

istence as a whole.[51] Anxiety thus has the ability to reveal something in the being as a whole, which is usually hidden in the daily focus on individual, worldly things. Thus, in Heidegger's terms, anxiety is a mood (*Befindlichkeit*), which exposes the being (*Da-sein*) in its thrownness (*Geworfenheit*). Anxiety uncouples us from our attachment to the world and shows our alienation from the world. Consequently, in anxiety, the human being sees its radical and undisguised being as a whole, while the taken-for-granted sense recedes and the nothing is disclosed.[52] Since, by moving away from our being as a whole, everything individual will become indifferent, the human being will become completely drawn into its being. In this sense, anxiety in Heidegger's terms is not a negative psychic state but a fundamental mood that opens onto authentic existence. Anxiety then, for Heidegger, "does double-duty, on the one hand as the mood in which the formal being-structures of Dasein are disclosed to the philosopher, and, on the other, as the mood of total crisis in or breakdown of one's life" (Shockey 6).

What is particularly interesting, however, and somewhat neglected by Heidegger, is the way in which the subject transitions into this state of nothingness. While the understanding of anxiety I pursue here likewise ends in a state of 'nothingness,' in which the subject is in an objectless state, following Ahmed, I argue that the origin of this nothingness is an excess of objects. The explanation of anxiety that will be used to approach the theatre of anxiety can be seen as a develop-

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I will use the term *mood,* keeping in mind that this is only a compromise. Its intended meaning by Heidegger is to show the subject's thrownness into the world (finding oneself 'thrown' in the world) – in German: *Wie befinden Sie sich* – "it is thrown in such a way that it is the there as being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 131). Oren Magid further explains Heidegger's two notions of world: "[f]or Heidegger, the 'world' (in single quotation marks) is the collection of all present-at-hand and ready-to-hand entities. The world (without single quotation marks) is the structure that makes the entities of the 'world' intelligible as the entities they are" (444). In other words, *Befindlichkeit* describes the way the world and its entities matter to the subject and are made intelligible through feelings.

51 For Heidegger, subjects are never free of moods as they exist in them and as they disclose the world to the subject; the subject can only deny them (*Being and Time* 131, 133 – 34; see also Coe 103). At the same time, moods are distinct from cognition, as they can only be mastered by a "counter mood" and they "come[] neither from 'without' nor from 'within,' but rise[] from being-in-the-world itself as a mode of that being" (*Being and Time* 132 – 33).

52 In relating being to nothingness, Heidegger is simultaneously breaking with the scholastics and modernity. As Sean McGrath observes, "[f]or Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, that which makes possible finite being, both mental and material, is (respectively) God, the unconditioned, and transcendental subjectivity. Heidegger is saying that the transcendental condition of the possibility of Dasein and the beings that show themselves to it is nothingness; more accurately, there is no transcendental ground" (69). Thus, Heidegger departs at a "being without cause or explanation" (69).

ment of Søren Kierkegaard's description of anxiety as unfocused fear (41–46)[53] and stems from Ahmed. Ahmed, who in this context is primarily interested in the examination of racism, argues that "fear is linked to the 'passing by' of the object" (*Cultural Politics* 65). What Ahmed describes here is the perceived absence of an object: while fear and anxiety differ when it comes to the exact nature of how their object is thus 'ungraspable,' the inaccessibility of their object is common to both emotions. A close look at fear not only reveals that the object of fear passes by but also that "[i]f fear had an object, then fear could be contained by the object. When the object of fear threatens to pass by, then fear can no longer be contained by an object" (65). The object of fear is thus "not quite present" (65). Even when the object passes by, for instance when a fearful spider vanishes, the fear lingers on, ready to re-surface whenever a spider is next seen. So far, Ahmed's approach resembles Heidegger's notion of fear in *Being and Time*, where he observes "that what is harmful, approaching near, bears the revealed possibility of not happening and passing us by. This does not lessen or extinguish fearing, but enhances it" (137).

Anxiety, however – and it is here that Ahmed's approach differs from Heidegger's – is an accumulation of objects (e.g., thoughts or impressions) that induce fear. Thus, it is not a lack of objects but an excess of these that causes anxiety.[54] The attachment to these countless objects of fear is so strong that one loses track of what exactly it is that one is afraid of. This is further intensified since each object of fear can be substituted with another object of fear over time and lead to an even bigger conglomeration of objects and anxiety.

> In anxiety, one's thoughts often move quickly between different objects, a movement which works to intensify the sense of anxiety. One thinks of more and more 'things' to be anxious

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[53] For Kierkegaard, anxiety "may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as on the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold to finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness" (61). The connection between anxiety and freedom, which can also be found in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, is in line with Ahmed's definition of anxiety as the accumulation of an increasing amount of objects – and thus the freedom to choose from infinite objects. In other words, it is the impossibility to choose between the various objects that leaves the subject overwhelmed and simultaneously paralysed, afraid that the objects will happen upon it before any solution can be found to overcome this state of excess (see also chapter 2.3). This fear is then further strengthened as, once one event/object is pursued, all other objects must be abandoned (Coe 71).

[54] Here it is important to note that not all conglomerates induce fear and anxiety. Sand, for instance, is a conglomerate that is often perceived as pleasurable and beautiful. However, sand can also be life-threatening when in an avalanche. Whether something is anxiety-inducing or not is thus often connected to the manifestation of the conglomerate.

about; the detachment from a given object allows anxiety to accumulate through gathering more and more objects, until it overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world. One becomes anxious as a mode of attachment to objects. In other words, anxiety tends to stick to objects, even when the objects pass by. Anxiety becomes *an approach to objects* rather than, as with fear, *being produced by an object's approach.* (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 66)

Therefore, anxiety can be described as an overabundance of fearful objects that are not quite present because these objects pass by. Thus, a subject in anxiety detaches from a specific object, but then accumulates several other objects and sticks them together. As Ahmed writes, "we could consider how anxiety becomes attached to particular objects, which come to life not as the cause of anxiety, but as an effect of its travels" (66). In other words, the focus in anxiety lies in the gathering of an increasing amount of fearful objects and in the attachment to this conglomerate of objects, not in the objects per se.

A further difference between Ahmed and Heidegger is the focus of Ahmed's work on the act of gathering rather than on an object alone. While Ahmed is referring to objects in anxiety and fear, she also states that "[t]here is nothing in the object that renders fear a *necessary consequence* of the object" (80) – especially in the sociological context Ahmed is concentrating on.[55] Therefore, in anxiety it is the accumulation of various objects – that might or might not be fearful – that overwhelms the subject and render any focus impossible. While this explains why Heidegger describes what is threatening in anxiety as "so near that it is oppressive and takes away one's breath – and yet it is nowhere" (*Being and Time* 180), he does not go into detail about how this paradoxical state comes into being besides it being linked to the world itself. In fact, for Heidegger, "[w]hat crowds in upon us is not this or that, nor is it everything objectively present together as a sum, but the *possibility* of things at hand in general, that is, the world itself" (181). However, if one has an indefinite number of possibilities, this does form an accumulation of possible objects and thoughts. Likewise, for Heidegger, "primordial Angst is the ontological a priori condition of the possibility of fear" (Coe 105). In other words, anxiety "even as it sleeps within Dasein's ontic mode of Being, can awaken at any moment, needing no stupendous event to awaken it. It is *always there* lurking just beyond the fringe of awareness, waiting to reach out to seize and transform us" (117–18). Therefore, for Heidegger anxiety is the precondition for fear, while in Ahmed's account it is the other way round: the act of gathering objects

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55 Sianne Ngai even goes one step further when she suggests that "anxiety is invoked not only as an affective response to an anticipated or projected event, but also as something 'projected' onto others in the sense of an outward propulsion or displacement—that is, as a quality or feeling the subject refuses to recognize in himself and attempts to locate in another person or thing" (210).

determines anxiety. Ahmed then circumvents one problem of the Heideggerian understanding of anxiety that is also described by David Coe: "Heidegger's account of the phenomenological phenomenon called primordial Angst may, after all, be an ontological construction which cannot *in principle* be grounded in ontic experience. There is a major leap, after all, between ontic 'uncanniness' and ontological Angst. We can only assume Angst is there. We can never experience it" (Coe 121). Ahmed's account of anxiety is substantiated on fear and thus on an ontic experience. It is the act of accumulation "through gathering more and more objects, until it overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 66) that constitutes anxiety and therefore an actual experience.

Although there is an entire chapter on fear in Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, her focus there is primarily political, on the ways in which fears are instrumentalised in racism. This is why the explanation and differentiation of fear and anxiety takes up only a small part in Ahmed's analysis. In order to fully understand how anxiety can be grounded in ontic experiences and connect various fearful objects, it is thus important to widen the scope and consult other phenomenological approaches on moods and emotions. I would like to do this by returning to Husserl's phenomenology, not least because he greatly influenced Heidegger's work. Here, a particular focus must fall on the Husserlian understanding of moods. For Husserl, moods can detach from the original object and become a free-floating sensation that colours all objects in the fore- and background in an (anxious) mood. Ahmed's claim that anxiety "accumulate[s] through gathering more and more objects, until it [anxiety] overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (*Cultural Politics* 66) therefore seems to have its origin in Husserl's phenomenology (although Ahmed herself does not refer to Husserl in her chapter on "The Affective Politics of Fear" (62–81)).

The body and its orientation in the world and towards/away from objects are central to phenomenology. While lived space is often thought of as three-dimensional, for Husserl, space is open to all possible orientations and the combination of vision, kinaesthetic and tactile experiences (*Thing and Space* 44). To further clarify how anxiety is a reaction to an overabundance of sensations and fearful objects, it is important to look at "sensations as a creative, differentiating, and dynamic multiplicity, as the way we feel our contact with the world, with others, and with our own life" (Al-Saji 52). For Husserl, sensations cannot be experienced independently. Before "sense-giving operations" (*Experience* 72) take place, a subject is surrounded by a vast field of sensuous data, for instance optical data like colours. This field represents "not a pure chaos, a mere 'swarm' of 'data'; it is a field of determinate structure, one of prominences and articulated particularities" (72). Within perception, several of those fields of data coincide. Every intentional grouping within these fields is a "unity of homogeneity" (73). This field of optical

data is already structured in that several colours can be distinguished from one another and yet it can form a unity, depending on how the subject groups the colours. Therefore, as Alia Al-Saji outlines, sensations play a crucial part in Husserl's differentiation between the subject and the outside world.[56] Regardless of whether the sensation is visual, tactic or kinaesthetic, the assembly of sensations constantly leads to new sensations which are always unique in their composition. The same way one single colour cannot be seen but only "a whole array of nuances," which changes with every new look, "[o]ur Bodily movements involve a multiplicity of changing sensations, that overlap and flow into one another," where these sensations are inseparable and "form a systemic whole" (Al-Saji 53).[57] In a second step, then, reflection and cognition isolate this conglomerate of different sensations according to personal interest (Jardine 55). In other words, for an object to be an object, "an objectivating operation of the ego" (Husserl, *Experience* 73) has to extract information from this field of passive data.[58] However, what happens if the subject gathers "more and more objects, until it [anxiety] overwhelms other possible affec-

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56 Perception is made possible primarily through kinaesthetic experience, which is a "way of feeling the active engagement of my Body with an outside" (Al-Saji 53). This makes so called *presentational-sensations* a crucial part of the experience of the world. They are "the way my Body lives in, and experiences, the 'redness' of the thing, the roughness of the surface – as vibrations of its own being. In other words, they express my feeling of being-affected by things, my way of resonating the qualities of the world. This would mean that presentational-sensations do not have a privileged role in perception; rather a multiplicity of sensations (presentational, affective, kinaesthetic) blend in every perception, working as a dynamic whole" (53).

57 Husserl famously cites music and its perception over time as an example: perceiving a melody always rests on the notes that have already been heard and the notes that are yet to come, that is, the melody's perception depends on retention (the awareness of elapsed sensations) and protention (the expectation of what's to come) (Husserl, *Zeitbewusstsein* 385). In this, retention not only takes place in the mind, but also in the body. As sensations linger on in the body, leading to a "Bodily memory" (Al-Saji 56), the felt sensations further influence the personal interest and thus (future) attentions and movements in the world.

58 To raise the subject's awareness, a unit from the passive data field must contrast with other aspects of the field. "Thus with regard to content the most general syntheses of sensuous data raised to prominence within a field, data which at any given time are united in the living present of a consciousness, are those in conformity with affinity (homogeneity) and strangeness (heterogeneity)" (Husserl, *Experience* 74). Over time, the alternation between homogeneity and heterogeneity inevitably leads to repetition, blending (i.e., the perfect repetition of exactly the same field of homogeneity) and – more likely – association, in which parts of the perceptive field stay the same and others change. "Homogeneity and heterogeneity, therefore, are the result of two different and fundamental modes of associative unification" (75). The two sides of association melt the already known with new information of the perceptive field, or, in Husserl's words, "one of the elements is characterized relative to consciousness as that which evokes, the other as that which is evoked" (75).

tive relations to the world" (*Cultural Politics* 66), as Ahmed argues? What if reflection and cognition of this "array of nuances" is coloured in a specific mood? For a better understanding of this, a closer investigation of Husserl's inner structure of feeling-acts and sensations is necessary.

To demonstrate that anxiety can stem from an overabundance of fearful objects, the transition from emotional colourings of sensuous objects to emotional properties of the empirical ego is important. For the analysis of anxiety, the differentiation between sensations or sense feelings and feeling-acts is important.[59] Sensations are something I feel or see, like a surface or colour; they are non-intentional and represent a physical state. A feeling-act, on the other hand, is a conscious act that is directed towards an object and as such intentional. Feeling-acts are thus the consciousness of felt properties of objects, not their presentations. "What is immanent to perception is not the same as that which is posited transcendently as a thing" (Husserl, *Thing and Space* 38). Thus, for Husserl, feeling-acts consist of two levels; an object and the conscious act that is directed towards the object (Melle 81; Varga 121). "Whether we turn with pleasure to something, or whether its unpleasantness repels us, an object is presented. But we do not merely have a presentation, with an added feeling associatively tacked on to it, and not intrinsically related to it, but pleasure or distaste direct themselves to the presented object, and could not exist without such a direction" (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 570). This describes intentional feelings that are aroused by an object but not automatically externally associated with the object.[60] For Husserl, emotions are always directed towards an object, although the object does not automatically necessitate the emotion. Emotional acts are thus a response to objects or situations (Melle 82). For Husserl, feelings, like sadness, then refer to both the feeling subject and the objective property (*Logical Investigations* 574–75). In Quentin Smith's words, "[t]o be conscious of a 'pleasantness' that is a property of an object is to be con-

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59 In general, Husserl differentiates between emotions and feelings (and moods, see below). Emotions are "positing, objectivating acts" that are connected to "valuing and evaluation" (Moran and Cohen 94). They take place in the body and "are intentional acts and […] essentially directed at or 'about' something: in love someone is loved, in hate hated, and so on" (94). Feelings, on the other hand, represent "a wide concept" that can include "pleasure, displeasure, like, dislike, approval, disapproval, valuing, disvaluing, etc." (121) and they are either intentional (e.g. displeasure at a loud noises) or they are "states of sensations" (e.g. pain) and thus overlap with sensations (121).
60 Contrary to intentional feelings are non-intentional feelings that arise through feeling sensible pain or through sensory content like surfaces or colours. These are not acts themselves but "acts are constituted through them" (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 572–73) and they constitute a certain accumulation: "[i]f we recall such pains, or any sensory pleasures […] we find that our sensory feelings are blended with the sensations from the various sense-fields, just as these latter are blended with one another" (572).

scious of a felt property of an object, not a presented property" (96). Feelings are then always relating to the subject and its ego. "I cannot under any circumstances have an awareness of the emotion of sadness, pleasure or anxiety without apprehending it is *my* sadness, *my* pleasure or *my* anxiety" (97). Thus, the sensuous object becomes an emotional property of the empirical ego.

Still, the question remains whether these felt properties of an object must always be related to an object. In other words, can the emotions linger on when the object passes by? The answer is yes. Even when the object that elucidates the emotion lapses, fear can persist as sensation or *Stimmung* (mood). Such moods colour all objects around the subject, even when the objects are no longer connected to the original sensation (Melle 60). This is the case, as Husserl explains, because:

> The mood has taken possession of the soul in such a way that a continuing feeling is dominant and at the same time a disposition persists to receive new stimuli and confirmation that is strengthened through everyone and everything. This means that again and again acts of the same kind emerge, like new impulses for lust or grief; furthermore, a continuing feeling persists that is not related to present contents and often not on past ones either. We sometimes wake up with a feeling of listlessness that does not leave us, we are sad and we do not know about what. (*Wahrnehmung* 177; my trans.)[61]

Because the mood is situated in the subject, emotions can linger on even when the object towards which this emotion was originally directed ceases to exist.

> Sensations of pleasure and pain may continue, though the act-characters built upon them may lapse. When the facts which provoke pleasure sink into the background, are no longer apperceived as emotionally coloured, and perhaps cease to be intentional objects at all, the pleasurable excitement may linger on for a while: it may itself be felt as agreeable. Instead of representing a pleasant property of the object, it is referred merely to the feeling-subject, or is itself presented and pleases. (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 574–75)

Thus, for Husserl, moods represent the accumulation of feelings that linger on when the original object lapses and colours other objects in the same mood. They have a longer duration than emotions and are non-intentional. While in the quote above Husserl describes the positive continuation of a pleasant emotion, this, I would argue, can also be the case for negative emotions like anxiety – only

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61 German original: "Die Stimmung hat von der Seele derart Besitz ergriffen, dass ein dauerndes Gefühl dominiert und zugleich die Disposition besteht, durch ‚alles und jeden' darin bestärkt, d.h. neue Anregung und Begründung zu empfangen. Es entstehen dann immer wieder Akte derselben Art, neue Anstöße der Lust oder Trauer, und außerdem besteht ein fortdauerndes Gefühl, das auf die präsenten Inhalte nicht bezogen wird und oft auch nicht auf vergangene. Wir erwachen manchmal mit einem Unlustgefühl, das uns nicht verlässt, wir sind traurig und wissen nicht worüber."

in this case the continuation of the excitement is not "felt as agreeable" but as disagreeable, or anxious. At the same time, the emotion is now directed towards the subject and not necessarily only "the property of [an] object" anymore. Consequently, when returning to the anxious mood, a fearful mood continues and becomes a sensation that persists and colours all other objects in the fore- and background until it has become anxiety.

In this context the difference between emotions that are intentional and such that are non-intentional is important. Emotions are intentional, if, like joy and sadness, they are directed towards something concrete, and they are non-intentional, sensual feelings, if, like pain, they have their locus in sensations like touching. Even when the object of intentional emotions vanishes, they can still be directed, for instance towards the pleasurable sensation.[62] For Husserl, fear is an intentional act, while sadness is a non-intentional, passive condition. This second condition can appear without an object as unknown continuation of earlier feelings. "We sometimes wake up with a feeling of listlessness that does not leave us, we are sad and we do not know about what." (Husserl, *Wahrnehmung* 177; my tranls.). This is, I would like to argue, the case with anxiety. It is the continuation of a feeling that leads into a mood. This continuation towards a mood can also stem from intentional emotions, like fear, as is the case for anxiety.

Thus, the origin of the mood of anxiety is a preceding feeling of fear.[63] "The mood then seizes the subject in the sense that he is now dominated by the feeling that gave birth to it" (Fisette 226). For Husserl, moods are thus extensions of original feelings that continue after the initial content lapses and colour all objects in the mood as they "influence the entire feeling environment or one's mood" (228). Returning to the question of the origin of moods, Denis Fisette argues that moods, for Husserl, are not directed towards an object.

> Whatever the origin of moods may be, they are, if not objectless, at least without specific objects because moods lack an objective reference [...] whereas fear is, *per definitionem*, about something specifically feared. A state of anxiety, for example, does not seem to be about any-

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62 James Jardine explains emotional intentionality as "a multi-layered experiential act that includes (a) an underlying presentation of the factual object or situation to which the emotion responds, this 'factual' awareness being, in some cases, augmented and articulated through attention and thought; (b) an affectively determined modality of this presentation which draws upon the non-intentional feelings elicited by the object or situation; and (c) a higher-order component of intentional feeling, that is directed towards and responds to, and in this sense intentionally appropriates, the object as presented in (b)" (55). Therefore, emotional intentionality always includes an object.

63 As Denis Fisette argues, a mood does not necessarily always relate to past sentiments or feelings and can stand on its own (227).

thing, at least not about anything in particular. Some believe that these states of mind never-theless have an object even if it is diffuse and underdetermined, while others – including, even occasionally, Husserl – believe that, in principle, such a state of mind cannot have any object at all because it is devoid of intentional content. (227)

Instead of referring to the anxious mood as objectless, however, I would argue that it is the accumulation of too many objects, a state of excessive fearful objects, that evokes the *impression* that anxiety has no object. The object is thus not "diffuse and underdetermined" but diffuse and *overdetermined*. If a mood is the continuation of a feeling and if that feeling cannot exist without an object, then the mood cannot exist without the object either. In other words, if a mood is the continuation of an emotion, like fear, and if that emotion is originally intentional and directed towards an object, then in anxiety there must have been an original object that the mood is directed towards and that colours all objects in the fore- and background of this mood. What Husserl writes about positive moods is then, I would argue, also true for negative moods, like anxiety:

> Once I am in a good mood, it easily spreads (as long as it is not broken by the opposite ten-dency). Once I am in a good mood, this can mean that I realise that I not only gain pleasure from this or that specific thing but also that I am living in a rhythm of pleasure: pleasure fol-lows pleasure. (What is more, pleasure is transferred to everything it can be associated with). In doing so, however, the mood always retains its intentionality. (*Gefühl und Wert* 103; my trans.)[64]

This intentionality is further explained by Husserl who continues: "To us, feelings appear to be founded on content rather than directed at it" (*Wahrnehmung* 177; my trans.).[65] Although anxiety might not seem intentional, there is a reason for anxi-ety in the first place, something that motivated it. For Husserl, "pleasure without anything pleasant is unthinkable [...] because the specific essence of pleasure de-mands a relation to something pleasing" (*Logical Investigations* 571). At the same time fear without anything fearful is unthinkable and anxiety without that previ-ous state of fearfulness is likewise unthinkable. This notion of anxiety, which Ahmed describes as "a mode of attachment to objects" (*Cultural Politics* 66), entails

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64 German original: "Bin ich nun in guter Stimmung, so pflanzt sie sich also leicht fort (solange sie nicht durchbrochen wird durch die Gegentendenz). Bin ich nun in guter Stimmung, so kann das heißen, ich merke, dass ich nicht nur mich an dem oder jenem Bestimmten freue, sondern dass ich in einem Rhythmus der Freude lebe: Freude schließt sich an Freude. (Dazu kommt, dass Freude sich überträgt auf alles im Zusammenhang Stehende.) Dabei behält aber die Stimmung immer eine ‚Intentionalität.'"

65 German original: "[Gefühle] erscheinen uns mehr als im Inhalt begründet als auf ihn gerich-tet."

exactly this cognitive overload that ultimately leads to the inability to focus on a single object and thus Heidegger's state of nothingness follows – a state in which all worldly objects vanish, because the subject is no longer cognitively able to focus on single objects simply because of the excess of objects that are coloured in a fearful mood.

What follows from this "mode of attachment to objects" (*Cultural Politics* 66) is that the subject in anxiety is not able to communicate its mood of anxiously coloured objects, because it cannot cognitively grasp it – it feels like nothing(ness), after all. This is further complicated as it is nearly impossible to speak of a fearful mood in the first place (Lickhardt 189). As outlined before, feelings, for Husserl, "are references to feeling objects that are founded on presented objects" (Q. Smith 90). Feeling objects are moreover the affective properties of presented objects. It is precisely this connection between feeling object and presented object as "being an affective property of" (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 801) that is of interest here, because this connection is preverbal (Q. Smith 93).[66] Quentin Smith illustrates this with the example of someone walking through the forest at night. While walking, I do not think of the forest as fearful but rather the property of fearfulness is attached to the forest preverbally and preconceptually. "I do not think of the property of 'fearfulness' as being a property of the woods, but 'intuit' or 'perceive' it as belonging to the woods" (93).[67] This understanding of fear as preverbal is reminiscent of the "[f]ree-floating fear or anxiety" (36) described by Aurel Kolnai:

> One need only think of one's fear of the dark, which has such a vivid character of being fear of something, which is yet clearly neither a simple fear of the dark, nor a fear of, say, robbers or ghosts. And it is indeed, undoubtedly true that even something undefinable – though certainly only in the rarest of cases completely undefined! – may be intended. (37–38)

Thus, it is impossible to speak of the affective property that connects feeling and presented objects.[68] While this does not mean that the affective property cannot be

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66 This point is also made by Bergo, who sees anxiety as "sign of a precognitive, pre-reflexive 'knowledge'" either of the subject's "possibilities (i.e., freedom)" (35) or in the Heideggerian sense as related to the question of being and nothingness.
67 In this example, the fear starts as a fearfulness towards the forest, which leads to a colouring of all other objects that are encountered in this fearful forest in a fearful mood – the subject is suddenly also afraid of the trees or all kinds of animals that would normally not induce fear. This accumulation and colouring of all objects in close proximity to the feared forest then leads to anxiety.
68 The notion of anxiety as not only containing an original object but also the inexpressibility of this object is also explained by Jacques Lacan, who rejects the notion of anxiety as objectless (147). The object in anxiety is for Lacan a surplus *jouissance*, which cannot be described verbally: "[i]t's very precisely the … I am unable to say the name, because, precisely, it's not a name. it's (It's?)

spoken of or rather emptily referred to at a later stage (e. g., through metaphors), this fearfulness cannot be perceived or imagined unless founded on something presented. In other words, in order to communicate this anxiousness, the subject must find ways to express a preverbal state (which is impossible) and it does this by referring to presented objects, although they are not anxiety per se and thus this reference is empty (a similar mechanism is at play in the inexpressibility of pain, see chapter 2.2). This means that feeling objects that rely on a written sentence and thus constitute an empty consciousness appear "independently from any presented object" (Q. Smith 94). Husserl unfolds this in terms of desire (and volition), where

> we are dealing with intentional experiences, but with such as are characterized by indeterminateness of objective direction, an 'indeterminateness' which *does not amount to a privation*, but which stands for a descriptive character of one's presentation. The idea we have when 'something' stirs, when there is a rustling, a ring at the door, etc., an idea had before we give it verbal expression, has *indeterminateness of direction*, and this indeterminateness is of the intention's essence, it is determined as presenting an indeterminate 'something.' (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 575; emphasis added)[69]

While in this case the indeterminateness is connected to desire, it is, I would argue, also the case for the opposite, fear, and for anxiety, since the latter can be seen as a mood that emerges out of the fearful colouring of objects. Thus, the subject in anxiety is in a mood in which it cannot concentrate on a single object and so feels as if in a state of nothingness; therefore, the subject cannot verbally express this anxiety – otherwise it needs an infinite number of, for instance, metaphors to do so and even then would this not express the true nature of anxiety. This is especially problematic for the representation of anxiety in the context of contemporary drama since drama heavily relies on language and speech.

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surplus *jouissance*, but it's not nameable, even if it's approximately nameable, translatable, in this way. This is why it has been translated by the term 'surplus value'" (147). For Lacan, then, as Andreja Zevnik explains, this object is not only "most significant" but also "marks a place of absence" (239). From a psychoanalytical perspective, anxiety and its relation to an object is important because "[i]t is that which drives the desire; it is that which attaches the subject to a master signifier (a sovereign, a source of authority); and it is that for which the subject seeks fulfilment through fantasies or objects of desire. *Objet petit a* is fundamental if one is to think of a split, postmodern subject (or the subject of psychoanalysis) and its socio-political action" (Zevnik 239). Lacan's understanding of anxiety therefore also highlights the importance of anxiety for the social and even political sphere.

69 This quote also illustrates how, for Husserl, desire and volition have a similar character to pleasure and pain in that they too can be present with the indeterminateness of an object.

Overall, then, Sara Ahmed's notion of anxiety as a gathering of more and more objects in connection with Husserl's understanding of moods can serve as the starting point for the description of the theatre of anxiety – both notions ultimately lead to the state of nothingness that is important for Heidegger's ontological function of anxiety. This understanding of anxiety is accompanied by a preverbal state of anxiety that further complicates an interpersonal communication of it.

2.2 The Building, Breaking and Crossing of Borders: Pain and Disgust

As should have become clear, the interpersonal communication of anxiety is complex and verges on being impossible. In general, anxiety is a private emotion that combines physical and mental aspects. In fear and anxiety, "[t]he emotional body rapidly gives forth a multitude of signs: the heart pounds faster or seems to freeze, breathing quickens or stops, blood pressure soars or falls and sometimes adrenalin pours into the bloodstream" (Bourke 7). Together with the cognitive overload of too many (fearful) objects that inconvenience the subject and the distorted timelines that accompany fear and anxiety (see next chapter), these aspects are mostly not directly visible to the audience in a play. More generally, if it is impossible to put in words the exact nature of anxiety, then any representation of anxiety on stage (and page) is, to say the least, problematic. Plays that still attempt to do so have therefore often taken to portraying anxiety on a more visceral, corporeal level – fear and anxiety are physical emotions after all.[70] As emotions are often not perceived in isolation but are connected to other sensations and emotions – for instance when the subject is "disgusted by [its] fear" (W. Miller 25; see also Bourke 8) – anxiety and fear can also be depicted via such 'substitute' sensations that share a very similar underlying structure with anxiety.[71] The most prominent sensations that are phenomenologically closely connected to fear and anxiety but have a more corporeal and thus visceral appearance are pain, abjection and disgust.

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[70] This is the case for all kinds of emotions as, according to Husserl, "[t]he lived body is experienced as a bearer of sensations" (Moran and Cohen 51) and the lived body is "the locus where feeling and emotions are experienced" (94).

[71] This can also be illustrated with Quentin Smith's example of the way in which woods are experienced as fearful (93; see chapter 2.1). The fearfulness that is attached to the woods is potentially intensified if a disgusting object like an animal carcass is encountered there because the carcass that is perceived as a reminder of the universal fear of death is added on top of the anxiousness that is already felt.

Anxiety and the Fearful Anticipation of Pain

A phenomenological understanding of both anxiety and fear is closely connected to pain. After all, following Ahmed, a fearful object that may also be the cause for anxiety is "an anticipated *pain* in the future" (*Cultural Politics* 65; emphasis added). What follows from Ahmed's claims is that if fear is connected to pain, anxiety can also be understood as the piling up of expected, but yet-to-be-realised pains. In other words, anxiety is the anticipation of several, interconnecting but never graspable painful experiences. Both pain and anxiety share a similar temporality and a similar embodied behaviour in space – subjects (attempt to) withdraw from the sources of pain and anxiety. In the context of theatre, pain can be used to circumvent the inexpressibility of fear and anxiety on stage. While pain is also accompanied by the dysfunction of language and often cannot be described through language – a structural similarity with fear and anxiety – pain has a physical component which, although it can only be represented indirectly (for instance by an immediate bodily reaction to pain), can still help convey pain on stage.[72]

Pain is, similar to anxiety, a complex and multidimensional experience that is itself often linked to other sensations and connects physical, mental and cultural aspects (Woolf 27).[73] The interconnection of pain and fear becomes particularly forceful whenever pain is consciously reflected on, as Ahmed explains: "The experience and indeed recognition of pain *as pain* involves complex forms of association between sensations and other kinds of 'feeling states'" (*Cultural Politics* 23). Thus, although pain is also an affective state, a sensation that follows a sudden hurtful event, it can have a cognitive level. This cognition of pain is then linked to its temporality as, according to Laurence Kirmayer, it necessarily "slows us

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72 In the following, my focus will be on the negative sides of pain. However, pain is not always negative as "it is helpful as an alarm signal that makes us take action to protect ourselves and it can in some situations even be enjoyed" (Svenaeus 544). Likewise, Hans-Georg Gadamer philosophically derives pain from the so-called "Geburtsschrei" to afflictions in old age and sees pain as a chance to meet different challenges in life (27).

73 Pain can also be described as possessing a "dual nature" that "is capable of mediating between the biological and the social: causing pain can destroy and rewrite elementary interpretations of the world, thus reconfiguring social relationships" (Sik 63). A Similar re-interpretation of the world also takes place in anxiety, an emotion that can influence nearly all aspects of (social) life and their histories (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 66). This social sphere of fear and anxiety in many ways resembles that of pain, where "the ontological and epistemological framing of pain outlines the available forms of causing pain; also, the power structures affect the narratives and experiences of pain itself" (Sik 63). Fear, anxiety and pain can therefore take place in the social sphere, which is important for their portrayal in contemporary drama – a social institution through and through. Nonetheless, both pain and anxiety also take place in isolation and can likewise isolate the subject, as the analysis of Ahmed's notion on pain will further exemplify.

down, insisting that we withdraw from the fray and take time to heal" (383). Taking time to heal also insinuates a reflection on and a search for meaning in pain. However, similar to anxiety, the reason for a felt pain is often not graspable. This is owed to the temporal inequality between a painful event and the sensation of pain, as the latter often outlives its source and thus extends the feeling of pain indefinitely (Scarry, "Schoolchildren" 282). In this temporal dimension, pain and anxiety are related in that in both time is stretched:

> The suffering of pain is closely related to the apprehension, belief or conviction that it will persist indefinitely – an experience of duration that is partly given by pain itself (intrinsic to its phenomenology, in the sense that pain makes our experience of time slow down and duration become static or unending) and partly imposed through ongoing interpretations or framing of its meaning. (Kirmayer 384)

Similar to anxiety, pain can linger on in time, even when the object of pain passes by, and the longer it lingers on, the more painful it becomes, descending into chronic pain.[74] At the same time pain can drift into memory and increase the anticipation of something unexpected and negative to happen again, which is then felt in the present as fear and anxiety. Over time, "pain exerts enduring effects even when not present, as something to fear, avoid, and warily anticipate" (Kirmayer 384). Pain can thus not only follow fear – as the anticipation of a painful future that is already felt as painful in the present – but fear can also follow pain – as the fear of a recurring pain. This also means that pain felt in the past can strengthen fear and anxiety in the present. Often hidden "past impressions" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 25) of pain strengthen the anticipation that a hurtful event might happen (again) and increase the anticipation of pain and with it fear and anxiety. Thus, although pain often has an original cause, over time it detaches itself from it and intermingles with other sensations.

From a phenomenological point of view, pain is also multidimensional in that it reveals a connection between feeling states and the outside world. Similar to fear and anxiety, in pain the world realigns around the body. As Fredrik Svenaeus, for whom pain is "a pre-intentional feeling," writes:

> To be in pain is not only to perceive parts of one's body in a certain way but also to feel how the perceived *world* changes in structure and content. Accordingly, pain can be explored and understood as an embodied mood; a way of finding oneself in the world that typically *leads to* certain emotions of the negative type: frustration, irritation, anger, fear, sadness, self-pity or even loss of hope and trust in others. (543)

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74 In this context, it is worth pointing out the etymology of the word 'chronic,' whose original meaning is "of or concerning time" (OED, "Chronic").

While Svenaeus only outlines the temporal relation between pain and fear *after* pain, in that fear follows pain, this relation can, as has been shown, also be reversed: in connection with fear, pain is transferred to a state in the future (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 65). However, what Svenaeus's quote shows is how closely pain and fear are connected and how both relate to the perception of the world. On a phenomenological level both pain and fear are accompanied by a new experience of embodiment.

This notion of a body in pain and its alignment in space then literally leads to a condensed physicality in space. Pain initiates, organizes and maintains behaviours of withdrawal and avoidance. Thus, there is at root a link between the bodily language of pain and systems for fear, flight and defeat. This behaviour of withdrawal is described by Ahmed, who uses the example of someone stubbing their toe on the bed. The consequent reaction to this event is, in the end, to move away from the cause of pain and, metaphorically, to move away from the pain itself (*Cultural Politics* 24). Thus, the body in pain as well as in fear and anxiety is physically minimized and shaped by avoidance behaviour (Leder 74).

The shrinking and withdrawal of the body in pain is further accompanied by a breach of the body's integrity, as pain is also linked to the borders of the body. "It is through sensual experiences such as pain that we come to have a sense of our skin as bodily surface […], as something that keeps us apart from others, and as something that 'mediates' the relationship between internal or [sic] external, or inside and outside" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 24). Thus, feelings of pain are important for the process of determining the boundaries of bodies. However, it is not the pain that creates the surface, but rather the experience of pain that makes us aware of the bodily surface in the first place. The skin, for Ahmed as for Husserl, plays an important part in this distinction between outside world and one's own body. The skin as boundary between self and others can, in general, separate and connect us to the outside world, depending on how we experience the impression on the skin. In pain, this experience is often negative and related to a body that feels vulnerable and turned inside out (Scarry, "Schoolchildren" 284). Here, the borders of body and mind can inadvertently and forcefully be crossed on several levels with several objects. The breach of the bodily surface is then accompanied by a foreign object that hurts a body's integrity. It follows that fear and pain share structural similarities, as "[f]ear, like pain, is felt as an unpleasant form of intensity" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 65). This unpleasant form of intensity becomes visual through the breaching of the bodily surface (wounds, scars, …) and through a bodily movement that presumes a shrinking of the body in felt space and a moving away from the source of the pain. Pain and anxiety then share both a temporality of anticipation and a corporeal reaction of withdrawal that has been caused by the breach of the integrity of body and/or mind.

These negative sensations are accompanied by the destruction of language in/through pain. What complicates the articulation of pain on stage is that in pain, similar to in anxiety, language and speech are disturbed. For Elaine Scarry, pain combines the affirmation of our own physical nature with the uncertainty about the physical nature of others: "[t]o have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*" (*The Body* 13).[75] Furthermore, pain is objectless and thus "has no referential content" (4). While the source of pain is clear, reminiscing about the pain and its meaning is often unrewarding. In Scarry's account, this becomes especially clear in considering language or rather the inexpressibility of pain through language: "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). The inexpressibility of pain not only influences the experience of pain within the personal story, but also raises questions of representation of these issues in political contexts, as "the relative ease or difficulty with which any given phenomenon can be *verbally represented* also influences the ease or difficulty with which that phenomenon comes to be *politically represented*" (12). This ties in with a paradox that accompanies the inexpressibility of pain: although pain "resists language" and thus refers to a stage "anterior to learned language" (Scarry, "Response" 64 – 65), pain does not resist culture. For Scarry, pain is also culturally shaped and thus reveals how a body is embedded in and dependent on the world. Pain can thus also be read on a social level (Kleinman 19), where the inexpressibility of pain increases the felt pain and where simultaneously social and political rejection are not just metaphorically painful (Eisenberger 441).

Because appropriate descriptions of painful sensations are often missing and the vocabulary describing pain is restricted to "only a small handful of adjectives" (Scarry, *The Body* 15), pain is generally often described though metaphors. For Scarry, there are two kinds of metaphors – the first describes an object that causes pain and the second describes the region of the body that feels the pain: it feels as if a nail pierces my stomach. Both metaphors refer to experienceable features and con-

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75 Although Scarry's work on the connection of pain, language and the body is pioneering and an important starting point for the connection of pain and anxiety, it has also been criticised for "the over-emphasizing of the unsharability of pain" (Sik 76) as well as for her lack of a medical perspective on the distinction between physical and psychological pain (Jackson). Her argumentation that pain cannot be expressed linguistically has also been criticised as she draws a divide between the physicality of pain and the cognitive process of language, in other words between body and mind, without taking further research on the body/mind dualism into consideration (Dawney and Huzar 10). For an overview of different perspectives on Elain Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, see also van Ommen, Cromby and Yen.

crete objects instead of abstract ideas of pain. Using metaphors to describe pain and at the same time extend the body to the outside world (the nail becomes part of the body) can help "to externalize, objectify, and make shareable what is originally an interior and unshareable experience" (Scarry, "Schoolchildren" 282). This visualisation reveals the underlying idea that something, a foreign object, is acting on the body and thus exposes, again, how in pain the body is related to the outside world. In Scarry's words, "[t]he feeling of pain entails the feeling of being acted upon, and the person may either express this in terms of the world acting on him ('It feels like a knife') or in terms of his own body acting on him ('It feels like the bones are cutting through')" (283). It is the representation of pain through metaphors that enables the communication of pain – in general as well as in drama – in the first place.

However, making pain visible through metaphors also leads to the ignorance of pain that is not visible. Thus, Scarry observes that "we have as a species an astonishingly consistent record of ignoring other people's pain if there is no body damage or no weapon to make it visible" ("Schoolchildren" 308).[76] This, unfortunately, is particularly the case for all kinds of mental and psychological pain, something that is often still stigmatised and met with rejection. Besides, even when body damage is visible, this does not automatically lead to a compassionate understanding of the pain of others:

> The problem with expressing pain through the metaphor of body damage is the nonseparability of the two: the body in pain is the same body whose surface is broken, and the overwhelming visual spectacle of that broken surface may either repel attention – causing the onlooker to wince, recoil, and turn away – or may instead be suggestive of the attributes of pain, but the obscenity of the hurt may drown out our apprehension of the nonobscenity of the person beyond. (284)

The visuality of pain, the wounds and scars, thus overshadows the person that is behind it, "as though the person is a template of pain rather than a person in pain"

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[76] The often arbitrary linguistic differentiation between mental and physical illnesses and/or their origin is also described by novelist and writer Siri Hustvedt in one of her essays. She writes: "Every sickness has an alien quality, a feeling of invasion and loss of control that is evident in the language we use about it. No one says, 'I am cancer' [...] despite the fact that there is no intruding virus or bacteria; it's the body's own cells that have run amok. [...] Neurological and psychiatric illnesses are different, however, because they often attack the very source of what one imagines is one's self. [...] In the psychiatric clinic, the patients often say, 'Well, you see, I'm bipolar' [...] The illness and the self are fully identified in these sentences" (7). The identity and not identity with the illness then further merges the source of pain and the subject in pain, where pain becomes an abstract part of the subject, making it even harder for others to grasp the pain of the subject.

(285). Therefore, pain, similar to anxiety, is to some extent inexpressible. But although the use of metaphors to relate to pain is not ideal and might lead to neglecting the suffering individual, it is nevertheless a possibility of visualisation that is not common for anxiety. At the same time, as will be shown, metaphors of pain are also used in contemporary theatre in order to deconstruct them and render them absurd to show how pain and anxiety are complex, abstract notions that cannot be explained by language alone. The visualisation of pain is then particularly important for the aesthetics of the theatre of anxiety (see chapter 3).

Disgust, Abjection and Anxiety

For a phenomenological understanding of anxiety in contemporary theatre it is not just pain but also abjection and disgust that needs to be taken into further consideration. Disgust and abjection are two sensations that can be linked to fear and anxiety and that can help convey aversive feelings on stage and page. They are of interest in this context because they both have underlying structures similar to those of fear and anxiety in that they remind the subject of its mortality. Both fear/anxiety and disgust/abjection are aversive emotions that increase the distance between the offending object, albeit fear can rather be seen as a flight response and disgust/abjection more as a removal (W. Miller 25) – the subject is simultaneously repulsed and fascinated by disgust and abjection.[77] Disgust and abjection are not only closely connected to fear and anxiety but also to each other – they are often even used interchangeably. What both have in common is that "*[a]bjection and disgust* […] *share a concern regarding the integrity of one's sense of selfhood*" (Ablett 99). Both the abject and disgust lead to feelings of repulsion (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 55), both threaten the border between subject and object and both question hierarchical structures and function as "a reminder of our animal origin" (55). In the end, it is fear that subsequently connects disgust and the abject, as the abject is linked to a higher degree of fear than disgust: "while the mouldy peach is an example of disgust it does not cause abjection, whereas the corpse does. The degree of fear means that not all cases of disgust are abject" (59). This close connection is the reason why a more detailed elucidation of both

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77 Imogen Tyler observes that the revolting quality does not emanate from the object, but "in actuality the subject is always already the source of her own abjection" (*Revolting Subjects* 28). In contrast to this, for Silvan Tomkins, in disgust attention is directed towards the disgust evoking object as opposed to the own body, since "the response intends to maximize the distance between the face and the object which disgusts the self. It is a literal pulling away from the object" (356). In the following, a middle ground between both positions will be taken. On the one hand, disgust is a subjective emotion that is governed by individual taste and/or cultural experiences, on the other hand, disgust is elicited by an object and directed at it.

disgust and abjection is necessary to understand their close connection with fear and anxiety.

Disgust is a multifaceted and contradictory sensation that can be discussed in relation to nature and nurture,[78] to other feelings like shame, contamination, contempt and fear and that can be found in personal and social contexts.[79] There are several domains that can elicit disgust: "food, body products, animals, sexual behaviours, contact with death or corpses, violations of the exterior envelope of the body (including gore and deformity), poor hygiene, interpersonal contamination (contact with unsavory human beings), and certain moral offences" (Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 637). These categories – which may also function on an abstract level, where the mere thought of a disgusting object can evoke disgust[80] – not only demonstrate the variety and ambiguity of disgust, but also suggest a connection with pain and fear, as they are associated with "confrontations, and frightening interactions" (637).

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78 Disgust is a sensation that often cannot be clearly attributed to either nature or nurture: while it seems to be an inherent sensation in which one does not have to learn how to be disgusted by a foul smell, it is at the same time a learned experience which is embedded in cultural expectations (Kelly 11).

79 Throughout time, disgust evolved into a learned social mechanism of exclusion and "negative socialization" (Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 650). Disgust eliciting objects (and subjects) can therefore be found on both the private and public sphere, where disgust is not just political (Tyler, *Revolting Subjects* 24) but also "plays a powerful role in the law" (Nussbaum 72) as well as in social and developmental psychology, "in that, along with fear, it is a primary means for socialization" (Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 638). For Ngai, disgust always has a social component, since it "seeks to include or draw others *into* its exclusion of its object, enabling a strange kind of sociability" (336). Disgust can thus also be used as a manipulative mechanism that separates certain groups from others and is therefore "instrumentalized in oppressive and violent ways" (340). This thought is taken up by Sara Ahmed, who writes that "disgust at 'that which is below' functions to maintain the power relations between above and below, *through which 'aboveness' and 'belowness' become properties of particular bodies, objects and spaces*" (*Cultural Politics* 89). Disgust thus establishes hierarchical orders that separate and alienate by deeming its object intolerable. Therefore, disgust and social abjection can be a powerful political tool, that is "revealing less about the disgusted individual, or the thing deemed disgusting, than about the culture in which disgust is experienced and performed" (Tyler, *Revolting Subjects* 23). Correspondingly, for Ahmed, an object becomes a disgusting object not by its nature, but by contact with other objects and thus by its history (*Cultural Politics* 87).

80 Similarly, for Colin McGinn, disgust is closely linked to avoidance and can be seen as an aesthetic emotion that is focusing on the sudden appearance of an object. Drawing on Kant, McGinn elucidates that "it is possible to be disgusted by an object in whose existence one does *not* believe. That is to say you could believe yourself to be merely hallucinating a disgusting object and still be disgusted by it" (8).

Similar to pain, disgust is a reminder of the porous body and threatens to annihilate the boundary between self and outside world. The border crossing nature of disgust and the resulting proximity is felt as an assault or, in other words, one is "*affected by what one has rejected*" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 86; see also Menninghaus 1). The disgusting object thus threatens to transfer its 'badness' or "noxiousness" (S. Miller 13) to the self; one wants to distance oneself from the disgusting object by all means. Therefore, disgust can be linked to the "anxiety lest some contact leave [the subject] contaminated or diminished" (14). For Mary Douglas, it follows that disgust is not only related to the crossing of various boundaries but also stands for chaos, which is brought back to order through acts of cleaning.[81] Thus, after the approach of a disgust eliciting object and the physical reaction of the subject towards it, a cleaning ritual, in which the disgusting object is removed, is the third stage in encountering disgust (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 55–56), which explains why the reaction towards it is not a flight, like in anxiety, but a removal. These purifying rituals then link disgust to fear, as William Ian Miller outlines:

> Intense disgust invites fear to attend, for contamination is a frightful thing. Fear without disgust sends us fleeing into safety and to a sense of relief, but disgust puts us to the burden of cleansing and purifying, a much more intensive and problematic labor than mere flight, one that takes more time and one at which we fear we may not have quite succeeded. (26)

Therefore, disgust is not only connected to fear and anxiety in that the subject is afraid of a contamination, but it is also the potential inability to clean itself from this contamination that may cause fear and anxiety.

In a phenomenological investigation of anxiety it is, next to disgust, also important to delineate the abject. Abjection describes the rejection of someone or something "inferior, unworthy, or repugnant" (OED, "Abject"). According to Rina Arya, abjection consists of "two modalities: the action of expulsion (to abject)

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81 For Douglas, who links the cultural notion of pollution to disgust, "[t]he body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (115). In this way, she connects the physical with the social and cultural realm. Furthermore, she distinguishes different kinds of border crossings that lead to social pollution, two of which are important for an understanding of the connection between anxiety and disgust: firstly, she describes "danger pressing on external boundaries" and, secondly, "danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system" (122). Disgusting objects that are threatening the border of the self from the outside (e.g. corpses) and disgusting objects that come from inside the body (e.g. vomit) are crucial for the understanding of both disgust and abjection, especially in connection with fear and anxiety, as the next paragraphs will show.

and the condition of being abject" ("Abjection Interrogated" 52).[82] Julia Kristeva theorised this action of expulsion during instances of abjection in more detail. For her, the focus does not lie on the source of the abject, but on the border between subject and abject eliciting object that is made into an object itself (*Powers of Horror* 4).[83] The abject then "has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*" (1). It threatens one's place in the world and "problematizes the boundary" between self and other (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 54). This becomes clearer when looking at Sara Ahmed's account of disgust, which draws on Kristeva's notion of transforming a border into a disgusting object: "The object that makes us 'sick to the stomach' is a substitute for the border itself, an act of substitution that protects the subject from all that is 'not it.' Abjection is bound up with the insecurity of the not; it seeks to secure 'the not' through the response of being disgusted" (*Cultural Politics* 86). For Ahmed, then, disgust is ambivalent: we are disgusted by an object and thus create a disgusting object that separates us from the source of the disgust and at the same time are disgusted by the newly created disgusting object per se – for example, when in close proximity to a rotting carcass (a disgusting object), we try to distance ourselves by vomiting and are then disgusted by the vomit itself. "Border objects are hence disgusting, while disgust engenders border objects" (87).[84] These disgusting border objects

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82 The abject works in two directions: it draws us in and at the same time expels us, or, in Arya's words: "The experience of abjection both endangers and protects the individual: endangers in that it threatens the boundaries of the self and also reminds us of our animal origins, and protects us because we are able to expel the abject through various means" ("Abjection Interrogated" 52). However, this process no longer works if the abject object is radioactive material that, once it hit the body, can never be expelled (see my analysis of *The Children* in chapter 5.2).

83 The act of expulsion has been theorised by Julia Kristeva as a psychological process in which a child rejects its mother in order to establish a border between self and mother and later form its own subjectivity. For this reason, abjection "occurs before the subject's positioning in language, anterior to the emergence of the 'I'" (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 50). This is not a phase in the development of the infant, but "a perpetual process" (18) that becomes an integral part of our ontology. Every later instance of the abject always returns to this primal moment of maternal abjection: "The abject is the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already been lost" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 15). This is why for Kristeva the abject is "neither subject nor object" (1). Kristeva's notion of the abject in combination with the maternal is, however, criticised by Tyler as reproducing rather than challenging the perception of the female body as disgusting ("Abjection").

84 Douglas links the disgust associated with bodily boundaries to vulnerability and the body's brittleness: "[w]e should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair, clippings and sweat" (121). As all of these bodily parings and liquids are

then inhibit a verbal expression of disgust. While disgust is often accompanied by verbal expressions like 'eww' or 'yuck,' they resist a clear communication since these expressions neither explain what is disgusting nor why this is the case. The same is the case for border objects that are established as a response to abjection, for instance bodily fluids like vomit. This resembles the inexpressibility of anxiety or pain through metaphors, as the disgusting border objects likewise do not represent the original sensation of disgust in its entirety. Nevertheless, these border objects can be visually represented and thus abjection possesses a form of visualisation that is lacking in fear and anxiety.

Similar to disgust, abjection "renders problematic any assumption of the stability of boundaries separating objects and subjects" (Chanter 3). It is the proximity that threatens the subject after all. The object that is approaching during phases of the abject is then often connected to the annihilation of the self and at the same time defends the self. For Kristeva, this object is "[n]ot me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognise as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (*Powers of Horror* 2). Abjection does not have an object per se, and yet its nothingness challenges my place in the world and threatens to annihilate me.[85] It is this threatening of the self that connects anxiety, disgust and abjection: "Everything seems at risk in the experience of disgust. It is a state of alarm and emergency, an acute crisis of self-preservation in the face of an unassimilable otherness, a convulsive struggle, in which what is in question is, quite literally, whether 'to be or not to be'" (Menninghaus 1). Therefore, the connection between abjection, disgust and fear becomes most apparent in the face of death – wich represents the ultimate annihilation and nothingness of being – for instance through abject corpses. Sigmund Freud already asserts that when encountering corpses, "[m]ost likely our fear still implies the old belief that the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor and seeks to carry him off to share his new life with him" ("Uncanny" 365). In order to challenge this, disgust and, I might add, also abjection, "can be understood as a defense against a universal fear of

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relatively easy to visualise, they play an important part in the visualisation of both disgust/abjection and fear/anxiety on stage and page.

85 This ties in with what Sarah Ablett argues, in that disgust can be evoked by several occasions that threaten the self, for instance by reminders of our animal origins (82), violations of the body's integrity like dismemberment, deformation or injury (110) as well as pollution that "become[s] manifest in many forms ranging from dirt, filth, and waste products to diseases and non-observance of cultural and social conventions" (111) and is thus connected to a mental and moral pollution and degradation.

death" (Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 642).[86] Therefore, paradoxically, while abjection, on the one hand, threatens to annihilate the subject, it is also "abject and abjection [that] are my safeguards" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 2).

The connection of the abject and the fear of death is then but one connection between both aversive emotions. Perhaps the most prominent phenomenological investigation into the connection of disgust and fear or anxiety has been undertaken by Kolnai, for whom both fear and disgust are connected to various albeit different avoidance strategies. For Kolnai, fear and anxiety – terms he uses interchangeably (36) – are interconnected to disgust in that "[f]ear is hardly a more immediate reaction than disgust; it is however more independent since every feeling of disgust, without necessarily including fear, yet alludes to it somehow. Indeed, it is sometimes – falsely, but not without foundation – taken as a variant of fear" (31–32). For Kolnai, both fear and disgust are defence mechanisms – they react to an outside object by mobilising bodily reactions and are thus directed towards the self and the outside world simultaneously. However, the focus of this direction differs in both. In disgust the intention of the subject is also directed outwards, towards an object,[87] while fear is directed towards the self (39; see also Vendrell Ferran 147–48). The crucial difference between fear and disgust is then that "[b]oth fear and disgust have external objects as their focal point, but only disgust rests with, remains focused on, the external objects and on their nature: fear moves on to intend rather an existential change in the subject person under their causal influence" (Kolnai 44). Thus, fear and anxiety lead to behaviours of flight to save the self, while in disgust this turning away from the source of disgust is accompanied by an analysis of the disgusting object.[88] This is also observed by Kristeva,

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86 Sara Heinämaa disagrees with this statement. For her, "disgust is not about fear of death or about abhorrence of corpses; nor should it be assimilated with anxiety about human mortality or vulnerability. It is a more complex aversion that concerns disproportional intertwinements of life and death (385) – intertwinements that, I would argue, are however still closely connected to states of fear and anxiety.

87 While the subject that feels disgusted by a particular object is directing its attention towards the disgust-eliciting object (as opposed to the subject in fear that directs its attention towards the self), this focus on the object differs from other feelings like hate. The hateful subject wants to destroy the hateful object and thus the focus is directly addressed towards the object. Disgust, however, is oscillating between the disgusting object and the self and thus, instead of destroying the object, the subject wants to remove the disgusting object and clean itself from it (Kolnai 42). Furthermore, the subject is also fascinated by the disgusting object and thus does not want to destroy it in the first place (39; see also Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 9).

88 Kolnai's differentiation of fear and anxiety challenges Kierkegaard's notion of anxiety. Kierkegaard speaks of "a pleasing anxiety, a pleasing anxiousness" (42) that "is *the desire for what one fears*" (76) and so grants anxiety to some extent positive qualities and a cognitive role. Such a partly positive evaluation is missing from Kolnai's understanding of anxiety.

who describes the abject as "a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up" (*Powers of Horror* 9). She continues that "one thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones" (9). Therefore, the abject is to be avoided and at the same time the subject is fascinated by it.

Another similarity not just with fear but also with pain is how disgust changes the way space is perceived. While in fear a room is scanned for escape routes and consequently leads to reactions of flight and avoidance, in disgust the focus and gaze lie on the disturbing object(s) (Heinämaa 380–81). What is more, the sensation that fear and anxiety can travel from one object to another and thus lead to a conglomerate of fearful objects can also be observed in disgust, as "both emotions easily transfer from one object to another. Having been attacked by a bull, a person may dread all cattle; and a person disgusted by spiders may also be alarmed by other arthropods" (380).[89] Thus, the phenomenology of disgust and abjection resemble each other and are closely connected to fear and anxiety, as all four involve avoidance behaviours. It is due to their structural analysis that fear and anxiety can also be portrayed through pain and disgust/abjection – sensations that can easily be physically visualised – in contemporary drama and performance.

It should then have become clear that the phenomenological structure of fear/anxiety is strikingly similar to that of pain and disgust/abjection. As fear is described by Ahmed as an "anticipated pain in the future" (*Cultural Politics* 65), pain naturally plays an important role for anxiety as an accumulation of fearful objects. This link is further strengthened as both share a complex temporality, where anxiety can follow pain and pain can follow anxiety, as well as bodily reactions that either breach the boundary of body and/or mind or lead to reactions of withdrawal. What is more, both pain and anxiety cannot adequately be described by language or metaphors alone, although, through the depiction of a wound as cause of physical pain, pain has a more strongly visual component that is often lacking in fear and anxiety. Similarly, in disgust, the clear communication of the inner sentiments is missing and replaced by shrieks or by visual signs like vomit, which can be vividly staged. Fear/anxiety and disgust/abjection are then,

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89 As Kolnai argues, the occupation with an object leads to a cognitive resonance in disgust that is missing in the immediate flight reaction fear induces (39). However, with the temporal aspect of anticipation and the distinction between fear and anxiety established in the previous chapter, I would disagree with Kolnai and grant a cognitive role to anxiety especially. If "the detachment from a given object allows anxiety to accumulate through gathering more and more objects, until it [anxiety] overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (*Cultural Politics* 66), as Ahmed argues, this requires a cognitive activity in the first place.

as Kolnai outlines, aversive emotions that cross various (physical and mental) borders and that trigger different kinds of avoidance behaviour.

2.3 Time in Anxiety

What is central to the way in which such aversive emotions like fear, anxiety, pain and disgust are perceived is their temporal dimension. As the previous part already hints at the crossing of borders, the following analysis of time shows the crossing of borders within the temporal boundaries that are not least represented in drama and performance. The temporality of anxiety stands out because it crosses the boundaries between past, present and future and thus goes beyond the typical phenomenological understanding of time.[90] As far as the phenomenological conception of time is concerned, for Husserl time is a lived experience and the perception of it is a combination of the present now with the past and the future. In this account, consciousness is situated in the living present, which is connected to the primal impression, retention and protention. While we perceive an object in this moment, this temporal perception also contains an indefinite past and an open future (Husserl, *Crisis* 160). Husserl also refers to those temporal spheres as retention – the awareness of elapsed sensations – and protention – the expectation of what's to come (*Zeitbewusstsein* 385; *Time-Consciousness* 58). Temporality is thus perceived as a complex continuous accumulation of past, present and future experiences where the past slowly fades (*Zeitbewusstsein* 44).[91] All three dimensions of time can therefore be found in the present now. Husserl's notion of temporality resists the idea "of time as a sequence of present moments" (West-Pavlov 43). Rather, for him, temporality is closely connected to conscious-

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90 While I use the terms 'time' and 'temporality' interchangeably in this book, there are philosophers who differentiate between the two. For Heidegger, for instance, time is connected to the basic structure of Dasein's being. For him, *"time* is that from which Dasein tacitly understands and interprets something like being at all. Time must be brought to light and genuinely grasped as the horizon of every understanding and interpretation of being. For this to become clear we need an *original explication of time as the horizon of the understanding of being, in terms of temporality as the being of Dasein which understands being,"* which leads to a new understanding of time that needs to "be distinguished from the common understanding of it" (*Being and Time* 17).
91 Husserl differentiates between the past and memory, because the past is situated in the present whereas memory is situated in the past. Similarly, hopes are not part of protention, as they are situated in the future and not in the present (Dostal 126). The subject in anxiety, I would argue, is physically situated in the present and feeling all the bodily sensations of fear and anxiety in the present. Nonetheless, it is mentally situated in the future and thus represents a temporal exception, as the following analysis will show.

ness, where "after the melody has sounded, we no longer perceive it as present although we still have it in consciousness. It is no longer a present melody but one just past" (Husserl, *Time-Consciousness* 58). This past memory can then influence the future, which is built on these past sensations, where "[b]ased on our past experience and knowledge, we create a picture of our present reality and anticipate what it is we will experience ahead" (Tiehen 128), a notion that, as will be shown, is closely connected to the anticipation of threat during anxiety.[92] Husserl's idea of time as a connection of past, present and future is expanded by Henri Bergson, who sees time's inherent complexity as the reason for its inexpressibility in language.[93] For him, time emerges as a complex concept that is, similar to anxiety, verbally inexpressible, because it consists of a "variety of qualities, continuity of progress, and unity of direction" (15) that cannot be conceptualised by images or language alike.[94] Time can instead be understood as a bodily emotion.[95] Thus, in a phenomenological understanding of temporality, it can be perceived as connect-

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[92] The inexorable drive towards the future is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's description of the Angelus Novus, a picture by painter Paul Klee that describes an angel that is looking at the destruction of the past but is unavoidably drawn towards the future (697–98).

[93] For Bergson, time is experienced as both a multiplicity and a unity. "There is a succession of states, each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it. They can, properly speaking, only be said to form multiple states when I have already passed them and turn back to observe their track. Whilst I was experiencing them they were so solidly organized, so profoundly animated with a common life, that could not have said where any one of them finished or where another commenced. In reality no one of them begins or ends, but all extend into each other" (11). While temporal duration unfolds as a multiplicity of states that are only retrospectively unified, it is also a unity that prolongs its elements in a "moving, changing, colored, living unity" (23) – a heterogeneous homogeneity then.

[94] Because time cannot be expressed verbally, it is often described as "relative to other concepts such as motion, space, and events" (Lakoff and Johnson 137). Thus, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson establish that time needs to be conceptualised through metaphors and metonymy as a form of "motion[s] in space" (139) that can be observed and compared.

[95] For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, time is likewise connected to the body, albeit in a different way than anticipated by Bergson. For Merleau-Ponty, the body "*inhabits* space and time" (139). A body in space does not experience time as "adjacent points" or "a limitless number of relations synthesized by my consciousness" (140) but rather the body belongs to space and time; "my body combines with them and includes them" (140). Therefore, time is not cognitive but must be experienced in the body. This body is then situated in the present, where it stands in relation to the "succession of previous positions" and "those which will occur throughout the movement" (140), which resembles Husserl's notion of temporality as retention and protention. At the same time, anxiety does combine both a physical and mental situatedness in time, where in the exact moment of anxiety time seems to stand still, which is nonetheless rooted in the mental overload of too many fearful objects that might happen in the future and that induce the physical symptoms of anxiety in the first place.

ing past, present and future, as challenging linguistic expression and as a bodily sensation – which all represent spheres that are altered by and through anxiety.

Therefore, if time can be perceived as connecting past, present and future and is, generally, a concept that is at once inexpressible and corporeal, how is time perceived during anxiety? To understand anxiety's temporality, it is important to differentiate between the exact moment of anxiety and the time that led to this moment. In the exact moment of anxiety, where too many fearful objects 'happen' at the same time, the subject can neither focus on any single one of these objects nor on their temporality. As the following analysis will show, fear and anxiety are directed towards a negative anticipation of the future, while the subject is simultaneously always situated in the present. However, during stages of anxiety this discrepancy between the present and the future is diminished. This manifests itself in the subject that, despite the temporal distance from the pain that is anticipated, can feel the negative side-effects of anxiety, like a rise in blood pressure or quickened breathing (Bourke 7) in the present – reactions that ignore the distance between future threat and present environment. This condition may, on the one hand, resemble a panic attack and, on the other hand, is reminiscent of what Kristeva has termed "the zero time of silence – empty, blank from trauma or pleasure or dizziness" ("Psychoanalysis" 182). While Kristeva is primarily interested in the relationship between patient and analyst and tries to find ways to express the often repressed information from the "zero time of silence," what is more important for the analysis of anxiety's temporality in the context of theatre is the temporality of fear and anxiety *before* it overwhelms the subject.

Anxiety in many ways dissolves temporality's linearity and tinkers with the clear distinction of past, present and future. This unique perception of time during anxiety is, for instance, observed by Ernst Bloch, who distinguishes between "filled emotions" (like envy, greed) that have their "drive-object" within reach and "expectant emotions" (like fear and anxiety),

> whose drive-intention is long-term, whose drive-object does not yet lie ready, not just in respective individual attainability, but also in the already available world, and therefore still occurs in the doubt about exit or entrance. Thus the *expectant emotions* are distinguished, both in their unwish and in their wish, from the filled emotions by the *incomparably greater anticipatory character* in their intention, their substance, and their object. (74)

Anxiety and fear are connected to an open, implied future and thus "open out entirely into this horizon" (74) of time and go "beyond the available given world" (75). Bloch comes to the conclusion that every negative expectant emotion – like fear and anxiety – has an underlying urge or wish that is directed towards the outside world: "for where there was no urge, there would be no unwish, which is only the reversed side of a wish" (75).

What stands out in Bloch's description of the temporality of negative expectant emotions like anxiety and what has been stressed by other theorists with regard to anxiety as well, is its anticipatory nature (Barlow 64).[96] This means that in anxiety the common phenomenology of time – where, according to Husserl, retention, impression and protention merge into one another – is subverted, because temporal perception is entirely geared towards an uncertain future. This is borne out by Sianne Ngai's suggestion that anxiety is "averted, deferred for analysis to a future which never arrives" (209).[97] In other words, when looking at fear and anxiety, their unpleasantness combines present and future experiences. While we feel fear and all its side effects like paralysis or palpitations in the present, the object we fear is, in Ahmed's words, "an anticipated pain in the *future*" (*Cultural Politics* 65; emphasis added). Therefore, fear and anxiety as a conglomerate of (fearful) objects tinker with temporality's linearity as the source of anxiety is not the past but the future; the subject in anxiety is thus mentally not situated in the present but in an uncertain future. Anxiety's anticipated future then is predicated on past events whose painful recurrence it projects, even though it is impossible to predict the exact nature of future events. The painful future anxiety anticipates will hence never happen, at least not quite in the anticipated way – and thus the subject cannot overcome anxiety by waiting for it to happen. Ahmed continues that even when the object we fear is passing by this might not contain our fear but enhance it. Since fear manifests itself through "an anticipated pain in the future," once the object we fear is gone, we can never know if the anticipated pain is real or not and thus never overcome fear. Therefore, the object in fear is "*not quite present*" (*Cultural Politics* 65).

Bernhard Waldenfels further discusses the connection of fear, anxiety and time. For him, anxiety combines present and future. The object that acts upon the subject emerges too soon for the unprepared subject to react. Thus, the subject does not have an answer (or protective mechanism) for an event that has suddenly come upon it. The subject feels anxiety in the present moment because something

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96 David Barlow goes so far as to refer to anxiety as "anxious apprehension" (64) in order to highlight its focus on a possible *future* threat and to distinguish it from panic and fear.

97 In contrast to concepts of fear and anxiety that are directed towards the future, for Heidegger, fear and anxiety take place in the past. If a mood reveals to the subject its thrownness into the world, it follows that the subjects must have been thrown into the world first. If fear is connected to a threat from within the subject's world and the subject expects the threat to approach, the subject must "focus upon what it is that threatens. But reaching-out into the future is itself possible only because I am grounded in my past" (Coe 112). At the same time, if anxiety discloses the subject's own thrownness in the world, from which the subject cannot flee, "[p]rimordial Angst, therefore, must be grounded in the temporal ecstasy of 'having been' for any of this to be possible" (112–13).

is happening which has come too early since the subject is not prepared for it and thus passes the subject by while it thinks about an answer that comes too late. While being in the present, the subject is at the same time thrown into the past (a past that came to suddenly since the subject was not able to prepare for it) and into the future (something is approaching too fast, coming towards us from the future) (Waldenfels 24).[98] In anxiety, paradoxically both the past and the future are catching up with us, and, compounding the paradox, anxiety's past is also a future projection in the sense of the future anterior – it will always already have been too late to prepare for the fearful object's arrival.[99] Thus, the subject is afraid that an unforeseen future that changes its way of life may happen too early and become the past without the subject having an adequate solution for it (to prevent it). This notion of a future that is unforeseeable is then also described by Jacques Derrida who differentiates between the future and *l'avenir*:

> In general, I try and distinguish between what one calls the future and "l'avenir" [the 'to come']. The future is that which – tomorrow, later, next century – will be. There's a future that is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, l'avenir (to come), which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival. So if there is a real future beyond this other known future, it's l'avenir in that it's the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival. (qtd. in Dick and Ziering Kofman 53)

Part of anxiety's nature is then this sense of "l'avenir" that is unpredictable and might strike at any moment. Therefore, anxiety can be understood, in Ahmed's

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98 German original: "Wenn also das, was uns widerfährt, zu früh kommt, so kommt umgekehrt unsere Antwort *zu spät*, gemessen an dem, was uns in Anspruch nimmt. Die zweifache Ungleichzeitigkeit von originärer Vorgängigkeit des Pathischen und originärer Nachträglichkeit des Responsiven bezeichne ich als Zeitverschiebung oder mit einem alten griechischen Ausdruck als *Diastase*. Die Erfahrung tritt buchstäblich auseinander, sie zerdehnt sich. Diese eigentümliche Zeitverschiebung läßt sich nicht begreifen als Abfolge von Zeitpunkten auf einer Leitlinie und als lineare Kausalität, als käme erst das Widerfahrnis und folgte dann die Antwort. Vielmehr geht die Erfahrung *sich selbst voraus*; als Antwortende sind wir von Anfang an mit im Spiel, nur eben nicht als Urheber. [...] Nur eine Erfahrung, in der im Grunde alles beim Alten bleibt, bliebe von solchen Zeitverschiebungen verschont" (Waldenfels 24).

99 While fear and anxiety are related to both future and the future's past, abjection is mostly directed towards the future, while pain is rather directed towards the past. The initial reaction to abjection, is anticipation. In abjection, as Kristeva writes, "[a]pprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects" (*Powers of Horror* 1). Abjection is thus directed towards a future but, before that future takes place, it is rejected and the subject returns to the present. In contrast, pain can be strengthened by past sensations and thus the memory of pain influences present and future's pain (Kirmayer 384).

sense, as an "anticipated pain in the future" (*Cultural Politics* 65) that links present and future, while it is also, as Waldenfels writes, an event that comes too soon and for which we are not prepared – combining present, future, future anterior and l'avenir.

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As the phenomenological investigation of anxiety has shown, anxiety is a multi-dimensional sensation. While in fear, the object cannot be contained and passes the subject by, in anxiety, several of these fearful objects are accumulated to overwhelm the subject. Therefore, the lack of an object in anxiety does originate in the overabundance of fearful objects, none of which can be singled out and focused on. This accumulation of objects is reminiscent of Husserl's understanding of moods, where all objects in the fore- and background are coloured in a specific emotion, even if the object that originally caused the mood is no longer present. At the same time, the overabundance of objects and, in general, the sensation of an anxious mood takes place preverbally and thus, although an anxious state can be referred to through linguistic periphrases like metaphors, anxiety cannot be expressed through language alone.

The inability to express anxiety through language alone can be circumvented by looking at fear and anxiety's "kinships with other emotions" (W. Miller 24). Often, one emotion is hardly felt in isolation, "unaccompanied by others" (25) – which once again highlights the border crossing nature of sensations like fear and anxiety – "[i]n routine speech we [therefore] use contempt, loathing, hatred, horror, even fear to express sentiments that we also could and do express by images of revulsions or disgust" (25). This means that, conversely, expressions of fear or anxiety may be replaced with images of disgust and pain. The phenomenological structure of fear/anxiety is strikingly similar to that of pain and disgust/abjection. Firstly, they have structural similarities. Fear, disgust, pain and anxiety have a similar underlying structure that threatens the boundary of the self and elicits a form of moving away from the object(s) that cause the aversive emotions. Fear/anxiety and disgust/abjection are then, as Kolnai outlines, aversive emotions that cross various (physical and mental) borders and that trigger different kinds of avoidance behaviour. Secondly, anxiety is very private, an emotion that is directed towards the self, especially in its existentialist form. Similar mechanisms are at play in pain, as our first reaction to pain is to withdraw from its source. Additionally, the inexpressibility of pain transforms it into a private emotion that, at first, cannot adequately be directed towards an object from the outside world. The same is the case for disgust, which also tries to increase the distance between the self and the disgusting and rejected object, a private emotion that is not uttered by clear speech, but by shrieks or bodily reactions like vomiting. Nonetheless, the close

proximity of anxiety, pain and disgust/abjection means that these other sensations may 'affectively displace' anxiety in representation, as both pain and disgust may be more readily expressible on the stage than anxiety.

Thirdly, following Ahmed, anxiety's temporality reveals that anxiety, although it is experienced in the present, is always related to the anticipation of a painful future. This abolition of linear temporality is then further discussed by Waldenfels, who argues that it is not merely a negative event in the future that is the reason for anxiety, but rather the possibility that this negative event might strike at any moment and pass the subject by, who is rendered defenceless against it. In the end, anxiety's accumulating nature then also describes the various different ways that enable the plays from the theatre of anxiety to display anxiety without primarily using language, for instance through the mirroring of anxiety's accumulating nature through form and structure, through other sensations and emotions like pain and disgust and abjection and through the genre of near-future dystopian writing – all of which will be shown in the next chapter.

3 The Aesthetics of the Theatre of Anxiety

The various ways in which we experience anxiety – and in particular the difficulty of putting anxiety into words – certainly influence the way anxiety is represented on stage. As both a private and social emotion, anxiety can be a link between political and individual concerns or serve as a basis for the investigation of broader philosophical perspectives in the theatre. Of course, for this reason the theatre's engagement with anxiety is not entirely new. In the late 1950s, for instance, Eugène Ionesco observed:

> To discover the fundamental problem common to all mankind, I must ask myself what *my* fundamental problem is, what *my* most ineradicable fear is. I am certain then to find the problems and fears of literally everyone. That is the true road into my own darkness, our darkness, which I try to bring to the light of day. (211–12)

While Ionesco's statement, which is part of his defence of anti-realist theatre, is not explicitly about anxiety, but about "ineradicable fear," it highlights some of the problems any aesthetic approximation of anxiety faces. Ionesco's approach to shared or common fears is to begin with his own, subjective fear and to then extrapolate from there to attain universality. In the same way, anxiety is a subjective experience, but a stage representation of anxiety inevitably broadens the experience and makes it, if not necessarily universal (although the political dimension of many of the plays of the theatre of anxiety would suggest so), then at least accessible to a large group of people, the audience. This broadening of scope is closely connected to a second key feature of the aesthetics of anxiety: when Ionesco writes about 'bringing darkness to the light of day,' this is a paradoxical (and deeply ambiguous – is the darkness enlightened or is the light of day darkened?) statement. This paradox is a consequence of the attempt to express a subjective emotion and so to universalise it. Here, as when it comes to anxiety, representation itself is bound to fail at some level. Grappling with the inexpressibility of anxiety, which resists its expression in words, is a central element of the way anxiety is aestheticised for the stage.

It seems clear that the phenomenology of anxiety, as discussed in the previous chapter, must impact the way anxiety can be represented, and hence on the aesthetics of anxiety in drama. Given that anxiety is a subjective experience that cannot be adequately expressed, theatrical performance and dramatic text alike must find strategies to externalise this emotion and so to represent the unrepresentable. As such aesthetic strategies are inevitably informed by anxiety's phenomenology, the crossing of boundaries in one way or another features prominently in all of them. In particular, the theatrical aesthetics of anxiety are frequently linked to

anxiety's temporality, its status as a conglomerate of multiple fearful objects and its connection to pain and disgust. These aspects correspond with different aesthetic techniques that can be traced in the theatre of anxiety: the deferred temporality of anxiety is most prominently mirrored in the ubiquitous genre of near-future dystopia; the conglomeration of fearful objects may be reflected by a 'liquid' style of writing that allows for textual conglomerates in form and structure and boundaries to be crossed; and pain and disgust themselves are more readily accessible or representable sensations that take up a 'placeholder' function in that they are staged in lieu of anxiety. The aestheticisation of fear and anxiety in contemporary drama and performance has at its core the portrayal of the overwhelming sense of vulnerability and anguish towards the current social, ecological, technological and pandemic situation. The depiction of fear and anxiety further thematises and aestheticises this general mood towards the world we live in.

Anxious Time(s): Near-Future Dystopian Writing
As far as the temporal dimension of a phenomenological understanding of anxiety is concerned, where past, present, future and future anterior coincide (see chapter 2.3), there is a tendency in the theatre of anxiety to implement in its dramatic structure this demolition of time's linearity. Writing about the temporality of theatre performances, David Wiles argues that the reception of plays depends on moods created by the preceding action and anticipation on what might follow, meaning that an audience "cannot inhabit a 'now' without thinking both backwards in time and forwards in time" (8). This suggests that Husserl's argument on the perception of time holds true for theatrical temporality as well. The theatre of anxiety can then tamper with time's linearity. It does so frequently by shifting its temporal setting into the (near) future where dystopian scenarios then play out (Reid, "Near-Future"). In this (near-future) dystopian writing, "even those plays that directly deal with the future unavoidably refer to the present as well and often to the past, too" (Klaić 2). After all, for members of the audience of a play set in the future, the play's past may be their present or may even be yet to happen, while their present becomes destabilised by the vision of a dystopian future put before them that presumably takes its origin (and has its causal past) in their very own present. What Simon Critchley observes concerning tragedy is then likewise true for near-future plays: "time is out of joint and the linear conception of time as a teleological flow from the past to the future is thrown into reverse. The past is not past, the future folds back upon itself and the present is shot through with fluxions of past and future that destabilize it" (32). In the near-future dystopian settings so often to be found in recent British plays, temporal linearity is thus suspended and the entire perception of time is destabilised.

In this way, the implicit temporality of dystopian and (post-)apocalyptic plays mirrors the temporal structure of anxiety, where present, future and future anterior are linked by a sense of frightful anticipation. This explains why so many of the plays discussed as theatre of anxiety in the following are near-future dystopias (see chapters 4 – 7). The fact that they are *near*-future dystopian writing strengthens the idea of fear as *anticipated* pain in the future, something that can strike any minute and catch the subject off-guard as opposed to something that might happen in a future far away. In general, the transference of the plot into the future indirectly comments on the supposed outcome of the current state of the world and adds a layer of anticipation and fear for the future, as Dragan Klaić describes:

> Drama probes the future of politics and at the same time enters the contemporary political debate about the desirable quality of the future and the political choices available that will determine its shape. A fairly simple sort of such dystopian construct is achieved by directly extrapolating the existing trends of a particular society into the *near future.* (Klaić 95; emphasis added)

These near-future dystopias attain particular emotive impact because the future they present by and large comes very close to the real-world present that audiences are familiar with. In the plays that I describe as theatre of anxiety it is sometimes a single event that led to the world turning dystopian, which means that the dystopian world is not necessarily that different, or at least just one step away, from the present reality. While, perhaps with the exception of *X, Pastoral* and *Escaped Alone*, all plays that will be analysed in the following chapters can be categorised as near-future dystopian plays, some other notable plays that fit into this category are Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*, Rory Mullarkey's *Pity*, Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* or Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (for a more comprehensive list see Reid, "Near-Future"). The fact that society in the plays was not prepared for the event that happened visualises – on the level of the text and on stage – that our world can crumble at any minute and leave us unprepared and defenceless: what Klaić observed thirty years ago is thus still true today: "dystopia appears as a consequence of misdirected or misapplied knowledge, as an unforeseen outcome of tinkering with the very foundations of life or with essential functions of human organisms" (75). The visualisation of these scenarios is at best eye-opening and the start of something new, or at worst the beginning of an infinite spiral of anxiety.

What is more, dystopian writing is also connected to a sense of defamiliarization: "by focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural or inevitable" (Booker 3 – 4). In the theatre of anxiety, this defamiliarization is accomplished on

an emotional level, by staging anxiety, pain and disgust in close proximity and thus crossing and liquidising the borders of what is known and comfortable. Overall, it is the feeling of excess, of too much too soon that can strike at any moment that may challenge known perceptions of the surrounding world.

Textual Conglomerates: Crossing Boundaries of Form and Structure

While anxiety's temporality can be reflected in the genre of a play (near-future dystopia) and through the overall rejection of linear temporality, the representation of anxiety in body and space is much more complicated. A prime reason is that bodily signs of anxiety are mostly 'invisible' organic reactions, such as a rapid heartbeat or higher blood pressure (Bourke 7), and hence are difficult, if not impossible, to represent on stage. Furthermore, one inevitable consequence of the conglomerate of (fearful) objects that is anxiety is that this piling up takes place in the mind only and is therefore not visually accessible. Nor can the lack of focus points, and thus the nothingness that is created through anxiety, easily be expressed verbally. This is a challenge to the representation of anxiety on stage and page as neither the bodily symptoms nor the mental processes can easily be visualised in theatre.

The dramatic representation of anxiety must then find ways to circumvent both the inexpressibility of anxiety through language and its non-visibility. This can be done, firstly, by reflecting on the scattered and excessive nature of anxiety through the destruction of clear communication and speech in the plays. In such cases, language is scattered and used to express a feeling instead of a clear message. Secondly, another aesthetic means to visualise anxiety's accumulating nature is the breaching of boundaries within the textual frame, which may lead to the description of anxiety's liquidity through a likewise overflowing style of writing and through the crossing of semantic and grammatical borders in unusual and often non-verbal forms of communication in the play.

While fear and anxiety can be written into the speech and dialogue of a dramatic text in various ways,[100] there is a tendency in the theatre of anxiety towards a 'liquid' style of writing: often dialogues overlap and crash into each other and

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[100] Recent plays, such as Alistair McDowall's *Pomona* (2014), that employ postdramatic aesthetics and that display several aspects of the theatre of anxiety, such as the overabundance of fearful objects and free-floating anxiety or the destruction of form and speech, prove that the central ideas of the theatre of anxiety can be realised in very different styles of writing. However, as this is an analysis of the current British theatre landscape and since on the British stage postdramatic representations of drama are relatively scarce, postdramatic plays are not central to my analysis.

cross the border of what can be understood and reflected on. Plays confront readers and audiences with a combination of stichomythic exchanges and breathless monologues that do not seem to follow any punctuation and may culminate in the apparent destruction of language altogether. Prominent examples of this type of fluid writing, especially in monologues, can be found in the plays of Caryl Churchill, for instance in Joan's speech at the end of *Far Away* (2000) or in the story "The Child Who Didn't Know Fear" in Churchill's *Love and Information* (2012) and, as will be analysed in more detail in chapter 4.2, in Mrs Jarrett's or Lena's Monologue(s) in *Escaped Alone.* More recently, Alistair McDowall's *The Glow* (2022) contains examples of speech that seems to resist its purpose of communication. At the beginning of the play, McDowall clarifies that speech in {curly brackets} cannot be understood by the audience as a coherent text. This means that in the following example the monologue on the right side of the page is not heard by the audience and can only be understood when reading the play:

She picks the book up and clamps it to her chest, muttering to herself inaudibly.

Sadie *continues to whisper. We only catch occasional words.*	**Sadie** {-and when riding across the land he meets a woman on a shining white horse come away come away she called to him and her beauty was so great he fell in deepest love and climbed onto the back of her horse and they rode across the fields and the hills until they reached the sea and kept riding until they rode across the surface of the water and under the waves to a magical kingdom where all was well where there were no wars and no disease and they were married and lived happily together-}
She hears something and looks off.	
She puts the book down and walks towards the sound, away from the candlelight.	
We listen to her whispering as she walks.	
The sound of wildlife as dull light creeps through a canopy of leaves-	

(McDowall, *The Glow* 30)

Although the text tells a fairy tale-like story, laced with stock-romantic imagery, the fact that it is whispered and not understood by the audience while Sadie simultaneously walks in dull light towards a sound deprives the scene of any rational meaning and invokes the realm of emotion and affect. Sadie's actions and the surrounding darkness are then in contrast to the story in her book. Sadie does not recite or read the story out loud; instead, she mutters it to herself as if she

wants to calm herself. The diminishing of language in this example coincides with a third aspect of theatrical engagement with anxiety, which is the already touched upon anticipation of a negative future. Set in an uncanny atmosphere, the scene leaves the reader and audience in a state of anticipation and alertness, which has the potential for a sense of anxiety to spill over into the auditorium. Thus, speech and dialogue in the theatre of anxiety is characterised by a sense of over-lapping utterances, of anticipation of a painful future and of metaphors and speech that gradually destroy the verbal communication in the play.

When perceived as a conglomeration of fearful objects, anxiety also manifests itself in the style of the written text and in the overall structure of a play.[101] A sense of overabundance and crossed boundaries can, for example, be accomplished by the overlap of different dialogues, by scenes that overlay each other without a break between them and by several dialogues and stage directions happening simultaneously. A prominent example of such fluid writing is Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* (2010), where, as Bartlett notes in the stage directions, "[s]cenes crash into each other impolitely. They overflow, overlap. The production should always seem at risk of descending into chaos but never actually do so" (5). Although the play is structured in five acts, with preceding preludes and an epilogue at the end, the different scenes within the acts "crash into each other" and overlap. The stories of the three female protagonists thus intersect, and their emotions, fears and struggles are intermingled. This is then enhanced as drama is itself a "multimedial form of presentation" (Pfister 6), where lighting, costumes, props, actors, sounds and speech are all perceived at once and acting upon the audience. It is this liquid presentation of scenes and dialogues that makes any attempt at a clear focus impossible and that reflects the rapid and unpredictable progress of the play's action and the overabundance of fearful objects audiences are confronted with.

(Not) Representing Pain and Anxiety

Apart from this liquid style of writing, anxiety may also be approached through the stage presentation of related phenomena, in particular of pain and disgust, which, as has been shown, are closely related to anxiety (see chapter 2.2).[102]

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101 The teaser-trailer of Alistair McDowall's play *The Glow* (2022) at 0:22 minutes provides an example of a visualisation of such a gathering of objects (www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6u6hle0SIo).
102 Another sensation that can likewise be connected to the dramaturgical presentation of fear and anxiety in contemporary drama is terror. Terror becomes especially clear through a chorus or through inhuman voices that emanate from speakers, depicting a sense of structural anxiety that is embodied by an invisible outside agent. In dramatic plot structures this can be mirrored

While the deferral of linear temporality and the suspension of clear communication are both cognitive approximations of a state of anxiety, pain, abjection and disgust are much more visceral sensations. Pain and related fields like violence or suffering take place on several levels in the theatre, where actual physical violence and pain differ from their performative representations on stage and from those in the dramatic text (Rebellato, "Apocalyptic Tone" par. 19). Some plays make use of pain's representability in order to not only express pain and violence in their dramatic texts, but also fear and anxiety. A scene from debbie tucker green's *dirty butterfly* (2003), may serve as an example of how this can work. In this scene, Jo, who is bleeding and obviously in pain, shows up at the café where her friend Amelia works:

> **Amelia:** Y'look shit.
> *Amelia looks to the floor at Jo's reflection.*
> Y'look shit twice.
> *Jo doesn't look.*
> *Amelia watches Jo, literally dripping blood from between*
> *her legs. Jo's dripping on the floor becomes unacceptable.*
> *Amelia exits.*
> *She returns with a wad of paper towels and an opened pack*
> *of sanitary towels.*
> **Amelia:** Catch.
> *She gently throws the sanitary towel pack to Jo, who makes*
> *no effort to catch it. It hits her. She doesn't flinch.*
> Beat.
> *Amelia starts to open up and lay paper towels unapologetically*
> *around Jo's feet where she is dripping and*
> *marking the floor.*
> *Up close she looks at Jo.*
> Satisfied. (tucker green 43–44)

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by the presence of surveillance practices and suspicion amongst the characters. This creates a claustrophobic space for the victims of the terror, who are often not able to leave the dystopian world, as in Thomas Eccleshare's *Foxfinder* (2011). A similar effect is also created in Churchill's *Far Away*, where the characters seem to fight an invisible, totalitarian regime that is, however, never directly mentioned. The overarching feeling of vulnerability, isolation and free-floating fear, where the characters do not know whom to trust and what to expect next, increases over the three acts of the play. A different account of staging terror in contemporary drama can be found by Ariane de Waal. In her study on the interplay of terror and war, which takes place at home and on the front line, it is the figures in the play she describes as fluid and border-crossing, which, ultimately, pushes the boundaries of the (representation of) conflict in the plays she analyses.

While blood and bleeding are a clear sign of pain and the red colour of blood can easily overpower all other (mental) sensations of pain on the stage, the fact that Jo is mirrored in the blood and floor alike shifts the attention away from the object (blood) and towards reflections of/on the subject in pain (Jo). The rejection of the physical pain in favour of mental discomfort is also observed by Lyn Gardner, who writes about the unusual storyline where in the play "characters stand around discussing their relationship rather than dialling 999 for the ambulance that is so clearly and urgently required" (Gardner). Nonetheless, the sensation of pain cannot be shared and Jo's true (and possibly anxious) feelings in that moment, especially since she seems to be in a state of traumatic paralysis and can neither communicate nor act, cannot be expressed through visceral pain alone. The depiction of physical pain can, in this case, help convey negative feelings and give them a surface to project these emotions on.

While some plays use pain on stage to show suffering and feelings like fear and anxiety, other plays go one step further. In this case, theatre can question the possibilities to express pain through analogies or comparisons. As shown in chapter 2.2, pain is often explained through metaphors, and this likewise holds true for many other sensations. Peta Tait in her study of *Forms of Emotion* even goes as far as to claim that "[i]t is metaphors that make emotional feeling meaningful" (82). Such metaphors, however, cannot always do justice to the sensation of pain and often shift the focus away from the subject in pain. Using metaphors to visualise pain leads to the ignorance of pain that is not visible, like mental pain. In other words, when explaining painful experiences through metaphors of pain, the focus lies on the visual part and ignores the subjective and invisible mental part of the pain as the metaphor overshadows the person that is behind it. At the same time, when applied to the theatrical sphere, overly graphic representations of pain can have the opposite effect of what they are intended for and render any real representation of pain impossible. What Dan Rebellato observes for violence in theatre is then likewise true for representations of pain on stage: "[t]he more realistic the representation, the more an audience is likely to ask questions about the way the effect was created, rather than focusing on the violent act depicted" ("Apocalyptic Tone" par. 22). The dramatic text of the plays from the theatre of anxiety, then, does both: on the one hand, it depicts pain through visual metaphors of pain-inducing objects or suffering and on the other hand, these metaphors are, at times, rendered absurd to show that the mental dimension of pain, similar to fear and anxiety, can only be represented by the unrepresentable. Nonetheless, while the representation of physical pain itself leads to new challenges, there are still ways of portraying pain as a bodily sensation – something that is often missing in the bodily symptoms that accompany anxiety – which is why pain

may serve as a substitute sensation for an indirect presentation of anxiety on stage.

Affected by Rejection: Abjection, Disgust and Anxiety

Another, closely related, way to approach anxiety in representation is through disgust or abjection. The relationship between theatre and disgust has a long tradition, not just since the rise of the in-yer-face theatre in the 1990s.[103] It is thus no surprise that plays that centre on anxiety follow this road where the audience is exposed to feelings of repulsion, abjection and disgust. This is even more important for the theatre of anxiety, as anxiety and disgust/abjection work with very similar phenomenological structures (see chapter 2.2). After all, some of these plays resonate with Ahmed's notion of disgust according to which the subject is "*affected by what one has rejected*" (*Cultural Politics* 86), something that is likewise true for fear and anxiety. What is true for the in-yer-face theatre, as Aleks Sierz observes, is then likewise – albeit on a much smaller scale – true for the theatre of anxiety: they both possess "an unusual power to trouble the audience emotionally" and they use "the vocabulary of disgust [which] nearly always involves ideas about what is dirty, what is natural, what is human, what is right and proper" (*In-Yer-Face* 6). Theatre itself often verges on the chaotic, on the opposite of order and stability; it does not respect fixed boundaries and social conventions and thereby is in proximity with disgust and abjection.

Since this notion of theatre as disgusting generally applies to nearly all aspects of theatre, drama and performance also physically stage disgust and thereby break the body boundary and portray fear and anxiety alike. Disgust is "an eminently *aesthetic* emotion" (Kolnai 100), and as such is easy to visualise. Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*, for instance, plays with this visual dimension of disgust and abjection and showcases the aesthetic interplay of fear and disgust. In the third act of the play, Harper talks about crocodiles as creatures that are physically and morally repugnant:

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103 Theatre used to be associated with all sorts of moral deviations from what was socially acceptable lifestyle. As a cultural practice it was – and still is – a site where the norms of society are questioned and challenged and where non-normative lifestyles were considered prevalent. In Early Modern London, the crossing of borders in the theatre was even an actual physical experience theatregoers would make, as they would have to cross the Thames to the south bank, where the 'disreputable' theatre had been banished to (see e.g. Gurr 81–84). The association of theatre with (moral) disgust was one of the reasons that led to the banning of performances in 1642 (P. H. Greenfield 197; see also Greenblatt 36–37). In the seventeenth century, in general, "more and more often the players were paid 'not to play', or more brutally, 'to rid the town of them'" (P. H. Greenfield 197), which shows how influential this connection can be.

> It is always right to be opposed to crocodiles. Their skin, their teeth, the foul smell of their mouth from the dead meat. Crocodiles wait till zebras are crossing the river and bite the weak ones with those jaws and pull them down. Crocodiles invade villages at night and take children out of their beds. A crocodile will carry a dozen heads back to the river, tenderly like it carries its young, and put them in the water where they bob about as trophies till they rot. (Churchill, *Far Away* 155)

Crocodiles are thus described as something dangerous that can threaten and kill – something that is deeply rejected by the characters in the play. The crocodile, amongst other animals, can cause injury and is a reminder of death and decay, and thus crosses body boundaries, inducing pain and fear (of death). In the play, the crocodiles are also seen as a source of pollution and diseases. This state is then intensified until, at the end of the play, the disgusting, fearful, pain-inducing and deadly objects increasingly accumulate:

> The rats are bleeding out of their mouths and ears, which is good, and so were the girls by the side of the road. It was tiring there because everything's been recruited, there were piles of bodies and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves, the smell of smoke was where we were burning the grass that wouldn't serve. (158–59)

In this scene, disgust and fear are connected and inherently different objects, like death and coffee or bleeding rats and girls, are juxtaposed with the effect that innocuous objects are 'charged' with fear – leading to an accumulation of ever more fearful objects. Moreover, these negative emotions are utilised to distract from a totalitarian regime, which highlights the political aspects of the play. Being overwhelmed by the situation and at times confused as to who is on which side, who is friend or enemy, the characters have no time to ponder the failing politics of the totalitarian regime from acts 1 and 2 of Churchill's play. This is also accompanied by a frightful anticipation of the future, which is uttered at the end of the monologue, when Joan steps into a river: "It was very cold but so far that was all. When you've just stepped in you can't tell what's going to happen. The water laps round your ankles in any case" (159). The notion of an overabundance of fearful objects, the breaking of temporal borders and the close connection of anxiety to other sensations like disgust and pain can all be found in *Far Away* and in many other plays that explore anxiety in similar ways. Thus, anxiety, fear, pain and disgust are not just structurally similar in terms of phenomenology but are also interconnected in the aesthetics of the theatre of anxiety.

As the investigation into the aesthetics of anxiety has then shown, the theatre of anxiety must react to the multidimensionality of anxiety, which can assert itself in body and mind, in space as well as in time. This can be achieved, firstly, by mirroring the liquid temporality that is inherent to anxiety in the structure of the play,

which explains the prevalence of near-future dystopias among plays that can be considered part of the theatre of anxiety. Secondly, anxiety is a conglomerate of fears, of too many fearful objects accumulating and thus happening at once, which leads to anxiety's inexpressibility. The theatre of anxiety has developed a number of aesthetic strategies to circumvent this representational difficulty: on the one hand, anxiety is often presented as mental overload that is illustrated through an overabundance of objects, sensations and topics the characters are confronted with as well as through the destruction of communication, meaning and form. On the other hand, anxiety can be affectively displaced with other emotions like disgust and pain, whose underlying structures are very similar to fear, but which have a greater physical component. Ultimately, what seems clear is that in all these cases the theatrical aesthetics of anxiety reflects the phenomenology of anxiety.

4 Liquid Anxiety: Social Uncertainties and Isolation

As the term 'theatre of anxiety' already implies, I consider anxiety a pervasive factor in many contemporary British plays. While there are various broad reasons for these anxieties (see chapter 1.1), the focus of the following analysis chapters primarily lies on anxiety that is related to a possible economic collapse, to ecological crises and technological surveillance, as well as pandemics and diseases.[104] Although they should not be thought of as divided in a strict sense, these different categories show how anxiety is ingrained in many aspects of public life. The focus of the theatre of anxiety often oscillates between the individual and society. This has to do with the overall structure of fear and anxiety. As Bourke observes, "emotions such as fear do not belong only to individuals or social groups: they mediate between the individual and the social. They are about power relations. Emotions lead to a negotiation of the boundaries between Self and Other or One Community and Another. They align individuals with communities" (354). It is especially this alignment of individuals with communities but also the opposite, the individualisation of a society through fear and anxiety, that are at the core of the following chapter.

Drama and theatre can be viewed as art forms that illustrate the way emotions, including anxiety, shape and are shaped by the private and especially the public sphere. Jill Dolan, for instance, suggests that theatre and politics belong together and that social actions can be influenced by emotions evoked by theatrical performances (10).[105] In this regard the description of fear in the Global North by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman mirrors what is depicted in the theatre of anxiety. For Bauman, we are currently living in frightful times, where "[o]ccasions to be afraid are one of the few things of which our times, badly missing certainty, security and safety, are not short. Fears are many and varied" (*Liquid Fear* 20) and while fears often differ according to class, gender, race or age, some fears and anxieties

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104 The reasons for the different global sources of fear and anxiety are manifold and their borders often blurred. For instance, the mechanisms at play when looking at the political and social side of fear from a sociological perspective often overlap with the reasons for the ecological destruction of the planet. At the same time, ecology and pandemics are closely connected, where the ecological destruction fosters the spreading of diseases.

105 In general, whether on the level of the individual or society, the political is often "deeply stirred by affect and emotion" (Szanto and Slaby 478) – often, it might be added, by negative emotions like fear and anxiety.

can nonetheless be shared by whole populations.[106] It is exactly those fears – fears that are widely shared – that are the focus of the following analysis of plays that can be described as belonging to a theatre of anxiety. Furthermore, while a phenomenological understanding of fear and anxiety sheds light on how these negative emotions can be experienced and, as a consequence, represented on stage (see chapters 2 and 3), the choice of 'anxious' subject matters for such plays is influenced by social and cultural developments such as those observed by Bauman. Intriguingly, Bauman's sociological observations of what he calls 'liquid fear' have a number of similarities to a phenomenological approach to anxiety like that of Ahmed. Both are predicated on the notion of the 'free-floating' and difficult to grasp, or liquid nature of anxiety.[107] This is why a brief overview of Bauman's concept of liquid fear in the light of a phenomenology of anxiety seems necessary as a starting point for the discussion of plays that are informed by both approaches.

4.1 A Sociological Perspective on Anxiety

Crucially, both the phenomenological and Bauman's socio-political understanding of anxiety (and consequently most dramatic representations) focus on the phenomenon's genesis in time and space (for phenomenology's alteration of time and space, see chapter 2). Both time and space have been extended in modern, globalised societies, where the human sphere seems to have expanded endlessly and rapidly, leading to the impression of infinite growth and wealth without taking into account the finite resources on Earth.[108] This is what Bauman describes as

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106 Anthony Oliver-Smith explains how "social systems generate the conditions that place people, often differentiated along axes of class, race, ethnicity, gender, or age, at different levels of risk from the same hazard and of suffering from the same event." (28) and how these social systems are connected to vulnerability. Kate Rigby complements this list with "dis/ability" (14). Nonetheless, as anxiety is not a rational feeling based on facts but directed towards a potentially painful future, the intensity of fear and anxiety often does not differ in people from diverse backgrounds, although their lived realities can be quite different.

107 Bauman chose the term *liquid* fear, as derived from his notion of liquid modernity, amongst other reasons because liquids and fluids "neither fix space nor bind time. While solids have clear spatial dimensions but neutralize the impact, [...] fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it" (Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* 2). The metaphor of liquid fear thus not only describes an anxiety that arises from liquid modernity's fast-moving society, but it can also stand for Ahmed's approach of anxiety that likewise describes it as unsteady and not containable.

108 According to Christian Attinger, who focuses on instances of globalisation in the plays of Philip Ridley, the relationship between globalisation and contemporary theatre "can be roughly divided

liquid modernity: the evolution of modern societies into global capitalist economies that are characterised by continuous growth and the continuous alteration of living conditions (*Liquid Modernity*).[109] Paradoxically, it is this vast growth, seemingly an expression of human strength and ingenuity, that fans fears and leaves the individual in a state of vulnerability and uncertainty: the permanent process of change societies are undergoing as a result of this growth introduces insecurity and uncertainty into the lives of individuals. "[T]he most awesome and least bearable of our fears" for Bauman thus lie in "the insecurity of the present and uncertainty about the future" (*Liquid Fear* 128) – which need to be tackled by isolated individuals without appropriate resources (see also Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*). Therefore, Bauman proposes that we not only live in times of liquid modernity, but also in times of liquid fear, in which we are no longer able to govern local and global affairs due to the insecurity, uncertainty, loneliness and isolation these contemporary societies create.[110]

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into three different categories" (55). The first category describes the "production process of contemporary theatre and its conditions" (55) and focuses on the influence of globalisation on more material (i. e. technical) or sales-oriented (i. e. marketing) aspects of theatre and performance. The second category highlights the connection of globalisation and contemporary drama considering their aesthetic representations within the dramatic text. Finally, the third group represents a general overview on the topic. Other books that give such an overview are Dan Rebellato's *Theatre and Globalization* – for whom "[t]here is an ethical impulse in the theatre's aesthetics, regardless of how globalization may wax and wane, whose singular moments of beauty allow us to glimpse the breadth and intensity of the cosmopolitan community" (85) and, focusing on Irish Theatre, Patrick Lonergan's *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (2010).

109 Liquid modernity and the negative scenarios that accompany it are not the result of enforced "dictatorial rule, subordination, oppression or enslavement" but, as Bauman explains, "the present-day situation emerged out of the radical melting of the fetters and manacles rightly or wrongly suspected of limiting the individual freedom to choose and to act. *Rigidity of order is the artefact and sediment of the human agents' freedom.* That rigidity is the overall product of 'releasing the brakes': of deregulation, liberalization, 'flexibilization', increased fluidity, unbridling the financial, real estate and labour markets, easing the tax burden, etc." (*Liquid Modernity* 5). The metaphor of liquidity does explain exactly this liberalisation from all kinds of limits and restrictions that leads to scenarios of constant change and insecurity, as the following chapters will outline.

110 Related concepts in sociology and philosophy are those of precarity and (existential) precariousness. Both are closely connected to anxiety, as precarious living conditions may increase insecurity, uncertainty and often also isolation in individuals. Due to political programmes like austerity, scholarly interest in precarity has increased over the past years, as Emily Hogg observes: "[f]rom temporary work contracts to imminent environmental catastrophe, from state violence to pervasive anxiety, in recent years a diverse range of experiences and affects have been analysed using the cluster of related terms 'precarity,' 'precariousness' and 'the precariat'" (1). In discourses on precarity and precariousness two strands emerge: one that understands precarity as referring to primarily economic hardship caused typically by neoliberal capitalist policies and one that sees

It is little wonder, then, that uncertainty and isolation play a crucial role in the theatre of anxiety, not only where the current political situation and/or future perspectives are described, but also when states of fear and anxiety are represented on stage. In other words, uncertainty and isolation further add to the conglomerate that is anxiety. In the following, four similarities between the phenomenology of anxiety and Bauman's description of modern societies will be analysed in more detail. All four are connected to uncertainty and isolation: firstly, anxiety's nature as a conglomerate of many fearful objects that has its origin in Husserl's description of moods is mirrored in Bauman's description of liquid fear as well as his description of what he calls *derivative fears*, which likewise show a structure of overwhelming objects and situations that put the subject in a fearful mood or, as I suggest, anxiety. Secondly, anxiety's temporality that combines present and future, especially when thought of as the anticipation of a painful future by Ahmed, is mirrored by Bauman when he writes about the temporality of insecurity that leads to a sense of uncertainty. Thirdly, the examples Bauman gives that describe the reasons and symptoms of liquid fear not only show the same accumulating nature that can be found in phenomenological descriptions of anxiety but also shift the focus to the public realm and look at society as a whole as opposed to an individual subject (as is often done in phenomenology). Finally, the fears and anxiety described by Bauman lead to a sense of isolation and likewise increase the already felt anxiety within society; thus, his notion of singularisation complements the phenomenological understanding of anxiety.

Anxiety vs Liquid Fear vs Derivative Fear

"Most fearsome is the ubiquity of fears" (4) – this quote from Bauman's *Liquid Fear* already anticipates the political dimension of anxiety as found in the theatre of

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precariousness as a broader ontological condition of our exposure to and dependency on other human beings "for shelter and sustenance," which in turn puts us "at risk of statelessness, homelessness, and destitution under unjust and unequal political conditions" (J. Butler, "Precarious Life" 148; see also *Mourning and Violence*). This is also reflected in research on contemporary theatre. The edited collection *Of Precarity: Vulnerabilities, Responsibilities, Communities in 21st-Century British Drama and Theatre* (Aragay and Middeke), for instance, explores the existential precariousness/precarity of twenty-first-century society by reading contemporary drama and performance in the light of theories of precariousness by thinkers like Emmanuel Levinas, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. While Aragay and Middeke's anthology focuses on both the written playtext and its performance, Jenny Hughes's *Precariousness and the Performances of Welfare* offers an overview of different theatre practices, like activist theatres, to "research into experiences of homelessness, the community work of regional theatres, arts-led social care initiatives, theatre in contexts of higher education and corporate training, people's theatres and youth arts initiatives" (4). For another recent analysis of precarity and performance, see also Costa and Field.

anxiety. The "ubiquity of fears" is exactly the kind of anxiety that can be found in many recent UK theatre productions. As opposed to most philosophical accounts, Bauman does not differentiate between fear and anxiety. Liquid fear, for Bauman, is "diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us with no visible rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen" (2).[111] This description of liquid fear already reveals several resemblances to the phenomenological account of anxiety (see chapter 2.1). Ahmed's notion of anxiety, for instance, similarly shows that the object of fear is "not quite present" (*Cultural Politics* 65) because in anxiety "the detachment from a given object allows anxiety to accumulate through gathering more and more objects, until it [anxiety] overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (*Cultural Politics* 66). In other words, the objects in anxiety seem to be everywhere but cannot be located anywhere specific. A similar understanding of fear and anxiety can also be found in Kolnai, who, in his phenomenological approach to both aversive emotions, states that "one can understand by anxiety in a narrower sense a kind of unmotivated, more or less 'free-floating' state of fear, not strictly related to any object" (36).[112] What all these notions of fear/anxiety have in common is their description as an unfocused and omnipresent entity. In this, Bauman's account of liquid fear is strikingly close to these phenomenological descriptions of anxiety, which is why I would argue that Bauman's liquid fear can also be understood as a type of *anxiety*.

While Bauman acknowledges that fears do accumulate into a cloud of "free floating" fears, he also notes that "those fears do not easily add up" (*Liquid Fear* 20). He argues that, if they were to add up, it would be easy to reveal their joined origin. This can, again, be explained by looking at the phenomenology of anxiety. To find the origin of anxiety is not possible because, although the accumulation of fearful objects as described by Ahmed does originate in a fearful object, this object does not seem present. What makes anxiety so overwhelming is the *accumulation* of objects, and not the objects themselves. According to Ahmed, "[t]here is nothing

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111 Bauman also describes one primal fear – the fear of death – which "is perhaps the prototype of archetype of all fears; the ultimate fear from which all other fears borrow their meanings" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 52). This fear of death is prominent in all plays from the theatre of anxiety.
112 Kolnai continues that, although he uses both fear and anxiety interchangeably, what he is interested in is more a wider sense of "the full, 'redundant' feeling of fear ('*pavor*'), in contrast to the concept of fear as a mere 'worrying' about an unwelcome event or as a presumption of a danger ('*timor*'). In general, [he has] in mind only the 'normal', object-directed anxiety as such, anxiety *in face of something* (even if it is not in every case proportional to that thing)" (36) and it is in this wider sense – fear as brought about by (dangerous) objects – that he uses the term anxiety.

in the object that renders fear a *necessary consequence* of the object" (*Cultural Politics* 80). Therefore, it is also not possible to trace anxiety back to a single object. As this is the case, the subject is unable to prevent a possible future threat. As Bauman comments, fears "are all the more frightening for being so difficult to comprehend; but even more horrifying for the feeling of impotence they arouse. Having failed to understand their origins and logic (if they do follow a logic), we are also in the dark and at a loss when it comes to taking precautions – not to mention preventing the dangers they signal or fighting back against them" (*Liquid Fear* 20). Simultaneously, as Bauman argues, fears do not add up because, although they might impact the many, they are only fought back against individually and it is neither assured "what our defence would gain" if they were to be combined nor how this can be achieved (20 – 21), leading to the individualisation he increasingly observes in the Global North. These notions of uncertainty and inability to react to those public and private fears as well as the isolation they create are then often connected to the fears and anxiety of entire populations.

In order to further explain his concept of liquid fear,[113] Bauman introduces *derivative fears.* While for him humans and animals alike can feel fear as a response to "a menace threatening their life" (*Liquid Fear* 2), only humans can feel derivative fear, or second-degree fear, "a sediment that outlives the [harmful] encounter and becomes an important factor in shaping human conduct even if there is no longer a direct threat to life or integrity" (3). It is this notion of derivative fear that in many ways resembles the notion of anxiety that connects sociology and phenomenology. Derivative fears not only mirror Ahmed's notion of fear as being "linked to the 'passing by' of the object" (*Cultural Politics* 65) but also her notion of anxiety as being the accumulation of various (fearful and ungraspable) objects. Furthermore, derivative fears also describe how moods like anxiety colour all objects in the fore- and background in the same mood, as described by Husserl (*Wahrnehmung* 177). Bauman continues that

> 'Derivative fear' is a steady frame of mind that is best described as the sentiment of being *susceptible* to danger; a feeling of insecurity (the world is full of dangers that may strike at any time with little or no warning) and vulnerability (in the event of the dangers striking, there will be little if any chance of escape or successful defence; the assumption of vulnerability to dangers depends more on a lack of trust in the defences available than on the volume or nature of actual threats). (*Liquid Fear* 3)

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113 In the following, I will continue to use the term *fear* in reference to Bauman's terminology. However, as argued before, his concept of fear in many ways shows more resemblances to anxiety as understood by phenomenologists like Ahmed, Kolnai or Waldenfels.

What makes secondary or derivative fear uniquely human is that it results from the reflection on past negative experiences and has the potential to shape entire societies or cultures. Guided by insecurity and vulnerability, derivative fear leads to a persistent feeling of threat and anxiety, even if no menace exists. Bauman's description of derivative fear then resembles in many ways the phenomenology of anxiety described by Waldenfels, who sees in anxiety the fear of an event that might strike at any moment and pass the subject by without any means for it to defend itself (24). In other words, the subject is afraid of an unforeseen event that may happen fast and at any moment in time and change the future without the subject being able to develop an adequate solution to prevent it (see chapter 2.3).

At the same time, the description of derivative fears as *secondary* fears also introduces a notion of temporality to Bauman's description that echoes the importance of the temporal dimension in phenomenological accounts and is encapsulated in Bauman's paradigm of liquidity. Anxiety is the consequence of the accumulation of fearful objects and hence represents a temporality that comes *after* the single fearful object and is in this sense secondary. In quite a similar way, time matters in the context of fear and anxiety not only because both aversive emotions are directed towards the future, but also because the threat (or conglomerate of fearful objects) might strike at any moment and is thus neither predictable nor calculable. In Bauman's words, "by far the most awesome and fearsome dangers are precisely those that are *impossible*, or excruciatingly *difficult*, to anticipate: the *un*predicted, and in all likelihood *unpredictable* ones" (*Liquid Fear* 11) – a description of dangers, or fearful objects, that closely echoes Waldenfels's epistemological account of anxiety (see chapter 2.3). What these accounts of anxiety have in common is their free-floating nature that gives these negative emotions an atmosphere of omnipresence and absence at the same time. Because of their lack of an object, their origin cannot be detected, leaving the subject unable to prevent these feared events from happening – events that might strike suddenly and at any moment. Therefore, it is not only Bauman's description of liquid fear as free-floating and difficult to comprehend but also his notion of derivative fears as causing feelings of insecurity, uncertainty and vulnerability that combine a sociological understanding of fear with a phenomenological understanding of anxiety.

The Temporality of Insecurity and Uncertainty

What is important for the theatre of anxiety is not only the description of anxiety as the accumulation of several (fearful) objects but also the temporality that accompanies anxiety (see chapter 2.3 and 3). The temporal dimension of drama is closely connected to its political scope, as drama, according to Klaić, "probes the

future of politics and at the same time enters the contemporary political debate about the desirable quality of the future and the political choices available that will determine its shape" (95). This political probing of "the future" – and, one might add, occasionally also the past – from a "contemporary" vantage point is predicated on similar temporal structures as feelings of anxiety, which, incidentally, are themselves often caused by political events. Drama's probing of politics in this sense is also often a probing of anxiety, and both depend on complex temporalities. In order to understand the temporality of anxiety from a sociological perspective, and the consequences this might have, the differentiation between insecurity and uncertainty is important. The theatre of anxiety, and most certainly the plays at the focus of the following two analyses, show near-future scenarios to reveal the uncertainty – understood as the "liability to chance or accident" (OED, "Uncertainty") – of the future. At the same time, this uncertainty reveals the insecurity that informs the present. As outlined in the previous section, anxiety is directed towards an uncertain future that makes any prediction and preparation impossible. Threats might strike at any moment in such enormity that the subject is not able to react accordingly. This uncertainty of the future then leaves the subject in a constant state of insecurity, that is, the subject is in "a condition of danger" in which it is liable "to give way, fail, or suffer loss or damage" (OED, "Insecurity"), or, in other words, in a situation that must provoke anxieties.

The insecurity that leads to feelings like fear and anxiety is then closely connected to the notion of liquid modernity that presents an environment of constant change, uncertainty and "*a setting that is irregular in principle*" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 99), which further fuels feelings of uncertainty. This notion of uncertainty is closely connected to one-sidedly negative globalisation, a highly selective and transborder "globalization of business, crime or terrorism, but not of political and juridical institutions able to control them" (135; see also 96). While globalisation, in general, promised and already accomplished to create some sense of security through prosperity, it has not been and never will be able to avert all fears altogether (130; see also Zevnik 236). Modern society established several ways to bypass these remaining fears and attempts "to make life with fear liveable" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 6). This can be done, for instance, through consumerism: "[t]he consumer economy depends on the production of consumers, and the consumers that need to be produced for fear-fighting products are fearful and frightened consumers, hopeful that the dangers they fear can be forced to retreat and that they can do it (with paid help, for sure)" (7). One of the 'products' that promise a sense of security are then insurances that seem to diminish private risks.[114] The idea of

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[114] While in the following, the focus lies on the negative side of risk, (successful) risk taking can

consumerism to bypass fear and anxiety is thus closely connected to the concept of risks.[115] Although risks do not change anything about the situation at hand, they trick the subject into a believed anticipation of dangers. "Risks are the dangers whose probability we *can* (or believe that we can) calculate [...]. Once so defined, risks are the next best thing to (alas unattainable) certainty" (10). However, this approach only relates to a felt certainty and avoids the problem, as "'calculability' does not mean predictability" (10); in other words, risks only measure the probability that any of the anticipated dangers might happen.[116] In a consumer society, anxiety's uncertainty of the future and insecurity in the present is met with attempts to calculate risks and to gain a sense of safety through (private) insurances.[117]

also be perceived as positive and even admirable (Giddens 3 – 4). In contrast to Giddens, Furedi sees risk taking as generally positive. For him, "[t]oday's sad attempt to pathologise risk-taking has the effect of undermining the spirit of exploration and experimentation" (*Culture of Fear* xx).

115 The idea of consumerism to bypass fear and anxiety, amongst other human needs, also stems from neoliberalist thinking. The neoliberalist agenda then strives to privatise both individual and state activities and provides "the conditions for the private sector to find ever-new sources of profitable activity. Neo-liberalism seeks to minimize the role of the state, [...] because it is presumed that states will always be inferior to markets in 'guessing' what is necessary to do" (Urry 202). The notion of "guessing what is necessary" is then not only important for a neoliberalist and negatively globalised society when it comes to the ostensible prevention of dangers and thus fear and anxiety but can also be applied to other fields of daily life, for instance the stock market, individual consumption or the job market.

116 In order to further understand how risks can shape societies and are connected to the temporality of anxiety the concept of *risk society* is inevitable (Beck, *Risk Society*; *World Risk Society*). While, throughout history, life has been hazardous or even dangerous (see also Bourke 5), these dangers were perceived as given and either controlled by God or as a natural part of the world. Throughout time, these kinds of dangers were substituted for the notion of risk, which "is bound up with the aspiration to control and particularly with the idea of controlling the future" (Giddens 3). The crucial aspect of the risk society is then not a world that has become increasingly dangerous, but "[r]ather, it is a society increasingly preoccupied with the future (and also with safety), which generates the notion of risk" (3). It is no surprise that risk societies are primarily concerned with the future, as the sense of anxiety that is inevitably connected to the sense of uncertainty and insecurity within risk society is likewise related to the future. Risks are therefore a way to circumvent anxiety's uncertain futurity and its insecure present with money (for instance through private insurances bought to protect an individual from future risks). However, all these measures to prevent anxiety and uncertainty cannot cure societies from anxiety (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 130).

117 For an analysis of collective risk management in contemporary British drama, focusing on Kirkwood's *The Children*, see also Hoydis ("Slow Unfolding").

Society and its Fears and Anxiety

In order to better understand how the spatial and temporal aspects of an anxiety that afflicts societies affected by negative globalisation presents itself in daily life, it is important to look at its sources. While the next chapter will further investigate external sources of anxiety that seemingly are not related to or not directly caused by human activity – for instance natural disasters, even though these are often caused by the human-made climate catastrophe – this chapter focuses on causes for anxiety that spring primarily from human economic interactions and influence human cohabitation.[118] For Bauman, "[d]isasters brought about by human actions arrive from an opaque world, strike at random, in places impossible to anticipate, and escape or defy the kind of explanation which sets human actions apart from all other events: explanation by *motives* or *purposes*" (*Liquid Fear* 86). One of the reasons for this opaque world and its fears is the *open society*[119] which, although it promises a free society, is most often more concerned with its own borders and the security within them– a paradox in itself (especially since the free society can never succeed as long as the world as a whole is not free and safe) (see 97). Within this open society it is especially three kinds of dangers that arouse (derivative) fears:

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118 In this regard it is also important to consider the differentiation between public and private spheres and their interplay. Here, Bauman claims that "[i]n a liquid modern setting […] it is the personal and the individual […] that becomes 'political' (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 47). In this context, Slavoj Žižek, who in his book *Living in the End Times* predicts that "the global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point" (x), refers to the *public use of reason.* Drawing on Kant, Žižek distinguishes the private from the public insofar as the private refers to the "communal-institutional order of one's particular identification; while 'public' designates the trans-national universality of the exercise of one's Reason" (*Dreaming Dangerously* 3). He postulates that, living in a society, we have to think on a public level (using public reason), but at the same time obey on a private level and, if in doubt about the justice of the current order, demand reforms (3–5). In the concluding chapters of Žižek's *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* he refers to the current apocalyptic tone surrounding us. He is concerned with how ecological catastrophes and economic downturns can lead to social change instead of fearmongering. In this context he is establishing the French words for future: *future* and *avenir.* While *future* stands for the continuation of the present, "*avenir* is what is to come (*à venir*), not just what will be" (134; see also chapter 2.3). As an answer to apocalyptic tendencies (here, he refers to Jean-Pierre Dupuy's dystopian 'fixed point' which describes the absolute ecological, economic and social collapse), he suggests changing the course of events to "open up a space for something New 'to come'" (134).
119 For Bauman, the *open society* evolved from a self-determined and autonomous "free society proud of its openness" into a society that is primarily associated with "the terrifying experience of heteronomous, vulnerable populations overwhelmed by forces they neither control nor truly understand, horrified by their own undefendability and obsessed with the security of their borders and of the population inside them" (*Liquid Fear* 96).

> Some threaten the body and the possessions. Some others are of a more general nature, threatening the durability and reliability of the social order on which security of livelihood (income, employment), or survival in the case of invalidity or old age, depend. Then there are dangers that threaten one's place in the world – a position in the social hierarchy, identity … and more generally an immunity to social degradation and exclusion. (3–4)[120]

These three dangers – body/possessions, livelihood and identity – in many ways resemble the fearful objects Kolnai describes when he writes: "[t]he agent in fear flees the object which he feels threatened his survival, safety, welfare, or any of his vital interests – the integrity of his possessions, body, or status in any sense (including chances or prospects)" (97). This once again highlights the intersection of phenomenology and sociology and shows how both have their *raison d'être* for the analysis of the theatre of anxiety. However, while all three kinds of dangers can be the cause of fear and anxiety, the anxious subject is often unable to connect the fearful anticipation and its threat where "'derivative fear' is easily 'decoupled' in the sufferers' awareness from the dangers that cause it" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 4). Similarly, Torin Monahan argues that, although they might have a "factual basis," fears "do not simply represent objective conditions" (145). At the same time, "[f]eelings of insecurity are actively cultivated by politicians and the media on one hand, and sustained by urban fortification, technological surveillance, and economic vulnerability on the other" (145), which further increases the ubiquitous nature of fear and anxiety. In other words, there is hardly any escape from these fears and anxieties that affect globalised societies: human-made economic insecurity cannot be escaped by building up physical defence or surveillance mechanisms, as these only serve as reminders of the very vulnerabilities they are supposed to protect against (on anxiety and technology, see also chapter 6.1).

The origin of these fears can then arise from other people, from nature and from a third zone Bauman describes as

> a sense-numbing and mind-chafing grey zone, as yet unnamed, from which ever more dense and sinister fears seep, threatening to destroy our homes, workplaces and bodies through disasters – natural but not quite, human but not completely, natural and human at the same time though unlike either of them. […] Day in, day out we learn that the inventory of dangers is far from complete: new dangers are discovered and announced almost daily, and there is

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[120] These various fears, especially the fear of exclusion described by Bauman, in some sense mirror Kierkegaard's understanding of anxiety "in the face of an abyss of meaninglessness" (Coe 46). For Kierkegaard, "[d]eep within every human being there still lives the anxiety [Angst] over the possibility of being alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked among the millions and millions in this enormous household" (65).

no knowing how many more of them and of what kind have managed to escape our (and the experts'!) attention – getting ready to strike without warning. (*Liquid Fear* 5)

This third danger zone then resembles Ahmed's notion of anxiety, and especially its accumulating nature where "[o]ne thinks of more and more 'things' to be anxious about" (*Cultural Politics* 66). It is anxiety's nature as overwhelming or free-floating, its nature as striking at any moment and leaving the subject in a state of uncertainty and insecurity that render it unpredictable – for the individual as well as for society as a whole. However, these dangers do not necessarily arise from external objects but rather from society itself – from society that is not prepared for these dangers.[121] In this context, Bauman speaks of the *Titanic syndrome.* Referring to the catastrophe of the Titanic ocean liner, for Bauman the horror does not arise from the iceberg itself but from the unpreparedness of the people on the ship to react to the iceberg, and from the suddenness with which the event took place although the danger was lurking in the background all along (*Liquid Fear* 17). What makes the story of the Titanic topical is that this catastrophe could have been prevented, similar to many of the various crises the world is facing, including the ecological catastrophe (see chapter 5.1). However, this and other catastrophes are often not prevented because they do not seem plausible – they are, firstly, not anticipated and, secondly, they reveal the failings of human intervention during crises and catastrophes. This is then further enhanced as the people on the ship (and in society in general) are not working together but act as singular entities, where everyone is fighting for themselves. Therefore, derivative fears are primarily caused by dangers concerning body/possessions, livelihood and identity, and they suddenly meet an isolated and unprepared subject, which prompts the comparison with the Titanic disaster.

The Fear of Loneliness and Isolation
While the fears that result from the Titanic syndrome are ubiquitous and happen randomly and unexpectedly, they are not the only fears that haunt modern societies, as there are also "fears of being picked out from the joyous crowd *singly*,

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121 All the dangers that are described by Bauman can be seen as the result of a neoliberal society that changed its consumer behaviour, especially in the rich Global North, in the last century: "[t]hese shifts have involved moving from low-carbon to high-carbon economies/societies, from societies of discipline to societies of control, and more recently from specialized and differentiated zones of consumption to mobile, de-differentiated consumptions of excess" (Urry 192). In other words, many of the fears and anxieties that afflict contemporary societies stem primarily from the Global North and disproportionally affect the poorest of the global population.

or severally at the utmost, and condemned to suffer *alone* while all the others go on with their revelries. Fears of a *personal* catastrophe. […] Fears of *exclusion*" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 18). Therefore, the dangers that arouse fears in modern societies mostly stem from human coexistence and primarily take place on three levels – body/possessions, livelihood and identity – and once again mirror the notion of anxiety as ubiquitous and omnipresent. The Titanic syndrome further exposes that these dangers are often fought individually and without the necessary tools to counteract them (see also Bourke 191). This increased level of isolation is one of the side effects of negative globalisation. "In the liquid modern society of consumers," as Bauman observes, "each individual member is instructed, trained and groomed to pursue individual happiness by individual means and through individual efforts" (*Liquid Fear* 48). This heightened focus on individuality that accompanies the fears and anxiety of globalised citizens is problematic for Bauman for various reasons. Firstly, in a globalised world, individual actions are always connected to other people, in the negative and positive sense, and therefore individualisation only takes place on a theoretical, cognitive level. In a globalised world, Bauman argues, it is not only the world order that has been liquidised but also interpersonal relationships (70). Instead of building long-lasting interpersonal connections with other people who are affected by the same insecurities and anxiety, the subject in a globalised world builds a network of friends that is as fluid and unreliable as the economic and political situation (see also Urry 200; Bude 28 – 38). At the same time, the increased interconnectedness experienced makes every individual a 'citizen of the world' whose actions at all times and in unpredictable ways may "affect the prospects, chances and dreams of some *others* whom we don't know or even know of" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 98).[122] This interconnectedness leads to a world of *"non-calculable* probability" (99), in which we have no control over the effects of our actions. Therefore, we are all, in one way or another, responsible for each other's happiness or discomfort, which further liquidises the divide between friends and enemies.

However, this network of potential friends often proves unreliable, especially when it comes to solving long-lasting and complex dangers. Therefore, secondly, isolation does not allow for long-lasting solutions that might overcome the source of fearful dangers that cannot be tackled individually. For Bauman, the individual is politicised and at the same time the tasks assigned to politics are imposed on the individual, as "it is left now to individuals to seek, find and practise individual sol-

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[122] This lack of control shows resemblances with Sartre's notion of the "Other's infinite freedom" (270) which ultimately limits one's own personal freedom in order to preserve the freedom of the other.

utions to socially produced troubles [... using] resources that are blatantly inadequate to the task" (136). This is even more the case as the problems that have risen through capitalism and the excessive consumption of natural resources cannot be controlled by capitalist forces anymore (Urry 193). Thus, while an open society should provide the individual with more freedoms and more securities, it fails to do so and instead creates isolation and loneliness, where individuals are left to defend their own fears through private means. This means that, instead of working together on global dangers to reduce their impact, the negatively globalised world is more concerned with distributing the risk among the individuals (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 81). This becomes especially clear with the climate catastrophe: instead of working together to prevent climate change, global nations are more concerned with maintaining the status quo and leaving the consequences of natural catastrophes to the individual (see chapter 5).

While natural catastrophes like hurricanes or floods physically affect all people in the same way, only those wealthy enough to insure their livelihood or to rebuild it are relatively safe from the insecurity, again shifting the risk towards the private individual.[123] The side effects of negative globalisation, like anxiety, uncertainty and individualisation, are then, for Bauman, often not noted as such and only perceived as "unanticipated 'side effect' of the new lightness and fluidity of the increasingly mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power" (*Liquid Modernity* 14). In other words, individualisation further strengthens negative globalisation which further strengthens fear and anxiety. Finally, negative globalisation is also connected to individualisation and loneliness in another way – by causing fears of exclusion. For Bauman, "the horror of being *excluded*" is caused by "a life of undying suspicion and unrelenting vigilance" (*Liquid Fear* 47) rooted in liquid modernity. Therefore, while on the one hand everyone is fighting for themselves, negative globalisation also induces fears of being excluded – especially excluded from a certain group of people that might promise prestige and wealth.[124] Isolation itself can hence be the cause of further fears and anxiety, especially when in combination with exclusion from society.

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123 Part of this trend of individualisation is then also connected to the privatisation of risks. For Bauman, the individual is ever more encouraged to focus on individual safety as opposed to collective efforts to tackle a "potentially dangerous world" (*Liquid Fear* 136). For him, "[o]ffering more flexibility as the sole remedy for an already unbearable volume of insecurity, the messages coming from the sites of political power paint the prospects of yet more challenges and greater privatization of troubles – and so ultimately more, not less, uncertainty" (136). Bauman's notion of individualisation is then closely connected to the concept of risk society.
124 These fears of exclusion Bauman describes are also observed by Waldenfels, for whom anxiety is closely connected to the singularisation of the subject (115).

In general, Bauman's understanding of fear then in many ways mirrors the phenomenological account of anxiety as free-floating and overwhelming anticipation of something dreadful and painful. Furthermore, these fears and this anxiety affect various private levels, from the individual body/possessions or a subject's livelihood to their personal identity. What is more, fears from a sociological perspective are closely connected to feelings of isolation, loneliness and vulnerability, where "*[f]ear is another name we give to our defencelessness*" (*Liquid Fear* 95). This isolation not only enhances the feeling of helplessness but also fuels fears of exclusion. Finally, fears are connected to the anticipation of dangers, which further distributes the consequences of these dangers amongst individuals, opening various kinds of injustice. This shows that modern society is shaped by insecurities and uncertainty, which explains the ubiquitous presence of discourses of anxiety and subsequently leads to the phenomena captured by the theatre of anxiety. Thus, as Bauman summarises, "[t]he new individualism, the fading of human bonds and the wilting of solidarity, are all engraved on one side of a coin whose other side bears the stamp of globalization" (146). In addition to individualism, it is also modernity's uncertainty and insecurity that further fuel global anxiety; in Monahan's words, "[t]he construction of insecurity offers a window into the distinctive problems of modern life in the twenty-first century" (145). In this regard, emotions like fear and anxiety are the effects of pervasive isolation, uncertainty and insecurity, and oscillate between the social and the individual sphere.

In the following, two plays will be analysed that demonstrate exactly this multi-layered appearance of the social and private facets of anxiety. Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* shows four women who, although they meet in order to chat, do not succeed in forming a functioning community. In between their private conversations that reveal fears and anxiety on a private level, Mrs Jarrett confronts the audience with seven dystopic monologues that disclose public anxiety from the past and the future alike. Churchill's play then shows how anxiety can be aestheticized in contemporary drama by highlighting the interplay of insecurity and isolation simply through speech and language. Zinnie Harris's *How to Hold Your Breath* likewise centres on insolation and uncertainty, albeit in a much more political manner. Here, Dana and her sister are surprised by the sudden downfall of the European banking system that leads to the collapse of the European countries and simultaneous closing of borders. Isolated and surrounded by constant insecurity, Dana ultimately loses everything she holds dear and starts to live Western, globalised societies' worst nightmare. With Dana shaken by loss and anxiety and barely alive, the play ends when the real struggle and ever new anxiety arise for her. In both Churchill's and Harris's plays, then, it becomes clear through which topics and aesthetic means (like epic tendencies) the theatre of anxiety may

address the pervasive conditions of anxiety diagnosed by Bauman to be a central part of our modern world.

4.2 Caryl Churchill: *Escaped Alone* (2016)

The interplay of uncertainty and isolation that accompanies feelings of fear and anxiety in globalised societies is central to many recent plays. One such play is Churchill's *Escaped Alone*, which premiered at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs in 2016. *Escaped Alone* offers a look at apocalyptic moods from the perspective of elderly women and showcases Churchill's "unsurpassed ability to dramatize the anxieties and concerns of the temporary moment" (Aston and Diamond 1). The play's portrayal of apocalyptic scenarios in combination with negative feelings, like rage and anxiety, as well as its overarching topics that include isolation, insecurity and vulnerability from the perspective of a marginalised group not only classifies the play as a feminist masterpiece that highlights "the agency of women" (Angelaki, *Political Theatre* 25) but also groups it into what I call the theatre of anxiety.

In Churchill's play three septuagenarians, Sally, Vi and Lena, are meeting and chatting in Sally's backyard when Mrs Jarrett (or Mrs J), who is likewise at least seventy years old, joins them. Over the course of eight scenes, all women share parts of their individual stories in chatty dialogues that are interrupted by a series of monologues and show both the uncertainties the women are faced with and their social isolation. Amongst other more mundane topics, like the TV programme or antique shops, the conversation reveals the women's fears and anxieties: Sally suffers from ailurophobia (fear of cats), Vi spent six years in prison for the homicide of her husband and Lena suffers from mental health issues.[125] "Although the tenor of the women's exchange is light and frequently funny," as Elaine Aston observes, "there is an undercurrent of negative, anxious feeling" (*Restaging Feminisms* 102). After each of several dialogues, Mrs Jarrett shares her vision of an apocalyptic future in seven isolated monologues that are in many cases "gruesome and politicized, fantastical yet full of real fear" (Templeton 40). Besides talking, the

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125 For Aston, "[e]ach of these anxiety states figures a dimension of Churchill's eco-socialist-feminist critique" (Aston, *Restaging Feminisms* 102), which range from domestic abuse and capitalist workspaces to "a world of predatory behaviour that Sally projects on to the feline species" (102). Aston continues that "these anxious voicings can all be diagnosed as the product of a capitalist system: the 'horror' of its predacious, violent culture which 'kills' the women's joy of home and (former) workplace" (102). It is this capitalist system and its fears that will be at the centre of the following analysis.

other activity the women take part in is when Sally, Vi and Lena begin to sing in harmony, which is, again, joined by Mrs Jarrett. Through these monologues and dialogues, Churchill's play thematises various topics that relate to the future of the planet and society alike – topics like diseases, natural catastrophes or economic collapse that are often connected to negative feelings. The play aestheticises this not only through the stark contrast of its mundane setting with the nightmarish visions, but especially though its (at times ironic) language: while Mrs J's monologues express the uncertainty so typical of living in what Bauman calls liquid times, the isolation of the individual characters becomes apparent in their dialogues. "Throughout the play," as Martin Welton observes, "there is an odd tension between the women's quotidian, almost banal gossip and the regular failure of their individual, matter-of-fact lines of thought to connect in dialogue with one another" ("Dark Visions" 501–02). The mundane world of the four women is then juxtaposed with the global problems Mrs Jarrett utters. It is also Mrs Jarrett who connects both worlds by constantly shifting between the private and the public sphere. When analysing *Escaped Alone* and its depiction of fear and anxiety, the focus must therefore lie on the use of speech and language as well as on Mrs Jarrett's role as a combination of outsider, narrator and metafictional character.

The skilful use of language in Churchill's play can already be seen in its epigraph which, although it only consists of one line, anticipates the main themes of the play and immediately links the play to the theatre of anxiety. In reference to the biblical book of Job and to Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick*, the epigraph reads as follows: "I only am escaped alone to tell thee" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 141). This quote is then not only the origin of the play's title, but also highlights several ways in which anxiety is central to the play: firstly, the notion of *escaping* is closely connected to uncertainty, insecurity and anxiety. In *Escaped Alone* the presence of anxiety as a conglomeration of fearful objects can be traced in the language of the characters, which frequently displaces anxiety with pain, disgust and abjection, in the play's temporal structure, as well as in the piling up of fear-inducing topics that creates the sense of threat described as derivative fear by Bauman. Secondly, the word *alone* in the epigraph hints at the loneliness and isolation the figures in the play experience. Although the characters are all meeting in order to chat, they still seem to be isolated entities. This becomes particularly clear during Mrs Jarrett's monologues, which take place in total isolation and darkness and further connect anxiety, nothingness, loneliness and isolation. Both insecurity and the isolation are then connected to anxiety as both its reasons and symptoms. And thirdly, the epigraph refers to the act of *(story)telling*, which can be seen as an escape mechanism from anxiety. The different stories that are told in the play – from the book of Job to *Alice in Wonderland* to the very private individual stories of the four elder women – display the intertextuality ingrained in this play and likewise

show how both uncertainty and isolation can be tackled by storytelling. Yet, these stories cannot counteract the fear, anxiety and insecurity the characters experience and only shift these emotions towards other, more outward emotions, like rage. In the end, Mrs Jarrett is the herald that escaped alone to tell us about the anxiety-inducing state of the world and yet she herself cannot escape her own anxious and/or enraged feelings.

4.2.1 Visions of Future's Uncertainty

Escaped Alone addresses various forms of uncertainties that afflict contemporary societies. While the play represents the damage neoliberal capitalism produces on the level of the economic, social and environmental (Aston, *Restaging Feminisms* 99 – 109), I would like to focus on the connection of these damaging mechanisms with fear and anxiety in my reading of the play. On the level of the characters, Churchill's play portrays fear and anxiety through its liquid style of writing, which emulates the phenomenology of anxiety. The depiction of individual cases of anxiety is complemented by anxieties in the public sphere. Although in Churchill's play it remains unclear where exactly Sally's backyard is located or when the conversations take place, the picture the individual dialogues and Mrs J's monologues paint is of a society that has been affected by the same uncertainty and insecurity that has also been described by Bauman as a consequence of negative globalisation. While the connection between Bauman's sociology and Churchill's writing has already been made by Angelaki (*Political Theatre* 20), I want to suggest that this connection is ultimately based on fear and anxiety. *Escaped Alone* presents this connection of capitalist societies, negative feelings and uncertainty and isolation on both the level of the individual characters and the level of society in general. The uncertainty and isolation diagnosed by Bauman can then be seen as the reason as well as the symptom of the characters' and society's anxiety. In its approach to anxiety through the related sensations of pain, disgust and abjection and its staging of anxiety's temporality, *Escaped Alone* illustrates how anxiety can be staged in contemporary drama.

Labelled as "drama of catastrophe" (Casado-Gual 236), *Escaped Alone* portrays uncertainty and anxiety through its dramatic speech and communication as well as through its topics. Anxiety's nature as a conglomerate of many (fearful) objects is aestheticised in the destruction of syntactic borders. The play's language thus reflects the pre-reflective quality of fear and anxiety, which emerges from too many seemingly painful objects that might happen at any moment. On the level of the individual women, this can be found for example when, during one of the conversations, Sally reveals that she is afraid of cats:

> **Sally:** I have to keep them out I have to make sure I never think about a cat because if I do I have to make sure there's no cats and they could be anywhere they could get in a window I have to go round the house and make sure all the windows are locked and I don't know if I checked properly I can't remember I was too frightened to notice I have to go round the windows again I have to go round the windows again back to the kitchen back to the bedroom back to the kitchen back to the bedroom the bathroom back to the kitchen back to the door, the door might blow open if it's windy even if it's not windy suppose the postman was putting a large packet and pushed the door and it came open because it wasn't properly shut and then a cat because they can get through very very small and once they're in they could be anywhere they could be under the bed in the wardrobe up on the top shelf with the winter sweaters [...]. (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 163)

What this monologue shows is how *Escaped Alone* engrains anxiety's nature as a conglomerate of various fearful objects in its aesthetic form. The way Sally talks about cats shows how anxiety makes various different objects stick together, even if they are usually neither connected nor fearful to begin with. It is rather, as Ahmed observes, the act of "gathering more and more objects" (*Cultural Politics* 66) that causes anxiety. At the same time the monologue reveals how everyday language fails to depict the feeling of anxiety and shows its pre-reflective nature. During Sally's stream of consciousness-like speech, all syntactic borders are blurred. For Sally, no meaningful conversation is possible as she tries to describe the pre-verbal nature of her anxieties. This is done through the repetitive nature of her speech, which keeps circling back to certain words without any real order or meaning. Through this act of gathering and repetition, Sally is stuck in an endless spiral of fear and anxiety that overwhelms all "other possible affective relations to the world" (66). Her fear of cats then reveals anxiety's nature as overwhelming excess.

Furthermore, what this example also illustrates is the overabundance of fearful objects that makes it impossible for Sally to focus on anything, thus leaving her in a state of constant isolation and anxiety. Sally is also reinforcing these fears as, the more she speaks about her fear of cats, the more she seems to strengthen her negative feelings. She thus seems to be caught in an unstoppable spiral of ever new objects and situations to fear, which illustrates Bauman's observation that fear can become "self-propelling and self-intensifying; it acquires its own momentum and developmental logic and needs little attention and hardly any additional input to spread and grow – unstoppably" (*Liquid Fear* 132). In particular, Sally is left alone with her fears by the other women. While the women interrupt each other on several other occasions, no one interrupts Sally in her monologue and tries to calm her down. Although Sally insists that she "needs someone to say there's no cats" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 164) in order to relax and leave this state of constant fear and insecurity, none of the other three

women say these words – the monologue form itself becomes a vehicle that trans-
ports her isolation. It is not until she herself shifts the topic away from cats and to
people she can trust that Sally can calm down. Thus, the monologue reveals the
overall structure of anxiety as a conglomerate of many fearful objects, where
the act of randomly gathering more and more objects constitutes anxiety, especial-
ly as the word *cat* can be replaced by any other mundane word or object. It is
hence not the physical cat that causes these fears – especially as cats are not usu-
ally fearful objects – but rather Sally's mentally attributing the property of fearful-
ness to cats that causes these feelings. At the same time, the way her monologue is
designed already hints at the loneliness the four women really suffer during their
conversations. In this way, Sally's speech exemplifies how *Escaped Alone* repre-
sents anxiety's overwhelming nature through linguistic excess and through the
way in which characters are left alone to deal with their anxiety.

Moreover, anxiety is also present in the play on the level of the themes and
topics that are communicated. While the play depicts various kinds of fears and
anxieties – the fear of old age being one of them (Casado-Gual 237) – the focus
of the following analysis lies on globalised anxieties. The most emphatic cases of
these global anxieties are voiced by Mrs Jarrett, who "soliloquise[s] her fears
and anxieties" (Aston, *Restaging Feminisms* 102) in isolation and speaks of disas-
ters that are "the result of capitalism's exploitation of nature" (103). Her seven
monologues, which come at each respective end of the play's first seven scenes, re-
spond to all four categories of the theatre of anxiety – politics/economics, ecology,
technology and pandemics – although the focus of the following analysis will only
be on the first category. In her monologues, which are "simultaneously energising
and draining" (104), Mrs Jarrett describes her version of the apocalypse in a way
that combines a sense of being overwhelmed with deeply ironic cynicism:

> **Mrs Jarrett:** First the baths overflowed as water was deliberately wasted in a campaign to
> punish the thirsty. Swimming pools engulfed the leisure centres and coffee ran down the
> table legs. [...] Yawls, ketches, kayaks, canoes, schooners, planks, dinghies, lifebelts and up-
> turned umbrellas, swimming instructors and lilos, rubber ducks and pumice stone floated
> on the stock market. Waves engulfed ferris wheels and drowned bodies were piled up to
> block doors. Then the walls of water came from the sea. Villages vanished and cities relocated
> to their rooftops. [...] Some died of thirst, some of drinking the water. When the flood receded
> thousands stayed on the roofs fed by helicopter while heroes and bonded workers shovelled
> the muck into buckets that were stored in the flood museums. (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 150)

While, in Rebellato's words, "there seems to be little order or shape to the various
acts of brutality and suffering" in Mrs Jarrett's monologues, which makes them ap-
pear as the representation of "chaos chaotically" ("Apocalyptic Tone" par. 56), the
structure of these monologues also reveals the excessive nature of anxiety; similar

to Sally's monologue, Mrs Jarrett's speech shows aesthetic and formal aspects of anxiety. Indeed, fear and anxiety are encapsulated by a general aesthetics of excess, of too much, of a too extreme and thus overwhelming nature that lacks any focus. This is illustrated in the at times absurd pictures that show the utter chaos of multiple things happening at once, which, at the same time, make no sense. When Mrs Jarrett reports that "water was deliberately wasted in a campaign to punish the thirsty," this speaks to a sense of isolation, as one group is deliberately targeted and punished by another, better-off group, which must create fears of exclusion. At the same time the "baths overflowed," which itself constitutes a form of surplus that, in the worst case, leads to drowning and death. Similar to Bauman's description of fear as lacking a "clear address or cause" this monologue likewise does not reveal the reason for the apocalyptic scenario and likewise lacks a concrete addressee. Mrs Jarrett's monologues, then, in Churchill's unique style of staging an "isolated woman [...] whose words are an unsentimental register of longing, confusion, fear and rage" (Aston and Diamond 2), mirrors thematically and aesthetically the various fears and anxieties that lurk in globalised societies.

At the same time this monologue shows derivative fears and describes a situation "when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 2). Mrs Jarrett shows how the most fearsome setting takes place in the mundane, everyday world that has come out of balance and leaves the subjects vulnerable to threats that may be encountered at any moment. She thus describes, in Bauman's words, "a feeling of insecurity (the world is full of dangers that may strike at any time with little or no warning)" (3), which is characteristic for derivative fears. Besides these descriptions of natural catastrophes, like floods and droughts, the stock market is likewise affected by the event and overflows with objects related to water, which brings the whole market system out of balance. While for Rebellato *Escaped Alone* represents "a kind of nihilism more than anything more expressly political" ("Apocalyptic Tone" par. 46), I would argue that Mrs Jarrett's monologues can be seen as a bleak progression of Bauman's description of the many fears that lurk in globalised societies,

> where power grids go bust, petrol taps run dry, stock exchanges collapse, all-powerful companies disappear together with dozens of services one used to take for granted and thousands of jobs one used to believe to be rock-solid, where jets crash together with their thousand-and-one safety gadgets and hundreds of passengers, market caprices make worthless the most precious and coveted of assets, and any other imaginable or unimaginable catastrophes brew (or perhaps are brewed?) ready to overwhelm the prudent and the imprudent alike. (*Liquid Fear* 5)

Mrs Jarrett's dialogue can be seen as an exaggerated version of Bauman's description of the various dangers that lurk in modern societies and that constantly cause fear and anxiety. Moreover, while the scenarios Mrs Jarrett describes seem highly unlikely, the Covid-19 pandemic did show how fast human-made diseases can spread and affect the whole world order. The way the various (fearful) objects and events are placed in close proximity in Mrs Jarrett's monologues anticipates these contemporary catastrophes and illustrates how anxiety accumulates an increasing number of objects that lead to negative sensations. Mrs Jarrett also seems to imply that, just as with derivative fears, "there will be little if any chance of escape or successful defence" (3), which links this monologue (and all her others) to the title-giving act of escaping.

The ubiquitous fear and anxiety in *Escaped Alone* are also accompanied by pain, disgust and abjection, which often result from border crossings and cause the anticipation of a negative future (see chapter 2.2 and 2.3). This can for example be seen in Mrs Jarrett's sixth monologue where she describes various scenarios that are connected to diseases:[126]

> **Mrs Jarrett:** The illness started when children drank sugar developed from monkeys. Hair fell out, feet swelled, organs atrophied. Hairs blowing in the wind rapidly passed round the world. When they fell into the ocean cod died and fishermen blew up each other's boats. Planes with sick passengers were diverted to Antarctica. Some got into bed with their dead, others locked the doors and ran till they fell down. Volunteers and conscripts over seven nursed the sick and collected bodies. Governments cleansed infected areas and made deals with allies to bomb each other's capitals. Presidents committed suicide. The last survivors had immunity and the virus mutated, exterminating plankton. (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 167)

Again Mrs Jarrett describes a world that has become unbalanced, this time due to illness and diseases that affect the human and non-human world alike and cross the border between both worlds. These border crossings are accompanied by pain and disgust, which are both also connected to fear and anxiety. Since both fear and anxiety are the anticipation of something painful, these monologues can only rep-

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126 In a sense, these negative descriptions of the world also reveal Mrs Jarrett's own emotional state. The fact that she anticipates a future that is painful and in which everything that is known and certain, at least in Western globalized societies, is destroyed reveals a cynical worldview that might stem from her own pain. After all, according to phenomenological accounts, in the experience of pain the whole perception of the world changes to a negative one, which colours all other aspects in a negative mood and simultaneously generates other negative emotions like "frustration, irritation, anger, fear, sadness, self-pity or even loss of hope and trust in others" (Svenaeus 543). Mrs Jarrett thus reveals a worldview that is born out of pain and further spreads negative emotions like fear and anxiety.

resent anxiety because they present painful scenarios. The pain in these monologues does then not take place on the physical level, through wounds or blood on stage, but through language and the description of painful experiences. A disease that not only has been developed from the exploitation of animals but that also leads to alopecia, damaged organs and swollen feet and thus shows resemblances to cancer symptoms not only blurs the boundary between animals and humans but also reveals a disease that is cancerous and at the same time a pandemic. In this scenario, then, something crosses the border of the body and induces pain in the whole population without any means to escape.

These diseases are not only painful but also highly disgusting and abject. Mrs Jarrett's monologue reads like a list of various objects that are known to elicit disgust, amongst them: "food, body products, animals, sexual behaviours, contact with death or corpses, violations of the exterior envelope of the body (including gore and deformity), poor hygiene, interpersonal contamination (contact with unsavory human beings), and certain moral offences" (Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 637). In Churchill's play, it is not even necessary to display these disgusting objects on stage as the mere description of such objects is often enough to induce feelings of disgust and abjection (McGinn 8). The monologue starts with food that is poisonous because it is developed from monkeys – a transgression of the animal-human boundary – and continues with body products, like hair, that further destroy the world's ecosystems and kill fish (which is again connected to the food industry). In this way, it shows the close connection between humans and animals and how human interference with nature's ecosystems brings them to collapse. The suggestion that "[s]ome got into bed with their dead" not only implies "sexual behaviour" and close "contact with death or corpses" – extreme social taboos and hence also associated with disgust (Ablett 112 – 13) – but also shows moral offences which are numerous (not only the violation of nature but also of other people, which take place when governments agree to bomb each other's cities, can be read as moral offences). The illness also leads to "violations of the exterior envelope of the body" and to poor hygiene and the contact with "unsavory human beings," when children must nurse the sick. The entire situation seems inescapable: when in the end the virus finally mutates and exterminates plankton, the implication is that the next global crisis is underway, as usually without plankton the entire food chain must collapse and starvation will follow. As "frightening interactions" (Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 637) are the root cause of all these scenarios, they are inevitably linked to fear and anxiety.

However, these scenarios are not only fearful because they are disgusting but also because the cleaning ritual and the removal of the abject elements and their consequences cannot take place. In general, the abject "both endangers and protects the individual: endangers in that it threatens the boundaries of the self

and also reminds us of our animal origins, and protects us because we are able to expel the abject through various means" (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 52). While Mrs Jarrett's monologue describes attempts to expel it, this does not succeed and instead leads to more disgust-eliciting scenarios. Although the "fishermen blew up each other's boats," possibly out of desperation, this 'cleaning ritual' does not solve the problem of dead fish floating in the sea. Although sick people are deported to Antarctica so as not to contaminate others, this does neither cure the sick nor save the rest of humanity. And while "[g]overnments cleansed infected areas" they also "bombed each other's capitals," which increases the suffering for the last survivors and hints at disgust's potential to be politicised (Chanter 3; see also Klein, *Shock Doctrine* 21). As apparently no mechanisms to prevent similar diseases in the future are put into place, the people in Mrs Jarrett's monologues, just like Mrs Jarrett herself, cannot escape from these scenarios. Likewise, the anxiety such scenarios may evoke appears to be inescapable. Mrs Jarrett's monologues thus combine fear, anxiety, pain, disgust and abjection and they reveal a society that oscillates between "excess and scarcity, desperate loneliness and masses, what is escaped from and what can't be survived sane. They are milling with detail but we feel that under this surface is more and more detail, more horror" (Templeton 40).

Along with pain, disgust and abjection, the fluidity of the play's language is perhaps the most prominent aesthetic device that captures anxiety's conglomerate of (fearful) objects, which in turn account for the horror the play portrays. The uncertainty and insecurity that induce and increase these negative feelings can then also be found on the temporal level. According to Vicky Angelaki, in *Escaped Alone* Churchill "takes temporal fluidity to a new level by denying her audience any firm indications of time transitions" (*Political Theatre* 24). This temporal fluidity establishes yet another link between fear and anxiety and a sense of uncertainty in Churchill's play. The uncertainty of the future in many instances leads to a sense of insecurity in the present. This can, again, be seen in Mrs Jarrett's monologues. While her monologues are narrated in the past tense, their temporality is not necessarily decisive and, in many instances, "[t]hese tellings, though in the past, sound less like remembering than like creating" (Templeton 40). It remains unclear whether the situations from the monologues have already taken place in the past and whether they thus represent a form of news report or whether the disastrous events will take place in the future, making the monologues a form of prophecy – which would also imply that the monologues create a near-future dystopia.[127] This might be due to the content of the monologues: Mrs Jarrett

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[127] In her monograph on *Brecht and Post-1990s British Drama,* Anja Hartl explores *Escaped*

talks about apocalyptic scenarios that seem too surreal for the other women to still sit together in Sally's backyard and chat. As Angelaki convincingly argues, the play consists of two different timelines – the timeline of the women talking in Sally's backyard and the timeline of Mrs Jarrett's monologues – that seem to clash in the play, or, as she describes it,

> [t]here are two major disruptions to the interpretation of the time sequence: one is Mrs Jarrett's existence on both levels – the garden conversation and the metanarrative that forms as she delivers the news of the catastrophe to the audience in direct address; the other is the beginning and end of the play, which realistically depict Mrs Jarrett's self-narrated entrance and exit from the garden, implying that everything that unravels in the interim is an interlude. (*Political Theatre* 23)

The uncertainty regarding the different time-zones and the possibility of various timelines coinciding then mirrors the parallel universes that are mentioned in the play (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 151) and that create a further sense of ontological uncertainty. The uncertainty of the present thus leads to insecurities about the future. As Angelaki observes, this allows for two readings of Mrs Jarrett's "anti-climactic line" (*Political Theatre* 23) at the end of the play, "[a]nd then I said thanks for the tea and I went home" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 179). If this is read as Mrs Jarrett stepping back into the past, this would imply that she did in her monologues anticipate a painful future. In this case, the monologues encapsulate the temporality of anxiety, where, although physically safe in the present, the subject is mentally directed towards a painful event in the future that might strike at any moment and that cannot be prevented. If, however, Mrs Jarrett at the end returns to the present, this would imply that "Mrs Jarrett's accounts of the apocalypse belong to the past and therefore the women in the garden, fenced up in the beginning and ending of the play to indicate a disconnection from the outside world, have been oblivious to the crisis, ensconced, as they were in their insularity" (Angelaki, *Political Theatre* 23). In either case, all four women are isolated from society and must deal with their worries alone.

Simultaneously, the overwhelming conglomerate of objects that makes any clear understanding of the monologues well-nigh impossible, their transgressiveness that combines pain, disgust and abjection with fear and anxiety and their temporality that, although extending into the past and future, unfolds in the present all show that there is no escape from the situation at hand. The act of talking in which the four women engage then in many ways does represent an action that

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Alone's dystopian mood as "integral to the play's political fabric" and links it to the Brechtian concept of alienation or *Verfremdung* (136).

takes place in the present. The characters are stuck in a world where besides talking about mundane topics, they are also surrounded by (imagined) fearful objects and anxiety. The only character that is able to transgress this claustrophobic and fearful situation is Mrs Jarrett, who can move between different worlds and who might be the one who "escaped alone to tell thee." Her status as a transgressive figure then anticipates the second aspect of fear and anxiety in a negatively globalised world: isolation and loneliness.

4.2.2 Isolation and Anxiety

Escaped Alone not only portrays anxiety through language and themes that are connected to insecurity and uncertainty but it also displays the isolation and loneliness that often accompany and simultaneously increase this anxiety. While for Andrew Burton the play is "inherently political in intent," as "the audience is invited to engage intellectually and critically with the play's exploration of humanity's dysfunctional relationship with the nonhuman world" (Burton), I would argue that this dysfunctional relationship also extends to the human world. Crucially, the anxiety that is so central to *Escaped Alone* is intensified because the characters facing it remain isolated in their anxiety. This reading is in contrast to Aston's analysis of *Escaped Alone*, which describes the women's chatting as "neighbourly networking" that offers "mutual care and support as opposed to a creed of self-centred individualism" (*Restaging Feminisms* 105). Although the four women come together and, as the conversations take place during "[a] number of afternoons" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 142), do so again and again, I would argue that they appear to be living in parallel universes, isolated from each other.

The women's isolation is not only conveyed by the props on stage – the women are sitting on "[s]everal unmatching chairs. Maybe one's a kitchen chair" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 142) – or by the mentioning of parallel universes in association with TV shows, where Sally complains that there are "too many universes for me" (151), but also by the frequent breakdowns in communication. As Ben Brantley observes, when listening to the conversation of the four women, one "sense[s] a specific, isolating unease in each" (Brantley). One possible reason might be that the characters, at times, speak at cross purposes – for instance when Lena talks about Cain murdering Abel, Sally's reply is simply "chimpanzees" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 158) before Lena continues to wonder about the killing. Another reason might be that every woman seems to be caught up in her own, disconnected world so that "their fragmented conversations, which offer impressionistic reflections on their lives, are contextualized in a post-traumatic universe that rather refracts, like a broken mirror, recognizable figments of the quotidian" (Casado-Gual

237). Although the characters seem to know each other and openly talk about their life and worries, there is also a sense of defamiliarization and isolation that accompanies them. The conversations Sally, Lena, Vi and Mrs Jarrett are having are described by Angelaki as "almost yet not quite 'normal' feeling of neo-absurdist verbal playfulness" that reveal how "events of their past are slowly revisited to reveal trauma and phobias that are still raw. Then, unexpectedly, each character enters a monologue" (*Political Theatre* 24). Different from Mrs Jarrett's monologues, these monologues within the women's conversation are expressions of personal fears and anxieties. Nevertheless, they cannot be seen as entirely separate from Mrs Jarrett's visions of social dystopia, whose, as Anja Hartl observers, "growing impact [...] on this private sphere" they reflect (143). In this way, the sense of disconnection that pervades the women's conversation mirrors the broader social isolation and fear expressed in Mrs Jarrett's monologues.

The inexpressibility in *Escaped Alone* can also be found in connection with the isolation of the characters and their (mental) pain. The conversation between the women also reveals how difficult it is to speak about pain. Speech, the only way the women attempt to express their pain, is exposed as a fragile medium that does not give them access to each other's sensations: since, as Scarry claims, "[t]o have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*" (*The Body* 13), the characters cannot quite understand each other's pain, which results in further miscommunication. Lena, for instance, reveals in her short monologue a mental state that comes close to depression:

> **Lena:** some days it would be all right for weeks but then
> I'd find it coming down again. *You're so far away*
> *from people at the next desk.* Email was better than
> speaking. It's down now.
> Why can't I just?
> I just can't.
> I sat on the bed this morning and didn't stand up
> till lunchtime. *The air was too thick. It's hard to*
> *move, it's hard to see why you'd move.*
> It's not so bad in the afternoon, I got myself here.
> I don't like it here. I've no interest.
> Why talk about that? Why move your mouth and
> do talking? Why see anyone? Why know about
> anyone?
> It was half past three and all this time later it's
> twenty-five to four.
> If I think about a place I could be where there's
> something nice like the sea that would be worse
> *because the sea would be the same as an empty*
> *room so it's better to be in the empty room*

> *because then there's fewer things to mean nothing*
> *at all.*
> I'd rather hear something bad than something
> good. I'd rather hear nothing.
> It's still just the same.
> It's just the same.
> *It's the same.* (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 170; emphasis added)

Lena experiences the inexpressibility of pain observed by Scarry, who argues that appropriate descriptions of painful sensations are often missing and thus pain is generally often described though metaphors (see chapter 2.2). In Lena's monologue, these metaphors try to describe a mental and emotional status rather than anything physical and so reveal her anxious state. This can be seen, for instance, in the paradoxical statement "[y]ou're so far away from people at the next desk." Despite being physically close to her colleagues, Lena still *feels* miles away mentally, isolated and disconnected. This isolation culminates in a state of paralysis when Lena says: "[t]he air was too thick. It's hard to move, it's hard to see why you'd move." Such paralysis of course is not only a sign of depression but also of fear and anxiety (see chapter 5.1). The most striking metaphor for Lena's state of depression and anxiety is, however, the preference of an empty room over the sea, "because the sea would be the same as an empty room so it's better to be in the empty room because then there's fewer things to mean nothing at all." This emphasis on nothingness at the end of her monologue, which is stressed by the repetition of her claim that everything she hears is "the same," i. e. nothing, mirrors Kirsteva's "zero time of silence" (see chapter 2.3) and evokes the universal nothingness central to the phenomenology of anxiety. Lena is already in an overwhelming state of nothingness here, where she cannot focus on anything, because everything seems fearful and, like the atmosphere, "too thick," which is why she prefers to not be surrounded by anything. However, this nothingness she feels is hard to explain – as Heidegger already noted in "What is Metaphysics" (see chapter 2.1). The metaphors Lena uses seek to concretise the abstract sensation of anxiety, but ultimately are not very successful at doing so because she returns to the abstraction of nothingness/sameness in the end. Lena's monologue is then a good example of the inexpressibility of the abstract notions of pain and anxiety that cannot be explained through metaphors and speech alone.

For this reason, this scene can also be seen to show interpersonal defamiliarization, isolation and despair. While the information Lena gives about her mental health is very private and reveals her suffering, the other women do not further comment on it. What the three women do is what Scarry describes as typical reaction to accounts of pain: "ignoring other people's pain if there is no body damage or no weapon to make it visible" ("Schoolchildren" 308). Although Sally asks Lena

about her medication and mentions that mental health/taking medication is "not a sprained ankle" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 170), Mrs Jarrett instantly talks about her own hip replacement as if it were related to Lena's suffering. The conversation continues about physical health problems and does not circle back to Lena, who remains silent. Her next words are then "it's not an easy thing to," "not fair really" and "self defence" (171), which is fitting not only for the topic of their conversation at this point, which has now changed to Sally's life as a hairdresser, but also as a description of Lena's own situation. Self-defence and not mutual help might then be the women's only escape from their living situations (Lena, and Mrs Jarrett before her, calls Sally's involvement in her husband's death – the exact nature of which never becomes quite clear – "self defence"). In many ways this echoes what Bauman identifies as the "present-day crisis of trust" where "human relations are no longer sites of certainty, tranquillity and spiritual comfort. They become instead a prolific source of anxiety" (*Liquid Fear* 69–70). While the women might not necessarily be a source of anxiety for each other, Lena already admits that she does not like it here (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 170), Vi was clearly afraid of her husband (172) and she is now afraid and hurt that her son and granddaughter Rosie do not visit anymore (177–78, 143) and Sally's fear of cats also makes her suspicious of other people (164). Thus, although, as Aston observes, Lena's "being part of the group is clearly vital to her day-to-day survival" (*Restaging Feminisms* 105), this does not mean that her feelings of fear and anxiety are met with comforting and open ears by the other women. Likewise, Sally is teased by the others about her fear of cats (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 153), Vi is accused of lying about the killing of her husband and feels the need to defend herself (172–73), Lena's mental health issues are met with ignorance and Mrs Jarrett is referred to, rather impersonally, as "*that* woman" (143; emphasis added) and, in general, takes up the position of an outsider. While for Aston, "their friendship runs deeper than these commonplace frictions" (*Restaging Feminisms* 105), I would argue that these frictions nonetheless increase feelings of fear and anxiety. Therefore, although the women seem to be chatting along as old friends, their conversations reveal their vulnerabilities and expose their fears as well as the fact that ultimately they have to face these fears in isolation. In Aston's words, each woman might be bound "to an anxiety state she may temporarily assuage but cannot fully overcome" (104).

The feeling of isolation and loneliness might be best described by the character of Mrs Jarrett, who is taking a special position in the play. As Angelaki fittingly observes, "*Escaped Alone* deals with two worlds and two experiences: the ordinary and the extraordinary. The character linking the two is Mrs Jarrett (or Mrs J)" (*Political Theatre* 23). She is not only the character that in many instances acts as a narrator figure in the play and the only character that is referred to with her sur-

name – "[t]he difference in the naming indicate the familiarity of the three women who are old friends, and Mr Jarrett's status as the outsider in the group" (23) – but Mrs Jarrett is also the bridge between the private quotidian encounters Lena, Vi and Sally disclose and her own, global perspective on planetary chaos and destruction. Met at times with suspicion (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 143) and exclusion (166), Mrs Jarrett combines the "present-day crisis of trust" with the general feeling of loneliness in globalised societies – especially since she is the character who addresses the catastrophic state of the world in her monologues.

The prevailing sense of isolation and loneliness has also been highlighted in performances of the play. In the 2016 Royal Court production of *Escaped Alone*, Mrs Jarrett, during her apocalyptic monologues, stepped aside from the other women and was captured in a spotlight, with the rest of the stage covered in darkness. The mundane setting of Sally's backyard recedes and Mrs Jarrett stands alone and isolated on stage, sharing her most intimate thoughts with the audience but not with the other women. "When Mrs Jarrett steps outside the frame [where the conversations with the other women take place], the stage is immersed in darkness and a rectangular frame resembling a live, burning cable is the only visual image, other than Mrs Jarrett recounting crisis while standing in close proximity to the audience" (Angelaki, *Political Theatre* 24). Indeed, the interplay of light and darkness around Mrs J is an apt way to stage the anxiety pervading her monologues, because "[d]arkness is not the cause of danger, but it is the natural habitat of uncertainty – and so of fear" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 2). At the same time, the beam of light creates a border and visualises that Mrs Jarrett is trapped in her own world and thoughts. Meanwhile the darkness surrounding Mrs Jarrett also links to anxiety's association with nothingness. For Heidegger anxiety's close connection with nothingness stems from a sense of indeterminacy of the fearful object; "[t]he indeterminateness of that in the face of which and for which we become anxious is no mere lack of determination but rather the essential impossibility of determining it" ("Metaphysics" 51). In other words, the subject experiences anxiety because no fearful object is discernible since there are, according to Ahmed, too many fearful objects that pass the subject by. This indeterminate quality of fear and anxiety has its aesthetic counterpart in the darkness on stage, since "seeing darkness engages a kind of touch or feeling of absence or nothingness" (Welton, "Dark Visions" 506). Paradoxically, the darkened space behind Mrs Jarrett is thrown into stark relief by the glowing frames around it, which as it were highlight the darkness of the void (502) and so transport a sense of nothingness. This interplay of darkness, nothingness, isolation and anxiety is further described by Welton, for whom "[w]hat is at stake in *Escaped Alone* is darkness, a property of nothing but space. To look at the darkness that Mrs. Jarrett appears to hover just in front of is to perceive something on the very edge of

tangibility. [...] Even as the audience sits, bathed in the glow of safety lighting, the onstage darkness feels proximate" (505 – 06). In other words, the darkness that surrounds Mrs Jarrett and at times even seems to swallow her up entirely (503) further shifts the focus to her words and away from her body and so puts anxiety centre stage.
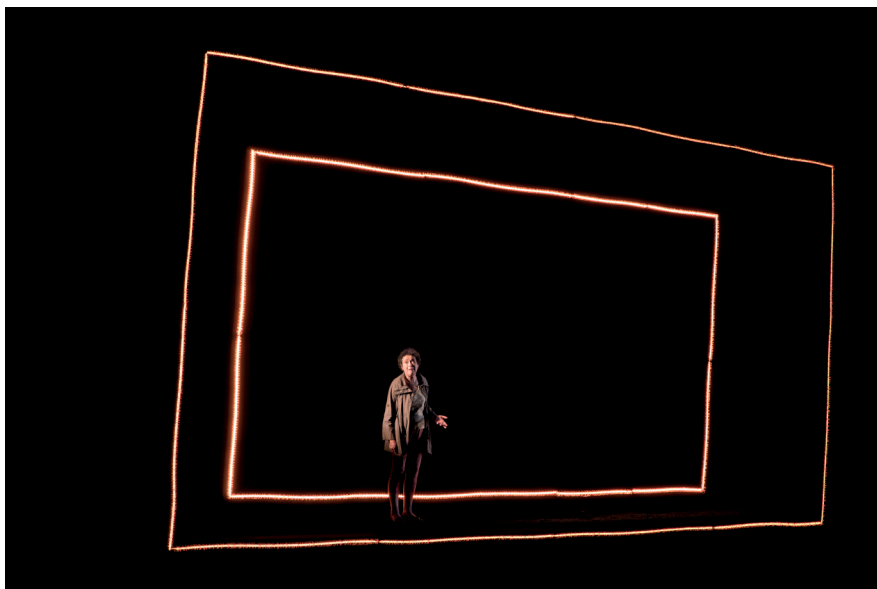

Figure 1: Krulwich, Sara. "Linda Bassett in 'Escaped Alone.'" 2017, *The New York Times/Redux/laif*, www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/theater/escaped-alone-review.html.

Both the playtext and the premiere production of *Escaped Alone* then reflect anxiety's nature as, on the one hand, excess of too many fearful objects, and on the other hand the nothingness that follows cognitive overload. Thus, although the darkness and nothingness feel tangible, they can never be reached. It is through Mrs Jarrett's monologues, which are spoken when she is in isolation and surrounded by darkness, that Churchill's play displays the isolation and loneliness that often accompany and increase anxiety. Besides Mrs Jarrett, the other three characters are not able to overcome their fears and anxieties by sharing them with each other either, which highlights the inescapable nature of anxiety.

4.2.3 Telling Stories (of Anxiety)

The conversations the four women have and Mrs Jarrett's monologues in *Escaped Alone* are connected to feelings of fear and anxiety, uncertainty and isolation. These sensations are repeatedly countered by the four women through storytelling. However, storytelling is yet another way that underscores the inescapability of the anxiety the women experience. Through storytelling the women try to share their emotions and attempt to flee into an idyllic world, which, in the end, does not cure their negative feelings. While the act of storytelling or, in another instance, singing does not really connect the characters, Mrs Jarrett's monologues are replete with intertextual references, most prominently to the biblical book of Job, that speak of anxious states and the accompanying feelings of uncertainty and at times isolation. The terrible rage Mrs Jarrett expresses in what can be seen as the last monologue of the play is a direct reaction to the inescapability of anxiety, which connects both worlds of the play: the mundane and the monstrous.[128] As Mrs Jarrett is the only character who enters both worlds, she is also the only character who can connect the mundane and the monstrous sphere by sharing her rage towards both. Nevertheless, these negative emotions are not resolved at the end of the play and Mrs Jarrett takes these anxieties with her – and so do the audience/readers, who are implicated by her epic tendencies.

In Churchill's play, the four women use storytelling as an (eventually unsuccessful) escape mechanism. This is suggested from the very beginning by the play's setup. Mrs Jarrett chances upon the other three women in a backyard that seems to offer temporary refuge – at least the refuge of the women's chatting and telling each other stories – from a possibly fearful reality. At the beginning of *Escaped Alone*, Mrs Jarrett tells the audience: "I'm walking down the street and there's a door in the fence open and inside are three women I've seen before. [...] So I go in" (Churchill 143). In this, the play's story bears resemblance to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, as Ben Brantley has remarked: "a voice invites her [i. e., Mrs Jarrett] to step on in, and so she does, a bit like Alice making the leap into Wonderland" (Brantley). Just as Alice follows the White Rabbit into an unknown world, "never once considering how in the world she was to get out again" (Carroll 38), so Mrs J seems to take an impulsive decision to withdraw into another world. Both Churchill's and Carroll's texts thus portray the escape of their protagonists and while Alice flees *from* a garden into the surreal world of Wonderland, Mrs Jarrett seems to flee *to* Sally's garden and hence into mundanity. What both stories have in common is the way they play with reality and fiction –

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128 For a more detailed examination of the difficulty to distinguish these two worlds see Proudfit.

in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* through the world Alice encounters and in *Escaped Alone* through Mrs Jarrett's monologues – and how these worlds seem to be an escape from reality.

However, while Mrs Jarrett flees into the garden, she repeatedly returns from there to the bleak world of her innermost fears: she time and again interrupts the conversation with the other women with her monologues. Thus, while sharing personal stories takes up an important part of the play, it does not seem to be a fully successful coping strategy for the four women. This also becomes clear from the nature of the intertextual references in Mrs J's monologues. The book of Job and the Bible in general are alluded to several times. On the one hand, the events reported in Mrs Jarrett's monologues resemble the biblical ten plagues of Egypt,[129] on the other hand, they are also connected to the epigraph, which is a quotation from the book of Job: "I only am escaped alone to tell thee" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 141).[130] The book of Job speaks of uncertainty, pain and anxiety: the well-known biblical figure of Job is a righteous and pious man, who has to suffer the murders of his children and servants and his financial ruin due to a bet God has with Satan. While Job is having dinner, several messengers come to him in quick succession and report catastrophic events in which Job lost his family and possessions, always ending their reports with the words "I only am escaped alone to tell thee" (Job 1.15 – 19). The book of Job then generates feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and isolation as a result of encounters with death and the loss of possessions, livelihood and identity. Due to the way in which Job's story questions divine justice – his misfortune is not deserved in any way –, Bauman calls it "the most insidious of challenges to the assumed order of things and the least easy to repel" (*Liquid Fear* 57). For although Job is "a true paragon of virtue," he has

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129 While the biblical plagues are not repeated verbatim in Mrs J's monologues, clear parallels emerge: in the first biblical plague, water is turned into blood (*The Bible* Exod. 7.14 – 24) and in one of the monologues water itself seems to be a plague where "some died of thirst, some of drinking the water" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 150). The second plague, which consists of frogs (Exod. 7.25 – 8.11/15), is replaced by pets that "rained from the sky" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 166). The plague of boils (Exod. 9.8 – 12) is replaced by "chemicals [that] leaked through cracks in the money" (155) and when there is a thunderstorm of hail and fire in the Bible (Exod. 9.13 – 35), in Mrs Jarrett's monologue "fires were lit to stop the fires and consumed squirrels, firefighters and shoppers" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 174). Finally, in Churchill's play, the death of the firstborn son (Exod. 11.1 – 12:36) is described as "[m]iscarriages [that] were frequently leading to an increase of opportunities in grief counselling" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 155).

130 The same passage from the book of Job appears as an epigraph to the epilogue of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, where it is followed by the words "The drama's done" (500). Melville's epilogue goes on to describe how the narrator Ishmael escapes alone, as sole survivor of the shipwreck of his whaler, hanging on to a floating coffin.

to face doom and destruction, which is in contrast to the "unbreakability of the sin-and-punishment and virtue-and-reward links" the Bible usually relies on (57). The book of Job hence questions exactly this simple logic and so seems to suggest that there is no security in the world whatsoever. If a pious man like Job can be punished by God and suffer, so can everybody else. Thus, as Bauman argues, the most fearsome of the many fears in modern societies is the unpredictability and uncertainty with which catastrophes might strike at any moment:

> What Job might have been as yet unaware of was that all the earthly pretenders to God-like omnipotence in the centuries to come would find the unpredictability and haphazardness of their thunder to be by far the most awesome, most terrorizing and invincible of their weapons; and that whoever might wish to steal the ruler's thunder must first disperse the fog of uncertainty that shrouds it and recast randomness into regularity. (58)

In other words, the book of Job already anticipates the fears of insecurity and uncertainty at the heart of liquid modernity. This is what makes it such an intriguing intertext for a play like *Escaped Alone* that is a sustained investigation of precisely these fears.

In particular, the intertextual references to the book of Job, whose messengers of doom are paralleled in Mrs Jarrett and her monologues that narrate catastrophes, mean that Mrs J must forever return to the anxiety she tries to flee from. Mrs Jarrett's monologues are in set contrast to the mundane setting of Sally's backyard and remind her that she always takes her anxious feelings with her. She is the herald that narrates the destruction of the world through her own vision of the apocalypse in an act of storytelling. The aforementioned temporal structure of these monologues, which could either report a yet-to-be-realised future or an event in the past, further connects her visions to the phenomenological structure of anxiety. In her monologues, Mrs Jarrett tells her own perspective on the world in her stories and describes her own version of the apocalypse, of suffering, destruction and anxiety. Simultaneously she "vocalizes the narrative of society" (Angelaki, *Political Theatre* 25) and refers to several economic, social and environmental crises (Aston, *Restaging Feminisms* 99–109). Through Mrs Jarrett's monologues, *Escaped Alone* tells of these various crises from the perspective of an elderly woman who represents a herald that tells/reports, amongst other things, of suffering and anxiety and by doing so reveals their inescapable nature.

The inexpressibility of anxiety through stories and the act of storytelling also becomes clear in the actions of the other three women: Sally, Lena and Vi. Similar to Mrs Jarrett, the three women share their own personal stories and, just like Mrs Jarrett, this storytelling does not cure them from their fears. Although the characters share their own stories, they remain isolated entities. Not even the act of singing can change this. Although they are singing in harmony, "[t]*hey are singing for*

themselves in the garden" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 166) and Mrs Jarrett "*joins in the melody*" (166) later – which outlines her status as an outsider. The play thus shows the tension between the private and the public, between being isolated and working as a group; the characters are in many ways isolated while being in company. In this I agree with Hartl, when she does not read the singing as a refuge for the women from the overwhelming dystopian outside world, as Aston suggests ("Recognition" 309), but rather sees it as "intimately embedded into the play's dystopian structure" (Hartl 144). For Hartl this can also be seen in Mrs Jarrett's monologues "directly impact[ing] on the women's retreat in the garden on the level of both content and form" (144), where they are "briefly opening up to, and considering their individual stories in terms of, a broader political context" (144). This act of impacting on other people's thoughts and emotions resembles a colouring of the world in an anxious mood that spreads from Mrs Jarrett to the other women. Thus, storytelling can reveal how a negative emotion or mood like anxiety stems from a cognitively overwhelming state that colours all objects – or subjects – in the fore- and background in this mood but that cannot be overcome or escaped from. In this case the storytelling has the exact opposite effect of an escape from anxiety. It seems that whatever the protagonists do to cope with their anxieties – from sharing their stories to singing – fails.

However, the negative feelings in the play do not necessarily stay the same and Mrs Jarrett's anxiety and fear shifts into pure rage. Most prominently, Mrs Jarrett uses her last monologue, which is embedded into the women's conversation at the end of the play, to express "terrible rage" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 179), twenty-five times in a row.[131] Described as "an apocalyptic breakdown of linguistic invention that sears anguish and fury into the flesh of the play" (Rebellato, "Apocalyptic Tone" par. 57), Mrs Jarrett's reactions towards the world she lives in reveals that there is no escape. In reference to Ahmed, Aston describes this emotional outburst as an 'affective knot' in which negative emotions suddenly break out ("Something's Missing" 23). And erupt they must. While for Hartl, the reason(s) for this emotional outburst are not explained (145), I would rather argue that they stem from the anxious situations she described before and the inability to either act on or escape from them. Her anxiety, it seems, has evolved into rage at the situation of the world in general.

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131 For a reading of this scene that changed from "capturing the righteous anger at our failed austerity politics or perhaps warning of those bubbling forces of racism and nationalism" to a more personal rage at "at my fellow citizens, at the cravenness of our political class, at the impenitent stupidity of the media, at the poverty of our public conversation" after Brexit see Rebellato ("Nation").

The general colouring of Mrs Jarrett's anxious mood of her surrounding environment and through her, of Lena, Sally and Vi's world, together with the conversion of fear and anxiety into other emotions is also transferred to the audience. In Churchill's play, it is Mrs Jarrett who is "the person who 'escaped alone' or lived to tell us the story of the apocalypse, narrated in the past tense" (Angelaki, *Political Theatre* 23). Separated from the other women and society in general, she takes the perspective of an outsider on society and repeats what Job's messengers have done before her: she describes the uncertainty and doom of human civilisation. As such, she is not only a border-crossing entity but also an epic one. Mrs Jarrett is the only character in the play who has this epic function. As an outsider, she can escape from the mundane world of Sally's backyard and is able to communicate feelings of helplessness, vulnerability, insecurity, uncertainty and isolation which are the consequences of the fear and anxiety created from a negatively globalised world. It is also through her "terrible rage" that Mrs Jarrett is able to close the gap between the mundane and the world at large, as both are connected to fear(s) and anxiety, to helplessness and the inability to escape and consequently to rage at their situation. This does not change, when, in an anticlimactic line, at the very end of the play, she says: "[a]nd then I said thanks for the tea and I went home" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 179). When Mrs Jarrett goes home, she still takes her moods and emotions with her – and here it is indifferent whether she feels anxiety or rage or a mixture of both. As Kolnai writes, in fear "the threatening object forms the constant backdrop to the moving play of intentions about the person's self" (39), which will most like endure until other emotions take over. At the same time the act of going home narrated by Mrs Jarrett directly refers to the audience – which will likewise go home after the play. This final sentence breaks the fourth wall and strengthens Mrs Jarrett's function as an epic entity. "Mrs. Jarrett's afternoons thus made us sensitive to the very oddness of ourselves as watching, witnessing beings" (Welton, "Dark Visions" 503). It is not least because of this epic function that her monologues make clear that "the crisis has caught up with us" (Angelaki, *Political Theatre* 25). Therefore, Mrs Jarrett not only takes her moods with her but she also shares them with the audience, which takes them home as well. At the end of the play, storytelling is not only another way that underscores the inescapability of anxiety, but it also reveals how emotions can shift and spread.

Ultimately, then, *Escaped Alone* portrays anxiety in various ways and "offer[s] knowing political commentary for audiences weary of realism, unambiguous messages and deceptive linearity claiming fidelity to the unpredictability of contemporary experience" (Angelaki, *Political Theatre* 25). This "unpredictability of contemporary experience" in many cases resembles anxiety's nature as a possible pain in the future that might strike at any moment. Besides this parallel in the temporal

structures of the play and the experience of anxiety, anxiety is also ingrained in the play in several other ways: firstly, through the language of the play that perfectly describes anxiety's overwhelming state and pre-reflexive nature. Secondly, through the themes that are addressed which mirror the many reasons for insecurity and uncertainty in globalised societies. Thirdly, the play responds to the close connection between fear and anxiety on the one hand and pain, disgust and abjection on the other hand, which collide with the numerous themes that cause anxiety. Fourthly, Churchill's play shows the lack of trust in other human beings that further fuels anxieties and describes the negatively globalised world. In performance practice, the loneliness that accompanies the characters has been further strengthened by the interplay of darkness and lighting that likewise reveals a state of nothingness inherent in anxiety. Finally, the play shows how these anxieties are countered through the act of storytelling, which ultimately does fail and shift the emotions away from anxiety to rage. Apart from giving elderly women a voice on stage, *Escaped Alone* thus also succeeds in granting women negative emotions and showing their perspective on anxiety.

4.3 Zinnie Harris: *How to Hold Your Breath* (2015)

Zinnie Harris's dystopian alternative reality play *How to Hold Your Breath* (2015) sees a similar interplay of insecurity and isolation, albeit on a much more political scale than *Escaped Alone.* The play describes the flight and ruin of Dana and her pregnant sister Jasmine from an economically, politically and ethically collapsing Europe: a conglomerate of dreadful events and tragedies happens at once, crashes into each other and crosses several thematic and aesthetic borders, while feelings of anxiety and pain are increased by and simultaneously cause the destruction of communication and language, which makes the play a prime example of what I call theatre of anxiety.

Harris's play begins with a misunderstanding between Dana and United Nations employee Jarron. While Dana, who is in her late twenties, thinks she has had a casual one-night stand with Jarron, he is under the impression that Dana is a sex worker and therefore wants to pay her for the night. As they heatedly argue over this, Jarron claims he is "a devil, [...] a demon" and that he wants to "play fucky fucky with your head" (Harris 23, 25). Still, Dana persistently refuses the money, but is from thereon obsessed with Jarron and persuaded that he is the personification of a demon/devil, a fearful apparition that is somehow involved in all misfortune that is about to happen to her, an idea that is further strengthened by the physical mark he leaves on her body and that seems to grow over time. After the encounter with Jarron and finding out that her sister Jasmine,

who lives with her, is pregnant, Dana leaves for an interview for a research grant and the job that comes with it. Although this interview does not go well for Dana, she is invited to yet another interview, which this time takes place abroad, in Alexandria. When Dana and Jasmine, who accompanies her, are on the train to Alexandria, the ticket inspector tells them that the bank refused their cards – as they later find out, due to a major financial and economic crash. In lack of cash, Dana and Jasmine must leave the train at a place aptly called Hartenharten. In the course of one day, the two sisters lose all their belongings, their money, their security and physical and mental integrity. During all these catastrophic events, Dana is not only repeatedly having/hallucinating encounters with Jarron but she is also accompanied by a Librarian who seems to follow her and who, unsolicited, provides her with 'how to' books which, however, cannot prevent Dana and her sister's mental and physical annihilation caused by the economic crash, the closing of all European borders and the subsequent collapse of civilisation. When, in the end, Dana has sold her phone to pay for Jasmine's treatment after a miscarriage, her only way to earn money to continue their travel to Alexandria is through sex work. Finally, she manages to go on a refugee boat with her sister to continue their travel. When this boat capsizes and kills Jasmine, Jarron and the Librarian debate about Dana's future, revealing the play's magical realism while Dana is now hovering between life and death.

Harris's play paints the worst-case scenario of Bauman's description of a society that lives in uncertainty and isolation and stages the fears and anxieties that accompany negatively globalised societies. Dana and her sister experience a tour-de-force through a society that, just like a negatively globalised society in Bauman's account, "is no longer adequately protected by the state; it is now exposed to the rapacity of forces the state does not control and no longer hopes or intends to recapture" (*Liquid Fear* 147). In this situation, the characters are left alone to cope with their anxieties. These anxieties then take place on several levels and show the interplay of uncertainty and isolation with anxiety: firstly, on the level of the storyworld, where the various horrific events that take place during Dana's journey mirror Ahmed's description of anxiety as the accumulation of too many (fearful) objects or events that take place simultaneously. These various events then also represent the uncertainties, insecurities and fears that accompany negatively globalised societies as described by Bauman. In the end, Dana has been subjected to social degradation and exclusion and has lost all her possessions, her bodily integrity, her livelihood and, after drowning, her life. Secondly, the story of the play mirrors the temporal structure of anxiety where, according to Waldenfels, during anxiety the subject anticipates an event that happens too suddenly before any protective mechanisms can take effect. Likewise, Dana and her sister are in no way prepared for the many catastrophes that happen upon them, linking their journey

to Bauman's concept of the Titanic syndrome – metaphorically and literally. Thirdly, these anxieties take place on the level of the play's language: Dana and her sister are not able to communicate their anxieties to the people around them, which leads to a state of isolation, where the characters must face the catastrophic events on their own. Finally, both sisters have to endure pains that further strengthen their anxieties and show how anxiety is closely linked to other negative sensations.

As is typical of the theatre of anxiety, *How to Hold Your Breath* illustrates the many facets of anxiety through various border crossings, which take place in time and space and affect Dana and Jasmine as well as the society they live in in general. Throughout Dana's journey, she and her sister cross various borders – literally and metaphorically – affecting her body, her mind, her sense of reality and fiction and her sense of security. While these border crossings, at the beginning of the play, oscillate between pleasure and pain, throughout their journey Dana's and Jasmine's sensations shift from pleasure to mere pain, disgust and abjection. In combination with the already shifting borders of what can be endured during anxiety's excessive nature and the coinciding of present, future and future anterior that accompanies anxiety, border crossings are the central aspect of the play's negotiation of anxiety. These crossings are then commented on by the Librarian, who is himself an epic entity crossing the border between reality and fiction and who, instead of bridging the various gaps, increases Dana's suffering. Similar to Mrs Jarrett in *Escaped Alone*, the Librarian is likewise a herald that tells Dana about her misfortunes – however this time not the misfortunes that already have happened but rather the ones that are about to happen. The Librarian, then, in many ways, stands for the insecurities and the unpredictability of future threats Bauman describes as "[b]y far the most awesome and fearsome dangers" (*Liquid Fear* 11) as well as the helplessness and isolation that accompanies citizens from negatively globalised societies. He does this in three ways: firstly, by narrating and commenting on the threats that cause Dana's and Jasmine's anxiety; secondly, by providing Dana with 'how to' books that nevertheless prove useless for her; and thirdly, the Librarian is an epic entity that, together with the devil, breaks the fourth wall and shatters the illusion of reality in the play, which mirrors anxiety's nature as a likewise fictional painful encounter in the future.

4.3.1 The Ramifications of Economic Anxiety

How to Hold Your Breath displays the effects of negative globalisation in extreme cases that are often associated with anxieties. The story of the play takes the protagonists on a journey through the ruins of European society caused by the breakdown of the banking system and reveals anxiety's conglomerate, where too many

catastrophic events happen simultaneously. The "multiple-crisis-layered script-ing" (Aston, "Moving Women" 304) of the play portrays a world that resembles Ah-med's description of anxiety as an accumulation and gathering of (fearful) objects or events. While for Ahmed this gathering takes place in the mind – where "one's thoughts often move quickly between different objects, a movement which works to intensify the sense of anxiety" (*Cultural Politics* 66), in Harris's play this usually internal, mental process is exemplified by more vivid examples of pain caused by the economic crash, like the lack of food or shelter that are likewise accumulating and overwhelming all other emotions and thoughts Dana might have. At the same time, these accumulating dreadful events and objects represent the uncertainties, insecurities and anxiety that accompanies negative globalisation as described by Bauman.

There are various situations the two women encounter that induce globalised anxieties – situations that threaten one's body/possessions, livelihood and identity and situations that could happen to everyone who is not rich enough to prevent them. Most prominently, these anxieties can be found when Dana and Jasmine are stranded in Hartenharten after a major financial and economic crash has hap-pened in Europe, leading the surrounding countries to close their borders. In their hotel room, Dana finds out that all banks have shut. Their hotel room is freezing, the heating does not work and neither does the kettle. They have no way to get money or to pay for the room. A succession of disastrous events continues until in scene seventeen they have no money, no water or food, no clean clothes, no health insurance and no safe opportunity to travel to Alexandria. At the same time, they lost their phones and thus cannot contact anyone, they lost their suit-case with personal belongings and Jasmine lost her baby, leading to physical and mental health issues. Therefore, the fear and pain Dana and her sister have to endure occur on a mental and physical level respectively. There are so many in-stances of fear and pain that Dana is not able to concentrate on any of them, feel-ing overwhelmed by what in Ahmed's terms may be described as the conglomerate of fears surrounding her and losing track of what she is afraid of. As Julia Boll claims, "[o]n a structural level, *How to Hold Your Breath* points at multiple causal entanglements that not only affect the characters' choices and their trajectories, but also make up the core structure of the society and indeed the universe in which they move and operate" ("Entanglements" 234). These "multiple causal en-tanglements" are, however, obscure. "By far the most awesome and fearsome dan-gers" as Bauman observes, "are precisely those that are *impossible,* or excruciating-ly *difficult,* to anticipate: the unpredicted, and in all likelihood *unpredictable* ones" (*Liquid Fear* 11), which further explains Dana's desperate situation and her fight for her and her sister's life by adding a layer of insecurity, vulnerability as well as chance and unpredictability to her already anxiety-stricken situation. Dana's

story, then, on an individual level, portrays fear and anxiety in relation to one's own life. As Kolnai observes, "in every genuine case of fear it is somehow the whole self, or the very existence of the self, which is put in question, whether it is one's very life which is threatened, or whether it is the salvation of one's soul, one's livelihood, social position or personal liberty" (38). Dana experiences these anxieties on various occasions during her journey to Alexandria in order to get a job and earn a livelihood, when she is restricted in her personal liberty when the borders are closing (Harris 119) or when she has to prostitute herself in order to escape the horrid situation (134) and her very life is threatened while she is on the boat (152), levitating between life and death. This is ever more striking in contrast to the lives of "relative privilege" (Aston, "Moving Women" 305) the two protagonists of Harris's play seem to have lived before the encounter with Jarron and the crash of the banking system. The play then shows how, as Bauman writes, "evil may hide *anywhere*" (*Liquid Fear* 67) and strike everyone, which resembles the overall structure of anxiety and is also reminiscent of the biblical intertext of the book of Job in Churchill's *Escaped Alone* (see chapter 4.2.3).

The depiction of society in *How to Hold Your Breath* echoes what Bauman warns about in negatively globalised societies and thus the play can be seen as the expression of both a phenomenological and a sociological understanding of anxiety. The insecurity that accompanies negatively globalised societies resembles, in the play, the uncertain political situation. What Dana must endure throughout the play, her pain and inability to express her needs and anxieties, comes very close to what Bauman describes as the three kinds of dangers that induce fear and anxiety:

> Some threaten the body and the possessions. Some others are of a more general nature, threatening the durability and reliability of the social order on which security of livelihood (income, employment), or survival in the case of invalidity or old age depend. Then there are dangers that threaten one's place in the world – a position in the social hierarchy, identity […] and more generally an immunity to social degradation and exclusion. (*Liquid Fear* 3–4)

At the end of the play, Dana has encountered all three kinds of dangers and their attendant fears and anxieties, as she neither possesses any valuables nor physical integrity, she has been raped and beaten up, she has no employment or stable environment that will secure her future and she has no position in society, being a refugee in a foreign country that is not friendly to immigrants. Although she thinks she lives in something Bauman would call an "open society," Dana experiences the negative effects of this kind of openness that

now brings to most minds the terrifying experience of heteronomous, vulnerable populations overwhelmed by forces they neither control nor truly understand, horrified by their own undefendability and obsessed with the security of their borders and of the population inside them – since it is precisely that security *inside* borders and *of* borders that eludes their grasp and seems bound to stay beyond their reach forever [...]. (97)

The open society thus can neither bring security nor can it tackle society's anxieties. The storywold of *How to Hold Your Breath* mirrors the many anxieties that lurk in societies due to negative globalisation.[132] In the play, these threats and dangers not only come from various different sources, threatening body/possessions, livelihood and identity, but also coincide with and thus visualise the accumulating nature of anxiety. The play then cynically plays with the end of the open society and illustrates what it means to stay on the outside, facing an uncertain present and future alike.

It is not only the phenomenological understanding of anxiety as a conglomerate of objects that is represented in the play but also anxiety's shattered temporality. Although anxiety does usually take place in the future, as an anticipated pain (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 65), the events that elicit anxiety in *How to Hold Your Breath* also take place in the present as a sequence of never-ending crises. What makes these present moments of uncertainty and insecurity so anxiety-inducing is that the two sisters are not prepared for the economic collapse and thus find themselves in a seemingly infinite sequence of catastrophes. The play then mirrors the temporal structure of anxiety – anxiety before a painful future event for which the subjects are not prepared and that will leave no time to act and prevent/moderate it. Moreover, these sudden events that happen during Dana and her sister's journey and their unpreparedness metaphorically and physically – both sisters are stranded on a sinking boat after all – mirror Bauman's concept of the Titanic syndrome and of a society that is likewise unprepared for the various threats that could happen at any time.

In *How to Hold Your Breath*, Dana and her sister do not experience anxiety as something painful they anticipate but they rather live through what Waldenfels describes as the temporality of anxiety and thereby directly demonstrate the fears and anxiety that lurk in contemporary societies. For Waldenfels, anxiety is the dread of something that might happen at any moment in the future and affect

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132 Among the manifold anxiety-inducing crises modern society is facing, capitalism, whose power to shape our society is increasingly coming under scrutiny, is one of the most prominent catalysts for various crises and is also present in *How to Hold Your Breath.* Dan Rebellato has convincingly argued that "the apocalyptic tone recently adopted in British theatre" ("Apocalyptic Tone" par. 58) and its many dystopian plays is the theatre's reaction to capitalism and its crises.

an unprepared subject which does not have any tools or mechanisms to prevent it. Thus, the painful event suddenly passes the subject by and becomes its past – a new and painful past. The subject is afraid that an unforeseen future that may change its way of life could happen too early and become the past without the subject having an adequate solution for it, ideally to prevent it (24). This temporal structure of the future anterior – it will have come too soon to be prepared – can be found in Harris's play: Dana and Jasmine are stranded in Hartenharten in the first place because the collapse of the banking system happened in precisely this sudden and unprepared manner as explained by Waldenfels. When the train inspector tells Dana that "the bank's refused" her card and that she'll "either have to get off at the next station or pay again" (Harris 72), Dana realises that neither she nor her sister have enough cash to pay for their tickets. When the ticket inspector offers to bend the rules and give them a "two-for-one offer" to Budapest for 45 euros, Dana declines suspecting Jarron being behind the discount to pay her for the night. Although Jasmine then buys a single ticket – spending all the cash they have – and Dana decides to leave the train in order to "sort the Bank and meet [Jasmine] in Budapest" (76), they both leave the train at Hartenharten. There, they meet the Librarian, who exposes how unprepared Dana is for the sudden economic collapse. While the Librarian advises Dana to leave the place as fast as possible, he also hands her the first 'how to' book which is titled: *How to Live with No Money.* Dana's encounter with the Librarian reveals how unprepared she is for the whole situation:

> **Dana:** what do you mean, no money?
> **Librarian:** I mean not much money.
> **Dana:** we have lots of money
> **Librarian:** look, do you want these books or not?
> **Dana:** we have lots of money in our bank account
> we just need a bank
> **Librarian:** third, *How to Survive an Economic Disaster.* Bit outdated, but -
> **Dana:** if you could just tell me where the bank is
> **Librarian:** fourth book. *How to Find a Bank when They Have All Shut*
> **Dana:** why have they shut?
> **Librarian:** do you read the papers? Watch the news?
> **Dana:** what has happened?
> **Librarian:** it was on the cards for a while, if you care to read
> Jefferson's *Economic Reality in Post-euro Europe* you
> would have had it all predicted. Or Fresherman's *How*
> *the Early Twenty-first-Century Economists Got it All*
> *Wrong*
> the banks have shut their doors
> internal collapse, one after the other
> just like before. Only they have done it again

> **Dana:** they were fine yesterday
> **Librarian:** they were teetering yesterday. They weren't fine
> yesterday. If you read the small print, the detail of
> what was going on
> look do you want these books or not?
> **Dana** *takes the books.* (82–83)

At this moment in the play it is already too late for Dana to act or even prevent the crisis from happening and she can now only react and try to prevent further collateral damage. This dialogue also reveals how Dana is always lacking behind and left to cope with a sequence of disastrous consequences she is never able to struggle through. Although the bank refused her card, and although the media already foreshadowed the crash, part of why Dana is not prepared is that she does not believe that the whole banking system is able to collapse. She thus neglects the Librarian's advice to leave the place as fast as possible. This distorted temporality of anxiety – where it is too late to prevent misfortunes – is then also the reason for Dana's uncertainty and vulnerability. *How to Hold Your Breath* thus exemplifies Bauman's observation that "'[f]ear' is the name we give to our *uncertainty:* to our *ignorance* of the threat and of what is to be *done* – what can and what can't be – to stop it in its tracks – or to fight back if stopping it is beyond our power" (*Liquid Fear* 2). Throughout the play and the various fear-inducing situations that impose themselves on Dana, she is competing against a temporality that is working against her: the catastrophe has already happened and she now lives in a world that has to deal with its consequences.

Although Dana, once she understands that the crisis is real, tries to prevent further misfortune to her and her sister, it is not only already too late to do so but Dana also lacks the means to achieve this. This condition of utter unpreparedness in many ways resembles the situation described by Bauman as the Titanic syndrome. For Bauman, the shipwreck of the Titanic liner was especially dreadful because the people on the ship were absolutely unprepared for it (although it was always a possible scenario) and once they realised the severity of the situation they lacked the means to prevent a catastrophe. The Titanic disaster could have been at least mitigated, if, for instance, the ship had carried enough lifeboats for all passengers. There likewise is an implication that the catastrophe that befalls Dana and Jasmine could have been prevented – perhaps by properly functioning controlling instances of the banking system, particularly since there were warnings of a possible looming financial crisis, at least according to the Librarian (Harris 83). As Aston pithily observes, Dana "comes to stand for all of us whose economic privilege occludes the suffering that could be, but is not avoided" ("Moving Women" 305). Of course, Dana herself, before the onset of the disaster, seems to have relied on her privilege and did not "care to read" the predictions and take preventive measures.

The play thus not only shows how anxiety can be represented on stage though a conglomerate of (fearful) events that comprise the worst-case side effects of a negatively globalised society in the present and characters that lack the means to overcome these anxious events, but Dana's reaction towards the collapse of the economy also mirrors the situation on the Titanic, as both do not seem plausible and are thus not prepared for.

4.3.2 Pain and Isolation

The anxiety and insecurity that has been described in the previous chapter is then accompanied by isolation – as can be seen in the relative lack of (successful) communication – and different forms of pain. For Bauman, one reaction towards the uncertainty and insecurity of the future and the present respectively is that people in negatively globalised societies are divided into three roles – each of which is isolated by itself: "perpetrators, victims, and 'collateral casualties'" (*Liquid Fear* 98). The consequence is that "[w]e are all in danger, and we are all dangers to each other" (98). While there is no shortage of the second and third group, who "frantically seek escape and breathe vengeance," the first group "are frightened that their turn to do the same may – and will – come" (98). This behaviour, which resembles the concept of 'survival of the fittest,' not only increases feelings of fear and anxiety – after all, for Waldenfels, anxiety is closely connected to the singularisation of the subject (115) – but through this rivalry increases the pain of those involved. All this is portrayed in *How to Hold Your Breath* through various forms of border crossings that threaten the characters' physical integrity, possessions, livelihood and identity and that, together with the characters' inability to communicate with other people, further increase Dana and Jasmine's isolation.

In Harris's play, Dana and her sister are not able to communicate their anxiety, which distances them from other people, from the Librarian and, in the end, also from each other. The dysfunction and destruction of language is depicted repeatedly, for instance by Martha and Clare, who can only communicate through acts of violence and beat up an already hurt Dana right before she gets on the refugee boat (Harris 143), or by Jasmine, who, after having lost her child, does suffer a form of amnesia and cannot follow any communication (125–26). The interactions between the Librarian and Dana are another case in point. Scene five is the first time Dana contacts the Librarian, asking for a book on demons after having had the encounter with Jarron. This first encounter takes excruciatingly long as the Librarian does not seem to understand Dana's simple request and, by asking detailed questions, complicates the matter without offering real help (39–46). While this seems to increase the comic relief in the play, it also shows that

Dana cannot rely on him to offer any support. In Hartenharten, the very friendly but pedantic and at times importunate Librarian accompanies Dana on her travels and provides her with books. He is then also part of another instance of dysfunctional communication in the play, which takes place when Dana calls an ambulance for Jasmine while she is having a miscarriage. The woman from the emergency hotline does not see the urgency of Dana's call and does a slow and inefficient assessment with her – the situation can be seen to mirror political reactions to various crises –, while the Librarian is providing Dana (who in her utter distress is considering calling back Jarron, "the devil") with well-meaning but utterly useless advice. Finally, at the end of the assessment, the woman concludes:

> **Woman:** twenty minutes now
> **Dana:** twenty minutes, there must be a way to call a devil
> **Librarian:** you can't rush me
> how to keep your cool when your sister is dying
> **Dana:** she isn't dying
> can you get it any quicker than twenty minutes?
> **Librarian:** she doesn't get blood, she'll die
> **Dana:** they'll give her blood then, won't they? Someone give
> her some blood. Give me a book, how to make them
> give someone blood when they need blood
> **Librarian:** how to listen when people are talking nonsense
> **Dana:** what sort of nonsense?
> **Woman:** I am sorry I have to ask, do you have insurance?
> **Dana:** insurance?
> this is an emergency –
> **Librarian:** how to keep your cool when life is stressful
> **Dana:** – I don't need insurance
> **Woman:** do you intend to pay for her treatment in cash?
> **Librarian:** it's got a CD, this one with breathing exercises
> meditation (112–13)

While Dana, for the woman on the hotline, is only one 'customer' out of many, the slow assessment is not only, to large parts, useless, but also wastes valuable time and shows Dana that institutions previously installed to help people in need do not fulfil this task anymore. In this scene, communication is reduced to absurdity because, while Dana becomes increasingly desperate, she does not seem to be able to communicate on a rational level with anyone. Dana's anxiety and pain thus become evident in the failure of communication in the scene. The characters talk at cross purposes, which results in a multitude of sentences that are unconnected and leads to several threads of communication that happen simultaneously. This chaotic coinciding of multiple topics and simultaneous events is an example of what Ahmed describes as a conglomerate of different fearful thoughts that

merge into anxiety (*Cultural Politics* 66). What is more, the Librarian does not show any real support but adds another layer of stress to Dana's condition by suggesting book titles that contain even more horror scenarios. In this way, the Librarian is confronting Dana with more objects and possible events that induce fear and anxiety. Although Dana can prevent her sister's death in this scene, this is not achieved by reading books – as there simply is not enough time to do so – but by enduring the assessment and selling her phone (and thus perhaps the most important tool that connects her to other people and allows her to call help), in order to pay for the treatment.

Being left in isolation to face a crisis they did not cause also increases the sisters' pain. These painful situations are then all connected to border crossings concerning body/possessions, livelihood and identity, which all represent possible loci of threats that induce fear and anxiety. The play's first scene already gives an impression of the physical and mental borders that are crossed throughout the play – through sex, manipulation and commercial interests. In particular, the connection between anxiety and pain (see chapter 2.2) is highlighted once more. Infuriated that Dana did not see their sexual encounter as part of a commercial transaction but was instead looking for the pleasure of a one-night stand, Jarron insists that he is "unloveable," "a demon" and "a bridge that you don't cross" (Harris 23). When, regardless of his warning, Dana crosses this bridge by refusing the money he offers for the night, for Dana the oscillation between pleasure and pain shifts towards mere pain, as she projects the reason for the ordeal that follows back onto this encounter, which can be seen as another representation of the crisis of trust already touched upon in *Escaped Alone* (see chapter 4.2.2). The pain and anxiety she thenceforth experiences become visible in the mark that appears on Dana's body after the one-night stand and that is not only referred to as the "mark of the devil" (46) but that also starts growing and, in the end, is "all over her" (132). Its growth coincides with Dana's descent into the painful chaos of her journey across the continent. While the mark does not seem to hurt Dana, it still infiltrates her body and marks her against her will – it becomes a sign of her growing pain.

Perhaps the play's most direct association between the staging of pain that threatens the body's integrity and anxiety occurs in the scene in which Jasmine loses her child. After the physical pain of the miscarriage, which includes massive blood loss, Jasmine is in shock and blames herself and her supposedly bad parenting skills for losing the foetus. She thinks of ever more surreal scenarios picturing how the baby might have lived and yet died, imagining "how it could have been after it was born" (Harris 115). This transfers her speculation into the irrealis mood that is closely connected to the future anterior and hence to the temporality of anxiety: she imagines a terrible future that she will have caused and will never

have been able to prevent, even though – or perhaps rather because – this future can never materialise as the child will never be born. Jasmine's outburst culminates in an absurd nightmarish fantasy in which she imagines how she might have caused her baby's head to fall off:

> **Jasmine:** What if the neck snapped and the head fell off?
> Then I would have this headless baby, I would have this
> horrible headless baby and what do you do with a
> baby that doesn't have a head? I wouldn't have known
> how to cuddle and comfort something like that. I
> would get cross. I would shout at it because I was so
> tired and it wouldn't feed. It would just bleed. Bleed
> and bleed all over the floor. I would shake it. I would
> hurt it, I would get very angry and shake it. Stop
> bleeding I would say. Stop bleeding. You can't bleed
> like this, you have to stop bleeding and live. You have
> to live. You have to be my boy. You have to let me put
> my arms around you and you have to grow up and ask
> about the stars. You can't ask about the stars if you
> are bleeding like this. You are just blood you aren't a
> child. You put blood in a pot and make a pudding.
> You mop it up with a sponge. You soak it up with
> tissues and flush it down the loo. There is nothing to
> you. You can't be my boy, my precious bundle of child,
> you are just blood.
> Down the toilet you go. Blood.
> **Dana** *holds her.*
> **Jasmine** *opens her mouth but can't make a sound.* (116)

While this outburst has its roots in the traumatic experience of the miscarriage, its odd temporal displacement into a never-to-be-realised future as well as the predominance of blood in her speech establish a link to anxiety (via pain and disgust) that goes beyond Jasmine's own experience. What Jasmine's monologue thematises are near-universal sources of anxiety: losing a child, or not being able to see them grow up and "ask about the stars," is also a conventional metaphorical double for the loss of a positive future. Jasmine's loss, which is already irreversibly past, thus still presents a potential future source of anxiety for the audience – a fearful event that, in Waldenfels's terms, will/would have happened too soon for them/Jasmine to prepare for and avert it. Again, anxiety is represented indirectly here, in a complex and multi-layered aesthetic displacement, both through the odd temporality and especially through the affective displacement of anxiety with pain and disgust. First, the imagined baby's excessive bleeding displaces Jasmine's own bleeding, a sign of her pain, which due to pain's inexpressibility (Scarry, *The Body*

4) can only be verbalised indirectly in this way. This pain is then in turn replaced by Jasmine's disgust when she realises that she does not hold a child but "just blood" in her hands and resolves to "flush it down the loo," in a reaction that is not only reminiscent of Douglas's observation that the human body's vulnerability, as visible in excretions like blood, is a frequent source of disgust (121) but also depicts a cleaning ritual characteristic of disgust and abjection (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 55–56). Both Jasmine's pain and her disgust are then affective displacements for the anxiety she projects.

Another prime source of anxiety in *How to Hold Your Breath* is the economic uncertainty Dana and her sister face, when, increasingly, their entire livelihood is at stake. After the encounter with Jarron and before both sisters are stranded at Hartenharten, Dana has her first interview for the research grant she applied for. The anxiety-laden situation of the interview is something the play presents in intermittently recurring scenes. During the interview Dana sits on a chair in the middle of the stage while a bright light is blinding her so she cannot see any of the interview panellists who consist of disembodied voices that surround her (Harris 35). This first interview situation establishes borders by playing with darkness and light – Dana is in the spotlight while the panellists are voices coming from the darkness, hiding from any real contact with her. Dana is separated from any human interaction and the blinding lights that seem to shine through her distract her from concentrating on her presentation. Nonetheless, she is invited to yet another interview to Alexandria. While the interviews do not threaten Dana's livelihood, the research grant interview is the reason why Dana travels to Alexandria in the first place. Fittingly, the people arranging the interview not only hide in darkness during the interview scenes, but they also hide from all responsibility and "leave travel arrangements up to the individuals" (135) although they soon know that the borders are shut. When Dana asks the panellists to give her a document stating that she has "a position to go to" (136) the panellists decline, describing it as an "administrative burden," reminding her that she simply does not have a position but is only invited to yet another interview and referring to the other applicants they can give the post to. However, the more desperate the situation in Europe gets, the more Dana is dependent on the research funding and, with all her money and possessions gone, the more the whole situation is threatening her livelihood.

It is not just the borders of body, possessions and livelihood that are crossed to induce pain and reveal a society's most gruesome anxieties but the boundaries between pain and anxiety are crossed as well, leading to the merging of pain and anxiety on a physical, mental and material level. As state borders close, Dana becomes entrapped on her journey and is forced to suffer hunger, pain and humiliation. These negative sensations are then reinforced with a sense of disgust when

Dana is forced to prostitute herself and in due course is raped by a punter. The play's focus on the crossing of borders – political and private, physical and mental – is nowhere as clear as when the act of raping coincides with an interview scene (Harris 133–38). This constitutes a breach of Dana's physical and mental borders at the same time and causes her unimaginable pains. However, desperate for her life, Dana sees the only way out of her and her sister's predicament in sex work – which is ironic as the whole play starts with a scene in which she defends herself against being a sex worker. In the end, her 'customer' is not willing to pay the 45 euros she demands and rapes her for 10 euros. While Dana is having rough intercourse with the punter, she is simultaneously asked to repeat her presentation for the interview panel. Being in the spotlight, surrounded by disembodied voices that have no mercy for her situation while her body is violated, is the ultimate crossing of borders in body and mind that induces long-lasting pain as well as desperation and anxiety. Pain and anxiety, which, according to Ahmed, is a conglomerate of anticipated pains in the future, are transgressive phenomena as they involve "the violation or transgression of the border between inside and outside" (*Cultural Politics* 65). Thus, in *How to Hold Your Breath*, some of the most dreadful threats are aimed at the body and livelihood at the same time, leading to the accumulation of painful scenarios. The collapse of the banking system, economic crash, closing of borders and breakdown of social structures that make it near impossible for Dana and her sister to get to Alexandria then further increase her pain.

At the end of the play, this becomes a question of bare survival. Dana and her sister are finally on a lifeboat[133] with hundreds of other people, discussing their future perspectives:

> **Jasmine:** we won't ever be going back home, will we?
> **Dana:** I don't think there is anything left for us there.
> *Beat.*
> **Jasmine:** I don't like the idea of not existing.
> Of being a person but not a person. Like the baby
> **Dana:** the baby –

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[133] The lifeboat in *How to Hold Your Breath* functions as a reminder of the thousands of refugees that not only face violence and assault but also die at European borders each year (International Organization for Migration; see also Quinn; Rankin). This reminder is important because, as Bauman wrote just a year after *How to Hold Your Breath* premiered, "[s]igns are piling up that public opinion, in cahoots with the ratings-covetous media, is gradually yet relentlessly approaching the point of 'refugee tragedy fatigue'. Drowned children, hastily erected walls, barbed-wire fences, overcrowded concentration camps and governments vying with each other to add the insult of treating the migrants as hot potatoes to the injuries of exile, narrow escape, and the nerve-racking perils of the voyage to safety – all such moral outrages are ever less news and ever more seldom 'in the news'" (*Strangers* 2).

> **Jasmine:** is dead I know, whereas we –
> we'll just be illegal. I understand.
> **Dana:** when we get there, it will get better.
> It will all feel better
> *There is a sudden jolt.* (Harris 148)

Here, Jasmine and Dana discuss what Bauman describes as "dangers that threaten one's place in the world – a position in the social hierarchy, identity [...] and more generally an immunity to social degradation and exclusion" (*Liquid Fear* 4). When Jasmine is referring to "the idea of not existing," she indicates how, in the course of a few days, the crash of the banking system has taken literally everything from the two sisters and made the Global North's worst nightmare a reality. Shortly after this scene the boat capsizes and kills Jasmine. This is the play's realisation of the ultimate fear, the primal fear of death, which "is perhaps the prototype of archetype of all fears; the ultimate fear from which all other fears borrow their meanings" (52). Simultaneously, while the boat capsizes and Dana and Jasmine are drowning, Dana finds herself back in an interview scene.[134] She is holding her breath and at the same time is trying to answer the questions from the panellists. Talking will drown her and holding her breath will diminish her chances of a new life in Alexandria – leaving her with a choice between being dead and being unable to live. This is the starkest way in which Dana's language breaks down, while her body, mind, livelihood and identity are under immediate threat. At the very end of the play, when Dana is hovering between life and death, it is the Librarian and Jarron who decide her fate. This very last scene then not only shows how liquid society "divide[s] humanity into those categories worthy of care and the *unwertes Leben* – the lives unworthy of living" (80) but the play also displays one of the most sinister fears of humanity: the fear of death (29, 41 – 42). It is then her death – metaphorically and literally – that silences Dana until the end of the play.

The destruction of Dana's language, in combination with border-crossings and the pain they cause, is already foreshadowed in the first scene of the play, which takes on the function of a prologue:[135]

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134 In the 2015 Royal Court production, the scene in which the boat capsizes was staged as a literal "tilting of the stage that multiple sea-crossing bodies of Royal Court extras fought and writhed to hand on to" (Aston, "Moving Women" 304) – underscoring the dramatic life-or-death character of the scene.

135 This prologue was not included in the premiere production of *How to Hold Your Breath* (Boll, "Entanglements" 218).

> I am stand at the back. Don't look out. Gets shouted
> at for looking down. I am eyes closed, head bent in
> every gathering. I am knees bowed, chest to the floor.
> I am a flower by the wall, grass in the shade. I am
> back turned, shoulders hunched, face hollowed. I am
> a scream. A howl. I am a snake on the plane, a hyena,
> an antelope. I am ant under a stone, beetle scurrying
> away. I am beaten at birth, blackened. I am sand. I am
> soil. I am earth. I am less than earth. I am poor. I'm so
> poor my skin is my clothes. I am uncovered. Ashamed.
> The land can't feed me. I am the end. The dead. The
> carcass by the roadside. I am the abyss into which
> people dread to fall. (Harris 13)

The annihilation of semantic meaning and language that leads to the isolation of both Dana and Jasmine can thus already be traced in the prologue, in which Dana "speaks to the audience" (13), describing the journey she is about to begin. The entire speech reads like a poem and the density of its poetic language makes the anger but also the fear and anxiety become palpable. This is the first incidence in which language slips from Dana's lips and she claims she is "a scream. A howl" (13), comparing herself to wild animals and natural elements. Furthermore, this prologue also shows the many fears that hide in negatively globalised societies, like the fear of exclusion – "I am flower by the wall, grass in the shade" – or the fear of threatening one's identity – "I am the end. The dead." Thus, the play already foreshadows the painful ending in its prologue and so mirrors anxiety's anticipatory nature.

While the destruction of society is described on several thematic levels that crash into each other and so comment on dysfunctional societies, Dana in *How to Hold Your Breath* hence has to endure the crossing of mental and physical boundaries and the destruction of her language, subsequently leading to and being a sign of her pain, fear and anxiety. As Elaine Aston observes, "[t]he circularity of Dana's journey from ignorance, through the seeing and to non-seeing augers [sic] a cycle that needs to break, but is not broken" ("Recognition" 305). *How to Hold Your Breath* then truly displays these fears that lurk behind the Global North and reveals "the abyss into which people dread to fall."

4.3.3 Reflections on/of Anxiety

How to Hold Your Breath can then be read as a sustained reflection on individual and social anxiety. This can perhaps best be seen in the figure of the Librarian. The way in which the Librarian foreshadows and comments on the events in the play

not only resembles the role of an omniscient narrator in a novel but also makes him an epic entity that has a metatheatrical role beyond mere comic relief: firstly, it is through the Librarian that the reasons for anxiety are reflected on, through the book titles that span from threats affecting the physical integrity or the economic welfare of Dana and her sister to titles that threaten the entire identity of the protagonists. Secondly, the Librarian comments on and ridicules the coping mechanisms the characters in the play use to overcome their anxiety by using the 'medium' of 'how to' books to comment on these anxieties. Thirdly, together with Jarron, who doubles as the devil, the Librarian comments on the inadequacy of the dramatic form itself to stage anxiety through dramatic realism: by being an epic character that transcends the storyworld and thus breaks the border between reality and fiction, the Librarian shatters the illusion of realism in the play and portrays anxiety in the realm of a fiction, as a never realised anticipated pain in the future.

The first and the second epic function of the Librarian are then closely connected to his quirk of communicating through 'how to' book titles. When Dana and her sister come to Hartenharten, *"the Librarian taps her on the shoulder"* (Harris 80) and reports that he has the books Dana ordered and that he added a few new ones – mirroring sales strategies of commercial online booksellers. These suggested readings then comment on Dana's situation without her realising the severity of it. As he hands over the self-help books, the Librarian wryly advises Dana to

> get back on a main-route train as fast
> as you can. My second suggestion is a 'how to' book.
> Always the best, you can't go wrong with a 'how to'
> book. This one, *How to Live with No Money*,
> published a few years ago but still one of the classics. (82)

It is through these book titles that the Librarian is not just commenting on but also foreshadowing the events of the play – at this point neither Dana nor the audience know that the entire banking system is about to collapse and Dana has permanently lost access to the money in her account. This instance of commenting on the play by the Librarian has its sad climax when Dana decides to prostitute herself to pay for Jasmine's treatment in the hospital and asks the Librarian for advice, who immediately delivers: *"How to Stop Gagging with Someone's Putrid Penis in Your Mouth* [...]. *How to Make Sure You Don't Get Strangled. How to Not Get a Disease that Will Kill You. How to Stay Alive during Prostitution"* (129). Thus, the horrendous events that happen to Dana are imagined, commented on and contextualised by the Librarian's book titles.

The way the Librarian then communicates through book titles, more specifically 'how to' book titles, presents another case of miscommunication in the play and re-

veals consumer-oriented market mechanisms that, instead of providing relief from the anxiety-stricken situation, increase Dana's helplessness and shift the responsibility to find solutions to the individual. Designed to provide basic knowledge on a specific topic in a very short time, 'how to' books are predestined to create superficial knowledge that in a state of urgent crisis does not prove helpful.[136] Thus, even if Dana had the time to read them, these books might not be as helpful as the Librarian thinks. In other words, they "symbolise [...] a consumerist belief in easy solutions to every problem" (Billington, *"How to Hold Your Breath"*). This also means that the books stand for the 'quick fixes' Bauman describes as avoidance techniques for liquid modern societies that circumvent any real change. These quick fixes, which can be bought with money, only repair the collateral damage, for instance after disaster events caused by the climate catastrophe (see chapter 5.1).

In *How to Hold Your Breath*, the 'how to' books can be seen exactly as this kind of quick fix that can be bought with money and instead of fixing the problems of the economy and the banking system – enduring and tedious endeavours – shift the responsibility of survival to the individual: the self-help books are the only source of help left when social structures are dysfunctional. The play thus stages what Bauman observes for the liquid modern society, where the task politicians and governments perform – the task of protecting citizens from threats to body/ possessions, livelihood and identity – is shifted to the individual who needs to "seek, find and practise individual solutions to socially produced troubles [... using] resources that are blatantly inadequate to the task" (*Liquid Fear* 136) – resources like 'how to' books. The result of this consumer-oriented behaviour is an endless negative feedback loop of consumerism and anxiety: "The consumer economy depends on the production of consumers, and the consumers that need to be produced for fear-fighting products are fearful and frightened consumers, hopeful that the dangers they fear can be forced to retreat and that they can do it (with paid help, for sure)" (7). Although the Librarian's books are free, the underlying system of these 'how to' books remains the same. Thus, instead of offering real help, these books and the ever new titles the Librarian suggests further overwhelm Dana in her current crisis. Although the Librarian gives Dana well-meaning advice by warning her of the various threatening situations that might happen at any

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136 A comprehensive online list of "50 Must-Read How-To Books" (bookriot.com/best-how-to-books/) contains titles that come very close to the fictional titles the Librarian suggests to Dana, such as *Water Storage: Tanks, Cisterns, Aquifers, and Ponds for Domestic Supply, Fire and Emergency Use*, or *How to Survive a Sharknado and Other Unnatural Disasters: Fight Back When Monsters and Mother Nature Attack* and, ironically, given that a 'how to' book is itself a form of consumption, *The Year of Less: How I Stopped Shopping, Gave Away My Belongings, and Discovered Life is Worth More Than Anything You Can Buy in a Store*.

moment in her life, it comes far too late for her to prevent any of these misfortunes and all the books he gathers for her (which again resembles the act of gathering objects in anxiety) cannot prevent the disasters from happening – firstly, because Dana simply does not have the time to read them nor to apply the knowledge and, secondly, because they only provide superficial knowledge in the first place. The Librarian is thus a near endless source of new events and objects that further add to Dana's anxiety.

The third function of the Librarian and Jarron alike is their capacity to cross the boundary between what Dana perceives as real and fictional. While Dana starts to believe Jarron's claim that he is the devil and sees in him the reason for her suffering after their one-night-stand, the Librarian, who seems to be on her side, although trying to help, is "shockingly ineffective" (Schnierer 206). Both entities add to Dana's pain during the crisis of the banking system and economic ruin rather than prevent/cure it. Through the Librarian and the devil, the dramatic form as a means to portray anxiety is questioned: by breaking the border between reality and fiction, first in Dana's perception, but by extension also in audience expectations towards the storyworld, the Librarian and the devil illustrate that the illusion of realism in the play needs to be shattered for anxiety to be adequately represented. The Librarian and Jarron as the devil are, on the one hand, both border crossing entities. Firstly, although they represent "the *angelus malus* and the *angelus bonus*" (206), as Peter Paul Schnierer observes, they cross the border of these two roles as "[t]here is something not quite right with this demon, a touch of insecurity maybe" (206) and simultaneously "the Librarian is not a proper guardian angel either" (206). Secondly, both are part of the plot and at the same time they possess a role that is beyond mere protagonist. The epic quality both possess, then, breaks the fourth wall of the play and destroys the illusion of reality – like Mrs Jarrett in Churchill's *Escaped Alone*, both the Librarian and Jarron step outside the storyworld.

This becomes clearest at the very end of the play. While Dana is unconscious and on the brink of death after her refugee boat capsized, the devil and the Librarian discuss whether she should live or not and what kind of new life she would be resurrected into. While Jarron brings her to a hospital, where she is referred to as an "unknown woman" (Harris 153) and declared dead by a doctor, the Librarian wants to deliver some books because "where she is going, it gets even more complicated" (155). However, while Dana is technically dead and the Librarian's books are provided to prepare her for her 'last journey,' the devil thinks about resurrecting her:

> **Jarron:** shall I wake her?
> *Beat.*

do you want me to wake her?
Librarian: you can't wake her
technically she is dead
Jarron: technically, her heart is still beating. Faintly but it's
present. She could go either way in truth.
on the one hand, a shot of adrenaline and eyes open.
Some oxygen perhaps if she needs it. On the other,
just leave her on a trolley and it will be over in an
hour or so.
The demon takes a small syringe out of his pocket.
I have it right here
the two gates (155–56)

The two gates between the living and the dead mentioned by Jarron reveal that this scene must take place in a world where two spheres, that of the living and the dead, that of the real and the imaginary, coincide, representing a limbo that resembles Dana's state as a migrant and emphasises the border-crossing aesthetics of the play. While the Librarian does not want Dana to be resuscitated because "she has been through enough" (156), for Jarron Dana is "one of the lucky ones" who "could have everything" (157) and thus he decides to resurrect Dana's inert body. This time, it is the devil that gives life. In this scene, it is also the devil that suggests 'how to' books in order to prepare Dana for her new life: "*What Not to Wear*, *Social Media*, *Twitter*, *Pastry-Making for Chefs*, *Meditation for People who Do Too Much*, *The Work-Life Balance and How to Survive It* [...], *Beating Anxiety*" (159). Jarron's suggestion of book titles not only illustrates the reversed roles of the Librarian and the devil but it also anticipates a near endless vicious cycle of Dana's struggle, where she is reborn to fight very similar battles again. Thus, while until the boat capsizes, the play could have been read as a realist story where the devil and the Librarian are Dana's hallucinations, this last scene positions the play in the realm of magical realism that shatters the illusion of reality in the play.

This shattering of the illusion of reality is important for its portrayal of anxiety. The Librarian and the devil make clear that *How to Hold Your Breath* is a parable for the inner workings of anxiety where a "gathering [of] more and more objects [occurs], until it overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 66). This projection and conglomeration of (fearful) objects becomes increasingly surreal and entangled, until the subject is overwhelmed by it. This anxiety, in the end, is as far removed from reality as the end of the play is, where a Librarian and a devil decide about life and death. As anxieties are never real – they take place in an imagined future that is based on the past and thus will never happen in exactly the same way as imagined – the representation

of these anxieties can likewise never be real. It can only be the imagination of future threats that get more surreal the further away from the present they are. The Librarian and the devil thus highlight the anticipatory and yet not real character of anxiety.

In the end then, *How to Hold Your Breath* portrays the anxieties that lurk in negatively globalised societies. Firstly, the play depicts anxieties through the multi-layered storyworld that not only mirrors Ahmed's understanding of anxiety as an accumulation of possibly fearful objects but also provides an example of what Bauman understands as the Titanic syndrome. This is concomitant with the temporality in the play that follows Waldenfels's understanding of anxiety as the unpreparedness for future threats. Furthermore, the play also stages the isolation that results from negative globalisation and the pain that follows the crash of the banking system by inhibiting the communication of the protagonist with the people around her. Isolation, pain and the lack of communication are then also closely related to anxiety. The only hope in the play comes from a Librarian who tries to tackle anxiety through 'how to' books that do not merely prove useless in Dana's situation but even increase her anxiety. At the end of the play, then, Dana, like Mrs Jarrett in *Escaped Alone*, cannot escape her feelings. While Mrs Jarrett goes home and takes her feelings with her, Dana is trapped in a near endless circle of rebirth, continuously living in a society where she is affected by the consequences of negative globalisation – consequences like fear and anxiety.

Both plays, *Escaped Alone* and *How to Hold Your Breath*, address social anxieties in combination with insecurity, uncertainty and isolation. They showcase the many problems of globalised societies and reveal a temporality of crisis that makes any reaction to these problems come too late. This is underscored by the (lack of) communication in the plays, which mirrors anxiety's excessive and at the same time pre-reflexive nature; in both plays, this lack of communication often coincides with atmospheres of isolation and loneliness. Furthermore, both plays portray the close connection of anxiety with pain, abjection and disgust – in *Escaped Alone* through Mrs Jarrett's monologues and in *How to Hold Your Breath* through the multi-layered storyworld that consists of a sequence of catastrophic events that cause these negative sensations in the protagonists Dana and Jasmine. Ultimately, both plays also employ coping strategies that, however, do not seem to be successful in reducing their characters' anxiety: in *Escaped Alone* this is done by the act of storytelling that, although it shifts the emotions from anxiety to rage, seems ineffective in tackling anxiety. In *How to Hold Your Breath* the coping strategy is embodied in the character of the Librarian, who distributes 'how to' books that are not only useless in the specific situation but further increase anxiety. Finally, Churchill's and Harris's plays make use of epic characters – namely Mrs Jarrett and the Librarian – who, by breaking the fourth wall, transfer the plays' emotions

to the audience. What becomes clear from the comparison of both plays is that their aesthetic negotiation of anxiety mirrors the phenomenology of anxiety: it is rooted in the coinciding of several anxiety-inducing global crises in a way that may best be described, in conversation with Bauman, as 'liquid anxiety.'

5 Paralysing Anxiety: Overwhelming States of Ecological Crises

"The end of nature is relatively recent" (3). This is how Anthony Giddens describes a fundamental change in humans' relations to their non-human environment (see also Latour; McKibben). It is this changed relation to nature[137] that has become a prime source of uncertainty and hence also of fear and anxiety in the 'liquid' modern world. What Giddens means when he speaks of "the end of nature" is, however, not a world entirely without a natural environment, but rather a world in which "there are now few if any aspects of the physical world untouched by human intervention" (Giddens 3) – human expansion impacts on, and frequently endangers, all ecosystems. Although "the end of nature" cannot be conclusively dated,

> [i]t happened when a transition came about from the sort of anxieties people used to have about nature to a new set of worries. For hundreds of years, people worried about what nature could do to us – earthquakes, floods, plagues, bad harvests and so on. At a certain point, somewhere over the past fifty years or so, we stopped worrying so much about what nature could do to us, and we started worrying more about what we have done to nature. The transition makes one major point of entry in risk society. It is a society which lives 'after nature.' (3)

The new worries identified by Giddens – anxiety experienced due to life "after nature," in the face of multiple intersecting ecological crises – are the focus of this chapter.

The last two or three decades have given rise to a number of terms describing human anxiety as a result of collapsing ecosystems and our changed relation to the non-human world (Lickhardt and Werber). At the same time, the growing prominence of new environmental movements like Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion is creating the awareness that human behaviour towards nature must change. After all, the climate catastrophe is human-made and, if humans as a species want to survive, the solutions must likewise be human-made (albeit this also means stepping back from the current trend of negative globalisation and a return

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137 The term/concept of *nature* is contested and has been deconstructed by second-wave ecocriticism, where it stands for "a loaded signifier, an idea fraught with contradictions, engaged in a persistent to- and fro-ing between physiology and psychology, representation and matter" (Lavery and Finburgh 18). Timothy Morton has for example advocated for *Ecology Without Nature* to avoid the contentious binary thinking often associated with the 'natural.' I will still use the term 'nature' here due to its pervasiveness in ecological discourse.

to more native, eco-friendly approaches). In order to change the current trend of destroying what is left of the ecosystems on Earth, it is important to understand the complex relationship between humans and nature and the feelings that are involved, in particular fear and anxiety. First and foremost, "the end of nature" inevitably induces negative feelings like fear and anxiety because, like any change, it comes with a great deal of uncertainty: as humans cannot exist independent of the non-human world that surrounds them, the destruction of ecosystems around us inevitably also threatens the destruction of the human *oikos*.[138] This is without doubt often accompanied by suffering and pain. For this reason, Glenn Albrecht coined the term *solastalgia* to describe exactly this destruction of the natural habitat or home through natural catastrophes. It expresses "the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault" ("Solastalgia" 48) – primarily through the destruction of the environment. Similar concepts that also arose in the last ten years are *Pretraumatic Stress Syndrome* (Kaplan xix), *Meteoranxiety*, which is "connected to the vicissitudes of the weather" (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 77), *Atmosfears*, which can be linked to "the challenges coming with representing – or, rather, not representing – climate and environment-related aporias and the fears coming with them in the age of ecological crisis" (Dederichs 20) or *Ecoanxiety* (*Earth Emotions* 76 – 77; see also Leff; Gregory). The accumulation of these new terms in the last decades illustrates this close connection of ecological crises, of living in a world "after nature," with negative feelings like anxiety. Moreover, the interconnectedness between ecology and fear is also increasingly represented in the media (Gregory), on product packaging and in advertisements, in series and films and, of course, in theatre productions, especially in subcategories like eco-drama and 'cli-fi' drama (Hoydis, "(In)attention" 340). It is because eco-drama so often investigates these negative feelings caused by ecological destruction that it frequently intersects with the theatre of anxiety – after all, ecological catastrophes can be counted among the most prominent sources of anxiety in the twenty-first century.

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[138] Middeke and Riedelsheimer comment on the etymology of the word *ecology:* "*ecology* derives from Greek *oikos* ('household') and *logos* ('discourse'), and its etymological rootedness in the household seems particularly apposite with regard to the theatre" (5). This is not only the case for theatre as a whole, but also for the two plays that will be analysed in more detail in the following analysis chapters.

5.1 Ecological Catastrophes and Anxiety

What makes art or literature in general and, perhaps, drama in particular such interesting media to approach life "after nature" and its attendant anxieties is their capacity for storytelling as an approach to the complexity of ecological questions. For Kate Rigby, stories are central to the way humans negotiate ecological destruction, not only because they "will shape how we prepare for, respond to, and recover from increasingly frequent and, for the communities affected, frequently unfamiliar forms of eco-catastrophe" but because "they will also determine whether our responses are geared toward maintaining current systems, relations, and practices or whether they are transformative, enabling the emergence of new ways of being and dwelling that might prove not only more adaptive but also more just and compassionate, in the long run" (2). The global ecological catastrophe humanity is currently facing – from climate change, the extinction of species and acidification of the seas to air pollution, oceans full of plastic, melting glaciers and so on – is not only a topic that affects humans on a global scale and is negotiated in (social) media or the news, but it is also a topic that – with a slight delay – has gained more and more attention in British drama. Although eco-theatre, at least in the US, can be traced back to the 1970s (Slagle), it only recently received widespread attention on British stages (Middeke and Riedelsheimer 12).[139] While early eco-plays "addressed a specific issue at a specific place and time" (Slagle), nowadays it is often the complexity of ecological destruction that is addressed.[140] Middeke and Riedelsheimer, for instance, use the term *critical theatre ecologies* to address "the multitude of approaches, methodologies, and text- and performance-related phenomena the ecological engagements of the theatre entail" (2). They observe a trend to regard theatre "as a complex interface of human and nonhuman bodies, matter, spaces, temporalities, ideas, and languages" (5) and

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139 Some notable publications in the last ten years include Vicky Angelaki's *Theatre and Environment*, Lisa Woynarski's *Ecodramaturgies*, Marissia Fragkou's *Ecologies of Precarity in Twenty-First Century Theatre*, Mohebat Ahmadi's *Towards an Ecocritical Theatre*, Carl Lavery and Clare Finburgh's *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd* as well as, in a US context, Theresa May's *Earth Matters on Stage* and Wendy Arons and Theresa May's anthology *Readings in Performance and Ecology*; for a more comprehensive list, see Middeke and Riedelsheimer (12).

140 This coincides with the different waves of ecocriticism: "[r]ather than making a fetish out of wilderness or place, as the first wave of ecocritics often did, second-wave ecocriticism highlights the extent to which a more progressive ecology might necessitate a new form of human subjectivity, one that is characterized, moreover, by weakness, vulnerability and uncertainty, and which consciously sets out to place the so-called exceptionalism of the human subject in crisis" (Lavery and Finburgh 12). In order to build this "new form of human subjectivity," one must understand human emotions first, as this book argues.

thus, in Carl Lavery's words, to "trouble the anthropocentrism" (230) that seems inherent to drama and performance.[141] Part of portraying the complexity of ecology in its entirety must then also lie in presenting the emotions that are connected to this complex conglomerate of subjects, objects, space and temporalities.[142] This, I would argue, is not possible without looking at the connection of fear and anxiety and ecology in contemporary British drama.

In general, our perception of current ecological crises is deeply connected to fear and anxiety. While anxiety can be a positive emotion that elicits action and change (see chapter 8), it can also cause paralysis and inaction. This might explain why, for large parts, humans have not reacted to the multiple ecological crises they are confronted with accordingly. The link between fear and anxiety, ecology and the destruction of nature as well as the inaction and paralysis humans display when faced with it is central to contemporary eco-drama. This connection manifests itself firstly in the inaction of large parts of the Global North to change their current behaviour that is harming the world's ecosystem(s). These societies either believe in 'quick fixes' that only repair the collateral damage that is done due to global heating or they believe in consuming the future now, while it is unspoiled, and leave the task of repairing the damage to Earth's ecosystem(s) to the next generations. The reason for this behaviour can then be found, secondly, in the excessive and overwhelming nature of the climate catastrophe that makes any cognitive processing impossible and is prone to evoking feelings of anxiety. In any case, fear and anxiety are a steady companion of the climate catastrophe.

Overwhelming Eco-Anxiety

The anxiety that is related to the climate catastrophe is then closely connected to the overwhelming nature of global heating in general. While the connection between global heating and the Global North's behaviour has been widely researched and solutions to overcome this global threat have been widely shared, still not

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141 For Lavery and Finburgh, "[t]heatre's function as a theatron (or site of looking) for the analysis of heightened and destructive human passions and emotions necessarily turns the spectatorial gaze away from the materiality of the external world. For if one wants to examine what is essentially human, as much western theatre purports to do, all that is deemed superfluous to that investigation – here, the environment – need to be bracketed off" (6). Both authors then demonstrate that one type of theatre that is set against this anthropocentrism is the Theatre of the Absurd.

142 Although global heating may affect every human on Earth – it was responsible for over 150,000 deaths in the year 2000 already (Urry 195) – it does not affect every part of the world and every social milieu in the same way (Oliver-Smith 28; see also Rigby 14). Therefore, Klein suggests a more intersectional approach to the "multiple overlapping crises" that coincide with the ongoing ecological destruction, like the housing emergency or racial injustice emergency (de Trenqualye).

nearly enough is done to prevent the catastrophic consequences the next genera-
tions must face if the Global North does not change its behaviour. Ulrich Beck rais-
es the same issue when he asks: "[h]ow is it possible that our society fails to rec-
ognize the vast challenges it faces" (*Ecological Politics* 3)? While for Beck one
reason lies in "the end-of-societal-history thesis," which implies that each civilisa-
tion thinks of itself as having reached the peak of history and is thus unable "to
look beyond the narrow horizon of the prevalent unquestioned assumptions" (3),
another reason can perhaps be found in the excessive and incomprehensible na-
ture of both the climate catastrophe and anxiety and their connection.[143] The in-
comprehensibility of the climate catastrophe that induces anxiety is described
by Bruno Latour as follows:

> It doesn't stop. Every morning it begins all over again. One day, it's rising water levels; the
> next, it's soil erosion; by evening, it's the glaciers melting faster and faster; on the 8 p.m.
> news, between two reports on war crimes, we learn that thousands of species are about to
> disappear before they have even been properly identified. [...] This is what the press calls liv-
> ing in the era of an 'ecological crisis.' (7)

What this example indirectly shows is that the climate catastrophe is accompanied
by a sense of overpowering helplessness that is triggered by, using Ahmed's terms,
a gathering of fearful objects that induce anxiety. In a similar manner, Dipesh
Chakrabarty describes the widespread destruction of nature on Earth. This de-
struction can no longer be ignored, at least since the 2000s,

> when the warnings became dire, and the signs of the crisis – such as drought in Australia,
> frequent cyclones and brush fires, crop failures in many parts of the world, melting Himalay-
> an and other mountain glaciers and of polar ice caps, increasing acidity of the seas, and dam-
> age to the food chain – became politically and economically inescapable. Added to this were
> growing concerns, voiced by many, about the rapid destruction of other species and about the
> global footprint of a human population poised to pass the nine billion mark by 2050. (25)

These events associated with the climate catastrophe are so manifold and extreme
and simultaneously compete with all other private and global information that it
is simply not possible to cognitively process them all and act accordingly, which

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143 The excessive and ubiquitous nature of the climate catastrophe is not only fear- and anxiety-
inducing but also has real-life consequences. For instance, the Alaskan Native village of Kivalina,
which is being eroded due to the climate catastrophe, is denied its "right as a sovereign nation" to
apply for a resettlement program because "global warming is too ubiquitous to be 'fairly traceable'
to the defendants' emissions" (Shearer 122).

fosters feelings like fear and anxiety.[144] This notion of overwhelming objects and events competing with each other – as is typical of anxiety – can also be explained through the Husserlian understanding of temporality. Jeanne Tiehen has taken such a phenomenological approach to ecological questions and, using Husserl's own example of a melody – where the subject can perceive a melody as a whole only through both remembering past notes and anticipating what is to come (see chapter 2.3) –, explains the temporal perception of the climate catastrophe:

> Thinking further about Husserlian phenomenology and presentism, our consciousness receives information about climate change in the form of statistics and prognostications from media sources. Yet, simultaneously, we are enveloped in a presentist culture that inundates each of us with other stimuli. We cannot cleanly sort out the 'notes' of the climate change 'melody' from all the other 'notes' we receive, and we then have difficulty in consciously creating a composite 'flowing picture' of climate change. (128)

Thus, the inability to separate the different notes from the melody, again, resembles the fusion of objects during states of anxiety. Therefore, what makes the ecological crisis anxiety-inducing is its excessive nature that transcends time and space. Being bombarded with information in the manner Latour or Chakrabarty observe leads to the feeling of the climate catastrophe not only as competing with all other information and crises, but also as too overwhelming to cope with and as anxiety-inducing. Although scientists can paint a clear picture of the future of the planet if humans do not change their behaviour, the anticipation of the natural catastrophe seems too complex.

Besides the "'flowing picture' of climate change" (Tiehen 128), another reason for the incomprehensibility of the climate catastrophe might be its complex temporality. When it comes to the climate catastrophe, the future must be perceived as something that has never before existed. As Jeanne Tiehen outlines, again in reference to the Husserlian phenomenology of time, "[c]onfronted with the uncertainty of the future, and particularly in the face (and fear) of climate change, our consciousness attempts to treat the future as if it will be like the past – narrow, conclusive" (128). However, this way of thinking does not provide any solution, as, "[u]nfortunately, climate change does not appear to play by these tidy rules, because what we have known about our climate, our existence within it, and how to survive may have to alter radically" (128). At the same time, the temporality of cli-

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144 Latour therefore argues in favour of a rethinking of the term 'crisis.' For him, "talking about a 'crisis' would be just another way of reassuring ourselves, saying that 'this too will pass,' the crisis 'will soon be behind us.' If only It were just a crisis!" (7). Instead, he suggests renaming what is often termed *climate crisis "a profound mutation in our relation to the world"* (8).

mate change is so excessive that it transcends human cognition. For this reason, Rob Nixon has coined the term *slow violence* to describe the ecological violence done to Earth. Such slow violence is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). It is a violence that is "playing out across a range of temporal scales" (2) and thus needs new ways to be engaged with.

Because of its long-term effects, slow violence can create festering political conflicts and lead to the deterioration of living conditions, which is why it is "exponential, operating as a major threat multiplier" (Nixon 3). This again feeds into the climate catastrophe's excessive nature that induces feelings of anxiety. Simultaneously, as Bauman writes, "anything likely to outlive individual life or even the fixed-term pursuits into which the span of life is split" (*Liquid Fear* 39) is devalued as it releases fears and worries about one's own life, resulting in an 'après moi le déluge' attitude whose consequences may quite literally manifest themselves in the case of the climate catastrophe. Therefore, a simple understanding of the ecological crisis is complicated by its transcendence of human spatio-temporal orientation. It is a topic that unfolds on such vast scales that an easy understanding cannot be achieved, which in turn adds to the sense of anxiety that accompanies the climate catastrophe.

Inaction and Deferral

Although global heating and the global environmental crises seem to primarily affect non-human nature, the reason for these crises is human-made and can be found in "a profound institutional crisis of industrial society itself" that "necessitates self-reflection on the foundations of social cohesion and the examination of prevailing conventions and foundations of 'rationality'" (Beck, "Reinvention" 8).[145] In other words, the human species, especially in the Global North, needs to rethink its social order and its place on Earth. However, this self-reflexion is complex and has not taken place yet, at least not globally. Rather, despite pledges to the contrary, reactions to the climate catastrophe and other ecological disasters have been ham-

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145 For this reason, activist Christine Shearer describes the disasters that derive from "a particular social 'order'" as "socio-natural events, with the degree in individual and community vulnerability affected by political-economic factors, such as access to stable housing, insurance, reliable health care, and responsive political representation" (128).

pered by inaction or outright paralysis.[146] As Naomi Klein pithily observes, "[i]ndeed the only thing rising faster than our emissions is the output of words pledging to lower them" (*Shock Doctrine* 11). One possible reason for this inaction lies in the connection between the already done destruction of nature through anthropogenic activity and anxiety. Anxiety, in general, can cause paralysis, as it "readily flows together with alienation, contributing to communal and political paralysis" (Bergo 476), which, in the face of the current climate catastrophe, ultimately leads to a negative feedback loop. This is also observed by Nicole Merola, who writes that "the more various detrimental trends (in carbon emissions, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, sea ice loss, etc.) increase, the less we do about arresting those increases, the more anxiety and guilt we feel, the more affective impact the next graph or chart can have, and so on – a classic example of a feedback loop" (28). It seems as if this feedback loop is not only inexorable but also indefinitely increases anxiety and the destruction of the ecosystem alike.

As the increasing destruction of nature is not graspable in its totality, progressively advancing as well as connected to negative feelings like anxiety, it is a topic that is often avoided. The Global North uses avoidance techniques to continue its inhabitants' current comfortable but also (self-)destructive life. Capitalism further facilitates these avoidance techniques and ingrains them into its market mechanisms. As the destruction of the natural environment is so advanced, it is then no wonder that these capitalist mechanisms have proved to be very effective in their exploitation of nature and its degradation (Klein, *Shock Doctrine* 22). This is the case because capitalism promises quick and easy fixes that can be bought with money instead of enduring and tedious solutions that might involve changing habits and a general decrease in comfort – at least for people in the Global North.[147] This capitalist mechanism is similar to what Bauman observes for nega-

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146 For a reading of inaction and nothingness as a "resistance against an economy that demands not only productivity but even demands attention when you are not productive" (31), for instance by consuming advertisements, see Mickey.

147 This might also explain the prevalence of carbon certificate trading, a system that leads to "[v]oluntary carbon markets [which] are unregulated, rife with reputational risk – and booming" (Kahn; see also A. Morton; P. Greenfield). However, these carbon markets do not solve CO_2 emissions in the long run: "ultimately, the polluters got a guilt-free pass to keep emitting CO_2, but the forest preservation that was supposed to balance the ledger either never came or didn't last" (Song and Moura). For one, emission certificates and carbon offsetting do not work as often their projects overlap with existing conservatory projects: "[i]n 2015, a French research center examined 120 projects and found that 37 % overlapped with existing protected lands like national parks" (Song and Moura; see also Fischer and Knuth). And even if companies save the promised CO_2 emissions by planting trees, this might not bind the CO_2 in the long run. "When trees take in CO_2 the gas doesn't magically disappear: The trees simply store the carbon, incorporating it into

tively globalised societies in general, where "[t]he dangers we fear most are immediate; understandably, we also wish the remedies to be immediate – 'quick fixes,' offering relief on the spot, like off-the-shelf painkillers" (*Liquid Fear* 114). While the actions globalised societies take in order to fight their fears and dangers are immediate, at the same time "we resent any solutions that stop short of promising quick effects, easy to achieve, requiring instead a long, perhaps indefinably long time to show results. Even more we resent solutions which require attention to be paid to our own faults'" (114). Although climate catastrophes require long-lasting and 'unrewarding' actions – that is, actions that do not yield quick financial benefits, but only the (hardly insignificant) long-term benefit of potentially averting the worst outcomes of the climate catastrophe – several avoidance strategies to trick individual consumers into using quick fixes instead of long-lasting solutions have become prominent. One quick fix is to merely focus on repairing the ultimate damage in the present instead of preventing ecological disasters in the future. Most actions taken in this context, then, are geared at alleviating the symptoms, not the underlying root causes of human-made ecological destruction, whose effects are merely temporarily delayed and, in the process, often even exacerbated.

What Bauman observes for political actions in general is likewise true for the ecological catastrophe, a temporal deferral where "a large part of daily 'progress' consists of repairing the direct or 'collateral' damage done by past and current efforts to speed it up," which wastes valuable time and ultimately "will make the task finally and unredeemably unmanageable" (*Liquid Fear* 76).[148] For Bauman, it is not only the repairing of "'collateral' damage" instead of long-lasting solutions to prevent future threats that, for instance, enhances the ecological catastrophe. Globalised societies also consume the future "in advance – while there is still something left to be consumed" (9).[149] This seems to be especially promising because "if the future is designed to be as nasty as you suspect it may be, you can consume it now, still fresh and unspoiled, before the disaster strikes and before that future has the chance to show you just how nasty that disaster might be" (9). For Bauman,

in their living tissue as they grow. When trees are destroyed, the accumulated carbon goes back into the atmosphere as CO_2" (Song and Moura). This example shows, again, how closely connected the four categories of this project are.

148 While similar mechanisms are at play in global heating as in economy-based constructs like the welfare state, climate change is also different because it is "a civilizational wake-up call" (Klein, *Shock Doctrine* 25). For Klein, fires, floods etc. are a cry for immediate change: "we need an entirely new economic model and a new way of sharing this planet" (25).

149 Again, this is what is happening in carbon certificate trading: "offsets are like the world's most forgiving credit card: The buyer gets all the benefit upfront, while it takes a century for the full debt to be repaid" (Song and Moura).

this is another way of "living-on-credit" and as such is responsible for the destruction of the natural world. All these avoidance strategies are then built on the deferral to find solutions and to solve the catastrophe, which now needs to be found and solved by the next generation(s) – an endeavour that is much more complicated and expensive – and on the continuation of the current exploitative living conditions.

Furthermore, these avoidance strategies serve one purpose: to distract from the bigger problems. "Focusing on things we can do something about," Bauman explains, "we are left with no time to occupy ourselves with reflecting on things about which we can't do anything any way" (*Liquid Fear* 11). At the same time, these tactics serve the purpose to incorporate nature into the realm of culture, where it is "subjected as a whole to exclusively human management (and consequently passing into the domain of human responsibility)" (82).[150] If it is possible to shift the dangers and problems that are human-made into risk enterprises that seem to be controlled by humans (see chapter 4.1), the same – as this particular logic goes – must be possible for nature (82), where "[n]ature would become just like those other aspects of the human condition that are evidently made by humans, and so in principle manageable and 'correctible'" (85).[151] However, as for example the increase of extreme weather phenomena and the accompanying loss of human lives and livelihoods over the past decades shows, nature seems to resist human management. It should then be clear that the use of quick fixes, whether it is mainly the repairing of the collateral damage or the overconsumption of natural resources, defers the problem of environmental catastrophe into an unforeseen future – whose impending, sooner than expected arrival in itself constitutes a cause for anxiety – and further increases the damage done to non-human

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150 This mechanism resembles what Jason W. Moore calls *cheap nature*, a term that describes an automatism that degrades nature to something that is inferior to humans to simplify and justify nature's exploitation (2–3). For Moore, a dualistic system of nature/society is highly problematic and, he believes, it is necessary to overcome this dualism in order to tackle the ecological crisis: "efforts to discern capitalism's limits today [...] cannot advance much further by encasing reality in dualisms that are immanent to capitalist development" (3).

151 The shift of ecology into the realm of culture does, however, not mean that it is now treated with respect. It can rather be described as "organized irresponsibility" (*Ecological Politics* 2), as Ulrich Beck terms it. For Beck, "[t]he interpretation of the principle of causation in individual terms, which is the legal foundation for hazard aversion, protects the perpetrators it is supposed to bring to book" (2). He continues that "[i]t is absurd how an ostensibly protective judicial system, with all its laws and bureaucratic pretensions, almost perfectly transforms collective guilt into general acquittal" (2) and thus encourages the destruction of the natural environment on the one hand and the in-action to prevent said ecological destruction on the other hand.

nature, until humans' relationship with their environment becomes entirely un-manageable.

Ecology and the Theatre of Anxiety

Besides its close connection with anxiety, its distorted temporality and overall overwhelming nature, the climate catastrophe also invalidates the idea of a meta-language. For Timothy Morton, for instance, it is impossible to speak about what he calls hyperobjects – objects that are so vast they exceed an easy conceptualisation, like oil or radioactivity – from an objective, safe distance (*Hyperobjects* 2–3). The same is the case for anxiety: it is impossible to speak about anxiety when immediately affected by it (Q. Smith 93). This problem of "'thinking the unthinkable as such'" (Middeke and Riedelsheimer 7; see also Latour 130), however paradoxical it might sound, is at the bottom of critical theatre ecologies. Speaking about the unthinkable and unspeakable "is precisely what criticism must do if it wants to have any purpose at all" (Middeke and Riedelsheimer 7). At the same time, this representation of the unthinkable and unspeakable must also be applied when visualising fear and anxiety on page and stage. In fact, as Morton writes, "[w]hat we desperately need is an appropriate level of shock and anxiety concerning a specific ecological trauma – indeed, *the* ecological trauma of our age, the very thing that defines the Anthropocene as such" (*Hyperobjects* 8–9). However, to portray the vastness of hyperobjects that is irreducibly connected to negative feelings like anxiety is not easy, as theatre director Katie Mitchell observes: "a hyperobject is a subject [...that...] is hard to conceive, let alone communicate – and this was exactly our experience of trying to make a production. Again and again, we created characters and stories set in present-day realities or in imagined futures, but they all failed to encapsulate the enormity of the subject" (Mitchell). For Mitchell, it is "the sheer scale of the subject [that] kept overwhelming us" (Mitchell) and that renders any depiction of the ecological crisis on stage problematic. The representation of the ecological crisis faces similar difficulties as accompany alleged solutions to tackle it: while the latter must be quick fixes, in the former it must be presented through spectacular images that capture long-lasting events in a short duration. Rob Nixon describes this problem as follows:

> In an age when the media venerate the spectacular, when public policy is shaped primarily around perceived immediate need, a central question is strategic and representational: how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world? How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public senti-

ment and warrant political intervention, these emergencies whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time? (3)

It is then, amongst other art forms, also the task of eco-drama to find these new representations of slow violence and ecological destruction (see also Kainulainen 110). One way to do so, albeit an anthropocentric one, might be to represent the many emotions that accompany the ecological destruction and to focus on the connection between the ecological catastrophe and anxiety.

The following two plays from what I call the theatre of anxiety then engage with the climate catastrophe in a manner that is demanded by Middeke and Riedelsheimer when they suggest "that critical theatre ecologies are directed towards an uncertain and precarious future and must find ways to imaginatively engage its manifold scales, temporalities, and intersectionalities" (21). Returning to the origin of the word *ecology*, the Greek word *oikos*, this interplay of "manifold scales, temporalities, and intersectionalities" in the following two examples primarily takes place at home – in a household – and links ecological destruction to anxiety caused by potential environmental displacement due to "the end of nature" – at least nature as we know it. In Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* (2016), retired nuclear scientists Hazel and Robin are visited by their old friend Rose in their cottage just outside the exclusion zone which is built to protect the citizens from a destroyed nuclear power plant that is leaking radioactive material. During their conversations the three characters reveal their own (existential) anxiety incidental with the threatening natural catastrophe and what Morton would call all-surrounding hyperobjects in the form of radioactivity. In the second play, Thomas Eccleshare's *Pastoral* (2013), protagonist Moll is facing a natural catastrophe in which nature reclaims human habitat – in this case Moll's flat. While her friends Hardy and Manz try and fail to evacuate her, they are visited by the Plum family, who are likewise stranded and seeking for an escape route. Trough reversing the role of perpetrator and victim – humans must flee a city that is forcefully being reclaimed by nature – this play portrays (existential) anxieties and reveals the characters' fear of, guilt about and disgust towards nature. Both plays then demonstrate how the lack of coping strategies and the inability to adapt to new (environmental) situations further enhances the anxiety that is already connected to the ecological catastrophe. Furthermore, both plays show two different ways to circumvent theatre's anthropocentrism: by putting radioactivity centre stage, as in Kirkwood's play, or by shifting the focus on the non-human, as in Eccelshare's play. Both strategies then give the characters on stage a passive role in which they can only re-act.

5.2 Lucy Kirkwood: *The Children* (2016)

The complex sense of anxiety in the face of the impending climate catastrophe and the unimaginable consequences of the destruction of the natural environment is central to Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* (2016). The play, which has since been staged on Broadway, in Canada, Australia and Germany, premiered at the Royal Court Theatre under director James Macdonald. *The Children*, which has been called "a genuinely disturbing play" (Billington, "*The Children*"), addresses a well-known fear of the nuclear age – the aftermath of a catastrophic accident at a nuclear power plant. Somewhat unusually, it presents the perspective of elderly people on this environmental catastrophe and so links the frailty of the human body to environmental degradation. Kirkwood's exploration of these topics is not only the reason why *The Children* has been placed among the top three of the 50 best theatre shows of the twenty-first century (Billington et al.) but also makes it a representative of what I call the theatre of anxiety.

In the play, which has been "devised as a naturalistic drama with an existentialist dilemma at its core" (Casado-Gual 236), retired nuclear scientist Rose visits her former colleagues and friends Hazel and Robin in a cottage near the sea.[152] As it turns out, their lives have been shattered by a catastrophic incident at the nuclear power plant they all worked at 38 years ago that has contaminated the environment the couple lives in. Hazel and Robin's cottage is thus situated just outside an exclusion zone that has been built to protect the people from the radiation. As they live rather isolated lives, Rose's visit comes unexpectedly: as the play opens, Rose's nose is bleeding because of an attack from Hazel who was alone in the cottage and thought Rose was an intruder. After this altercation, the women talk about their past lives – Rose, who is unmarried and does not have children, lived in the US for most of her life, while Hazel and Robin raised four children, have three grandchildren and were working as farmers just before the catastrophe –, about the accident at the power plant and about topics related to their age. When Robin returns from working on their old farm, which is inside the exclusion zone, the atmosphere shifts. While they have dinner and drink homemade wine, it not only becomes clear that Rose and Robin were having an affair until five years earlier but also that the main reason for Rose's visit is not to seduce Robin but to recruit both to return to the nuclear power station. Rose's plan is for the older generation to spare the lives of young scientists who are trying to prevent a new catastrophe that is imminently threatening the area as a consequence of soil erosion under the leaking power plant. While Hazel is outraged by this sugges-

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152 For a reading of the play in light of fear of old age see Casado-Gual.

tion, Robin, who is coughing up blood and suffers from serious health issues, at the end of the play decides to return to the nuclear power station. Uncertain whether she will leave as well, Hazel calls a taxi that is to take the scientists to the power plant. In this literally and metaphorically toxic environment, Hazel is, to say the least, suspicious of Rose and Robin having an affair and often acts in a cold and aloof manner towards Rose, while Robin's behaviour towards both women shows a mixture of admiration, lust and guilt. Their interpersonal conflicts then play out against the backdrop of a human-made ecological disaster that is on the brink of becoming worse if no decisive action is taken – a parable on the climate catastrophe. As the protagonists are still caught up in their simmering conflicts, the play ends abruptly when a giant wave washes over their cottage.

Described as a "problem play" (Casado-Gual 237), *The Children* investigates the multiple ecological crises the Earth faces, the anxiety those may cause and the lack of any meaningful action to counter them. In the play, radiation can be seen as a placeholder for various things related to ecological destruction and is a prime source of negative feelings (primarily anxiety and fear of death) in the characters. Importantly, nuclear radiation is an example of what Morton has termed hyperobjects – and such hyperobjects are structurally similar to the sensation of anxiety in their pervasiveness, their temporality and their overwhelming nature. In *The Children*, this close connection between a hyperobject (nuclear radiation) and anxiety is central to the play's aesthetics. Conceptually, anxiety and hyperobjects are like two sides of the same coin, or, in other words, anxiety is the dark side of the hyperobject. Therefore, the two concepts share a metonymic relationship: hyperobjects cause anxiety and anxiety's overpowering nature leads to the inhibition of mechanisms to contain the further spread of hyperobjects.

In Kirkwood's play, it is not possible to detach the characters from radioactivity and to detach radioactivity from anxiety: the hyperobjects, humans and their feelings are enmeshed. This is then how the invisible causes of anxiety take centre stage: they are encountered as a hyperobject that is as invisible as anxiety itself. In a double metonymic displacement the nuclear radiation in the play then stands in for both climate change and anxiety – neither of these three is directly visible, but nuclear radiation seems to be the most concrete threat. The fear and anxiety this hyperobject causes is of long-term consequences of events, that have taken place in the past and extend into the present – just like climate change. Using the human body as a canvas, the play depicts these consequences that usually take place in a near infinite future in the lifetime of the three scientists. At the same time, it investigates the three scientists' reactions to the radioactive catastrophe and their attempts to tackle the mesh of anxiety and hyperobject. Following Bauman, who describes different strategies in the Global North to ostensibly overcome this feeling of helplessness and liquid fear – strategies that are nonetheless useless

to counter hyperobjects like climate change – the characters try to implement quick fixes that will not change the situation in the long run. On the one hand, the protagonists consume the future while it lasts (the play focuses on the consequences of this mechanism), on the other hand, they try to repair the ultimate damage. Both reactions are coping strategies that try to make climate change manageable, but only defer it into the future and so in fact make it even less manageable, which further increases the characters' anxiety.

5.2.1 Anxiety and Hyperobjects

In *The Children*, anxiety is constantly looming everywhere because of the permanent invisible stage presence of radioactivity as an anxiety-inducing hyperobject.[153] In fact, a number of parallels can be found between Morton's theory of hyperobjects and the phenomenology of anxiety. Hyperobjects surround the Earth in various forms ranging from black holes to oil fields, plutonium, uranium, Styrofoam or "the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth" (T. Morton, *Hyperobjects* 1). Moreover, hyperobjects establish new temporalities as they "do not rot in our lifetimes" (130) and they never become a collection or system (2). They are "real entities whose primordial reality is withdrawn from humans" (15).[154] Morton establishes five distinguishing aspects of hyperobjects which can be connected to a phenomenological understanding of anxiety and which can all be found in *The Children*.[155] Hyperobjects

> are *viscous*, which means that they 'stick' to beings that are involved with them. They are *non-local*; in other words, any 'local manifestation' of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject. They involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to. [...] Hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time. And they exhibit their effects *interobjectively*; that is, they can

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153 The observation that "Kirkwood's play [...] has a hyperobject at its heart" is also made by Burton (109). However, in his analysis he focuses on the play's naturalistic dramaturgy instead of the connection of anxiety and hyperobjects this analysis focuses on.

154 In general, Morton's focus lies on the negative outcomes of these hyperobjects being "directly responsible for what [they] call *the end of the world*, rendering both denialism and apocalyptic environmentalism obsolete" (*Hyperobjects* 2).

155 Although Morton refers to the phenomenology of Levinas and especially Alphonso Lingis, thus leaving the Husserlian phenomenology aside (*Hyperobjects* 6), I would argue that hyperobjects are nonetheless compatible with a phenomenology in Husserl's tradition when thought of in terms of moods and anxiety (see chapter 2.1).

be detected in a space that consists of interrelationships between aesthetic properties of objects. (1)[156]

In Kirkwood's play the relation between hyperobjects and anxiety is metonymic, that is, a relation of contiguity (Baldick 154).[157] The contiguity between hyperobjects and anxiety is one of cause and effect as well as of their respective characteristics in space and time. In *The Children*, a hyperobject, nuclear radiation, metonymically replace the invisible anxiety that is looming over topics related to the ecological crisis. Firstly, hyperobjects and anxiety are connected because the excessive nature of hyperobjects ultimately leads to the same mechanisms that cause anxiety, namely an unmanageable amount of objects that stick together. Conversely, this means that the more humans are surrounded by hyperobjects like radioactivity, the more afraid they are. In particular in the context of ecological catastrophes, hyperobjects and their close relation with anxiety are also linked to reflections on the inability to change the status quo. While anxiety can be the source for action (see chapter 8), it can also paralyse and lead to the overextension

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156 Not all hyperobjects induce feelings of fear and anxiety in the same way. Plastic or oil, when in daily use, are not anxiety-inducing while radioactive material always is – even though, in the long run, both are deadly. This is connected to the link between hyperobjects and the ultimate fear of death. In general, the anxiety that hyperobjects induce is similar to how Bauman describes the fear of death: "[s]plit into countless worries about uncountable threats, fear of death saturates the whole of life, though in the diluted form of a somewhat reduced toxicity. Thanks to the ubiquity of its small doses, the dread of death is unlikely to be 'taken in' whole and confronted in all its nightmarish ghastliness, and is commonplace enough to be unlikely to paralyze the will to live" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 41–42). Similar to death, hyperobjects are also not "'taken in' whole," but phased and they hide their true destructive nature "in small doses." Although hyperobjects cause death, this connection is often neglected until direct consequences emerge. In *The Children*, this connection of hyperobjects and fear of death is displayed when Rose suggests that Hazel and Robin return to the power plant. Although Robin is already sick and thus probably does not have a very long life expectancy and although the radiation will take years to affect them, they are naturally afraid of the radiation and of death alike (Kirkwood 53), which is ironic as they are already living in the toxic environment. While the fear of death, according to Bauman, does not paralyse humans, often the connection between hyperobjects and death is far too weak and thus, thinking themselves safe from hyperobjects' destructive nature, humans stick to old routines instead of changing their behaviour, which is another form of paralysis. In other words, as long as the consequences of hyperobjects, like death, are not directly visible, humans keep surrounding themselves with them.

157 For a somewhat similar reading of rhetorical strategies to address the complexities of the climate crisis, see Elizabeth DeLoughrey's *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019). For DeLoughrey, allegory is "the animation of universalizing figures such as planet, species, nature, and the human into narrative – and thereby into space and time" (5) – a notion that is similar to my understanding of metonymy.

of a subject, which is the case in *The Children*. This, however, leads to a lack of countermeasures to tackle the spreading of hyperobjects in the future, which in turn leads to ever more anxiety; it is the start of a vicious circle or negative feedback loop. Secondly, most of the qualities that are inherent to hyperobjects – viscosity, nonlocality, phasing, temporal undulation and interobjectivity – likewise apply to anxiety.[158] Therefore, while it is as complex to represent hyperobjects as it is to represent anxiety, Lucy Kirkwood in *The Children* has found ways to portray hyperobjects like radioactivity and through them, because of their metonymic relationship, also fear and anxiety.[159]

Viscosity is the first similarity between hyperobjects and anxiety. Radioactive materials, for Morton, are a good example of hyperobjects' viscosity, as "[t]hey seriously undermine the motion of 'away'" (*Hyperobjects* 36). In other words, hyperobjects are constantly sticking to a subject, "no matter where you move on Earth" (48). This idea of something sticking to you is the same for anxiety – once in an anxious state, the feeling not only colours all surrounding subjects and objects in an anxious mood but it is also often impossible to autonomously leave this state.[160] Wherever the subject goes, anxiety will follow. Likewise, the characters in the play cannot get away from their toxic environment and the anxiety that comes with it. As the protagonists are surrounded by nuclear waste throughout the play, the toxic environment sticks to them. This can first be seen by some of the objects in the play. When Rose pours Hazel a drink from a glass near the sink, Hazel only reluctantly drinks from it (Kirkwood 9). Later, in Rose's absence,

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158 The interobjectivity of hyperobjects is then the only key quality not shared with anxiety and so marks a significant phenomenological difference. While anxiety is constituted as a reaction to the multitude of fearful objects that make up an overwhelming conglomerate, Morton's understanding of interobjectivity is altogether different. As Morton writes, "[i]nterobjectivity provides a space that is ontologically 'in front of' objects, in which phenomena such as what is called *mind* can happen" (*Hyperobjects* 85). Crucially, it thus precedes subjectivity and hence also the necessarily subjective feeling of anxiety.

159 Although hyperobjects like climate change or radioactivity are themselves invisible, drama and theatre are media that can make them visible. The human body, for instance, which is central to theatre performances, can function as a canvas and show physical reactions to radioactivity in a compressed timescale (in the course of one life) as opposed to the consequences of the climate catastrophe which often includes near infinite timescales. Kirkwood's play then manages to illustrate the way hyperobjects' "primordial reality is withdrawn from humans" (T. Morton, *Hyperobjects* 15). Hyperobjects are the more frightening and anxiety-inducing because they are too vast to comprehend, since anxiety is often directed towards what is "unknown and unidentifiable, when its nature can be only conjectured" (Kolnai 37).

160 The notion of stickiness, especially in relation to emotions, is reminiscent of Ahmed's concept of sticky affects, where she is interested in the way "emotions circulate between bodies, examining how they 'stick' as well as move" (*Cultural Politics* 4).

it is revealed that the glass is not suitable for drinking, possibly due to radioactivity (39). This can also be seen when Robin enters the stage with a child's trike he brought into the cottage that is still radioactive (26). These objects surround the protagonists every day and reveal what Morton means when he writes that "their very nearness is what menaces" (*Hyperobjects* 27). The toxic substance that sticks to the characters has already breached the body of the couple various times:

> She [**Rose**] *picks up the Geiger counter.*
> *Looks at him, asking for permission.*
> *He nods*
> **Rose** *runs the Geiger counter over* **Robin.**
> *It beeps.*
> *She looks at the reading*
> *She hands it back.* (Kirkwood 60–61)

It is thus not only the objects but also the characters themselves that are radioactive. The hyperobject radiation is sticking to their bodies, making it impossible for them to ever leave it behind and thus turning it into a source of inescapable anxiety.

The viscosity that comes with hyperobjects also has another factor connecting it with the anxiety that is represented in *The Children:* both cause pain. For Morton "[i]mmediate, intimate symptoms of hyperobjects are vivid and often painful, yet they carry with them a trace of unreality" (*Hyperobjects* 28). They are painful and fearful alike because they breach the borders of the body, for instance when radioactive material enters the body and alters its DNA. A similar connection between fear and pain has been traced by Ahmed, who writes that "[f]ear, like pain, is felt as an unpleasant form of intensity" (*Cultural Politics* 65), an intensity that can also be found in hyperobjects due to their viscosity. Robin then already knows that the radioactive material has penetrated his body uncountable times and altered his DNA, which ultimately leads to pain and suffering. This is confirmed when Robin is coughing up blood later on, a situation that, from Robin and Hazel's reaction, must have happened before and which hints at a cancerous condition (Kirkwood 67). But Rose, who has not lived in this toxic environment after the catastrophe, is affected as well and has already undergone chemotherapy and a mastectomy due to breast cancer (33). The encounter with nuclear radiation then not only causes a fear of death and immanent anxiety but also pain that is felt "as an unpleasant form of intensity" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 65). This pain is typically accompanied by various avoidance strategies to move away from it (24). Thus, while moving away from hyperobjects is simply not possible due to their viscosity, the characters avoid speaking about their physical pain altogether.

Both cancer diseases are, for instance, only revealed near the end of the play, leaving the audience in the dark about the character's health.[161] Because hyperobjects are painful and ubiquitous, feelings of anxiety, especially the fear of death, constantly surround the characters. Once revealed, the pain caused by radiation shows the close connection of anxiety and pain: the characters have had a small dose of what will ultimately follow as they cannot repair the damage to their body the constant radiation has caused. Thus, the characters know that a painful future will follow, which explains their obsession with health and their fear of death, as evidenced in the numerous mentions of death and decay in the play. Their illness shows the unreal quality of the pain caused by hyperobjects (T. Morton, *Hyperobjects* 28). The radiation thus sticks to the characters like an invisible disease, leaving them at first ignorant and later in imminent fear of death.

This anxiety is compounded by the fact that radiation, as is typical of hyperobjects, is not only viscous, but also nonlocal. Hyperobjects manifest themselves on such a large scale that it is not possible to locate them; they evade any attempt to distinguish and specify them in space or time. Morton explains this property of hyperobjects with the example of global warming:

> Nowhere in the long list of catastrophic weather events – which will increase as global warming takes off – will you find global warming. But global warming is as real as this sentence. Not only that, it's viscous. It never stops sticking to you, no matter where you move on Earth. How can we account for this? By arguing that global warming, like all hyperobjects, is nonlocal: it's massively distributed in time and space. (48)

By arguing that hyperobjects are not only nonlocal but also stick to the subject, Morton already delineates how hyperobjects and anxiety are connected: both stem from a non-graspable and at the same time sticky overabundance of (fearful) objects that are not quite present. Hyperobjects are thus, just like anxiety, "a mode of attachment to objects" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 66). In fact, there is a further parallel to the structure of anxiety as a conglomerate of fearful objects because a hyperobject is an amorphous conglomeration of many quasi inseparable single objects. "When it comes to hyperobjects, nonlocality means that the general itself is compromised by the particular. When I look for the hyperobject oil, I don't find it" (T. Morton, *Hyperobjects* 54).

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161 In Hazel's case this is revealed in precisely the way described by Morton when they write that hyperobjects "*are already here.* I come across them later, I find myself poisoned with them, I find my hair falling out" (*Hyperobjects* 29). Hazel only finds out about Rose's cancer when, upset that Robin wants to return to the power plant, she tries to prevent Rose from leaving in order to smoke a cigarette and, grabbing her by the hair, Rose's wig comes off (Kirkwood 70–71).

Likewise, the protagonists in *The Children* cannot locate the radioactivity. Nonetheless, the characters try to make it particular in order to come to terms with it. This can be seen when Hazel recollects her first encounter with the radiation, which happened when she returned to her old house that had been destroyed by the nuclear explosions: for her, it "felt like I could *see* it the radiation hanging in the air a sort of a sort of filthy glitter suspended and I didn't like it, I'm not a silly woman and of course my background would suggest that I could but I couldn't I couldn't stand it any longer" (Kirkwood 12). While this first encounter with radiation might have been overshadowed by shock and reveals that Hazel must also have been afraid of the "filthy glitter," as she describes it, she nonetheless stays close by, as the cottage is only just outside the contamination zone. It is not just Robin and Hazel, but also the government that tries to contain the radiation in such a radiation zone. Such an attempt to contain a hyperobject and counter its border-crossing nature is necessarily futile. The border of this radiation zone is arbitrary and the couple only lives a few miles away from their old, contaminated house:

> **Rose:** But this place. It's only ten miles from the house,/ it's
> not
> **Hazel:** No, it's just that little bit extra but it makes a world of
> difference to our peace of mind. And because the thought of
> leaving the area entirely felt somehow I don't know it felt
> disloyal, to the land if that makes sense?
> **Rose:** Well, you've lived here so long.
> **Hazel:** Yes exactly. I would've felt like a traitor. (12–13)

Drawing a border between the radioactive land and the presumed safe land gives the characters some peace of mind – at least for a while and until the consequences of the radioactivity reveal themselves, like in Robin's illness. This practice of exclusion only seems to work initially because, for hyperobjects like radioactivity, "there is no direct proof of a causal link" (T. Morton, *Hyperobjects* 39) between the hyperobject and the harm it causes. As long as the characters think they are safe, there is, for some duration, no indication that it might be otherwise. This might even be the reason why, although an exclusion zone is established to save people from the radiation, Robin keeps moving in and out of this exclusion zone (Kirkwood 22). Besides, the exclusion zone can generally never work as long as there are still animals that cross this arbitrarily drawn border:

> **Hazel:** I heard another man died today.
> **Rose:** From the plant?
> **Hazel:** There are cats and dogs running wild around it,

> apparently. No one to stop them, and how are they supposed
> to know? What they're breathing in, it breaks my heart. (41)

What the animals are breathing in is, however, the same air Robin and Hazel are breathing. At the same time, Hazel's observation underscores that hyperobjects like radiation are nonlocal – they are impossible to pinpoint to one single location, but rather spread indefinitely and cannot be contained by any means. In this, they share key qualities with anxiety. Although, in the play, there is an exclusion zone, the radiation has already breached the body boundary of the characters various times and, although they try to contain the radiation in an exclusion zone, the radioactive material is still nonlocal and ubiquitous.

What is more, Hazel and Robin's ambivalent attitudes towards the exclusion zone seem to betray a sense of disgust, which itself is a sensation closely linked to anxiety (see chapter 2.2). While they are all evacuated from the exclusion zone, Hazel and Robin settle down on its fringes – which itself of course is a device to highlight the nonlocality of nuclear radiation and the impossibility to draw any definitive border around it – and Robin in particular is drawn to returning to the exclusion zone frequently. This becomes clear in the way Rose describes leaving their old home near the power plant: "[i]t felt very. Final and that was, I found that quite frightening. Yes but then a week later Robin decided to go back. [… H]e goes down there every day now" (Kirkwood 22). This behaviour, a repeated return to a source of pollution, is typical of what Kolnai sees as disgust's ambivalent middle position between fascination and fear and the resulting impetus to 'clean up': "where fear coerces me principally to retreat from my surroundings, to alter my circumstances or my situation, disgust leads me much more to a cleaning up of my surroundings" (42). This, after all, is precisely what Robin does in the exclusion zone, where he tends to cows that have been left behind and buries those cows that have died:

> **Robin:** I've been digging graves. You need to dig a very big
> pit for a cow, it takes me a few days just to do one so it's
> been quite a, quite a slow process.
> I have to dig it next to wherever they're lying and then I get
> the tractor and sort of drag them in.
> Then I cover them up and then I conduct a little service.
> Say a good poem and sing a good song.
> **Rose:** Oh, Robbie.
> **Robin:** No I sort of… I dunno, I quite enjoy it I cry a lot.
> Sometimes I get to the end of a day and I realise I've been
> crying for… six or seven hours.
> **Rose:** You must have been very attached to them.
> **Robin:** No, not really. (Kirkwood 60)

Robin's reaction to the dead cows and the ecological catastrophe is then grief – presumably more for his old life than for the cows – and an action that will likewise poison him with radiation. This again echoes Kolnai's observation that "although disgust is triggered as a defense against the object, its subject yet finds himself turning towards the reality which is that object" (44). Particularly for Robin, the exclusion zone, or rather the nuclear radiation associated with this zone, is as alluring as it is revolting. In this sense, the nonlocality of the hyperobject that is nuclear radiation not only leads to the various techniques the characters employ to make it visible, like the creation of an exclusion zone, but it also reveals a connection with disgust, especially when it comes to the breaching of this zone, and thus a certain fascination in the characters with the disgusting and fear-inducing object that is radioactivity.

The third quality of hyperobjects Morton mentions, phasing, creates yet another parallel to the experience of anxiety. By phasing Morton means the phenomenon that only parts of hyperobjects can ever be thought of but never the whole hyperobject (*Hyperobjects* 70).[162] In our perception, hyperobjects "seem to come and go, but this coming and going is a function of our limited human access to them. What we experience as the slow periodic recurrence of a celestial event such as an eclipse or a comet is a continuous entity whose imprint simply shows up in our social or cognitive space for a while" (74). While such an event, or indeed a hyperobject, is not continuously visible, this does not mean that it has vanished but rather that hyperobjects have an "*invisible presence*" and so "loom[] around us constantly" (76). In much the same way, anxiety is an ungraspable presence because as a mood it forms the "emotive background of experience" (Husserl, *Gefühl und Wert* 111, translated in Fisette 227): it is perpetually present but never quite concretely manifest.

In *The Children*, phasing becomes apparent through various objects that unexpectedly reveal the toxic and dangerous environment the characters live in. These various short instances are momentary phases in which radioactivity is suddenly visible. One example is Robin driving a tractor to the top of the cliff every year, when he "drive[s] the tractor a little closer to the edge and every year the edge comes a little closer to the tractor" (Kirkwood 26). This "little game," as he calls it, is a recurring reminder that the land beneath them is being eroded and that the very soil they built their cottage on is slowly decaying. This is nothing

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162 Morton also calls the connection between hyperobjects and phasing a metonymy: "[w]hat we are dealing with, with the phenomenon of phasing, is an indexical sign that is a *metonymy* for the hyperobject. Metonymy is the mereological figure, the figure that deals with parts and wholes and relationships" (*Hyperobjects* 77). This adds another level to the double metonymic displacement in *The Children* – one in which the concept of hyperobjects itself consists of metonymies.

new for the characters, as Hazel remarks: "[t]he coast is just crumbling away around here. Has been for centuries" (26). But clearly, there is no sense of urgency about this soil erosion: it is an ongoing process that only ever comes to light in short phases, notably when Robin drives the tractor to the top of the cliff. A similar, somewhat more morbid reminder of the decay of the land and the fear of death that occurs in phases throughout the play lies in the so called "ghost bells" (28), whose apocryphal intermittent ringing is a reminder of death, as Hazel and Robin explain to Rose:

> **Hazel:** [...] there was a town, Rose, very
> close to where we are now.
> It was one of the most important towns in the country in the
> Middle Ages.
> Then one day it fell into the sea, the whole thing in one go.
> The cliff just crumbled off like a lump of wet cake.
> The houses, the school, the church, the marketplace.
> Just tumbled into the water.
> **Robin:** At certain times people say you can walk on the beach
> and hear the church bells ringing from under the sea. (27)

These ghost bells then resurface at the end of the play and announce the impending doom. Intermittently, they thus cast a light on those threats that remain invisible for most of the play and so embody the phasing of hyperobjects and of anxiety itself.

This phasing quality is so central that it is also incorporated in the stage design as suggested by the play's stage directions. At the beginning of the play, stage directions state that "*[t]he room is at a slight tilt. The land beneath it is being eroded. But this should not be obvious to the naked eye, and only becomes apparent when, for example, something spherical is placed on the kitchen table*" (Kirkwood 4). This is the case, for instance, when "HAZEL *puts the apple on the table. It rolls down the table away from her.* ROSE *catches the apple, returns it to the bowl*" (9). The erosion of the ground that consequently leads to the power plant being unstable – a further catastrophe and pain – is only visible when objects are moved. Both hyperobjects of radiation and soil erosion and the connected feelings of fear and anxiety thus stay invisible in the background and only become apparent at certain phases – in the case of the stage design in those situations when objects roll down the stage's slope. In the same manner the ocean outside that is responsible for the erosion of the soil under the power plant is only occasionally heard (46), until, at the end of the play, a huge wave is approaching (79) that will kill the characters one way or another.

Another quality of hyperobjects that stands out when considering their anxiety-inducing potential is their temporality. As previously outlined, the temporality of hyperobjects is "unimaginably vast" (T. Morton, *Hyperobjects* 67), which is why they, again, exceed any easy conceptualisation and so are, to a large part, incomprehensible. This becomes clear when Morton describes the temporality of hyperobjects as follows: "[t]he worry is not whether the world will end, […] but whether the end of the world is already happening, or whether perhaps *it might already have taken place.* A deep shuddering of temporality occurs" (16).[163] This is reminiscent of the 'shuddering' temporality of anxiety posited by Waldenfels. For him, we feel anxiety because an event of such enormity will have happened in the future that it will have passed by and become the past before any protective mechanisms can be established. Thus, an event might strike at an unforeseen and unprepared moment and so irreversibly change the world we inhabit – a thought that instantly causes anxiety (24). In much the same way, in our age of ecological catastrophe, "[t]he future, a time 'after the end of the world,' has arrived too early" and so the disruptive force that accompanies hyperobjects "came too soon for us to anticipate it" (T. Morton, *Hyperobjects* 21). This chimes in with the temporal structure of both anxiety and the perception of ecological crises, which can best be thought of in terms of the *future anterior* (Huggan ix). The future anterior describes a future that is already past, and hence the temporality of anxiety in Waldenfels's sense, as an anxiety caused by the advent of a future in which the opportunity to act is already past. Thus, the subject in the future looks remorsefully back into the past and wonders at which point it should have acted in order to prevent the catastrophe that is now happening. This goes hand in hand with a sense of uncertainty, as Morton makes clear when they ask: "Has it [the ecological crisis] started yet? How far in are we? This anxiety is a symptom of the emergence of hyperobjects" (*Hyperobjects* 56). While the exact timescales of hyperobjects are unknown and while there is not enough time to construct meaningful solutions, the ecological crisis must be dealt with right now (67).[164]

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163 The temporal structure of hyperobjects is then also similar to that of pain. While, in pain, a temporal disparity between the source of pain and the sensation of it is normal as the sensation often outlives the immediate painful event (Scarry, "Schoolchildren" 282), hyperobjects like radioactive material, which can cause unbearable forms of pain, operate on such a slow temporal scale that the pain seems unreal until the immediate effects materialise.

164 At the same time, the reaction to the climate catastrophe betrays a sense of temporality as described by Husserl, where the future is approached as if it were the past. This ties in with Chakrabarty's observation that "we normally envisage the future with the help of the same faculty that allows us to picture the past" (23). However, when it comes to the consequences of the climate catastrophe this must result in a paradox, as we may well have to envision a future without humans. Chakrabarty argues that imagining what Alan Weisman in a well-known thought experi-

The protagonists of *The Children* are caught up in this 'anxious' temporality of hyperobjects. Having worked at the power plant 38 years ago, they had the chance to prepare for future dangers, for example by building a safer structure for the power plant – which would at least have had some positive impact – but failed to do so. While Hazel and Robin think that the situation is stable, the next catastrophe is already under way. This amounts to blocking out the future consequences of present inaction – a common feature in humanity's attitudes towards the hyperobject that is climate change, as Rigby observes: "[o]ne of the widely recognized impediments to acting on climate change hitherto has been the negative equation between the (real or feared) immediate costs of mitigation and people's capacity to imagine the (actual and potential) future impacts or runaway global warming" (9). In a similar manner, transposed to a different hyperobject, the characters in Kirkwood's play do nothing to prepare against a further spread of radioactivity because they cannot conceive it happening anytime soon. This becomes clear when Rose surprises Hazel and Robin with a plea for help in the face of another imminent nuclear disaster, as the soil erosion causes leaks in the power plant: "I thought I'd have more time, but... this morning there was a radiation spike. They should be pulling them all out but they can't, there are major leaks in unit two, somehow there's contaminated water flooding into the discharge channel" (Kirkwood 51). The situation is about to get out of control as contaminated water is just three feet away from spilling into the sea (51) and thus from breaching all protective barriers. Yet Hazel flat out refuses to return to the power plant to help and prefers to argue with Rose, even going as far as to call Rose's proposition (rather than the radiation leak) "poison" (53). The next imminent catastrophe, built on the last, is about to happen and the characters do not know how to (re)act. "[T]heir decision-making," as Julia Hoydis observes, "fails in terms of risk management (for either it simply comes too late, or they are destroyed by an accident beyond their predictive horizon)" ("(In)attention" 344).

Thus, *The Children* plays with the connection of present, future and future anterior and incommensurable timescales that lead to inaction in the present and to the impossibility of action in the future. The future, in which the inexorable nuclear catastrophe has happened, is approaching without any of the characters being able to stop it in the present, spreading a mixture of denial and anxiety. At the same time, the next generation, which is represented by Lauren, Hazel and Robin's

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ment has called "the world without us" (3–5) removes the future from humans' sense of history, because history presupposes "a certain continuity of human experience" (Chakrabarty 23). Thinking of a future without humans then creates a temporal disconnect in which the future is severed from the past: this is then the "historicist paradox that inhabits contemporary moods of anxiety and concern about the finitude of humanity" (23).

daughter, is "just quite angry" (Kirkwood 37). When Rose asks why Lauren, who is never present on stage but makes a phone call to her parents at one point, is angry, Robin only replies that she is angry about everything and that she only called because "[s]he was frightened" and felt "a sort of general terror" (38). While Robin dismisses this response and answers "[o]h well, as long as there's nothing specific" (38), the fright and terror Lauren feels is mixed with anger and helplessness – her "rage" (37) seems to be of a similar kind as that of Mrs Jarrett at the end of *Escaped Alone* (see chapter 4.2). Given the play's focus it stands to reason that the root cause for Lauren's general terror is a sense of dread at the future passing by, the anxiety caused by hyperobjects.

Ultimately, then, *The Children* negotiates anxiety through its connection to hyperobjects, in particular to the play's central hyperobject of radioactivity. Due to the metonymic relationship between hyperobjects and anxiety and the central role of hyperobjects in the ecological destruction of our planet, they become fitting vehicles to explore ecological anxiety and the immensity of the ecological crisis. This is particularly so because hyperobjects share a number of key qualities with anxiety: anxiety is viscous in the sense that it is ubiquitous and sticks to the subjects and so also crosses the boundaries of the body, like the related phenomena of pain and disgust; it is also nonlocal and, being a conglomerate of different fearful objects, cannot be traced to one source. Further, anxiety likewise possesses a phasing quality in that the whole extent of the feeling can never be revealed at once as the conglomerate of fearful objects is far too vast – the effect is that anxiety is only ever felt momentarily. Lastly, anxiety also 'shudders' a linear temporality and thus is connected to a future that is not only inevitably painful but also hits societies that are unprepared. While radioactivity, the hyperobject which features so prominently in *The Children*, is just as invisible as anxiety, the characters' reactions towards this hyperobject make up a large part of the play's stage action.

5.2.2 Anxiety and Inaction in the Face of the Climate Catastrophe

As is typical of human reactions to the climate catastrophe, Kirkwood's protagonists react to their own human-made ecological disaster by not acting very much at all. This is a prime reason why the play can also be read as a climate change play. "The planetary crisis of climate change or global warming," as Chakrabarty clarifies, "elicits a variety of responses in individuals, groups, and governments ranging from denial, disconnect, and indifference to a spirit of engagement and activism of varying kinds and degrees" (23). While especially Robin and Hazel react to the natural destruction of their environment with a mixture of "denial,

disconnect, and indifference," their ultimate actions come very close to what Bauman terms 'fast-track' solutions: solutions that either only repair the collateral damage that is done due to climate change or the act of consuming the future in the present, and leave it to future generations to repair the damage done to Earth's ecosystem. The characters in the play employ exactly these two avoidance strategies: although they know of the potentially destructive force of power plants, they still built one close to the sea – presumably because a catastrophe seems highly unlikely and will take place at an indeterminate point in the future – and, once the power plant is destroyed, they focus on their individual pain instead of devising solutions that might help the area in the long run. Both quick fixes are used to manage hyperobjects, albeit they are not sustainable. The metonymic relationship between hyperobjects, like radioactivity or climate change, and anxiety may explain to some extent why capitalist societies employ such quick fixes: because hyperobjects are so vast and unfold across incommensurable timescales, they evade any clear comprehension and thus also any easy solutions. This, however, leads to a lack of countermeasures to tackle the spreading of hyperobjects in the future, which leads to ever more anxiety; it is the start of a negative feedback loop. A common reaction to complex problems like this is to shift the focus on "things we can do something about," as Bauman writes, so that "we are left with no time to occupy ourselves with reflecting on things about which we can't do anything any way" (*Liquid Fear* 11). However, this reasoning leads to ever more natural catastrophes and ever more 'clean-up' work for the next generations.

In Kirkwood's play, the first quick fix, namely the consumption of the future in the present, has already taken place in the past. The society in the storyworld, the protagonists included, knew of the consequences of building a nuclear reactor on unstable ground, as Rose reveals: "[w]e built a nuclear reactor next to the sea then put the emergency generators in the basement! We left them with a shit-show waiting to happen and no evacuation procedure!" (Kirkwood 55). In other words, they willingly took the chance of a malfunction in the power plant that might poison the land for centuries – however unlikely this scenario may have seemed – in order to have cheap energy in the present. This course of action seems to follow Bauman's dictum that "if the future is designed to be as nasty as you suspect it may be, you can consume it now, still fresh and unspoiled, before the disaster strikes and before that future has the chance to show you just how nasty that disaster might be" (*Liquid Fear* 9). The play's past is then one of reckless consumption at the cost of a future that becomes the play's present.

This behaviour of seeking out quick fixes continues when, after the initial nuclear meltdown, a flood wave hits the area and lays waste to the nuclear plant as well as to Robin and Hazel's house. When Hazel returns to the house shortly after the catastrophe, she sees that everything is destroyed, "the house was just stinking

and full of silt it was cosmetic you know but I can't describe to you the stench"
(Kirkwood 20), something she describes as "dreadful, a smell a feeling a hopeless-
ness. Like the infinite sadness" (20). At that moment the couple, again, employs
quick fixes when they decide to never return and simply leave the destroyed
house behind:

> **Hazel:** […] Anyway, I couldn't cope with thinking: how are we going to
> clear it up? and I cried, Rose, I just sank down at the bottom
> of the stairs where the pencil lines mark the children's
> heights and I / was just
> **Rose:** Your poor thing.
> **Hazel:** *crying* (thank you) because the mess the mess was just
> overwhelming […]
> And then I had this amazing thought: we don't have to. We
> don't actually have to.
> **Rose:** Sorry, have to what?
> **Hazel:** To clear it up. It was like e equals m c squared, one of
> those exquisite pieces of thinking that's so simple, you feel
> like Archimedes running naked to the king, screaming
> 'eureka!' Because when I told Robin, the relief on his face.
> And you know all our lives we've been those kind of people,
> when we have a picnic or, camping we don't just clear up
> our own litter, we go around and pick up other people's too,
> I have a little stash of plastic bags in my cagoule, that's just
> our policy, leave a place cleaner than you found it but but but
> so you see we'd *earned* it.
> We'd earned the right, on this one occasion, just to say: at
> our time of life, we simply cannot deal with this shit. (20–21)

The easy solution Hazel describes then implies that future generations will have
to clean up the ruin of their house – future generations too far away for them
to be imagined. The inability to take responsibility and the attempt to balance
their behaviour out by removing some plastic bags in the years before the catas-
trophe, while they were benefitting from the power plant and the cheap energy it
provided, is a typical mechanism that promises relief on the spot, although it is
clearly consuming the future of the planet in its present. In other words, they in-
dulge in "living-on-credit" (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 9) and, after the catastrophe, are
shocked that the bill arrived.

Besides consuming their own as well as their children's future in the present/
past, the second quick fix the characters use is primarily related to the time after
the collapse of the power station. As the catastrophe that followed the destruction
of the nuclear power plant is so enormous, instead of helping to prevent such dis-
asters in the future, the characters focus on the collateral damage instead of pur-

suing long-lasting solutions and thus do not try to prevent the catastrophe that is ultimately about to happen to the destroyed power plant. This can be seen, on a smaller scale, in the conversation in which Rose talks about her plan to return to the power plant, during which "HAZEL *takes out a can of air freshener from under the sink and sprays it liberally*" (Kirkwood 48), as if she wants to clean the atmosphere through a sort of personal cleaning ritual in order to rid herself of Rose's plan. On a bigger scale, avoidance techniques can be seen in the actions of the characters, which are mostly directed towards their own health and well-being. They are doing yoga, eating salad and vegetables, wearing sunscreen in winter and at night (56) and they do not smoke:

> **Rose:** Do you mind?
> *Rose is holding up her cigarettes.*
> **Hazel:.** Oh, yes – would you mind standing at the door?
> **Robin:** Are you sure that's a good idea?
> **Hazel:** She's a grown woman, she can dig her own grave, it's
> fine Rose.
> **Rose** *moves her chair to the back door.*
> *Opens it and sits, lights a cigarette. Smokes.* (46)

In a sense, this scene is ironic as the whole environment is toxic from the radio-activity. However, as they cannot see nor really grasp its toxicity – although they know about it and fear its consequences – they rather focus on the little things they can do something about. All these self-care routines are then like a cleaning ritual from the toxic environment that ultimately means death. While the characters cannot hold onto radioactivity, they can see and prevent smoking (although Robin starts to smoke in a later scene). Thus, when focusing on these little things they can control, they do not need to cope with the bigger issues, like the radiation itself. While these quick fixes seem to have worked in the past, they make the future catastrophe even less manageable. Instead of trying to develop new and safe energy sources – all three characters are scientists after all –, they still believe in fusion (34) and, at least Hazel, cannot picture a life entirely without electricity (54). Therefore, both quick fixes work for Hazel and Robin until Rose re-enters their lives and suggests another solution for the ever-new ecological catastrophes that result from the destroyed power plant and their subsequent inaction.

Rose is then the only character that advocates for real change. Throughout the play, Rose reveals that she has always been fascinated by Hazel's life that is built around routines and even tried to adapt her life-style: "I won't smoke cigarettes and I'll wear suncream and plan the week's meals ahead and get a slow cooker and not just buy sandwiches from petrol stations and I'll keep the bathroom really clean not just give it a wipe when people are coming over and I'll stop crying all the

time and I'll do exercise and have a really neat handbag" (73). In the end, however, it is Rose that returns to the power station in order to save younger scientists, not Hazel. As an outsider that is not living by these routines nor has any children, Rose is the only character who can fulfil this function – similar to Mrs Jarrett in *Escaped Alone*, who is likewise an outsider who brings bad tidings to the otherwise mundane conversations of the other women (see chapter 4.2). As Clare Wallace pithily writes, "Rose disturbs the surface of the ordinary with an ethical challenge, one that attends impersonally to relationality and reciprocity, that dispassionately surveys the finitude of natural resources and the irrefutable threat of nuclear catastrophe" (53). Hazel, on the other hand, feels as if she and Robin have already done enough, for instance by removing the topsoil from a playground after the catastrophe or by using as little power as possible (Kirkwood 54). At the same time, it becomes apparent that the characters want the compromises and solutions to tackle the natural catastrophe to be accompanied by as little inconvenience as possible. The play reveals how complicated it is to change certain patterns, especially when it comes to things that are related to a hyperobject – something that is not only impossible to grasp but also anxiety-inducing. Hazel has lived her whole life with these routines that seem to benefit her health. Changing them for routines that secure the living of the next generation and the environment then seems impossible and leads to anxiety, just as with the routines Moll follows in *Pastoral* (see chapter 5.3.2). Living in a consumer society, the characters reveal their fear of less prosperity:[165]

> **Hazel:** [...] Rose. I'm frightened.
> **Rose:** That's alright.
> **Hazel:** It's just it's very hard to, I don't know/ how to
> **Rose:** I know
> **Hazel:** I don't know how to want less. (77)

When they are confronted with Rose, this world Hazel and Robin created does not hold any longer and, although they try to make amends – at one point Robin suggests that while they have four kids and Rose has none this makes it even (32) – they know what they have to do.

In the end then, both quick fixes that are employed in the play – the consumption of the future in the present and the focus on the collateral damage instead of long-lasting solutions – reveal the inaction and paralysis of the characters in the

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[165] In a similar manner, Hazel, when she realises that Robin will go to the power plant, is more worried about the possible lack of tea pots and towels on the power station than about more existential things (Kirkwood 74).

face of the hyperobjects they have to confront and the anxiety this causes. The paralysis the three protagonists in *The Children* experience in view of the destruction of their environment and the enormous task to come to terms with it is typical of the Global North's response to the climate catastrophe. *The Children* portrays the exact mechanisms Bauman describes as shifting the dangers of the destruction of climate change to the realm of culture in order to transfer them into human-made risk enterprises that are controlled by humans alone (*Liquid Fear* 82). In other words, positioning nature within the cultural realm, the Global North tries to control and manage nature like other human-made ventures. In *The Children*, the characters employ both quick fixes: they do and already did consume the future in their present and thus they "live on credit" and only focus on the ultimate, collateral damage instead of long-lasting solutions to prevent these dangers in the future.

Hyperobjects, anxiety and the resulting inaction and paralysis of the characters are also the note on which the play ends. Waiting for a taxi to arrive to take them to the power station, Rose starts her yoga routine – "if I don't do it now, it won't get done, and I'll feel it tomorrow" (Kirkwood 78) – and is later joined by Hazel, while Robin starts mopping up water from an overflowing toilet Rose accidentally blocked (79). Water – both the water leaking from the toilet and the sea the characters can hear through the open door – can be seen as another metaphor for hyperobjects. Because water shares a key quality with hyperobjects, namely its phased status (water literally approaches us in waves), the presence of water on stage can be a metaphor that visualises hyperobjects that usually remain invisible. At the same time, the wastewater and the sea stand for anxiety-inducing threats that are approaching: the dirty water comes from the defect toilet that literally floods and soils their home while the sea is further eroding the land and the soil beneath the power station and will eventually kill the three scientists. The characters then, for the last time, employ quick fixes: while Rose and Hazel do yoga and thus take care of their individual well-being, Robin cleans up the sewage from the toilet and so only pays attention to the symptoms, not the root causes of the problem.

The futility of these quick fixes becomes clear in the very last moments of the play that again showcase the theatre's potentials of aestheticizing the anxiety attending ecological destruction. *The Children* ends with a giant wave crashing over the house:

> *Through the open door*
> *the sound of the sea and waves breaking*
> *mixes with the movement of* **Robin***'s broom*
> *and the women*

as they try to keep breathing.
Out of this, very gradually, the sound of a wave building.
It grows and grows
It crashes upon us.
Silence.
Distantly, a church bell rings.
As if from under the water.
The sound distorted but unmistakable.
End. (79)

Aesthetically, this is a dramatic acceleration of the slow workings of ecological catastrophe: the erosion of the soil under the unstable power plant that slowly but surely must kill the protagonists is anticipated and visualised in a concrete fearful event and the imperceptible slow violence and vast scales of the ecological catastrophe are precipitated and condensed into one moment of destruction. This catastrophe arrives too soon for the characters to adequately prepare for it (not that they ever tried to) and so mirrors the temporality of anxiety: the fearful object (the giant wave) will have been upon us before we will be ready for it. In this way the insufficiency of social and political responses to the climate catastrophe – represented by the ultimately entirely useless quick fixes the play's protagonists resort to – is put on stage in a powerful image.

This concluding scene can then also be read as a call to action as it stages the consequences of the prevailing social and political stupor when it comes to addressing the human-made climate catastrophe. By shifting the focus from the characters to "*us*" in the stage directions, *The Children*, similar to *Escaped Alone* and *How to Hold Your Breath*, breaks the fourth wall and projects the experience of the characters onto the audience. This is also underscored when the play ends with the church/ghost bells that ring under water. These bells are reminiscent of John Donne's *Meditation XVII*, whose most famous lines seem to echo the call for action implicit in Kirkwood's concluding scene:[166]

> No Man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the maine; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea, Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if a *Mannor* of thy *friends*, or of *thine owne* were; Any Mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee.* (299)

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166 My thanks go to Martin Riedelsheimer for bringing Donne's meditation as a possible intertext to my attention.

Donne's – admittedly anthropocentric – notion of interconnectedness is echoed in Kirkwood's play: although Rose and Robin try to hide in their cottage and pursue their ineffectual or self-centred quick fixes, they and their actions are nonetheless inextricably linked to the environment they inhabit, just as "no man is an island" or isolated entity that will not be affected when it comes to ecological disaster. This interconnection is in some sense perhaps even more pervasive in today's globalised world, where individual actions inevitably are always connected to other people (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 70) and when it comes to the environment, as one natural catastrophe may lead to a chain reaction of further destruction (as can also be seen in Mrs Jarrett's monologues in *Escaped Alone*, see chapter 4.2). In the final moments of *The Children*, a 'clod' is quite literally "washed away by the sea" and this diminishes all humankind – the soil erosion is the cause for the destruction of the power plant that then impacts a region far greater than any exclusion zone, which once again shows the interconnection of environmental catastrophes on Earth. In the end, then, the play and its seventeenth-century intertext can be seen to directly address the reader/audience: the bell in this sense "tolls for *thee.*" Nobody is safe from the climate catastrophe. This is how the end of Kirkwood's play illustrates the coinciding of vast, incomprehensible and anxiety-inducing hyperobjects and the inability of the characters to react to them. The only certainty the protagonists have is that they will die – either from radiation, or from the soil erosion beneath them or from the wave that is approaching or from all these scenarios, which is a highly anxiety-inducing image.

The silver lining in such a dire conclusion is then to understand it as a call to action. Although, as *The Children* shows, anxiety can be the cause for inaction, it can also, at least according to Morton, play its part in improving our understanding of the ecological crisis: "What we desperately need is an appropriate level of shock and anxiety concerning a specific ecological trauma – indeed, *the* ecological trauma of our age, the very thing that defines the Anthropocene as such" (*Hyperobjects* 8 – 9). For this reason, it is important that plays like *The Children* confront their audiences with anxiety-inducing scenarios. Kirkwood's play does so through a double metonymic displacement, where climate change, the hyperobject radioactivity and anxiety form the basic configuration of the storyworld. The characters are then only able to react towards this mesh of anxiety and hyperobject and do so by implementing quick fixes that, however, will not free them from either anxiety or the hyperobject.

5.3 Thomas Eccleshare: *Pastoral* (2013)

Thomas Eccleshare's *Pastoral* (2013) is another example of a play that thematises the fear and anxiety that accompany the ecological crisis – albeit this time it is nature itself that induces these emotions. As the winning entry for the 2011 Verity Bargate Award, *Pastoral* premiered at the HighTide Festival Theatre in a co-production with Soho Theatre, under director Steve Marmion. While the title of the play refers to an old poetic mode, the play is set in a dystopian futuristic reality, in which several borders are blurred and reduced to absurdity: past vs future, old vs young, non-human nature vs humans, strong vs weak. Described as a "surreal comedy" that contains a "mix of the apocalyptic and the mundane" (Billington, "*Pastoral*"; see also Shore), the play is not only a reminder of human dependency on nature but also links environmental change with anxiety and is thus another example of what I call the theatre of anxiety.

Pastoral presents a satirical reversal of ecological catastrophe, in which a sprawling, relentlessly growing non-human world engulfs and threatens to completely destroy humanity. In the play, two men, Hardy and Manz, both in their twenties, come to collect Moll from her flat. Moll is an elderly woman with an odd and at times discriminatory sense of humour: the play starts with a monologue in which she makes fun of obese people she observes from her window. While Moll is reluctant to leave, the audience soon finds out that she must evacuate due to the hostile expansion of nature around her. Animals and plants of all sorts start to excessively grow and intrude into the living spaces of the figures in the play and simultaneously deny any consumptions by humans. This is also the reason why the Plum family, including their eleven-year-old child Arthur, come to Moll's apartment looking for something to eat, while the other three figures try and fail to evacuate the flat. While Moll waits for the Ocado Man to deliver the food she ordered beforehand, Hardy and Manz desperately try and, again, fail to hunt for food for the famished group. When the Ocado Man finally arrives, in tatters and with only one microwaveable dish he saved from the increasingly apocalyptic scenario outside the flat, it becomes evident that the world they live in is a battlefield between humans and nature. Driven to the extreme – they desperately try to kill the Ocado Man in want of food and fail to do so until Arthur, the youngest of them, shoots him – the characters realise how utterly helpless and dependent on international corporations they are to survive. When Hardy and Manz find out that the army entrapped them with a plastic wall in order to protect the North, Arthur and Moll are abandoned, because neither the old nor the young are physi-

cally able to pass the wall.[167] Left alone to starve, Arthur and Moll find solace in each other's company and entertainment when they meet a bride who is celebrating her hen night during the environmental catastrophe and, when all else ends, still believes in her upcoming marriage.

In Eccleshare's *Pastoral*, the borders between human habitat and environment and between animals and humans are shifted and blurred, which leads to the figures in the play feeling pain, fear and anxiety.[168] In the play, this anxiety is connected to other negative feelings, like disgust, which further blur the already established borders. Furthermore, the depiction of ecological crisis accompanied by the crossing of borders and by feelings of fear and anxiety is instrumental in placing a spotlight on the play's dysfunctional society. Transferring Ahmed's analysis of the exclusionary mechanisms of racism to the reactions to nature in this eco-drama, I would like to suggest that the figures in the play, while united in their pain and fear, are not forming one homogenous group fighting together against the environmental crisis but rather create new binaries to fight each other. Furthermore, the characters try to react to the anxiety-inducing and, for them, life-threatening situation by sticking to past routines; they simply cannot adapt to the new situation in time. This becomes most apparent in the play's stock characters, like the Ocado Man or the bride. When both stick to a seemingly internalised habit of delivery – either of food or of a speech – they reveal a system that is rooted in past actions. It is a system that is detached from the present situation, rendering the actions of these characters absurd. The same is the case for the genre of the play, which can be described as a pastoral dystopia. This clash of an old poetic mode and the near-future dystopian genre likewise shows that the coping mechanisms of the past are no longer functional in the face of the new environmental catastrophes and further increase fear and anxiety.

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167 The North is the part of the world that has not yet been fully embroiled by the environmental catastrophe and that has given up on the South – a thinly veiled critique of the politics of the Global North towards the Global South.

168 While 'environment' is typically understood as "the landscape or habitat in which the human beings find themselves," it is also often seen as a milieu/place they occupy but "are not necessarily part of or affected by" (Lavery and Finburgh 19). In *Pastoral*, in this sense, the environment strikes back and reasserts its place in the characters' consciousness with a vengeance.

5.3.1 Anxious Border Crossings

Typically, when anxiety is considered in connection with ecological crises, it is the destruction of the environment that is at the centre of this anxiety. In Eccleshare's play, however, it is the other way around: nature has become the active part, the actant that is reclaiming its natural habitat. In the play, plants of all sorts start to excessively grow and, together with wild and domestic animals, intrude into the living spaces of the human characters. What started with weeds and insects (Eccleshare 28, 33) has soon become a life-threatening situation for the protagonists of the play.[169] It is nature's reclaiming of habitat that is not only shifting the border between the human and the natural world, but also, first and foremost, inducing fear and anxiety. Moreover, *Pastoral* aesthetically and contextually reflects on the crossing of borders between nature and humans and the subsequent feelings of pain, disgust, fear and anxiety that are connected to this border crossing. Firstly, the play portrays a network of humans, animals, human-made objects and non-human nature that has not only shifted its borders but in many instances reversed the relation between humans and nature: where humans want plants (and animals) to stay close, for instance for consumption, the plants resist this utilisation; conversely, where humans want to draw a border between themselves and nature, for instance when it comes to the environment and human habitat, plants of all sorts disregard this need for space and start to excessively regrow. Similar mechanisms are at play when it comes to animals: in cases where humans want animals close – for instance as pets – animals resist this domestication and instead wild animals intrude into the living spaces of the humans in the play. On the one hand, it is nature that intrudes into human habitat – and so shatters any notion of a nature/culture divide – and, on the other hand, it is nature that draws a border by resisting human consumption and utilisation, for example when plants refuse to be eaten by humans or refuse to catch fire (Eccleshare 50, 52). The play thus ironically reverses the human domination of the natural world: the border between humans, plants and animals is redrawn. This becomes clearest when, in the middle of the play, human and animal behaviour cannot be distinguished anymore. It is this border crossing that is, in the play, connected to feelings of pain and anxiety. Secondly, these shifting borders also reveal the arbitrariness of the human-nature relation in the first place: humans want to consume and dominate nature and at the same time they want nature to stay away from their realm. This

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169 It is somewhat ironic that the 'natural disease' in Eccleshare's play starts with weeds and insects, as it is insects like bees that, although often disregarded as too small to be of importance, can disturb the whole human food-chain (Agence France-Presse).

ambivalent behaviour of fascination/utilisation and flight mirrors the phenomenology of disgust. By rendering nature disgusting and labelling it as dangerous and fearful, the characters in the play employ cultural techniques in order to subdue and continue to exploit nature.

The representation of fear and anxiety in Eccleshare's play is first and foremost achieved through the non-human environment that has become dangerous and fearsome for the characters, not least because it is unidentifiable and all-surrounding. In general, as Kolnai writes, "[t]he concept of fear is inseparable from that of threat, danger, rescue and need of protection" (37) – and the characters are in increasing need of protection from the dangers nature imposes on them. Whether it is death by wild animals, starvation or cold due to missing fires, nature's refusal to be dominated is ultimately painful for the characters. It is threatening "the very existence of the self" (38), just like fear and anxiety in Kolnai's phenomenological account. This fear is further increased as the characters do not know what is happening. As the outside world becomes increasingly fearful – for instance when Moll looks out of the window and Manz asks her to step away with the words "it's scary for you out there" (Eccleshare 26) – the characters are still unaware of what happened and what it is exactly they must fear. This represents another similarity with both fear and anxiety: their object is often unknown. For Kolnai, "what is alien and threatening can be so much more profoundly experienced when it is unknown and unidentifiable, when its nature can be only conjectured" (37). Although the characters *know* that nature behaves in unexpected ways, they cannot anticipate what is about to happen next. The characters seem utterly unprepared and helpless in the face of the new world they find themselves in and at the same time they have no idea what the government has planned, for instance when roads are suddenly closed, which further entraps the characters in the flat (Eccleshare 35).

The unpredictable ways in which nature reacts are also connected to another cause of anxiety: they are the anticipation of something painful. In other words, nature's encroaching is a source of fear because "[f]ear responds to what is approaching rather than already here" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 65). In the play, the plants and animals approach and encircle the characters and simultaneously stay a vague and unpredictable threat. The characters are threatened by nature and its excessive expansion and by the uncertainty of what will happen next. There is no escape from the threat, from fear and anxiety, because even if they do leave the flat, as Hardy and Manz occasionally do, they are still surrounded by the fearful presence of nature – there is no escape from nature as source of fear and anxiety. In every corner of the flat new threats lurk, as invasive nature seems to hide everywhere, for example as flowers in a vase (Eccleshare 25) or in a box of matches now populated by ants (49). Thus, even mundane objects in

the flat are 'contaminated' by nature and so evoke anxiety, which "accumulate[s] through gathering more and more objects, until it [anxiety] overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 66). Therefore, the environment in the play is anxiety-inducing because nature represents an omniscient and at the same time unpredictable and unknown threat that accumulates more and more objects that might potentially be dangerous.

This anxiety-inducing environment is then further increased by the various border crossings that take place in the play. The first border that is crossed and that multiplies these negative feelings is the border between humans and their environment. While nature is inevitably invading human habitat – which ultimately causes pain and anxiety – the characters in the play desperately try to redraw the border and take back their concrete cities. The excessive growing of the weeds that destroys houses and shops is a clear indication that the border between human habitat and environment is getting thinner and that human efforts to shut out nature by placing themselves at the dominant end of the nature/culture divide have failed. When Moll declares that "[t]hat branch had grown through the hall overnight. I couldn't climb over it" (Eccleshare 28), she gives an impression of how natural growth accelerates and traps humans in their home. Having realised that their private spaces have been 'invaded' by nature, the only way the humans in the play find to re-establish the arbitrary border between humans and nature is to fight this invasion with the armed forces: "[t]here are some soldiers or firemen or something talking in Tesco pointing at the trees. I think they're trying to chop them down. There's a soldier with a chainsaw trying to clear the door to Vision Express" (44). In other words, the human population declares war on nature in a desperate attempt to maintain the nature/culture divide.

This is also mirrored in the language of the protagonists, for instance when Moll describes her situation as being ambushed by the continuous growing of the trees (Eccleshare 37) or when she explicitly likens the situation to a war (29). However, this crisis cannot be solved by the armed forces and nature continues to invade human spaces. Boundaries between humans and environment are further enhanced by the figures in the play and the language they use, for instance when Manz tries to persuade Moll to come with him:

> **Manz:** Look Moll. Things are dangerous here for you now. Everyone else in the building's leaving if they haven't already left. I'll take you to Mum's. It's safe there. She's concreted the field outside and built plastic walls around the concrete. It's all the latest stuff. You'll be happy there. And then, in a few weeks, once the army sort this mess out, we can come back here. (27)

The language Manz uses resembles the communication in the face of an imminent catastrophe, like an earthquake, explosion or war. The play thus satirically revers-

es nature's slow growth and the slow violence humans impose on it by making nature the prime source of fear and anxiety. *Pastoral* then aesthetically answers Nixon's questions when it comes to the representation of slow violence – the intrusion of nature together with warlike vocabulary might be able to "convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making" (3), as Nixon demands. This is foremost done through shifting borders between humans and nature and the accelerated destruction nature imposes on humans.

Additionally, both movements, the breaking of borders between humans and nature (i. e. invasion) and the simultaneous drawing of borders in the play (coming from animals and humans alike) ultimately lead to feelings of fear and pain. This is not only the case as the extreme growth of nature already causes painful sensations like hunger, but also as the private borders of the characters are invaded. As Ahmed argues, pain is closely linked to both the borders of a body (which might also be a body of people) and fear. While the boundaries in the play have always been in place, the characters are only just becoming aware of these borders because nature has regained its active status. In other words, it is only through emotions like fear and pain that the characters become aware of this border crossing in the first place. This is closely related to what Ahmed calls the "intensification of pain" (*Cultural Politics* 24). Ahmed describes this connection between negative emotions and border crossings with the example of the skin:

> To say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders is to suggest that what 'makes' those borders also unmakes them. In other words, what separates us from others also connects us to others. This paradox is clear if we think of the skin surface itself, as that which appears to contain us, but as where others impress upon us. This contradictory function of skin begins to make sense if we unlearn the assumption that the skin is simply already there, and begin to think of the skin as a surface that is felt only in the event of being 'impressed upon' in the encounters we have with others. (24–25)

In the play it is not the skin not the skin that is perforated but rather the characters' living space that is invaded. What ensues is a self-reinforcing mechanism: if pain and fear are indicators of our private borders, then the intrusion of these borders consequently leads to feelings of pain and fear. This fear becomes especially clear in Hardy's messenger report, when he informs the others about the world outside the flat:

> **Hardy:** [...] The middle was so dark, just shadows of looters, and howls of people lost in there. Bonfires were springing up round the outside, people piling the paper and folders out of Rymans and burning them up, trying to make it catch the edge of the forest, but it's not working. Nothing's working. Eventually we found Tescos, but it had all gone. (Eccleshare 47)

As this shows, the unstoppable encroaching of the forest leaves the figures with a sense of helplessness and ever-growing anxiety as a result of the shifting borders between human habitat and non-human environment.

Another border that radically shifts in *Pastoral* is the one between humans and animals: on the one hand, animals refuse to be domesticated by humans and on the other hand, humans and animals merge, which results in disgust-inducing scenarios. The border in behaviour between humans and animals is repeatedly blurred, for example when humans suddenly eat like animals or when a hen night is shepherded through the square and behaves like wild animals (Eccleshare 29). These border crossings are then connected to disgust, which not coincidentally is frequently associated with food (Korsmeyer and B. Smith 2). In *Pastoral*, the characters' inability to eat natural-grown food (Eccleshare 37) or to use wood and plants to make a fire (52) redraws the border between nature and humans, as nature withdraws from human consumption. While, once again, some borders are newly established, others are blurred. The animals do not just come closer to the human habitat, they also take over their way of living and at the same time the humans in the play give way to their inner drives. Therefore, the following example stays ambiguous on whether it relates to animal or human behaviour:

> **Ocado Man:** They knocked me to the ground and kicked and bit and scratched me. [...] They ate in front of my face. They gobbled it down like wolves. They crammed the fruit and veg into their hungry mouths. They tore open the bagels and the pitta bread and ate them in two bites. They moaned and growled in ecstasy. And they fed their young with the crisps and the raw meat. The milk ran down their throats and down their necks in great rivers, sticky and thick. Crème fraiche, pork pies, oven pizzas, gone. (55–56)

This scene is a good example of how border crossings and humans' most innate fears can be a source of disgust. As Susan Miller observes, "[w]e often feel disgust toward animals when they are portrayed as creatures dominated by their drives, which are seen as base, unruly, and undignified" (49).[170] In this case, however, the

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[170] Rozin, Haidt and McCauley explain this relationship between humans and animals in more detail: "[d]isgust serves to 'humanize' our animal bodies. Humans must eat, excrete, and have sex, just like animals. Each culture prescribes the proper way to perform these actions – by, for example, placing most animals off limits as potential foods, and all animals and most people off limits as potential sexual partners" (642). Ignoring these rules may then lead to being labelled "as disgusting and animal-like" (642) and outcast from society. They also outline two other similarities between animals and humans that renders the former disgusting: firstly, both have "fragile body envelopes that, when breached, reveal blood and soft viscera that displays our commonalities with animals. Human bodies, like animal bodies, die. Envelope violations and death are disgusting because they are uncomfortable reminders of our animal vulnerability." (642). And secondly, "hygienic rules govern the proper use and maintenance of the human body, and the failure to meet

animals are driven to human-like behaviour and, in turn, the humans exhibit a behaviour that is often attributed to animals, which means that a previous border so carefully cultivated by humans is also blurred in the play.

It thus seems that the humans in the play become increasingly controlled by their animalistic drives. This is for instance the case when the characters eat the last of the food they find in the flat: "*Mrs. Plum picks up the plate and licks it clean. When she has thoroughly licked it she passes it to her husband. He takes it and gives it another licking. He places it on the floor. Mrs. Plum takes it up again and begins to lick*" (Eccleshare 36). In addition, they start to eat raw hedgehogs and later on kill and eat the delivery man, who fails to deliver all the pre-ordered food. This relation between humans and nature in many ways resembles one of disgust: while the characters, on the one hand, want nature to stay away, on the other hand, they want nature to be as close as possible. This interplay of fright and fascination hence mirrors the phenomenology of disgust (see chapter 2.2). Indeed, the relationship between humans and nature is then, in general, often governed by disgust, as Susan Miller outlines:

> We have yet another problem in our relationship with nature, one that is psychological. We want to be apart from nature, but then again we do not. We want to draw close and merge and be one with mother earth or father sky but not be threatened with the extinction of our selves. In relation to nature, we experience the fundamental paradox that in order to be enhanced through feeding and nourishment, whether physical or psychic, we must approach closely enough to put out sense of identity at risk. (48)

The play highlights exactly this paradox and reverses human domination over nature, creating a scenario in which the human "sense of identity" is jeopardised and which again is a source of fear and anxiety.

The most obvious instance of border crossing, however, can be found when the North builds a plastic wall to protect its citizens. This plastic wall is problematic because it affects the most vulnerable people, since it renders escape impossible for them and so further enhances their pain. The wall is built to protect people from the overgrowing nature:

> **Manz:** They've built a wall. A plastic wall as high as the canopy. Redwoods, oaks and pines are pressed to it, their roots are crunching against it. The army must have encircled us. Given up the South and tried to stop the seed spreading any further. (Eccleshare 62)

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these culturally defined standards places a person below the level of humans. Animals are (often inappropriately) seen as dirty and inattentive to hygiene. Insofar as humans behave like animals, the distinction between humans and animals is blurred, and we see ourselves as lowered, debased and (perhaps most critically) mortal" (642).

However, this checkpoint is for adults only – Moll and Arthur are both not allowed to the other side: "[t]o get through the checkpoint you have to be decontaminated. But it's heavy stuff. They won't do it to any one they think is... frail" (62), which is ironic, because being left alone in the constantly growing nature means they will die an even more excruciating death. Here, a border between classes of humans – the strong and the frail, those from the North and those from the South – is built as a result of the crisis at hand. As Hardy says: "[t]here were dozens of children there. Abandoned the wrong side of the wall. They won't let them through" (63). Instead of working together, society's reaction is to go back to a form of survival of the fittest. This also shows in the hypocrisy of those characters that can escape to the other side of the wall: while Hardy and Manz as well as Mr and Mrs Plum speak about protecting Moll and Arthur, they abandon both in the end and leave them to die. At the end of the play, the characters who show the most humanity, namely Arthur and Moll, are also the ones who are left behind in painful isolation – which reveals how the other characters abandon their humanity and display cruel behaviour at a time of crisis.

All these examples from the play show how the borders between humans and animals are blurred and shifted. The environmental crisis and the transgression of borders accompanied by feelings of pain and fear throw the problems the play's society already has into sharp relief. In a society whose members have to rely on multinational corporations for survival, the protagonists know no other way than to fight individually, against each other and passively against a ubiquitous and yet impalpable enemy. They are isolated from each other in their pain, which illustrates Sara Ahmed's point that "pain does not produce a homogenous group of bodies who are together in their pain. A political model of pain cannot gather together all the different pain experiences" (*Cultural Politics* 31). However, while Ahmed here refers to pain caused by socio-political acts, like racism, I would like to suggest that pain during crises, for instance during environmental catastrophes, may function in a similar way.

In *Pastoral*, the crossing and shifting of several borders – human/environment and human/animal – can evoke fear and anxiety. The border between human habitat and non-human environment is blurred by nature's invasive growth. At the same time a new border is drawn between humans and environment by nature's withdrawal from human consumption and humans' declaration of war against nature. Additionally, the border between humans and animals is blurred by the altered behaviour of both and simultaneously new borders are drawn by animals' refusal to be domesticated. Furthermore, the depiction of ecological crises, accompanied by the crossing of borders and feelings of fear and anxiety shines a spotlight on a dysfunctional society. In a society united in fear, the characters fight each other and, during crises, the weakest members of society are left behind.

The singularisation of fear and pain does not produce homogenous groups of bodies, leading to an insufficient reaction to the environmental crisis in the play.

5.3.2 On Being Stuck in a Pastoral Dystopia

Pastoral portrays a world where nature is the primal source of fear and anxiety. The characters in the play must react to their radically changed environment and the anxiety and fear this generates without any prior knowledge or experience on this topic. Estranged from all non-human life forms, the characters' commodification of everyday life proves fatal. In the absence of any other coping mechanisms, they stick to internalised routines, tokens from the past that have lost all meaning in the face of the current ecological catastrophe. Therefore, the coping mechanisms the characters employ to flee from nature and the attached fear and anxiety are only the repetition of past actions. However, it is not only the characters but also the play itself and its reference to pastoral literature that is directed towards the past – an idealised past that romanticises nature. The anxiety-inducing storyworld is then contrasted with an idealised perception of nature. In general, in Eccleshare's play "the fundamental mechanism of the pastoral mode is frustrated" (Farrier 6). While for David Farrier the play instead is a pastoral comedy (3), I would suggest that the play's genre can best be described as pastoral dystopia. This pastoral dystopia juxtaposes the past with a relentless present that quite literally overshadows and renders absurd both the characters' internalised routines and the play's portrayal of pastoral nature. Thus, in the end, the mechanisms to escape from the anxiety-inducing situation fail, as neither sticking to known routines nor dwelling in nature saves the protagonists.

The characters in the play are exposed to an environment that behaves (from their perspective) out of the ordinary and thus they must quickly find coping strategies to survive this life-threatening scenario. In the past, it seems, they have been living a life that was mostly separated from anything natural and dependent on multinational corporations for survival. Faced with the current situation – at the beginning of the third and last act, the flat is transformed into a "dense wood" (Eccleshare 49) in which Moll's chair is the only remaining trace of its former state –, they simply do not know how to behave: while nature becomes ever more active, the characters fall into inaction and paralysis – partly because they have lost their ability to interact with nature. Every attempt to eat plants or animals or to light a fire fails. While the play leaves it open whether the natural world really has become too strong for humans to cope with or whether it is humans that are too weak to adequately respond to their natural environment, the characters employ different strategies to cope with the situation.

One such strategy is the return to internalised habits and practices. These internalised habits that are employed to tackle the severely anxiety-inducing situation can first be seen in the character of the Ocado Man. Right from the beginning, Moll tells the audience/reader that she ordered food from Ocado and not once does she doubt it will be delivered (Eccleshare 34). Her trust in this company and its delivery policy is, at times, the only thing that gets Moll's hopes up (39). This illustrates the blind trust in a no longer operative market mechanism the characters, especially Moll, still employ, even though the reality they encounter must tell them something different (similar to Dana's believe in the European Banking System in *How to Hold Your Breath*, see chapter 4.3.1). Used to being provided for by multinational corporations, the characters, and especially Moll, do not know how to reorientate their outlook and thus stick to old habits and wait for their delivery – a distraction to counter their helplessness and anxiety.

This waiting for a saviour that will provide them with food is then rewarded by the actual arrival of the Ocado Man, who turns out to be as faithful to the capitalist system as Moll. When he finally arrives at the flat, he has barely any food on him, which he explains as follows:

> **Ocado Man:** I was attacked. My van was useless, stuck in a bog, stuck in Parson's Road. I left it there your see. I set out on foot. I got told, Mr. Sanderson told me, another complaint from a customer, another missed order, and I was liable to get the sack. To get fired. He said he's hook me if it happened again. I didn't want to risk it. It's the whole company that's at stake, that's what Sanderson says. I'm a representative of the whole company, so I'm not to let them down. It's actually quite a responsibility when you think of it. I'm an ambassador. So it's up to me to provide the goods, to get them to the address. Well, that's why I set out on foot. (Eccleshare 54)

Persuaded and manipulated to do his job until the bitter end by a mixture of threat and flattering, the Ocado company policy creates individuals whose trust in the company and the capitalist market system is so strong that they do not question them (the same way the characters do not question nature's behaviour). While the Ocado Man's journey is idyllic at first, with "little saplings, bushes and reeds" (54) on the way, the situation changes quite radically when "[t]hey got me outside Habitat" (55) and he is attacked – it remains unclear whether *they* are wild animals or other people. The only food he can rescue is "*a microwave chicken jalfrezi*" (56) and instead of running for his life, he dutifully delivers it to Moll. In other words, the Ocado Man's fear of losing his job far outweighs his fear of death. This behaviour is geared towards maintaining a system that is no longer functional and so proves futile and becomes the source for ever new anxieties. While the Ocado Man seems to have fulfilled his role in the capitalist system and managed to deliver at least one ready-made meal – which is of course not nearly enough to feed all the characters – he is afterwards no longer needed.

The present situation in the play catches up and Hardy and Manz, together with the other characters, try to kill the Ocado Man in order to eat him in a final act of consumerist frenzy – an example of *Pastoral*'s black satire. However, not used to any kind of physical work, they fail to do so and when their attempt to let him starve is thwarted by the Ocado Man's attempts to flee from the flat, Arthur shoots him with a gun (60).

Another example of internalised routines in the face of (natural) catastrophe that shows how the characters still stick to maintaining a dysfunctional system are stereotypically female gender roles. While in the face of an all-destructive natural catastrophe the characters must be afraid for their life, they still stick to internalised – and, given the situation, quite absurd – rituals. Once Moll and Arthur are abandoned, for instance, Moll starts to put on make-up, in order "[t]o look beautiful" (Eccleshare 69). Shortly afterwards, at the end of the play, a bride enters the stage. While Moll refers to a hen night earlier in the play, the same hen night, it seems, is still going on. Instead of getting herself to safety, in an act of blind obedience the bride desperately tries to fulfil the tasks assigned to her. While she herself is not even able to speak about her journey, Moll reads out a piece of paper she has written:

> **Moll:** *(Reading.)* 'I'm getting married tomorrow! Before I get
> hitched I must complete six tasks: One. Snag a bald man.
> **The Bride** *nods.*
> Two. Get a man's pants.
> **The Bride** *holds up some men pants. They have blood on them.*
> Three. Swap an item of clothing with a man.
> *She holds up a bloody shirt.*
> Get a man to flash his bum at me.
> *She nods, and cries.*
> Enjoy one last kiss of freedom the sexiest guy in the
> club.
> *She looks at the* [sic] **Arthur***, collecting herself. She goes to him and
> kisses him slowly on the lips.*
> Last one. Enjoy one last dance of freedom: slow dance
> with the sexiest guy in the club.'
> *She takes out her phone and begins to play some music.*
> *She looks at* **Arthur.** *He holds her by the waist and they dance,*
> *slowly and romantically.* (70 – 71)

While this scene is designed for comic relief, it also reveals how the figures in the play are not able to question their own actions. The play then ends with a dance macabre (which is followed by the typical speech of thanks characteristic of weddings) that not only shows the absurdity of the routines the characters act out – until the very end – but also how desperate the situation really is. In an increas-

ingly threatening world, the characters, like Moll or the bride, do not know what to do and stick to internalised routines and rituals. These rituals are a deferral and happen instead of real action – it seems, they are waiting for the situation to get better by itself (which creates a parallel to the characters in *The Children*). Both examples, the Ocado Man and the bride, show how the characters flee into known habits to cope with the situation at hand. However, when it comes to the climate catastrophe – and *Pastoral* puts on stage an ecological crisis – this behaviour does not work.

The inadequacy of these coping strategies points to the complex temporality of climate change, which in turn is connected to the temporality of anxiety. Humans have never before faced a future world affected by human-made climate change and likewise the scenario Eccleshare's play stages of a world whose future seems to be one of unrestricted natural overgrowth is unknown. Thus, in an ironic reversal, the rampant growth of industrial industries is juxtaposed in Eccleshare's play with the near endless growth of nature. In such situations of facing the unknown, as Tiehen argues in her phenomenological account of (the fear of) climate change, "our consciousness attempts to treat the future as if it will be like the past – narrow, conclusive" (128). However, as she continues, in order to survive, humans' behaviour has to "alter radically" (128), which is something the characters in the play clearly fail to do. Instead, they turn towards the past: by trusting a long-gone market mechanism or by employing internalised routines. Yet, none of these distractions will help them in the long run.

The clash of past, future and present also becomes apparent in the generic questions the play's title asks. While the poetic genre of the pastoral evokes a "Golden Age of rustic innocence and idleness" (Baldick 186) in which humans live in harmony with nature, the state of war between humans and nature in Eccleshare's play can be seen as a near-future dystopia. This juxtaposition might best be described as a pastoral dystopia.[171] One reason why the combination of pastoral and dystopia seems effective is the pastoral's characteristics as a mode: while often described as a genre, the pastoral can rather be seen as "a broad and flexible category that includes, but is not confined to, a number of identifiable genres" (Alpers 44). In this respect John Frow, for instance, uses "*mode* in the adjectival sense as a thematic and tonal qualification or 'colouring' of genre" (73). In other words, pastoral colours the dystopian genre by introducing a new thematic (i.e. the focus on nature) and temporal (i.e. a sense of entanglement with the past) orientation –

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171 Such a pastoral dystopia is necessarily closely related to the anti-pastoral – which "attacks the very idealizing role inherent in poetry about the English countryside" (Gifford 22) – and post-pastoral – which is a work in any time period that is "'reaching beyond' the limitations of pastoral whilst being recognizably in the pastoral tradition" (26).

and, due to the tension this must create, also an anxious mood in Husserl's sense. What is more, "modes are understood as the extensions of certain genres beyond specific and time-bound formal structures to a broader specification of 'tone'" (71). This means that modes do not stand alone but "are usually qualifications or modifications of particular genres (*gothic* thriller, *pastoral* elegy, *satirical* sitcom)" (71). While modes like the pastoral start out as a genre, pastoral "modulates from the georgic or the eclogue into a broader form which can be applied to any genre that deals with an idealised countryside populated by simple folk" (71–72). Ironically, *Pastoral* does exactly this: it portrays characters that find themselves in the 'countryside' against their will. However, while the "simple folk" Frow describes know how to live and work in the countryside, the characters in the play do not.

The pastoral mode in general is itself connected to borders and their crossing, as Malcolm Hebron explains: "[f]rom the beginning, there is a tension between the conception of the pastoral setting as an imagined, ideal world and as a real place of labour" (189).[172] While often associated with idyllic nature, pastoral can also be "a setting for satire and social criticism, often through veiled references" (190), as is certainly the case in Eccleshare's play. Itself a genre of extremes, where love and malevolence are set side by side (for instance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) or where an island utopia is set alongside cruel punishments (for instance in *The Tempest*, see Hebron 192), the pastoral is itself a distraction from a much more cruel reality, "a comfortingly peaceful fictional version of the countryside which could serve as a pleasing distraction from the real thing" (193–94).[173] In Eccleshare's play, this distraction of an idyllic nature is set against the backdrop of a dystopic storyworld. What renders *Pastoral* dystopic is then the rejection of the idyllic side of natural environment and its (satirical) inversion into the source of disaster: the increasingly bewildering non-human environment becomes the prime site of fear and anxiety.

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172 The juxtaposition of the idyllic past and an instable present is not new. As Gifford outlines, "[i]n the *Eclogues* (42–37 BC) Virgil evokes a Golden Age of the past that is set against the instability and alienation of the present. Later readers would rediscover Arcadia in Eden, the Forest of Arden, Marvell's gardens, John Muir's Yosemite, and the Georgian poets' English countryside during the First World War" (19; see also Hebron 193). However, in these cases pastoral is seen as a rather positive "retreat in order to return" that might "reveal truths" through the idealisation of a different lifestyle (Gifford 19). Contrarily, in Eccleshare's play, this retreat into a 'natural' parallel world is instead the ultimate place of fears and anxiety.

173 The pastoral mode and attached characteristics like idyll or nostalgia have their origin in the *Idylls* of Theocritus, a text that "established a sense of idealisation, nostalgia and escapism in a poetry of the countryside written for a court audience" (Gifford 18). A sense of escapism has thus been connected to the pastoral mode from the beginning.

The juxtaposition of a poetic mode hearkening back to an idealised past and the dystopian genre that projects a negative future also becomes apparent in the play's portrayal of the non-human world: a mythical past becomes the future of the storyworld. In other words, an idealised past version of non-human nature is 're-'established. This can be seen for example in the references to King Arthur and his knights – for instance when Moll tells Arthur about his namesake (Eccleshare 44–45). Here, the play evokes the impenetrable dark forests of Arthurian legend, an image of how nature might have been in the fifth or sixth century, when large parts of the UK were still covered in forests. This presentation of the British forest is closely connected to a perception of nature as unspoiled by humans and as such desirable. However, this nature, if it really comes into being, proves to be cruel and destructive for the characters in the play. Paradoxically, then, the play presents a near-future dystopian scenario of an uninhabitable environment that is the revenant of a mythologised past. Thus, the idyllic notions of pastoral are rendered absurd when juxtaposed with the sprawling, unchecked spreading of a non-human environment that is hostile to human life, a setting that is anything but harmonious and tranquil. It is then the juxtaposition of pastoral mode and near-future dystopian genre that fuels this sense of absurdity, which also shines through the characters' refusal to change their habitual behaviour in the face of nature's reclaiming of the environment. In the face of ecological catastrophe, the pastoral mode's idyllicisation of a green past must fail, as *Pastoral* demonstrates.[174]

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174 Given that *Pastoral* is an eco-drama, the absurdist elements in connection with ecology are no coincidence. What Lavery and Finburgh write in reference to Theodor Adorno's reading of Beckett's *Endgame* is then likewise true for this play: "we should not expect the ecopolitics of the Absurd to be found in green sloganeering or in celebrations of some restored, pastoralist version of 'nature'; rather, they are located in the ability of absurdist work to express the inexpressible through concrete stage images and fragmented dramaturgies which communicate complex and inarticulate emotions" (41). The Theatre of the Absurd can be seen as criticism of anthropocentrism by defamiliarising habitual ways of behaving. By drawing on absurdist techniques, *Pastoral* is able to highlight the absurdity of anthropocentrism and of humans' behaviour towards a life-threatening and anxiety-inducing situation. There are, in fact, various similarities between *Pastoral* and the Theatre of the Absurd as described by Martin Esslin. The "absurdity of the human condition" (Esslin 6) or rather the "metaphysical anguish" (5) in the face of this absurdity is extended in *Pastoral* to the absurdity of life during a global, ecological catastrophe. The way Esslin describes how the Theatre of the Absurd "castigates, satirically, the absurdity of lives lived unaware and unconscious of ultimate reality" (351) and satirically highlights "the absurdity of inauthentic ways of life" (352) is then likewise true for *Pastoral.* Four striking similarities are then: firstly, the combination of tragedy and comedy, secondly, the hopeless and repetitive situations the characters find themselves in. These situations are then contrasted, especially by Moll, with the act of waiting – either for the situation to get better by itself or for death. Thirdly, in the at times clichéd communication in the play, for instance, when Arthur talks about love (Eccleshare 43). And, finally, in the reference

By tampering with temporality, where not only nature's past becomes the present and future but also by reversing the reaction time of humans and nature – where humans are too slow to react to nature's fast growth –, the play not only shows the absurdity of the idyllicisation of nature, but is also a comment on ecological destruction as such. In Eccleshare's play, time is out of joint: while nature's typically slow growth has been unusually accelerated, the characters in the play are far too slow to react to their changing environment. As Manz observes: "[w]e thought we had time. They've been too quick for us and now it's escalated" (32). This is especially the case as nature behaves in ways that are usually associated with humans, where, in the course of the play, human and animal behaviour cannot be distinguished anymore. At the same time, the play's temporality also inverses what Nixon has described as the slow violence of ecological destruction (2): the usually vast timescales of ecological destruction that are hard to depict in the course of one play are condensed to mere hours. It is then through this temporal inversion that the play manages to portray "the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world" (3). While humans do not need to worry about nature going awry the way it does in *Pastoral*, the play nonetheless succeeds in satirically reversing the violence that humans inflict on nature and so represents human dependency on a functioning ecology.

At the end of the play, the bride gives her speech of thanks, in which she talks about a world that "seems fresh, full and alive. Birds are singing, the sun is shining. And we have a whole new future ahead of us" (Eccleshare 72) – words that are ironic in light of Arthur and Moll's and even the bride's seemingly inevitable imminent death. Thus, while harmony seems to be restored – at least in her speech – the classical happy ending of pastoral comedies fails to materialise. While the bride talks about the rest of her life with her husband to be (72), the rest of Arthur and Moll's lives might only last for a couple of days, at most. "*Pastoral* ends," as Farrier argues, "on a point of refusal, denying the reconciliation typically signified in literary comedy by marriage. The harmony offered by literary comedy is, it would seem, an illusion, polluted by a redolent irony" (7). Thus, the distraction from fear and anxiety through routines or through the pastoral mode's evocation

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to homecoming or rather the inability to do so. "In absurdist theatre," as Lavery and Finburgh write, "homecoming [...] is contested, impossible" (27). The characters losing their home is then another instance in *Pastoral* that is connected to pain and anxiety. This feeling of "homesickness while at home" leads to feelings of solastalgia, the pain and fear a subject feels when the home is under assault through the destruction of nature or in the case of *Pastoral*'s satirical reversal through the destruction of their home by hostile nature (Albrecht, "Solastalgia" 48).

of a golden past fails at all levels and does not protect the characters from the anxiety-inducing world around them.

Overall, *Pastoral* engages with ecological catastrophe and its attendant anxiety through various border crossings that are typical of what I call the theatre of anxiety. By satirically reversing the role of perpetrator and victim of ecological destruction, the play represents human vulnerability, fear and anxiety. This is achieved by crossing and shifting the border between humans and their non-human environment: the natural world eludes all kinds of human consumption and reclaims its former habitat. Thus, human domination is reversed: in the play the characters need to react to a fundamentally changed world order – a situation that causes fear and anxiety. The shifting borders between humans and animals are not only perceived as anxiety-inducing but also as disgusting: by rendering humans as such, the play reverses the nature/culture divide that is established in order to exploit natural resources. Moreover, the only way characters like Moll, the bride or the Ocado Man know how to behave in this situation is by sticking to old routines. With the ruin of society and large parts of the population fleeing to the North, this blind faith in capitalist market mechanisms or rituals proves futile, which is a direct reference to the current climate catastrophe. The clash of backward-looking behaviour and the present life-threatening situation is further highlighted by the play's genre as a pastoral dystopia, which juxtaposes the imagination of an idyllic nature of the past with the dystopian visions of the play's present. In the end, the relationship between humans and their environment becomes the prime source of fear and anxiety in *Pastoral:* because of the reversal of roles, human vulnerability and dependency on a functioning ecosystem is thrown into sharp relief – its dysfunction is the play's prime source of anxiety.

Both plays, *The Children* and *Pastoral*, portray different aspects of an impending ecological catastrophe that are inevitably connected to negative feelings like fear and anxiety. In Kirkwood's play, nuclear radiation in a double metonymic displacement stands in for both climate change and anxiety. What unites all three – generally and in the play – are hyperobjects. The characteristics of hyperobjects – viscosity, nonlocality, phasing, temporal undulation and interobjectivity – also apply to anxiety and are all depicted in Kirkwood's play in different nuances. In *Pastoral*, the ecological catastrophe is present in an ever-growing nature that simultaneously eludes any kind of human consumption and thus leaves its characters in an existential crisis. The play stages several forms of border crossing that not only connect anxiety with pain and disgust/abjection but that also become apparent the mode of the play as a pastoral dystopia. What both plays have in common is then the character's reaction to the ecological catastrophe that is often a mixture of denial/disconnect and avoidance techniques: while the characters in Kirkwood's play utilise quick fixes to 'repair' the collateral damage, the characters

in Eccleshare's play revert to past internalised habits – both of which are futile attempts in the face of ecological crises and lead to absurd reactions, which can be seen as a further comment on the real ecological destruction that is currently happening.

6 Controlling Anxiety: Between Security and Surveillance

Security and control are two different concepts that are nonetheless mutually dependent. To be in a state of security, which is "the absence of worry or anxiety" (OED, "Security"), one needs to be in control. Control, on the other hand, is the absence of anxiety's uncertainty and future-directed worry, a state where someone is "directing and regulating the actions of people or things" (OED, "Control"). Both terms, security and control, are thus inevitably connected to anxiety and constitute important aspects not just of anxiety, but also of the plays from the theatre of anxiety. This is even more the case since both concepts, security and control, are highly political. Control, in general, can be transferred to specific authorities – private or state alike – that then try to install a state of security, frequently on the condition that control is surrendered.[175]

While in some sense perhaps the entire idea of society or a social contract can be framed in these terms – giving up individual freedom (or control) in order to obtain greater (collective) security – the means with which states strive to maintain alleged security have drastically changed along with technological progress in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Increasingly, mass surveillance through CCTV or the mining of big data or data doubles plays a key role in concepts of public security all over the world. In this process, the boundaries between what is public and what is private are shifting and becoming obsolete, while the political focus on security goes hand in hand with widespread anxieties. This is a self-reinforcing process: placing security at the centre of public policy means that a lack of security is implied. This leads to anxiety among citizens (about terrorism, war, crime etc., but also in a wider sense about phenomena that are not linked to physical danger, like inflation, immigration and so on), which leads to a craving for more security, which in turn may reinforce anxieties.

It is exactly this juxtaposition of security and (lack of) control that connects anxiety and different forms of surveillance and so accounts for the third political aspect of the theatre of anxiety. Anxiety, as outlined before, influences body and mind as well as space and time alike and thus takes place in four spheres that

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175 The transference of control to a state like institution has already been delineated in Hobbes's *Leviathan.* In order to prevent a condition without industry and culture, with "no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes 84) Hobbes proposes to "tie them [men] by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants, and observation of those laws of nature [...]" (111).

can be visualised, controlled and manipulated in both drama and performance. It is also within these four spheres that surveillance takes place and likewise infiltrates body, mind, space and time. Surveillance can cross the boundaries of bodies and infiltrate them, coining terms like cyborgs and data doubles. Surveillance reveals its multiplicity through the gathering of huge amounts of data, collected through CCTV and data retention in the physical space where it becomes omnipresent and transcends human cognition. And surveillance has its own temporality that is directed towards an uncertain future. It is also within these four spheres that the oscillation between security and (lack of) control takes place – the more information is gathered and the closer the controlling power gets to the body, the more control they have over future crises. Thus, in order to function, surveillance must be omnipresent and constantly observing.

6.1 Surveillance, Technology and Anxiety

When it comes to the dramatic potential of surveillance practices, the process of observation establishes a link between surveillance and theatre. Drama, theatre and performance are inevitably voyeuristic, albeit voluntarily so. An audience that is situated in darkness is watching a mostly self-contained stage performance while itself remaining unseen in most cases. In this case it is the audience who is collecting information and at the same time hands over control throughout the evening to the theatre company. While some contemporary plays make use of theatre's close connection to surveillance, like Mike Bartlett's *Game* or Philip Ridley's *Radiant Vermin*, where the audience/readers become aware of their role as spectators on a (meta-)textual level, there are also instances of surveillance in contemporary drama that reveal their voyeurism through a more complex structure that often connects them to anxiety's multifaceted nature. In short, surveillance and anxiety share a similar structure. Firstly, anxiety's excessive nature that culminates in a conglomerate of fearful objects exceeding human cognition is mirrored by the culmination of data, gathered ostensibly either to simplify life or to monitor certain (groups of) people. Secondly, anxiety's temporality that is directed towards a painful future finds its counterpart in the act of surveillance, installed either to predict aspects of the future or prevent a certain undesirable and/or painful event. Thirdly, anxiety has a close connection to the human body and often breaches several of its borders. A similar development can be seen in data doubles or cyborgs, where humans merge with technology – the transgression of boundaries here can turn out to be a source of anxiety. As a cultural practice, theatre seems inextricably bound up with these modes of surveillance: while the close connection of anxiety and surveillance is frequently transferred to the stage, it also invades audience

spaces, where the audience that is kept under surveillance by several CCTV-cameras before entering the auditorium is then turned into critical observers themselves.[176]

Anxiety and Surveillance

As stated before, one of the most characteristic features of a theatrical space is its voyeurism – an audience that is situated in darkness watches a spectacle while remaining unseen. This simplified image of what happens during a performance has been linked by Michel Foucault to the panopticon, which has come to symbolise the repressive potential of surveillance.[177] Originally designed by Jeremy Bentham as an ideal prison, the panopticon consists of a multitude of prison cells that fill one side of the prison building where each cell is equipped with a window to the outside to illuminate it and one window facing inwards towards the other side of the building. Opposite these cells is the watch tower, from which a supervisor remains unseen and unknown to the inmates of the cells. "By the effect of backlighting," Foucault explains, "one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (*Discipline and Punish* 200).[178] It is

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176 For Shonni Enelow surveillance itself is affective, especially when the audience that is a spectator during a play, becomes the subject that is observed when leaving the theatre by all kinds of technological devices. "In fact, the pervasiveness and dissemination of surveillance – like the pervasiveness of media – might lead us to questions that are not ontological but affective: not 'what is surveillance?' or even 'where is surveillance?' but 'what feels like surveillance'" (24). For Enelow transformation of the media in connection with surveillance influences contemporary theatre and leads to a new way of acting that can guide the "surveilled subject" (24).

177 Foucault's concept of the panopticon is in close proximity with his notion of *biopower*, a term that describes "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power" (*Security* 1), starting in the eighteenth century. In other words, it relates to the regulation and control of populations by nation states through the use of diverse techniques like public health or risk regulation. For a connection of biopolitics and the Covid-19 pandemic (chapter 7) see also Steinhoff.

178 While the audience sitting in the auditorium watching a play in total darkness is reminiscent of the panopticon, there is one decisive difference, as Elise Morrison observes: "whereas prison inmates or 'ordinary practitioners' of surveillance are given to *not see* certain aspects of surveillance in public space, theatre audiences have been conditioned to *see double.* In the theatre, spectators watch actors and stage objects that perform both *as* and *in excess of* themselves." (*Discipline* 41 – 42). In other words, the objects on a stage represent a multitude of what "oscillates among sign, referent, and material reality onstage" (42), where the visible aspects of a performance are accompanied by the unseen aspects like unseen spaces and actions. Therefore, the audience in a play is constantly drawn between the physical aspect of the play and the sign to which it refers.
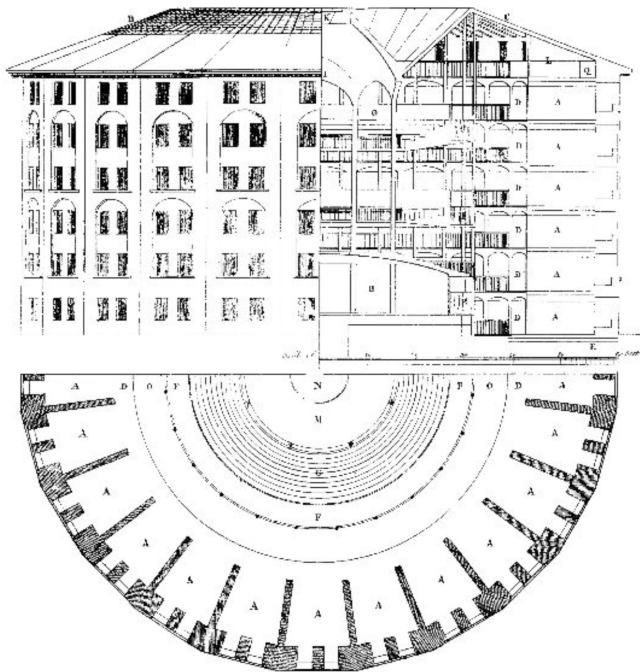
Figure 2: Reveley, Willey. "Plan of the Panopticon." 1791. *Wikimedia*. wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Panopticon.jpg

this interplay of visuality and invisibility (the watchman sees everything while being invisible and the inmates see nothing while being visible) that creates a sense of insecurity in the inmate: "the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon [... and] the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so" (201). The panopticon is thus designed to evoke anxiety in its inmates: it creates an uncertain present and future for them in which their actions might be painfully punished. This uncertainty is increased when the number of watchmen is increased, which again mirrors Ahmed's notion of anxiety as a conglomerate of several fearful objects: as Foucault puts it, "[t]he more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed" (202). Foucault then transfers this prison-style system to several other aspects of public life: hospitals, schools or factories that use a similar style of surveillance to control, manipulate and discipline individuals (204). The concept of the panopticon already delineates an important aspect of sur-

veillance in combination with anxiety: it establishes a state of uncertainty and lack of control. Both negative sensations can also be traced as stimuli for more recent models of surveillance.[179]

Building on Foucault's notion of the panopticon as an ideal system of surveillance, Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon describe what they term *liquid surveillance* (which is based on Bauman's concept of liquid modernity outlined in chapter 4.1), where "surveillance works at a distance in both space and time, circulating fluidly with, but beyond, nation-states in a globalized realm" (5). Constantly surrounded, monitored and tracked, a citizen living in a state of liquid surveillance is paradoxically always surrounded by uncertainty. Thus, a sense of uncertainty is not only part of the panoptical society as outlined by Foucault but can also be applied to today's society and plays a central role in current surveillance strategies that are closely connected to anxiety. The connection between anxiety and uncertainty becomes apparent when looking at a concept that opposes uncertainty, namely that of security. Security is linked to surveillance and anxiety alike as it is by definition the "[f]reedom from care, anxiety or apprehension; absence of worry or anxiety" (OED, "Security"). What is desirable is thus a (physical/political) state without fear and anxiety, a secure state. To achieve this condition, surveillance is installed to compensate for the lack of control during states of anxiety. Surveillance is the futile attempt to prevent future crimes and predict future crises to then reinstall (feelings of) security.[180] Within a liquid surveillance society,

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179 Relating to the future of surveillance, David Lyon observes: "[t]he idolatrous dream of omni-perception embodied in the panopticon is present in contemporary surveillance. This is the minacious twinkle in the electronic eye. But it is now connected with a yet more ambitious goal of perfect knowledge, in which simulation steadily supercedes knowledge of past records. This is surveillance without limits, aspiring not only to see everything but to do so in advance." (*Surveillance Society* 147).

180 The temporality of surveillance, which is directed towards future threats, is complemented by the neoliberalist notion of the *insecurity subject*, a term coined by Torin Monahan. Such an insecurity subject, amongst other characteristics, "can flexibly respond and adapt to the vicissitude and uncertainties of modern life without relying on the state. This *insecurity subject* anticipates risks and minimizes them through consumption, [... and] voluntarily sacrifices privacy and civil liberties on the altar of national security" (Monahan 2). Through the individualisation of the civic subjects away from the state, corporations press into the surveillance market. The privatization of surveillance, however, leads to the omission of (ethical) obligations towards the citizen the state might have (149). The insecurity subject, as described by Monahan, also reflects Marwick's notion of the 'ideal,' neoliberal subject that likewise reacts to an uncertain economic future by being "self-sufficient and responsible" (13). For Marwick, economic and social uncertainties are faced by the ideal subject through consumerism: "[h]e or she is comfortable integrating market logistics into many aspects of life, including education, parenting, and relationships. In other

[t]he prominent means of procuring security, it seems, are new surveillance techniques and technologies, which are supposed to guard us, not against distinct dangers, but against rather more shadowy and shapeless risks. [...] It seems that, ironically, today's security generates forms of *in*security as a by-product [...] an insecurity felt keenly by the very people that security measures are supposed to protect. (Bauman and Lyon 100–01)

This looping structure of seemingly creating security through insecurity has to do with the nature of surveillance that is obscure and "shadowy," very similar to the state of anxiety it wants to prevent. Thus, every attempt to gain control over anxiety through surveillance does fail.[181] In other words, "we fall over ourselves trying to make life-with-fear liveable, but each attempt produces more risks, more fears" (Bauman and Lyon 102). Surveillance as a cure for uncertainty and lack of control vis-à-vis anxiety must fail, as both anxiety and surveillance possess similar structures. They both work with a sense of overabundance, where an accumulation of fearful objects that caused feelings of anxiety in the first place is replaced by an accumulation of data and a network of surveillance that is designed to cure anxiety and simultaneously is the cause for new anxieties. Likewise, they both take place in the present and relate to a possible pain in the future, which further explains the urge to install security measures.

The (Anxious) Temporality of Surveillance

Thus, one structural similarity between both surveillance and anxiety lies in their temporal coinciding: both take place in the present and are directed towards an uncertain future. As Bauman and Lyon assert, "[s]ecurity has morphed into a future-oriented enterprise [...] and works through surveillance by attempting to monitor what *will* happen, using digital techniques and statistical reasoning" (5). Surveillance is thus the overcoming of anxiety's uncertain future through the gathering of data, its analysis and calculations in the present to predict what might come. Meanwhile, anxiety "can be roughly characterized as a state of helplessness, because of a perceived inability to predict, control, or obtain desired results or outcomes in certain upcoming personally salient situations or contexts" (Barlow 64).

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words, the ideal neoliberal citizen is an entrepreneur" (13). This behaviour then helps to "normalize[] corporate and government surveillance" (13) and creates huge amounts of data.

181 This notion of insecurities that are omnipresent and elude a clear understanding of their object, in this sense mirroring anxiety's cluttered nature, leads to the creation of "multiple cultures of fear" (Bauman and Lyon 106) that exist concurrently and, again, add to the already ungraspable nature of both insecurity and anxiety. These cultures of fear are then again intermingled with the surveillance culture, where surveillance has become mundane and part of many people's lives (Lyon, *Culture of Surveillance* 7).

It is especially anxiety's suddenness and the perceived irreversibility of its objects, as understood by Waldenfels (see chapter 2.3), that any attempts at exactly calculating what might happen hope to tame. In other words, "[s]ecurity's imagined future is one in which all abnormalities (terrorism, disease, violence) have been excluded or at least contained" (Bauman and Lyon 107) to create a secure and anxiety-free world. However, this anxiety prevention only works to a certain extent and further increases the accumulation of ever more data to predict the future even better. This, again, culminates in the idea of liquid surveillance that is, just like liquid modernity and liquid fear/anxiety, ubiquitous.

The accumulation of data is also connected to the future in terms of its storage. As the collection of vast amounts of data has become cheap and the deletion of old data practically unnecessary, collected data can be stored indefinitely and played back in the future. "As a result, transactions undertaken today (for example, a message sent to an e-mail list or Facebook page [...]) may well be logged and kept beyond the death of the person, with the potential to be recalled and analysed at any point in the future" (Kitchin 85). Data thus has the potential to outlive a person. As data flows are impossible to control once someone passes on, data can become unmanageable and ungovernable, adding another source of anxiety to data collection in the name of security. Therefore, the accumulation of big amounts of data is always connected to a liquid temporality, where data collected in the present is used, first, to predict future (painful) actions and, second, to be stored for a later point in time, where the flow of data cannot be controlled by the individual as it might outlive them. Both temporal dimensions connect the present with the future and both – a painful future and the loss of control beyond one's own death – are sources of anxiety. Thus, surveillance's temporality in many ways coincides with anxiety's orientation towards the future.

Conglomerations: Anxiety and Big Data

The idea of ubiquitous surveillance is the second connecting feature of surveillance and anxiety and resembles what Haggerty and Ericson call "surveillant assemblage." They borrow Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the term 'assemblage' to "introduce a radical notion of multiplicity into phenomena which we traditionally approach as being discretely bounded, structured and stable" (608). Surveillance is such an assemblage. It consists of various media and technologies that intersect and connect myriad technologies – ostensibly to install a sense of security. Although the single term 'surveillance' suggests a certain conceptual uniformity, surveillance is neither stable nor does it have clear boundaries – for instance, it comprises a multitude of different practices and it can operate both within and outside of state institutions (610). Haggerty and Ericson's notion of

(surveillant) assemblage merges heterogenous objects together to create a functional entity of these different phenomena that, I would add, becomes a unity of fearful objects and thus resembles anxiety in its structure as outlined by Ahmed. If the accumulation of (fearful) objects culminates in anxiety, then an assemblage of data, as can be found in surveillance, can likewise function in this manner and result in anxiety. For the assemblage of a vast amount of unconnected phenomena as data points must lead to the construction of ungraspably large spheres of interest or influence – big data, in other words, is not just big, but so vast that human cognition cannot cope with it; at the same time the practice of surveillance suggests that all gathered information is of interest and potentially threatening, and thus a source of anxiety. It is not primarily important what kind of object accumulates to anxiety (although of course fearful objects further increase the anxious feeling) as it is the accumulation itself that leads to the anxious state. As Ahmed explains, "anxiety becomes attached to particular objects, which come to life not as the cause of anxiety, but as an *effect of its travels*" (*Cultural Politics* 66; emphasis added). Anxiety thus has become a (Husserlian) mood (see chapter 2.1) that colours all other objects in a fearful glance. It is therefore not necessarily the object itself that causes anxiety but the accumulation of objects. This means that "[t]here is nothing in the object that renders fear a *necessary consequence* of the object" (80). It is the accumulation of too many objects that cannot be controlled and that add up to a conglomerate that creates the sensation of anxiety. This multiplicity thus resembles the surveillant assemblage that consists exactly of this kind of uncontrollable data. And vice versa it is exactly the multifaceted and anxiety-stricken structure of surveillance as assemblage that revokes any form of control: "As it is multiple, unstable and lacks discernible boundaries or responsible governmental departments, the surveillant assemblage cannot be dismantled by prohibiting a particularly unpalatable technology" (Haggerty and Ericson 609). The means to provide a secure environment thus has become a security breach itself and can as such neither be controlled nor contained. It is, again, the juxtaposition of a want for security and a sense of lost control that links anxiety with the surveillant assemblage.

The accumulation of ubiquitous amounts of data goes hand in hand with technological advances that enable the storage of huge amounts of data with low efforts and costs (Kitchin 80).[182] Rob Kitchin identifies the various technological de-

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182 The difference between small data and big data, as understood by Kitchin, is that big data has several essential characteristics that distinguish them from small data, relating to their overall "volume, velocity, variety, exhaustivity, resolution/indexicality, relationality and flexibility/scalability" (79). These characteristics resemble in many ways what Timothy Morton has termed *hyperobjects*, which are all-surrounding but real entities (like oil) that transcend human cognition because

vices that work together to accumulate data (that then becomes a source of anxiety) as a

> wave of information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the plethora of digital
> devices encountered in homes, workplaces and public spaces; mobile, distributed and cloud
> computing; social media; and the internet of things (internetworked sensors and devices).
> These new technical media and platforms are leading to ever more aspects of everyday
> life – work, consumption, travel, communication, leisure – and the worlds we inhabit to
> be captured as data and mediated through data-driven technologies. Moreover, they are ma-
> terially and discursively reconfiguring the production, circulation and interpretation of data,
> producing what has been termed 'big data' – vast quantities of dynamic, varied digital data
> that are easily conjoined, shared and distributed across ICT networks, and analysed by a new
> generation of data analytics designed to cope with data abundance as opposed to data scar-
> city. (xv)

In other words, data flows now dominate nearly all aspects of daily life. The way data is produced and gathered similarly resembles anxiety's multifaceted structure: according to Kitchin, data forms networks that accumulate it into confusingly complex systems governed by obscure (private and governmental) authorities. This is the evolution of the term Big Brother coined by George Orwell in his 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where individuals are constantly monitored and their data collected by *one* controlling power. The notion of a data network, how-ever, is rather described as "overlapping surveillance" and represents "a world characterized by a proliferation of different monitoring networks with varying capabilities for information capture under the control of different entities" (Andrejevic 93). Although there might still be individual entities that function similarly to what has been described in Huxley's novel, the majority of monitoring and surveillance entities rather resemble a network working on two interconnected and global acting levels: on the level of private corporations and on that of the state.

A system of ubiquitous surveillance on both a corporate and state level can then observe whole populations by gathering huge amounts of data that are collected first and, in a second step, analysed by algorithms. This analysis can then be directed towards, for instance, future crime prevention, an emotional invest-ment into campaigns or to experiment with the data in virtual laboratories (Andrejevic 95 – 96; see also Kitchin xvi; Zuboff 8). All three aspects can increase a sense of alienation from the executive organisations and lead to a weakened sense of con-trol, as the collected data is often not authorised by the individual to be used in this

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of their vast acceleration in time and space (see chapter 5.2) – once again, this shows how the dif-ferent topics that are part of the theatre of anxiety are interconnected themselves.

manner (Andrejevic 97).[183] When anxiety is being thought of as a conglomerate of fearful objects, all data that cannot be controlled and that can potentially be used against an individual do count as fearful objects that are accumulated in big data. The more information is gathered, the more accurate the prediction but also the more anxiety is generated. As "[t]here is no logical endpoint to the amount of data required by such systems" (94), the accumulation of data, but also its mismanagement and the anxious feelings this creates, seem to know no bounds. The collection of these vast amounts of data can then be abused, which leads to new forms of anxiety as it remains uncertain who has access to these data and for what purpose.[184] The large amounts of data can be used to create a digital copy of the human body, which resembles an amalgamation of data that is often the target of these assemblages of surveillance. The human body increasingly resembles a "hybrid composition" (Haggerty and Ericson 611), a cyborg that is monitored through the breach of the body boundary in forms of tags, apps, techno-chips, cameras and other technological gadgets. It is thus first monitored to then create a body double. It follows that the concept of surveillant assemblage abstracts "human bodies from their territorial settings and separate[s] them into a series of discrete flows" (606) that then become *data doubles.*

Pain, Disgust and the Body: Data Doubles and Cyborgs

In general, surveillance often targets the human body. This merging of technology and the human body then takes place in two steps, which are both accompanied by anxiety. First, data is (voluntarily or not) collected from the body. Second, this data

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183 In a similar manner, Lyon notes that personal details collected through different security measures can be shared with other authorities. "For instance," he observes, "the data for contact tracing depends on location-tracking possibilities embedded in the smartphone. If, say, police obtain access to the public health data, as has occurred in several places, including Singapore, the same data could be used for crime investigations as well as contagion control" (*Pandemic* 5). This "surveillance of personal data" can also be described as *dataveillance* (Morrison, "User-Unfriendly" 8).

184 Social media, for instance, not only collects huge amounts of data but can also create anxiety by spreading manipulated analyses and interpretations of the collected data, a concept that is not only used by private corporations. As Patrick Duggan observes, "the 'politics of fear' and discourses of anxiety have become commonplace as efficacious and affecting tools of (Western) global politics" (40), where fear and anxiety are created to justify new surveillance technologies. As the predictions can only be verified in the future, it becomes increasingly complicated to judge given predictions. The uncertainty, complexity and interconnectedness of data networks and big data render a clear understanding of these mechanisms impossible.

is reassembled to create a *data double* or cloud of data.[185] This data double, which lacks any moral obligations, can then live on indefinitely and can be used to predict future scenarios. Installed to return a sense of security, these data doubles are then controlled externally, often without the consent of their human source. Likewise, both the crossing of the body boundary to collect data and the accumulation of data outside the body are connected to feelings of fear and anxiety. Anxiety, which is itself a physical emotion, is thus also connected to surveillance on a corporeal level. Technological gadgets can target both body and mind alike and collect data either with or without consent:[186] "[s]ocial and commercial applications of digital doubles have ballooned in recent years as biometric surveillance and predictive analytics have become increasingly sophisticated, automated, and, as of yet, relatively unregulated" (Morrison, *Discipline* 185). The unregulated gathering of private data is also described by Bauman and Lyon, who argue that the collection of vast amounts of data that is re-assembled to a new digital persona breaches the human body in various ways to create a moral-free zone:

> Another angle of adiaphorization in surveillance is the way that data from the body (such as biometrics, DNA) or triggered by the body (think of logging in, using access cards, showing ID) are sucked into databases to be processed, analysed, concatenated with other data, then spat out again as a 'data double'. The information that proxies for the person is made up of 'personal data' only in the sense that it originated with a person's body and may affect their life chances and choices. [...]. Software designers say they're simply 'dealing with data', so their role is 'morally neutral' and their assessments and discrimination are just 'rational.' (8)[187]

This procedure is problematic on various levels and can be seen as another source of fear and anxiety. Whoever analyses a data double can do so without any moral restrictions and deprive the human source of these data sets of their control to manage the data – control thus shifts away from the individual to an algorithm. Once in the realm of the digital world, these data doubles become free-floating and can accumulate to ever new clouds of data and new versions of data doubles

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185 Performative implications of this intersection between "the corporeal body" and "its digital double" are further evaluated in chapter 5 of Morrison's *Discipline and Desire* (183–229).

186 In cities like London, where it is impossible to use the underground without being filmed on CCTV, the collection and evaluation of data is steadily increasing. In 2022, for example, London Mayor Sadiq Khan allowed the metropolitan police to access data from traffic cameras for their investigations – data that was not collected with the individual's consent (Sinmaz).

187 Bauman defines the term adiaphorization, which is also a war strategy, as a "tendency to play down the relevance of moral criteria, or whenever possible to eliminate such criteria altogether from an evaluation of the desirability (or indeed permissibility) of human actions, leading ultimately to individual human agents being expropriated of their moral sensitivity and their moral impulses being repressed" (*Liquid Fear* 86).

that then outlive the human.[188] This, again, resembles the idea of the surveillant assemblage: "while the surveillant assemblage is directed toward a particular cyborg flesh/technology amalgamation, it is productive of a new type of individual, one comprised of pure information" (Haggerty and Ericson 613 – 14). This data double is then not only used to control human individuals but also to predict future scenarios.

In order to predict a potential risk, surveillance needs to gather an increasing and never-ending amount of data. These data become more precise the closer they are collected from the body – ideally from *inside* body and mind. To collect this kind of information, the border of the body has to be breached.[189] This breaking of the body boundary, however, is often connected to pain. As already outlined in chapter 2.2, fear, anxiety and pain are closely connected as both fear and anxiety are directed towards "an anticipated pain in the future" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 65). What makes anxiety so fearful is that something painful might happen at any moment. Surveillance wants to eliminate this possible pain by crawling under the skin and, paradoxically, causes pain in the process. Drawing on Judith Butler, Ahmed describes a phenomenological understanding of pain in connection to what she terms *intensification*: "It is through the intensification of pain sensations that bodies and worlds materialise and take shape, or that the effect of boundary, surface and fixity is produced" (24). Pain thus emerges when the seemingly impermeable borders of the body are transgressed. This breaching of the body in pain resembles the way technological devices target the human body. The breaching of the body's boundaries by technology has long been theorised, most famously by Donna J. Haraway, as the cyborg: this term, itself a blend of *cyb*ernetic *org*anism, describes "a hybrid of machine and organism" (5).[190] A cyborg is never a sta-

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188 This notion of a free-floating data double that transcends time and space and that may not only be connected to moral/political considerations but that is also surrounded by a mythical atmosphere can also be described as digital sublime, as suggested by Vincent Mosco (see also Bauman and Lyon 114) and connects the notion of the sublime with anxiety.

189 In this context, the notion of *sousveillance* is pertinent. Sousveillance means "the self-monitoring and management of one's personal health and life through intimate digital technologies" (Kitchin 95). This can be achieved by actively monitoring one's fitness and health and includes private information like blood pressure, arousal, sleeping patterns, nutrition or menstrual cycles. This is a special case of border crossing where surveillance literally goes under (*sous*) the skin and invades bodily autonomy. The information gathered in this way can then be used to influence various decision processes, buying or voting behaviour.

190 Haraway convincingly argues that present-day technological advances have turned all human beings into cyborgs: "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics" (7). However, Haraway's reaction to this state is not one of anxiety but rather an argument for responsibly accepting the

ble unity: "[w]hile perhaps it is the imaging of the cyborg, the visual creation of flesh and machine that reinforces stability, it is also the cyborg's very non-human-ness that creates a paradox – the cyborg is never 'whole.' Even as the masculinized war-machine, a physical body invaded by technology has changed integrity and is no longer fully 'human'" (Parker-Starbuck 3). The body thus becomes the site of multiplicity: "as we slip further into an age of integrated technologies, perhaps the physical body can more easily be thought of as fragmented, or multiple" (3), which once again highlights the porous body.[191] The cyborg in this sense is the epit-ome of a fragmented body, a body that has become vulnerable and in part control-led by a technological device (that is itself often controlled by other instances). At the same time this connection between humans and machines can be understood as a "bond with multiple others" where the subject "merges with one's technolog-ically mediated planetary environment" (Braidotti 92). This is also what Braidotti understands as "eco-sophy," where "transversally the multiple layers of the subject, from interiority to exteriority and everything in between" are crossed (92) – a border crossing that is in some instances accompanied by fear and anxiety.

In the perception (as well as in the theatrical representation) of surveillance in/through the cyborg and data doubles, the phenomenology of anxiety itself is per-tinent. Anxiety can be thought of as an emotion of excess. A subject in anxiety is overwhelmed by excessive fearful objects, which all pass by and of which none can contain the negative feelings (see chapter 2.1). In anxiety, the fearful objects culmi-nate and become a cloud of objects that cannot be comprehended. In a similar manner, surveillance gathers data that are in some way connected to the subject but nonetheless cannot be grasped or controlled by the subject anymore. Techno-logical devices then enhance this trend by making it easier to gather these clouds of data – for security purposes. This connection of anxiety and surveillance as a conglomerate of (fearful) data points is then crucial to understand how the polit-ical critique of surveillance practices and the experience of anxiety are closely linked in contemporary British drama. In particular, there is an inherent similarity between the phenomenology of anxiety and that of surveillance: both depend on incomprehensibly vast conglomerations – data assemblage in surveillance and the

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situation and deriving pleasure from the dissolution of established repressive boundaries, in par-ticular gender boundaries (7). While I agree with Haraway's premise that the crossing of bounda-ries can be pleasurable and liberating, especially for repressed groups, my focus here is on the anxieties that may be caused by the 'dark underbelly' of the cyborg, which, as Haraway concedes, includes the possibility of surveillance (44 – 50).

191 As Anneke Smelik observes, in films the notion of the non-human or cyborg has developed from a fear- and anxiety-inducing topic to more pleasing and romance related terrain, possibly echoing Haraway's argument in search of pleasure from our cyborg ontology.

conglomerate of fearful objects that is anxiety – and both are directed towards the future – surveillance due to the predictive quality it is supposed to have and anxiety as a state of overwhelmed anticipation. At the same time, the cyborg as a representation of multiplicity and border crossings becomes the personification of the lack of control associated with anxiety. This is what makes it a key concept at the intersection between anxiety and surveillance.

It is precisely the paradox of security on the one hand and lack of control on the other that, at least to some extent, characterises drama and performance.[192] While situated in a secure surrounding and in control of which performance an individual wants to see, during the play, the control lies with the playwright/actor(s) of the play. This lack of control describes a contingency that is inherent to theatre plays. During a performance the audience sits in a secure environment while at the same time the play unfolds and challenges them emotionally and cognitively, juxtaposing both anxiety and the sublime.[193] The plays analysed in the following use exactly this contingency and the connection of security and loss of control to call attention to the ways surveillance and anxiety are inevitably and politically connected. After all, "[m]uch like surveillance, performance is ubiquitous and productive of power relations" (Hall, Monahan and Reeves 154). The same power relations are also found in the dramatic text, as the following analysis will show.

In the following, two plays will be analysed that use exactly this juxtaposition of security and (lack of) control in relation to anxiety in order to highlight the political potential these plays inhabit. Alistair McDowall's *X* traps its crew members in a panopticon-like space station that is established for science experiments on Pluto but instead becomes the site of a theatrical experiment on human anxiety when all communication with Earth is suddenly cut off. The play approaches the anxieties provoked by human dependency on technology through its mise-en-

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192 For an analysis of how technology can influence performance and theatre practices through embeddedness and simulation and thereby connect the theatre with metaphysics, aesthetics and politics see Matthew Causey's *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture.* For a detailed analysis of the juxtaposition of body, technology and theatre/performance that culminates in the cyborg theatre see Jennifer Parker-Starbuck's *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance.* For an analysis of how surveillance can be transferred to theatre and performance, which establishes surveillance art as a genre itself, see Morrison's *Discipline and Desire.*
193 Carolyn Korsmeyer links disgust to what she calls the *sublate*, which parallels, for her, the relationship between fear and the sublime. "Just as the sublime is not experienced as fear, so in the complex, layered apprehensions of the sublate disgust may not be experienced as such. But the aesthetic affect gains intensity from the hallmark visceral repulsion of disgust – a somatic spasm that registers the inescapable, dolorous frailty of material existence" (379). The sublate is then yet another example of how close fear and anxiety are connected to other sensations.

abyme-like structure. Designed to intensify anxiety, the nine short scenes that make up the mise en abyme connect anxiety with the sublime and are a prime example of how anxiety can be aestheticized in dramatic texts. Stef Smith's *Girl in the Machine* likewise puts on stage the interplay of security and (lack of) control, albeit in a more political style. Introduced to relieve its users from anxiety, a technological device becomes the main source of anxiety and reveals how a longing for security often involves the abandonment of control. In the play two competing totalitarian systems – one on the state level and the other maintained by a commercial company – use the human body as site and battlefield of their technological gadgets and demonstrate how the evolvement of new technologies can be exploited by utilising fear and anxiety.

6.2 Alistair McDowall: *X* (2016)

Alistair McDowall's *X* (2016) is an example of a play whose structure and context displays the many facets of anxiety and comments on a world that becomes more and more aware of the failings that accompany the age of technology. The play premiered at the Royal Court Theatre under director Vicky Featherstone and its complex temporal scope as well as its focus on dysfunctional human cohabitation has not only led to it being hailed as a "consistently witty, fleet-footed and thematically formidable play" (Pringle) but also classifies it as part of what I call the theatre of anxiety.

   The two-act near-future dystopian drama (Reid, "Near-Future" 81) is set on a small research base on Pluto, set up to find alternative places for human habitation and to secure human survival, as the Earth the characters in *X* left behind is deprived of any nature or animals. While the crew members Clark, Cole, Ray and Gilda should have returned to Earth weeks ago, all technical devices for time measurement and communication are dysfunctional, trapping them on Pluto in an unstable environment. Cut off from human civilisation, the main characters are driven to conspiracies, anxieties and insanity. While each crew member has their own way of dealing with the fear-stricken situation, a fifth character, Mattie, appears. In combination with mixed-up timescales and strengthened by desperation, especially Gilda's, Mattie becomes a source of hope and reason for dispute alike and fluctuates between being a crew member, Gilda and Clark's daughter, another version of Gilda or a hallucination. When ultimately the clocks stop working and the characters lose all sense of time, they increasingly lose connection with each other and their sense of reality. At the end of the first act, Ray commits suicide and is 'buried' in the freezer, adding to the already anxiety-stricken situation the characters find themselves in. In the second act, which is cap-

tioned as "A_ct Two," this conglomerate of isolation, hallucination and mental and physical decline leads to the implosion of language and time itself, all of which coalesce in Cole's death due to cancer. When ultimately Clark dies too and leaves Gilda alone on the research base everything in the play seems to stand still. Reminiscing a faulty computer system, the play then sets out to a new start with Gilda and her daughter Mattie, who is eventually left alone by Gilda. In McDowall's "sci-fi horror" (Sierz, "X"), thus, time, story, characters and language are demolished and simultaneously connected on several thematic and aesthetic levels, breaking several boundaries and, together with mental and physical pain and the abject, mirroring the multi-layered structure of anxiety.

As an example of the theatre of anxiety, the play and the letter X serve to highlight both the question of how to represent anxiety in a playtext and on stage and the different methods the characters apply to overcome said anxiety – an endeavour that fails. In this play, similarly to *Girl in the Machine*, the characters oscillate between a longing for security and total lack of control over the situation they are in, which further increases their anxious mood. Anxiety is ingrained in the play in several ways: firstly, the anxiety-stricken situation that the crew members are stuck on Pluto is accompanied by various scenarios offering why this might be the case. Each scenario is, according to Ahmed's definition of anxiety, itself a fearful object that might further impact the future of the crew members. Secondly, this is then strengthened by the lack of communication within the play, which further demonstrates the isolation of the characters. It is also the lack of communication with Earth and the simultaneous feeling of being observed that is reminiscent of Foucault's notion of the panopticon and thus highlights the political aspect of the play. They are not only isolated because they have lost all contact to Earth, but also because they are unable to communicate with each other, leading to the total destruction of language itself through the overbearing state of anxiety the characters are in. Thirdly, the disrupted timelines in the play mirror the many fearful possibilities that might strike at any moment and demonstrate that fear and anxiety are not only closely connected to a lack of control, but also to an anticipated painful future. Finally, although not at the centre of my analysis for this play, pain, disgust and abjection add to the already anxiety-stricken situation the characters are in and complete the conglomerate that is anxiety.

These sources of anxiety are then countered by the play's characters in three ways. Firstly, the many fearful possibilities and likewise ungraspable nature of the storyworld is countered by the characters' need of physical objects and past experiences. However, based in the past, this approach cannot solve future problems, nor can this escape mechanism help cope with the anxiety-stricken situation. Secondly, Gilda establishes a mechanism where she listens to 'nothingness' to circumvent anxiety's conglomerate of fearful objects. She thus indulges the state of

nothingness anxiety creates. Yet, this escape mechanism likewise does not solve the anxious mood on the research base as it leads to inaction and isolation. Thirdly, the anxious mood is countered by Mattie, a character that appears in several real and imagined situations and that is likewise non graspable and passes the other characters by. For Gilda, Mattie is a harbinger of hope, a more-than-human character that she imagines helping them escape the research base. However, as she is only seen by Gilda, the other crew members doubt Mattie's existence. Evoked to rescue the crew members, Mattie then becomes a source of dispute and a security breach herself. All three attempts to tackle anxiety fail, leading to the anxious mood consuming the play in the second act, where language and time come to a halt. Right before the more hopeful ending of the play, *X* reflects on the different forms of anxiety, none of which has been overcome, by including a mise en abyme structure that repeats anxiety's multi-layered and painful nature and renders it absurd. These interscenes then combine the structure of anxiety, which is conditioned by the overabundance of fearful objects, with the structure of the sublime, which is conditioned by the lack of familiar concepts to fill the blanks the play creates. These silent interscenes then form the basis of my final analysis of the aesthetic dimension of anxiety in the play, which showcases how contemporary British drama can visualise anxiety despite the emotion's private and nondescript nature.

Within the play, borders and thresholds are crossed on several occasions and levels. This is perhaps best visualised by the recurrence of the letter X – itself a cross – that not only gives the play its title, but also takes on a central role within the play. It is simultaneously used as a symbol for hugs and kisses, as placeholder for names and the identity of the characters (McDowall, *X* 120), as a visual image smeared across a wall (10) or generally to signify space (based on the conventional use of the variable x for space in physical equations). Moreover, as Trish Reid notes, "[i]t stands for the chromosomal inheritance a mother passes to her daughter [and] is a harbinger of doom in the vision of a little girl someone sees at the porthole" ("Near-Future" 82). The letter X not only accompanies the many border crossings within this play but can also be traced down to all four aspects of anxiety that will be analysed here. In the play, X stands for a sense of mental overload caused by an accumulation of fear and anxiety, but it is also a placeholder for time and space, a symbol for the destruction of language, as well as the source of pain and disgust when displayed as a scar or smeared across a wall with blood.

6.2.1 Anxiety's Uncertain Temporalities

As the title already suggests, (border) crossings in various forms are core to the play. It is also within crossed borders that phenomenological states of anxiety are showcased and thus *X* exemplifies how anxiety, a private and often non-visible emotion, can be staged in contemporary drama. All border crossings are accompanied by a breach of security, lack of control and fear for the characters' lives. Firstly, the play isolates the characters by cutting all communication with Earth and thus cuts the border between their home planet and the research base. The characters are left in total lack of control, which increases their feelings of vulnerability and anxiety. While there are many fearful possibilities for the lack of connection with Earth, these possibilities accumulate into an anxious mood, which culminates in the isolation of the crew members. Secondly, linear temporality is disturbed, which further breaches the border between past, present and future and increases the vulnerable and insecure situation the crew members are in. Finally, the borders of body and mind are breached in pain and abject through hallucinations and death, which is exemplified by Ray's suicide and the impact it has on all other crew members. This notion of anxiety as related to a lack of control and security, in combination with its border-crossing nature is also strengthened by the design of the research base. All scenes take place in the communal room which "*resembles an airport waiting room. Or an expanded train carriage. Functional and charmless. It's slightly untidy and cluttered*" (McDowall, *X* 4). There are "*[o]pen exits leading off left and right*," a hatch above the room and a black window that displays the nothingness that surrounds the research base. "While the presence of a window in a typical building is necessary to avoid claustrophobia," Ian Farnell observes, "on Pluto it becomes entirely absurd as it only affords views of nothingness, inducing a state of existential hopelessness, even dread." ("Science Fiction" 130). The setting thus already mirrors the increasingly claustrophobic space that traps the characters, especially in the second act.

At the centre of McDowall's near-future dystopia is the anxiety-inducing lack of communication between research base and Earth. While the characters know *that* they cannot communicate with Earth and are entirely on their own – at the beginning of the play it has been three weeks since the last contact – they do not know *why* this is the case. There are, however, several theories as to why they are stranded on Pluto, often connected to an assumed failing of individual characters to do their job, resulting in a general suspicion towards each other that adds to the isolation the characters feel – especially in the first act of the play. While Cole, father of a son, is diligently trying to work out a solution for their problems, Ray, the oldest crew member, is severely depressed and deploys a form of inner migration. Gilda, who becomes captain in the course of the play,

is a rock scientist and the character most openly worried about their current situation while Clark, her counterpart, is an unlikeable character who does not seem to take his job or the mission seriously. Although unreliable, Clark is responsible for the technological communication with Earth and assures Gilda that he is not liable for the communication breach:

> **Clark:** Every single transmission we've made has been
> marked as received.
> …
> Okay?
> …
> Do you get what that means?
> …
> Our computer. Their computers. Everything works.
> Everything we send is getting to Earth.
> Every broadcast. Video, audio, text. Received. Tick.
> Everything's getting there.
> Fine.
> But no one's sending anything back.
> …
> No one's on *their* end of the phone.
> …
> Okay?
> …
> I can't make someone who's not *there* answer our
> transmissions. (McDowall, *X* 20–21)

Yet, Gilda is not convinced that Clark did everything in his power to re-establish the communication with Earth. If he is correct, however, it would mean that all human life on Earth has been obliterated, leaving the crew members as the only surviving human beings – a frightening prospect. Alternatively, the station on Earth could have received their messages but decided not to reply out of financial considerations, leaving the crew members behind as the whole endeavour does not seem prosperous enough – a similarly frightening situation. Another reason for their condition could be Ray's fear of returning to Earth. Being the oldest, he is afraid that he will be retired on Earth and have to return to a life he does not want to live. "What have I got back there? Two ex-wives and a bedsit full of old photographs. That's not living. [...] I'll stay out here and go on my own terms" (35). Staying on his own terms, however, does imply that he tampered with the tech-systems to stay on Pluto – a thought he confesses to Gilda: "[l]ast run I did I thought about messing with the comms" (79). Although he assures her that he did not do it, some mistrust remains. Thus, there are several possible reasons why the research base may have no connection to Earth.

Having several possibilities and not knowing if and when they can return to Earth or why they are still on Pluto establishes a sense of defamiliarization and suspicion that separates and isolates the characters, further reinforcing their feelings of vulnerability and fear. This suspicion and uncertainty that is created at the beginning of the play mirrors the operating principle of the panopticon. It represents exactly this juxtaposition of possibly being observed at any time but never knowing at which exact moment. The scientists on Earth thus have the possibility to observe the crew members (if Clark is right that their technology is functional and if humanity on Earth has not been obliterated) and interfere with their lives, but the crew members do not know if and when that will be the case. In Foucault's words, power is established by "permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible" (*Discipline and Punish* 214). Following this, the scientists on Earth, while not visible, dominate the play and establish a cloud of uncertainty and anxiety. While the connection with Earth is established to provide the space travellers with vital infrastructure and security, this dependency backfires when the connection is breached and becomes the main source of insecurity. The crew members are thus surrounded by insecurity, lack of control and accompanying feelings of vulnerability and anxiety, similar to the inmates of the panopticon. The panopticon, which is also described as a laboratory and "privileged place for experiments on men" (204), then mirrors the space station, which is, similar to a prison, a self-contained laboratory that experiments with different forms of anxiety. The research base is thus not only designed to study Pluto, but also to study human interaction during states of all-consuming anxiety. However, the crew members are not just separated from Earth, but they increasingly isolate each other. This is also accounted for in Foucault's notion of the panopticon, in which "procedures of partitioning and verticality" are introduced in order to "oppose to the intrinsic, adverse force of multiplicity the technique of the continuous, individualizing pyramid" (220). The insecurity, fear and anxiety the crew members encounter are then met with suspicion and isolation, further adding to the anxious mood on the space station. As none of the crew members know the reason for their desperate situation, this uncertainty is consequently met with the different possibilities, of which each is a fearful object that might or might not have been realised in the past, for which the crew members were clearly not prepared and that did affect the painful state they are in as well as their future states. Not knowing which scenario it was also leaves the crew members inactive and incapable to work on a solution, increasing their vulnerability to future pains and leaving them in a state of constant alarm.

What is perhaps the most characteristic feature of *X* is its complex temporal structure (see also Farnell, "Science Fiction"; Fragkou; Pham). It is also the feature that situates the play most firmly within the context of the theatre of anxiety. The

perception of time in the play is disrupted on several occasions. From its beginning, time is perceived differently by each character and increasingly desynchronised from the time displayed by the large digital clock on the wall. The first scene does not just set the mood for the whole play but is an example of how, in anxiety, time and language are connected and destroyed simultaneously. It becomes clear that, for unknown reasons, the characters have no way to leave the research base nor to get into contact with Earth and that there is no solution for their technical problems. The characters' involuntary isolation in combination with their different perceptions of time leads to their inability to work together, again resembling the working mechanisms of the panopticon. Their relationship is increasingly built on suspicion and resentment, social boundaries are not respected and, due to the lack in trust, the crew members are inhibited from showing any emotions (McDowall, *X* 8). The characters' anxiety steadily increases as they are constantly waiting without any aim or hope:

> **Mattie:** [...] Waiting for someone to pick up the
> phone. Or come get us.
> ...
> Or we're just waiting to die [...]
> And there's nothing you can do about that.
> We've got more than enough food. Water won't run out.
> And the base is designed to last for *decades*, it'll still be
> breathing way after we've stopped. Its *job* is to live forever. (45)

The temporal contrast between the technological devices that last forever and the finite nature of humans can be seen as another source of anxiety in which not just nature but also technology might outlive humans, thus adding to the opaque conglomerate of fears and anxieties. Installed to secure human survival, these artificial systems then pollute the environment for an incommensurable amount of time (see also chapter 5.1) and thus elude any control mechanisms.

However, while the technological devices last forever they may still be dysfunctional and are thus a further source of insecurity and anxiety. Cole is doing some math calculations with pen and paper when Clark looks at them and tells him that they are wrong. When Cole explains that he wants to calculate "[t]ime. X is time" (*X* 66) it becomes evident that all clocks on the base are dysfunctional: "[e]verything's linked to Earth through the main clock. And the main clock's wrong" (68). Their time neither fits Earth time nor Plutonian time, which is why Cole's calculations can never be correct. These irregularities in time are also monitored by the digital clock that is situated above the window and clearly visible by crew members and audience alike. Within a performance, a clock on stage is a disturbance in any play's linearity: "[c]learly, there is something about a working clock on stage that is minimally disturbing to an audience. But it has less to do with

time per se than with our awareness that theatrical time is being measured by a real clock – an instrument that is visibly obeying its own laws of behaviour" (States 30). This is even more the case when the clock stops working and thus combines the real time, the theatrical time and the disruption of the theatrical time. The irregularities in the play also shift between day and night, week and month, and do not seem to follow any pattern. Thus, the whole crew does not know what time or day it is, which further increases their uncertain and anxious mood. This destruction of time symbolises an increasing lack of control. While the measurement of time and the use of a clock are usually instruments that structure the day and thus give a sense of security in their repetition, the destruction of time further increases the feeling of insecurity and lack of control in the crew members. This uncertainty is also described when Ahmed refers to the object of fear as "not quite present" (*Cultural Politics* 65) and to anxiety as an accumulation of these fearful objects that build up "until [anxiety] overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (66). While the characters in the play are provided for by the base, they are surrounded by anxiety and fear a future that promises to be an infinite regress of boredom, despair and isolation. Their anxiety, elicited by their isolation and temporal displacement, leads to anti-social behaviour that further isolates the characters, who are not able to speak about their emotions, further increasing their anxiety.

Next to the destruction of communication and time, the play also showcases how pain and disgust are connected to anxiety. In Act One, for instance, Mattie, the newly introduced fifth crew member, reveals that Ray believes he has seen a little girl with a scar over her mouth in form of an X outside the research base, where the life systems are. Ray fears this disturbing image and the possibility of the girl entering the research base not knowing "[w]hat happens when she gets inside" (McDowall, *X* 57). Seeing this girl and not knowing whether she is real or imagined, in combination with all other fearful objects and situations, Ray increasingly doubts his sanity. After another short encounter with the girl, Ray commits suicide:

> **Ray:** [...] *He takes a penknife from his pocket and flicks it open.*
> *He stabs it brutally into his neck, over and over and over.*
> *He hacks at the tendons, windpipe, jugular.*
> *Blood cascades down his front in rivers and waves.*
> *He drops the knife and grabs at the gore spilling from his neck.*
> *He turns to the wall and stumbles against it, gurgling, choking,*
> *yelping.*
> *He paints a vast, smeared X onto the wall with the colour that pours*
> *from him.* (85–86)

When Ray cuts his throat to kill himself, he breaches the border between inside and outside, similarly to the girl that is first seen outside the research base and

then crawls inside it. While the little girl stands for an (imagined) security breach within the space station, Ray's suicide reveals the porous human body. Disgust and abject are often associated with the crossing of borders, with chaos and disorder (Douglas 122). Similar to Kristeva's notion of abjection, this abject object Ray fears vis-à-vis the little girl is unstable. Although it might be a hallucination, it is neither him, "[but] not nothing either. A 'something' that I do not recognise as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 2). The little girl, for Ray, does exactly this, it threatens his sanity, his security and his future. It represents the instability "of boundaries separating object and subjects" (Chanter 3) and threatens Ray's whole being. The girl breaching the border of the research base thus stands for a disorderly action. Consumed by anxiety, Ray reacts to the girl by imposing physical pain. The pain itself is then a border crossing, "it reestablishes body boundaries and a sense of wholeness in individuals who are experiencing fragmentation due to intense feelings of anxiety. Pain cuts through the cloud of anxious feelings that leave the person feeling self-estranged and 'disembodied'" (Kirmayer 374). At the same time, Ray imposes his own cleaning ritual as a reaction to the disgusting vision of the girl. As Ahmed outlines, one reaction to disgust is to create a disgusting object that draws a (symbolic) border towards the source of disgust, an object that is itself disgusting. For Ahmed "[b]order objects are [...] disgusting, while disgust engenders border objects." (*Cultural Politics* 87). For Ray, this new abject border object that separates him from the scarry girl is blood, something that is itself disgusting. Blood is one of the liquids that symbolise the orifices of the body and thus stands for the boundaries and the vulnerability of the body (Douglas 121). Smearing his blood on the wall then further adds to the painful encounter as it also reveals, to the other characters in the play, that their private borders might likewise be intruded, further inducing abject and anxiety.

The image of the bloody X is disgusting on several levels. Firstly, it directly confronts the other crew members with their own mortality (which is enhanced when Ray's corpse must be stored in the freezer as they cannot burry it outside and thus is always around them). Secondly, the blood on the wall is a remainder of pain and represents something that is not only abject but also out of place. The torrent of blood that is smeared across the wall as a huge X then perpetuates the anxiety present in the play. These abject and disgusting images then accompany the crew members throughout the play, who live in a panopticon-like situation with its communication disrupted and its temporality increasingly disturbed. All three aspects add to the overall anxious mood of the play and showcase how anxiety can be visualised in contemporary drama.

6.2.2 Countering Anxiety

Alistair McDowall's *X* showcases anxiety in various forms though its temporal structure, its disruption of communication and its portrayal of pain, disgust and abjection. These cases of anxiety are then accompanied by several instances of border crossing where not only the outside borders of the research base are intruded but the border between body and mind, hallucination and reality are blurred, which further increases the states of anxiety the characters are in. Living in an all-consuming mood of anxiety, the crew members try to counteract these negative sensations, albeit with only marginal success. After A_ct Two, scene I, the division into acts and scenes in *X* breaks down. There are no more numbers for new scenes, which are now indicated by brackets [ ], mirroring a research base trapping its own crew members and the vacuum, isolation and nothingness inside the space station and the emotional emptiness inside the heads of the crew members. The characters increasingly drift apart, and so does their language. Communication in the play is increasingly disturbed as the crew members still cannot communicate with Earth and with each other, which impacts their mental states. "In the hallucinatory second act," as Reid writes, "X represents the crossing out of neurons in a dying brain as it colonises language itself, erasing meaning as it goes" ("Near-Future" 82). The overarching conglomerate of insecurities, possibilities and general disarray that has already been touched upon still surrounds the characters and sets the mood through disgusting images, blood, tumours and suicide, hallucination and the constant fear and desire to intermingle the outside world and the space station – all of which are connected to the letter X. Everything becomes very absurd, fast, circling around the same lines of conversation. Ray has committed suicide and Cole and Gilda are constantly in dispute, while Cole has advanced cancer, which impairs his mental and physical abilities. Here, a spiral of Cole forgetting about his illness, his hostility towards Gilda and later Clark, his worsening physical and mental state and subsequently his death begins, with words and actions crashing into each other, breaking the boundaries of mental and physical states, of true and false, illness and health, conscious and unconscious, friendship and hostility. These are scenes in which the boundaries of time, language, individuality and humanity are breaking (McDowall, *X* 110). Fuelled by anxiety, the words get mixed up, blurred, and language and time stop making sense. Suddenly, feelings are expressed instead of a message, talking about things so horrendous the words are missing. In the end, the crew members cannot remember their old stories, their own names or what X stands for. The blurring of sensory and physical experiences becomes increasingly clear on a sequence of pages which consist of hundreds of X, like a wall or a prison of letters that cannot be overcome, a system that cannot be used and experiences and emotions that cannot be described

(126 – 30). On these pages, time, language, space, sensation and emotion are all intermingled and cannot be differentiated or expressed, leading to a conglomerate of fear and anxiety. Alistair McDowall's *X* then showcases three possible ways to circumvent anxiety and its fearful mood. Firstly, some crew members try to find something to hold onto, a physical token from the past that can give them stability but that nonetheless does not solve the current anxious situation. Secondly, Gilda actively listens to the nothingness that surrounds and consumes her to flee from anxiety's conglomerate of fearful objects that likewise does not solve the instability of the research base. Finally, their desolate situation leads to the imagination of a herald in form of crew member Mattie. While Mattie, who represents a form of non-human or more than human, is seen by Gilda as the only way to escape Pluto, Mattie further destabilises the situation at the space station and thus leads to even less security and an increase of anxiety.

As the differentiation into acts and scenes in *X* is dysfunctional, the only measurement of time is through dialogues and memory (McDowall, *X* 157) – something that is also increasingly disrupted throughout the play and that adds to the anxious mood on the space station. While being trapped in an endless repetition of the same situation where they are waiting to be rescued, the characters try to hold onto something stable. Although the play is set in the future, the characters are constantly trying to hold onto a long gone past. They play games like Guess Who from the 1990s and chess (28), tell each other stories of the last time they ate meat, of the last birds and trees they saw on Earth and listen to the recording of bird songs to remember them and their Latin names (25). This nostalgia is in contrast with the futuristic and sterile environment the characters are in. While in an earlier scene, when Clark tells the story of the last tree on Earth, he insists that "[h]istory's bullshit" and that one "[c]an't see it. Touch it. There's just this second, right now, as I'm saying it it's dying, it's gone. [...] Pimps like me live in the present" (15), he is fascinated by birds, their songs and names in a later scene (25). This shows that he is torn between the longing for an irrevocable past and an at least superficial rejection of the intangibility of history, an inner turmoil that explains his inability to talk about emotions and sentiments.

The characters not only look for safety in the past, but also in physical objects. Clark's colleague Cole, for instance, rejects anything fictional as he doesn't "like things that aren't real" (McDowall, *X* 61) and Ray collects old photographs from strangers:

> **Gilda:** You can't just look at them online?
> **Ray:** They exist.
> No one has anything that *exists* anymore.
> Everything you own is just ones and zeroes.
> ...
> They have a life.

> Light trapped in paper.
> Something from then I can hold onto now. (77)

Surrounded by anxiety's ungraspable objects, the characters in the play try to hold onto objects that promise stability. It is no coincidence that Ray uses photographs as an object from the past to hold onto. Ever since it was invented, as Susan Sontag observes, "photography has kept company with death" (24). For her, "photographs were superior to any painting as a memento of the vanished past and the dear departed" (24). In the play, this "dear departed" is then not directed towards a person or object, but rather the lost notion of security; a time where the mistakes from the past were still in the future. At the same time, pictures are something to hold onto: "[p]hotographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed" (81). Engaging with birds, pictures, sounds and objects from a past the characters in the play have not been part of helps them to encounter a long-gone time and gives them some stability and hope. However, this hope is set in the past. Following Waldenfels, the catastrophe that happened on Earth prior to the first act and that explains the depletion and destruction of nature, came too soon for humanity to react and prevent it (see chapter 2.3). The research base on Pluto is only the futile attempt to fix the mistakes made on Earth centuries earlier. It becomes clear that the crew members have taken their (and Earth's) problems with them. Correspondingly, Michael Billington observes that "the human race, having wrecked its own planet, now transfers its problems to the colonised outer reaches of the solar system" ("X"). Therefore, the shifting boundaries of past and future and the inability to live in the present in *X* comment on the current political inability to react to several global crises at once.

While the conglomerate of possibilities, stories, characters and irregular timelines increases the feeling of fear and anxiety in the crew members, Gilda seems to have found another way to elope from these anxious feelings by reversing this cluster, which resembles the mechanism Black Box uses in *Girl in the Machine*. In Act One, scene VI, Gilda admits that she is anxious about the situation she is in and everything surrounding her (McDowall, *X* 49), and she tells Mattie how she calms down:

> **Gilda:** With everything whirring away it never gets properly quiet
> in here, so I like to take a recorder out on surface walks and
> I, I'll record, you know, outside.
> The nothing out there.
> *Beat.*
> **Mattie:** You're listening to nothing.
> **Gilda:** And I sit here with the lights off and look out the
> window and sort of, zone out a bit.

> **Mattie:** Like meditation.
> **Gilda:** I guess. Almost. Kind of.
> **Mattie:** You can't just listen to a blank audio file?
> **Gilda:** It's different. It has a…
> An organic quality. The type of silence I get.
> It – Breathes.
> **Mattie:** It doesn't.
> **Gilda:** No, I know, but – It's – Real. Real… nothingness. (51–52)

Therefore, clearing her head from all the fearful objects that surround her and that she cannot comprehend because they accumulate with her anxious feelings are turned off by numbing her senses and listening to, and looking at, nothingness. By doing this, Gilda embraces the nothingness that accompanies anxiety. As Heidegger notes, "[w]e 'hover' in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. ("Metaphysics" 51). Gilda, however, reverses this Heideggerian understanding of anxiety. It is not during anxiety that she feels the nothingness but rather she seeks the nothingness in order to cure her anxieties. This scene then reveals how anxiety is the consequence of a conglomerate of fearful objects rather than the lack of objects, as otherwise Gilda might not have needed the nothingness to tackle her anxieties. This nothingness is then prolonged to the audience when Mattie wants to hear it:

> **Mattie:** Can I hear some of your silence?
> **Gilda:** Oh –
> **Mattie** *yanks the headphones out the laptop.*
> **Gilda:** It won't really work out the speakers –
> **Mattie** *hits play.*
> *All the sound is sucked out of the room.*
> *It's as if the whole scene is plunged under water.*
> *They stand in the total silence, feeling it move around them.*
> **Mattie:** It's nice…
> *Pause.*
> *A crackle.*
> *A voice starts to pull out of the laptop.*
> *Neither of them seem to hear it as it dribbles out the speakers,*
> *Then fills the theatre.*
> **Voice:** Hellooooo…
> …
> Hello!
> *Laughter.* (McDowall, *X* 57–58)

Although Gilda has found her way to escape from the negative feelings that accompany her, this escape is again spiked with the voice of a little girl – the little girl Ray saw outside the research base and who is now able to talk. Hearing this young

girl's voice is then a reminder of the twisted timescales, hallucinated characters, destroyed communication – especially when the voice starts talking in a gibberish language – and of the scar the little girl has had over her mouth. The young girl's voice is also a reminder that it is not possible for the crew members to escape from their anxious feelings in this closed, claustrophobic setting, although Gilda and Mattie do not seem to hear young Mattie's voice in this scene. The girl then not only crosses the boundary between a relaxing and an anxious atmosphere, but also between reality and illusion, between inside and outside of the research base and between different time scales. The only character that can cross the threshold between the inside and the outside world and that can leave the research base is thus the older and younger versions of Mattie, who are, at least in parts of the play, hallucinated – a shared hallucination between Ray and Gilda.

The conglomerate of possibilities and ungraspable fearful objects, the suspicion and hope for rescue are then all projected onto Mattie. While at the beginning she seems like a regular crew member, she reveals to be an unstable character, fluctuating between reality and hallucination. She is introduced in Act One, scene II, where she talks to Clark, who tells her the story of the last tree on Earth – an event he witnessed as a child when visiting his uncle in South America. Throughout the scene, a large X is displayed that has been "*smeared across one of the walls in thick, faded brown strokes*" (McDowall, *X* 10). At this point the audience is oblivious to the fact that this scene might have taken place at a later point in time, the X being a remainder from Ray's suicide and thus consisting of his blood. It is therefore a harbinger of a painful future that will happen five scenes later and a sign of fear and anxiety smeared over the scene. This also ties in with Mattie being Clark's daughter – something that is not revealed until the last scene of the play. After a while, while Clark and Mattie talk, Cole enters the room and Mattie seems to fade away and is replaced by Gilda, who takes over the scene. This demonstrates how in *X*, the temporal timescales and the storyline intermingle. Although Clark talks to Mattie in this scene, he does not seem to remember ever having met her in a later scene in A_ct Two. He only remembers telling the story to Gilda. It thus remains vague who Mattie really is and what she stands for, crossing the boundary between reality and hallucination and adding to the anxiety the crew members already encounter. By being a shadowy and ungraspable figure, Mattie symbolises the posthuman, a liminal state between being and hallucination, body and mind.

While she is introduced as a crew member at the beginning of the play, she then shifts between being a hallucination, (a vision of) Gilda's daughter, an astronaut sent from Earth to rescue the other crew members and a little child that spooks around the space station. She is thus unstable in her appearance, fluctuating between matter and data, and she is unstable in what she represents. Her

appearance becomes the site of a multiplicity that highlights the porous body and mind alike. Being the only character in a space suit, she stands for the cyborg as understood by cultural studies, "as a posthumanist configuration in its hybridity between human flesh and mental or digital material, its wavering between mind and matter" (Smelik 110). While Gilda sees her as the solution to their problems, the other crew members, who cannot see her, doubt Mattie's existence. Thus, introduced as a herald of rescue and security, Mattie becomes the reason the crew members further isolate themselves. She is an unstable figure and a placeholder fluctuating between hope and insanity. "Humanism deconstructs itself," as Bruce Clarke observes, "whenever 'the human' is observed not as a unity but as an assemblage. In the parlance of earlier literary, philosophical, and theological texts, the human frays into gradations of subhuman, inhuman, and superhuman – the bestial, the daemonic, or the divine" (141). Mattie represents all three. She is the divine for Gilda who glorifies her (McDowall, *X* 91), the daemonic for Cole who mistrusts her (106) and the bestial for Ray who is utterly scared of her (85). She then represents the posthuman that nonetheless cannot solve the problems on the research base and, instead of curing it, further increases the anxiety on Pluto.

While the posthuman is a future oriented hallucination, Mattie also represents a past incarnation of Gilda, one where she could be free and leave the outside world. Therefore, Gilda also is a ghost-like figure as described by Kathy Smith:

> the idea of something which is there and not there, something which has gone but has not gone, which is tangible and intangible, something which is a material representation of otherness, of alterity, of a liminal state. The ghost represents something which has gone; but it cannot be gone if it can be seen and heard. The ghost might be regarded as the physical representation of a melancholic state, the representation/repetition of something no longer there." (45)

The ghost-like figure is then one strategy to come to terms with (pre-millennium) anxiety. The fading differentiation between reality and illusion, friend and enemy, past, present and future, that is crossing several thresholds, has its climax in the second act. Gilda has welcomed Mattie, who vomits into her helmet (another source of border crossing and abjection), to the space station and believes that Mattie will bring them back to Earth. For Gilda, thus, Mattie is the harbinger of rescue and security. In the next scene, however, she is gone and Gilda has to face Clark and Cole who question her about Mattie. While Gilda tells them how she looks, what they talked about, what Clark and Cole (who do not remember this encounter) said to her and that she could not smell the vomit, Cole and Clark get more and more suspicious. When Gilda then tells them that she heard the story of the last tree from Mattie, Clark objects that it is his story. When Gilda insists that Mattie is not a mirage, that she touched her and that Mattie ate cereal, the boundary

between reality and illusion is, again, broken. Gilda then tries to find explanations for why she mistook Clark's story for Mattie's and tells them that she must have intermingled them.

> **Gilda:** Yes, okay, maybe I do remember you told me,
> I just got it -
> I got muddled with the,
> or maybe I heard it from the girl who used to manage life
> systems
> maybe you told her and she told me and that's how I, I -
> It doesn't matter, what matters is -
> **Clark:** What girl.
> **Gilda:** Fuck *off*.
> **Cole:** *He* manages life systems. He's tech. *What* girl. (McDowall, *X* 101)

The girl that manages life systems is, again, Mattie. Especially within the panoptical setting of the play and within theatre in general, which functions through both observation and surveillance, the merging of human and non-human characteristics to what can be termed a cyborg is of interest in that "posthumanism observes the inhuman or nonhuman other inhabiting the ostensibly human and so deconstructing the humanist concept of the human" (Clarke and Rossini xiv). By imagining a new crew member that is able to break the boundaries between inside and outside and thus has more than human strength, Gilda already anticipates a stronger version of herself (thus also the mistaken identity of Gilda and Mattie at the beginning of the play). At the same time, this futuristic person, which is also the future child of Gilda, is itself unstable. Being the only character that vomits and fluctuating between a grown woman and a child, this non-human crew member can only provide a momentary relaxation from the situation and, in the bigger picture, further adds to the anxious mood on Pluto.

Thus, anxiety is ingrained into *X* in several ways. First, the crew members are isolated from Earth and from each other, mirroring a state similarly frightening to the one induced by the panopticon. This is then strengthened by the lack of communication between Earth and the crew members. The disruption of a linear timeline and the destruction of bodies on stage through suicide further add to the anxiety in the play. These aspects of anxiety are then countered by the characters. Firstly, Ray likes to reproduce bird songs and collect photographs to counter the memory loss and hold onto physical objects. Secondly, Gilda records the nothingness outside the space station. Thirdly, the play introduces Mattie, an unstable body that, on the one hand, stands for security and rescue, but on the other hand becomes the reason for more suspicion and isolation. Mattie is already breaching the body and mind of various characters in the play and thus foreshad-

ows how border crossings and anxiety are connected. These anxious situations are thus met with the hallucination of a harbinger of hope, the attachment to past memories and objects and the escape into a sense of nothingness, where this conglomerate of fearful events has vanished, at least for a while.

6.2.3 Anxiety Meets the Sublime

While the analysis of the next play, Stef Smith's *Girl in the Machine*, lies on the political dimension, the following analysis of *X* shows how phenomenological anxiety can be staged formally and aesthetically and how this affects the reader/audience. The conglomerate of many fearful events and possibilities already touched upon, together with the destruction of communication, mixed up timelines and mental and physical pain, disgust and abjection that all lead to anxiety has its climax before the last scene (scene X) at the end of act [ ] (it remains unclear whether the following nine short scenes and the last scene of the play, scene X, belong to the previous act [ ] or represent a new act). Here, again, time seems to be reversed, as this chapter is presumably at the end of A_ct Two, but starts again with I, and thus creates a mise en abyme structure that mirrors, on a meta-level, the themes and events from the play.

> **I**
> **Gilda** *is alone.*
> **II**
> **Gilda** *is alone.*
> **III**
> **Gilda** *is alone.*
> *She stands by the window looking out into the black.*
> **IV**
> **Gilda** *sees herself standing by the window.*
> **V**
> *A bed stands by the window where the second* **Gilda** *was,*
> *a blanket covering a form beneath it.*
> **Gilda** *watches as the form thrashes through a violent seizure.*
> **VI**
> **Clark** *and* **Cole** *eat cereal at the table.*
> **Gilda** *is fixed to the bed.*
> *She struggles and shouts for their attention but no sound comes from her.*
> **VII**
> **Ray** *and* **Mattie** *eat cereal at the table.*
> **Ray** *feeds his spoon into the ragged gash in his neck, milk and blood streaming out.*

Gilda *kicks and bucks in the bed, which seems to be swallowing her.*
She screams silently in desperation.
VIII
Gilda *cowers against a wall.*
A gigantic nightingale lies on the floor, injured, bleeding.
Gilda *appears the size of an infant next to it.*
She shrinks from the bird's laboured breathing.
Hands begin to push from within the bird's chest,
a swallowed figure wrestling out from within the flesh.
IX
The machinery, the life systems, all have increased in volume tenfold.
Gilda *crouches on all fours howling in agony.*
The sound is deafening.
The walls run thick with blood. (McDowall, *X* 141)

These nine short interscenes repeat the already outlined images of anxiety in the play. Firstly, all communication is disrupted, as the scenes all take place without any form of dialogue or linguistic conversation. Throughout these interscenes, the oxymoronic stage direction that Gilda screams silently again reveals the absurd situation the characters are in and highlights the lack of conversation the characters have. Secondly, during the nine short scenes, time does not follow any linearity, as the scenes do not follow any form of sequence, nor do they build upon each other. Thirdly, the sense of disgust, abjection and pain is demonstrated through the images in the play that are rendered absurd. Ray, who is eating his cereal through the gash in his neck he committed suicide through – an image that is utterly disgusting and likewise fearful – now reverses the bloodstream by putting a liquid from the outside world – eating cereal is a picture that repeatedly occurs throughout the play – into his body and thus once again links the crossing of the body boundary through blood and liquids, through pain and disgust, with fear and anxiety. However, this liquid vis-à-vis milk does not stay in his body for long and intermingles with his blood, showing a vivid image of crossed boundaries. Fourth, standing in front of the window and simultaneously looking at the nothingness outside and her mirror image explains the hallucination Gilda encounters. Mattie is thus not only a hallucination of another crew member or a premonition of Gilda and Clark's daughter, but she also stands for Gilda herself, and demonstrates a version of herself that is free from all constraints she feels, being the only character that can shift between the inside and outside world. Here, again, Mattie represents the more than human, an improved version of Gilda. In the next scene, Gilda watches herself on the bed, a featureless form that is in pain and later turns out to be Gilda herself. Up until here the interscenes, that "should last longer than they perhaps appear to on the page" (157), demonstrate the isolated environment and constraint the crew members encounter, the inability to differentiate between re-

ality and illusion, a temporal disorientation as it is unknown for how long Gilda was and will be fixed on the bed nor how this scene ties in with the overall play, the inability to communicate and the inability to form any sense of trust, as now it seems that Gilda is an unreliable character – all of which are again fearful situations and objects that lead to anxiety and repeat the already outlined phenomenological understanding of this concept.

From now on the situation becomes more and more absurd and nightmarish. At the same time, the coping mechanism the characters evolve are likewise rendered absurd. Mattie is re-introduced as a crew member who is casually eating cereal and, together with Ray, ignores Gilda, who is struggling on her bed. The images and natural symbols Ray and Clark used as means to establish a sense of security and calm are now nightmarish visions of an enormous nightingale. In these short scenes, then, borders are again crossed, as something from inside the bird wants to get outside, similar to the crew members that want to escape from the space station. It is the embodiment of claustrophobia, of the omnipotence of nature and of a nightmare that connects all fearful objects from the play. This situation is then increased when in the last scene, IX, the fearful situation is transferred to the auditive sphere, where sounds are deafening Gilda and the audience alike. The nothingness Gilda was listening to earlier on to calm herself is now reversed and the sounds are deafening and overwhelming. This auditive sensation is visually accompanied by streams of blood running from the walls, echoing pictures from the apocalypse.

This scene not only depicts the various phenomenological aspects of anxiety and renders any attempt to overcome it impossible, but it also shows how anxiety can act on the reader and audience alike. The connection of the subject and the fearful object here is an example of the aesthetics of what Elżbieta Baraniecka calls *Sublime Drama.* The fundamental inexpressibility of anxiety is the result of a cognitive as well as emotional overburdening, which creates an interesting parallel between anxiety and the sublime that is sometimes exploited in theatrical approaches to anxiety. As outlined before, anxiety represents an accumulation of (fearful) objects that leads to a sense of cognitive nothingness in the mind of the perceiver as they cannot focus on a single object. This conception of anxiety that leads to a sense of cognitive overabundance resembles the experience of the sublime.[194]

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194 Edmund Burke defines the sublime – a concept that has far more positive connotations than anxiety – as comprising a combination of pain and terror as well as delight. "If the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine, or gross, of dangerous and troublesome incumbrance, they are capable of producing

In Baraniecka's reading, the sublime can be transferred to the theatre, where it "is the audience's response to what it perceives as an overwhelming element in the performance" (50). As such it is similar to anxiety, which likewise stems from the confrontation with an "overwhelming element" or rather elements. The sublime, then, exceeds human cognition (Kant 57) and in doing so mirrors the understanding of anxiety as a conglomerate of fearful objects that overwhelm the subject's cognition.[195] For Baraniecka, sublime aesthetics force the reader or audience into a "split-second of cognitive paralysis" (5) in which preconceptions are questioned. When applied to the dramatic text and performance, she continues that

> [t]he specificity of this process in sublime drama lies in the *overwhelming nature* of the aesthetic object that is formed in the perceiver's consciousness in the interaction with the elements and strategies of a given play. Emerging in the audiences' minds as some *monstrous, formless and indeterminate entity, the object escapes their grasp* and thwarts their processes of cognition and perception. This is the moment of Lyotard's threat of privation, the short-circuiting of our consciousness, the *fearful experience that meaning may never arrive* and that our system of thought has failed us in supplanting the gaps in the text and assembling its elements to form a totality of meaning. The text of the sublime drama acts on the audiences' consciousness by saturating it with its sublime indeterminacy, as the latter struggles to patch up its gaps with what turns out to be useless, old and worn-out concepts. (74; emphasis added)

The subject confronted with the sublime and the subject experiencing anxiety both share a sense of cognitive dissonance, which can develop a transformative effect. While the sublime focuses on one singular object that is rendered unfamiliar, meaning that the concept to process this object is missing, which leads to the cog-

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delight, not pleasure but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror; which as it belongs to self-preservation is one of the strongest of all the passions. Its object is the sublime" (123). This early definition already highlights the connection of the sublime with negative sensations like pain, noxiousness and danger – aspects that are closely connected to fear and anxiety. These negative sensations, especially in combination with terror, do not affect the subject in the present, but refer to something not graspable. This is further elaborated by Immanuel Kant, for whom "[s]ublime is the name given to what is absolutely great" (Kant 54), a sensation that "cannot be contained in any sensuous form" (53).

195 Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern conception of the sublime then goes one step further and shifts the focus to the perceiving subjects and their sensual feeling reaction. For Lyotard, "[w]hat is sublime is the feeling that something will happen, despite everything, within this threatening void, that something will take 'place' and will announce that everything is not over. That place is mere 'here', the most minimal occurrence" (84). This notion of anticipation, where something (painful) might happen at any moment is then another parallel between the sublime and fear. In her study of *Sublime Drama*, Baraniecka further elaborates on Lyotard's notion of the sublime in combination with Wolfgang Iser's theory of 'blanks' in reception (65).

nitive paralysis, in anxiety, the cognition of one fearful object would be possible and it is rather the accumulation of too many objects that render any clear understanding of anxiety impossible. Thus, while the sublime is directed towards the subject that lacks a cognitive concept to apprehend it and so develops a state of cognitive paralysis, in anxiety the focus is on the act of accumulation that takes place in the mind of the subject that then likewise cannot apprehend this feeling, leading to a state of Heideggerian nothingness (see chapter 2.1). What is more, anxiety and the sublime are both experienced as crossing (mental) borders and both are difficult, if not impossible to express through the means of 'ordinary' or 'familiar' discourse – whether due to the excess of too many fearful objects that interact with attention or due to an object being rendered unfamiliar so it lacks a cognitive concept altogether.[196] As such, both anxiety and the sublime must represent a challenge to any representation on stage or page. In all of this, the aesthetics of anxiety resembles the aesthetics of the sublime.

Both anxiety and the sublime thus lead to a new way of thinking about a situation or object, an "expansion of consciousness" (Baraniecka 70). If sublime drama then implies "dramatic strategies leading the audiences' consciousness to momentary paralysis and, later, transformation" (74) this is also the case for the theatre of anxiety. However, while in sublime drama the focus is on the cognitive concepts of the audience, within the theatre of anxiety the focus lies on the cognitive overload of fear and anxiety. The short interscenes in *X* then describe exactly this sense of "monstrous, formless and indeterminate entity" that is sublime and fearful at the same time. While *X* and the other plays that I suggest make up the theatre of anxiety place their focus on the presence of (fearful) objects that because of their sheer multitude must remain ungraspable, in sublime drama audiences are confronted with objects that have been defamiliarised in such a way that they lack a conceptual framework to grasp them. The nine short scenes that form the mise en abyme structure in *X* then combine both notions. They represent an overwhelming state of anxiety through the conglomerate of different (fearful) events and objects that are intermingled and that resist any attempt to be overcome. And they represent the sublime because, especially as the scenes progress, determinable, mundane objects, like a bird, are rendered indeterminable by increasing them in size and trapping an unrecognisable figure inside them. Just like the crew cannot leave the space station, this figure struggles to escape the

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196 Furthermore, both the sublime and anxiety are perceived from a safe distance that mirrors the distance between the perceiver of a play and the actual play (dramatic text and performance alike). When it comes to the sublime, the dangerous and alarming concepts are perceived through a safe distance and only take place in the mind of the observer (Baraniecka 5), while anxiety does likewise start in the mind, possibly with physical aspects like a rapid heartbeat to follow.

body of the bird. Similarly, something as mundane as eating cereal is rendered absurd when done through an added orifice, one that is not designed to let fluids inside the body. These objects and situations have become indeterminate and strange. They thus challenge the audience or readers in two ways: by confronting them with anxiety's ungraspable multitude of fearful objects and by presenting some objects that, like the experience of the sublime, lack a conceptual frame within which they can be grasped. Thus, the recipient of the play, just like its characters, lacks all sense of (cognitive) security and is likewise not in control. This cognitive limbo is then suspended in the last scene, scene X, which again contains dialogues and where the topics from the earlier scenes are reflected again, however in a more positive connotation. Gilda and Mattie are alone and it is revealed that Mattie is Gilda and Clark's daughter who is metamorphosing from a young girl into a grown-up woman who takes care of an already elderly Gilda, again shifting the temporal boundaries and exemplifying that the play does not end in the climax of anxiety but on a more hopeful note.

Throughout the play, then, *X* comprises all aspects of the theatre of anxiety. While the crew members are in a constant state of insecurity and cannot control their anxious situation, the play creates, on a microlevel, anxiety though an overabundance of disgusting and painful objects as well as possibilities – none of which are graspable, some real and some imagined – as to why they cannot communicate, whom to trust, and what Mattie's role in all this is. An even bigger conglomerate of fearful objects is created on a macrolevel, where different intermingled timelines and temporal disorientation in combination with states of mental and physical pain and abjection further strengthen the underlying anxiety in the play. The characters in the play then try to avoid this anxious mood by either holding on to physical objects from the past, creating a state of nothingness through sounds or imagining a harbinger of hope. In the end, all these attempts to bypass anxiety and reinstall both control and security fail, and the play deteriorates into a sense of nothingness itself, in which all language and temporality are destroyed until, in the end, only Gilda (and Mattie) remain. It is right before the more hopeful last part of the play is revealed that the recipient of the play is likewise thrown into a state of anxious cognitive overload, which mirrors the sublime drama that likewise challenges established cognitive concepts and is closely connected to anxiety. As Marissia Fragkou observes, in *X* "the unimaginable or the dystopian serves as an index of what we are about to lose" (91).

Alistair McDowall's *X* can then be seen as an allegory for climate change, for gender relations, for fear of the future, for social isolation and for fake news. In this play several (temporal) boundaries are crossed, which is accompanied by the dissolution of language: the boundary between emotion and reason, nature, culture and technology, old and young, mother and child, noise and silence, inno-

cence and guilt, fear and anxiety. *X* then also outlines how all aspects of the theatre of anxiety are connected. By placing the characters in a panopticon-like situation the play experiments with the interplay of security and control and shows how technology is used to solve the problems the last generations were not able to solve. Sending a crew to Pluto to build a second world while all nature on Earth is irrevocably destroyed then shows the failure of politics to solve the problems of the future. All this is summarised by Ray shortly before his suicide, questioning the whole mission as useless as it is designed "to find some way of prolonging whatever paltry existence we can manage on our own planet. The one *we ruined.* It's too *late*" (McDowall, *X* 78). The play then embeds this notion by focusing on Mattie as the only survivor and the future child that, while being a harbinger of hope, is nonetheless still trapped in the research base.

6.3 Stef Smith: *Girl in the Machine* (2017)

The interplay of (lack of) security and (lack of) control during anxiety is also showcased in the next example: Stef Smith's 2017 play *Girl in the Machine.* Here, an anxiety-inducing shift in power relations is also combined with the distorted temporalities already touched upon earlier that often accompany fear and anxiety in contemporary British theatre, along with other characteristics of anxiety, like the accumulation of fearful objects and situations, the inexpressibility of fear through speech and the close connection of fear, anxiety, pain and disgust. Due to its topic – the invasion of AI into human habitat – and overall aestheticization of the cohabitation between humans and machines that culminates in the interplay of security and lack of control, the play is not only "emotionally and intellectually intense" (Edwards) but also outlines primal anxieties in relation to technology and surveillance and thus is a vibrant example of the theatre of anxiety.

    With its negotiation of the risks of technological progress and setting "not too far into the future" (S. Smith, *Machine* 4), *Girl in the Machine* is another example of near-future dystopia (Reid, "Near-Future" 81).[197] In Smith's play, the dynamics be-

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[197] While the overall storyworld of *Girl in the Machine* and the utilisation of Black Box seems highly fictional, the play is a good example of a *near*-future dystopia. On closer consideration, the storyworld of the play and especially the uploading of brainwaves into a cloud is not as unlikely as it might seem. In an article in *The Guardian*, Michael Graziano, for instance, already writes about the possibility of "mind uploading," or "the digital duplication of your mental essence," that may lead to "a virtual afterlife" (see also Corbyn). However, similar to the play, in order to do so the user needs to be killed first (Hern; Cadwalladr; Davis). Thus, although the play is situated in the future, this future might become reality in the real world in short time. Hence, *Girl in the Machine*

tween married couple Polly and Owen shift when Owen introduces Polly to Black Box, a machine that "relaxes you," as Owen explains: "[s]omething about brainwaves, something about syncing to your heartbeat, something about ... I don't know" (S. Smith, *Machine* 5). While this machine does relax Polly, who is an overworked solicitor already medicated for anxiety and panic attacks, the use of Black Box gets out of hand, not just for Polly. The couple increasingly find themselves caught up between a government that traces its citizens with Citizen Chips transplanted under their skin, Black Box's own way of tracking and recording its users – it remains unclear who is behind Black Box, a company or AI itself – and other citizens that through Black Box leave their physical body behind and upload themselves into a cloud of eternal data that promises to be a sanctuary of a disembodied and painless life. While Owen remains sceptical of Black Box and seeks recreation in worldly things, like his relationship with Polly, Black Box repeatedly finds its way into Polly's life, as she is hired to fight this all-too-powerful machinery. In the end, having lost her job and living in the bleak reality of a world that has become a war zone between humans and technology, she cannot resist and decides to upload herself into the Black Box Cloud, leaving behind a hurt and desperate Owen, whose attempts to follow her are rejected because of his earlier scepticism.

Girl in the Machine is another example of how fear and anxiety can be explored and aestheticized in the theatre of anxiety. On the one hand, on a personal level, it addresses the ways in which technological progress first opens new, near-infinite spaces of possibility that at the same time can be seen as spaces in which a new overwhelming multitude of virtual – and hence literally ungraspable – and uncontrollable fearful objects may be encountered and how, as a consequence, technology itself turns into yet another source of anxiety. On the other hand, on a political level, these structures of anxiety showcase an urgency for security and simultaneous loss of control. On both a corporeal and state level the characters are monitored – ostensibly to create a safe environment – while at the same time their data are being exploited. This is embodied in Black Box, which initially seems to relieve the protagonist Polly from her everyday anxieties. As the play progresses, though, it becomes clear that Black Box itself creates the very structures of anxiety it is supposed to cure: where Black Box seemingly is an escape from fearful objects, it really just adds a new dimension to them; where Black Box appears to allow its users to find a voice and express themselves, it really furthers the destruction of language; and where Black Box seems to provide its

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is a vibrant example of a near-future dystopia as opposed to dystopian plays (or novels) that play in a future that is decades or even centuries away (i.e. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, which was written in 1932, takes place in 2540).

users with an exit from pain and fear by abolishing linear temporality, it really just shifts these painful sensations to those left behind. In doing so, Black Box becomes the play's central site of border crossing – not only does it create a seemingly anxiety-free world of bliss only to immediately conflate it with the anxiety-ridden outside world again and so cross this new, barely-established border, but it also is the location of the play's key transgression of the boundary between the human and non-human. In Black Box, *Girl in the Machine* puts "the different intimacies possible between humans and machines" (Edwards) at centre stage and thus oscillates between both worlds. At the same time, the play's negotiation of anxiety is also intensely political: Black Box, like its legally required opposite, the Citizen Chip, is an instrument of surveillance; while ostensibly, surveillance is there to grant a sense of security and so prevent anxiety, it really becomes a totalitarian instrument that makes use of the very structures of anxiety it has created in the first place to shore up its power – whether governmental power or that of capitalist companies. Ultimately, Smith's play then productively puts a focus on how technological progress, as a central factor in twenty-first-century life, in its crossing of thresholds may produce new fearful objects and so engender ever new anxieties, which at the same time run the danger of being exploited politically and undermining established social structures.

6.3.1 An Impossible Future as Cure for Anxiety

While Stef Smith's play is described as a "gripping two-hander" (Fisher, "Girl in the Machine"), I would argue that Black Box (or its voice), too, plays a central role as an antagonist that shatters both Polly's and Owen's lives by seemingly improving them. Ostensibly, this machine cures anxiety by liberating its users of three of its core aspects to insert a deceptive/misleading feeling of security: it relaxes them by creating an atmosphere of 'nothingness' and thus relieves them from anxiety's conglomerate of fearful objects; it also provides its users with a platform to encounter their feelings and help them form a clearer understanding of them and so seemingly circumvents anxiety's inexpressibility; and it liberates its users from a linear timeline that is connected to the notion of anxiety as an inevitable pain in the future.

This can all be seen in Polly's interactions with Black Box, albeit in a distorted way. First, Polly is overwhelmed by a neoliberalist world that confronts her with various fearful and stressful situations: a never-ending job that continuously sends her messages after work, television news that present increasingly atrocious events, her family planning that implies an uncertain future and a partner who tries to help but does not seem to get through to her. Polly increasingly finds herself in an anxious

mood where, following Husserl's understanding of moods, all aspects of her life are coloured in fearful anticipation. All this already becomes apparent in the first scene, where Polly is greeted by her partner Owen, who just returned from work at the hospital. Coming to Polly's home office, he hands over Black Box, which he stole from work – a machine in combination with a headset that, he supposes, is designed to relax its users (S. Smith, *Machine* 5). Although she is stressed by an approaching promotion and by her work in general, at the beginning of the play Polly seems to be at ease when engaging with Owen. Simultaneously, Black Box determines "low levels of stress" in her (7). Still, she tries the new gadget. The instant trust in the machine and blind faith that it will improve Polly's life and not increase her anxiety, although the exact mechanism of the machine stays unknown, already delineate that the characters are used to living in an environment that is filled with a plethora of technological devices and hints at the way technical media conquers nearly all aspects of daily life (Kitchin xv). While using the machine, Polly's thoughts are rendered in a monologue that is unheard by Owen:

> He [**Owen**] *leaves. She sits with the headset on and she*
> *closes her eyes.*
> **Voice:** Welcome to Black Box.
> *Silence.*
> **Polly** *tilts her head. Wriggles in her seat. Sighs.*
> **Polly:** *It's just. Nothing. A nothingness.*
> *Not a sound. Not a glimmer. Not a...focus. Polly.*
> *Focus on feeling...nothing. How the hell do you feel*
> *nothing?*
> *Focus on feeling...focus on feeling...focus on and it*
> *foams up – that familiar stomach swirl and whirl,*
> *with the motion that says I must. Move. Forward. As*
> *fingers twitch and itch for something to do, for all the*
> *things that need doing, for all the things that need me*
> *to push and pull and it's messages pending and*
> *paper clips and cuts and contracts that need signed*
> *and sighs over the telephone and it's letting people*
> *go and saying no, as my veins vibrate with the urge*
> *to get up and go, be gone and there is a thumbing –*
> *my heartbeat. My heartbeat. My heartbeat. My*
> *heart...beats... just behind my...just behind any my*
> *and my and my...my body just...hands being to...*
> *feet...flying. Almost. Almost feel like I'm*
> *like I'm*
>   *like I'm*
>   *like I'm*
>   *like I'm*
> **Owen** *enters.* (S. Smith, *Machine* 8)

This first time Polly uses the machine already anticipates the different aspects of anxiety and its cure as performed by Black Box. First and foremost, this first encounter illustrates how Polly is overwhelmed by her feelings and by the many stressful situations that surround her. While she is forcing herself to feel calm, to feel nothing, her thoughts instead "foam[] up" and she imagines all the things that need to be done. As she imagines all future tasks and challenges in a scattered way, it is impossible for Polly to concentrate on any single one of them. This is the epitome of anxiety's overwhelming and liquid nature and once again demonstrates how anxiety can be described and aestheticized as a state of various fearful objects that pass by and are never graspable (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 64). Ultimately, however, she focuses on her heartbeat and seems to calm down. Black Box thus succeeds in creating a minimalist, secure atmosphere, almost one of nothingness, which, for her, seems to be the opposite of fear and anxiety. This first encounter with Black Box then leads to an addiction and higher levels of stress whenever Black Box is disconnected. The more Polly uses the machine, the more it seems to control her actions when disconnected. While at the beginning it seems to be her work that leads to Polly's negative feelings, the world around her deteriorates and a sense of *Weltschmerz* follows, where Polly claims: "I don't need to know how specifically shit the world is" (S. Smith, *Machine* 24) and instead escapes into the world of Black Box. Her growing addiction to the device and increasing incapability to cope with the world outside of it, a world that is for her coloured in an anxious mood, lead to bigger conglomerates of fear in the real world and necessitate an even higher use of Black Box to relax. Her addiction showcases how anxiety can be connected to a lack of control which leads to a lack of action. While fleeing into the 'security' provided by Black Box, Polly surrenders herself to the machine. While this lack of control, at first, feels like freedom from all responsibility and difficulty, it later on enhances the crises in the real world as Polly (and everyone else who uses the device) is either inactive while connected to Black Box or stressed and overwhelmed, and likewise inactive when disconnected. Paradoxically, then, Polly's attempts to flee anxiety thrust her into a spiral of ever new anxieties.

What this short excerpt also shows is how Polly's inability to concentrate on any single one out of the plethora of fearful objects that create anxiety also leads to the inexpressibility of said anxiety through language and dialogue. With anxiety being an emotion that complicates linguistic expression (it is almost impossible to meaningfully speak about something that cannot be grasped), Polly also realises that the only place she can at least try to express her feelings is Black Box. While Owen knows that Polly is stressed about her upcoming promotion and work, the exact reasons and overwhelming nature of her feelings remain unknown to him. This further isolates him from her, as Owen cannot be part of this world Black Box creates for Polly. Yet, even when using Black Box, her language

consists of more ellipses and repetitions than actual conversation. Polly's mono-logue while using Black Box for the first time also shows that it is impossible for Polly to form meaningful sentences and how anxiety can only be thought of as a scattered conglomerate of fearful objects and situations that Polly clearly cannot communicate in lucid terms while she experiences the overwhelming sensation of anxiety. Instead of trying to communicate with Owen, she isolates herself ever more while fleeing into the digital realm. This increasing isolation is then, again, used by Black Box to further draw her into the force of the machine, as it is easier to control singular individuals (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 21).

The ruthless new reality that Black Box's upload mechanism creates and Polly's deteriorating mental health – she decides to get rid of Black Box after finding out about the new update and now shows withdrawal symptoms – collide, further leading her away from Owen. The sheer impossibility for Polly to express her feelings intensifies when, additionally to her not using Black Box, she also constantly works on the Black Box case as a solicitor – with only marginal success. By trying to hold Black Box legally accountable for the deaths it causes throughout the play due to its addictive nature and trying to stop its spreading, Polly is working against herself, which further reveals how dependent she is on the machine: if she is successful as a solicitor, she will lose, at least to her knowledge, the only source of security that can relax her and if she does not win the case, she will lose her job. The accumulation of her withdrawal symptoms, lack of sleep and, consequently, lack of success in her case further render any chance of her communicating her anxiety impossible, even when she tries to explain her situation to Owen: "I... I... I... I can't. I can't... I don't know how... I can't seem to... I can't seem to stop... Owen. My mind just... I just... I can't stop. I can't seem to stop thinking. I can't stop thinking. I can't stop thinking. I can't stop thinking." (S. Smith, *Machine* 36). Again, Polly is caught in a condition where she is pondering on too many things simultaneously so that she cannot focus on or express any of them but also cannot stop thinking about them, as she does not seem to get any kind of closure or solution. It is the epitome of fearful objects passing by without the subject being able to grasp any of them, leading them to accumulate into anxiety (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*). At the same time Owen cannot comfort her anymore as, in the next scene (S. Smith, *Machine* 12), she tries to repair Black Box again (without success) and so tries to return into the dependency of the technological device she is fighting on a legal level. The continuous inexpressibility of her anxiety further isolates Polly and pushes her into the realm of Black Box. Guided by anxiety, her need for secure surroundings exceeds her need to take charge of her life and she, again, wants to surrender all control to the machine to flee into a secure parallel world. While she was able to talk to Owen and find comfort in his company at the beginning of the play, after having used Black

Box, its momentary escape turns the real world into a nightmarish reality which strengthens the need for a new escape mechanism.

Once the relaxation Black Box provides is not sufficient anymore, Polly then finds a new escape from her anxiety-stricken life by tinkering with anxiety's futurity. By uploading her mental ability to the cloud and thus ridding herself of the capacity to feel pain, she can escape from all negative feelings and from any pain she might feel in the future. By distorting linear temporality, Polly thus seemingly frees herself of fear and anxiety into free floating, endless oblivion. If surveillance and the accumulation of data that is connected to it is installed to predict future crises and pain (Bauman and Lyon 5), the extinction of the unpredictable human body in favour of a data double that is in total control of the institution that provides the means to do the upload (in this case Black Box) might be the most impressive instance where, in the play control is shifted away from the individual in favour of the promise of a secure sanctuary without anxiety. That Polly is afraid of possible future crises already becomes clear the first time she uses Black Box, where Polly stresses that she "must. Move. Forward." (S. Smith, *Machine* 8) – already hinting at a future that is the source of a work-related stress-induced breakdown. Black Box then tinkers with time in various ways. First, by creating a discrepancy between Polly's subjective temporal experience and the actual duration of her use of the machine. Whereas the first time she uses the machine Polly thinks it has only been minutes, Owen indicates that she has been using it for an hour. This temporal discrepancy deteriorates when Black Box releases an update that enables its users to upload themselves into a cloud:

> **Polly:** Uploading. Using Black Box. It's evolved. If it used to be a momentary escape, now it offers a permanent one.
> It asks you 'Do you want to live forever – Yes? Or No?' And if you say yes – apparently – it begins to scan your brain, capturing not just the shape of your brain but the content too... somehow.
> Then your mind gets reproduced on to a network and you leave behind your body... your mind, soul, consciousness digitally lives on... a new way of living, a type of consciousness that is unimaginable to us. (28)

In creating a version of eternity, Black Box then, secondly, suspends time's linear progress and so eliminates any notion of futurity. As a consequence, the machine also succeeds in liberating its users from a linear timeline in which inevitably the future will become the present. It is especially in people who are already prone to

anxiety that the anticipation of the future is thought to be on a negative and painful spectrum (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 64), further strengthening fear and anxiety.

Later in the play Polly does not only want to change the future and lead an endless, disembodied and thus painless life as part of a data cloud, leaving all anxiety behind her, but she also wants "another chance at life" (S. Smith, *Machine* 50) and thus to return to the past and re-live her life. This is the inversion of Waldenfels's understanding of the temporality of anxiety. For him, we feel anxiety because an event in the future will pass by and become the past before any protective mechanisms can be established. Thus, an event might strike at an unforeseen and unprepared moment and so cause anxiety (Waldenfels 24). Polly, however, wants to return to a point where she can start her whole life again and rethink her life-choices, this time prepared for whatever will come. Her cure for anxiety is to rid herself of a painful as well as pleasant future. However, this new life comes at a price: the deterioration of their living conditions that already happens before Polly uploads herself and the total lack of control this life as a data cloud implies. By providing the uploading mechanism, Black Box succeeds in storing the data of its users indefinitely, even beyond the death of each individual, with, as Kitchin outlines for all forms of data doubles, "the potential to be recalled and analysed at any point in the future" (85). With the death of the human source of the data, Black Box creates a moral-free zone that can use the data and exercise power over its users without any moral restrictions. Smith's play thus hints at one of the core problems of digital doubles: the lack of rules and laws that enables the unregulated shift of control from the individual to a ruling authority. As Bauman and Lyon observe, "[s]oftware designers say they're simply 'dealing with data', so their role is 'morally neutral' and their assessments and discrimination are just 'rational'" (8). Only existing as a data cloud, the individual can then be controlled and manipulated by Black Box alone. Simultaneously, this new uploading mechanism reveals how the state lags behind corporate entities when it comes to new technologies, as, in the play, "people are breaking laws before they've even been made" (S. Smith, *Machine* 36). Although a Citizen Chip is implanted into each citizen in the play and although it tries to prevent the upload to the machine, these safety mechanisms can easily be circumvented (50). In a similar manner, Polly tries to impair Black Box through legal terms and similarly fails. What is happening in the play then mirrors the real, globalised world. As Bauman and Lyon observe, "[w]ithout political control, power becomes a source of great uncertainty, while politics seems irrelevant for many people's life problems and fears" (5–6). While the state cannot protect its citizen from this machine, Polly, on an individual level, tries to flee from the increasingly insecure environment Black Box's uprising created by eliminating all sense of futurity.

As the world outside becomes ever bleaker, the use of Black Box as a source of relaxation gains even more importance. Black Box's new upload mechanism leads to a chain reaction with more people uploading themselves to the cloud and less people fighting the challenges of the world they inhabit – with the effect of a steady increase in Polly's anxiety level. This is represented in a dialogue between Owen and Polly, when the former, coming home from his job as a nurse, tells Polly about the desolate state the world is in as a result of more and more people using Black Box, uploading themselves and leaving their dead bodies behind which then have to be burned by people like Owen. This further increases Polly's anxious state:

> **Polly:** I've been... overwhelmed.
> **Owen:** We're all fucking overwhelmed.
> **Polly:** I understand if you /
> **Owen:** It's not about understanding, it's about... I've forgotten. I've forgotten what you feel like. And I've no idea... how to /
> **Polly:** Everything hurts.
> Everything.
> Everything is too bright and too loud and too...
> much. Everything is just too much.
> Everything is...
> **Owen:** Then you better try and get some rest.
> **Owen** *goes to leave.* (S. Smith, *Machine* 44)

Unable to use Black Box as a momentary escape in this scene, Polly is in a state of fear and anxiety, where she is overwhelmed by a conglomerate of sensations. This time, it is not even possible for her to name the objects and sensations that cause her fear and anxiety. Her language further deteriorates and her personal cloud of fear is summed up in the word "everything" (44). It would seem that Black Box can only override a user's anxiety when they are connected to the machine but not cure it in the outside world. Instead, it serves up a new opportunity for disconnect – this time literally, between the device and its users – and so becomes a new source of anxiety that is exacerbated by withdrawal symptoms.

It follows that in *Girl in The Machine* Black Box has become a vital source of anxiety by ostensibly attempting to cure it. Instead of curing anxiety by creating coping mechanisms to better interact with the outside world, it generates addiction and thus leads to a deterioration of the outside world's problems, reinforcing the use of the machine. Instead of providing a platform to learn to express one's feelings, it destroys communication and further isolates Polly and Owen. In the end, it also robs its users of a future by uploading them into a cloud and leaving behind a lifeless body. Black Box thus succeeds in taking over control while osten-

sibly curing its users from anxiety by creating a secure surrounding. While it re-
mains unclear whether Polly does really experience the bliss she was hoping for, it
is abundantly clear that Black Box is the cause for Owen's (physical and mental)
pain: as the following analysis will reveal, Black Box establishes a totalitarian re-
gime that bridges the gap between humans and machines and simultaneously sep-
arates humans from each other, to utilize the resulting anxiety for its own pur-
poses.

6.3.2 Technology's Complex Simplicity

Girl in the Machine then showcases how the border between humanity, machines
and AI, reality and illusion, are shifted and blurred. While in the play the human
body is connected with pain and disgust, especially when left behind after the up-
load, Black Box creates a seemingly secure alternative for the flawed body. Howev-
er, this upload mechanism is controlled by Black Box itself, which decides who can
upload and who is prohibited to do so. The play thus reveals how security technol-
ogies can separate people according to their own terms and conditions (in the play
it is suggested that class and blind faith are two of them). The blurring of the boun-
dary between humans and machines in the play is then inevitably accompanied by
feelings of fear and anxiety and reveals a totalitarian administration that uses sep-
aration and anxiety to secure its power. While it remains unclear whether life as a
data cloud really is "bliss" (S. Smith, *Machine* 40) for the uploaded people, the as-
pects of anxiety that justify Polly's initial use of Black Box now shift to Owen.
First, he is left behind in a world that is a conglomerate of catastrophes and fearful
events and objects, on the private and public level. Simultaneously, the cloud that
Black Box creates is the epitome of something eclectic, scattered, ungraspable and
insurmountable – its structure mirrors what Haggerty and Ericson term surveil-
lant assemblage. This cloud is surrounding Owen and yet he can never reach it,
recalling an important aspect of anxiety's multi-layered nature and a sign of
lack of control. Secondly, Owen is unable to communicate with Polly once she is
a data cloud, further isolating him and adding to his anxiety-laden situation. Third-
ly, he is left behind in a world of pain and disgust amid the dead bodies of people
that uploaded themselves, where every future perspective seems bleak and hope-
less. Black Box then urges the characters in the play to decide between being a cy-
borg with a Citizen Chip under their skin or being a data double that renounces
the human body. In both cases, the characters in the play are controlled by forces
beyond their command. The machine that was ostensibly designed to cure anxiety
thus creates an environment of infinite pain for everyone that is not using it and
promises a secure utopia for those that agree to surrender their being to Black

Box. By deciding who is allowed to upload themselves, Black Box thus deprives potential users of a genuine choice and so erects a totalitarian regime that, as will be shown in the last part of this analysis, clashes with the already established and likewise totalitarian political order. The mechanisms to attain control are the same for both the capitalist venture of Black Box and the totalitarian state: both first create anxiety under the guise of providing security and later utilize this anxiety to build a world of division and suspicion to further strengthen their power and control.

As outlined in the previous chapter the reasons why Polly decides to live as a bodiless data cloud are manifold and caused by a neoliberalist workplace and Black Box itself. Polly's withdrawal symptoms and simultaneous accumulation of stressful and fearful situations on the public and private level, her incapability to express her feelings to Owen mixed with her desire to escape from an anticipated painful future that further adds to her anxiety, all get worse until she is supplied with a new Black Box. This new Black Box is provided by aid workers that try to support the last survivors in a disintegrating society, where a large number of people have already decided to be uploaded. The negative impacts of Black Box on the social fabric and on Polly's private life are clear: thousands of uploaded people leave their dead bodies behind, there are riots in the streets, the government seems unable to find any solutions as social systems collapse and, as a lawsuit instigated by Polly's law firm against Black Box fails, she loses her job. For Polly, Black Box seems to be the only answer and the only escape from the dystopian world she finds herself in: "I need to believe in something and this is the answer – the only answer. […] There is no escape, no end, no peace or place for me to breathe without my lungs flooding with fire. I cannot be, I cannot see, I cannot hold any more of its hurt" (S. Smith, *Machine* 51). Fleeing from a seemingly never-ending pain accompanied by anxious anticipation, Polly does not even contemplate the possibility to physically fight for a better world instead. Unable to cope with the world as it is, Polly decides to upload herself against Owen's will, leaving him behind in despair.

While Owen is facing the same conglomerate of fearful situations and a world in regress, he also sees Black Box itself as a threat, which adds to his personal conglomerate of (fearful) objects. The exact workings of Black Box remain unknown to Owen, as does its origin:

> **Polly:** Fuck. Look. It's got past every piece of security on everyone's phone.
> **Owen:** What is it?
> **Polly:** It's a giant advert for Black Box. Details on how to get sent the headset. Everything you need to know on how to upload.

Owen: No, it...
Owen *takes back his phone.*
He keeps tapping it to try and delete the application.
Someone is fucking with us. Why won't it delete
off my phone?
Polly: You can't delete it. The technicians at work have
tried to follow the route of where it is but they can't.
Every time they think they've got it. It shifts. Like
it's organic.
Owen: So, you contact the maker?
Polly: There is no known maker of Black Box. We can't
find a trace of it ever existing before it... existed. (S. Smith, *Machine* 31)

Black Box thus stands for a mysteriously complex mechanism that leaves dead bodies behind and restricts any communication with the people that uploaded themselves. The more people upload to the device, the more its power gets out of hand, the more it becomes all-consuming and abstract at the same time. It presents an unstable unity and yet is a multi-layered and opaque cloud, similar to the surveillant assemblage described by Haggerty and Ericson (610). Black Box uses an all-encompassing cloud that contains the lives of thousands of people and no life at all. This assemblage of data that Black Box creates in its cloud represents the fragile threshold of body, mind and data and hints at the ontological question of what differentiates AI from the human mind. Anxiety is then a natural reaction to these shifting, ungraspable boundaries, where Black Box is perceived as dreadful because its mechanism is never fully understood. It is thus no surprise that this device is called Black Box, as one possible meaning of this term refers to "[a] device which performs intricate functions but whose internal mechanism may not readily be inspected or understood; (hence) any component of a system specified only in terms of the relationship between inputs and outputs" (OED, "Black Box"). Black Box thus is all-surrounding and simultaneously involves a lack of control, it seems easy to use and is yet incomprehensibly complex. Black Box appears as a ghost-like figure that can be heard and felt but never fully comprehended, similarly to the many fearful objects that accumulate to anxiety but can never really be grasped. Thus, Black Box itself, in combination with the nightmarish outside world it creates, composes an atmosphere of (fearful) objects that separate Owen from the machine but also from Polly, leaving him in a state of fearful dread.

This is intensified as, once someone is uploaded to the cloud, communication can only function on the AI's terms. Even before Polly uploads herself, some of the people who decide to leave their human body behind and to live as a cloud communicate via smartphones. When, for instance, a message from their already uploaded neighbour arrives that only contains the word "bliss" (S. Smith, *Machine*

40), it remains unclear whether this message is really sent from them or from the AI itself. Besides this, it does not seem possible to react to this message and thus start a real communication with the neighbour – a step that seems plausible, especially before taking a life-changing decision. The lack of verbal exchange thus further increases the distance between the people in the cloud and the people left behind. Nonetheless, this message makes an impression on Polly, who refers to the "other side" (41) as bliss. Once she is uploaded, Polly similarly tries to communicate with Owen through technological devices:

> *Silence.*
> **Polly***'s voice suddenly booms through the room.*
> *Saying his name, almost as if she is yelling through*
> *every piece of technology in the room.*
> **Polly:** Owen?
> *It's not clear where it is coming from and it's*
> *a sharp shot of a moment that leaves a chasm*
> *of silence.*
> *Uncertain of where* **Polly***'s voice is coming from,*
> **Owen** *is almost breathless, searching for it.* (56)

However, this is the last time Owen hears Polly's voice and concurrently he has no means to talk to her. It also remains unclear whether this really is Polly speaking. In an earlier scene, when Black Box is destroyed by Polly, it reveals that it recorded them both while they were speaking, without their consent or knowledge. Thus, the last time Owen hears Polly's voice might again be just the device playing back snatches of their conversation. This is intensified as Polly is Owen's only contact and her company seems like his only coping mechanism, which is very different to Polly's understanding of happiness. Right before Polly uploads herself, she leaves Owen with words that resemble the neoliberalist society she grew up in: "[t]o live is not enough. To love is not enough. I won't forget you. I promise" (55). It seems Polly is finding relaxation and bliss in virtual reality rather than in her relationship with Owen. Owen, instead, is seeking refuge in worldly things like Polly's company (24, 54), in the possibility of raising a family (22, 32, 42), in bodily pleasures like their kisses (12 – 13) and, once the situation deteriorates, in alcohol (44). Thus, losing Polly further adds to his distress by robbing him of his main source of pleasure and comfort.

At the same time, Owen must face a reality that predicts to be painful and tedious for those left behind. While Polly has rid herself of any future while being a data cloud, the future for Owen has become increasingly bleak. The control over who is allowed to leave and who must stay to face a world of total destruction lies within Black Box and thus the device can control even those individuals who

never use it. It has the power to divide whole populations according to its own terms because of its power to either spread or cure anxiety. It then follows similar mechanisms as the liquid surveillance described by Bauman and Lyon, where it "divides populations in two groups: it benefits those that assimilate with the surveillance techniques and excludes others that do not comply" (4; see also Kitchin 83).[198] While at the beginning it seems that Black Box is a technological device everyone can use (albeit, at the beginning of the play, the machine was associated with money) this changes when Black Box restricts the access to its uploading mechanism and thus, in a last step, reveals its totalitarian nature. When Owen wants to follow Polly into the Black Box Cloud, he is inhibited from doing so:

> **Owen:** I'm coming... I'm coming, sweetheart.
> **Owen** *places on the headset. There is a loud beep.*
> **Voice:** I'm sorry but we have reached capacity.
> **Owen:** What?
> **Owen** *falls to his knees.*
> **Voice:** There is no room left.
> The border is closed.
> **Owen:** What?
> **Voice:** A firewall has been constructed.
> **Owen:** Who are you?
> **Voice:** We are the choices you have made. We came for
> those who felt dissatisfied. We allowed those who
> were willing to believe.
> **Owen:** But you... you can't.
> **Voice:** I'm sorry, your attempt to upload has been rejected. (S. Smith, *Machine* 57)

It is thus Black Box alone that can restrict access to the presumably blissful experience of uploading your mind to a cloud. Seemingly, Owen is rejected because of his lack of 'faith' in Black Box earlier on, which means that the device has recorded Owen's scepticism although he was not the one using the machine nor was he aware of the consequences this scepticism might have later on.

It is Black Box alone who makes the decision to trap Owen in a world of infinite pain and precariousness. As Mathies Aarhus argues, "the distribution of anxiety is one of the central arenas where class stratification is played out

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198 This resembles what Foucault writes about authoritative regimes that use binary systems (alongside discipline and fear) to increase their power. "Generally speaking," he writes, "all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal); and that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.)" (*Discipline and Punish* 199).

today" (43). The question of who can presumably escape from a painful reality and future into a seemingly secure environment has become a political one, where some people (Polly is a solicitor after all and the differences in Polly's and Owen's class become apparent throughout the play) are allowed to flee from their negative feelings while others (Owen is a nurse and thus belongs to the working class) are restricted to stay.[199] This mirrors what Aarhus observes about anxiety in the precariat where the security industry

> offer[s] the upper classes the pleasure of escaping their anxiety, stress or discomfort, for a moment at least, but in a process of emotional exchange where the unpleasant feeling is transferred into the worker in a form of transaction. This transmission of feeling can be structured into particular flows that systematically transfer certain feelings downward by shielding those with economic resources from 'bad' feelings while putting the emotional baggage on the backs of workers. One can take this analysis even further and argue that the distribution of anxiety is one of the central arenas where class stratification is played out today. (43)

The injustice that follows the totalitarian action Black Box exercises not only puts the burden of emotional strain onto the working class – in this case onto Owen, who is deprived of his means for relaxation, namely Polly. Black Box also strengthens its power through anxiety and by inducing (pain and) disgust which are themselves border crossing experiences – in this case through Owen's work as a nurse. In his job, Owen has to participate in the burning of bodies which is associated with feelings of abjection and disgust. Working in the hospital, Owen is confronted with the side effects of Black Box long before Polly is. With more people uploading their mind into the cloud, more bodies are left behind that need to be buried:

> **Owen:** I'm going back to work anyway. They've declared
> a state of emergency.
> **Polly:** Why?
> **Owen:** The hospital is overflowing with the uploaded, with
> their bodies.

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199 This discrepancy of security measures in different classes is already apparent in the real world. "Never before have our society's most powerful players assumed that the primary impact of their own conquests would be to render the world itself unliveable for everyone else" (Rushkoff). The Silicon Valley escapism that has been described by Douglas Rushkoff shows how billionaires build "doomsday bunkers" or propose the restriction of food supply (under their supervision) to separate themselves and utilize technology to increase their power. "Amplified by digital technologies and the unprecedented wealth disparity they afford, The Mindset [ultra-wealthy stakeholders] allows for the easy externalisation of harm to others, and inspires a corresponding longing for transcendence and separation from the people and places that have been abused" (Rushkoff) – something that is also implied in *Girl in the Machine.*

Polly: But /
Owen: We're burning them. Burning the bodies. They can't
dig the graves quick enough and it was becoming a
health hazard. They're making nurses, they're
making us cut off their hair – so the smoke doesn't
smell so bad when we... I've never been around so
much... even for me it's a little... So I'll be... (S. Smith, *Machine* 43–44)

It is here that the separation between those that are uploaded and the people left behind becomes most apparent as this whole situation is accompanied by feelings of disgust and abjection. In Kristeva's terms, abjection "has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I" (*Powers of Horror* 1) where it threatens Owen's life and "problematizes the boundary" (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 54) between self and other, machine and human, life and death. Especially when induced by corpses, the abject and especially "disgust can be understood as a defense against a universal fear of death" (Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 642). This fear then, as Freud delineates, "implies the old belief that the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor and seeks to carry him off to share his new life with him" ("Uncanny" 365). Owen is then directly confronted with the most primal fear, the fear of death. By removing the corpses of his cohabitants Owen is burdened with Black Box's side effects and has to fight the machine on two levels: privately when Polly decides to upload herself, and publicly, by disposing of the corpses. It hence seems fitting that Kristeva describes the abject as neither subject nor object (*Powers of Horror* 9), resembling both the dead bodies left behind and the cloud of uploaded minds. Their state as border crossing entities that are neither subject nor object increases the state of confusion and reveals anxiety's ungraspable nature that complicates any communication, as can be seen in Owen's ellipses when he talks about the dead bodies. Both the dead bodies and the uploaded minds, it seems, are opposed to Owen. Additionally, similarly to the nature of disgust and the abject, he is "*affected by what [he] has rejected*" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 86) without any means to flee from the dystopian world he lives in.

In the end, thus, Black Box has established a totalitarian authority that utilizes anxiety and the characters' need for security to separate them according to its own terms and conditions. By ostensibly curing anxiety, it only shifts anxiety to other (classes) of people, who now have to suffer from anxiety's overwhelming nature that accumulates more and more fearful objects, by isolating them and withdrawing any kind of communication from them and by leaving the dead bodies behind to further establish a border between humans uploaded and the remaining humans. Thus, the play ends where it started and Black Box shifts the pain to Owen, who is now overwhelmed, stuck in an infinite nightmare, without the means to communicate his anxiety and disgust. By separating users from non-

users, the technological system Black Box reveals then presents a system that is itself disgusting.

6.3.3 Security vs Control, State vs AI

It is through the use of Black Box and the Citizen Chip that *Girl in the Machine* showcases two competing, totalitarian systems – one implemented by the state, the other by a state-independent entity. Both systems then use the human body as a battlefield. Thus, what is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the play is the way it depicts the breaching of the body boundary through technology in order to exercise control. The connection of human and machine as an instable multitude (Parker-Starbuck 3) is at the heart of the play that connects Citizen Chip, Black Box, data double and cyborg and shows how the breaching of the body can be a cause for anxiety. In the end, Black Box wins this fight, as throughout the play it learns to utilise the body and analyse its data in the most reckless way. Black Box then operates on two levels to lure its users in and spread its use. Firstly, it uses different surveillance techniques and analyses the data it collects while in use. Based on this data, the machine then provides a new, updated version that promises even more security from the outside world. Secondly, the most distinct way *Girl in the Machine* showcases the correlation between the search for security and exploitation of power is by creating data doubles that replace human individuals. By leaving the porous body that is home to pain, disgust, fear and anxiety, the users can flee from mortal pain. These newly created data doubles are, however, controlled by Black Box itself. Thus, the machine succeeds in gaining more control by promising a secure world. Although Black Box is a commercial enterprise, it then has all the features of a totalitarian political system.[200] At the same time, the actual political system the characters live in is no less totalitarian: it is a surveillance state that uses technology just like Black Box for its own purposes. The use of technology in both cases functions with the same mechanisms: technology promises security/relief from anxiety. Once accepted, this technology then soon becomes a source of, rather than relief from, anxiety. This pervasive anxiety creates new social divisions that seem to suggest the need for further relief from it.

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200 I would suggest that both regimes in *Girl in the Machine* – the government and Black Box – can be understood as totalitarian. This can be seen, for instance, in the implementation of Citizen Chips and Black Boxes as electronic devices to gather information about and monitor and control the people in the play. Furthermore, as the end of the play reveals, everyone who is not part of the right system will be punished and left behind. Surveillance and punishment are then two mechanisms used by totalitarian systems to maintain power.

Whether capitalist or state-run, the 'machine' is thus self-sustaining, thriving off the anxieties it generates and gaining even more control by doing so.

In order to gain the upper hand, Black Box first observes its users and collects vast amounts of data. Data are then not generated by common forms of surveillance, but are, similarly to what Kitchin outlines for automated data, "generated as an inherent, automatic function of the device or system" (87) – data that, although Polly agrees to use Black Box, are nonetheless directly harvested from her brainwaves and thus are not controlled by her consciousness anymore. The analysis of the data Black Box gathers then functions in a similar manner as in surveillance operations that observe entire populations: first, the technological device Black Box and its monitoring function help the AI, together with predictive analytics, to monitor its users and predict their future behaviour and needs. This is then increased, secondly, by the collection of sensory data and sentiment analysis, which instantly monitors the feelings and sentiments of its users "to minimize negative sentiment and maximise emotional investment and engagement" (Andrejevic 96). By monitoring Polly's brainwaves and synchronising with her heartbeat (S. Smith, *Machine* 5), Black Box has access to Polly's emotions and can manipulate them. Finally, Black Box constantly experiments with new, upgraded functions and updates its terms and conditions (20). It thus mirrors the "virtual laboratory" and the controlled experimentation of ubiquitous surveillance that manages and manipulates data and individuals alike (Andrejevic 96). When Polly uses the machine, she does not know of the different ways she is observed nor of the "memory bank [...] application" (S. Smith, *Machine* 34) Black Box compiles for every user. She thus never consented to her data being used in that way nor does she exactly know about it. Black Box only reveals this when Polly tries to destroy the machine, when it plays the recorded conversation between her and Owen (34–35). The surveillance techniques Black Box uses therefore hint at the way whole populations can be monitored and reveals how Black Box becomes a future oriented endeavour that seems to be one step ahead.

This data can then be used to evolve Black Box. First, Black Box and its new uploading mechanism need to be associated with something positive. In this case, it is the word 'bliss' (the message one of the first users who was uploaded sent only contained this one word). Collecting data directly from Polly's (and many other people's) brainwaves, the machine can detect that it is exactly this notion of bliss and security that people are lacking. Polly's monologues reveal that she is lacking security and support. When Black Box is broken, for instance, she reveals that she is lost and confused, stating: "I want to be better, I want to be... I don't. I don't know how to... I don't know how to be..." (S. Smith, *Machine* 38). All Black Box needs to do in order to succeed in its endeavour is thus to provide this feeling of security and

show Polly that the only way to be is to be uploaded. In the end, Black Box succeeds in implanting itself as the only solution for Polly's anxiety and distress:

> **Polly:** I can't seem to sit or sleep or stand without my skin
> stinging and I cannot stop thinking I can't stop
> thinking I can't stop thinking I can't stop thinking
> I can't stop thinking I can't stop thinking I can't stop
> thinking I can't stop thinking I can't stop thinking.
> I can't stop thinking about how beautiful it could be.
> I want to know. I want to know bliss.
> **Owen:** Please just take a moment. Just take a moment. Just /
> **Voice:** We are waiting for you, Polly. (52)

While her language is similarly elliptical as at the beginning of the play, she now seems to have found a way out of her confusion, guided by Black Box. Black Box then positions itself as the only cure for her anxieties and clears the confusion Polly feels. At the same time, Black Box can provide Polly with a solution to leave her flawed, hurting body.

While these mechanisms of surveillance, experimentation and evolution then give Black Box the upper hand, the Citizen Chip used by the government works in a similar way. Implanted under the skin to provide a sense of security – Polly admits, "it makes me feel safe" (S. Smith, *Machine* 10) – it is the epitome of surveillance. As David Lyon observes, "[i]dentification is the starting point of surveillance" and "counting, monitoring and documenting citizens is a fundamental form of state power and technologies for achieving this [...] make quite a difference to the reach and effectiveness of that power" (*Identifying Citizens* 4). Similar to Black Box, the Citizen Chip updates itself, even without the consent of the characters (S. Smith, *Machine* 39). The body is here, too, the site of surveillance. It is then no surprise that the device is placed under the skin and thus constantly breaches the body boundary to leak private data to an outside authority:

> Skin functions in several, somewhat contradictory ways: as a protective and exposing layer of our corporeal identities, a supposedly stable indicator of biological identity, and malleable surface with which to express one's self. Within critical discourses of biometric surveillance, skin is understood as a porous boundary, a contested space that is both private and public. (Morrison, *Discipline* 186)

Placed under the skin, the chip can then prevent the citizen from ordering new headsets for Black Box as well as from uploading themselves, which is, as Owen states, "a reactive measure" (S. Smith, *Machine* 39) that interferes with people's lives. However, only implanting the device under the skin is not enough, as the Citizen Chip cannot collect data directly from the brainwaves. The emotional attach-

ment Black Box creates thus gives it the upper hand. Both systems are juxtaposed when Polly wants to upload herself but is prevented from doing so by her Citizen Chip (50). For Polly, the decision is clear and she cuts the Citizen Chip out of her arm. As both Black Box and the government use technology to spy on the characters in the play, the boundary between different surveillance techniques from political and social spheres intersect. In other words, "[c]onvergence and ubiquitous surveillance go hand in hand, undermining clear-cut boundaries between state and commercial surveillance, policing and marketing" (Andrejevic 94). At the same time, multinational corporations use anxiety's multidirectional structure to sell a sense of safety. The state then fails to provide a secure environment and has become, in some sense, "irrelevant for many people's life problems and fears" (Bauman and Lyon 5 – 6) as it cannot bring Black Box to justice – instead turning Black Box into an entity that functions globally and without any legal restrictions. Black Box then manages to switch off the human body – the main source of information for the government – and control the data in its own cyberspace.

Black Box then manages to combine the different meanings of the term 'black box.' First, a black box, in general as well as in the play, is a mysteriously complex mechanism, whose exact workings remain unknown or not understood. Second, a black box is also a recording device that can be extracted from planes in the event of a crash. Similarly, the Black Box in the play promises to be the only safe haven that can outlive the apocalypse of the outside world (the one it helped create). Third, black box can also relate to a warning accompanying certain prescription drugs. Similarly, Black Box itself is used as an alternative to Polly's anxiety medication, although the warning itself is missing. And finally, black box is also a type of minimalist theatre stage. All four meanings are contained in the play's device and foreshadow the destructive forces the machine raises. *Girl in the Machine* is thus not only a "triangular conflict" (Fisher, "Girl in the Machine") between a machine, an advocate and an opponent of virtual reality but rather looks at two opposing totalitarian regimes that blur the boundaries between reality and illusion and separate humans while bringing them closer to virtual reality. Polly is thus the *Girl in the Machine*, drawn between a search for security and cure from her anxieties and the total loss of control, captured in an obscure machinery that relates to technological surveillance devices and the totalitarian systems they help to create alike – systems that all utilize anxiety to extend their power.

What both plays, *X* and *Girl in the Machine*, have in common is the anxious mood in combination with a longing for security and lack of control that they approach both thematically and aesthetically. Anxiety is not only represented through a sense of excess of fearful objects and situations but also by the abandonment of temporal linearity where the plays either shift between past, present and future or present a scenario in which human future no longer exists. Anxiety is

further encountered, on a more visceral level, vicariously through pain and disgust, typically evoked by the presence on stage of bodily fluids or corpses. Additionally, over the course of both plays language becomes increasingly incapable of expressing feelings, further isolating the characters. *X* and *Girl in the Machine* display a spectrum of possible cures for anxiety, which range from physical objects like pictures to relationships and digital/technological solutions. To overcome anxiety, both plays tinker with the nothingness that is created through anxiety and present it as a momentary relief to anxiety, which, however, cannot be a permanent cure. In a similar manner, different forms of machines, cyborgs, posthuman and ghost-like figures emerge that are likewise expected to cure anxiety but further increase the anxious mood in the plays. Lastly, the characters try to hold onto objects from the past as something real, which likewise fades away. While *X* uses an aestheticized mise en abyme structure to restart the play and render it absurd after the first break down, verging on the connection between anxiety and the sublime, *Girl in the Machine* is more politically charged and showcases how different political and private authorities use anxiety for their own benefit.

7 Contagious Anxiety: Viruses, Plagues and Scapegoating

One very recent global event that brought fear and anxiety squarely in the public realm all over the world was the Covid-19 pandemic. In general, the reaction towards the outbreak of a pandemic – a disease that affects a large proportion of a population (OED, "Pandemic") – is often fear and anxiety (Snowden 2). In a manner of weeks, the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 spread across the world and, as of early 2023, when the pandemic faded into an endemic phase, 758,390,564 people were infected – counting only confirmed cases – and more than 6,859,093 people died (WHO, "WHO Coronavirus"). Likely transferred from animals to humans – an event that quite literally represents a border crossing –, the pandemic affected all aspects of public and private life and became the reason for widespread disruptions in daily life due to problems in supply chains, forced reductions in work hours or pay, curfews and the closing of schools, universities and, of course, theatres.

The Covid-19 pandemic was and still is also a major source of fear and anxiety and continues to cause physical and mental health issues (not to mention the many cases of long/post-Covid), which are exacerbated by the effects the pandemic had on health systems and economies in general (WHO, "Impact of COVID-19").[201] What makes a pandemic so anxiety-inducing is its unpredictability. As the WHO writes, "[a]nyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age" ("Overview"). Pandemics and epidemics, generally, are "more devastating than other categories of illness [and, globally,] remain leading causes of suffering and death" (Snowden 3). Although the Covid-19 pandemic has transitioned to an endemic phase, other epidemic diseases (like AIDS or Ebola) are far from over and, together with new viruses, will recur in the future of humanity (3).

Therefore, pandemics are and will continue to be one major source of fear and anxiety on a global scale. Pandemics and anxiety are often also structurally connected. The overall structure of a pandemic, which "is a multi-faceted phenomenon" (Lyon, *Pandemic* 10), is a conglomerate that, although it is foremost a physical disease – an infection with SARS-CoV-2 leads to respiratory illness and symptoms like fever, a sore throat or loss of smell (WHO, "Symptoms") –, also affects mental and emotional capacities and, through them, both the public and private

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[201] As Lyon states, not all people were affected in the same manner: "[w]hile in the early 2020s no one in the world is untouched by the pandemic, at least as a social condition, people are affected with differing degrees of severity, often relating to social class, gender, race and other decidedly social factors" (Lyon, *Pandemic* 4).

spheres. The way a pandemic combines physical and mental symptoms resembles the overall structure of anxiety and its multi-faceted dimension resembles anxiety's characteristics as a conglomerate of (fearful) objects (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 66; see also chapter 2.1). For Ahmed, it is not so much the emotion that is shared but rather the object on which emotions are projected on (*Cultural Politics* 10 – 11). The more such objects are (thought to be) present, the more fear and anxiety they induce. Therefore, the pandemic represents ever more reasons to be afraid that infiltrate all aspects of private and public life and further increase the already felt anxieties.

Pandemics and epidemic diseases are also connected to other sources of fear and anxiety. Negatively globalised societies are built on the exploitation of humans, animals and natural resources, which furthers the spreading of pandemics. As Frank Snowden writes, "epidemic diseases are not random events that afflict societies capriciously and without warning. On the contrary, every society produces its own specific vulnerabilities" (7) and, with it, its own fears and anxiety. It is no coincidence that pandemics keep happening, even in the technologically advanced twenty-first century. In fact, "many of the central features of a global modern society continue to render the world acutely vulnerable to the challenge of pandemic disease" (7). Thus, pandemics are inevitably connected to all topics that have already been described in this study.

Consequently, some of the reasons for society's vulnerability to pandemics are also discussed in the previous chapters, for instance climate change or "widening social inequalities" (Lyon, *Pandemic* 7; see also Vakoch and Mickey; see also chapter 4.1 and 5.1). Further, it is not only the negatively globalised world that helps spread epidemic diseases, but it is also the pandemic that exacerbates negative side-effects of globalised societies – a vicious circle that has become apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic. Claudia Jahnel writes about this connection, focusing on a postcolonial perspective:

> The fear of contagion on the one hand and a politics and epistemology of boundary-setting and delineation on the other [...] have not only been present since COVID-19, but [...] accompany the ongoing globalization. In the Corona 'crisis,' however, this scheme of stimulus—fear of contagion—and reaction—drawing of boundaries—has taken on a concrete, existentially threatening and highly emotionalized appearance. (103)

The Covid-19 pandemic thus confronted societies that were already afflicted by a vast conglomerate of anxiety-inducing scenarios with concrete fears of contagion. Furthermore, the pandemic also intensified the disparity between the rich and poor (Neate) and lead to the adoption of more authoritarian measures, for instance

in Eastern Europe (Šeško).²⁰² It also led to widespread conspiracy theories as to where the virus originated and who is to blame, which further affected global politics (this topic was, for instance, a controversial debate in US politics and influenced the relationship between the US and China (D. Smith)).²⁰³ At the same time, the pandemic proved to be a springboard for technological innovations, like video communication tools that were used in schools, businesses and doctor's offices (Lyon, *Pandemic* 9) and as such affected nearly all aspects of public life. Thus, for Lyon, Covid-19 was the first pandemic that occurred "in a context of surveillance capitalism" (7) as all these tools are collecting data that can be stored, analysed and used for surveillance purposes (see chapter 6.1). All in all, the example of the Covid-19 pandemic shows how "[i]nfectious diseases [...] are as important to understanding societal developments as economic crises, wars, revolutions, and demographic change" (Snowden 2). Although there were various pandemics before Covid-19 (like the 1918 flu pandemic, widely known as the Spanish flu), the high death toll and number of people still affected with (long/post-)Covid shows that the negatively globalised society was not ready to contain its spreading in time. What Snowden describes as "historical[] amnesia" (451), will also affect the next pandemics and meet a society that is, again, not prepared, highlighting the workings of the Titanic syndrome, in which a society is not prepared for future threats that will very likely happen (see chapter 4.1). Therefore, this last chapter summarises the previous three chapters that focus on social, economic, ecological and technological topics and channels these through the lens of contagious anxiety that has been caused by different kinds of pandemic/epidemic diseases.

The Covid-19 pandemic has, of course, also affected theatres in the UK (as well as worldwide). While during the pandemic all theatres were closed and had to postpone or cancel their performances, they are now open again. Nevertheless, many theatre companies must still deal with the financial consequences of the closures (Wiegand; Svich) in addition to the already precarious and underfinanced situation of the arts in the UK. Fear and anxiety are then not only portrayed on stage but quite literally felt by the theatre practitioners: financial difficulties enhanced by the pandemic "pressed theatre-makers to continue to produce even as financial trouble, exhaustion and fear were felt by many" (Pietrzak-Franger, Liedke and Radak 4). In order to keep going, theatres came up with creative solutions for audiences to watch plays during the pandemic, like the "see it safely campaign" that ensured that all public health guidelines were met and ticket exchange

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202 For an explanation of why and how politicians use global and national catastrophes to enforce restrictive and autocratic new rules, see Naomi Klein's *The Sock Doctrine.*

203 For a historical perspective on this topic that compares conspiracy theories during the Covid-19 pandemic with earlier health crises see Tschiggerl.

in case of cancellation or illness was possible (Mayo). Other theatre companies approached the pandemic with new performance techniques "variously termed viral, pandemic and digital theatre" (Pietrzak-Franger, Liedke and Radak 4), for instance by producing digital performances or streaming live performances online (Bay-Cheng; Chatzichristodoulou et al.; Langston).[204]

Although digital performances have many advantages, especially when it comes to accessibility, many theatre companies have since returned to live performances (Sherwood, "UK Theatres"). While the pandemic is now in an endemic state, contemporary British theatre does not seem to put it on stage yet, or, as Aleks Sierz observes, "so much post-pandemic theatre is comfort theatre, shows with a blatant feelgood factor" ("*Middle*"). However, this does not mean that contemporary British theatre does not investigate the possibility and inner workings of pandemics or contagion.[205] Two plays that not only look into different kinds of diseases but also into the anxiety that is attached to them are Dawn King's *Foxfinder* and Stef Smith's *Human Animals.* Intriguingly, both plays had their premiere before the outbreak of Covid-19, in 2016 and 2011 respectively, and in many instances anticipated what would happen during the pandemic. In *Foxfinder*, the Coveys' farm isn't meeting its target and is thus visited by a foxfinder who investigates whether the farm has been contaminated by foxes – a scenario that is highly unlikely as, although they are constructed as an omnipresent enemy and plague, foxes are extinct in the storyworld. While this procedure clearly does not solve the problem of the failing crops and, in the end, leads to the foxfinder's death, the fox becomes a cipher onto which grief, anger, fear and anxiety are projected. In *Human Animals*, a virus that spreads amongst animals not only leads to fear and anxiety, but also to the breakdown of society, as the characters employ individualistic coping strategies that cannot stop the merging of humans with animals and of the physical virus with anxiety. Both plays then show how a virus – whether real or imagined – may not only be utilised in pursuit of various political and private agendas but is also inevitably connected to anxiety. The analysis of these plays will then illustrate

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204 Research into contagion in theatre has only just begun. However, the new performance techniques have already inspired projects on the pandemic and theatre. Digital performances are, for instance, at the heart of a concept called 'viral theatre,' established by Heidi Liedke and Monika Pietrzak-Franger, which combines postmodernity with contagion and digitalisation and links "first, historical/theoretical notions of contagiousness in theatre, second, 21st-century musings on virality as the condition of postmodern society, and, third, the current digitalization of theatre (due to the pandemic) and its attempts to go online and 'go viral'" (129).
205 Fintan Walsh, for instance, coined the term "Theatres of Contagion" in order to explore, as the blurb of his book says, the "anxieties of our current political and cultural climate by exploring theatre's status as a contagious cultural force" (Walsh).

how anxiety, if reduced to mere fear by projecting all of anxiety's negative characteristics onto one single object or scapegoat, can distract from anxiety's real causes but never help overcome it.

7.1 Dawn King: *Foxfinder* (2011)

Dawn King's multiple award-winning play *Foxfinder* depicts a world that has been affected by a mysterious plague of foxes. The play premiered at the Finborough Theatre (London) in 2011, directed by Blanche McIntyre, had a West End revival in 2018 and has since been translated into several languages and produced all over the world and is now in development as a feature film project. Described as a play that "haunts the mind long after you've seen it" (Billington, "*Foxfinder*"), King's play is above all interested in people's reaction to the plague: both the character of the foxfinder and the never-to-be-seen fox stand for loss, grief, anger and anxiety, and connect ecological with political and social questions. "Whether Foxfinder is a metaphor for religion, dictatorship, global warming, or something else, the fox as a scapegoat used to instil fear in the public is a theme that runs throughout the play" (Varley). The play thus touches on several aspects of what I call the theatre of anxiety, most notably on the connection between scapegoating, fear and anxiety and the way anxiety is utilised by totalitarian regimes.

In King's dystopian play,[206] Samuel and Judith Covey are farmers who expect a visit from William Bloor, a foxfinder, "investigating the area" (King 12) to find and destroy foxes. As it turns out, the food supply in the country is endangered due to heavy rainfall, and the farm is not "on target to meet its quota for this year" (19). The only explanation that the government provides for the climate change and the failing crops is a contamination by foxes. Although foxes seem to be nearly extinct and there is no clear evidence linking them to the bad harvests, they are held responsible as scapegoats and are themselves treated like plague whose form and effect is not unlike that of a disease – they remain invisible throughout the play, but the government successfully associates them with the crop blight and so renders them a source of fear and anxiety.[207] After his arrival, the first thing William does is make a very detailed assessment of the farm and its surroundings by asking Judith and Samuel several private questions – something he will continue to do throughout the play. It becomes clear that the couple must be very careful about

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206 For a detailed analysis of the play's dystopian potential see Voigts and Tönnies.
207 On the scapegoat mechanism, in which a victim is arbitrarily singled out and destroyed in order to protect and/or restore social order, see René Girard's seminal study *Le bouc émissaire.*

what they say to the foxfinder in order not to lose their farm. While William constantly tries to reassure that he is at the farm to help, he only distracts Samuel, who neglects his work at the farm, and through his questions brings back memories of Samuel and Judith's four-year-old son Daniel's tragic death that happened before William's visit. The more the play goes on, the clearer it becomes that it is the foxfinder, not the foxes, who is a primary cause of fear and anxiety for the characters: the fear that they might lose their farm and attendant anxiety about their economic and private future after the loss of their child resurfaces to haunt them. During the course of his investigations, William declares that the farm is "suffering from contamination" (49) and, after finding a leaflet in support of foxes at the farm, he starts pressuring a neighbour to inform on the Coveys. Meanwhile Samuel gradually begins to believe that foxes are to blame for their misfortune and in particular for Daniel's death. The more Samuel believes this, the more William, on the other hand, becomes doubtful that foxes are to blame for the crop failure. When William follows Samuel, who shoots at imagined foxes, into the woods, William realises that the evil fox is only a myth. He then meets Judith in the forest and coerces her into having sex with him in exchange for his leaving the farm. When Samuel catches them in the act, he shoots William, shouting: "I shot a fox" (82). The play ends with the couple waiting for someone to pick up William's body, planning to claim that William has collaborated with the foxes and thus they had to shoot him.

In the course of the play, it turns out that due to the near-extinction of the fox, the rabbit population has grown excessively and is partly to blame for the bad crops – the ecosystem in the storyworld has become entirely unbalanced. *Foxfinder* shows how a (imagined) plague of foxes in combination with a dysfunctional ecosystem leads to a negative feedback loop of fear and anxiety – feelings that are utilised to control and indoctrinate the people living in the play's totalitarian society.[208] As Eckart Voigts and Merle Tönnies observe, in the play "foxes are [...] constructed as the ethical Other to man, as a scapegoat in a dystopian regime" (304). It is this scapegoating as an act of exploiting anxiety that is the focus of my analysis of the play. In *Foxfinder*, scapegoating is the attempt to reduce anxiety, with its multiple and complexly linked objects, to fear, which is directed towards a single object. Although this piece of governmental propaganda does not change the complex situation, it does distract from an autocratic government that fails to tackle the real reasons for the failing crops and changed weather conditions. This tech-

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208 I would suggest that the regime in *Foxfinder* is totalitarian: the only real aim the foxfinder has is to monitor and control Samuel and Judith. Printing flyers that claim the fox might not be the real enemy is punished by the loss of possession. The surveillance, restrictions in free speech and ensuing punishment prevailing in the play's society are typically totalitarian mechanisms.

nique of scapegoating, or reducing anxiety to mere fear, follows the logic that "[t]he uncertainty of anxiety can be whisked away by processes of naming an enemy (it may be a plausible or implausible enemy)" (Bourke 190). Nonetheless, this mechanism of converting anxiety to mere fear is not necessarily progressive or productive (Rachman 6–7). In the play, though, contrary to its initial purpose, scapegoating is also used by Samuel to project his own grief and anger onto the fox and in doing so accidentally reveals the absurdity of the totalitarian system they live in.

Over the course of the play, it emerges that the role of foxes as scapegoats for the failures of the government is a well-established practice – a practice that makes the foxes objects of fear and carriers of anxiety at the same time and conceptualises them as a plague or infection of sorts. From an early age, foxfinder William Bloor is indoctrinated by a government institution called "The Institute" (King 35) to believe that foxes are humans' enemies, although neither he nor anyone else in the play has ever seen one (60). William's only sources of information on the fox are his teachers and his textbook, which claims, amongst other things:

> **William:** The red fox, Vulpes Vulpes, is as the name suggests, most usually reddish brown, but its colour ranges to silver and black. [...]
>
> Many incidences have been recorded of a mother leaving her baby unguarded outside for only a few seconds, returning to find it gone, taken and devoured. The beast's bloodlust far outstrips its appetite and it will slaughter every hen in a henhouse, leaving the headless carcass behind. A perfectly evolved killing machine, the beast's teeth can grow up to ten centimetres in length, and its claws can disembowel a man. [...]
>
> The beast has influence over the weather, and blights farmers' crops with unseasonable rainfall or periods of drought. It can also cause fires [...] and is riddled with parasites and dangerous diseases to which it is immune but which it reveals in spreading about the countryside. The fox has powers to confuse and can send visions to the mentally unstable and disturb the dreams of the weak. Under its influence, the good and hard-working become fat, lazy, alcoholics or [...] sexual perverts. [...]
>
> Differentiating between the guilty and the innocent is very difficult and it is better to view all those living on contaminated farms with suspicion. (44–5)

What William's textbook describes are several instances of possible future pain – targeting body/possessions, livelihood and identity (see chapter 4.1) – that accumulate to become multiple objects of anxiety that all possibly endanger individual wellbeing: death and bodily harm, weather events, parasites, diseases, mental illness, moral weakness and socially unaccepted behaviour patterns that may lead to social isolation as supposedly hard-working citizens are turned into "fat, lazy, alcoholics or [...] sexual perverts." As they are all projected onto "the fox," this conglomeration of multiple fearful objects is merged into a single object of fear. The fox's status thus becomes ambiguous: on the one hand it clearly is an object of

fear, identifiable as a source of danger, while on the other hand, the alleged 'crimes' of the fox comprise such a multifaceted array of different fearful objects and events that their fuzzy amalgamation has the phenomenological structure of anxiety – rendering the fox both an object of fear and a carrier of anxiety. At the same time, the apparent omnipresence of the foxes and their direct association with disease turns them into a plague that spreads across the country and needs to be kept in check by the government – it "provides the government with a contagion narrative" (Pham, par. 12).

The government's scapegoating is designed to provide a projective space for all kinds of social ills, that is, a monolithic concept for what is to be feared in the play's society. While the textbook describes a mixture of real and imagined characteristics of the fox, it becomes apparent that most of the characteristics are projected onto the fox without any scientific proof and thus can be altered accordingly until the fox becomes an omnipresent enemy that is to be feared at all times. This furthers the insecurity and the myths that surround the creature. William is educated to trust nobody because everyone could be infiltrated by the fox. Searching for signs of contamination, William is prone to suspicion: from a flock of birds in the sky that behave in a "suspicious manner" (King 24) to a rabbit scull he finds on the Covey's farm in which he likewise sees a sign for the existence of the fox (30), William is constantly on edge lest the fox might show itself. At the same time, he has been ordered not to actively seek out for the fox nor to hunt it in darkness – which is the usual time of day foxes are active. In short, William is instructed to look for the fox in a manner he is not likely to find one. As William says, "[w]e do not approach him. We retreat and make our report" (52). Not knowing his enemy, it thus becomes ever more fearful. This mirrors the underlying structure of fear, as explained by Ahmed: "[i]f fear had an object, then fear could be contained by the object. When the object of fear threatens to pass by, then fear can no longer be contained by an object. Fear in its very relationship to an object, in the very intensity of its directedness towards that object, is intensified by the loss of its object" (*Cultural Politics* 65). In *Foxfinder*, the fox on the one hand is turned into an object to contain the diffuse anxieties people might otherwise experience, and on the other hand, because the fox is not present, the fear attached to it can never quite be contained and overcome – and so remains a useful tool for the totalitarian regime.

The foxes' main political function is then an instrument to stoke suspicion and justify totalitarian control. In this atmosphere, it is little wonder that the farmers – Judith, Samuel and their neighbours Sarah and Abraham – are afraid of behaving suspiciously, especially after the incident with the leaflets: "Abe says the worst thing we can do is panic. It'll make us look guilty. Arouse suspicion. We carry on as normal. All of us" (King 43). Likewise, William is suspicious and fearful of

the foxes, while the government and the farmers are suspicious of each other – the former because they fear for their power and the latter because they fear for their life. The foxhunt is thus a proxy war that distracts from the real problems the society faces. In a dialogue with Samuel, William reveals:

> **William:** this entire country is a battleground between the forces of civilisation and the forces of nature. If we lose, England will starve. Our towns and cities will crumble, and trees will grow amongst the ruins using the bones of dead men as fertiliser. Do you see? They want nothing less than our complete annihilation, Samuel. Without man, the fox will rule. (31)

William's conviction that there must be a war between humans and foxes reinforces the human/nature binary, making the fox an enemy other and distracting William from the government's failures. While all characters are concentrating on the fox, it is the rabbit that seems to eat all the crops because the ecosystem has become unbalanced due to human interference and the hunting down of foxes. However, in line with the general vilification of the fox, the rabbits are seen as the foxes' victims and are thus protected by humans. The fox as the designated enemy to distract from a dysfunctional and oppressive surveillance state is a chimera and therefore can never be contained.[209]

The act of scapegoating and scaremongering is often specifically used to simplify anxieties and propagate certain (political) perspectives. Scapegoating, or turning anxiety into fear, distracts from the real problems that cause negative feelings in the first place or, as Bauman describes it, "by far its most important benefit [...] consists in diverting the eyes of the frightened from the causes of their existential anxiety" (*Liquid Fear* 159). The conglomerate of objects that lead to a state of overwhelming anxiety can be bypassed by focusing on one single object and projecting all negative emotions towards it. While this does not change the overall structure of anxiety, it is an avoidance strategy that is often used.[210] As Bauman puts it, "we

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209 As Arya observes, stigmatized individuals or groups "[i]n their otherness [...] are regarded as abject, lowly and despicable and, to return to etymology, are 'cast away' (are outcasts)" (*Abjection and Representation* 7), which is exactly what happens to the fox in the play. The fox stands for the degradation of nature to something fearful, contagious and disgusting, and it opens a binary structure that separates humans from nature and that sends William into a war-like state in which his life is restricted to fighting and killing a hallucinated enemy, set up to assure that he questions neither the Institute that 'educated' him, nor the government that employs him.

210 A typical example of this scapegoating mechanism is the case of right-wing politicians blaming immigrants for the rising unemployment rates that are caused by a mixture of complex market mechanisms and failing social security systems. This mechanism can also be explained by what Ahmed describes as the stickiness of affects: the act of substituting one object of an emotion with another. Thus, in Ahmed's terms, "the sideways movement of fear (where we have a metony-

seek *substitute* targets on which to unload the surplus existential fear that has been cut off from its natural outlet" (143) – a natural outlet that can, given the structure of anxiety, never be returned to its origin.[211] What Bauman describes is how an increasingly complex and liquidised society is reducing omniscient anxieties to more tangible fears. This is even more the case when the government predetermines the target.

Similar mechanisms are at play in King's dystopian drama. While the society in the play, especially in the cities, is starving – "[c]ity dwellers have one egg a week on their ration, and three ounces of cheese. A factory worker... well... they live on what they get" (King 56) – the government desperately tries to cling on to their story of blaming the foxes. This system is questioned by Sarah:

> **Sarah:** Have you ever seen a fox? Has anyone you know ever seen a fox?
> **Judith:** Foxes are sly. Everyone knows that. Just because you can't see them. Doesn't mean they're not there.
> **Sarah:** Wake up, Jude! It's a fairy story, the whole thing! The foxes are gone, but anyone who speaks out, anyone who talks about their doubts... they're arrested!
> **Judith:** Why?
> **Sarah:** Because they're terrified of the truth and what it can do, what's why! They don't know why the weather's gone bad, or the crops are failing, and they don't know how to stop it. They've been wrong all this time, and all those people who lost their farms... all those people who died... Something like this... It could bring the whole bloody Government down. (43)

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mic and sticky relation between signs) is also a backwards movement: objects of fear become substituted for each other over time" (*Cultural Politics* 67). These objects can then never be contained as in fear, the object always passes by. This means that it is not only fear but also other negative things, like unemployment rates, that are (discursively) attached to immigrants. Furthermore, Ahmed's understanding of fear "works to enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public space through restricting the mobility of other bodies to spaces that are enclosed or contained" (70), which likewise explains the power dynamics of racism, where right-wing politicians are afraid to lose their share of public space.

211 Bauman further describes self-isolation and surveillance as another technique to circumvent anxiety, which relates to the insurance techniques already outlined in chapter 4.1. He writes: "[t]hose of us who can afford it fortify themselves against visible or invisible, present or anticipated, known or still unfamiliar, scattered yet ubiquitous dangers through detoxifying the insides of our bodies and our homes, locking ourselves behind walls, surrounding the approaches to our living quarters with TV cameras, hiring armed guards, driving armoured vehicles or taking martial art classes" (*Liquid Fear* 143).

Sarah reveals the inner workings of a totalitarian government that creates an enemy that can never be contained and thus distracts its citizens from its own failings. For this system to work, it is therefore best if the fox is never found, because even when William cannot find any foxes on farms, he simply blames the farmers of mismanagement and orders them to try harder (40), again shifting the responsibility away from the government.

There is, however, yet another way in which the act of scapegoating is utilised in *Foxfinder:* it helps Samuel to target his own, personal emotions. Samuel uses the image of the fox as a projection surface for his grief. In doing so, he reveals the system's absurdity: by actively seeking for the fox and hunting it – something that is not wanted by the authorities – he is able to reveal the truth to William and hunt down his own grief at the same time. As June Xuandung Pham writes, "the myth disseminated by the oppressor is unexpectedly instrumentalised by the oppressed to reclaim justice." (par. 14). This can be seen in the storyline including Judith and Samuel's four-year-old son Daniel, who died a couple of months earlier. From the beginning, the lethal accident hangs like a dark cloud over the play and reveals Samuel's feelings of guilt and his mental health problems (King 21–22). William's insistence that the fox is to blame for all distressing events is taken up by Samuel, who now has found someone to blame for his son's death. Therefore, seeing the fox as a scapegoat and disgusting object does not only alienate and isolate William, but also Samuel. This idea of blaming the fox for Daniel's death is first mentioned by William in scene 10: "I suspect that the beasts were watching your house that night. [...] For a few moments Daniel lay unguarded and they used that time to call to him. They lured him outside. They led him into the muddy water and they laughed as he drowned" (49). While at first doubtful, from scene 12 onwards, Samuel begins to believe it has been foxes who killed Daniel. The more William starts to doubt that foxes are in fact the enemy of humans, the more Samuel gets hooked on the idea and hopes to take violent revenge on the foxes: "I'd like to use dogs. More painful. But a bullet will do it. I'll bring back the heads, so you can spit on them" (73). As Miriam Gillinson observes, "Samuel, desperate for someone to blame, hunts down his grief with a gun" (Gillinson).

This can be further explained by returning to Ahmed and her understanding of fear and anxiety. As anxiety starts with a mental disposition – the act of "gathering more and more objects, until it [anxiety] overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world" (*Cultural Politics* 66) – it is usually not the object per se that is necessarily threatening, but rather the process of gathering objects that causes anxiety. This mechanism can be reduced to fear: this time, it is not an excess of objects that is threatening but a single object that has all (negative) objects and characteristics attached to it. As Ahmed puts it, "[p]olitical discourse transforms feeling by giving that feeling an object or target. We would call this projection: neg-

ative feelings are projected onto outsiders, who then appear to threaten, from without, what is felt as precariously within" (227). This mechanism then mirrors a circular movement, in which the outsider enhances the inner feelings, and vice versa.[212] In the play, thus, Samuel's grief and his fear of losing his farm and wife are all projected onto the fox. This obsession with the abject fox further leads him into a spiral of paranoia and neglect, isolating and alienating him from Judith until he finds the fox in form of William. At the end of the play, Samuel shoots William, who is about to rape Judith, with the words: "I shot a fox" (King 82). This demonstrates that all negative connotations associated with the fox have travelled to William, whose murder is an attempt to eliminate fear and so to restore the balance in Judith and Samuel's lives. The play then ends in violence. This is the perhaps inevitable result of the practice of scapegoating: it can only perpetuate the totalitarian regime's violence at another level.

In the end, what *Foxfinder* shows is how the threatening conglomerate of gathered objects that is anxiety is reversed into a state of mere fear by picking one single object and projecting all negative emotions onto it. In King's play, the fox has simultaneously become an object of fear and a carrier of anxiety. As such, it is an object that spreads anxiety and contains it at the same time. In doing so, the reason for anxiety – whether real or imagined – recedes into the background, while

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212 Bourke's historical approach to anxiety further extends Ahmed's notion of anxiety. For her, the differentiation between fear and anxiety, which, here, is not as distinct as can be found in philosophical approaches, does not necessarily lie in the object but rather in the coping mechanisms that are connected to it. "Indeed, because one common response to threat is scapegoating, it could be argued that the only difference between a fear and an anxiety is the ability of individuals or groups to *believe* themselves capable of assessing risk or identifying a (supposed) enemy. To put it another way, the difference lies in the ability to externalise threat, which provides a sense of personal invulnerability. The difference between fear and anxiety may reside solely in social, hierarchical responses. In fear states, individuals are consciously able to take measures to neutralise or flee from the dangerous object, while purposeful activity fails individuals whose subjective experience is anxiety. But the ability or inability to 'neutralise or flee' ('fight or flight') is a question of power relations within historical communities – not a fundamental difference between the object or state causing an emotional response" (Bourke 190). What Bourke observes is, however, only the *believed* simplification of anxiety into fear. In other words, if Bourke is right and an individual is reducing anxiety to mere fear – a fearful object on which all negative feelings are projected – then this only seems to simplify the matter. Returning to what Ahmed writes about the fearful object, this can never be conceived. As she writes, "[f]ear responds to what is approaching rather than already here" (*Cultural Politics* 65). In other words, the object in fear is "*not quite present*" (65) and thus can never be reached, even if it is simplified to a single as opposed to a conglomerate of objects. Nonetheless, Bourke's observation is likewise true as, in the precise moment that the individual *believes* that, by eradicating this object, all that is fearful and anxiety-inducing is gone, this proves to be an effective (albeit unproductive) avoidance strategy.

the fox in its purpose as an object of fear distracts from a totalitarian regime. However, this mechanism of reducing anxiety to fear does not solve the underlying complex processes that lead to the anxiety in the first place: by selecting the fox as a scapegoat, the real and complex causes for anxiety – something the foxfinding distracts from – cannot be contained.

7.2 Stef Smith: *Human Animals* (2016)

The idea of anxiety as the conglomeration of multiple (fearful) objects can take many forms in the theatre of anxiety. It can occur in the guise of many disastrous economic events happening simultaneously (*How to Hold Your Breath*), as a compilation and connection of several anxiety-inducing visions (*Escaped Alone*), in connection with hyperobjects (*The Children*), as an inexorable natural catastrophe (*Pastoral*) or as an overabundance of fearful possibilities and twisted timescales (*X*). In Stef Smith's *Human Animals*, which was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 2016, all those aspects are combined, as the play shows how a virus can be the cause for an uncontrollable spreading of anxiety. The initial situation in Smith's play depicts an ecosphere that is gradually affected by an apparently zoogenic virus. When extermination does not work and the virus cannot be stemmed, society breaks down. While the play also thematises (political) resistance, it is centrally concerned with "how fear of infection can be used to spread panic and obedience in a population" (Sierz, "*Human Animals*"). With its focus on the intersection of anxiety with social topics it fits perfectly into what I call the theatre of anxiety and is the last play that will be analysed in this study.

Human Animals*, which has been called "resonant and disturbing" (Sierz, "*Human Animals*"), portrays six characters – the couple Lisa and Jamie, neighbours John and Nancy as well as Nancy's daughter Alex and Lisa's boss Si, who is also an acquaintance of John's – that are entangled in each other's lives during the outbreak of a contagious disease and features a chorus that interrupts and comments on these events. The play starts with Lisa and Jamie, who talk about a dead pigeon they have found on their living room floor. While Jamie is rather sentimental, Lisa is more practical in removing the animal. The dead pigeon is only the first sign of an out-of-balance ecosystem that soon leads to a pigeon infestation in John's garden due to changed flocking patterns. This is where the play's magical realism sets in – what started as a normal human-animal interaction soon deteriorates until animals are believed to be the prime source of a contagious virus and so turn into objects of fear and anxiety. In response, the roads are closed by the authorities, who also impose voluntary curfews and incinerate dead animals and burn down bushes and trees that might shelter animals. Simultaneously, mis-

information starts to spread as nobody seems to know anything about the virus and the government's next steps to contain it are similarly unclear. As the play progresses, the characters' stories become increasingly intertwined and the different scenes and dialogues merge into each other. At the same time, the characters are more and more isolated due to the lockdown measures and struggle with their loneliness and with the increasingly drastic crackdowns on those suspected of sheltering animals. The situation becomes ever more chaotic when rolling blackouts start, John's house is burned down because three birds rested on its roof and when Jamie, who quit his job in order to nurse all kinds of animals, is reported to the authorities by Si and nearly beaten to death – he still has enough time to free the animals before they can kill them, though. When in the end nearly all animals are dead, it turns out that the humans might have been infected after all and the border between humans and animals is blurred. The last scene shows an otherworldly metamorphosis of pigeons into humans, in which the pigeons' "*beaks turned into noses [a]nd their wings into arms*" (S. Smith, *Human Animals* 104) and the new hybrid beings then use the subway to go to the theatre – which, the text says, is on Sloane square, like the Royal Court Theatre where Smith's play premiered. In this fashion, the play ends on an apocalyptic note in which the border between animals and humans is entirely dissolved.

In the near-future dystopia[213] that is *Human Animals*, foxes and pigeons are made out to be the source of the mysterious disease – two animals that are already living in close proximity with humans, especially in cities. While the crossing of the border between humans and animals in and of itself constitutes a potential source of anxiety, the following reading is more interested in the way in which the physical virus that affects animals leads to the infectious spreading of anxiety, which thus becomes another, secondary 'virus,' and in the uncertainty and loss of control during the epidemic that causes this anxiety, as well as in the (failed) attempts to cope with the virus and anxiety alike. In the end, the virus and anxiety intermingle and become an indistinguishable mesh in which even the audience is implicated via the play's metatheatrical techniques.

Strikingly, *Human Animals* seems to revisit almost all of the various aspects that were discussed in the previous chapters and reflects on their viral spread – which is why the analysis of the play makes for a fitting end to this study. First, the virus leads to the breakdown of social structures and leaves the characters to fend for themselves in isolation, although they are not prepared to cope with the situation on their own (see also chapter 4.1). At the same time the ineffectual

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[213] For a reading of the play that focuses on the dystopian aspects in connection with the notion of the posthuman, see Voigts and Tönnies.

and ultimately helpless official response to the disease is reminiscent of the government reaction to the financial crisis in *How to Hold Your Breath*, for instance when banks are closed (S. Smith, *Human Animals* 34). Besides, the play has been linked to Churchill's *Escaped Alone* (Sierz, "Human Animals"), as it reads like the continuation of one of Mrs Jarrett's monologues, in which "the city was left to sick foxes, who soon abandoned it for lack of dustbins" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 155). The play also thematises ecological catastrophe, as the spreading of the virus leads to the annihilation of animal life and goes hand in hand with the excessive destruction of nature by humans. This bears some resemblance to the eco-dramas analysed in chapter five: like in *Pastoral*, the characters in *Human Animals* are also locked in against their will and fend off animals they perceive as dangerous. Finally, Smith's play also addresses the intersection of security and control that I discuss in chapter 6.1. Perhaps the connection of all these plays with *Human Animals* is reflected most clearly in the following scene, which is performed by the chorus:

> *They turned off the gas*
> *They've stopped the ambulances*
> *There is no money left to pay the doctors*
>   *There is nowhere left to put the dead*
>   *The trees are*
>   *The birds are*
>   *The streets are*
>   *The rivers*
>   *The oceans*
>   *The icebergs*
> *Something about icebergs*
> *It's too hot*
>   *And it's too cold*
>   *And it's big.*
>   *It's bigger than words what's happening.*
>   *Bigger than words.* (S. Smith, *Human Animals* 79)

From the inability to receive help from ambulances or to pay doctors (*How to Hold Your Breath*), to the impossibility to bury the dead (*Girl in the Machine, X*), to different parts of an ecosystem that are chaotically dispersed across the page and yet also inexplicably intertwined while it remains unclear what is happening to/with them (*Pastoral*), this scene assembles various by now familiar anxiety-inducing images. If what is happening is bigger than words this is also reminiscent of anxiety's inexpressibility (see chapter 2.1) and to the larger-than-life scales of hyperobjects (see chapter 5.2.1). What this scene then shows is how a virus can bring to the surface and magnify the reasons for fear and anxiety that are already afflicting societies. It is thus no coincidence that a play that centrally focuses on a virus should

touch on so many of the facets of the theatre of anxiety that have already been described in much greater detail in the previous chapters.

What is striking is how in *Human Animals* fear and anxiety appear as a secondary virus. Although the epidemic in the play starts with a virus that attacks the animals' (and possibly humans') bodies, the fear and anxiety that are attached to this virus and its border crossing turn into a second epidemic that takes place solely in the mind. In other words, it is not only the virus that is contagious but also the fear and anxiety that are attached to it.[214] This can again be explained with Ahmed's understanding of emotion. As a subject can learn what to fear (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 215), this secondary pandemic can spread indefinitely and disconnect itself from the pandemic that originally caused it as the suffering subjects learn to fear ever more things, leading to anxiety. The reason for this might be the performative aspect of emotions. This means that it is not necessarily the object, in this case the virus, that causes anxiety (albeit in this case this might very likely be the case) but rather the act of attaching special feelings to this object. In other words, the virus "becomes a shared 'object of feeling'" (13) and as such causes anxiety. Additionally, the virus elicits political and social actions that further increase anxiety as they directly influence the characters' living conditions – targeting their body/possessions, livelihood and identity (see also chapter 4.1).

This contagious quality of anxiety is then also caused by the underlying uncertainty of the situation. One character in the play who openly addresses this anxiety is Jamie. He tells Lisa that all the animals are healthy and that there was no physical virus to begin with: "[t]he only thing you are infected with is fear. Fear is poisonous and contagious. They are scaring you so you stay in your place, so you burn and eat and kill and don't notice it because it pacifies you. Because you're scared to ask – why? And being compliant might taste good but it fucking rots your insides" (S. Smith, *Human Animals* 78). Although Jamie speaks of fear here, it is, strictly speaking, anxiety that he describes: it does not have a single clear object – the characters simply do not know what is going on around them – but rather is an overwhelming conglomeration of multiple objects, such as the virus, the uncertainty over how it spreads and who or what can carry it, the sudden breakdown of society and the destruction of public and private spaces. While Jamie's theory seems plausible, so does the opinion of the people who do believe that the animals are infected. Similarly, the information that circulates about the virus (which solely sees animals as the origin and carriers of the disease and does

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214 The extent of this varies: the anxiety that is attached to a virus that can literally infect anybody – as is typical of a pandemic – is bigger than the anxiety and fear that is connected to a virus that only infects groups of people – as seen in epidemics.

not question human involvement at all) is contradictory and hence highly unreliable: there are claims the virus is not airborne (60) and claims that it is airborne (68), while others say it spreads through the soil or water (53) or by merely looking at animals (36). It seems that the virus could be everywhere, lurking in the soil and spreading to all kinds of animals, from cockroaches in the street to lions in the zoo.

This uncertainty is then caused by a mixture of scaremongering and panic on the one hand and doubt about the reasons the authorities may have for destroying nature on the other hand. The act of scaremongering is often highly politicised. Especially Jamie and Alex question the political motives of the cleansing of human society from nature. Alex for instance, argues with her mother about the impending burning down of a park:

> **Nancy:** Children play in that park. Do you want more
> children getting sick? They've started closing
> schools, Alex. They're worried it might be in the
> soil now, and if it's in the soil it's in the water.
> **Alex:** That's not true. The newspapers are fear-
> mongering. You know they've wanted that park
> gone for years. It's valuable land. Land where they
> can build shopping malls and flats. It's just an
> excuse. They're spreading fear to get what they
> want. It's what they always do.
> **Nancy:** Why should I believe your idea against what
> everyone else is saying? Frankly, I think they
> should burn all the parks to the ground! (S. Smith, *Human Animals* 53)

While it remains unclear whom Alex refers to as *they*, it is very likely she means politicians. The misinformation about what is happening and what means are necessary to contain the virus leads to further anxiety and reflects a politics that is oscillating between scaremongering and inaction.

This confusion and uncertainty is aesthetically represented in the way the boundaries between the scenes are blurred. In the playtext, the dialogues often overlap and different conversations are joined together. This can be seen, for instance, in a scene in which Alex returns to John after being evicted from the park against whose destruction she had protested while, simultaneously, Lisa talks to her boss Si about the virus and tells him what he wants to hear:

> **John:** Come in. Come in. I thought you were... I
> thought... your feet. They're bleeding. Where are
> your shoes?
> **Alex:** They ripped them off my feet.
> *Pause.*
> **John:** Who did? Why did they?

Si: Let people know it's best to report rather than be
reported... about any strays. My neighbour was
keeping three pet parakeets and he had an
'accident' while they were confiscating his birds.
He has his jaw wired shut now. Stupid bastard. No
need to look so worried.
Lisa: Oh. No. I've never liked animals anyway – too
much... saliva.
Alex: I ran. I just ran.
Through the police. Through the... I slipped past
them all and as I ran I could hear people scream
and I just... kept running. I didn't even turn
around to look...
I thought I was braver, I thought I could handle it.
But... (S. Smith, *Human Animals* 67)

Through the presentation, in quick succession of incompatible bits of dialogue the characters' different positions are juxtaposed and merge, while all of them are still in the dark as to what the real source of danger is: animals and the virus or the authorities, who act in increasingly brutal ways. Characters like Jamie fuel doubt on the authorities' motives when he says "[p]eople are turning on each other. It's not the animals drawing blood, it's people against people now. There are no civilians in this war. Not any more" (86). The representation of different reactions towards the catastrophe in close proximity creates a heightened sense of uncertainty about the epidemic, as characters like Lisa are increasingly drawn between her boss, who is benefitting from the turmoil, and her partner, who is questioning the reality of the virus in the first place. By juxtaposing these different opinions, Smith's writing powerfully highlights how the uncertainty about the virus leads to fear and anxiety, especially given that anxiety is caused by the accumulation of (fearful) objects and, in *Human Animals*, also of contradictory opinions and events. The merging of different dialogues then also formally underpins the anxiety-inducing uncertainty.

Further, the anxiety in the play is causing isolation. This is a typical consequence of anxiety. As Bourke observes, "[a]nxiety states tend to make people withdraw from one another, unlike fear states, which are more liable to draw people together, either for comfort or to defend themselves more effectively against the danger" (191). Bourke further explains that states of anxiety rather lead to the implementation of "individualistic solutions," while states of fear are more prone to action in "associative groups" (191). In contrast to *Foxfinder*, where the fox has already been designated as the enemy, the situation in *Human Animals* is much more obscure and thus the characters apply "individualistic solutions" instead of one collective approach to the virus, which again echoes Bauman's words: "it is

left now to individuals to seek, find and practise individual solutions to socially produced troubles [using] resources that are blatantly inadequate to the task" (*Liquid Fear* 136; see also chapter 4.1). While Lisa is trying to go on with her normal life – for instance, she desperately tries to bake a cake for sweet tooth Friday although the world has already descended into a near apocalyptic scenario (Pham, par. 15), which again resembles the way the characters in *Pastoral* react to their own dystopia –, Jamie starts to breed the animals in spite of government orders to destroy all animals in order to stop the spreading of the virus. Alex's unsuccessful protest against the burning down of a park is a similar act of rebellion. Si, as a manager in a big company, benefits from the virus and increases his income while he is simultaneously lonely. John is, like Si, looking for solace in a bar and tries to use sex as an outlet for his suppressed feelings, while Nancy is depressed, grieves her deceased husband and tries to kill herself in course of the play. Thus, all six characters employ different approaches in dealing with the new virus – all of which seem to fail in the end (similar to the approaches adopted in *X*).

All the play's sources and configurations of anxiety – from ecological destruction to the political agenda to contain the virus, to the fuelling of the characters' anxiety, to the insecurity, uncertainty and isolation this causes – are summarised in a scene in which a dialogue between Si and John merges with the chorus that projects these topics onto the audience in a metatheatrical manner:

> *They're quietly pouring petrol on the bushes*
> **Si:**   I'm just looking for some company.
> *And they'll light them at night*
> *So no one has to know.*
> **John:**   I think you better look somewhere else.
> *The sound of birds calling*
> *Mice are chewing through their own veins*
> > > > *I can't stop watching*
> *Frogs are calmly laying eggs in cold baths*
> > > > *I can't stop watching*
> *Dead flies all along the window ledge*
> > > > *I can't stop watching*
> *I can't.*
> *Is that the smell of skin burning?*
> *A body of a dead mouse rolls across the floor of the bus*
> > > > *The smell of stagnant water*
> > > *A child cries somewhere a little too close*
> *A dog yelps and snaps*
> *The sound of metal on metal and glass and screaming*
> *and crying*
> *and screaming*
> *and then silence* [...]

> *But it's not the type of silence that feels like a void,*
> *a nothingness, it's the type of silence that is so*
> *thick it makes you choke.* (S. Smith, *Human Animals* 30 – 31)

Firstly, this scene depicts the destruction of nature, which goes up in flames.[215] Secondly, the scene shows the isolation of the characters, at times caused by the different approaches they have to the virus and by the different ways the virus affects their lives. Where Si reveals that he is lonely, he is rejected by John who is, at times, repulsed by Si's profiting from the virus (at one point Si wants to invest in incinerators because "it will be good for business"; (52). Thirdly, the scene gives an indication of how the virus might actually affect animals, which begin to destroy themselves. Fourthly, silence is described as one so "thick it makes you choke," which links it to the phenomenology of anxiety as a conglomerate that chokes the characters/audience and leaves them in a void of nothingness and thus speechless. And finally, the scene is strongly metatheatrical, as can be seen from the repeated *"I can't stop watching."* What is being watched is, of course, the destruction of nature, in which the audience is thus implicated as bystanders. In the 2016 premiere production of the play this was realised in a hamster cage-like design that included "a huge Perspex window demarcating the inside and the outside" (Pham, par. 7),[216] so the play's crisis could unfold behind a window through which splatters of blood, ash and people in hazard suits could be seen. Thus, in the end, "[t]he interplay of the visual and the audible seems to suggest that, while the double glazing may protect the characters from direct physical harm, no amount of isolation could shield them from the pervasive anxiety of a world suddenly turned upside down and plagued by fear" (Pham, par. 8).[217]

Ultimately, in Smith's play the virus and the anxiety merge into one in the same manner the animals and humans metamorphose into the eponymous human animals. While the play is, at times, undoubtedly humorous and filled with irony and jokes – as Sierz observes, during the play "[w]e laugh in the face of disaster" ("*Human Animals*") – this changes at the end, when animals, humans and virus become one and the virus, or rather the feelings attached to it, spreads to the audience. Alex's words, spoken to Lisa, are also directed at the audience: "It's just... important

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215 This scene is then reminiscent not only of Eccleshare's *Pastoral*, where the park is concreted over in order to contain the further spreading of plants and trees, but also of Churchill's *Far Away* that, at the end of the play, likewise imagines a global war between different groups of humans, animals and the weather.
216 Ironically, Plexiglas windows were also used as a shield to prevent contagion during Covid-19.
217 For a comparison of the 2016 stage design with a panopticon-like situation of surveillance, see also Pham (par. 9).

to watch the things that scare you. Are you watching? Or are you protesting?" (S. Smith, *Human Animals* 93). In this way, just like at the end of *The Children*, an aesthetic shift to a collective 'we' that includes the audience takes place. *Human Animals* thus is not only about a virus that causes anxiety and, because of its attendant uncertainty, unpredictability and isolating quality, leads to various different approaches to cope with both the virus and anxiety alike – none of which, however, really seem to stop the spreading of the virus – but it also shows how virus and anxiety become one. In the end, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the physical virus spread by the animals and the mental virus that is anxiety. The latter, however, is bound to live on beyond the confines of the play – with and through the audience.

Although written before the Covid-19 pandemic, *Foxfinder* and *Human Animals* both stage a pandemic-like state. While in King's play the disease is human-made and utilised to distract from a totalitarian regime, the reasons for the pandemic in Smith's play are more ambiguous. Both plays show the workings of negative feedback loops: in *Foxfinder*, the population's anxieties are exploited when they are channelled onto the foxes as scapegoats that distract from the shortcomings of the regime. In *Human Animals*, a physical virus that originally came from animals is transferred to humans and generates anxiety in the characters that itself turns into a secondary 'virus.' Like in all other plays that have been analysed in this book, the mechanisms to cope with anxiety fail. Instead, both plays make clear that anxiety itself is the pandemic they are dealing with.

8 Conclusion: After Anxiety?

What should have become clear over the course of this study is that anxiety is an emotion that is hard to grasp. There is no unifying definition of anxiety: depending on whether the focus lies on a philosophical, psychological or sociological perspective its definition often fluctuates radically and although anxiety is different from fear, it is often not easy to differentiate both emotions, either from each other or from other sensations like pain, disgust or abjection. Moreover, anxiety is often paradoxical: it can be very personal and public, it can stimulate and paralyse – and it can do all of this sometimes simultaneously – and although it affects both mind and body its physical dimension is often not visible to a bystander. Nonetheless, while a portrayal of anxiety in the theatre is often complicated, I hope to have shown how this complex emotion can be put on page and stage. The key to such representations of anxiety is an understanding of its phenomenology, and above all of its three central characteristics. Firstly, anxiety is a state of mental emptiness or nothingness that is induced by the gathering of an ever-increasing amount of objects, as Ahmed describes it. While fear is caused by an object's approach – an object that can never be contained as it always eludes the subject – in anxiety the subject approaches various objects (which may or may not be fearful) and connects them. It is this process of accumulation that is causing anxiety while in fear, it is the object that is approaching that causes fear. This act of gathering objects until the subject is overwhelmed is reminiscent of Husserl's understanding of moods that colour all objects in the fore- and background, in this case with anxiety. This constitutes a first border crossing: anxiety leads to the feeling that the border of what can be perceived is crossed. However, this understanding of anxiety also leads to its inexpressibility: because no clear focus on any object is possible and the subject feels as if all objects elude it – thus leading to the *perception* that anxiety is a state of nothingness – the subject cannot talk about any of these objects in a meaningful way.

For the portrayal of anxiety in theatre and drama – a genre that relies on speech and dialogue – this attribute of anxiety is problematic. Therefore, it is important to also look at the second characteristic of anxiety, as it opens up a different avenue for the representation of anxiety: its close connection with other emotions and sensations, especially pain, disgust and abjection. Anxiety is connected to pain in that it is the anticipation of something painful that causes both fear and anxiety. Furthermore, both anxiety and pain are border-crossing entities, as it is the breaching of the body boundary (physically and mentally) that causes pain. However, in contrast to anxiety, pain has a much more physical component and can be staged more directly by showing wounds or acts of violence – something

that cannot be done as straightforwardly when it comes to anxiety. Similarly, anxiety can also be represented through disgust and abjection, which are likewise border-crossing entities where a subject is approached by something it rejects. Similar to anxiety, disgust and abjection are avoidance techniques and similar to pain, they are much more visual and thus easier to represent on page and stage.

Thirdly, apart from anxiety's nature as a conglomerate of objects and its close proximity with other sensations, anxiety is also characterised by its crossing of temporal borders. Fear – and given that the objects accumulated in anxiety are often fearful, the same also holds true for anxiety – is not only related to a possible pain but to a pain that will take place in the future, meaning that fear and anxiety are both directed at the future while their physical symptoms like heart palpitations take place in the present. Furthermore, anxiety does not just anticipate the future but rather is a state where a subject is afraid that an event from the future will pass it by and become its past without the possibility to react to it, a temporal structure that resembles that of the future anterior. Thus, anxiety shifts the natural order of past, present and future and liquidises these distinctions, which is another form of border crossing.

These characteristics are then also aesthetically represented in the plays that make up what I call the theatre of anxiety. Anxiety's primary inexpressibility through language is on the one hand encapsulated in the destruction of speech and communication that frequently coincides with states of anxiety in these plays and on the other hand compensated for with the affective displacement of anxiety with other, related sensations like pain, disgust and abjection. Meanwhile, the predominance of near-future dystopian plays reflects anxiety's complex temporality: such plays show a negative future that has already materialised and will not have been prevented. In this manner, they bring the anticipation of pain during stages of anxiety to stage and page.

At the heart of this project is the analysis of eight plays that represent the various topics of the theatre of anxiety. Although these topics often intersect – which is almost of necessity given anxiety's characteristic accumulation of multiple different objects, and hence of a variety of topics that are simultaneously charged with anxiety – each of these four chapters tried to channel the focus on one specific aspect of global anxieties. Chapter four focussed on political and social reasons for anxiety. It linked the already mentioned conglomerate of objects to Bauman's concept of liquid fear – I prefer the term liquid anxiety as more accurate in light of the phenomenology of fear and anxiety –, which connects anxiety with political and social crises. Further, I argued that the anticipated pain that is central to fear and anxiety is reflected in a society that is not prepared for the threats that are yet to come and that target body, mind, livelihood and identity. This was then demonstrated in my readings of both Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* and Zinnie

Harris's *How to Hold Your Breath* – two plays that represent anxiety on the individual and social level. In *Escaped Alone* vulnerability, uncertainty, isolation and anxiety are ingrained in the language of the play, where anxiety, pain, disgust and abjection meet the quotidian world of four septuagenarians. In *How to Hold Your Breath*, it is the storyworld that leads to the characters' vulnerability, uncertainty, isolation and anxiety. In both plays, anxiety is staged through the accumulation of more and more fearful scenarios – either in monologues or through the political collapse of the society in the play. At the heart of both plays is a sense of insecurity and isolation that increases the women protagonists' fears and anxiety. Further, what both plays have in common is the destruction of communication: although the women in *Escaped Alone* are physically together, their communication reveals that they are nonetheless isolated entities. The sisters in *How to Hold Your Breath* are likewise isolated as they cannot seem to communicate their worries to anyone and are, in the end, also separated from each other. Furthermore, anxiety is illustrated through various cases of border crossing in pain, disgust and abjection – either through stories or literally by crossing country borders and the border of the body. What both plays also share is the presentation of failed attempts to escape from anxiety, through storytelling in the former and through 'how two' books in the latter case. Finally, both plays rely on metatheatrical entities to allow for yet more border crossings in their dramatic configurations of anxiety: Mrs Jarrett in *Escaped Alone* is a transgressive figure that combines the mundane, internal world and the global external worlds while the Librarian, who is a border-crossing epic entity, transcends the storyworld and questions the dramatic form itself.

In chapter five, my focus shifts to representations of the ecological crisis in contemporary British drama. As impending ecological catastrophes might well lead to drastic changes to the negative in the conditions of human life on Earth, the connection between a sense of ecological crisis and anxiety seems clear and has indeed already been expressed in concepts like "solastalgia" (Albrecht, "Solastalgia") or "pre-traumatic stress syndrome" (Kaplan). Yet the ecological emergency is met with a strange lethargy and slowness to act, which might be explained by a prevailing state of anxiety: due to the act of gathering an increasing amount of objects in anxiety, the subject is overwhelmed and lapses into a state of paralysis. If action is taken, it is often connected to quick fixes: 'solutions' that either target the collateral damage only or that result in the 'consumption' of nature in the present and leave the task of repairing the damage that has been done to future generations. While the ecological destruction often happens on scales that far outlive the short duration of a play – or a human lifespan, for that matter – and thus the ecological crisis, similar to anxiety, is difficult to represent, the plays I analyse in chapter five have found different ways to circumvent both difficulties. Both Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* and Thomas Eccleshare's *Pastoral* look at the connection

between an unbalanced ecosystem, the frailty of the human body, anxiety and the lack of coping mechanisms to overcome this situation. In the plays the cause for anxiety either stems from radiation as a hyperobject that is incomprehensible and omnipresent or from nature as a hostile, incomprehensible and ubiquitously encroaching entity. The complex temporality of both anxiety and ecology is mirrored in the vast scales of radiation as a hyperobject or in the acceleration of nature's growth that challenges the scales of climate change and human consumption in *Pastoral*, a play that also captures the clash of past, present and future in its mode of 'pastoral dystopia.' What both plays have in common is that they depict the drawing up of ultimately useless borders against what causes anxiety: the creation of a radiation exclusion zone in *The Children* as an arbitrary delimitation of radioactivity and the building of a plastic wall to contain the threat of nature in *Pastoral.* Further, physical borders are crossed, either by radioactivity that causes physical pain in the retired scientists in Kirkwood's play or by hunger and wild animals in Eccleshare's play. The answer to these anxieties is then either denial/ disconnect or resorting to quick fixes and avoidance techniques or escape mechanisms that revert to past habits – all of which ultimately prove to be futile attempts to overcome both anxiety and the crisis the characters must face.

Chapter six has its focus on the intersection of anxiety with security and (lack of) control, fuelled by technological innovations and surveillance. In discussing how surveillance techniques and other modern technology is designed to counter anxiety, this chapter illustrates the impact of different technologies on the human body and mind. My analysis of Alistair McDowall's *X* and Stef Smith's *Girl in the Machine* shows that technological progress carries its own risks of failure and potential new anxieties. Both plays share a general longing for security and present audiences with protagonists that lack control in the face of their anxieties. In both plays technology is used to instil a sense of security in them – a security that takes recourse to a sphere that is removed from life on Earth. At the same time, in both plays communication between the characters comes to a standstill and language no longer connects but isolates the characters or, in *X*, breaks down entirely. Both plays stage the crossing of borders: *X*'s setting in a research base on Pluto plays with the crossing of outside and inside (it is set *in* the station in *outer* space), while Black Box in *Girl in the Machine* is an entity that crosses the very border of what being human means. Both plays then also show painful encounters, through Ray's suicide in McDowall's play or when Polly uploads herself in Smith's. In both plays temporality is disrupted, echoing the temporality of anxiety, and in both plays a sense of nothingness is employed as a possible escape mechanism from anxiety, in form of Gilda listening to nothingness outside the space station or in form of the nothingness that is created by Black Box. In both cases, this coping mechanism fails. While the technology that was supposed to save humanity in

X fails, it is not a failure of technology that becomes deadly in *Girl in the Machine* but rather its success that is threatening in and of itself. Whereas in *X* humans are still in control of technology at least insofar as they are still employing it for their needs, relying on the fact that it will respond to their commands, *Girl in the Machine* is at a point where technology has taken over, inserting itself into the human body or controlling it from the outside (Black Box).

My final analyses in chapter seven then turn their attention to pandemics and plagues, which, as the Covid-19 pandemic has only too poignantly shown, are prone to induce anxiety in large swathes of the population. My focus here, however, is on the way such anxiety spreads, caused by either plagues or viruses and can be utilised for political agendas by reducing anxiety to mere fear and singling out a scapegoat onto whom this fear is then projected. This mechanism, I have argued, is at the heart of Dawn King's *Foxfinder* and Stef Smith's *Human Animals*. While the plague in *Foxfinder* is only imaginary, the fear in the play is real and diverts the attention of the farmers and of the foxfinder himself away from the actual underlying problems. Although the reasons for the poor harvests might be manifold and complex to solve, the reduction of anxiety to mere fear that is directed towards the fox seems to bring momentary peace. When, in the end, Samuel acts in just the same way to process his grief for his dead son and instead of a fox kills the foxfinder, he utilises the fox and reveals the absurdity of this act of scapegoating and perhaps transfers his grief to other emotions, like rage (similar to Mrs Jarrett in *Escaped Alone*). In *Human Animals*, on the other hand, a virus starts to spread from animals and might affect humans. And while some characters doubt its existence and believe that the virus is only a scam and the animals only a scapegoat that distracts from society's real problems, this does not stop the (imagined) virus from spreading anxiety – a form of mental virus that parallels the physical one. Smith's play then depicts isolated characters that employ different coping strategies that all seem to fail as the virus appears to spread inexorably – until it reaches the audience through the play's use of metatheatrical means, which echoes similar techniques in *Escaped Alone, How to Hold Your Breath* and *Pastoral*. Fuelled by the pandemic, the portrayal of anxiety in *Human Animals* recapitulates and combines the major topics of this study – economic and social anxiety and isolation, ecological catastrophe, as well as surveillance – and so once more shows anxiety's multifaceted and ubiquitous nature.

While all eight plays differ in their themes and aesthetics, there are some similarities that can be found in all four categories I have grouped the plays into and that may also be found in other representatives of the theatre of anxiety. Thus, all eight plays share similar configurations of anxiety, which emerges as a pervasive factor in their fore- and background: characters experience a sense of isolation, often stemming from the inability to communicate with other people; lin-

ear temporality is frequently disrupted so as to evoke anxiety's temporality as an anticipated pain in the future; consequently, the future is constantly apprehended as negative; anxiety is experienced as a sense of being overwhelmed by too many, possibly painful, objects; representations of anxiety are characterised by the breakdown of language or by the plays taking recourse to disgust-eliciting and painful border crossings; any attempts to escape from anxiety fail; and, ultimately, the characters do not succeed in overcoming their anxiety or finding meaningful solutions to the underlying problems.

What all these plays also show is that anxiety is an inevitable part of human experience. Given the multiple crises the world is facing in the early twenty-first century, it is not likely that it will recede into the background anytime soon – clearly, if "a complete elimination of fear or risk is a social fantasy" (Zevnik 237) then the same is the case for the elimination of anxiety. The ecological catastrophe, for instance, is a topic that will haunt the next generations, regardless of whether we act now and try to contain the damage done to the natural environment (which is something that is not happening) or not, and it is a topic that will continue to cause fear and anxiety.[218] In Morton's words, the future of anxiety is guaranteed because hyperobjects, like oil or radioactivity, will last: "[s]uppose that future humans achieve a society that is less materialistic than ours. This will probably be the case, if only to prevent human extinction. They will be less materialistic, but the actually existing produces of profound materialism will persist, haunting them like inverse ghosts" (*Ecological Thought* 131). Thus, if anxiety is an emotion that persists and that will haunt us in the future, is there anything that can be gained from it?

While the negative aspects of anxiety predominate in the theatre of anxiety, this does not mean that anxiety is a solely destructive emotion. I would like to end this study with a question posed by Bettina Bergo who writes: "beyond the search for anxiolytics of all varieties, we rarely ask whether anxiety has some value – indeed, whether there is something to be learned from anxiety that might even make it endurable" (2). In answering this question, it is important to distinguish between anxiety as understood by psychologists and anxiety in a phil-

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218 In March 2023, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released its latest report, which makes for dire reading. The report, which is "almost certain to be the last such assessment while the world still has a chance of limiting global temperature rises to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, the threshold beyond which our damage to the climate will rapidly become irreversible" (Harvey), states with very high confidence that "[t]here is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all" and that "[s]ome future changes are unavoidable and/or irreversible but can be limited by deep, rapid and sustained global greenhouse gas emissions reduction" (IPCC). The report itself just states facts and gives scientific assessment – yet it is enough to cause anxiety in any reader.

osophical and sociological sense. While a person that is affected by panic and anxiety attacks that hinder them from living a self-determined life might not see any advantage in being in this constant state of anxiety, this is different in philosophical investigations of anxiety. Søren Overgaard, for instance, sees the potential of anxiety in its capacity to question everyday life. For him, "*[a]nxiety is something that makes the obvious everyday life less obvious, and thus points the way to a phenomenological inquiry into that life*" (29). By rendering everything "familiar problematic and uncomfortable" (29), anxiety has the ability to disrupt the mundane in everyday life and by doing so, force us to find new solutions (see also Lafontaine). Thus, while anxiety is a negative emotion that can paralyse us (see chapter 5), it can also help us to find constructive new solutions and so to rethink everyday life (Bergo 35; see also Pihkala). However, in order to gain something from anxiety, it is important to first understand its underlying mechanisms: "anxiety also motivates at more reflective levels, provided we understand *what* we are feeling, its complexity, and its implications" (475). This is also what Naomi Klein demands in the face of the climate catastrophe and all the crises attached to what she calls "disaster capitalism":

> But what should we do with this fear that comes from living on a planet that is dying, made less alive every day? First, accept that it won't go away. That it is a fully rational response to the unbearable reality that we are living in a dying world, a world that a great many of us are helping to kill, by doing things like making tea and driving to the grocery store and yes, okay, having kids. Next, use it. Fear is a survival response. Fear makes us run, it makes us leap, it can make us act superhuman. But we need somewhere to run *to.* Without that, the fear is only paralyzing. So the real trick, the only hope, really, is to allow the terror of an unlivable future to be balanced and soothed by the prospect of building something much better than many of us have previously dared hope. ("Shock" 28)

Although Klein refers to fear in her description of the energy that can be released when fear is converted into action and hope, I would argue that the same is the case for anxiety.

In giving anxiety a more hopeful nuance, I would like to return to Bloch, who describes anxiety as an expectant emotion which is characterised by its anticipatory character (see chapter 2.3). In general, for Bloch, emotions always have a counter emotion and for anxiety, this counter emotion is hope: "the most important expectant emotion, the most authentic emotion of longing and thus of self, always remains in all of this – hope" (75). In other words, anxiety carries hope at its core. As Bloch continues, "[h]ope, this expectant counter-emotion against anxiety and fear, *is* [...] *the most human of all mental feelings and only accessible to men, and it also refers to the furthest and brightest horizons.* It suits that appetite in the mind which the subject not only has, but of which, as unfulfilled subject, it

still essentially consists" (75). While being hopeful in spite of anxiety does not necessarily mean that this leads to action – when it comes to climate change, for instance, being hopeful may also induce a mentality of waiting for the problem to solve itself, which will not happen[219] – the juxtaposition of being anxious and being hopeful may nonetheless prove helpful in the face of the crises yet to come.

The same is the case for contemporary theatre. While the dystopian trope in many of the plays helps to cast the storyworld in an anxiety-inducing light, there is also something utopian in these plays. As Klaić writes, "[d]ystopian drama frightens us with its vision but at the same time reawakens utopian instincts and urges the rejection of dystopian threats" (188). Within contemporary theatre, there is a trend to juxtapose both notions, the dystopian and the utopian in order "to re-engage with hopeful narratives" (Tönnies and Voigts 5; see also Fragkou). The same seems to be the case for the plays that are analysed in this study: while all plays focus on different nuances of anxiety, they do not end in it. In an anticlimactic ending, Mrs Jarrett in *Escaped Alone* thanks the hosts for the tea and "went home" (Churchill, *Escaped Alone* 179), which implies that she has a home she can return to. Dana in *How to Hold Your Breath* "*wakes up with a sharp intake of breath*" (Harris 159) and is asked to give her presentation, which implies that she has another chance at a new life, in Alexandria or elsewhere. While this might not necessarily mean that this new life is any better than the last, there is still hope that it might be and there clearly is a chance to change it. The last word in *Pastoral* is said by the bride – a character that itself stands for renewal and a new life: "[t]he world seems fresh, full and alive. Birds are singing, the sun is shining. And we have a whole new future ahead of us" (Eccleshare 72). While this is rather ironic as Arthur and Moll face near certain death, there is still a glimpse of hope in the face of nature's growth. Likewise, McDowall's *X* ends in "*the ambient sound of a forest. The birds sing and whistle to each other*" (McDowall, *X* 156), which represents the hope of a new life. Similarly, *Human Animals* ends on the notion that "*[a] new life will begin again*" (S. Smith, *Human Animals* 105), altered from the last, where humans and animals merge into one. While for Samuel and Judith in *Foxfinder* it is not necessarily a new life they will live, they at least rid themselves of the foxfinder, which provides them momentary relief. However, this does not mean that all plays end in a hopeful way. In some cases, the end remains ambiguous: whereas it is unclear if Polly in *Girl in the Machine* really lives a new life of promised bliss uploaded into the data cloud, Owen has to find a new way

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219 For this reason Greta Thunberg in her speech at the Davos World Economic Forum in 2019 insisted: "I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house was on fire. Because it is" (World Economic Forum; see also Attinger 3).

to cope with the destruction left behind by those who uploaded themselves. In a similar vein, the three scientists in *The Children* have to find a way to deal with the ecological destruction they helped cause, as the past is catching up with them – yet even in *The Children*'s ending can utopian aspects be found in a reading in which the characters' "choice to take action and responsibility, however small and however late, inspires hope (Hoydis, "Slow Unfolding" 93; see also Farnell, "Utopian Dreams"). Thus, in spite of all the doom and gloom, the theatre of anxiety affords its audiences with the occasional glimmer of hope and so turns anxiety into an emotion that may be productive of change.

Without doubt, in the third decade of the twenty-first century there are more than enough reasons for humans to feel anxiety. After all, this as yet young century has already seen multiple global crises: the prospect of the formation of new political power blocks and international tensions, terrorism, wars and genocide; the rise of populist and authoritarian leaders worldwide; financial crises and recessions and the hardship they cause for many; the ecological catastrophe and all its concomitant effects, like the mass extinction of species, fires, droughts and other extreme weather events; technological innovations that can be abused, for instance to control whole populations; and the Covid-19 pandemic that almost overnight threw a spanner in the works of life as we knew it. Little wonder, then, that "permacrisis," defined as "an extended period of instability and insecurity" – and anxiety, one is tempted to add – was named word of the year 2022 by *Collins Dictionary* (Sherwood, "Permacrisis"). As Klein observes, "a crisis this big, this all-encompassing, [...] changes everything. It changes what we can do, what we can hope for, what we can demand from ourselves and our leaders. [...] And it means that a whole lot of stuff we have been told is impossible has to start happening right away" ("Shock" 28). However, this can only be achieved if we understand our fears and anxieties – something for which this study hopes to at least lay the foundations. Thus, despite all its negative implications, it is important to remember anxiety's hopeful quality and turn it into positive action – after all, anxiety does not have to be the end.

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