Magdalena Górska

BREATHING MATTERS

FEMINIST INTER-SECTIONAL POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY
To all of you who help me breathe.

At the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Linköping University, research and doctoral studies are carried out within broad problem areas. Research is organized in interdisciplinary research environments and doctoral studies mainly in graduate schools. Jointly, they publish the series Linköping Studies in Arts and Science. This thesis comes from Tema Genus, the Department of Thematic Studies – Gender Studies.

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Breathing Matters was a transformative project for me. It taught me to develop feminist theory in an empirical manner. I was interested in understanding the agency of human bodies and relations of poststructuralism and new materialism, and breathing helped me to work through these interests while articulating the politics of fighting for breathable lives in their specificity and structurality. When I started this project, I told myself that I would be lucky and happy if I managed to get a little bit closer to developing my voice. Breathing Matters opened this path for me in a way I could never have imagined. By challenging me regarding my own breathing, my own assumptions and the need to articulate the relevance of this project for feminist studies, breathing became the wind in my sails – sometimes steady and moving me firmly forward, sometimes leaving me at a standstill that was far from tranquil, and sometimes moving me in gusts that were exciting and intoxicating but on other occasions challenged the limits of my capabilities.

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Linköping, April 2016
Magdalena Górska
CHAPTER 1

HOW BREATHING MATTERS?
Breathing may seem to be an unusual research concern for feminist studies. Since I started working with breathing in 2010, in different disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts, my work has often been met with surprise. Has the ivory tower of academia gone mad allowing for research in humanities that focuses on such a bizarre topic to take place? How is breathing relevant for humanities and social sciences at large or for feminist studies in particular? How can breathing be pertinent for any kind of politics and ethics? In such conversations, therefore, my engagement with breathing usually, at first, has inspired an exhalation of suspicion; in better cases it has inspired amusement or curiosity. But it also brought forward questions, associations, examples, personal stories, short connections or long conversations during which interlocutors started opening up to their own, often (but not always) taken-for-granted, practices of breathing.

In such engagements, breathing opened up a space of wonder – wonder that challenges assumptions about “proper” scientific or political objects. Wonder that inspires connections across diverse cultural imaginaries, subjectivities, embodiments, and intersubjective engagements. Wonder that diffuses boundaries between scientific disciplines and between science, art, politics and everyday practices of living. All of a sudden, the wonder of breathing opens scapes of new relationalities of personal and collective imaginations, natural and cultural entanglements, bodily agencies and affective engagements.

The first RESPITE that opens Breathing Matters strives to articulate the significance of breathing as a lively and deadly force that is part of the political. “I can’t breathe” were Eric Garner’s last words when he died in the police chokehold on July 14, 2014 in Staten Island, New York City. His last words – which he repeated 11 times while being forcefully held facedown by police officers on the sidewalk for suspicion of a violation he did not commit and for the expression of his civil rights – became a forceful articulation of the racial structures in the US of which racialized police brutality and operations of the prison industrial complex are only a couple of examples. In the context of contemporary US antiracist and social justice struggles advocated by Black Lives Matter, “I can’t breathe” became a political slogan that has more than symbolic meaning. Breathing becomes an articulation of the suffocating operations of social norms and power relations. And, crucially, such operations – as the Black Lives Matter movement makes clear in its problematization of the power-evasive slogan “all lives matter” – have differential effects when systemic racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism and more forms of social discrimination and their relations make different lives (not) matter differently with different consequences for their breathability. Therefore, although breathing is often imperceptible as part of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, I argue here for its political forcefulness. And while breathing is a phenomenon shared by all living and breathing (human) beings, in Breathing Matters I stress the importance of its differential and intersectional understanding and significance because it does matter whose breath matters (and whose does not) and how.

Moreover, in Breathing Matters I work with a nonreductive understanding of breathing in which I do not want to reduce it to one particular definition, one phenomenon or one kind of feminist politics and ethics; Breathing Matters is instead a matter of very specific interventions.

My overall research question focuses on not only how bodies are political as social constructions or as actors in politics, but first and foremost on how bodies enact politics. I also ask how embodiments and affectivities enact vulnerabilities and their intersectional relations with power. My aim is to contribute to developing breathable feminist politics through engagements with breathing enacted in different kinds of vulnerable lives.

The analytical examples I chose to unfold my reflections on
feminist intersectional politics of vulnerability relate to pneumoconiosis (known as coal miners’ “black lung disease”) and phone sex breath (part 1), and breathing in anxieties and panic attacks (part 2). These particular enactments of breathing are discussed in terms of corpomaterial (see definition in chapter 2) negotiations of two concepts that I find central for contemporary feminist debates – intersectionality and vulnerability.

Intersectionality has been a crucial analytical and political concept in feminism for decades, and today it is both contested and embraced in feminist studies. For me, feminism is an approach that focuses on an analysis of unequal social power relations and on the development of social justice tools and strategies. As such, feminism, in my opinion, cannot operate without intersectionality, as it is an analytical and political concept that analyzes the dynamics and differential operations of power relations. Moreover, I understand the analysis of power relations as a matter of identification of normative practices of privileging and deprivileging, in which vulnerability is one of the central aspects of those dynamics: some lives are breathable, others are suffocating; for many, keeping on breathing is a matter of daily struggle. Keeping on breathing is a political matter in which vulnerability is central to the enactments of intersectional politics.

Moreover, while politics are usually associated with conceptual contestations, struggles, strength and social organizing, in Breathing Matters I am interested in the ways in which politics are enacted as vulnerable and in quotidian corpomaterial actions. This interest is not in contrast to the prevailing understanding of politics; I strive, however, to add to this yet another aspect of political agentiality – bodily agentiality. It is the material agency of the bodies – matterwork, as I call it (see definition in chapter 4) – through which I develop intersectional politics of vulnerability enacted in quotidian corpomaterial agencies and discuss their transformative power.

**ATMOSPHERES OF BREATHING**

While breathing is still a wonder-inducing subject for research in the social sciences and humanities, Breathing Matters is not situated in a vacuum. Most of the books that create the contemporary scape of breathing scholarship appeared in the later phases of the development of this project, but they clearly indicate that breathing is an inspiring phenomenon for diverse disciplinary and interdisciplinary research.

In the context of feminist studies, breathing is an infrequent subject. But as there is always an exception to a rule, there exists some feminist scholarship that addresses breathing. The work of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray (1999) is such an exception. In *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, Irigaray criticizes Western metaphysics – and the limitations of the work of Heidegger in particular – for being “founded in the solid” (1999, 2), which has as a consequence, for example, the exclusion of sexual difference from philosophy. Instead, Irigaray proposes an aerial intervention in which the focus is not only on the element of earth but also, and centrally, on the element of air, which is understood as a mediation of logos. Irigaray explores the role of air and breathing further in her book, *Between East and West* (2002), in which through a discussion of pre-Arian traditions of India, she argues for the need for the cultivation of breath as a way to conceive of the relationality of individuation and community, and sexual difference beyond logocentrism and patriarchy. Working with earth and breathing, Irigaray strives to imagine a new philosophy of spirituality, embodiment and sexual difference.

Irigaray’s work, however, is often criticized for its essentialism, heteronormativity and orientalism. The edited volume *Breathing with Luce Irigaray* (Škof and Holmes 2013) notes these important pitfalls of Irigaray’s work while embracing her philosophy of air, breath and breathing in order to develop an ethics of breath in a time which Irigaray called “the age of breath” (Irigaray 2004). The volume, hence, strives to further develop feminist scholarship on breathing by offering an analysis of breath in relation to (human) embodiment as well as relations of nature, culture, spirituality, sexual difference and interculturality. This understanding of breath and breathing prevails also in Lenart Škof’s (2015) *Breath of Proximity* in which, working with Irigaray’s philosophy, the author develops a theory of intersubjectivity, hospitality and nonviolence in order to propose a respiratory philosophy, which combines Western and Asian approaches and practices, and develop an embodied ethics.
But Irigaray's work is inspirational not only in philosophy but also in film studies. Davina Quinlivan's (2012) *The Place of Breath in Cinema* offers an Irigaray-inspired analysis which utilizes her concepts of the schema of spatiality, corporeality and inter-subjectivity in order to provide a cinematic analysis of embodiment, sensoriality and spectatorship. In Quinlivan's original analysis, breath becomes a filmically significant visual and acoustic phenomenon.

Apart from Irigaray and scholarship inspired by her work, breathing has also entered twentieth and early twenty-first century scholarship in several more instances. In philosophy, breath become significant as part of an analysis of air. In *Air and Dreams*, originally published in 1943, Gaston Bachelard (2011) offers an analysis of the concepts of will and imagination through the movement and dynamics of air. Air functions here as a space for articulating the mutual relationality of the human and the material world which are in active and responsive relation with each other. Conducting extensive poetic aerial analysis, Bachelard develops a philosophy of poetic imagination. Air has also been crucial for contemporary philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who in *Terror from the Air* (2009), discusses air in relation to atmosphere which in the twentieth century, he claims, became a space of warfare and breath became a weapon. Sloterdijk makes his argument through analysis of the twentieth century's development and usage of poisonous gases, air bombing and the airplane attacks of 9/11. Analyzing air as a space of conflict, Sloterdijk proposes a concept of *atmoterrorism* in which warfare consists of attacking the "enemy's primary, ecologically dependent vital functions: respiration, central nervous regulations, and sustainable temperature and radiation conditions" (2009, 16).

Sloterdijk's fundamental interest in air as one of the worldly elements also continues *Bubbles* (2011) – the first part of his trilogy called *Spheres* – in which he develops his atmospheric philosophy through a discussion of art, science and metaphysics.

Recently, air also became of interest in the field of environmental humanities. Steven Connor (2010) articulates the environmentalist relevance of air in his book *The Matter of Air*, in which he offers an interdisciplinary historiography of air and its meanings throughout the last three centuries. *Aerial Life*, by Peter Adey (2010), also analyzes the meanings of air but in relation to aerial politics such as air travel and its cultural, social and political effects and transformations. Through analyzing the history of aviation, Adey proposes an aerial theory of mobility and social change. His second book, *Air: Nature and Culture* (2014), moreover, conducts an analysis of air as an artistic, literary, evolutionary and technological force. This visually rich book offers cultural analysis of air’s lively and deadly forcefulness. Timothy Choy’s (2011) *Ecologies of Comparison* develops an ethnographic analysis of air in relation to its quality and argues for air to be a matter of medical and political concern.

In *Going Aerial*, edited by Monika Bakke (2006), an interdisciplinary collective of authors offers another, posthumanist, analysis of air. In order to analyze air’s liveliness not only as atmosphere for respiration or warfare but also as a matter of communication, the book engages with air as a matter of biosemiotic and technological information circulation discussed through a wide range of air-focused artistic formats. The edited volume *The Life of Air* (Bakke, n.d.) takes this challenge further and proposes a biosemiotic analysis of air as a space of human and nonhuman existence, "a space where species meet" (Bakke, n.d., para. 1). In an environmental humanist and posthumanist spirit, the newly published edited volume *Elemental Ecocriticism* (Cohen and Duckert 2015) also offers an interdisciplinary analysis of the elemental vitality that decenters the human and articulates an environmental agentiality in which cultural and material spheres are analyzed as mutually constitutive.

Finally, breathing has been addressed in relation to social struggles and politics. One of the most significant concepts in that field is *combat breathing*, articulated in 1959 by Franz Fanon (1965) in relation to civil rights and anticolonial struggles. It has also been recently discussed in the first issue of *Somatechnics* (Sullivan and Murray 2011), which focused on the relations of embodiment, racism and structural violence. Also, Shulamith Firestone (1998), in *Airless Spaces*, has articulated breathing, or rather the suffocation of hospital institutionalization, in relation to politics of affect in states of crisis. The work of Adriana Cavarero (2005), *For More than One Voice*, which is inspired by the political theory of Hannah Arendt, focuses, on the other hand, on the power of voice and argues for a politics and philosophy of
voice in which logos and politics are embodied in plurality of corporeal uniqueness. Breath and social politics have also entered the field of science and technology studies: Lundy Braun (2014) in *Breathing Race into the Machine* discusses the history of the spirometer and the role this medical instrument played in the naturalization and essentialization of racial and ethnic difference, in establishing and maintaining white supremacy, and in the development of racial bias in science.

Although breathing often inspires wonder and suspicion regarding its relevance for the social sciences and the humanities, I believe that the already existing body of scholarship briefly discussed above not only indicates how the topic of breathing and air have gained a growing intellectual, environmental, cultural and political impact but also its potential to become an interdisciplinary field on its own terms.

**NONREDUCTIVENESS**

As is already pertinent from the discussion above, breathing can be engaged with in multiple ways, and in *Breathing Matters* I attend to breathing in relation to its human corpomaterial commonality and as a phenomenon that has specific and pertinent patterns of operation across differences while being forcefully differential in its enactments.

In the commonality of its enactments, breathing brings human corpomaterial subjects into life. Living humans (but not only humans) are always engaged in breathing, in doing breathing, in living breathing: there is no human life without breathing; there is no science, social criticism or politics without breathing. Living humans are always already embodied, always-already breathing beings. And while breathing is a force of life, it is also a matter of dying, in which, for example, the oxygenation of every breath has its physiological toll. Breathing is also an event of bringing the outside in and the inside out. As a continuous metabolism of air in the movement through the lungs; in the flow of oxygen through the veins, organs and cells; and in the exhalation that lets the breath out, breathing opens the horizon of what it means to be a human breathing subject beyond conventional boundaries of human embodiment.

But even as a force that is shared by all breathing beings, breathing is not a homogenous phenomenon. For example, breathing is enacted differently in relation to lung specificities such as breathing with one partially collapsed lung, the diverse materialities of lungs such as those with cancer or coal dust sediments, different sizes of lungs and their respiratory capacities. Breathing also has different rhythms and flows as different bodies – according to their age, constitution and size – breathe at different rates and depths. Breath can also be enacted with diverse respiratory aids and technologies such as respiratory ventilators; or in relation to living in atmospheres where oxygen stations, which started to appear in heavily air-polluted metropolises such as Beijing, become a necessity; or even as part of a privileged lifestyle, as newly appearing oxygen bars aspire to become part of the contemporary entertainment and well-being industry.

Breathing is also a transformative phenomenon in terms of the diverse ways it is understood. In Western perspectives, breath is considered to be enacted through inhalation and exhalation, and in Pranayama, for example, breathing is considered to consist of four parts: inhalation, an airfull pause after inhalation, exhalation, and an air-empty pause after exhalation. Breath also has different meanings within, for example, theories and practices of yoga, pain control and in philosophical, mystic and religious thought in which breathing is associated predominantly with spirits, Gods and the immateriality of life. And even when considered material, the way breathing is described, bounded and conceptualized also differs if it is approached from the perspective of physiology, anatomy, biochemistry or physics - classifications through which it both escapes as well as becomes intelligible. Furthermore, breathing also transforms depending on whether it is understood as human or nonhuman activity. Its understanding and material enactments change according to the actors one follows – be they human, animal, over- or under-water beings (such as sea mammals or water plants), or plants, leaves and soil as well as veins, muscles, brain and elements such as oxygen or carbon dioxide.

Furthermore, the intelligibility of breathing is also enacted through cultural symbolism with which it is associated. In common conversations, one meets with idioms or phrases such as “a breath of fresh air” (which means that someone or something is new or exciting),
“breathing down my neck” (which describes a creepy feeling of being closely watched or under pressure) or “please, save your breath” (which is an indication to stop persisting). Also, popular and alternative cultures are saturated with (human and nonhuman) breathing – my favorite ones are “Teach me gently how to breathe” by the band The XX (2009), “I want to breathe in the open wind” from the famous Here Comes the Rain Again song by the Eurythmics (1984) and Jeannette Winterson’s “The walls, bumpy and distempered, were breathing” (2001, 51) which articulates that breathing can be a matter of not only animate beings.

In its persistent commonality and constant differentiation, breathing, hence, can inspire diverse analyses of relational natural and cultural, material and social scapes that are oxygenated across diverse spaces, times, geopolitical relations, ecosystems, industries and urbanization while being situated in their phenomenal specificities. It becomes an enactment of movement and circulation within and across (human and nonhuman) bodies, spaces, species and cultures. Also, multiple forms of breathing (such as with technologies or with different kinds of air and the dust or pollution it contains) have the power to articulate how societal power relations materialize in and through, and are enacted by, bodies.

For example, following the diversity of the breathability of life and air quality can lead to researching the dynamics of geopolitical economic and (neo)colonialist power relations. It can lead to questions about political, social and economic distribution and maintenance of privilege and lack thereof, and power that materializes not only in (un)breathable and (non)toxic air but also in political, social and ethical matters such as whose lives are breathable and whose loss of breath is grievable. A respiratory analysis can also provide insights into relationalities that allow for an understanding of contemporary trends in the development of neoliberalism and its consequences for both local and global levels. It can allow for an analysis of complex socioeconomic processes through which pollution-reducing technologies enable countries such as Sweden, or specific geopolitical areas in many parts of Europe to enjoy cleaner and fresher air while other countries or areas suffocate in smog. Furthermore, (not merely) human dependency on the daily necessity to inhale air draws attention not only to the local trees, national forests or to rain forests that are considered to be “the lungs of the earth” but also to the coral reefs (and oceanic pollution and extinction), soil respiration and global ecosystems. The vast relationalities those breathing scapes unfold can offer respiratory interventions in the development of interdisciplinary social and environmental justice politics.

As I will articulate throughout Breathing Matters, breathing has the potential to develop such politics while simultaneously challenging universalizing and exceptionalist understandings of the notion of “human” as well as undifferentiated approaches to embodiment. It also allows for an analysis of not only how subjectivity but also how human and nonhuman materialities are agential actors of intersectional societal power relations. As such, breathing can support thinking about what it means to be human after “the human” and how to conceptualize politics when “the human” is challenged.

Considering the differential enactments of breathing discussed above, I therefore work with a nonreductive understanding of breathing, which does not sediment breathing into one narrative, one phenomenon or one form of feminist politics or ethics. What matters for Breathing Matters are not clean and bound objects and definitions of breathing but rather nonhomogenizing engagements that work with relational dynamics. Instead of asking what breathing “is,” instead of attempting to fixate it, to understand it as a static object of research, I prefer to think with breathing and ask how breathing is enacted and what breathing does.

Despite, or rather because, of the worldly complexity of breathing, in Breathing Matters I focus on the relationalities enacted through human breathing, understood broadly and in a posthumanist sense which challenges the assertion that we have ever been “human” (see, e.g., Haraway 2008; Braidotti 2013). Such relationalities, however, are markedly more-than-human than one might think, and as such they allow me to inquire into the complexities of how particular enactments of breathing can be productive of feminist politics.
FEMINIST BREATHING

Breathing Matters is a specifically feminist project. Feminism, however, as a social movement, political concept, academic field or artistic and activist practice has multiple, often contradictory and conflicting definitions, practices and effects. The political and ethical stakes of Breathing Matters are embedded in and are formative of a particular understanding of feminism that has emerged in this project through breathing. Through breathing engagements, I came to an understanding of feminism (always nonreductive and multiple) as a philosophical, activist, political and ethical practice of intersectional social justice that consists of individual and collective, mundane and organized work. This work strives to critically question, challenge, analyze, smash, ridicule, provoke and resist dynamics of the privileging and deprivileging of intersectional social power relations and/or to imagine, dream, inspire, aspire, and to generate hope, outrage, cry and despairing longing for alternative affective, material, social and cultural realities and possibilities. This practice is also inherently failing, partial, reductive, never finished, never right. It enacts affinities across differences as well as similarities; it is a practice which can be as much synergetic as it is separatist.

Through this understanding, in Breathing Matters I advocate for a pluralistic understanding of feminism while I situate myself in the specific polities and ethics I develop. In some activist circles around the world, such feminism is signified as asterisk feminism (feminism*) – a notion of feminism in which the asterisk indicates the plurality and nonhomogeneity of positions and avoids reducing feminism to only a specific point of view or selected identitarian positions. The addition of the asterisk, therefore, underscores the multiplicity of feminist approaches within what is often homogenized into a unitary notion. This feminism, then, does not signify a unitary position but allows for an articulation of feminist debates as diverse, full of contradictions and openness. As such, it allows for various positions to articulate miscellaneous feminist concerns and practices that multiply and differ across diverse intersectional social positionings, political stances and identities.

While I do not use the asterisk myself, it is through such a pluralistic understanding of feminism that Breathing Matters turns to towards politics of intersectionality and vulnerability. Such politics, however, are not a matter of universal proposition. While the breathing engagements that the project enacts – through interviews conducted in the Czech Republic, Germany, Sweden and US – spread across Europe and across the European and North American continents, these enactments are of a specific character. They materialize in terms of the enactments of breathing with which they engage. They also materialize through my position as a scholar who is embedded in Western-dominated academic debates that blend with my theoretical and political engagements as a white Eastern European cis queer subject with a transitional nomadic positionality across Europe and multiple forms of belonging and nonbelonging.

The privileges and struggles of such a collective and personal feminist positionality diffuse through Breathing Matters in the choice of enactments of breathing with which I work and in the personal political commitments to which I am dedicated. It is this situatedness, dispersed in broader (contemporary and historical) feminist conversations, that grounds my insistence on the relevance of breathing for feminist research, methodologies, ethics, politics, activism, art and more.

RESPITES AND BREATHS

The specific interventions that Breathing Matters makes rest in the particular enactments of breathing with which it engages. In order to articulate a dispersed potentiality of breathing for politics that go beyond the claims that I make here, I developed a specific form of intervention that I call RESPITE. RESPITES are short moments of a break, moments to take a breath. The three RESPITES included here enact such respiratory instants between the individual parts of Breathing Matters’ parts and chapters, showing what is at stake but in a different situatedness. They also disperse my arguments beyond what is said. As such, they expand beyond Breathing Matters, opening
other directions in which breath can take feminist theoretical, empirical and political engagements. They are small performative interventions that create a moment to breathe differently.

Chapter 1 presents my aims and research questions and previous research as well as introduces the issue of breathing as a crucial topic for a feminist intersectional politics of vulnerability which I unfold. Chapter 2, on the other hand, introduces the theoretical, empirical and methodological situatedness of Breathing Matters. The chapter discusses how I work with breathing as a nonreductive phenomenon by utilizing a concept of corpomateriality and an agential realist onto-epistemological approach developed by Karen Barad (2003, 2007). As I work with breathing as a both material and discursive phenomenon, the chapter also explains my specific understanding of knowledge production and of the relationality of materiality and discursivity. Discussing this issue though the concepts of situated knowledges (Haraway 2002) and intertextuality (Kristeva 1986), I propose working with material-discursive enactments of breathing as situately dispersed. Finally, the chapter also introduces the methodologies, methods and ethics of my specific engagements with breathing and explains my analytical strategies.

After the introductory discussions of chapter 1 and 2, Breathing Matters is divided into two parts, which in terms of the overall argument about a feminist intersectional politics of vulnerability are mutually constitutive but for the sake of in-depth discussion of the specificities of intersectionality and vulnerability are engaged with separately.

Part 1 focuses on my discussions of intersectionality and the overarching argument that intersectionality is not only a matter of categories but also of embodiment and material agentiality. Chapter 3 constitutes an opening to the part. It introduces the specific goals of part 1 and situates them in the context of social and environmental justice politics. In this chapter, I also introduce the two interviews through which part 1 is developed – with Marek, who is a retired coal miner and who discussed with me what he calls “dusty lungs,” and with Anna, who used to work as a phone sex worker and talked to me about her work with breath, voice and moaning. The chapter explains how dusty lungs and phone sex breathing are relevant for feminist respiratory politics.

Intersectionality is a concept with a significant history of social justice politics, and it is currently being debated regarding its relevance, usage and politics or lack thereof. As intersectionality is a central concept of Breathing Matters, the specificity of its past and present requires me to take some time to discuss them. In chapter 4, I therefore situate part 1 in my understanding of those debates. I first discuss intersectionality as a feminist practice of knowledge production and politics and focus on the peculiar challenges the concept faces today. Then, in the context of those debates, I analyze a poster entitled The True Cost of Coal designed by the Beehive Design Collective (2010f) in order to propose that intersectionality is also a matter of human and nonhuman material agentiality.

Chapter 5 expands this proposition further through in-depth analysis of the interviews with Marek and Anna and the politics of their breath. Focusing on the expulsive forcefulness of Marek’s respiratory system that expels the coal dust from inside his lungs and externalizes it through spitting out black saliva, I propose a concept of matterwork that articulates that the work that bodies do is ultimately political. While in Marek’s case, such politics are enacted in the daily practices of spitting, Anna’s breathing matterwork enacts specific prosodies. Working with Marek’s and Anna’s breath, therefore, articulates matterwork as material-discursive productive, reproductive, resistive and transformative corpomaterial work. By relating matterwork with the concept of proletarian lung discussed by Stacy Alaimo (2008, 2010), I further make a point about why and how matterwork is an intersectional, resistive and political matter.

Finally, chapter 6, as the last one in part 1, summarizes the discussions of part 1 in order to distill their main line of argument: that intersectionality is a corpomaterial matter, that corpomateriality is intersectional, and that matterwork is politically significant. The chapter, moreover, concludes my discussions of the operations of intersectional dynamism by discussing the relationality of the dynamics of intra-active constitutiveness and differencing.

Part 2 of Breathing Matters is embedded in an understanding of the intersectional dynamism developed in the previous part. It continues to further develop intersectional corpomaterial politics in relation to vulnerability. In analogy to chapter 3’s introduction to part 1, chapter
7 provides an introduction to part 2. It situates part 2 in the interviews with Matt, who lives with anxieties and panic attacks and shares his life with his assistant dog companion Tarik, and with Lina, who is a psycho- and physiotherapist and who shared with me insights regarding her work with breath in her therapeutic practice. The chapter also discusses why anxieties and panic attacks are specifically interesting for engaging with breathing and why it is significant for feminist scholarship and activism, and in particular, for the unfolding of a feminist intersectional politics of vulnerability, to consider what I call *corpo-affective* dynamics.

While in part 1, chapter 4 situated the part’s discussion in the context of the history of and contemporary debates about intersectionality, in part 2 chapter 8 situates my discussions in the problematization of contemporary approaches to anxieties and panic attacks. Working with the two interviews and my own autoethnographic experiences, the chapter challenges contemporary practices of delimitation and defining of anxieties and panic attacks and argues for the need for a nonreductive approach. While recognizing the significance of diverse medical and therapeutic approaches to anxieties and panic attacks, the chapter criticizes their homogenizing and depoliticizing effects. In doing so it also argues for an understanding of anxieties and panic attacks as a political matter.

Situated in the problematization of delimitation and definition practices articulated in chapter 7, chapter 8 provides an analysis of what it means to think about anxieties and panic attacks as political. By in-depth work with interviews with Matt and Lina and with my autoethnographic analytical attention, the chapter articulates how matterwork is a political and transformative practice. By discussing what I call the *response-ability in-difference* of Matt and Tarik’s companionship, I articulate how the quotidian material agentiality enacts transformative politics that are matters of not only human but of multispecies relating. The discussion of the role of breathing in anxieties and panic attacks that Lina shared with me allows me to further specify how matterwork works and how it is transformative. By relating this understanding of matterwork to a concept of *combat breathing* developed by Franz Fanon (1965), I further articulate how quotidian practices of breathing are not only individual but also structural political matters. Through such discussions, the chapter aims to further support the overarching claim of *Breathing Matters* that quotidian (human and non-human) material agentiality is politically not only significant but also forcefully productive and transformative (while also keeping open a space for conceptualizing its ambivalence).

In a similar vein as chapter 6, chapter 10 provides a conclusion to part 2. In this chapter, I summarize why corpo-affectivity is political and underline how intersectionality is an integral part of such politics.

Finally, chapter 11 provides an overall conclusion to *Breathing Matters*. It summarizes its general contributions and the concepts I worked with or introduced and provides an outlook into further research that breathing can enable.

In her recent talk at Roma Tre University, Angela Davis – as reported by Luciana Castellina (2016) – argued that one of the roles of philosophy is “to look beyond. We again have to start imagining, right now, what a world different from our current one might be like” (Davis quoted in Castellina 2016, para. 7). The scapes of relationalities that breathing opens, and the particular global and local, personal and political engagements for which it opens an analysis, can become crucial spaces for such contemporary and future feminist interventions. *Breathing Matters* is a glimpse into such an analysis and an attempt to imagine and to look into a world of breathable feminist politics, where intersectionality and vulnerability are constitutive forces of politics; it is an invitation and an insistence on the need to consider the potential that breathing has for academic research and activism, and for feminist theories, methodologies, analysis, ethics and politics. The forces of breathing matter more than one might think at first.
CHAPTER 2

WORKING WITH BREATHING
With the aim of developing a nonreductive approach and feminist theoretical interventions, my work with human breathing required, for this project, a specific approach and set of tools. *Breathing Matters* works with an agential realist approach developed by Karen Barad (2007), which enables an analysis of phenomenal becoming as materially and discursively *intra-actively* (a neologism introduced by Barad) constitutive. As the following chapters will further elaborate, such an approach allows for an analysis of quotidian corpomaterial agentiality as an intersectional and vulnerable political practice. It also creates room for an understanding of relationality as both *intra-active* and differential and enables knowledge production as an onto-epistemological practice (Barad 2007).

Within such an approach, *Breathing Matters*’ knowledge production consists of material, conceptual, situated and dispersed agencies, where practices of phenomenal delimitation are matters of accountability and ongoing negotiations and transformations rather than of representation and ontological detachment. Importantly, in this approach, ethics are an inherent part of knowledge. Such knowledge, however – as agential realist and posthumanist approaches articulate it – consists of not only human but also nonhuman (e.g., air, coal, dogs), natural, cultural, technological, material and social forces.

In this chapter, I first concentrate on the particular conceptual situatedness of *Breathing Matters* – the situated, dispersed and embodied understanding of knowledge; the role and *intra-actively* constitutive relationship of materialization and intelligibility; the ethical investments of this research; and the way a posthumanist yet anthropo-situated research can be developed. In the second part of the chapter, I proceed to a discussion of the particular research methods, materials and analytical practices that are enacted within and simultaneously formed throughout the development of this project.

**ENGAGING THE MATERIALITY OF BREATHING**

Human breathing can be engaged with in multiple ways – for example, it is often associated with lungs and air, with meditation and yoga practices, or with infusing matter with autonomous life in the first breath or exhaling it into death in the last one. In *Breathing Matters*, I am interested in understanding the corpomaterial agentiality of breathing and its *intra-actively* constitutive enactment with intersectional power relations. The development of such analysis requires a specific understanding of corpomaterial relationality that goes beyond prevailing notions of interactive causality and ideas of universal human embodiment.

Physiology – a science that explains the functional processes of living organisms – is a good place to start such a query. As a science that explains the workings of human flesh, it shapes prevailing understandings of the dynamics of quotidian bodily actions and their fleshy material processes. By defining the spaces of human bodies – their organs, functions and relations to each other – physiology delimits the internal and external boundaries of human bodies and articulates their dynamics and causalities. It is a Western scientific narrative that delineates where human bodies begin and end, what they consist of and how they function. As such, physiology has consequences for how notions such as “a human,” “a body,” “an organ” and the relationality of mind, affect, body and society are articulated and demarcated. For *Breathing Matters*, which focuses on the politics of daily bodily actions and the dynamics they imply, a critical yet in some aspects affirmative engagement with such practices is central for the articulation of an understanding of corpomateriality and corpomaterial relationality, and of the specific onto-epistemologies with which the following chapters work.
THE PHYSIOLOGY OF BREATHING

As does any kind of delimitation practice, physiology offers a specific understanding of human breathing, which attends to particular complexities (e.g., bodily flows and processes) and not others (e.g., breathing as a spiritual or experiential matter). Physiology provides a universalized understanding of how bodies work. And while a physiological approach is crucial in the development of medicine and science (and my goal is not to dismiss it), it is an approach where differences are matters of exception – of pathology – rather than part of corpomaterial processes, and where cultural and social dynamics are not understood as components of physiological dynamics, as I would like to argue here, through a discussion of the physiology of breathing.

A physiological perspective commonly frames breathing as a respiratory process. It is described as consisting of two phases: inspiration and expiration. During inspiration, the diaphragm (the muscle at the bottom of the chest cavity) and intercostal muscles (the muscles between the ribs) contract and allow the flow of air to enter the lungs. Breathe in. During expiration, the diaphragm and intercostal muscles relax and push the gases out of the lungs. Breathe out. In a physiological approach, breathing is clearly associated with lungs. But, as I will argue shortly, in order for the lungs to metabolize air, a multitude of actors, relationalities and actions must take place.

The material dynamism is, in physiology, understood in an architectural sense, where localization of breath in the lungs is inspired by ascribing the lungs as the primary space of air metabolization. In terms of this architecture of bodily spaces, breathing becomes a matter of aerial and tissue-composed practices of taking and ascribing space. The physiological narrative usually proceeds as such: the lungs are located in the chest cavity, inside of the rib cage, and are separated from the other organs and fluids in the chest cavity through thin pleural membrane that covers the lungs. This physiological location is understood in pulmonary physiology as the main space where the enactment of breathing occurs. But in order to metabolize air, certain flows have to be activated and certain actors and actions enacted.

The material spatiality of breathing – or rather, what I consider to be a material-discursive understanding of the enactment of breathing in physiology – can be explained through the flow of air through a human body. With every inhalation and exhalation, air undergoes a particular flow through bodily spaces at a certain time. In physiology, these spaces are carefully categorized, named and delimited into bounded entities according to their understood function and structure. As mentioned earlier, according to physiological understandings of processes of breathing, air enters the human body as an effect of contractions of the diaphragm and intercostal muscles, which brings the chest cavity into movement. The expansion of the chest lowers the pressure in the chest cavity beyond the air pressure that is outside of the body. This change of pressure allows air to enter the respiratory system, inflate the lungs and flow through the human body. In the state delimited by physiology as “normal,” such a process of inhalation is enacted by “healthy” human adult subjects 12 to 20 times per minute. If one does not breathe for more than four minutes, one will most likely die or one’s nervous system can be affected by the lack of oxygen and changed or, as medical discourse articulates it, damaged. And whereas this understanding of breathing is discussed in physiology in universalized terms, the universalism is not enacted universally. Some people, such as free divers, spend their lives challenging the line of life and death of breath, increasingly pushing the limits of the time they can live without a breath (Lee 2015). Also, the lung capacity of every body is different, and it is transformed with physical training such as that of free divers, by lifestyle habits such as smoking, or through occupations such as coal mining or opera singing. As I argue throughout Breathing Matters, breathing and corpomateriality cannot be understood universally and are physiological and social matters.

When the pressure in the chest cavity decreases – the physiological narrative continues – air enters the lungs through the nose or mouth. If the air enters through the nose, it becomes moistened, warmed, and filtered in the nasal cavity. Then it flows through the throat (pharynx) to the epiglottis – a flap of tissue that closes the trachea, an upper part of the airways, when swallowing so that food and liquids do not enter the lungs. After the epiglottis, the air goes through the larynx – a voice box where vocal cords are located – and flows into the airways. First, the
air enters the part of the airways that looks like a tube and is called the trachea, and from the trachea it descends further, into the bronchi. Both trachea and bronchi consist of smooth muscle and cartilage, which enact the airway’s contraction and expansion. Apart from bringing oxygenated air into the lungs and releasing the carbon dioxide (a respiratory waste produced by the cells), the airways participate in regulating the hydrogen ion concentration (pH) in the blood. From the bronchi, air flows into each of the two lungs – or one lung, as breathing is a differential practice, and many people live with a single lung or diversely functional lungs, and/or the diverse respiratory technologies that articulate the processes discussed here in relation with additional agents such as oxygen tanks, ventilators or inhalers.

Similarly to a sponge, a lung consists of an elastic tissues, which stretches and constricts during breathing. First, the airways, which consist of trachea and bronchi, bring air into the lung’s bronchioles. Together with the bronchi, the bronchioles develop a tree structure in which individual bronchioles function as small tubes, which get smaller and smaller the further they extend from the bronchi. Through the bronchioles the air enters alveoli – tiny, thin-walled air sacs at the ends of bronchioles – where the metabolism of air, the gas exchange, happens. Each alveolus is surrounded by small blood vessels called pulmonary capillaries. It is this interface of alveoli and pulmonary capillaries that creates the blood-gas barrier (a thin wall about 0.5 microns thick through which air gasses – oxygen, carbon dioxide and nitrogen – pass) where the blood, which then flows through the body and brings oxygen to the cells, is oxygenated. From the alveoli, where there is a high concentration of oxygen, the oxygen diffuses through the alveolar membrane into the pulmonary capillaries.

The gas exchange in the blood-gas barrier happens because the concentration of oxygen is high in the alveoli and low in the blood that enters the pulmonary capillaries. This difference leads to a process called diffusion, where oxygen moves, or rather is dissolved, from the air into the blood. Because the blood that enters the capillaries has a higher concentration of carbon dioxide than is in the alveolar air, carbon dioxide moves from the blood into the alveoli. The amount of nitrogen in the blood and in the alveolar air is similar and therefore it is only the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide that takes place across the alveolar wall. As a result of this exchange, the air inside the alveoli becomes depleted of oxygen and enriched with the carbon dioxide. The air that the human subject breathes out is, therefore, enriched with carbon dioxide but poor in oxygen.

But a universalized process such as diffusion is a matter of differential practice. Different gases have different intensities and temporalities of diffusion. This difference, however, is not the only reason for the specific motion to take place. The dynamism is enacted through intra-active processes where particular specificities of the gases, cells and pressures that are taking place at the blood-gas barrier enact particular possibilities and limitations. The transfer of gas between alveolus and pulmonary capillary differs in relation to the diffusion and perfusion limitations and the different effects those limitations have with different gases. While carbon monoxide is diffusion limited, nitrous oxide is perfusion limited, and both gases diffuse across the gas-blood barrier in different ways in relation to the pressure changes that enact their limitations in relation to the blood flow, alveolar gas and red cells. While the amount of carbon monoxide that diffuses into the blood “is limited by the diffusion properties of the blood gas barrier and not by the amount of blood available” (West 2000, 27) (i.e., diffusion limitation), the amount of nitrous oxide is dependent on “the amount of available blood flow and not at all on the diffusion properties of the blood-gas barrier” (West 2000, 23) (i.e., perfusion limitation). The diffusion of oxygen, to stir things up, challenges the omnipotence of the binary categorization and boundaries of those two processes (perfusion and diffusion limitations). The combination of oxygen with hemoglobin can be both perfusion limited (which is the case in “resting conditions”) and diffusion limited, as in “circumstances when the diffusion properties of the lung are impaired, for example, because of the thickening of the blood-gas barrier [when] the blood PO2 does not reach the alveolar value by the end of the capillary” (West 2000, 22). Therefore, different solubility of gases is not a matter of merely what is understood as their qualities but a process of relationality and differentiation of gases, blood-gas barrier, blood etc. Following different gases tells different stories about breathing’s different intensities (different pressures they enact), different saturations (their
concentrations in the blood), different temporalities (different speeds of diffusion) and corpomaterial spaces and processes.

CORPOMATERIALITY

At stake in the preceding discussion is not a submission to a merely physiological understanding of human embodiment or to a delimitation of breathing as a universal and homogenous research object. But neither is it a rejection of physiology. Instead, my goal is to discuss the relationalities of bodily agentialities as they are described and delimited in physiology, to problematize the universalizing approach of physiology and to argue for the constitutiveness of differentiation as part of the bodily processes described. Such affirmative and critical work with physiology, combined with two concepts that I will introduce shortly, allows me to develop a specific understanding of bodily agentiality and bodily dynamics that I work with throughout *Breathing Matters* – a notion of corpomateriality.

The term corpomaterial was introduced by Nina Lykke in relation to what she called a feminist corpomaterialism – an umbrella term for diverse feminist discussions that have a “shared focus on the materiality of bodies and corporeality” (2010, 107). I use the notion of corpomateriality to work with materiality in its human material specificity, and to avoid working with materiality as a universal term that designates everything without specification. Simultaneously, the notion of corpomateriality allows me to differentiate my understanding of human materiality from the notion of “the body” that has been used extensively in feminist (but not only feminist) discussions of bodily norms etc., in which the attention to material agentiality is lacking or not the focus of the argument. Simultaneously, understanding corpomateriality through the two specific concepts I work with – Karen Barad’s (2003, 2007) notion of intra-action and Stacy Alaimo’s (2008, 2010) notion of trans-corporeality – enables me to articulate specific relationalities and dynamics of differentiation through which human bodies can be understood in a nonuniversalizing and nonessentializing manner. Such an approach, I believe, can provide an opportunity for a different understanding of quotidian bodily processes – an understanding where nature and culture, body and society, inside and outside, organs and bodily flows are understood not only as separate (as, for the sake of categorization, occurs in physiology) but also as mutually constitutive yet differential. Such a physiologically inspired but reconceptualized understanding forms the notions of corpomateriality and corpomaterial relations that I argue for throughout *Breathing Matters*.

The first concept that allows me to articulate corpomateriality as processual and dynamic rather than universal and essential, is intra-action – a neologism developed by feminist physicist and theorist Karen Barad (2003, 2007) within her already-mentioned approach of agential realism. Intra-activity is a specific causal dynamism through which phenomena – another central concept – as well as their boundaries and properties materialize and become meaningful. To rephrase, intra-activity articulates relational ontological (and epistemological) dynamics where entities are not understood as pre-existing relations but enacted in the process of relating. Phenomena (such as breathing), then, do not pre-exist materialization processes but come into being within intra-active dynamics as “differential patterns of mattering” (Barad 2007, 206). Intra-activity, therefore, articulates constitutive processes of phenomenal becoming by articulating their simultaneous (ontological and epistemological) inseparability and differentiation. In other words, intra-activity articulates agential constitutiveness of phenomena in their practices of differing. It also articulates the multiplicity of the agential (human and nonhuman) “actors” that are both constitutive of the processes of becoming and constituted themselves by these processes. Such an intra-active understanding of corpomaterial dynamism enables engagement with a physiological understanding of breathing but not by identifying and analyzing entities nor by localizing physiological processes into a single, prebounded organ or into one singular and essential understanding of breathing. Instead, it allows for an engagement with breathing as a dynamism that is enacted relationally in the intra-active constitutiveness and differentiation of organs, fluids, substances, flows, and as the following chapters will discuss in detail also with environments, cultures, affective processes, social power relations etc.
One example of this intra-actively constitutive and differential understanding of breathing that simultaneously works with the physiological approach may be found in the communication of the respiratory nerve cell and diaphragm that is understood to enact the rhythm of breathing and breath’s mere possibility. In an agential realist approach, breathing is not a mechanistic process independent of the environment of its existence. On the contrary, an intra-active analytical engagement works with a multitude of actors that enact (and are enacted by) the activity of the respiratory centers. In such an approach, for example, it is possible to engage with breathing through the intra-active constitutiveness of oxygen and the breathing rhythm, where oxygen not only is an element of respiratory metabolization but also agentially enacts the pace and heaviness of human breathing. If, for example, the concentration of oxygen in the blood is low, peripheral chemoreceptors – specialized nerve cells, as physiology delimits them, within the aorta and carotid arteries – which monitor the concentration of oxygen in the blood, provide the respiratory centers with information about the amount of the oxygen in the blood, which increases the rate and depth of breathing. Simultaneously, the rhythm and depth of breathing is enacted not only through oxygen but also through concentrations of carbon dioxide. If the carbon dioxide concentration is too high, the central chemoreceptors can increase the rate of breathing until the rate of the carbon dioxide is stabilized. This adjustment occurs because the central chemoreceptors are constantly relating with the concentration of carbon dioxide in the cerebrospinal fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. In another example, if the acidity of the blood and of the cerebrospinal fluid is too high, due to a pH increase, then the central chemoreceptors communicate with the respiratory center and increase the pace and depth of breath. The pH is, simultaneously, highly influenced by the concentration of carbon dioxide. Such agential dynamics – rather than merely interactive causal effects – are constitutive and transformative of breathing speeds, different concentrations and corpomaterial processes and indicate how complex, or rather intra-active and differential, the processes of breathing are.

Moreover (as part 1 discusses further), the intra-active relationality of corpomaterial processes is a matter not merely of “internal” dynamism but, as Stacy Alaimo (2008, 2010) articulates – through the second concept that is central to Breathing Matters – of trans-corporeal character. Using the concept of trans-corporeality, Alaimo proposes thinking about human embodiment in terms of “entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual” (2008, 238). Such an entanglement is dynamic, and within it the mutual constitutiveness of bodies and environments shows the ongoing changeability, mutual relationality and transformations of nature and culture (e.g., the relationality of genetically modified food, bodies and environments). What is at stake in Alaimo’s approach, however, is not the mere assimilation or comparison of human corpomateriality with non-human nature but the need to rethink concepts of materiality and nature as well as of the notion of “human” itself. As Alaimo argues, “dwelling within trans-corporeal space where ‘body’ and ‘nature’ are comprised of the same material, which has been constituted, simultaneously, by the forces of evolution, natural and human history, political inequities, cultural contestations, biological and chemical processes, and other factors too numerous to this list, renders rigid distinctions between ‘mind’ and ‘matter’ impossibly simplistic” (2008, 257). For Alaimo, the “‘material world’ ... includes human actions and intra-actions, along with the intra-actions of man-made substances, all of which intra-act with natural creatures, forces, and ecological systems as well as with the bodies of humans” (2008, 259).

The notion of trans-corporeality is significant for the way I understand corpomateriality, not only in terms of its intra-active understanding of nature and culture, and body and mind, as well as the posthuman ethics and the politics it implies, but also because it allows for the articulation of the challenge of the internal and external boundaries of human corpomateriality that are also problematized by breathing. Breathing brings the environment in through inhalations in order to disperse the internally metabolized air in the environment. Such breathing processes may also be – as part 1 further discusses – a matter of toxicity and specific corpomaterial enactments. For example, if air in the airways is “polluted” with coal dust, pollen, or toxic fumes, the nerve cells in the airways sense it and signal to the respiratory centers to start coughing or sneezing by contracting the respiratory muscles. In coughs
or sneezes, the air is rapidly exhaled from the lungs and airways, and through this rapid movement the undesired substances are expelled from the respiratory system. Simultaneously, as chapter 5 articulates, coughing can be a manner of corpomaterial materialization and intelligibility of intersectional social positioning where the environmental toxicity is embodied, expelled and produced corpomaterially. The trans-corporeal character of corpomateriality, therefore, challenges the boundaries of inside and outside the body and allows for an analysis of human breathing as a posthuman and political matter. Also specific geopolitical locations and intersectional situatedness within power relations can enact very different ways of breathing, and part 1 of *Breathing Matters* addresses how corpomaterial dynamics are intersectional matters (and, simultaneously, how intersectionality is a matter not only of categories but also of materiality and, as specifically discussed in chapter 5, of corpomateriality).

But the intra-active constitutiveness of corpomaterial breathing processes is enacted not only through the agential dynamics of corpomaterial and for example the elemental (that challenge interactive causality) or trans-corporeal processes (that challenge ideas of internal and external boundaries of human bodies). As part 2 of *Breathing Matters* discusses further, corpomaterial breathing processes can also be enacted with agential affective dynamics. Many people experience a change in breathing when experiencing anxieties or panic attacks. Such transformations are usually explained physiologically to be a result of communication between the nerve cells in the hypothalamus, cortex and respiratory centers. The hypothalamus tells the respiratory centers to speed up, slow down or even stop (by holding the breath). At the same time, the influence of the hypothalamus and cortex can be challenged or overridden by the amount of oxygen, carbon dioxide and hydrogen ions in the blood. In the case of panic attacks, therefore, erratic breathing is enacted simultaneously through changing affective states, situated dynamics of corpomaterial communication and transforming chemical concentrations. The intra-active understanding of such processes, therefore, reveals corpomateriality as a matter of affect as well – as part 2 elaborates further by introducing the notion of corpo-affectivity for bringing the mutual constitutiveness of corpomateriality and affect to the forefront of the discussion of the politics of vulnerability.

The physiological understanding of human breathing discussed earlier is central to the formation of the Western understanding of embodiment. But its linear interactive causality of bounded organs, fluids and elements, as well as its universalizing approach, is neither sufficient for understanding the complexity of bodily processes that take place in diverse bodies in similar yet differentiated ways – for example, breathing enactments are different if one breathes with two lungs or with a ventilator, as well as with the different bacteria, dust particles, or concentrations of air elements they entail. These are not matters of pathology but of differential corpomaterial living. Nor is the mere physiological understanding of breathing sufficient for understanding corpomaterial dynamics of breathing in relation to the bodily life of affect or of social power relations. But working with breathing as intra-active, differential, and trans-corporeal opens possibilities for a different engagement with corpomaterial dynamics.

There is more to breathing than a single-organ localization (lungs) or a mechanistic and linear process. Throughout *Breathing Matters*, I develop an analysis of a relational dynamism of breathing that focuses on the ways breathing is enacted intra-actively and trans-corporeally. This intra-actively relational and trans-corporeal work with breathing, rather than a mechanistic one, is employed throughout the chapters as an experiment as well as an argument. As the following chapters discuss, through engagement with black lung disease and also breath in phone sex work (part 1), and through anxious and panicky breathing (part 2), breathing materializes and becomes intelligible in an intra-active manner of simultaneous constitutiveness and differencing of multiple material-discursive, natural-cultural, human-nonhuman, organic and inorganic forces; of rhythms, flows and movements that are enacted and enacting situated natural-cultural, sociopolitical worlds and with specific effects. The notion of corpomateriality is used in *Breathing Matters* to keep those dynamics of intra-active and differencing movement, circulation, production and reproduction of embodiment, subjectivity, and nature and culture at the forefront of my engagement with breathing.
CHAPTER 2
WORKING WITH BREATHING

BREATHING MATTERS

BREATHING AS A PHENOMENON:
ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND POLITICS

The intra-active understanding of relational dynamism also has significant consequences for understanding the knowledge production of this project, as it reconfigures conceptualizations of ontology and epistemology. In Barad’s (2003, 2007) agential realist redefinition of ontology and epistemology, the primary foci of analysis are not pre-existing objects but phenomena. Phenomena are not ontologically prior entities that are epistemologically distinct form the subject and have clear boundaries, properties and characteristics. On the contrary, they are defined as relations of intra-actions where none of the “components” that materialize within the intra-active processes pre-exist these processes and have any pre-given essence. These components, or relata as Barad calls them, are always bound to the phenomena, and they come to exist and acquire boundaries and properties within specific intra-actions.

In such an approach, therefore, phenomena emerge as specific and local “sets” of becoming of agentially intra-active relations of relata, which themselves become intelligible within this intra-active process of becoming within the phenomena. Importantly, although for Barad phenomena consist of the agentially intra-acting relata, it is the phenomena – not the relata – that are a primary analytical unit (but not pre-existing, since phenomena become through relationalities). What comes to the center, then, is the ontological inseparability of the “object” from the specificity and forces of its becoming, which also include knowledge production practices.

In such an approach, ontology and epistemology are therefore not understood as separate and epistemology is not understood to be a reflection or representation of the objective and independent world. Barad, instead, proposes an ethic-o-onto-epistemological approach where ontology and epistemology (and ethics, as they are also agential forces of knowledge production, which I discuss later in this chapter) are understood as intra-actively constitutive. Onto-epistemology, on which I focus (but which is always also an ethical matter) therefore, addresses the intra-active constitutiveness of reality and knowledge, of matter and meaning. This constitutiveness, however, does not collapse all categories or flatten ontologies (as intra-active relationality is sometimes understood). Rather, in an onto-epistemological approach phenomena come into being materially and discursively and through simultaneous intra-active constitutiveness and differing.

In the relationality of intra-activity and agential cut (another central neologism of Barad’s which addresses matters of separability, and I would say also differencing of phenomena), intra-activity allows for an analysis of specific causal material production that does not presuppose the existence of independent relata (as interaction implies). It is “through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful. A specific intra-action (involving a specific material configuration of the ‘apparatus of observation’) enacts an agential cut ... effecting a separation between ‘subject’ and ‘object’” (Barad 2003, 815). The notion of the cut, therefore, does not work with the Cartesian distinction between the object and the subject as inherently given, but, instead, positions this distinction as a result of the intra-active enactment of temporally, spatially, materially and discursively situated separability of specific phenomena. For Barad, the agential cut is a moment of situated and inherently onto-epistemological intra-active enactment of the resolution of various relata within the phenomena. The enactment of an agential cut generates agential separability through which the exteriority within phenomena, where there is no priority to the discursive or the material, is constituted. Such exteriority is an inherent part of the phenomena and is enacted through the process of simultaneous intra-action and an agential cut.

The notion of an agential cut and agential separability are crucial not only for Barad’s redefinition of the constitutiveness of the relationship between the object and the subject, but also for the condition of objective analysis. The agential cut is an agential realist concept that allows for accountability of the delimitation processes of knowledge production, as every definition, categorization or conceptualization is a practice of intra-active constitution as well as of exclusion and abjection.

As I argued in the previous chapter, breathing is an expansive and explosive biosocial phenomenon, which implodes and opens up scopes of a multitude of relationalities. As such, breathing can be engaged
with in multiple ways, starting with phenomenological experiences, spiritual understandings, conceptualization as a worldly process of air consumption, and circulation and (re)production that occur not only in human bodies but in a multitude of life forms including trees, soil and coral reefs. While in *Breathing Matters* I attempt to work nonreductively with breathing, my intra-active understanding of breathing’s relationalities enacts agential cuts that in a situated manner delimit its particular breathing engagements. These cuts, understood as mutually constitutive with intra-active dynamics, are enacted in, for example, the specific instances of breathing that are discussed here – dusty lungs, phone sex breath and anxieties and panic attacks; in my specific engagements with those enactments of breathing (e.g., the employment of autoethnography in part 2); in the diverse intersectional positions in which breathing is enacted and experienced by the interviewees (and the dynamics of the interviews that were also enacted through my own relational positionality with them). In *Breathing Matters*, breathing is therefore an onto-epistemological phenomenon that materializes here in a situated manner through specific dynamics of its intra-active becoming and agential separability. In such an understanding of breathing as a phenomenon, not only are ontology and epistemology understood as mutually constitutive but so are the specific material-discursive situatedness of the object-subject relations, research ethics and politics.

Because this project is invested in understanding the politics of everyday corpomaterial practices, the role of politics in knowledge production is especially pertinent. The redefinition of relations of ontology and epistemology and of relations of object and subject allows for a new conceptualization of politics. It reworks the relations of individuality, identity and collectivity, locality and globality, materiality and discursivity, human and nonhuman relations, and body and mind that are discussed in *Breathing Matters*. Such reworking takes place through intra-activity and separability as concepts, which allow for a reconceptualization of boundaries in terms of constitutiveness as well as differencing – a dynamism that is central to the discussions in the following chapters.

The dynamics of intra-active constitutiveness and differencing problematize an individualized understanding of human subjectivity by positioning an individual not as a bounded and independent subject but rather one that comes into being intra-actively. Such a conceptualization allows for a situated yet differentiated understanding of individuals (and politics) which is, as Barad articulates it, about the “making of differences, of ‘individuals,’ rather than assuming their independent or prior existence. ‘Individuals’ [therefore] do not not exist, but are not individually determinate. Rather, ‘individuals’ only exist within phenomena (particular materialized/materializing relations) in their ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring” (2012a, 77). The agential realist approach that fundamentally forms the understanding of relationalities, phenomenal becoming and knowledge production of *Breathing Matters* thus allows for new conceptualizations of politics that reconfigure relations of individuality, collectivity, politics, identity, materiality and power relations. In such an approach, the distinction of object and subject is a result of the intra-active enactment of agential differencing. Such differencing takes place as a situated intra-active enactment of the resolution of various relata within the phenomena. The agential realist politics, therefore, are neither deterministic nor voluntaristic. Neither they are deterministic because they are always enacted with “particular exclusions, and exclusions foreclose any possibility of determinism, providing the condition of an open future” (Barad 2003, 826). But nor are they voluntaristic, as they are always enacted in a certain material-discursive context. Therefore, what do such intra-active feminist politics of knowledge production, which work with intra-active constitutiveness and differencing, look like? *Breathing Matters* asks this question.

**SITUATED-DISPERSAL: DEVELOPING MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE RESEARCH PRACTICES**

The discussion of the relation of ontology, epistemology, politics and the process of knowledge production, however, is not only of concern in agential realism. It has been one of the central questions in feminist studies and their search for developing accountable research. It is also an issue with a long philosophical history of conceptualization that
varies significantly throughout the centuries and in terms of assumed theoretical perspectives. Historically, these questions have been discussed predominantly within the field of philosophy. Nowadays, they are part of most disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, such as philosophy of science, feminist studies, science and technology studies, and sociology and anthropology. The classification of these debates varies depending on different logics and criteria, such as the relation of reality and knowledge; the relation of science, theology and society; or problems such as objectivity, truth, values, ethics, the role of method etc. For *Breathing Matters*, which is situated in the onto-epistemological approach discussed above, the debates within feminist studies are crucial for developing situated-dispersal – a concept that articulates my understanding, which permeates the following chapters, of knowledge production as both situated and intertextual, and of politics as both situated and structural.

**SITUATED KNOWLEDGES**

In the twentieth century, one of the significant shifts in academic thinking, writing and researching was the challenge to the positivist understanding of science as a neutral, disembodied, rational project of knowing the world, by showing instead that the development of knowledge is not an innocent act. A positivist approach to science situates knowledge as a description of facts obtained empirically or sensually. In this framework, facts are objective, and the role of philosopher is to state their existence, order them and, based on them, predict the future phenomena which will then themselves become the norm (Störig 2000, 357). Positivism is shaped by its ideological relation to modernism including the societal, cultural and economic developments of the nineteenth century, as well as the expansion of natural sciences and popular belief in technological progress. Apart from Hume or Comte – who are considered to be the founders of positivism – other representatives of the positivist epistemology are John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham and Herbert Spencer (English positivism), as well as Rudolf Carnap and Bertrand Russell (logical neopositivism).

Feminist scholars such as Sandra Harding (1986), Donna Haraway (1989, 1991, 1997), Lorraine Code (1991), Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen Longino (1996) and Fox Keller (2000) significantly problematized positivist notions of science and philosophy. They criticized the logocentric and masculinist character of Western positivist science that is grounded in the disembodied, delocalized and disengaged position of the objective, knowing subject whose knowledge production practices perform what Haraway called the God Trick of science – the illusion of speaking from the invisible, unmarked position of nowhere (2002, 364). Along with deconstructing hegemonic knowledge production practices, feminist researchers have developed alternative approaches to the fundamental questions of epistemology including the relation of the object and subject of scientific practices, objectivity and representation. These and other ongoing feminist epistemological debates have taken place in parallel threads throughout feminist discussions, and they are neither unitary nor absolutely different. They constitute multiple, overlapping as well as differing and multilayered writings and conversations across different conceptual, ethical research problems, fields, and academic cultures. Important for the notion of situated-dispersal, these debates brought attention to the dangers of reductionism and homogenization which, as Laurel Richardson argues, “occurs through the suppression of individual voices and the acceptance of the omnipresent voice of science as if it were our own” (2000, 925). The feminist politics of location argue that through the explicit and situated positioning of the writer the God Trick of science can be avoided. In relation to the homogenizing practices of knowledge and politics, it is also situatedness that allows for the development of accountable, temporally delimited knowledge that does not homogenize phenomena but works with the situatedness of its onto-epistemological and phenomenal intra-active constitutiveness and differencing.

Importantly, this situated – and not reductive and homogenizing – approach is a matter not of relativism but of a redefined concept of objectivity where corpomaterial agentiality, intersectional social power relations, ethics, politics and geopolitical locations, to name a few, are constitutive forces in producing situated knowledge. As Haraway puts it, situated knowledges are about
learn[ing] in our bodies, endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name. So, not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. ... Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (2002, 365)

Haraway's emphasis on the mental and material location as intra-actively constitutive with theory and politics, as well as her redefinition of vision and the importance of working towards things that are to come, provides a nonpositivistic approach to objectivity where corpomateriality matters. In such an approach, situatedness is a matter of specific onto-epistemological and political intra-active materializations of intersectional subjectivity, knowledges and research subjects. They come into being in a situated specificity and in a dispersed structural patterning of processes of materialization and intelligibility.

Situatedness, therefore, is a material-discursive (and political) matter. In such an approach, matter, language and power are wording and worlding the word into existence. The role of language in such an onto-epistemology is not merely representational but ontologizing (language, word and various relata – to use Barad's terms – enact the world in the process of writing and knowledge production). As Barad (2007) shows through her analysis of quantum physics and the way knowledge is produced in the research practices of natural sciences, apparatuses as one of many research process relata – which, I would like to stress, are not limited to scientific machines but can also include language, concepts, academic discussions etc. – intra-actively enact the world. Research processes are enacted in a situated manner while simultaneously through multiple actors, who intra-actively come into being through the phenomena they enact. Language, human and nonhuman subjects, and many other actors are the wording-and-worlding forces of a research process.

Breathing Matters, therefore, is situated in understanding research practices as materially-discursive, where both materiality and discursivity are agential. In such an understanding, not only does knowledge enact (not represent) the world but the world enacts (not enables) knowledge that comes into being. The relationship of the world and language is, hence, chiasmatic: it is not only language that *words the world* but it is also the world that *worlds and words the word*. This approach has a both intra-active and differencing character.

Furthermore, the ontologizing force of language is not neutral but situated and intra-actively constitutive with power relations. As Richardson argues, “language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity, is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world makes language a site of exploration and struggle” (2000, 929, italics in the original). Including into an analytical practice the ontologizing force of language and power relations that are performatively materialized through language (and matter) is crucial for understanding the corpomaterial agency as a dynamic that is both natural and cultural, material and discursive, and in which corpomateriality is a “witty agent” (Haraway 2002). In such an approach, where intersectional politics matter as they are part of phenomenal becoming, knowledge production is not only a situated way of enacting particular problems defined within the research but a way of making interventions and making science political.

Or to address the mutual constitutiveness of matter and meaning in knowledge production slightly differently, as Jessica Miles (2011) emphasizes in her review of Arthur Frank's (2010) book *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*,
In the phenomenal understanding of knowledge production, the body of the story, the body of the writer, and the body or materiality of various kinds of actants (such as breath or air) are conditions and agential forces of a situated knowledge.

INTERTEXTUALITY

While situated understanding of knowledge production has long been established in feminist studies, I would like to argue that knowledge and its production are situated but also dispersed. As was discussed above, an onto-epistemological understanding of knowledge production does not operate within an understanding of knowledge as residing only in the writer’s intentionality, as a representation of the world, or within the text itself. Instead, knowledge production can be understood as a relational process of material-discursive meaning making and materialization of onto-epistemological phenomena. I, therefore, propose to understand knowledge in terms of situated-dispersal.

The idea of dispersion that I develop as a way of understanding my research process and politics – in addition to (and in intra-active relation with) its situatedness – is inspired by Julia Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality. Kristeva’s concept is grounded in poststructuralist literary studies, and it explains how knowledge is produced within and across texts or discursive formations.13 The concept of intertextuality was introduced by Kristeva in 1966 in the essay “Word, Dialogue and Novel” and was developed in conversation with literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism. According to Kristeva, for dialogism, text is “a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (1986, 37). Dialogue refers not merely to the conversations amongst the characters of the novel but to the complex meeting of worlds, ideologies and social positionings that characters enact (Allen 2000, 23). In such an understanding, narratives are not detached from reality or representative of it but are – as Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism is embedded in the Marxist criticism of society – relating with, enacting and deconstructing societal power relations.

Such political aspects of the signification practices within and across texts, society and culture also inform Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality, where “all utterances depend on or call to other utterances; no utterance itself is singular; all utterances are shot through with other, competing and conflicting voices” (Allen 2000, 27). In such processes, which I read as having intra-active relationality, language is an ongoing process of signification that is dynamic, multiple, nonsingular and uncontainable. Bakhtin’s discussion, with which Kristeva is in conversation, articulates such dynamism as follows:

The word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered. (Bakhtin 1984, 202)

Significantly, in such an understanding, language becomes a force that is not dependent on human intentionality, as it becomes a phenomenon of agential signification. This interpretation is also sustained in Kristeva’s own understanding of language as not a representational static system of signs but a productive and dynamic process of signification (1986, 28).

MATERIALITY AND LANGUAGE

This delimitation of the dynamism of language, moreover, brings to the forefront one more question crucial for the discussion of material agency in knowledge production processes and corpomaterial politics – the relation of materiality, sign and the transcendence of the signifier. For Kristeva, as well as for most poststructuralist scholars, “there is no ‘transcendental signified,’ no essential signified behind the signifier. Signifiers do not refer to anything beyond, to anything outside the system of signifiers. Signs are merely signifiers individuated by their differences from one another, referring only to other signifiers”
This understanding of language is often read as a claim that “there is nothing outside of language” – an argument often criticized as representationalist and ignoring the agency of materiality.

Barad addresses this issue in relation to the representationalist character or social constructivism which is “caught up in the geometrical optics of reflection where, much like the infinite play of images between two facing mirrors, the epistemological gets bounced back and forth, but nothing more is seen” (2003, 802–803). Such an approach, therefore, presupposes a distinction between epistemologically and ontologically independent reality, where the world is composed of individual prediscursive entities that passively await representation. As Barad points out, in a representationalist approach, “representations serve a mediating function between independently existing entities” (2003, 804), and the relation between the known, the knower and produced knowledge is based on the ontological gap which therefore produces the question of accuracy of the linguistic representation of a referent.

The work of poststructuralist theorist Judith Butler is often considered to be an example of a linguistic monism – an approach where “linguistic construction is understood to be generative and deterministic ... or when construction is figuratively reduced to a verbal action which appears to presuppose a subject” (Butler 1993, 6). But, as I argue elsewhere (Górska 2006), Butler’s work is a good example of a social constructivist poststructuralist approach, which focuses on epistemological processes while simultaneously working with matter as an agential force of production.

In Bodies That Matter (1993), Butler engages with the issue of agentiality of matter through the Greek term *hyle* and its Latin equivalent, *materia*, on the one hand, and on the other hand through the Greek term *schema*. Hyle and materia enable Butler to grasp the agential dimension of matter and understand it as an actor and producer of intelligibility. Schema, on the other hand, allows her to analyze the agency and power of language in materialization practices. The combination of the two accounts enables Butler to grasp both epistemological and ontological dimensions of matter and materialization practices and work with the agency of language and matter, perceived not as pre-existing substances but as configurations of becoming within the processes of materialization.

Butler’s account also incorporates two more important aspects of materialization practices, which I think are crucial for the uncontainability, excess and operations of social power relations: the abject and prohibition. In her elaboration of the constitutiveness of the abject, Butler draws on Luce Irigaray’s two essays “Plato’s Hysteria” and “Une Mère Glace,” published in Speculum of the Other Woman (Irigaray 1985). She refers predominantly to Irigaray’s notion of the feminine as a constitutive abjection that is a nonthematizable condition of becoming and whose exclusion is a constitutive condition of what is acceptable and intelligible. In her account, the abject is that which is expelled from the order and which is simultaneously constitutive for the order as an internal condition of its coherency. In this sense, the abject is neither entirely inside nor outside the order. Such constitutive outside is “composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless internal to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity. It emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to its own systematicity” (Butler 1993, 39). Simultaneously, Butler includes the concept of prohibition in her account of materialization practices. In her analysis of Plato’s dialogue “Timaeus” (1961), Butler shows that materialization practices take place within the normative sets of prohibitions that delimit matter’s intelligibility.

I understand Butler’s work as a poststructuralist approach which addresses mutually constitutive agencies of language and matter in materialization practices from a perspective of their discursive enactment. With this approach, Butler also addresses the importance of power relations in materialization practices. For her, the problem of power is not a mere substitutive aspect of materialization practices but a constitutive one. As her deconstruction of the sex-gender binary implies, for Butler, matter is not an independent, ideational entity exposed to the external operations of power; it emerges simultaneously with the operations of power. Further, power and its effects do not precede matter but are dependent on their reiterative, performative materialization. I understand such an approach to be anti-representationalist and anti-linguistically monist because, for Butler, both matter and the conceptual apparatus are mutually constitutive – they do not precede one another and are not grounded in the humanistic subject.
As I have argued elsewhere (Górska 2006), Butler’s materialist account may be encompassed within three terms that she, however, does not define in Bodies That Matter, and their meanings are never fully fixed but rather fluctuate within the text. These three crucial terms are matter, materiality and materialization. While the term matter refers to the matter in the process of becoming, materiality articulates matter in a specific phenomenal materialization. Moreover, matter and materiality are not understood in Butler’s account as a passive surface for social inscription. Rather, materiality is a term that articulates matter as specifically intelligible. The third term, materialization, refers to the complex discursive and material practices of matter’s becoming and is inherently linked with Butler’s concept of iterative citational performativity. Within the performative materialization matter comes to matter and simultaneously (re)produces the order within which it becomes intelligible and obtains its (temporary) boundaries. Within Butler’s materialist account, both matter and materiality are an ongoing process of becoming. However, her explicit elaboration of the concept of materialization concentrates on its discursive practices.

Although Butler’s notion of materialization practices is predominantly epistemological, I would like to argue that it also has ontological consequences as – through the concept of performativity – it positions materiality and discursivity as mutually constitutive. In this sense, I perceive Butler’s epistemologically oriented account as leading to similar conclusions – regarding the relation of the material and the discursive, ontological and epistemological – as does Barad’s notion of agential realism (which, however, is developed from a different point of entrance). I also believe that Barad sees the potential of Butler’s form of materialism, as Barad articulates the posthumanist potentiality of a performative understanding of materiality:

Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. Hence, in ironic contrast to the misconception that would equate performativity with a form of linguistic monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve. (Barad 2003, 802)

When performativity is interpreted together with Butler’s notion of materialization, when the mutual constitutiveness of the norms and their reiterative (re)production is addressed, and when Butler’s claim that reiteration and materialization are never fully accomplished because the subject never fully embodies the ideal which is to cite and reiterate, the concept of performativity escapes not only linguistic monism but also the determinism and voluntarism for which Butler’s work has been criticized. Similarly to Barad’s notion of intra-action, performative materialization as a concept has the capacity to take into account the mutual constitutiveness of various material and discursive actors (or relata in general) that constitute matter’s materiality, including the operative significance of the processes of abjection and prohibition discussed earlier. Simultaneously, the importance of Barad’s approach rests in addressing dynamics of materialization and intelligibility explicitly in terms of intra-activity, leaving no space for the ontological gap of representationalism, in her words, and anthropocentrism – which Barad rightly points out in Butler’s materialism, which focuses predominantly on a human materiality that is addressed in humanistic terms.

Both Barad’s and Butler’s approaches to the relation of materiality and language and to the transcendental signifier challenge the binary understanding of the relationship of materiality and discursivity and show how feminist de/constructivist and postconstructionist theories – a term used by Nina Lykke (2010) to delimit contemporary feminist discussions regarding materiality – are in conversation with each other, rather than in a dichotomized relationship.

Moreover, if together with Barad and Butler, signification is enacted not only by language but also by materiality (or rather, in the intra-active constitutiveness of the two, which escapes their binary understanding), the way the transcendental signifier is addressed changes. Acknowledging the materiality of the signified and its agential potential does not imply the transcendental status of the signified. On the contrary, the signified is understood not as an essential object or as
an ultimate power (of, for example, Nature or God) but as an agential force that is not bounded in a particular essence but agentially and intra-actively materializes, obtains temporary situated boundaries and becomes intelligible with the process of signification.

Furthermore, the sign is not purely transcendental, as it is enacted through the materiality of its process of signification and its agentially intra-active constitutiveness with the signified. Knowledge and reality, therefore, are not mere products of linguistic signification or representation but are an ongoing, relational, intra-active process of material-discursive becoming. Also, the dichotomy of the signified and signifier is challenged as the signified and signifier intra-actively enact each other, rather than representing (or transcending the representation of) each other. Consequently, the situatedness and intertextual dispersal (which is also socially structural) work with the agency and entanglement of discourses and materiality in processes of materialization and intelligibility of phenomena that are enacted in the process of material-semiotic mattering-and-signification.

The entanglement of Kristeva’s intertextuality with an onto-epistemological approach allows for an understanding knowledge and materialization processes as not merely linguistic or material but material-discursive intra-active processes of materialization of phenomena. Matter is therefore not a mere surface on which language ascribes its meaning, and language is not merely representational. On the contrary, the categorical dichotomy between the two is challenged (which does not mean that their difference is removed), and instead it is possible to think of knowledge production in terms of material-discursivity, which blurs the boundary (while being accountable for agential separability) between object and subject; signifier and signified; human and nonhuman agency; inside and outside; and author, reader and text while enacting a practice of differencing. The process of signification within research practices can therefore be understood not as representational but as onto-epistemological intra-active and differing enactment. Such a process, moreover, is not linear – a process of departing from an origin and arriving to analysis – but rather situately-dispersed, in its materialization and intelligibilization of the intra-active forces of material-discursive becoming. Knowledge is, hence, not a product but a process.

SITUATED-DISPERSAL

As the discussion of situated knowledges, intertextuality and material-discursive intra-activity aimed to address, Breathing Matters works with both situated and dispersed understandings of knowledge and phenomena, where situatedness and dispersal are understood as simultaneously intra-active and differently articulated or analyzed. Working with situated knowledges allows scholars to understand research as an embodied, multiple process where knowledge is enacted within specific contexts for which it is accountable. As Richardson notes, working with situated knowledges allows researchers to search for concrete practices through which we can construct ourselves as ethical subjects engaged in ethical ethnography... working within theoretical schemata... that challenge grounds of authority; writing on topics that matter, personally and collectively; jouissance; experimenting with different writing formats and audiences simultaneously; locating ourselves in multiple discourses and communities; developing critical literacy; finding ways to write/present/teach that are less hierarchal and univocal; revealing institutional secrets; ... not flinching from where the writing takes us, emotionally or spiritually; and honoring the embodiedness and spatiality of our labours.” (2000, 939)

In situated research practices, knowledge is understood and enacted as an embedded, accountable, and political process where the social, material and personal are political. I want to add to this debate that research practices and politics are situated and dispersed, personal and material, and all are matters of collectivity and multivocality, of intra-active becoming and differencing.

The importance of situated knowledges resides in the argument for situating knowledge in the research process, making the position of a researcher visible and accountable, and voicing the importance of embodiment as well as the context in which the knowledge is produced. Intertextuality brings another aspect to this debate: the agency and relationality of processes of signification, of and within texts and materialities, and challenging the central role of the author as the sole
knowledge producer (while holding the author accountable). Although it may appear that situatedness and intertextuality contradict each other, I find these concepts to be mutually sustaining and articulating different forces in onto-epistemological processes of knowledge production. Their tension is productive in that it combines – without eliminating the tensions – two important points: acknowledging and working with the situated, embodied, and material agentiality of knowledge production; and understanding its nonlinear, dispersed, socially structural, and not only present-situated temporality. In such an approach, knowledge becomes a phenomenon of a dynamic process of intra-active constitutiveness and differencing of multiple (human and nonhuman) agencies across time, space, voices, positions, material-discursive realities, societal and cultural formations and power relations.

Both situatedness and dispersal, moreover, enact specific accountability. Situated knowledges sustain the accountability for intra-activities and agential separations enacted within and through phenomenal knowledge production processes. And though in such processes the agency is much more dispersed than in a representationalist or anthropocentric understanding of knowledge, it is accountable because within a dispersed understanding, knowledge as a phenomenon is accountable for the multiple, nonhomogenizing delimitations and enactments of intra-actions and differencings (or agential separations, as Barad calls them). In such an approach, intertextuality and situated knowledges – or, rather, knowledges of situated-dispersal as I think of them – bring to the forefront the onto-epistemological capacity of not only language or matter but rather their material-discursive intra-active constitutiveness where knowledge and the world are always already (intra-actively and differentially) relational.

The political aspects of a situatedly dispersed understanding of knowledge production, exemplified shortly, reside in the history of feminist criticism of knowledge and in relation to feminist epistemological debates; in challenging positivist understandings of science as a disembodied, rational, controllable practice of human exceptionalism; and in the need for societal as well as academic accountability within research. It also challenges (by articulating intra-active and differencing relationality) boundaries between the writing subject and written object, passive materiality and (pre) scriptive discursivity, and neutral nature and value-laden culture and knowledge and reality. It also challenges boundaries between the materiality of a human subject and the materiality of the research, as both are material enactments that materialize and become intelligible intra-actively. As Vicki Kirby explains, “our corporeal realities and their productive iterations are material reinventions. Life reads and rewrites itself, and this operation of universal genesis and reproduction is even internal to the tiny marks on this page, which are effective transubstantiations” (2011, location 70, italics in the original). In this sense, the knowledges of situated-dispersal do not reside only in texts or in a transcendental signifier. Instead, knowledge as a material-semiotic phenomenon becomes an enactment of various agencies that have no essence and cannot be designated through the binary understanding of nature and culture. Knowledge is always already material-discursive, always already naturalcultural (where the understanding of culture is not limited to human culture but is rather posthumanist and anti-anthropocentric). Finally, knowledges of situated-dispersal point to the idea that knowledge is not produced about the world but is of the world (Barad 2007).

Research, then, can be understood as an epistemological and also an ontological, ontologizing and ethical process. An agential, embodied and onto-epistemological understanding of research practices not only changes the positivist understanding of the role of the researching subject as the main actor of knowledge production and of apparatuses as mere research tools but also allows for intra-active engagement with the world’s multiple forms, forces and agencies, in order to understand the world as an intra-actively constitutive research force which becomes a “witty agent” with an “independent sense of humor,” as Haraway articulated it in her discussion of scientific practices (2002, 369).

**BREATHING ENGAGEMENTS**

Working in such an understanding of onto-epistemologies and the above-discussed conceptualization of corpomateriality, the knowledge
production of *Breathing Matters* is also enacted in concrete research practices of engaging with breathing as a transformative and uncontainable phenomenon. Breathing is engaged here through narratives of individual experiences and of medical or cultural delimitation and enactments, and also as a political matter. While the project engages with multiple enactments of breathing, its main empirical engagement took place in five in-depth interviews with four research participants. The interview conversations were conducted with four different interviewees in four different countries. Three of them took place in Europe (in the Czech Republic, Germany, and Sweden), one in North America (in the US), and one between Europe and the US via Skype. The main four interview-conversations took place face-to-face between 2012 and 2013 and one additional interview (a follow-up with Matt) was conducted over Skype in 2015.

*Breathing Matters* is developed through four interviews which were selected for their differential enactments of breathing and for the way they open up a possibility to analyze if and how is corpomaterial agency relevant for politics of (un)breathable lives. Part 1 is enacted in conversations with a retired coal miner, Marek (interview in 2012), who worked in a coal mine in the Ostravsko region of the Czech Republic, and with Anna (interview in 2012), who used to work as a phone sex worker in the 1990s in Berlin. Part 2 is written in conversation with Matt (face-to-face interview in 2013 and over Skype in 2015), who lives with anxieties and panic attacks and metabolizes them with his dog-companion Tarik in their home in California. The second interview that forms the part 2 took place in Sweden, where a psycho- and physiotherapist, Lina (interview in 2012), discussed with me the psychosomatic and bodyknowledge approach with which she works. This part also works with autoethnography, which creates a specific sensorial attention of mine in writing and engaging with the issues and politics of anxieties and panic attacks. Autoethnography enters the text through specific analytical attention embedded in my own experiences of living with anxieties and panic attacks; it is part of the text through the specific questions I ask and attention to and staying with the ambivalences of living with anxieties and panic attacks.

In both of the following parts, *Breathing Matters* also engages with the specific cultural enactments of the phenomena – e.g., a discussion of the US-based Beehive Design Collective’s (2010f) *The True Cost of Coal* art project and of Beyoncé’s (2016) music video *Formation* in part 1, and of Swedish artist Malin Arnell’s (2015a) performance *Setting the Scene* in part 2. Discussions of such diverse artistic productions are linked closely with the interviews and autoethnography. Additionally, part 2 works with mainstream, pop-cultural scientific delimitations of anxieties and panic attacks produced in US and UK contexts. These engagements, in addition to the interviews that constitute the main focus of the analysis, keep my specific discussions of breathing open to the vibrancy of other and exceeding enactments of breathing, its material-discursive materialization and intelligibility, and its political relevance. They touch upon the excess that is always uncontained in my own discussions while being constitutive of them.

**INTERVIEWS**

As I mentioned, the interview-conversations form this project’s main engagements with breathing. These conversations enact the research, analysis and narrative practice of *Breathing Matters* and took place through semistructured in-depth interviews. This method enabled me to work with several prepared questions specifically tailored for the individual interview encounters while being flexible and open to the flow of the conversation, and focusing on the dynamics of relating within a conversation (Reinharz 1992). In my interviewing practice, the open-ended and broad questions guided conversations and helped the discussion to revolve around breathing while providing space for the unexpected. The guidance of the questions was issue oriented – for example, How is breathing experienced? How and when does it become perceptible and explicitly meaningful? The questions as well as their content and order transformed with the dynamics of the individual interviews and the relationships the interviewees and I developed. This method allowed me to create space for spontaneous engagements and for articulations of the interviewees’ experiences, matters of concern, and specific relationships with the way breathing became a significant force in their lives.
The interviews were conversational. We asked each other additional clarifying questions, inquired into our positions and understandings and followed the flow of the issues discussed or a curiosity about breathing that always developed. We often were not sure how to engage with breathing – how to articulate its everyday presence, especially its material and affective agentiality. Our conversations about breathing were recorded and usually lasted one-and-a-half to two hours – we talked about present and past; about how breathing matters in relation to individual, situated life temporalities; about how it is enacted in our daily practices of living. We did breathing and body exercises (with Matt and Lina), engaged with breathing through voice and sounds (with Anna, who demonstrated different voices and moans), through stories about dying, illness, and self-care (which Marek and I discussed when talking about his and his friends’ coal-mining work and life and death with dusty lungs). Our interview conversations took place not through standardized questions, control of the interview time or question order, but through an active mutual engagement (for more discussions of such qualitative interviewing see, e.g., and Reinharz [1992], Kvale and Brinkmann [1996] and Deacon et al. [1999]).

During the interviews with Marek, Anna and Lina, I simultaneously took notes. I found note-taking productive in terms of writing down the specificities of our conversation, but also – and more importantly – in the interviews that took place not in my or interviewee’s first language, my note taking relaxed the atmosphere. When I was able to make notes while staying focused on the conversation and engaging with the interviewees dynamically, the note taking created more breathing space – as if the interviewees and I had more time between our articulations and responses to each other, and we could communicate from a more introspective and shared yet autonomous position. During the interview with Matt, I on the other hand, did not take notes – our engagement had the form of an informal conversation between friends (though I had some prepared guiding questions with me). Both approaches – with and without note taking – allowed in-depth discussions. During the interviews, all of the interviewees were very open with me, and each interview was different in terms of its dynamics.

Following the openness of the semi-structured in-depth interviews and onto-epistemological understanding of knowledge, the goal of conducting and analyzing the interviews was to develop analytical engagements situated in the interviews that could be dispersed in further conversations and matters of concern. The interviews with Anna and Marek, which constitute part 1, are situately dispersing in my understanding and analysis of corpomaterial agency with a focus on individual, structural and global operations of intersectional power relations. The interviews with Matt and Lina (part 2) engage with issues of the relationality of corpomateriality and affectivity and their everyday politics of vulnerability and resistance.

Three of the interviews (those with Anna, Marek and Lina) are anonymized, and the analysis of the interviews was not shared with the interviewees before I finalized Breathing Matters. The interview with Matt, however, is not anonymized and its analysis was shared. I had ongoing conversations with Matt regarding the anonymization of our interviews, as not only are they intimate but they also articulate his specific relationship with the US military and government, as well as with Syria, and they may be sensitive matters for him personally and politically. But from the beginning, Matt expressed his desire to use his and Tarik’s real names and continued to do so after I sent him the first, second and final drafts of part 2, where I engage with our interview.

**PRACTICING RESEARCH ACROSS LANGUAGES**

Though I used a relatively standard semistructured in-depth interviewing method, the interviews that form Breathing Matters have one significant specificity – linguistic and national multiplicity. The multiplicity has significance for the development of research that in the contemporary globalized world with high mobility (not available, however, to all while it is becoming a growing trend for some) allows scholars to conduct research that is not bound by nationally delimited objects – such as groups, populations and territories (e.g. Sweden, Czech Republic, Germany or the US, or their specific, clearly delineated populations) – or their comparative studies. Conducting research that works across national borders and outside modes of comparability has...
a long tradition in, for example, anthropology, while it nevertheless remains a challenge due to, for example, scientific conceptualizations of social units or identities and the national and European mechanisms of research funding. The linguistic and national multiplicity of *Breathing Matters* is therefore my attempt to challenge such methodological nationalism and to experiment with developing alternative methods and modes of analytical engagement.

By having conversations with differently socially and linguistically positioned interviewees, this project’s analysis is developed through multilingual and multinational engagements. The interview-conversations for *Breathing Matters* were conducted in three different languages (English, Czech and German) and with different degrees of comfort in those languages. The interview with Matt, who is a native English speaker, took place in English, where the linguistic vulnerability was on my side as English is my third language, and even though I live and work fluently in it, I struggle daily with its oddity, richness and complexity. On the other hand, in the interview with Lina – which also took place in English – I was the more comfortable English speaker, and Lina (whose first language is Swedish) was more vulnerable in her expression. She often searched for words, and sometimes I was able to help; at other times I also struggled to find adequate terms for which she or I searched. In those moments, we talked a lot around the words, trying to explain them to each other; we pointed to anatomy posters on the walls of her office; or I wrote down the Swedish (or Latin) terms she used and double-checked them later when working with the interview. I fully transcribed the interviews with Matt and Lina and used direct quotations from them, which preserve the specificity of the interview’s linguistic expression.

In contrast to those two interviews, the interview with Marek took place in Czech with some Ostravian and Polish dialect. I am a fluent speaker of both Czech and Polish, but I do not feel “at home” speaking either of them due to the history of my specific (Central-European) geographical mobility. I translated Marek and my conversation into English while forming it into a thick description that I later worked with in my analysis. During the chapter writing, I continued to come back to the interview recording to listen to the conversation, to hear our specific formulations of the issues and to find direct quotes that I then translated into English.

The most challenging, while also a very engaged and in-depth interview, was the conversation with Anna. It took place at the interface of German and English where none of the people involved in the conversation had full comfort in English. We all worked with the language with different degrees of discomfort. While for me, as already mentioned, English is a learned language and I do not feel “at home” in it, it is a language in which I am proficient. Anna could speak and understand English but did not consider it (and her command of it) sufficient for our interview-conversation. Anna’s and my English competences were enough for our basic exchanges, but for the interview-conversations she preferred German, a proficiency in which I lack. Fortunately, Anna and I were introduced to each other through our shared friend Lale, who arranged for the three of us to meet over a dinner, which she also offered to prepare while we were to hold the conversation. The moment we realized that we needed to search for alternative ways to communicate, Lale also offered to translate. For Lale – who speaks German and Turkish – English is also not the prevailing language. The interview, therefore, took place as a hybrid conversation between the three of us and across our competences. We all sometimes struggled for words and needed clarification, but we had a great time trying to understand each other across the word gaps, misunderstandings and guesses, as we were driven by a desire to connect, understand, and communicate. We developed an understanding in un/mis/understandings, where words and meanings resonated not only conceptually and contextually but also affectively in the shared or unknown emotions; in the corporeal resonances of eating, drinking and digestion; in the bodily practices of gesticulation, facial expressions, sounds etc. For the interview with Anna (that was enabled by Lale), I used the same method of working with a thick description that I had developed earlier for the interview with Marek. In total, the five interviews that constitute the core of *Breathing Matters* took place across the three languages that we used (Czech, English, and German) and seven language proficiencies – Czech, English, German, Latin, Polish, Swedish and Turkish.
The innovative contribution of this methodology consists in practically investigating how to do international research that is not based on methodological nationalism, the latter of which recognizes research participants in relation to their static belonging to one specific group, nation or language, or in terms of unidirectional migration. What binds the interviews together is not a matter of “representative samples.” It is, rather, the specificity of each interview and its engagement with breathing, its particular situatedness in specific power relations, and the differences that were materialized within and across the interviews. Such a challenge is enacted in the methodological practice of this project, which I believe is not only timely but also necessary in the context of (trans-) European mobility (but also immobility and practices of fortification of Europe and the West).

**ETHICS OF AFFINITY**

As is already pertinent from the discussion of corpomaterial relationalities, onto-epistemologies, and practices of situated-dispersal and interviewing, the knowledge production of *Breathing Matters* is embedded in specific ethical concerns that develop the analysis, arguments and narratives of the following chapters. These concerns incorporate specific analytical attention developed through the practice of corpomaterial, onto-epistemological, and situatedly-dispersed knowledge production. This practice is embedded in an approach of searching for affinities as well as separations, political visions as well as social criticism, empowerment of and sensorial attention to corpomaterial and affective dynamics and the inspirations as well as rage, frustration and pain that they breathe into life.

Such ethics and analysis are inspired by the knowledge production practices developed in *Playing With Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India* written by Richa Nagar and Sangtin Writers (2006). The process of collaboration the book enacts is in itself an example of intersectional feminist knowledge production that is antiracist and transnational while simultaneously highly contextual and situated.

Nagar and Writers’s project’s narrative strategies also problematize the notion of the author and authorship, and of a research object and a research subject, as discussed above. They do so by centering the diverse speaking subjects (not limited to the narrator of the text) at the forefront of the agency of the text. This practice is central for chapters 5 and 9 of *Breathing Matters*. As well, the understanding of autobiography the authors develop – which situates my understanding of my autoethnographical accounts included in part 2 – works with the notion of experience and memory but not as an unmediated and authentic account about the subject. Instead, it offers an understanding of autobiographical (and in my case autoethnographical) accounts as situated phenomena that are part of the research and whose meanings, simultaneously, exceed their situatedness (or disperse) and have more general analytical character where the research object and research subject are enacted intra-actively.

Also, the authors’ development of a politics of situatedness, accountability, responsibility and affinity are inspirations for the understanding of affinities and separations this project strives for. As Nagar and Writers’ project argues, solidarity is not something that can be presupposed and expected. Instead, it is an achievement, which Chandra Talpade Mohanty characterizes in her foreword to their book as “mutuality, accountability, and common interests anchoring the relationships among diverse communities” (2006, XIV). In this sense, solidarity is not to be understood in terms of global, homogenized categories such as “woman” or “sisterhood” but as locally based affinities and struggles that are situated and dispersed – “that are rooted in the particularities of place-based needs but that simultaneously map and engage political processes at all geographical scales” (2006, XV). Such an approach can also allow for an understanding of affinities as practices of both coming together and separating, as well as of developing collaborations, support and interests that are strategic but do not assume any homogenized subject or unitary politics.

The ethics of affinity that are inspired here by *Playing with Fire* (Nagar and Writers 2006) also relate with a writing and analytical strategy to which *Breathing Matters* aspires. This strategy is grounded in challenging a binary understanding of critical versus
affirmative practices while simultaneously sustaining the importance of the difference in work and effects they enact. The critical approach is mobilized in this project for deconstructing texts and arguments, articulating the situated-dispersal, values, genealogies and aims in which they are located while affirming the position from which they are enacted. Such an approach – seen, for example, in chapter 8 which critically discusses delimitation practices of anxieties and panic attacks while simultaneously affirming some of their effects – is inspired in a long tradition of feminist deconstructive and critical rereadings of the philosophical canon, biology, literature, art etc. The affirmative reading, simultaneously, builds on the critical one in order to work with the complexity of the discussed phenomena, which are not unitary or one-dimensional in their effects. The affirmative approach also allows me to create new connections and possibilities of thought while being aware of their problematic aspects. The works of, for example, Rosi Braidotti (1994) (and her reading of Deleuze), Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Margrit Shildrick (2009) (in their reading of phenomenology), and Donna Haraway (1991, 2004b) (and her engagements with biology and technology) are exemplary of such a critically affirmative reading.

Breathing Matters, therefore, aims to engage with the multiple voices and actors that breathing intra-actively assembles, to create textual, conceptual and political affinities inspired by breathing and articulate the political importance of nonreductive knowledge and politics that are situated and dispersed – where corpomateriality and vulnerability are constitutive of material-discursive knowledge and politics.

ANALYTICAL STRATEGIES

The ethical and onto-epistemological research practices of Breathing Matters are, lastly, also embedded in the specific analytical strategies that I have developed throughout the project. These analytical strategies attend to two specific interventions: developing a discussion of corpomaterial and affective agentiality where materiality, discursivity and power relations are understood as intra-actively constitutive while differential, and developing an understanding of politics as situately-dispersed practices of affinities and separations that are embedded in analysis of quotidian sensorial, affective and corpomaterial processes.

MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

In grappling with the first overall goal of the project, throughout the work on Breathing Matters I developed a method of material-discursive analysis – an analytical practice that articulates material-discursive practices of worlding and that I use especially for articulating corpomaterial dynamics as intra-actively material and discursive and enacted by and enacting power relations. I was inspired by Lykke’s (2010) discussion of the postconstructionist approach to matter, the already deliberated intra-active agential dynamism (Barad 2007), Michel Foucault’s (1982) critical discourse analysis and, as previously discussed, Butler’s (1993) understanding of performative materializations.

The material-discursive analysis is embedded in Foucault’s methodology of critical discourse analysis, which problematizes a positivist understanding of science and its epistemological practices and challenges a continuous, accumulative and teleological understanding of knowledge (that is, for example as I argue in chapter 8, part of the way anxieties and panic attacks are conceptualized, researched and attended to today). It deconstructs prevailing understandings and categorizations (and their operations as “truths”) of phenomena and analyzes spatially and temporally situated normative discursive practices of their homogenization, rationalization, normalization and essentialization. As such, Foucault’s approach also enables scholars to account for phenomenal multiplicity and transformativeness in the phenomena’s spatiotemporal specificities and heterogeneities.

Simultaneously, by focusing on discursive operations of power, a Foucauldian approach also helps to account for the subjectivizing and materializing effects of language, social structures and power relations. Critical discourse analysis – identifying fields of discourse and their particular normative categories, analyzing how they operate and to what effects, and exploring their deconstruction, criticism and recomposition
(Foucault 2002, 43–44) – provides the necessary tools for analyzing the specifically social, cultural and discursive enactments of phenomena. Critical discourse analysis, therefore, opens the possibility of engagement with, for example, anxieties and panic attacks in terms of the particular ways they are discursively enacted.

The limit of the method, however, consists in under-conceptualizing the agential role of embodiment in discursive processes of materialization.\(^{16}\) Butler’s understanding of performative practices of materialization – embedded in Foucauldian conceptualizations of discourse and power, and in poststructuralist understandings of language – folds in the analytical possibility of focusing on the particularity of the relationality of embodiment and discourse, on the performative role of materiality in materialization practices (where social power relations do not only constitute but are dependent on their material performative reiteration), and on a challenge to an essentialist understanding of ontology.

Butler’s work, simultaneously, relates critical discourse analysis with the quotidian political enactments of power. As I argued earlier and also elsewhere (Górska 2006), Butler’s monograph *Bodies That Matter* proposes an understanding of materiality and discursivity as mutually dependent. For Butler, materiality and discursivity are neither pre-given entities nor fixed essences, while her analysis focuses on the role of discursivity in materialization practices (1993, 35). In Butler’s work, “to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what ‘matters’ about that body, its very intelligibility. In this sense, to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where ‘to matter’ means at once ‘to materialize’ and ‘to mean’” (1993, 32). For Butler, therefore, and as discussed earlier, the relationality of language and materiality is a matter of coming-to-being-in-meaning, where meaning and materiality are inseparable in their intelligibility. It is an account, to come back to the previous discussion, that is not inherently deterministic – neither presupposing pure dependency on a humanist subject nor being linguistically monist (while simultaneously it is an epistemological and humanistic approach). Butler’s conceptualization of materialization practices became inspiratorion for my material-discursive analytical strategy in its explanation of the dynamic processes of becoming-in-meaning. It is an epistemological account of how bodies matter and it has been part of the complex debates of embodiment and materiality in feminist philosophy, theory and research.

Simultaneously, as Barad (2003) points out, it is important to account for material agentiality in terms of intra-active onto-epistemological (and ethical) dynamics. My practice of enacting material-discursive analysis is, therefore, working with bringing together the Foucauldian methodology of critical discourse analysis – that challenges positivist accounts of epistemology and coherent, continuous and teleological understanding of knowledge – a Butlerian analysis of the epistemological materializations of the constitutiveness of matter and discourse, and Barad’s conceptualization of intra-active practices of materialization, in which both discourse and matter are understood agentially in the onto-epistemological processes of phenomenal becoming.

The material-discursive approach that I developed, however, is not itself a novelty in terms of its analytical investments. It is part of current feminist research which argues for the need for material-semiotic, agential, posthumanist and environmentalist research (among other aspirations), which accounts for “how matter matters” (to paraphrase Butler’s *Bodies That Matter*) and “how matter comes to matter” (Barad 2003). Such research has been diversely delimited over the past few years such as within material feminism (Alaimo and Hekman 2008), new materialism (Coole and Frost 2010; van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2012), feminist materialism (van der Tuin 2011; Hinton and van der Tuin 2014), postconstructionism (Lykke 2010) and posthumanism (Åsberg 2011, 2013, 2014; Braidotti 2013). These diverse terms delimit contemporary feminist research of materiality through many convergencies (in relation to, for example, anti-anthropocentrism) as well as divergences in their differentiated approaches and conceptual frameworks (e.g., phenomenological, Deleuzian or agential realist approaches). They are also part of broader feminist discussions about the development of the field of new materialism, the relations of matter, language and culture, and cartographies of feminist scholarship – such as criticism by Jackie Stacey (2011), discussions between Ahmed (2008) and van der Tuin (2008), and van der Tuin’s feminist cartographies (2015).
For a material-discursive analysis – that works with poststructuralist and materialist approaches – the articulation of the relationality of matter and discourse within a postconstructionist positioning (Lykke 2010) is especially pertinent. This positioning (which is not static and is a matter of a specific situatedness of research rather than of delimitations of an academic field) within contemporary debates explicitly focuses on the relation between critical discourse analysis – a critical and crucial tool for discursive and social constructivist approaches and analysis of social and cultural power relations, as well as their materialization practices, effects and performative (re)productions – and materialist approaches. While the notion of “post” usually implies sequential, linear, accumulative and progressive temporality, Lykke’s delimitation of postconstructionism mobilizes temporalities of the “post” as both transgressing and including (2010, 106), where the temporality of the scholarship is not linear and teleological but rather multiple, transversal, cartographical and nondichotomizing of the dynamics of past and present scholarship. Postconstructionist positioning of the feminist debates incorporates the poststructuralist and social constructivist scholarships that articulate how discourses come to matter and analyze discursive, social, cultural, geopolitical and historical operations and materializations of language and power (that are essential for critical discourse analysis). It also brings poststructuralism into conversation with diverse feminist scholarships which addresses nonrepresentationalist and agential understandings of matter and corpomateriality, and articulates the relation of those diverse approaches in a dynamically transversal rather than linear, dichotomizing, essentializing and competitive manner.

Embedded in the conversations that articulate (intra-active) material and discursive dynamics and agentialities of phenomena, the material-discursive analytical strategy enables me to enact analysis where, for example, the anxieties and panic attacks that are discussed in the part 2 are not understood essentially as pre-given forms of experience and subjectivity that are to be truly discovered, described and categorized in a teleological quest for increasingly accurate representations of their ontological essence. Instead, a material-discursive analysis enacts the possibility of playing with the trouble of onto-epistemological practices of grappling-with material-discursive phenomena in their simultaneous situatedness and dispersal; in their material and discursive dynamics of becoming; and in their ongoing onto-epistemological transformative mattering in space and time that does not attempt to clean up the phenomenal (not essential) uncontainability into coherent, continuous and progressive narratives. Instead, this analysis allows for an understanding of knowledge as an agential phenomenon that is intra-actively constitutive of and constituted by phenomenal material-discursive dynamics of materialization and intelligibility, a practice that is always-already ethical and political. This analysis also leads to an understanding of knowledge as spatially, culturally, affectively, materially and temporally situated and dispersed (rather than as a solidified representationalist truth). In *Breathing Matters*, therefore, I analyze both discursive and material forces in their intra-active and differencing constitutiveness.

**SENSORIAL, AFFECTIVE AND CORPOMATERIAL ANALYTICAL STRATEGY**

Apart from the material-discursive analytical strategy that enacts *Breathing Matters*, one part (part 2) of the project is also embedded in an autoethnographic research practice. Autoethnography becomes a constitutive tool in developing part 2 and its specific attention to the material, affective, and sensorial processes. Simultaneously, autoethnography as a method is attuned with the situated-dispersal of knowledge production practices for which I have argued in this chapter. Although for some critics autoethnography may imply self-indulgence, for many scholars it is a tool for the development of situated research, which simultaneously calls into question concepts of coherent subjectivity and ideas of knowledge as value-free (Allen-Collinson 2012, 193). Being situated, it is also a method that has dispersed intertextual, cultural, social and political relevance for developing knowledge and politics.

In autoethnography, “the roles of researcher and participant coalesce so that the researcher’s own experiences *qua* member of
a social group and within social contexts are subject to analysis, in order to produce richly textured, often powerfully evocative research accounts” (Allen-Collinson 2012, 194). In this project, however, autoethnography does not provide systematic material for analysis. In fact, in *Breathing Matters*, the autoethnographic stories are used marginally. Autoethnography in this project is a strategy for developing a sensorial and corpomaterial analytical attention that is embedded in my own affective, corpomaterial and existential experiences of living with anxieties and panic attacks. It emerged throughout the development of the project and became an important research force of part 2.

Such sensorial, affective and corpomaterial analytical attention consists of a specific responsiveness to the sensorial and material parts of the interview-stories and the dis/orientations and ambivalences of living with anxieties and panic attacks those stories articulate. It enacts intra-active knowledge production, where the attention to one’s own frustrations, hopes, and desires, pressure in the chest, suffocating power of breath or muscular tensions in the processes of having anxiety or a panic attack, and life with them becomes part of the discussed phenomena. Or, to put it differently, such sensorial and corpo-affective attention becomes part of the analytical apparatus that is part of the phenomena. Such attention, resonances and dissonances within the intra-active process of conducting analysis was, for example, enacted by my own suffocation and rising anxiety when I was transcribing, repeatedly reading the interviews with Matt and Lina, and writing part 2. The sensorial and corpo-affective attention became written between the lines of the interview transcriptions, where I noted convergencies and divergences between Matt’s and my experiences and associations or further inspirations that those modes of engagement were enacting. Such sensorial and corpo-affective attention created an analytical process that trans/formed not only part 2 but also my own lived practice. It also enabled me to attend to the sensorial human-nonhuman companionship and the corporeality and corpo-affective transformations that a soft dog’s fur and scent enact, and to the transformative power of such enactments.

The sensorial and corpo-affective attention developed through the autoethnographic attention also shapes the questions I ask about, for example, the material agentiality of breathing as a force of politics or the uncontainability and excess of anxious and panicky processes in relation with their scientific and pop-cultural delimitations. While these questions may also be engaged without an autoethnographic research practice, the mobilization of the method created specific corpo-affective sensitivity and investment in thinking through what it means to live life which “stays with the trouble” (Haraway 2010) of the complexity, multiplicity and transformativeness of the phenomena that I keep on living in my own way, and in engaging with their differential enactments as articulated by Matt and Lina.

The autoethnography, furthermore, materializes in the respites that are part of *Breathing Matters*. While one of the respites (the first story in “Everyone is fucking fine”) is an autoethnographic metabolization of a panic attack, the other two respites in *Breathing Matters* articulate specific momentary implosions of political issues that are part of the investments of my project or, to put it differently, are directions in which the project disperses. The respites situate the project, therefore, in its dispersed political, ethical, cultural, affective and corpomaterial resonances and relevance. They take a step away from conventional academic writing in order to enact its multigenre potentiality. In a pause, they articulate breathing’s worldly, individual and structural forcefulness.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

One of the main goals of *Breathing Matters* is to articulate the conceptual and intersectionally political significance of corpomateriality and to develop an approach that is posthumanist while human oriented, which pays attention to dynamics of simultaneous intra-active constitutiveness and differencing. This approach allows, for example, for an understanding of human breathing as a complex force that is vital for human life yet nonsingular in its dynamism. The material-discursive analytical strategy that this project develops works with the dynamic materializations and intelligibility of multiple flows (such as breath, blood pressure, neuron-information-exchange etc.), tissues (such as organs, muscles, brain) and intersectional contexts (such as geopolitical location, positioning in
society, discourses about “proper human subjectivity” etc.). In *Breathing Matters*, knowledge production is, therefore, a matter of material, discursive, human, nonhuman, natural and cultural intra-activity and differentiation, and of the mutual constitutiveness of phenomenal becoming and conceptual articulation. It is also a matter of affinity politics that are developed through specific ethical investments with which each of the following chapters engages.
PART 1
CORPORATE
MATERIAL
INTER
SECTIONAL
DYNAMICS
AIR? FLEEING WAR, DESTRUCTION, OPPRESSION. SUFFOCATING ACROSS BORDERS, TERRITORIES OF SEA AND LAND. UNTIL THERE IS NO AIR, THERE IS NO BREATH. UNTIL ONE OF MANY DESTINATIONS IS REACHED AND A NEW SUFFOCATION CAN BEGIN. ONLY DEAD BODIES CAN FLY THROUGH THE BORDERS THESE DAYS.

GASPING FOR AIR

STRUGGLING ON THE WAVES UNTIL THE LAST BREATH. REACHING FOR AIR THROUGH THE CRACKS OF THE CEILING OF A BOAT HULL VIOLENTLY LOCKED DOWN, OVERCROWDED WITH OTHERS. CAN YOU PAY A THOUSAND FOR A BREATH OF FRESH
CHAPTER 3
EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE: CORPOMATERIAL AGENCY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
I wrote the opening RESPITE of this first part of Breathing Matters because breathing is a matter of both individual and structural operations of power with local and global relevance. During the contemporary fortification of Europe, where I am located, when so many people are dying or surviving in suffocation on its external and internal borders, it is significant how some lives are considered worthy of breath while others’ breath is approached with the hostility, repulsion, and forcefulness of social, economic and ideological marginalization. I wrote this RESPITE in September 2015, when alternative and mainstream media were discussing the drowning, slow suffocation and trading of access to air on the boats crossing the Aegean Sea from the Turkish to the Greek coast, overloaded with people seeking refuge from war, economic inequality and no horizon for breathable lives in, for example, refugee camps (e.g., Globe Editorial 2015; Mackinnon 2015; Martinez 2015). I wrote the RESPITE at the time when pictures of Alan Kurdi, a little child who drowned alongside his siblings and mother during their sea crossing, and whose body washed up on the beach of Kos island, circulated the Western world, causing outrage which by now, in late winter of 2016, seems to have become forgotten in mainstream European debates. In the quickly spinning news cycles, it seems that refugee and migrant deaths do not appall; they slip out of media attention and are persistently replaced – although, regrettably, they were never central – with issues of forging white European privilege under the discourses of “European security,” “border protection” and negotiation of European identity that is, “all of a sudden,” “caught by surprise” by the growth in popularity of right wing politics.

And as refugees’ loss of breath becomes a daily matter of rapidly declining concern, such forgetting of breath of lives that are not privileged by Western power structures has been taking place throughout diverse temporal and cultural spaces. Just in the last few years, as the residents of and refugees to the Italian island of Lampedusa have been arguing, the European Union, media and civil society have been avoiding dealing with the loss of breath of diverse groups of refugees in the Mediterranean Sea and the requests for humanitarian help from the island (e.g., Sinibaldi 2008; Davies 2013; Bello 2015). And as the Black Lives Matter movement in the US has been arguing, the deadly structural racism of US society (as well as in Canada, where the movement has become prominent too, and, in specific and different ways, European societies), its economic disparities and repressive forces have been systematically suffocating and taking the breath away from black communities (e.g., Black Lives Matter 2016). And these are merely two examples from the Western contemporary context in which I situate my research. What this RESPITE strives to articulate as an entrance point to – and simultaneously argument of – this part of Breathing Matters, which addresses intersectional corpomaterial power dynamics, is that breath is a matter of structural power relations all over the world, and breath matters in power relations’ differential operations of their local and global specificities.

It matters if and how one can breathe and if and how one’s life is breathable. One of the central contributions that I find in feminist studies is the articulation of the intersectional specificity of whose lives matter and how. And I therefore find the concept of intersectionality crucial for the analysis of the politics of breathing. It prevents homogenizations and generalizations that have been criticized throughout feminist discussions (e.g., Sojourner Truth’s speech from 1851 [1995]; Combahee River Collective 1981; hooks 1981), and it allows for the development of an analysis of the specificities of social power differentials. As a concept embedded in political practices of resistance, in which knowledge is understood as a political practice (as chapter 4 discusses further), I understand intersectionality as a conceptual and methodological tool of social change.

This part of Breathing Matters, therefore, has a double purpose. On the one hand, it is an engagement with contemporary key
conceptualizations of intersectionality and, on the other hand, it enacts a material-discursive analysis of breath and power in order to contribute to the debate about the ways in which intersectionality is a matter of not only social categories but also (human and nonhuman) materiality and material agency. In the analytical practice, therefore, it focuses not merely on the societal operation of categories and power but on the intra-active constructiveness of dynamics of “micro” and “macro” corpomaterial politics, embodiment and society, materiality and discursivity, and human-nonhuman relationality. In doing so, this part of *Breathing Matters* argues for an understanding of operations of power relations as not only social but also material, not only human but also nonhuman and environmental matters.

**THE BREATHERS OF CORPOMATERIAL INTERSECTIONAL DYNAMICS**

The preceding *RESPITE* articulates the urgency of engaging with questions of whose lives (do not) matter, whose lives are breathable (and grievable). As such, it frames the political position and engagement of *Breathing Matters* as a text that articulates the necessity of intersectional politics of vulnerability. Continuing to resonate with the issue of (un)breathable lives, this part of *Breathing Matters* engages with the intersectional political agency of matter and with intersectionality as a feminist concept through two in-depth interviews, with Marek and Anna, that I conducted in the Czech Republic and in Germany in 2012.

**MAREK**

Being interested in the relationality of air, corpomateriality and power relations, I conducted the first interview for *Breathing Matters* with Marek. Marek is now a retired white cis coal miner who comes from and still lives in the Ostravsko region in northeast Czech Republic. This region, especially during the socialist period during which Marek worked in the coal mine, was called “the iron heart of Czechoslovakia” because its strongest industry was coal mining. The Ostravsko – or more precisely the contemporary Moravian-Silesian – region had vast black coal reservoirs. It used to be the area the socialist government was most proud of in terms of the growth of its industrial character and its working-class background. Over the years, the area’s population grew to 130,000, which had tremendous effects in terms of infrastructure growth and the establishment of cities (see, e.g., the documentary about life in Havířov in the 50s [Jurda 2010]). Nowadays, Marek told me, the shafts are being shut down, the region has become depopulated, and there are no jobs in the coal-mining and other industries, such as mills, which faced production decreases and let people go. As Marek said, “the profession of a coal miner has no prestige anymore, not the respect which it deserves – it is a dangerous and hard profession.”

Apart from the industry, the figure of the coal miner was also crucial for the ideology of the socialist regime under which Marek worked as a coal miner. It represented the glorified physically hard-working hero whose work was crucial for the industrial development of the country. In socialist-realist esthetics, the coal miner was depicted predominantly as a young, strong, muscular man with a face slightly dirty from coal dust, holding his head high and proudly facing the East. As an embodiment of industrial progress, he was always holding the symbolic tools of coal mining such as a hammer or a pick. The reality of coal miners was, however, far less glamorous, healthy and “filled with lightness” than the regime was trying to portray.

But it wasn’t the glorified image that brought Marek into the coal-mining profession. He became a coal miner because his father was one. Although in socialist-realist discourse, Ostravsko was a region proud of its industry, parents often didn’t dream of coal mining as an occupation for their children. Neither did Marek’s parents; they wanted him to go to university. Marek followed his parents’ wishes and decided to go to university rather than following in his father’s footsteps. But due to difficult financial circumstances, he could not complete his university studies and went, instead, to work at the coal mine.

The coal-mining industry is large and offers various occupations within particular hierarchies. Marek spent his first two years at the coal mine as a manual laborer – in other words, the worker
so often glorified in socialist-realist esthetics but who in reality works for six hours a day in a hot, dusty and noisy environment which is completely dark. He spends hours lying down or kneeling, squeezed in small spaces and manually digging the coal rocks from the mine walls. As Marek told me,

To earn your living with your hands is hard. Sometimes even just arriving at the underground location of your work takes thirty minutes. Even when you are two hundred meters under the ground you have to walk up the hills. The older you get the less physical strength you have. It’s ok until you are forty or 45, but after forty it is getting harder. For example, props weigh a hundred kilograms and you have to lift them on your own and put them in place – it’s quite a heavy job and after work you are completely exhausted.

Moreover, the deeper you are under the ground, the hotter it gets. The temperature can reach up to 35 degrees Celsius. On top of that, there are many heavy machines and their operation and functioning also heats up the environment. And besides the heat there is also a lot of dust and moisture. For example, the harvester, which is scratching the coal off the walls has the water jets whose function is to reduce the dustiness with spraying the surfaces with water. However, even despite those technical solutions the dustiness of air was great. During my time there were only little respirators available. You would put them on your mouth and the filter would catch the dust. But the dustiness was greater than what a filter could eliminate. Today, if there is no water, the machines stop working automatically so that the dustiness in the shaft doesn’t increase. But during my times, the work had to go on so that the coal mine completed the official mining plan.

Not only is the work physically demanding, but once the coal miner gets down into the shaft he is isolated, has no contact with the world on the “surface,” as Marek calls it, and is dependent on technologies that sustain the breathability and work-ability of the coal mine: respirators, air ventilation systems, air composition and gas pressure measurement systems, cooling systems, and lifts that bring the workers “down there” and up to the “surface.” The extreme conditions of the coal mines, the physical demands of the profession and the high risk of injury are further enhanced by the dust-saturated air that fills the shafts. The dust not only enters but permanently sediments in coal miners’ lungs, leaving only through irritating the respiratory system and forcing its way out through coughing and spitting black saliva – a phenomenon that will be further discussed in chapter 5.

After working as a manual coal miner, in those demanding and extremely dusty conditions, Marek was selected by his senior colleagues, who valued his previous (despite unfinished) university experience, to continue his education. The education opportunity arrived because a new teaching program focusing on air measurement was established at the local university. Therefore, for the next two years Marek studied how to measure the shaft’s air composition and secure the optimization of shaft’s safety. It is an occupation that is responsible for the life and death of coal miners. The person responsible has to patrol their own shaft district twice a shift to measure the content of the air and make sure that it contains the necessary 20% of oxygen and has a balanced chemical composition. If the chemical configuration of air becomes life-threatening or deadly, the shaft has to be shut down immediately and the workers evacuated.

After obtaining the university title and expertise, Marek became a mine steiger (aka supervisor) responsible for the gas measurement in the shafts and for organizing workers during his shift. Marek had to patrol his sector and its air, control the security of the workplace and verify that all the technological procedures, such as construction of the tunnels, were done properly. As Marek described,

[For the morning shifts] I had to wake up at 4 am. I was at the mine at 5 am, I changed my clothes and at 5:45 am I was already down in the shaft. And I would get home at 1:45 pm. The coal miners who dig out the coal work for six hours a day but [as a steiger] I worked one hour longer as I couldn’t leave the workplace until everyone from my shift was out. I was responsible for sixty, seventy people and that’s an amount which is hard to control. Everyone who works at the shaft has his own number and when a miner gets up on the surface they have to give back their lamps and respirators and leave them in the lamp room – that’s how I knew that all my people were out.
His education, therefore, enabled Marek to start working in a different position, which allowed him to avoid the mining areas most heavily polluted with coal dust and in general breathe less dust than when he had worked as a manual coal extractor. But even in a new position, the dust was unavoidable. Coal miners, regardless of their concrete occupation, are constantly exposed to it, in different degrees of proximity and intensity. Most of the professions within coal mining that include working “down there,” as Marek called working in the shaft, are physically demanding, and apart from the dust, the darkness, physical exhaustion and danger of injuries there are other factors a coal miner has to learn how to work with, including finding ways of often taken-for-granted – by able-bodied people – practices of seeing and breathing:

Apart from the personal light that you carry with you and it gives you light, in the coal mine you work in a complete darkness. Today the main corridors and nods are electrified with the lamps that are five hundred meters apart from each other. Apart from that there is an absolute darkness in there. When I started working, I had a burner which weighted five kilograms. You carried the light on your body, adjusted to your belt and hanging between your legs. This was the only light I had available. Then, later on, we got lights that we fixed to our helmets, and later on we got reflectors. But you couldn’t work with them everywhere [and if you used them, you saw only maximum three meters ahead of you]. When using the burners, my legs were battered from carrying them around.

And apart from the lamp you always had to carry your one kilogram heavy respirator [the mask contained air that lasted for 45 minutes – just enough of time to leave the dangerous area]. You had to have it with you in case of unexpected events or in case of fire so that you don’t die. And on top of that you had to have a bottle with something to drink. I never had a water bottle with me; I would just drink the water directly from the water pipes that were going through our shaft. The human can get used to anything.

When Marek worked in the coal mines, they were “devastating and unpleasant,” as he put it, and coal miners worked in three shifts:

morning, afternoon and night. Marek worked as a mine steiger for twenty years and his work in the shaft, for example in the night shifts that he much disliked, defined his biological cycles and family and social life. But after twenty years working as a mine steiger, he had a stroke. As his education had, the stroke changed his position in the coal mine, and Marek became a dispatcher, which brought him, again, farther from the dust.

Even though Marek was exposed to dust every day and during his working years – especially during his initial two years – “spitting out black saliva,” he was one of the “lucky ones,” as he said, who did not have what in medical terms is called coal workers’ pneumoconiosis (known also as “black lung disease” or “black lung”), which Marek referred to as “dusty lungs.” Specifically, even though his lungs were dusty and he was spitting and coughing black mucus, he was not classified as having the disease. It is this living and dying with dusty lungs, and “spitting out black saliva,” that will constitute my engagement with Marek in chapter 5, where I discuss the politics of “dusty lungs.”

ANNA

Whereas Marek was retired when we conducted our interview, at the time of our conversation Anna was a 36-year-old, white, cis professional who was married, had a child and lived in Berlin. Anna’s story has a very different spatial and political temporality to Marek’s. Marek’s experiences took place in socialist Czechoslovakia, and Anna’s story is located in Berlin of the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and when the politics, economies and social relations of Western, Central and Eastern Europe were being renegotiated. The in-depth analysis of these differentials would be rich for a politological articulation of differential politics of breathing. While my work is, of course, situated in the aforementioned spatiotemporal differentials, in Breathing Matters, as I have mentioned, I focus on different aspects of the politics these two interview conversations developed. I focus on corpomaterial politics.

The story of Anna’s phone sex breathing starts when she moved to Berlin at the age of 24. At that time, she had recently quit her studies...
in another German city to start new studies, with a different academic specialization, in Berlin. Arriving in a new city was a challenging and lonely process for her. She didn’t know anyone, didn’t have any permanent job and – as a self-supporting student – she struggled financially and oscillated between different “student jobs” such as waitress and receptionist. But the amount of time Anna could devote to working was limited due to her study obligations, so with the badly paid “student jobs” she could not earn enough money to make ends meet. At that time, Anna didn’t know exactly what kind of job she wanted. The first two years in the city, due to the lack of finances and time, as well as social isolation, were very hard for her, especially as Berlin is a big, vibrant and exciting place and it requires a lot of time before one starts to feel at home here. But finding a job as a phone sex worker changed many things for Anna.

At first she had only heard of a well-paid job opportunity as an operator at a newly established chat line. The job wasn’t officially phone sex work. The idea behind the chat was to keep the clients on the line as long as possible by talking to them. At the beginning, Anna said, she and her colleagues were not pressured to do phone sex work at that chat line. But as the phone sex industry developed and clients grew to recognize the potential character of the chats, the talks became requested as phone sex, and for the next three years Anna worked as a professional phone sex operator, first in a smaller Berlin-based company, then in a bigger one with nation-wide reach. In the context of economic necessity and being a lonely newcomer in Berlin, Anna found comfort, friendships and excitement in the nice group dynamic of her new colleagues. Some of the colleagues were already professionals (or were active in Berlin’s S&M scene) while others, like herself, were just starting in the occupation. In their everyday work practice, they listened to each other’s phone talks and took inspiration from each other.

What Anna liked most about her new job was the storytelling practice. She liked reading erotic literature and exchanging ideas with her colleagues. From these inspirations she developed storyboards, which she used as narrative templates for her phone sex conversations. The stories she told were designed according to the needs of her predominantly cis male, heterosexual clients. They had to be constructed in an escalating manner in order to catch clients’ attention and keep them on the line as long as possible – a crucial economic factor, as Anna was paid according to the average time her clients spent talking with her. Her clients varied according to their needs and wishes, but there was also a big group of customers who “thought economically” and had “standard wishes,” as Anna put it.

Anna’s encounters with her clients were highly gendered, both in terms of the clients being cis male and heterosexual but also in terms of the heteronormative and stereotypical character of the stories she told. Getting outside of the gender and sexuality storyboard standard was a challenge. Women or genderqueer individuals were not amongst the main clients of the phone sex services, and if someone called introducing herself as a woman, it was, as Anna put it, “the men who were changing their voice to sound like a woman.” If a person identifying as a trans called, they usually identified themselves in one of the normative gender positions. In such a heterosexual and gender-normative context, gender and sexuality alternatives were not very common, and the mode of connection with the clients relied heavily on the worker’s own sexuality and gender identity.

For Anna, phone sex work became integrated into her life. In the beginning, she had a workplace outside of her flat. She worked two to three times a week, starting at 8 pm and working till 4 am, sitting in the office in Berlin’s Kreuzberg. Then she biked home and fell asleep. During the day, she studied. The problems she had had before finding phone sex work were gone: she had money, could pay her rent, go on vacation sometimes and lead an independent life. Her community and friends knew about the job, including her mother, who paid a visit to her office once. Her friends were also interested in her stories. But the job also had some downsides:

I also had some negative experiences with the phone sex work. I think, in this job, I got used to play a role and when I met a new man I also started to play a role. I invented stories, I wasn’t myself. But my friends helped me to get off it [playing the roles in her daily life], to get away from it. I also think they were annoyed with this behavior of mine. I did that often, I also did it in situations when I was bored and wanted to make it more...
exciting for myself. I think it was a waste of time and I realized that. It changed my perception of myself. ... When you listen to the fantasies of others you also create your own fantasies and it changes your creativity; it becomes an important part of your life and changes your perception of yourself. Before I had unhappy relationships with men but since I started the work, men become less magical to me, less mysterious. ... I think it’s because the job gave me more strength, gave me consciousness of my female identity. I could see their vulnerabilities and that brought me closer to them.

Anna’s work as a phone sex operator transformed her life not only economically but also in terms of her experience of herself and her relationships. While opening space for experimentation, it also required her to develop boundaries for others but also for herself. After switching to the bigger company, she no longer worked in the office and, instead, worked on the phone from her home – a practice that has become the norm today, especially in times of economic crisis, many women choose the profession of phone sex worker in order to make ends meet (e.g., Pflum 2011). The phone practice and the content of the work stayed, however, the same.

Anna left her phone sex occupation because it became boring for her. She was able to quit the job because by that time she had a second part-time job that provided a stable income. While working two jobs simultaneously Anna realized that she did not want them to mix and for her colleagues from the “serious job,” as she called it, to find out about what she referred to as her “not serious background.” As she didn’t need the phone sex job for financial reasons anymore, she simply quit. Once, a while later, she returned to phone sex work in a time of financial necessity. But as Anna told me, “I was really out of it as I didn’t have this kind of magic on the guys anymore, they could realize in the conversation that I was really bored. At that time it was an extra, little job but I didn’t like it anymore.”

As mentioned earlier, Marek’s and Anna’s breaths are enacted in different spatiotemporalities and they make breathing matter in differential ways, which allow me to articulate the politics of intersectionality as not merely categorical but also corpomaterial matters.

As research concerned with a social gradient of environmental pollution and social deprivation shows (e.g., B. Wheeler 2004; Germani, Morone, and Testa 2014; Padilla et al. 2014), breath and air matter in terms of social geographies in which intersectional positioning is related to how and what saturation of air pollution one breathes. According to a health geographer Jamie Pearce et al., for example,

the unequal exposure to air pollution between advantaged and disadvantaged groups provides a direct causal explanation for the socioeconomic gradient in ill health, particularly for those diseases related to air pollution such as asthma and lung cancer. ... [A]s well as suffering greater levels of exposure, disadvantaged populations are likely to be more susceptible to the effects of air pollution upon health. This inequity arises because communities with higher levels of relative disadvantage experience poorer provision of medical care, housing, and access to facilities such as grocery stores, and adverse psychosocial conditions. ... [Also,] disadvantaged communities have a higher susceptibility to predisposing health conditions such as diabetes and asthma, because of socioeconomic differences including occupation, social support, and medical care, which renders them more sensitive to the effects of air pollution. Therefore, this combination of factors relating to environmental justice provides a set of interrelated mechanisms that help to illuminate some of the pathways that lead to inequalities in health. (2006, 934)

Breathing with “dusty lungs,” therefore, demonstrates how intersectionality, as a political and analytical concept, can comprise work not only with categories but also with material agentiality – agentiality that is human but also nonhuman. Discussions of “dusty lungs” open up space for questions such as the following: How do the environmental
politics of air pollution matter as part of intersectional social justice politics? How can they articulate the differential ways that the ability to take a breath and to breathe fresh air is a matter of intersectional situatedness in local and global power relations? And what kind of implications and affinities are enacted when, for example, a light switch enacts specific practices of privileging and deprivileging. Or when some electricity users breathe fresh air while others live in the areas polluted by coal mining, or breathe coal dust for a living?

Furthermore, in 2009, an established US organization, Physicians for Social Responsibility – which works with issues of environmental toxicity, health and global warming and received a joint Nobel Peace Price in 1985 together with the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War – released a report that addressed yet another aspect why breathing coal dust matters. The report, titled “Coal’s Assault on Human Health,” shows that issues that are usually taken for granted by most Western middle-class people in their daily lives as they are the backbone of contemporary Western societies, such as energy security and production and consumption of goods, are issues of respiratory social justice as well. As the Physicians for Social Responsibility argue, in the website post discussing the report, “By examining the impact of coal pollution on the major organ systems of the human body, the report concludes that coal contributes to four of the top five causes of mortality in the U.S. and is responsible for increasing the incidence of major diseases already affecting large portions of the U.S. population” (2009, para. 1). According to the organization, coal pollution has respiratory effects (e.g. asthma, lung cancer, and lung diseases), cardiovascular effects (the combustion of coal produces pollutants leads to, for example, arterial occlusions that are related to heart attacks), nervous system effects (the coal pollutants, especially mercury, may lead to loss of what the research called “intellectual capacity”) and climate change and its global effects (2009, para, 7).

Engaging with “dusty lungs” is, therefore, also a matter of, for example, national energy security and the global electricity trade, as well as how air and lungs matter in individual and structural, privileging and deprivileging operations of power relations. Anna’s phone sex breathing also addresses such questions, but in a differential way. Her breath is also one where social gradients matter in terms of the toxicity of social norms that are stigmatizing, exclusionary and discriminatory. Anna’s breathing enacts a prosodic intelligibility – a meaning-making practice that is simultaneously material and semiotic – which brings up questions such as, how is breath a matter of social justice in terms of challenging social norms, discourses and practices of (de)valuation of, for example, sexuality, subjectivity and embodiment? As the discussion in chapter 5 will further elaborate, while Marek’s breathing with dusty lungs is not pleasurable, Anna’s breath enacts pleasure in its normative as well as resisting and empowering manner. Such pleasure is enacted differentially and intra-actively with power relations. It is a pleasure that is contextually present and absent in the specificity of the phone sex conversations and who experiences them and how and when they are experienced. It is constantly negotiated in terms of the operations of (phone) sex work as an industry, the autonomy of the phone sex workers, their relations with their clients and the fight for sex workers’ rights. Anna’s breath simultaneously enacts a struggle of destigmatization of diverse professions within sex work and the right of self-definition as well as necessity of understanding social justice as a matter of dispersed affinities beyond – or even against – national borders.

In this part of Breathing Matters, breath, therefore, works as an articulation and materialization of intersectional social justice politics that are enacted not only through bodies (e.g., in street protests, direct actions or in political negotiations) but also in terms of quotidian bodily agencies, wherein every breath one takes is a process of intra-metabolizations of power relations. This is the case in terms of not only air pollution and environmental toxicity but also breathing social norms of human subjectivity and struggling for non-normative breathable life and existence – as the engagement with Anna’s phone sex work breath articulates. The differential corpomaterial inclusion, negotiation and resistance of social norms and power relations of Marek’s and Anna’s breathing allow for an analysis of individual and structural operations of the environmental and social toxicity that in daily practices of corpomaterial and affective living and dying make lives (un)breathable.
BREATH AND CORPOMATERIAL INTERSECTIONAL DYNAMICS

In chapter 4, which relates Breathing Matters with key contemporary debates about intersectionality, what is considered today to be intersectional thinking has been developed within feminist antiracist politics as a way of analyzing interlocking systems of power relations, and it became central in addressing and challenging structural operations of power. Contemporary debates are hardly categorizable into one linear and homogenous narrative. And although today the notion of intersectionality has become a canonical feminist concept, it is a concept with multiple analytical and political effects.

While situating Breathing Matters in the contemporary debates about intersectionality and relating my position to other embodied approaches to intersectionality and intersectional analysis, such as Jasbir Puar’s (2005), I address the concept in a slightly different manner regarding its analytical and political potential. As I argue in the following chapters, I want to think of intersectionality as a concept and analytical practice in which not only categories but also (human and nonhuman) materiality matter. I argue for its understanding as a concept that addresses human embodiments in terms of social positioning but also in the intra-active constitutiveness of embodiment and power relations. Part of such an approach is not to understand the body as a passive surface on which societal discourses and power regimes ascribe their meanings. It is, rather, to understand human corpomateriality (but also corpomateriality and materiality in a wider sense) as an intra-actively agential force of production and reproduction of power relations. My discussion of the concept of intersectionality through human corpomaterialities, then, is part of my aim to complexify understanding of operations of power relations as both structural and individual, discursive and material.

In the following chapters, I want to propose an approach in which intersectionality is a concept that articulates not only the intersections of categories but the material worlding power that is not only constituted by but also (intra-actively) constitutive of power relations.

In order to develop such an understanding, I engage with two specific concerns. Firstly, I am interested in how intra-active dynamics of material (human and non-human) agentiality and power relations are enacted, and how they can constitute an intersectional analysis. Situating this question in contemporary discussions about intersectionality as a feminist concept and political practice, I address it in chapter 4. By discussing The True Cost of Coal poster developed by the Beehive Design Collective (2010) I make a point about intersectionality being a matter of not only human but also nonhuman agency. By developing a posthumanist intersectional analysis, my goal is not to “diffuse” social justice projects but rather to argue for politics in which environmental struggles are part of the social justice efforts.

Secondly, in this and also the next part of Breathing Matters – in their differing specificities – I inquire into how understandings of intersectionality in terms of materiality and specifically corpomateriality can work with centering analytical attention on human embodied subjects while understanding such attention and human embodied subjects beyond normative notions of “the human,” and universalistic and homogenizing understandings of materiality and corpomateriality specifically. This goal is motivated by Steven Epstein’s intersectional criticism of the ignorance of difference in medical practices and his discussion of the biological relevance of social categories such as sex/gender, race or ethnicity (2004, 198). Through an engagement with breathing enacted in Marek’s “spitting black” and Anna’s phone sex breath in chapter 5, Breathing Matters, therefore, discusses intersectionality as a feminist concept and analytical practice that is embedded, embodied and enacting social justice research and politics in which material agentiality is not an “add on” that is to be merely taken into account but a constitutive agential force of intersectionality – an approach in which corpomateriality is not understood as universal and unitary but rather as powerfully differential in its spatiotemporal specificities and structural dispersions.

Moreover, these two matters of concern are developed through an onto-epistemological approach – discussed in chapter 2 – that is a central pillar of Breathing Matters. As the current engagements with matter, nature and nonhuman actors bring to the forefront, it is necessary to radically rethink not only modernist notions of humans, subjectivity, agency, science and knowledge, causality, and time and space but also
feminist analytical tools. In *Breathing Matters*, I want to contribute to work with a central feminist concept – intersectionality – and articulate the importance of (human and nonhuman) materiality as an agential force that is constitutive of intersectional analysis. While such an articulation is embedded in my specific materialist and posthumanist theoretical orientation, it is also embedded in the historical and present social and environmental justice struggles that enacted intersectionality’s first breath and the ways in which intersectionality should – in my opinion – keep on living and breathing.
CHAPTER 4

DOING INTERSECTIONALITY: ANALYZING MATERIALITY AND POWER
As many concerned scholars have argued, today the notion of intersectionality has become not only a prevailing research tool but also a buzzword (K. Davis 2008) – or even a paradigm (Hornscheidt 2009) – that consists of various epistemological and methodological approaches with highly diverse consequences. This chapter addresses some of the central issues of contemporary feminist debates surrounding intersectionality and situates my own theoretical approach, political engagement and contribution within these discussions. Whereas the first part of the chapter discusses key contemporary debates of intersectionality in the context of feminist knowledge production and politics, the second part introduces my proposal to engage with intersectionality as not merely a categorical but also a (human and nonhuman) materially agential analytical and political concept and practice. It also makes a claim about the importance of intersectionality for environmental humanities and of environmental research for understanding not only human but also nonhuman intersectional agencies.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND POLITICS

The articulation of intersectional thinking was introduced by African-American feminists in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a critical intervention into feminist debates and politics. Intersectional thinking – and the academic concept of intersectionality – was developed as part of a feminist analysis of Black women’s experiences (in relation not only to race but also to gender, class and sexuality) (Hill Collins 2000) and as a criticism of the prevailing whiteness of feminist agendas. The 1977 political statement of the Combahee River Collective (1981) is considered to be the first articulation of intersectional analysis and criticism. Simultaneously, in the early 1980s, works such as Angela Davis’s *Women, Race and Class* (1981) and Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider* (1984) articulated multidimensional analysis of the dynamics of oppression. Not until 1989, however, did the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) – who coined the term – and the associated thinking, criticism and politics become recognized as the academic concept today called intersectionality.

The thinking that is now understood as intersectional also had, at the time of its inaugural development, other definitions. One example is Patricia Hill Collins’s notion of a *matrix of domination*, introduced in 1990 in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) and later in the second edition of the book (2000), differentiated from the concept of intersectionality. Simultaneously, as Katrine Smiet (2015, Forthcoming) points out – with reference to Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004) and Kathy Davis (2008) – such historical delimitation is troubled when the contemporary historiography of intersectionality is taken for a journey with Sojourner Truth (1995) and her famous speech from 1851 “Ain’t I a Woman?” As Smiet (Forthcoming) points out – with reference to Vivian May’s (2014) argument about the necessity of accounting for the intersectional history of feminism as well as the history of the concept of intersectionality – this journey allows for the further historicization of intersectionality beyond the 1970s and 1980s and into the nineteenth century.

In its multiple initial conceptualizations, an intersectional understanding of experiences and structures of oppression became a theoretical and political tool for challenging prevailing homogenized, white, middle-class conceptualizations of a feminist subject and feminist politics in which the category of sex was considered to be the primary vector of social power relations. For example, in the US context, political groups such as the Combahee River Collective (1981) problematized the feminist unitary category of “woman,” which failed to address “a whole range of oppressions” (1981, 214), and Black socialist feminist groups
have articulated politics that started from intersections of not only patriarchal and classist structures but also racism and sexuality. These discussions were, simultaneously, embedded in anticapitalist struggles and activism, at a time when intersectional thinkers and activists simultaneously resisted sexism, homophobia and the white male domination of liberation movements and leftist anticapitalist politics (Combahee River Collective 1981). Instead, these activists and thinkers developed an intersectional understanding of power relations as an analytical framework for “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall 2005, 1771). They aimed to understand how categories intersect and produce social and cultural forms of discrimination, oppression, privilege and violence.

At its first breaths, therefore, intersectional thinking was a revolutionary and transformative intervention into feminist politics. It became a both empowering and critical analytical and political practice. It addressed the differential power realities of diverse communities of color excluded in dominant white feminist discourses (see hooks 1981). Such criticism was central to the development of postcolonial feminism (e.g., Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; hooks 1984; Lorde 1984; Mohanty 1984; Spivak 1988), to diverse debates around identity politics in the 1990s (e.g., Butler 1990, 1993; Scott 1992; Brah 1996; Ang 2001), and to an analysis of state legal apparatuses (see McCall 2005). Intersectionality also became central to the institutionalization of feminist and gender studies at universities and in academic financing systems, and had many different forms and effects in different countries and academic institutions (see McCall 2005; Hornscheidt 2009).

Today, the concept of intersectionality continues to play a crucial role in a consistently underdeveloped analysis of the structural racism in contemporary Western societies and discourses such as multiculturalism and color blindness. Simultaneously, it has expanded from its original focus on articulating Black women’s experiences as it has begun to enact multiple affinities across (as well as differentiations of) specific operations of power relations. As such, intersectionality has become a tool for analyzing operations of not only gender, race, sexuality and class but also diverse dynamics of living within structural operations of power such as dis/ability, queerness, migration, aging, beauty, mental and physical norms and more. Moreover, I would argue that intersectionality can be a tool (and in many aspects it has already become one) that also considers matters of living such as geopolitics and environmental toxicity (which, as the next chapter argues, is agentially constitutive in operations of intersectional power relations across diverse environments and embodiments) or bodily transformativity (for example, the relationality of gender identity, embodiment and medicine).

While such broadening development has its dangers in relation to the institutional power in which the concept of intersectionality is used and often also abused, the expansion of an intersectional analytical scope has been crucial for the further development of intersectional anti-oppressive politics. This process is not only anticipated but considered necessary by, for example, Hill Collins, who argues that “since Black women cannot be fully empowered unless intersecting oppressions themselves are eliminated, Black feminist thought supports broad principles of social justice that transcend U.S. Black women’s particular needs” (2000, 22). She notes that fundamentally, “while focused on U.S. Black women, U.S. Black feminism constitutes one of many historically specific social justice projects dedicated to fostering the empowerment of groups within an overarching context of justice. In this sense, Black feminist thought constitutes one part of a much larger social justice project that goes far beyond the experiences of African-American women” (2000, 19).

Intersectionality – as this short introduction aimed to sketch – is not a singular, static concept with clearly bound theoretical delimitations and empirical applications. Since what are today considered its first articulations in the late 1970s and 1980s, intersectional approaches have undergone numerous transformations in terms of their conceptualizations and applications in relation to their temporal, geographical, cultural, political, analytical and empirical contexts. Today, intersectionality is an “an umbrella term for divergent debates and political projects, both radical and hegemonic ones” (Erel et al. 2008, 265–26). And although conceptual, methodological and political multiplicity is crucial for feminist knowledge production politics and ethics, it also matters what effects particular engagements enact. Furthermore, as Lann Hornscheidt
DOING INTERSECTIONALITY

(2009) points out, the norm-noncritical applications and particular forms of institutionalization of intersectionality put the analytical and political concept in danger of losing its power-critical potential and (re)producing exclusionary\(^\text{19}\) and alibistic\(^\text{20}\) knowledge deprived of its political edge and history.

The concept of intersectionality, therefore, is now – as always – under negotiation. Apart from becoming a concept that has been and is used for diverse research with miscellaneous consequences, for radical as well as co-optive projects, it is a notion with many conceptual contestations. One of these critical contestations, for example, revolves around the issue of the boundaries and relationality of categories through which intersectionality operates, which have been understood in multiple ways. Furthermore, as intersectionality has become a buzzword with diverse meanings, methodologies and analytical investments, many scholars question the usefulness of the concept, problematize its apolitical usage and challenge its institutionalization and the particular power configurations it enacts academically. Importantly, many scholars point to neglect of the political heritage of the concept, to its importance for addressing racism and to the problem of whitewashing – using a concept developed by women of color for a white or depoliticized agenda which ignores matters of racism as a constitutional force of structural power relations. Such criticism also has diverse consequences in different contexts, especially as operations of racism and antiracist struggle function with many similarities and differences in different geopolitical contexts (e.g., the political, social, and cultural contexts of the US and Europe – spheres in which Breathing Matters is situated).

In such contexts, some scholars argue for the need to reclaim intersectionality for radical antiracist projects and for centering analysis on Black women’s subjectivities (see, e.g., this approach in Alexander-Floyd 2012). Other scholars propose differentiating between diverse forms of intersectional research (e.g., McCall 2005; Hornscheidt 2009). And some propose introducing new concepts instead of or in addition to the notion of intersectionality (e.g., Puur 2005; Geerts and van der Tuin 2013). As all of the above approaches have their significance, I want to engage with intersectionality as a concept both in resonance with the discussion as well as in yet another way.
intersectionality in this context tends to overlook the political dimension and responsibility of the concept with respect to the embeddedness of intersectional thinking in African-American feminist scholarship and activism. This problem is a matter of concern not only for US scholarship but for European scholarship as well, which overlooks, for example, the knowledge production of Afro-German scholars and activists—as Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2010) points out—and of diverse racialized minorities—as Bilge articulates in relation to the work of French decolonial scholars such as Fatima Ait Ben Lmadani and Nasima Moujoud (2012) and Houria Bouteldja (2013). At stake is not merely the reference to the roots of the concept in African-American feminism extending to the European context but the particular appropriations through which the criticism of African-American and European of color feminists has been incorporated—while minoritized or rendered invisible—into the academic (disciplinary and interdisciplinary) scholarship on intersectionality in order to reproduce a “white hegemonic position of knowledge production [which] has not been shared or changed but where other knowledges are even used to secure the own self-positioning by way of integrating and appropriating them” (Hornscheidt 2009, 39).

Such practices are also considered to be part of the process of whitewashing. As Bilge points out in her articulation of “whitening intersectionality,” the process is not a matter of the “skin color or heritage of its practitioners, nor does it attempt to police the boundaries of who can legitimately do intersectionality and who cannot. Whether scholars are ‘whitening intersectionality’ refers to ways of doing intersectional work in the political economy of genealogical and thematic reframings, in the citational practices, and in the politics of canonicity” (2013, 412) and, as Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2010) argues, of using position and white privilege as unmarked. And as Gail Lewis (2013) points out, whitening or whitewashing intersectionality also consists of the displacement of the knowledge of race and racialization to minoritarian positions (a process Lewis calls a “gesture of ghettoization,” which produces minoritarian positions and subjectivities of color and majoritarian positions and subjectivities of whiteness [2013, 887]), disavowing race as a European feminist issue which as such becomes a method of “epistemological and social erasure” erasure both of contemporary realities of intersectional subjects (including racialization of whiteness) and of the history of racial categories and racializing processes across the whole of Europe” (2013, 887).

Moreover, the significance of knowledge production and of the materiality of everyday life of academics is part of the struggle of what it means to produce intersectional knowledge. The contemporary neoliberalization of academia renders many lives across their intersectional enactments precarious. The institutions of academia are still embedded in racialized, racist, sexist, classist and West-privileging, to name a few, discriminatory structures, and these bear different weights for white people and people of color, for cis and queer and trans people, and for academics with diverse—visible and invisible—disabilities, class locations and geopolitical positions. These structures of privileging and deprivileging matter; Heidi Safia Mirza refers to them as “the ‘weight’ of living a nonwhite existence in a consuming white world” (2014, 3).

The whitening of intersectionality then is not a matter simply of the identity politics of skin color but of complex social and material practices where whiteness can be understood as “a social formation that is conditioned, reproduced and legitimized by a racial habitus—a White habitus.” While hegemonic positions are never entirely stable, hegemonic ‘White’ ways of knowing and ‘White’ entitlements are fully implicated in the feminist struggles for meaning over intersectionality and the forced take-over of intersectionality from feminists of color” (Bilge 2013, 413).

Intersectional scholarship, therefore, should be accountable not only in terms of the theories and concepts it mobilizes but also in terms of intersectionality as a matter of doing. In other words, its genealogies in antiracist and antioppressive struggles are constitutive for the concept and for—as Hill Collins (2000) articulates—developing intersectional analysis that focuses on multiple configurations of power relations. My reading of the debate about the whitewashing, institutionalization and depoliticization of intersectionality rests in an understanding that the goal of antiracist scholars and activists and those who point to the whitewashing of intersectionality is not to provide a prescriptive framework of who can work with the concept, and how. Instead, I understand this debate as an articulation of the importance of the
politics of genealogies and canonicity and of norm-critical, political and activist grounding and doing of intersectional research. I understand it as a call for research that matters politically – research that is a matter of counterhegemonic doing, which works with nonreductive understandings of feminism and a feminist subject, and incorporates understandings of the diverse power positions, processes of privileging and deprivileging that are operational in feminist politics (politics in which interests and power struggles are often unequally distributed and articulated, and even oppositional).

Such doing of intersectionality is, then, a matter of both situated and dispersed engagements. As Bilge argues, “intersectionality does not entail a universal (i.e., undifferentiated and context-free) application of a static, almost dogmatic, rule to be applied to every form of knowledge and political organization dealing with oppression. On the contrary, the careful and conscious deployment of intersectionality requires us to take into account systemic disparities in social location” (2013, 419). Situated doing of intersectionality simultaneously works with a dispersed understanding of power relations. In such an approach, processes of privileging and deprivileging are central for academic and intersectional work. They are understood dynamically as ongoing processes. Those processes are matters of continuous quotidian doing, of performative materialization and transformation, while they are simultaneously powerful in their structuring of social norms and of discrimination, oppression, entitlement and privilege.

In this perspective, power can be understood in a Foucauldian sense “as a system of relations dispersed throughout the society, rather than as a set of relations between those who ‘have’ it (oppressors) and those who don’t (oppressed)” (Bilge 2013, 415). Working with this understanding of power and situated and dispersed understanding of intersectionality, as a tool for antioppressive and antinormative work, requires, I argue, a nonhomogenized and nonreductive understanding of intersectionality and the work it can do. It also requires situatedness in the specific politics of genealogies, as well as in the past and present processes of the canonicity of intersectionality. As Bilge suggests, "to avoid a prescriptive, disciplinary use of intersectionality requires paying proper attention to historical contingencies, to specific contexts, and the purposes of specific arguments. Thinking intersectionally about how intersectionality is and should be deployed requires considering structural locations and power differentials” (2013, 420). In this approach, therefore, it is crucial to work with whiteness as well – not as an unmarked position but as a position of racial analysis, of privilege.

CATEGORIES, BOUNDARIES, RELATIONALITIES

Another crucial concern regarding intersectionality today is what kinds of analysis of the dynamics of power relations the concept enacts in relation to the categories it mobilizes. This is not only an epistemological or methodological problem. As I argue later in this chapter, this issue is central for an onto-epistemological (Barad 2007) and political understanding of the material-discursive dynamics of power relations. However, many scholars have attempted to classify the diversity of approaches to the status of categories in intersectional thinking and politics. I believe that those differentiations and classifications are crucial here as they enact different onto-epistemologies of intersectional understandings of the operation of power relations, and they situate the interventions this chapter aims to enact.

Operations of categories within intersectional research have been classified in various ways. Hornscheidt, for example, argues that “different approaches [within an intersectionality paradigm] can be subdivided with respect to the ways in which they connect ... categories to each other and/or whether they understand them as diminishable or not” (2009, 34). Departing from this position, Hornscheidt identifies three different approaches that operate within an intersectional analytical framework: (1) an additive approach, where categories and forms of domination are added into the analytical framework; (2) an intersecting approach, where categories are perceived as fixed but intersecting with each other in particular circumstances; and (3) a coconstitutive approach22 – Hornscheidt, themselves a proponent of this approach, calls it an “integrated interdependency frame” – where categories are understood as mutually constitutive and not representing specific and clearly bounded essences.23
Another differentiation of contemporary intersectional approaches is offered by McCall (2005), who proposes engaging with intersectionality in terms of the approach to the categories various perspectives enact. McCall differentiates between (1) an anticategorical approach, (2) an intercategorical approach, and (3) an intracategorical approach. The anticategorical perspective is in McCall’s reading represented by the deconstructivist approach to categories, which is rooted in criticism of the validity of modern analytical categories (2005, 1776) and problematization of the conceptualization of categories as pure, essential entities with clearly delimited boundaries and with a foundation in reality (2005, 1777). The intercategorical (also known as categorical) approach advocated by McCall, on the other hand, “provisionally adopt[s] existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions” (2005, 1773). Last but not least, the intracategorical approach (which, as McCall argues, is often mistaken for the anticategorical perspective) “interrogates the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself, though that is not its raison d’être. ... It acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point of time, though it also maintains a critical stance towards categories” (2005, 1773-74). Such an approach perceives categories as ambivalent and “misleading constructs that do not readily allow for the diversity and heterogeneity of experience to be represented. ... [I]t avoid[s] the fully deconstructive rejection of all categorizations that go with the territory of classification and categorization. The point is not to deny the importance – both material and discursive – of categories but to focus on the process by which they are produced, experienced, reproduced, and resisted in everyday life” (2005, 1783).

As the debates about the role of categories in interdisciplinary research show, ways of understanding and the mobilization of categories in research practices are not innocent. As McCall clearly demonstrates, particular approaches create specific analytical frameworks, research questions, and levels of analysis, and they delimit research fields in a specific way. Therefore, as Hornscheidt argues, it is crucial for intersectional analysts to be critical about their own biases and presuppositions about selected categories, and their own understanding of the dynamics of their intersections and the analytical framework and specific delimitation such an approach mobilizes. Further, it is crucial for researchers to be critical of their own position within their academic fields (disciplinary location, privilege and lack thereof), the knowledge they mobilize and the knowledge they inevitably exclude (academic, non-academic, canonical, peripheral), and of the effects these choices, approaches and positions have on their own research fields, academic communities and the knowledge produced.

It is the integrated interdependency frame developed by Hornscheidt and a combination of the deconstructive and intracategorical approaches discussed by McCall that I find particularly relevant for Breathing Matters. These approaches inspire analysis that addresses the processuality and intra-active (Barad 2003) constitutiveness of categories, which both deconstruct modernist notions of categories and open them up for strategic analytical application in feminist and politically engaged research. Such approaches move away from the version of intersectionality that concentrates on the “relations between ‘sections’ and ‘categories’” (Erel et al. 2008, 275). Instead, they articulate dynamics of “the interdependence and relationality of social processes of negotiation” (Erel et al. 2008, 275). In the perspective I advocate, analytical categories are not perceived as static, essential or, importantly, representationalist (a difference from one aspect of the intracategorical approach discussed by McCall), but rather as multidimensional, mutually coconstitutive, productive, contextual, fluid and processual. Furthermore, the dynamics of power relations are understood as intra-actively constitutive, where “every categorization and thereby discrimination etc. implies and is constituted by other forms (categorizations, discriminations) as well” (Hornscheidt 2009, 34).

Such an approach allows for an understanding of oppression, domination, discrimination and inequality as continuously transformative and intra-actively constitutive, but it also attends to specificity, situatedness, dispersal and phenomenal agencies. Importantly, in the attention to the processual, relational and agential understanding of the concept and the debates about the epistemological and methodological consequences of intersectional analysis and (inter)disciplinary knowledge
production practices, phenomena (and categories) are understood not in a fixating and homogenizing way, as they are in for example additive approaches within intersectionality, but rather as becoming-with, an analytical framework that also pays attention to slippages, multiplicity and ruptures.

**INTRA-ACTIVE ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL DYNAMISM**

The relational approaches to intersectionality discussed above correspond with the contemporary postconstructionist (Lykke 2010) new feminist materialist and posthumanities (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Åsberg 2011; van der Tuin 2011) debates that take place in feminist studies and social sciences and humanities in general. The agential realist approach developed by Karen Barad (2003, 2007) – introduced in chapter 2 – resonates with the criticism of the additive and intersecting approaches and is in (resonant and dissonant) conversation with the integrated interdependency frame (Hornscheidt 2009).

The understanding of causality and relations of ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics intersectionality enacts is – in my opinion – at the core of contemporary debates about the relations of categories in intersectional thinking. Barad’s rethinking of space, time and matter, and the introduction of the concept of intra-activity as a spatiotemporal material-discursive enactment of reality (2007) reworks prevailing notions of causality in a way that allows intersectionality to become not only an epistemological but, I would argue, an onto-epistemological analytical apparatus. The transformation of an understanding of causal dynamics takes place in an agential realist approach through the concept of intra-activity. Causality is understood here as enacted in a dynamic relational way, which does not presuppose pre-existing entities but, rather, the causes, effects and their relations are intra-actively constituted and delimited within the materialization processes of phenomena. This transformation has important consequences for understandings of power relations and politics, as the concept of causality defies both determinist and voluntarist notions of agency. The latter are, then, not attributes of an actor (whether human, nonhuman, individual, or groups and specific categories) but, rather, an ongoing intra-active process of enactments and reconfigurations of the world in the process of becoming (to paraphrase Barad’s discussion of matter [2007, 234]).

While I will return to the discussion of the political implications of intra-active understandings of power relations, such a redefinition of causality through the dynamics of intra-activity also constitutes Lykke’s understanding of intersectional dynamics. For Lykke, intra-activity is the operative dynamic of intersectionality, as intersectionality “refers to the ways in which gender intra-acts with race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, etc.” (2006, 152). Working with a poststructuralist understanding of categories combined with agential realist intra-active causal dynamism, Lykke argues for a conceptualization of intersectional categorical dynamism, in which categories are not understood as stable and essential entities with particular properties. Instead, in the logic of intra-active causality, categories become a matter of doing, of a “dynamic intertwinement ... [where categories] mutually construct each other in constantly changing configurations under continuous renegotiation” (2006, 158). This understanding of intersectional categorical dynamism allows for an analysis which focuses on the “process of mutual construction and transformation instead of a simple clash between preformed entities” (2006, 158).

For Lykke, intersectionality focuses on dynamic processual enactments which are always-already embedded in and enacted with the processes of sociocultural change (2006, 156). Such an approach offers an understanding of intersectionality not as a matter of micro- versus macroanalysis but, I argue, as an analytical practice where micro- and macrodynamics are intra-actively constitutive and their analysis as well as political challenges are to be enacted in a situatedly dispersed manner. As the next chapter will discuss further, intersectional analysis can focus on very specific, situated, corpomaterial dynamics of coal breathing while simultaneously articulating broader, dispersed, intersectional power dynamics (which are, simultaneously, corpomaterially and trans-corporeally [Alaimo 2008, 2010] situated). In such an approach, categories as well as micro and macro power dynamics are intra-actively constitutive.
Therefore, intersectionality can become a tool for articulating structural oppressions while simultaneously articulating them in a transformative, dynamic and situated manner. Intersectionality then becomes not a matter of hierarchization of oppressive power structures (e.g., debates about the primacy of some categories over others) but rather an analytical and political tool for understanding multiplicities of situated and dispersed positionings (and also research accountability) in and enactments of dynamic processes of privileging and deprivileging that are enacted in the material-discursive operations of power relations.

REPLACING INTERSECTIONALITY?

Contemporary debates about the concept, the analytical and methodological practice, and the political potential of intersectionality draw attention not only to the operations of intersectionality and to its institutionalization and the specific notion of categories it mobilizes but also to the term intersectionality itself. Such a challenge opens up new terminological possibilities and could allow for a reformulation of the understanding of the dynamic operations of power relations without the problematic vocabulary of categories, sections and crossroads.

Jasbir Puar (2005), who – within a Deleuzian theoretical framework – proposes thinking through assemblages rather than intersectionality, introduces one such alternative. Instead of an intersectional and identitarian approach – which is often associated with intersectionality – Puar proposes queer assemblage, understood in terms of “spatial, temporal and corporeal convergences, implosions, and rearrangements” (2005, 121). Puar’s approach is, simultaneously, positioned in relation to a discussion of categories through the problems of identity politics:

As there is no entity, no identity to queer, rather queerness coming forth at us from all directions, screaming its defiance, suggests to me a move from intersectionality to assemblage. The Deleuzian assemblage, as a series of dispersed but mutually implicated networks, draws together enunciation and dissolution, causality and effect. As opposed to an intersectional model of identity, which presumes components – race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion – are separable analytics and can be thus disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency. ... [A]ssemblages allow us to attune to intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities. Intersectionality privileges naming, visibility, epistemology, representation, and meaning, while assemblage underscores feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information. Most important ... assemblages work against narratives of U.S. exceptionalism that secure empire, challenging the fixity of racial and sexual taxonomies that inform practices of state surveillance and control, and befuddling the “us versus them” of the war on terror. For while intersectionality and its underpinnings – an unrelenting epistemological will to truth – presupposes identity and thus disavows futurity, assemblage, in its debt to ontology and its espousal of what cannot be known, seen, or heard, or has yet to be known, seen, or heard, allows for becoming/s beyond being/s. (2005, 127–128)

In her focus on the dynamic flows of intensities, energies and affectivities rather than coherency, permanence and linearity, Puar’s approach articulates the necessity of a relational rather than additive or intersecting understanding of the causality of categories. Such thinking is central for Breathing Matters as well and resonates with the intra-active intersectional approach articulated by Lykke and with the interdependent framework proposed by Hornscheidt.

Also, Puar’s focus on “doing” rather than “naming” is an important step in challenging categorical fixities and following relational dynamism. This step, however – I would like to argue – does not have to be understood in terms of a binary opposition of naming and doing. As much as doing is a matter of dynamic processes, so is – as it has been articulated within poststructuralist theories and discussed in chapter 2 – a practice of naming. Naming can be an important political tool for articulating social and political positions, and enacting strategic affinities as well as separations. I would like to argue that as an analytical and political tool that focuses on practices, dynamics, flows, intensities etc., intersectionality is not only a matter of ontology – as
Puar argues in her differentiating ascription of ontology to assemblage and epistemology to intersectionality – but a matter of epistemology as well.²⁶ Or, to be more precise – mobilizing agential realist formulations – it is a matter of onto-epistemology intra-actively enacted with ethics and politics where matter and meaning, individual and structural power relations, oppressions and resistances are enacted relationally as a material-discursive processes.

Apart from Puar’s proposal of assemblage instead of intersectionality, another possible redefinition of the term could be replacing the inter- of intersectionality with intra- and creating the neologism intrasectionality. Such an approach grows from intersectionality as an academic and activist concept while it addresses contemporary concerns about the character of categorical thinking. It also resonates with Lykke’s agential realist articulation of intersectional dynamism.²⁷ Such a modification of the term would explain, directly in the name of the concept, an understanding of not only categories but also power relations as intra-actively relationally dynamic and intra-actively constitutive.

The two discussed alternatives, however, are not simply interchangeable. Although they share an urgency for a dynamic, coconstitutive and not merely additive understanding of the operations of power relations, they also diverge. An intrasectional approach would allow for an understanding of analytical practices in terms of onto-epistemologies, but assemblage as proposed by Puar focuses on ontology and does not address the role of epistemological practices in knowledge production. They also envision politics differently: for Puar, who links intersectionality and identity politics, assemblage theory is anti-identitarian, whereas Lykke argues that although “stable discursive and institutional foundations for identity formation and subjectification” (2006, 156) have been rightly problematized, the “axes of social power and hegemony” (2006, 157) are still constructed around differentiating categories (such as gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity etc.). In Lykke’s understanding, the concept of intersectionality is therefore useful as an analytical tool that enables an analysis of the dynamics, changes and fluidity of the “intersections and mutual constructions of different power regimes as well as the ways in which individuals and groups negotiate their identities in intra-action with them” (2006, 157). In this discussion and in relation to my own theoretical situatedness, it is the intra-active understanding of intersectionality – or intrasectionality – that I find most productive for feminist knowledge production and politics.

Terms such as assemblage or intrasectionality may offer a change towards mutually constitutive and/or intra-active understandings of categories in the causalities and dynamics of the concept’s operation. Simultaneously, however, renaming may also (re)produce the same patterns of privilege, hegemony and exclusion that have been addressed by, for example, Hornscheidt, regarding the institutionalization and paradigmatization of intersectionality (2009). Whereas on one hand I offer the neologism of intrasectionality to articulate the intra-active dynamism in the concept of intersectionality, I prefer to stay with the trouble of the notion of intersectionality. This preference may be counterintuitive, as it undermines the importance of consistency of a concept’s naming and its workings. However, I think that it is precisely the tensions, contradictions, resonance and dissonance of feminist debates – that have been and still are developing and challenging intersectionality as an analytical concept and political practice – that make it worth staying with the “old” term instead of “adjusting” it. The notion of intersectionality is part of feminist struggles, and it is as multiple and uncontainable as them in all their divergences, resonance, dissonance, contradictions, implosions and explosions. While neologisms are an important part of such struggles (Barad’s notion of intra-activity is one example), sometimes it is the diverse, multiple, nonlinear histories, presences and futures of antioppressive struggles, conversations, differences and ways of enacting the politics of difference and affinity that are worth of staying with – they are what makes the notion of intersectionality a concept that continues to live and breathe.

**INTERSECTIONALITY, MATERIALITY AND NONHUMAN AGENTIALITY**

Intersectionality as an analytical (and political) tool and concept has been discussed here specifically in relation with key contemporary feminist debates such as institutionalization practices and whitewashing,
knowledge production practices, categories, relations of categories and their boundaries. *Breathing Matters*, moreover, also aims to articulate the importance of conceptualizing and working with intersectionality as a material-discursive concept and tool for analyzing power dynamics as they are enacted materially. Chapter 5 articulates this analysis and material intersectional dynamics through engagement with coal miner Marek’s dusty lungs and phone sex worker Anna’s breath, voice and moaning, and part 2 will put intersectionality into practice in relation to corpo-affective processes.

But why is it important to engage with human and nonhuman material agentiality specifically as constitutive forces of intersectional power dynamics? Whereas the next chapter articulates the significance of human corpomaterial agentiality in politics and an analytical practice of intersectionality, I want to make clear here that my claim of understanding intersectionality materially is not limited to human corpomateriality. Beyoncé’s music video *Formation* (2016), directed by Melina Matsoukas, is a strong example of intersectional thinking where materiality matters not only in terms of human agentiality but also in terms of nonhuman agency. The video, situated in the context of the Southern US, links Hurricane Katrina with its social and political consequences for Black communities in New Orleans, with the artist’s own heritage, with Black feminist and Black queer feminist politics, and with contemporary Black Lives Matter protests. In visually and narratively evocative form, the video articulates the lively and deadly intra-active constitutiveness of corpomaterial, racist, gendered, environmental and economic structures of US society. In a move of Black feminist empowerment, which contributed to important debates about US racism and white privilege (e.g., Bradley 2016; Robinson 2016), Beyoncé puts her finger directly on the reason why intersectional social justice politics are also matters of intersectional environmental justice politics.

But as chapter 5 discusses the corpomaterial intersectional politics in relation to coal mining, here I want to further address the relation of social and environmental justice by examining the way intersectionality is a matter of intra-active constitutiveness of human and nonhuman agencies. I will discuss it through yet another US example situated in environmental activism.

At the workshop “Frak-off: An Illustrated View on Resource Extraction” (Fishlyn 2012), which took place at the Practical Activism conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz in October 2012, an artist and activist of the Beehive Design Collective, Zeph Fishlyn, presented the collective’s large-scale artwork entitled *The True Cost of Coal* (Beehive Design Collective 2010f). The big black-and-white drawing (Figure 4.1 on pages 134-135) maps the history, presence and future of the mountaintop removal coal mining in the Appalachian Mountains in the US.²⁸ It is a graphic story embedded in a two-year research project the collective conducted through its engagement with hundreds of local activist groups working with the diverse environmental, social, cultural and economic effects of the mountaintop removal coal mining. The poster is relevant here not only for its relation with coal mining and its differential forms and enactments in different geopolitical contexts (as the story of Marek takes place in a very different space not only geographically and politically but also physically and temporally) but especially because it enacts a materially agential analysis and politics that highlight the complexities of the (situatedly dispersed) intra-active relationality of materiality and power relations.

The poster tells a story of the material-discursive agentiality, spatiality and temporalities of the coal mining industry in the Appalachian Mountains. It is a narrative of the industrial and capitalist commodification of the land, and of the struggle of local people (who are at the same time active participants of the coal mining industry as employees of the coal mine company) and activists against the environmental, social and political consequences of the mountaintop removal coal industry. Positioned against the US governmental claims about the necessity of the “energy security of the country” and presentation of coal energy as “clean” and “cheap,” the Beehive Design Collective’s story problematizes all of the aspects above: the cleanness of coal electricity (in contrast to the pollution and environmental destruction it brings); the cheapness of the electricity and the methods of coal extraction (performed at the expense of the local environment and human and nonhuman communities who are the ones “paying the price” of this electricity through environmental pollution); clean local water (and lack thereof); and extraction (and the population that breathes and metabolizes the dust and chemical contamination produced by this extraction).
FIGURE 4.1
The True Cost of Coal Poster
(Beehive Design Collective 2010f)
The story told by the collective also challenges the ideas behind the US notion of “energy security” by bringing to the forefront the fundamentals on which the notion of security is enacted: cultural and material practices of consumerism; the accumulation of resources and profit in the hands of the few and at the expense of the majority; the politics of sustaining the position of the US as a global political and industrial power and as a global empire;\(^{29}\) and coal’s role in “fueling the American Dream” which, among many other effects, is also based on the forced displacement of local people and communities and their replacement with those who become the coal mining labor force\(^{30}\) and form local communities today. All of these aspects are part of the story of the US “New Coal Rush” (Beehive Design Collective 2010h, para. 10) the collective engages with.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMAN AND NONHUMAN AGENCIES**

The world of the collective’s artwork is populated by multiple actors – animals, plants, machines, elements and technologies (Figure 4.2 on pages 138-139) – enacting its narrative literally and symbolically. The poster tells a story of the intra-active constitutiveness of agencies that transform lives and environments in intra-active relationalities with the forces of human industrial, consumerist and capitalist ways of being. It articulates the processes of intra-activity of, for example, environment; social stratification; the production of classed, racialized, and gendered human lives; environmental pollution; and transformation. Importantly, however, the story is embodied not by humans but by local plants, critters, elements (rocks, coal, water and air), technologies and commodities. The agential forces of the poster that materially-discursively enact particular historical human-environmental, naturalcultural events are, therefore, diverse forms of animate and inanimate life as much as technologies developed throughout the industrial revolution and the commodification of nature in capitalism. The plants and critters chosen for each drawing are embedded in the particular material-discursivity each of them enacts in relation to the context in which they appear – they are the actors who inhabit or once inhabited (as many of them are now extinct due to the effects of the coal mining industry) the Appalachian region.

The poster, however, does not simply replace human actors with different critters, plants or elements. It is not a story of a substitution, or a turn away from human worldly accountability. It is a story of intra-active constitutiveness that in its naturalcultural power dynamics enacts not only new configurations and ongoing transformations but also multiple displacements and extinctions. The political events that are classified in the prevailing historical perspectives in an anthropocentric way are rethought here in a posthumanist relational way. The goal of such approach, therefore, is not to argue that humans are still implicated in these stories yet not embodied explicitly in the semiotics of the poster. It is, rather, that these political and social events are relational in a way that can be engaged with in many ways, with a focus on the intra-active constitutiveness of relationalities that brings to the forefront different (and not merely human) agential forces (where human as one of many of those forces is agentially implicated).

It is one of the main points of the intra-actively relational analytical and political practice of the poster – a practice that I would call, in this context, a posthuman political historiography – that some animals which are extinct today appear in the poster in the moment they were facing extinction in relation to the effects of coal mining, and that they embody events that are mostly told as human political or social struggles because they were part of those struggles. Such posthumanist historiography, as much as contemporary analysis, allows for a different telling of scientific stories – not only through anthropocentric grand or micronarratives but also through nonanthropocentric (but simultaneously anthropo-situated) material agentialities that are wording and worlding the world. In this analysis, materiality is not merely a moldable matter of human power relations but an intra-actively agential force of what constitutes power dynamics. In such an analysis, matter matters conceptually, politically, socially, environmentally and ethically.
INSTITUTIONALIZATION, INTERDISCIPLINARITY, WHITEWASHING AND GEO-POLITICAL SITUATEDNESS

FIGURE 4.2
The True Cost of Coal Poster – Actors
(Beehive Design Collective 2010c)

FIGURE 4.3
The True Cost of Coal Poster –
Mountaintop Removal and the System
(Beehive Design Collective 2010a)

FIGURE 4.4
The True Cost of Coal Poster –
Pollution and the Evolution of Species
(Beehive Design Collective 2010d)
Conducting posthumanist analysis, therefore, allows for a telling of scientific, political, environmental etc. stories otherwise. Such storytelling transforms understandings of human, natural, cultural, social, economic and environmental relationality and, hence, allows for different forms of engagements and transformations. It is this type of analysis that the next chapter conducts in order to articulate the importance of corpomaterial agentiality for articulating, analyzing and politicizing intersectional power dynamics.

**NATURALCULTURAL METABOLIZATIONS**

Apart from offering an anthropo-situated while not anthropo-centric posthumanist historiography, *The True Cost of Coal* poster also offers an innovation in articulating intra-actively constitutive relationalities of space-time mattering (Figure 4.3 on page 139). Designed as a folding graphic narrative, the poster tells two stories. When folded, it tells of the ecosystem, biodiversity and relationality of the Appalachian Mountains before mountaintop coal mining. When it is unfolded – the part of the poster that was presented at the “Frack-off” workshop and which will be further discussed here – it tells a story of the changing ecosystem and biodiversity with the introduction of mountaintop coal mining. As the Beehive Design Collective describes their work,

> Opening the poster literally splits apart the mountain range, and the first image you see is of a mountaintop removal site, where explosives are blasting the mountain, and a dragline is symbolically scooping away a whole community in its enormous bucket. The bigger story unfolds chronologically from left to right, tracing the epic history of coal in a series of five chapters. Along the bottom of the poster are stories from Appalachia. As you move up in the image to the top of the poster, the stories become national and global in scope. (2010g, para. 7)

The poster articulates an important dynamic of a spatiotemporal enactment of intersectional human and nonhuman power dynamics. In the poster, the temporality is enacted as intra-actions of forces, dynamics, agencies and transformations. The poster’s horizontal temporality is a linear, historical one. It tells a story of the development of mountaintop coal mining from the beginning of industrialization, through social and political conflicts in US history, through the contemporary situation and towards an outlook for the future. Simultaneously, the linear temporality is divided into specifically situated events with temporalities of their own, such as “The story of the land,” “Industrialization,” “Mountain top removal and the system,” “Resistance,” and “Regeneration” (Beehive Design Collective 2010e). These situated events can be folded further in different ways in order to enact different relationalities of particular materialities and time. Additionally, the temporality of the poster can be differentiated even further, as one can engage with temporalities of each event and different agencies that enact particular temporary intra-active enactments. Furthermore, an event on a poster can inhale yet another assemblage of events that relate to the other events or exhale the relationally of completely different stories that address different questions, different relations and different effects that have not been explicitly included in the poster.

The spatiotemporal metabolization is articulated in, for example, one of poster’s situated entanglements, which depicts naturecultures of the industrial revolution (Figure 4.4 on page 139). On the picture, the three high central chimneys and the four in the background exhale grand clouds of black smoke and dust. The power plant, itself a product of its place and time, metabolizes coal into electricity and dynamically transforms the world through further inventions and ecosystemic transformations. The images of the power plant, smoke and dust critically enact the toxifying, privatizing, commodifying and exploitative processes of the industrial revolution in terms of human and nonhuman lives. The moths in the picture articulate yet another dynamic of naturalcultural metabolization. Whereas on the left side of the picture (that symbolizes the past) a half of the moth is still light after flying into the smoke, its second half becomes darker, and the moths on the right sight have clearly darker wings.

As Zeph Fishlyn (2012) notes, the moth opens up not only direct questions about air pollution (such as, for example, asthma or dusty lungs syndrome) but also broader questions of temporality regarding
the evolution of the species. In the spatiotemporal natural-cultural metabolizations, environmental pollution and animals intra-actively become-with and through each other. In this case, the change of the moth’s wing color is intra-actively transformed with the environmental changes – the wings of the moth are transforming-with the air’s transformations.

The poster also enacts a vertical temporality – a temporality of the ecosystem and the way the effects of coal mining are metabolized through such forces as air, plants, human-critters and animal-critters, soil, water etc. Also, the vertical temporality is a spatial one, but this time in terms of the relationality of the global and local power relationalities of coal mining. Furthermore, both horizontal and vertical temporalities also enact the material discursivity of the political and social struggles of the local communities relating to the entanglements of coal mining, state politics, lobbying, capitalism and globalization.

The multiplicity of the poster’s temporality shows the intra-active constitutiveness of the past, present and future – a story where one flip on a light switch connects each and every electricity user (be it human, machine, animal31) with the contemporary, future and past effects of the coal mining industry, political struggles and capitalist economy and culture. This temporality challenges contemporary consumerist desensitization, which is based on immediate consumption and an outlook to the future driven not by accountability but by the furthering of consumerism, and on the contemporary temporalities of the “What comes next?” logic.

The temporality of the poster also brings to the forefront what I call the matterwork – work that matter does – temporality of coal in terms of the relationality of nature and culture. The coal matterwork temporality is enacted through the nonhuman (and human) dynamics of metabolization such as slow processes of coal creation, the agential force of coal (e.g., as matter that filters water), the effect of its specific geographical locations (and the qualitative and quantitative diversity of those locations for the qualitative and quantitative specificity of coal), and its energetic32 metabolizations throughout industrial development. It is also a temporality of the metabolization of coal in relation to the landscape where in times of mountaintop coal extraction whole mountaintops are relocated, filling in streams, for example. It is a metabolization that includes the areas where the coal is no longer extracted, which are being repopulated by redevelopment projects such as the creation of prisons. These areas are also therefore part of the story of financial resources being moved from, for example, regional education to the prison industrial complex. It is also a story of the metabolization of space, in which water dams are built in order to “wash the coal” and the toxic water from the dams leaks into the surrounding environment, making the water toxic to all inhabitants. This metabolization further leads to the spiral of consumption and economic dependence that is enacted by the need of the local people to buy drinkable water in supermarkets that are often owned by the coal mining companies, in plastic bottles whose production and consumption links coal extraction to further consumption politics and environmental consequences.

Therefore, the industries are not the only ones involved in the coal-metabolization – so are the Beehive Design Collective (which is aware of its own involvement33), activist groups, audiences of The True Cost of Coal poster and anyone using electricity or consuming goods. Coal metabolization has specificities enacted through intersectional power relations: coal metabolization enacts (in an enabling and destructive, privileging and deprivileging manner) communities, social stratifications and social migrations; it metabolizes corpomaterial toxicity in the dynamics of trans-corporeality and environmental destruction. Coal metabolization materializes and articulates situated and dispersed complexities of the transformations and devastations that take place in the Appalachian Mountains. Crucially, coal metabolization doesn’t matter only locally – in terms of the coal mining regions, communities, ecosystems, and human and nonhuman bodies - it involves diverse, always-already coal-implicated individuals, communities, social groups, nations, continents, geopolitics, war machines and agricultural complexes, to mention just a few. In this way, matter matters intersectionally, as well as locally and globally.
The first goal of this chapter was to discuss key issues in the contemporary debates about intersectionality – such as understandings of institutionalization, power relations and the whitewashing of intersectionality, categories and relations of ontology and epistemology, and the contemporary relevance of the concept for feminist studies. Situated in this debate, I simultaneously wanted to propose my own argument for the need to understand intersectionality as a matter of material (human and nonhuman) agentiality. The second part of the chapter, therefore, articulated how intersectionality can analyze not only categories (and their relations) but the dynamics of material-discursive power relations enacted through human and more-than-human agencies. By pointing to Beyoncé’s *Formation* video and by working with the activist project *The True Cost of Coal*, developed by the Beehive Design Collective, I argued that intersectional power relations are enacted in terms of not only humanist understandings of their materialization processes but also posthumanist understandings and that social justice is also a matter of environmental justice.

The discussion, therefore, had both political and theoretical aims. While some feminist scholars critique purely theoretical ruminations about intersectionality, as diverting attention from counterhegemonic politics, and focus on how intersectionality can support and enact social change and social justice (Bilge 2013), I see activist and the theoretical engagements as mutually constitutive rather than exclusionary. Theory can – and in *Breathing Matters* I aim to work with it as such – be a transformative practice, as it is part of social, cultural, local and global negotiations of norms, power and resistance (e.g., negotiations of what it means to be a human subject, negotiations of what social justice practices can consist of and strive for, or challenges to the power relations that enact privileging and deprivileging structures and individual lives). In that sense, this chapter argued for an understanding of intersectionality as a doing and as a material-discursive analytical practice – a practice that is academic and political, which works with situated and dispersed understandings of power relations and their intra-active material, human and nonhuman enactments.
CHAPTER 5

SPIT AND PASSION: CORPOMATERIAL INTERSECTIONAL POLITICS OF BREATHING
The previous chapter addressed contemporary feminist intersectionality debates and proposed thinking of intersectionality as enacted materially in terms of not only human but also nonhuman agencies. This chapter builds on that discussion and explains further how material conceptualization of intersectionality may be enacted analytically. Focusing on human corpomateriality – but working in a posthumanist manner where more-than-human agency matters as an intra-active force of practices of worlding – the chapter analyzes a coal miner’s breathing with “dusty lungs” and the breathing prosodies of a phone sex worker. Focusing on their differential practices of breathing, the chapter argues for a situated and dispersed understanding of corpomaterial intersectional politics.

EXPULSION: CORPOMATERIAL FORCES OF “SPITTING BLACK”

As I mentioned in chapter 3, Marek spent his first two years working at the coal mine in Ostravsko as a manual laborer. He spent six hours a day doing heavy physical labor in complete darkness, in a very hot, moist, noisy and dusty environment, often in uncomfortable positions on his knees or lying on his back or side, digging into underground rocks and coal veins, breathing the dusty air in and out. As Marek told me, “there is a lot of dust in the mines.” That was especially the case when he worked in the areas of the mines that had already been “dug out” – where the extraction of coal had already taken place – and then filled back in with stones. Because those areas were extremely dusty, during work hours, machines developed to moisturize the air were used to help the dust settle. This technology of dust control, during Marek’s working years, was far from perfect. If too much water was used, everything in the area got sticky with coal dust. And if not enough water was sprinkled into the air, the environment stayed very dusty. Another solution for the dusty air was the compulsory respirators miners were required to wear. But the respirators’ filters not only were inefficient but restrained the miners’ breathing. Marek and most of his colleagues, therefore, often did not use the respirators or wore them without the filters.

Because of working in the dusty air, Marek’s lungs and those of his colleagues became more and more dusty – the coal dust settled in his lungs as his body simultaneously tried to expel it by coughing. So, as Marek pointed out in our interview many times, because of the dustiness of the air, he

would come home and spit [out] black [saliva], [while he added in resignation that] every occupation has its risks and dusty lungs are one amongst many risks of the coal mining profession.

The chance to obtain an education, which he received after working for two years as a manual coal miner, allowed him to change his occupational position within the professional structure of the coal mine. It allowed him to avoid the mining areas that were the most heavily polluted with coal dust. Marek’s coal-air-breathing changed with the changes in the positions he inhabited within the hierarchies of the coal mine. And those changes mattered critically in the ways the coal dust and lungs intra-actively materialized with his every breath, every movement (on the coal mine’s surface and deep under the ground), and every cough and spit that exteriorized bits and pieces of the fine coal dust he carried daily in his lungs. As Marek told me,

During my first two years at the coal mine, every time I came back home I was coughing out black spit. … [But] the position I had [later] as a mine steiger allowed me to avoid the dust. I went there when the level of the dust got lower. But many people had to stop working under the ground because of the dust.
Living in proximity to the dust made everyday work difficult, but the dust also became an integral part of life and the corpomaterial metabolization of air. It was critical to their dust incorporation in what areas of the coal mine miners worked and for how long. The intensity of the dust in the air and the time spent in the mines was a matter not only of living with dusty lungs but also of dying with them. Marek, for example, had a friend who worked in one of the dustiest areas of the coal mine where dry drilling – which produces a lot of dust – took place. His friend died of dusty lungs when he was forty years old because, Marek said, “many of the workers worked until they died because they were not called-off in time.” Some of his friends managed to stop working in the dusty areas of the coal mine or in the coal-mining industry in general in order to prevent themselves from developing dusty lungs.

Marek was one of the lucky ones. Upon advancing into the position of steiger, Marek was able to breathe air with lower coal saturation than he had in his first two years. The professional advancement, which was enabled by his university education, protected him from developing dusty lungs.

Having a higher education, which was not available for many people in the region, opened opportunities for him to move farther from the most dusty areas. Education was, and is, a matter of privilege. But because Marek had gone to university shortly before starting to work at the coal mine and then had an opportunity to complete another university education, he had a second – rare – chance. Apart from his opportunity to return to university, Marek associated his luck in not developing dusty lungs syndrome to his particular lifestyle, to working in the mine for “only twenty years and not forty,” and to a particular understanding of what it means to breathe (un)well with the dust:

My body is ok. I did some sports, I did everything moderately. I tried to avoid the dust, I didn’t lack anything in my family and so I don’t have any effects of the dusty lungs [syndrome]. But when I came home I coughed the coal out. Sometimes they [the doctors responsible for the regular check-ups of the coal miners] did X-rays for the lung dustiness but then they mostly said that it was within the norms. It was when you couldn’t breathe anymore that you were considered to be outside of the norms.

Marek’s story of breathing the dusty air articulates the constitutiveness of the dust, breath, and bodily and social norms – for example, how positioning within social and professional power relations enacts breathing proximity to the coal dust that defines the livability of life and the vicinity of suffocating death. These dynamics are articulated not only in Marek’s statement that “it was when you couldn’t breathe anymore that you were considered to be outside of the norms” but also in one specific sentence that reoccurred throughout our interview and that articulated the corpomaterial agency that Marek shared throughout our conversation: “I would come home and spit black.”

The corpomaterial expulsion of dust particles through coughing and spitting saliva full of black coal dust, which Marek called “spitting black,” articulates the dynamics of intra-active processes of corpomaterial materializations of air, lungs, bodily fluids, coal, technologies, corporate and social structures, and hierarchies and dynamics of movement across particular material-cultural enactments of and through space and time. It is an articulation that offers the possibility of discussing intersectional power relations in a specific – corpomaterially agential and not merely categorical – way. Instead of talking about class, masculinity, dis/ability, heterosexuality or ethnicity as independent (while intersecting) categories, and instead of fixing those particular categorical positions, a different way of questioning comes to the forefront when one starts to think about Marek’s story in terms of the relational, agential and material-discursive dynamics of intersectionality.

The dynamics of “spitting black” – between coal veins, dusty air, the lungs’ air tubes, the wavelike motions of cilia hair in the bronchi and bronchioles (that move the dusty mucus and dust-containing macrophages up the air tubes in order to expulse the fine coal particles) – are agential processes and intra-active relationalities that enact and tell about naturalcultural, material-discursive dynamics of intersectional corpomaterial living. “Spitting black” becomes a signified and signifier of the dynamic enactments of social processes of differential living, of the transversal movements across space and time. It is a movement between and across and within itself and outside of itself – a movement that breaks the distinction between inside and outside, as it shows how those binaries are intra-actively constitutive. “Spitting black,” then, becomes
an externalization of the inside out (and a challenge to separatist and binary understandings), a material enactment of social power relations: of the intra-active constitutiveness of social positioning and the dynamics of embodying the coal and social power relations.

The intra-active power dynamics are also enacted in terms of differential proximities between coal dust and breathing bodies. As mentioned earlier, within coal-mining structures, proximity changes according to hierarchical positionings within the coal mine, which allow some to work in air with lower coal particle saturation. But proximity to dust also matters in terms of social and geopolitical locations and relations. For example, the significance of proximity to the dust is also enacted in the collective breathing of dusty air in the region and nationwide. In Ostravsko, the coal dust saturates air in levels higher than in areas where the coal energy is consumed but not produced. Proximity to the dust also articulates specific intra-active materialization processes of power relations that are enacted by “spitting black” when the organic and inorganic relationality, pollution and resistance come to matter as processes of both incorporation and resistance. It articulates the intra-active constitutiveness of the dusty lungs and social (capitalist and socialist) consumerism, progress and technological development (all dependent on the constant energy flows necessary for the production of goods and scientific development).

The phenomenon of “spitting black,” therefore, materializes and makes intelligible how the societal development materialized in the coal industry both figuratively and literally “comes out” of the coal miners’ bodies. The human body is not a passive surface here. It intra-actively – in its politically iteratively enabling, resisting and physically disabling, pestering and painful way – becomes a political actor. It foregrounds how societal notions and practices of progress, development and everyday consumption are embodied, enacted and enabled by embodiment, which is simultaneously intra-actively enacted by those societal power relations. Furthermore, in its painful and undesirable materializations, “spitting black” is in these dynamics not only a materialization of sociopolitical relations but a kind of bodily protest which can be interpreted as resisting phenomenal force. Although they are not to be glorified or understood as desired phenomena, occupational diseases as an effect of socioeconomic, geopolitical positioning can along these lines be understood as enactments of everyday bodily resistance – “direct action,” to use grassroots political vocabulary – that brings coal mining from below the ground to the surface, from the lungs into the coal mine’s corridors, the coal miner’s living room and every single switch of a light.

“Spitting black” is, therefore, both a material enactment of societal power relations and a material-discursive phenomenon of the intra-active intersectional processes of – enabling, disabling and resistive – the world’s becoming.

MATTERWORK: MATTER, WORK AND AGENCY

“Spitting black” enacts a specific work that I understand to be corpomaterially political. It is a work that Marek’s body does in materializing, enacting, reproducing and resisting intersectional power relations by their intra-active incorporation, reproduction and expulsive resistance. I call these corpomaterial dynamics – that are intra-actively material and discursive, natural and cultural, human and more-than-human – matterwork. Matterwork is a material work of, in the case of my specific interest, human corpomateriality (but it can be extended to different forms of corpomateriality – such as animal embodiment – and to different forms of the work of matter, such as the agency of trees or soil in the world’s respiration).

A substantial body of scholarship that enacts what I call matterwork analysis already exists within the posthumanities, environmental humanities and feminist theory. Amongst the inspirational works are, for example, Donna Haraway’s (2008) criticism of the notion of “the human” and articulation of multispecies relations, Anna Tsing’s (2012) work with mushrooms, Elaine Gan’s (2011) artistic and academic work on rice, Gan’s and Tsing’s (2012) _Fungal Clock_ art project, and Jeniffer Gabrys’s (2011) work with plastic, carbon and biodegradability.

Gabrys’ work in particular relates closely to the concept of matterwork. Gabrys employs environmental terminology to carbon emissions and those who are called carbon workers in climate change
debates – a term “that points to the diverse if at times problematic ways in which any number of humans and more-than-humans are enrolled in the work of mitigating climate change” (2011, 3). Our projects share an interest in developing material politics where the material agentiality of the intra-active dynamics of human and more-than-human becoming is not merely an object but also an agential force of transformative analysis, intervention and change.

Gabrys follows particular political trajectories of carbon work in enacting “site ontologies” (2011, 7) of plastic oceans by, for example, analyzing how plastic fragments accumulate in ocean waters and in the bodies of animals and transform into studies of toxicity, political campaigns, or research of bacteria and their role in plastic’s biodegradability. While Gabrys focuses on the entanglement of more-than-human work with human practices and geopolitics, "Breathing Matters" also develops a notion of matterwork in a posthumanist but anthropo-situated manner. The issues at stake for me are human corpomaterial workings and their political forcefulness. In order to understand intersectionality as an embodied lived practice, I am interested in material workings that bodies do in living corpomaterial and corpo-affective lives and agentially materializing, challenging and transforming social power relations. The notion of matterwork, then, is for me a tool for engaging with corpo-affective, material-discursive corpomaterial dynamics and their intra-active relationality with power. By analyzing breath’s corpomaterial politics of expulsive resistance (as in the case of “spitting black”) or corpo-affective transformative power in enacting suffocating world breaks as much as world continuity, and by challenging concepts of human voluntariness and involuntariness (as discussed in part 2), matterwork makes room for engaging with the specificities of intra-active constitutions and transformations of corpomaterial and corpo-affective work and power.

This approach has a specific relationality of work and agentiality. Gabrys, for example, makes a distinction between work and agency, arguing that “the practices that agency captures potentially resist further specification” (2011, 8). In order to attend to their political situatedness, distribution and forcefulness, she proposes a concept of work which, for her, “performs in ways that agency does not since it allows for a more thoroughgoing discussion of the specific transformations” (2011, 8). For Gabrys, work is one of many possible ways of specifying agency, and – in a context of what she calls carbon work and carbon workers – it allows her to follow the ways in which “plastics accumulate, circulate, break down and stack up in environments, and the bodies that process these bits, where work is an exchange of energy and transformation of natures and bodies-in-the making” (2011, 8).

Although I share Gabrys’ political and conceptual investments in terms of problematizing human exceptionalism and understanding worlding dynamism in terms of intra-actively relational human and more-than-human agentiality, I take a slightly different theoretical stance regarding the relation of agency and work. While the notion of matterwork shares Gabrys’ concern about the need to attend to specificities of the situatedness, forcefulness and “distribution” of agency, I understand the specificity not as a force that is potentially resisted by agential dynamics but rather as a particular materialization of agential dynamics.

This approach fosters questions – not far from Gabrys’ but involving different understandings of the relation of work and agency around, for example, the ways of conceptualizing natural-cultural and human-nonhuman intra-active dynamics that are possible when observed via past and present spatiotemporalities of the phenomenon of coal mining. What notions of intersectionality does “spitting black” (and the ways in which it is intra-actively materialized as a phenomenon of relational becoming of coal, lungs and technologies) articulate? How can the intersectional dynamics analyzed through “spitting black” be understood through intra-active processualities of air circulation and metabolism through ventilation and gas composition measuring and balancing systems; through coal-scratching machines and their water jets, which are supposed to reduce air dustiness; through the respirators and the breathing resistances they enact (by filtering air and making breathing harder, which leads to not using filters in order to breathe more freely)?

As discussed above, one of the aspects that makes coal mining dangerous is the proximity to coal. Breathing dusty air is what brings all professions within coal mining together (in differential ways, though; for example, office workers breathe the dusty air differently and in lesser
concentrations than the miners who manually extract the coal). Despite the professional differences (e.g., coal miners, locksmiths, mine steigers), everyone who goes underground (or moves in the area of the coal mine – or Ostravsko) is exposed to the dust and is in danger. The difference between dangers is based on the type of (paid labor and bodily) work and the proximity to the coal dust and its different intensities in the air that the work enacts.

The particular engagement with coal creates certain proximities to the dust. When a coal miner extracts the coal, he is in direct contact with coal’s different physical materializations: from a dark stripe in the mine’s wall to black pieces of different sizes in the mine’s transportation carriage. These transformations fill the air with coal dust, which enters the coal miner’s body with every breath, especially as many coal miners during Marek’s time were, as he said, reluctant to wear respiratory masks.

The danger and risk are also enacted through the ways coal miners’ embodied skills work with diverse technological developments. The embodied skills are enacted through the agentiality of the phenomenon of the coal extraction: a process of the intra-active becoming of multiple agencies of coal creation throughout the centuries, human industrialization, technical developments and particular (male, working-class, able-bodied) forms of, and norms about, embodiment that are considered to “allow” human-embodied beings to act in the dusty darkness and move in the space and time of coal extraction. It is a process that – due to the agency of gasses that can cause explosions, the smothering walls of the coal mine, and the flaring of the coal – is in itself dangerous and unpredictable. All these agencies, including breathing, enact the phenomena of the coal mine, coal extraction, coal dust, the coal miner’s body and the work it does in constantly breathing, metabolizing and expulsing the coal.

Although “spitting black” is one of the agential forces of coal extraction – a process of externalization of corpomaterial forces in relation to the coal-mining profession – it is simultaneously a force of coal internalization. With every breath, Marek inhaled the coal mine into his body. Breathing moves and sediments the coal from the coal vein and coal mine air into the lungs, and releases the coal particles only in the moments when the coal miner “spits black.” As the coal mine is structured hierarchically, and as Marek’s progression within the hierarchy of his coal mine has shown, the specific situated relationality of coal and power allows for breathing that is more or less dusty.

Breathing matterwork is a matter of, for example, the specific situated metabolization of coal, but it also has a dispersed character. The dispersion rests in, for example, the forcefulness of more-than-human forces (e.g., gas concentrations in the mine) and of technological development that is a matter of the politics of global power distribution and has different consequences in different coal mines in different parts of the world. This understanding of matterwork therefore allows me to articulate that the work that bodies do is not a matter of human embodiment as an essential, bounded and universal form. Corporeal matterwork is instead a matter of the intra-active constitutiveness of tissue, bacterial, elemental, biochemical, technological, social etc. agential forces.

In our interview conversation, Marek addressed this complexity when he described his situated experience of working “down there” – under the ground in the mine shaft. As he said, working “down there” in the coal mine takes place in extreme conditions: it is completely dark (lit only by a personal light), hot (up to 35 degrees Celsius), wet, noisy and dusty. Once the coal miner goes down into the shaft he is isolated, has no contact with the “surface,” and is completely dependent on the technologies that sustain the livability of the coal mine: air ventilation and cooling systems, air composition and gas pressure measurement technologies, lifts that bring the workers up and out of the shaft.

Other dangers are fire or the ground collapsing due to the change in the gas pressures in the shaft, and these constitute the daily reality of coal miners and their communities. In the shaft, the coal can dampen and ignite into an open fire through oxidation processes. The coal can also start burning because of the increase of air in the shaft due to extraction. As Marek described, fire was not only a safety issue but an economic problem. A fire can shut down a whole shaft for up to a year. Such shutdowns have vast economic consequences and, especially during the socialist era when Marek worked in the mine, political effects for the workers, as any problems such as fire or boggling down of the shaft were investigated as a potential sabotage. In the intra-active constitutiveness of all these forces that enact the phenomena of a socialist coal mine and
life as a coal miner, the danger of the accusation of political sabotage is as dangerous as the forcefulness of fire, gas or coal dust.

As Marek pointed out, life “down there” is separate from life “on the surface” – “when you go down there, you have no clue what happens on the surface.” It is also dependent on “the surface,” because “if the electricity doesn’t work, they can’t get you out on the surface, or the ventilation cannot function.” Politically relevant yet painful and disabling, “spitting black” is, therefore, also enacted by the complex relationalities of the natural, social and technological agencies that (productively and destructively) articulate how easily these agencies (that sustain life while destroying it in other ways) can be reconfigured by electricity blackouts or air composition in the shafts.

Such agentiality demonstrates that intersectionality is not about the meeting of independent social categories but rather about the intra-active constitutiveness of agential natural-cultural, human and more-than-human forces (as chapter 4 discussed in relation to The True Cost of Coal project [Beehive Design Collective 2010f]). Intersectionality examines the situated realities of embodied subjects and the ways they are enacted in the dynamics of power relations. Such power relations are, therefore, social and material – intra-actively so – and therefore both social and material agency (in the ambiguity of its empowering as well as limiting and painful forcefulness) needs to be discussed as part of intersectionality in terms of corpomaterial and environmental agency.

Moreover, breathing dusty air in a coal mine, or polluted air in a coal-mining region or in such cities like Beijing, makes it clear that air cannot be taken for granted and it is not bereft of power relations. In the coal mine where Marek worked, breathing air was a bodily, technological, economic and political matter. It was also a necessity and a constant risk – the air that sustained his life was damaging his lungs, and it could have also killed him if its specific composition and concentration had caused an explosion. This air is also an achievement, as it needs to be balanced, preserved and circulated (in the coal mine as much as in, for example, any building with air conditioning or other air management systems) through the ventilation system.

The concept of matterwork, therefore, engages with the dynamics of “spitting black” as a specific (situatedly dispersed) agential worlding corpomaterial practice. Matter (corpomaterial as well as the matter of the coal dust or agency of gas and fire) is simultaneously understood as a dynamic intra-active and differential agentiality (of, e.g., intra-actively constitutive biological, geological, chemical as well as cultural, social, economic and political forces). In that sense, matterwork is both an analytical concept and a material practice, and within it “spitting black” articulates the geopolitical histories and contemporarities of coal extraction; of political, economic and environmental negotiations of social norms and hierarchizations; and the corpomaterial reproductions and resistances – that are productive but also extremely difficult and a strain in everyday life – of structural power relations.

The matterwork of breathing is enacted in material practices, which are common but not universal. Whereas in physiological discourses breathing operates through humans’ universally shared patterns and structures (e.g., physical principles of the diffusion processes), breathing matterwork changes through the embodied living of intersectional power relations. Examples of these embodied differences include breathing fresh versus polluted air, having dusty lungs syndrome, corpo-affective distress related to the social structures of discrimination, or living with breathing technologies (e.g., respirators, artificial lungs or extracorporeal membrane oxygenation technologies). Matterwork, therefore, is differential and in the case of corpomateriality it problematizes universal understandings of embodiment and addresses corpomaterial specificities and the particular intra-active relationality of dynamics of corpomateriality and power.

Simultaneously, as the discussion of more-than-human agencies has shown, matterwork is a matter of more-than-human forces. While Breathing Matters focuses predominantly on human corpomaterial breathing processes, the notion of matterwork has much broader implications. Being embedded in a trans-corporeal (Alaimo 2008) understanding of economies, ecologies and natureculture of human-and-nonhuman worlding dynamics, matterwork helps to articulate the material agencies of diverse material (but also intra-actively discursive, social and structural) worlding forces. In analyzing these agencies, it is necessary to understand them not as objects but as agential forces of knowledge production.
Matterwork is also a concept that – not simply capturing how social power relations are inscribed or incorporated in materiality – articulates the corpomaterial dynamism and agentiality, or the work, of the intra-active metabolism of power relations in everyday life. This metabolism consists of, for example, incorporating, enacting, transforming and resisting structural power relations. It is a concept which understands matter and power in dynamism, and it challenges notions of interiority and exteriority as well as positioning them as analytically significant. As such, matterwork articulates the intra-active constitutive relationality of matter and power while working with their differencing, which is politically transformative but also difficult for quotidian life.

Matterwork does not position matter as universal. It is rather an analytical concept and material dynamism that words material worlding (in the case of Breathing Matters, it words human corpomaterial worlding) in the specificity of processuality of matter’s intra-active relational becoming in naturcultural power relations. This concept, then, allows for an understanding of corpomaterial politics not as merely reactive and individualized practices but as differential, specific yet structural, situated yet dispersed actualities and potentialities of transformation. As such, matterwork enacts the politicization of material agentialities in their material-discursive constitutiveness. Matterwork, therefore, allows for an articulation of the corpomaterial politics of naturcultural, material-structural intra-active constitutions and transformative actualities and potentialities. In the concept of matterwork, human corpomateriality is not an object for intersectional knowledge production or politics but it is their intra-active producer.

PROSODIES OF MATTERWORK: BREATH, VOICE AND MOANING

As Anna said in our interview conversation, phone sex work is not only about the words and narratives one develops with the caller but also about working with one’s voice and breath. Prosody is the study of the materialities and semiotics of the acoustic, rhythmic elements of language and its intonation that enacts its affectivity. Prosody is a matter of tempo, pitch, volume and pauses that does not necessarily have a syntactic structure. It is usually concerned with such linguistic functions in relation to poetry and prose, but the affectivity of language is also a matter of other spectrums of language use. As Ashley Manta explains in A Feminist’s Guide to Phone Sex, prosody signifies the nonverbal traits of language and articulates how they participate in the creation and communication of meaning (2014, 7). In phone sex work, working with voice and breath to articulate affective states and pace the conversation is a skill. Desire and passion are communicated through a “combination of tone, breath, and words” (2014, 7). Dropping the pitch of the voice down, exhaling at the beginning of the sentence – practices Manta recommends – can fill the air with sex.

Anna also uses her voice and breath in her phone sex work practice. As she told me, usually when the phone started ringing and she picked up, the person introduced himself (most of her clients were cis men). Some of the introductions were preluded with an erotic moan. By the caller’s moan, Anna was able to tell what kind of illusion, as she called it, the caller wanted. Even though she usually used what she called a “standard program” – a pre-prepared and common narrative – every conversation she had was different and, as she said, “the moan was part of the story.” Moaning as an opening to the story, the body of the story, and often also the ending of the story that finished with the client’s orgasm (although some of her clients needed what she called afterplay). The moan, breath and voice of her clients were Anna’s navigators; she paid attention to the changes in their voices as their arousal grew and as their voices became “more pushed, more pressed or more relieved, dependent on their consciousness or freedom of their sexuality.” And whether Anna had used a “standard program” or improvised, breath was always a crucial working tool for her. As she said,

What matters is the way you work with your breath in order to create particular kinds of moans as well as how the breath is materialized in the voice that creates a particular environment, story and excitement.
Although Anna’s deep voice was an asset in terms of creating a sexualized environment, her ability to read and relate to the voice, breath and moans of her client was also important in terms of developing the conversation:

I think the moan had the same importance like the story I was telling. The difference between the moans depended on the guy I was talking to; it depended on the customer what was important, if it was the moan, the story or some higher standards.

In a story with “higher standards,” Anna needed to improvise according to the needs of her clients, which in these cases were not part of the standard spectrum of sexuality with which she usually worked. Breathing and moaning for “regular standards” and “higher standards” differed. In S&M (sadomasochistic) conversations, for example, Anna’s breathing and moaning had a more dynamic character because it required a prosodic practice that did not create an atmosphere of tenderness, sweetness or sensitivity, as she called it. She considered such breathing much harder and, in order to practice it, she used a lot of, as she said, clichés:

it started with a moan when you licked your lips, then the story would have a dynamic curving of arousal, which gets higher and higher. You always had to kind of react to the arousal of the guy. ... You followed him in his arousing. And this you mainly realized through moaning because you interacted with his moaning. Most of the men didn’t take part in the story; they were just receiving the story. You could just come up with the story through the guy by guessing how aroused he was.

Apart from moaning, Anna’s voice was her tool. She described herself as having a deep and calm voice, which is appreciated in her profession. She usually started conversations with a dark, deep voice, which she called “the cliché of the phone sex voice.” Developing this voice was easy for her, as her “natural voice,” is deep, and she has often been “accused,” she said, of having a “sexual voice.” Sometimes, but very rarely, Anna used her “natural voice” when she sympathized with her client. But most of the time she modified her voice slightly in order to protect herself, her anonymity and her own intimacy. She also modified it according to the story and clichés she was using, and throughout the conversation. She used her voice to stay in a particular story and to change the story if she wanted to. In an S&M story, for example, she used a rough sexual voice. Anna described,

If a guy wanted S&M talk, he would use masochistic devotee speech and you would sense he wants the S&M conversation. Then you knew in the first minute that you have to use a very hard, demanding voice and imperatives.

When phone sex work started to bore her, Anna started to play with her voice much more. She changed the stories she told and the way she told them – they became “more absurd, provocative, and strange. I used different voices [...] or different dialects. It brought something new to bear the boredom.”

During her work, especially in the early days, Anna also realized how powerful breath can be in not only enacting the story but also in embodying it. By working with her breath, and occasionally getting aroused herself, she sometimes brought herself to hyperventilation. When that happened, it was “a nice and relaxing thing” for her. Such moments happened, however, uncontrollably and randomly, depending on the situation and if she developed, during the call, “some kind of tension within [her]self.”

In phone sex work, breath, moan and voice figure as material-discursive phenomena – they are corpo-affective signification practices that enact sexualized vibrancies where narratives, fantasies and bodily processes are enacted in intra-active constitution. Moans, breath and voice become forces of affective narration, which is both linguistic and corpomaterial. As Anna explained, they enact the gradation of a conversation, the fantasy story and the corpo-affective experience throughout the phone call. Breath becomes, in phone sex conversations – in transformational prosodic enactments as an initiation, a moan, a pause, a vocalization – a force of enacting desire. At this point, the work of matter (the matterwork of, for example, the vocal cords, diaphragm and biochemical compositions) is enacted and constituted (and
constituting) intra-actively with the work of social norms that agentially form the conversations; the story lines; the clichés; the economic, social and racialized realities; and the corpomaterial relating of the phone sex worker and client.

Anna’s elaborations also articulate how those material-discursive practices of enacting meaning and corpo-affective action are dynamic processes. While the prosodies of breath, moaning and voice mobilize social norms and sexual clichés, they are not stable and bounded entities of representative linguistic communication. Rather, their materialization and intelligibility are performative; they change and transform intra-actively through different phone calls, needs and conversational dynamics. The dynamics of moaning, breath and voice change relationally with the narrative and dynamics of the conversations. In phone sex work, breathing is a skill and a dynamic process of material-discursive relationality that constitutes the phenomenon of the conversation: an entanglement of (hetero)sexual, gendered, classed, racialized and anthropocentric imaginaries; bodily experiences of sexual arousal and different breathing; voicing and moaning prosodies that intra-actively enact and are enacted by the dynamics and directions of the narrative development. Breath, voice and moaning are also forces of Anna’s (and of course clients’) agency, which take place not only in the imaginaries she mobilized but also by the way she worked with them and how they allowed her to grade, control or change the conversation.

As Anna clearly stated, phone sex work not only mobilizes social norms and discourses but also – or rather intra-actively – takes place as a prosodic work of matter where breath, moaning and voice become forces of conceptual and corpo-affective meaningfulness. They are enacted-with cultural imaginaries, social and economic realities, shifting power relations within conversations and sexual norms and stereotypes. In such material-discursive processes, patriarchal, heterosexist, racist and classist structures matter, and they are also constitutively enacted and negotiated in the processes of the air flow, circulation of oxygen through the body, vibration of vocal cords with the exhalation and the proximity of the phone as a technology of closeness and distance.

CORPOMATERIAL RESISTANCE OF PROLETARIAN LUNGS

Marek’s metabolization of the coal-full air and Anna’s breath and its vocalizations are natural-cultural matters that also breathe and enact specific power relations. These power relations are not merely acted on bodies or reproduced in Marek’s and Anna’s work; they are matters of corpomaterial materializations, enactments and resistance. In her work Bodily Natures (2010), but also in earlier elaborations (2008), Stacy Alaimo develops the previously discussed concept of trans-corporeality (see chapter 2). Trans-corporeality articulates how bodies and environments, as well as nature and culture, are mutually constitutive. It problematizes concepts of bodily boundaries as clearly delimited, impermeable and stable. By discussing, for example, environmental toxicity, it challenges the boundaries and notions of the inside and outside of the body, of the human and nonhuman, and of the separation between nature and culture.

In Bodily Natures Alaimo (2010) moreover introduces into feminist environmental debates the concept of the proletariat lung and analyses it through historical archives of workers resistance in relation to the development of health care as well as in poetic expression. The proletariat lung is a concept Alaimo picked up and further developed from Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins’ (2007) discussion of the relationship of class, race and embodiment. It allows her to articulate the trans-corporeal character of corpomateriality and to challenge the very boundaries through which human (but not only human) bodies are conceptualized:

Ostensibly external social forces have transformed an internal bodily organ ... [and enact a] movement across the social and the biological, the private body and the social system [which] suggest[s] traffic among other personal, political, epistemological, institutional and disciplinary domains. ... The lung certainly “belongs” to the worker, and yet it may also be scrutinized by experts in medicine, law, “industrial hygiene,” occupational health insurance claims, and union organizing (as well as by the academic writings of Lewontin, Levins, and myself). The
proletarian lung illustrates ... that the human body is never a rigidly enclosed, protected entity, but is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments, which may include industrial environments and their social/economic forces. (Alaimo 2010, 28)

Discussions of proletarian lung articulate the intra-active constitutiveness of corpomateriality, cultural norms and social power relations. It also challenges the binary distinctions between the notions on which the Western concept of human subjectivity are developed, such as inside versus outside and private versus public.

Such reconfiguration of boundaries also transforms the understanding of the relationality of social power structures and corpomateriality. In their analysis of class, race and embodiment, Lewotin and Levins point out that “racism becomes an environmental factor affecting adrenals and other organs ... [and] the conditions under which the labor power is sold in a capitalist labor market act on the individual's glucose cycle as the pattern of exertion” (2007, 37).

Power structures are, therefore, undividable from embodiment, and understanding their intersectional dynamics can no longer only be a matter of categorical analysis but has to also include how power matters (and is agentially enacted) materially. As Alaimo argues, in resonance with Lewontin and Levins,

The workers' bodies are not only the sites of the direct application of power, but permeable sites that are forever transformed by the substances and forces – asbestos, coal, dust, radiation – that penetrate them. (2010, 30)

I would argue that thinking with environmental feminist research on toxic bodies, as Alaimo does, necessitates an understanding of human lives as always-already intersectional becomings enacted in and through bodies. But such analysis should be a matter of understanding not only how power comes to matter corpomaterially but also how societal power relations are intra-actively enacted by embodiment. The earlier discussion regarding Marek's dusty lungs and the significance of proximity with dust articulates that it does matter what position one has in intersectional power structures. As Lewontin and Levins' example shows, in terms of racism and classism affecting bodily adrenaline levels, intersectional lives materialize differently with highly discrepant ways of corpomaterial and affective well-being and privilege and lack of privilege that are enacted through specific embodiments and local as well as geopolitical social power structures. As Anna pointed out, the way meanings of social power relations (as they are enacted in sexual fantasies governed by specific – hierarchical and normative – modes of sexuality, gender normativity etc.) are enacted in breathing, moaning and voice colors matters in the ways those power relations are enacted, communicated and transformed.

Moreover, a norm-critical analysis should also engage with the ways in which power is not only enacted, embodied and (re)produced but also resisted corpomaterially. As Alaimo argues,

"Proletarian lung" testifies to the penetrating physiological effects of class (and racial) oppression, demonstrating that the biological and the societal cannot be considered separate spheres. ... The oppressed, it seems, may be physically affected by economic and societal systems and yet be unable to produce evidence for their biosocial conditions. (2010, 28)

Resistance, therefore, takes place not only on the conscious, organized and activist levels but also in the corpomaterialities that are exploited. In conversation with Christopher Sellers, whose work informs Alaimo's elaboration of embodied resistance, Alaimo argues that

the laborer resists the way her corporeality is utilized as a resource for industry. Sellers points out, for example, ... “the extent to which their [workers'] bodies were reacting to, rebelling against, the chemical and physical conditions of the workplace. Even the least organized and most submissive workers were not infinitely pliable; their own physiology set limits to their obedience” [Sellers 1997, 230]. Occupational disease, then, can be seen as a corporeal mode of resistance to harmful labour practices. Rather than separating bodily resistance from conscious action, however, we can imagine a multitude of intra-actions or
trans-corporeal processes in which, for example, physiological responses to work environments spark lines of inquiry, paths of struggle, and even bodies of literature. (2010, 31)

Alaimo’s argument is crucial in terms of rethinking what resistance and political action mean. Firstly, it shows how the agency of matter is an active form of resistance – resistance that takes place in context of exploitative manual labor, as discussed by Alaimo, and also of other exploitative capitalist relations that produce growing rates of burnout, depression, anxiety and panic attacks, which are also forms of bodily resistance to the contemporary capitalist logics of performance, effectiveness and individualism. Secondly, Alaimo’s argument challenges the binary logics in which the notion of resistance is embedded. Instead of seeing bodies and organized political actions as separate, Alaimo’s observation brings them together, showing that resistance – in the corpomaterially empowering as well as painful, unpleasant and disabling (as in case of the “dusty lungs” or toxicity of social norms) forcefulness – can occur simultaneously in multiple places and is always-already a material-discursive, bodily political form of action.

Consequently, the air one breathes and how one breathes it matters in terms of how power relations are embodied as well as how they are enacted corpomaterially and affectively. Breathing, therefore, is not a process free of societal power relations – quite the contrary. Breathing materializes and enacts what it means to be intersectionally living societal material-discursive power relations. Thinking about breathing trans-corporeally with the notion of the proletarian lung allows for the conceptualization of corpomaterial agentiality as political, politically transformative and resistive. Breathing is one corpomaterial way to articulate sites of political interventions.

In the 1970s, feminists were aware of this argument when they centred politics as beginning at women’s bodies as sites of resistance and empowerment (e.g., empowerment workshops focusing on discovering pleasure, desire and sexuality, and initiatives such as Our Bodies, Ourselves [Boston Women’s Health Book Collective 1973]). Many lessons may be learned from those discussions and embodied forms of resistance where the “personal is political” but also where, I would add, the political is personal. What can be learned from breathing is that bodies – in their differential enactments – are agential actors and sites for feminist analysis and resistance. Working with breathing in its multiple enactments allows for an analysis and challenge of intersectional power relations as social and material ways that constitute corpomaterial realities of individual and collective lives.

INTERSECTIONAL MATTERWORK AND CORPOMATERIAL INTERSECTIONALITY

The norm-critical challenges enacted in matterwork are always intersectional; simultaneously, the concept of intersectionality is a material matter. As the discussion in chapter 4 articulated, breathing dusty air is not merely an individual matter but enacted through the industrial and capitalist commodification of land; the struggles of the local communities and activists against the environmental, social and political consequences of the coal-mining industry; and human and more-than-human agencies. Breathing dusty air articulates power relations when a coal miner “spitting black” is enacted by and enacts individual health problems and vulnerability as well as economic needs and interests. These needs and interests are framed in terms of national energy security or the strategic positioning of coal energy as “clean” or “cheap,” and they omit the pollution and environmental destruction coal energy brings and the question of at whose expense the “cheapness” and “security” of the energy is achieved. As an individually situated dynamic, the matterwork of “spitting black” in the coal mine and at home also becomes a process of materialization of war machines and practice of building and sustaining the dominance of Western countries, as I discussed in relation to The True Cost of Coal project (Beehive Design Collective 2010e) in chapter 4.

Such processes of dispersal of situated breathing are also political matters in breath’s enactments in phone sex work. The prosodies of Anna’s breathing, moaning and vocalization enact, as I have discussed, specific desires in sex work. But they also enact power relations that are specific to the individual phone conversations and to the realities
of Berlin in early 1990s. In this era in Berlin, telephone sex work was a developing industry (to be later replaced by virtual sex, which dominates contemporary nonphysical contact forms of sex work), the S&M scene was vibrant and growing, and phone sex work enacted a specific kind of work that both mobilized and challenged sexual norms and clichés while developing alternative communities (such as the S&M and phone sex work communities).

In our interview conversation, Anna mentioned several times that she found many friends amongst her colleagues and she maintains friendship with some of them to this day, though she no longer works in the industry. She said that the shared intimacy of the work inspired friendship and closeness – Anna and her colleagues shared their erotic stories, which they used for developing story boards for the dramaturgy of their phone conversations; they listened to each other’s conversations with clients and to each other’s moans, breath and vocal tones. Whereas shared intimacy was substantial with some of her friends, it was often also what she called an “artificial intimacy” with others – an intimacy based on the work relationship and shared space of vocal and breathing prosody, which brought a feeling of closeness into the atmosphere. Having freshly arrived in Berlin, Anna’s breathing prosody became a way of building her own life and making new friends, new communities and arriving in new places. Not only did it allow her to arrive in a new city, make it her home, and finish her education, but phone sex work opened up possibilities for her to engage with her own sexuality in multiple ways.

Although in many ways Anna’s work was a form of empowerment, it also materialized the economic vulnerability of many young people, whose desire for education requires self-redefinition in the struggle to make ends meet. Education was in Marek’s case a privilege that allowed him to breathe lower intensities of dusty air; for Anna it was a reason to take the job as a phone sex worker. She was not forced to do phone sex work in any way and she (mostly) enjoyed it, but the economic deprivilegising she experienced underlines the problematic neoliberal ideology of “free choice.” Although diverse people choose diverse ways to make ends meet, socioeconomic disparities do matter in the ways diverse people breathe their lives differently in relation to their intersectional positioning in a specific time and place (which in itself is a dynamic process).

Anna’s breathing practices are therefore situated in the particular temporal and spatial specificity of her life, but they also have dispersed relevance in relation to sex workers’ struggles for rights and for their voices to be heard. As the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe points out,

societal perceptions impose a moral hierarchy within the sex industry – based on migrant status, race, ethnic origin, gender, age, sexuality, drug use, work sector and the services provided – adding to the stigma and social exclusion of certain groups of sex workers. ... [it is necessary to] assert that all sex workers and all forms of sex work are equally valid and valuable and condemn such moral and prejudiced divisions. We recognize stigma as being the commonality that links all of us as sex workers, forming us into a community of interest – despite the enormous diversity in our realities at work and in our lives. We have come together to confront and challenge this stigma and the injustices it leads to. (2005b, 3)

The matterwork of phone sex work is therefore not an individual matter, wherein breathing prosodies are marginal issues of minor social relevance. The matterwork of sex work – and its differential enactments – is a matter of enacting as well as negotiating and resisting normative power relations. It is practiced, for example, in the sex workers fighting for the right to unionize, equal physical and mental health care access, decriminalization, destigmatization, recognition of the specific realities of migration and trafficking, an end to systemic racist and deportation practices, self-determination and much more (see International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe 2005a, 8).

Such fights breathe intersectionality, where the fight against stereotyping and stigmatization of sex workers as “unworthy, victims and/or a threat to moral, public and social order” (International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe 2005b, 5) is also a matter of a fight against “the xenophobic portrayal of migrant sex workers [that] adds an additional level of stigma and increases their
vulnerability” (2005b, 5). This fight, at the same time, is also a matter of working against illegal trafficking, forced labor, violence and abuse; requiring structural tools for providing sex workers with fundamental human rights; and overturning such practices and providing support (such as asylum) to those who need it (including sex workers’ families and companions) (International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe 2005a, 2).

The (prosody of) breathing in sex work enacts differential realities of sex workers. As sex work activists point out, “abuse happens in sex work, but does not define sex work. Any discourse that defines sex work as violence is a simplistic approach that denies our diversity and experience and reduces us to helpless victims. It undermines our autonomy and right to self-determination” (International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe 2005b, 2). In their political practice, sex workers therefore fight for the right for breathable lives where they have autonomy over themselves as embodied subjects whose matterwork not only is enacted by power relations but also demands structural changes in social norms, cultural imaginaries and geopolitical relations.

Moreover, matterwork is enacted intersectionally and vice versa: intersectionality is also human and more-than-human matterwork. As Marek mentioned, when he spoke about the regular health check-ups he had to undergo, “they [the doctors] mostly said that [the dustiness of his lungs] was within the norms. It was when you couldn’t breathe anymore that you were considered to be outside of the norms.” Even though now as an emeritus Marek managed to escape the suffocation of dusty lungs syndrome, from Marek’s own discussion it was clear that his lungs were breathing and accumulating coal dust, as he was, especially during his first two years, coughing and “spitting black.” And while he had access to regular spa treatments that the socialist government planned for the coal miners, his breathing was not suffocating enough to be recognized by the doctors and health guidelines. As he said, the way the guidelines were set recognized the occupational disease of “dusty lungs” only when one couldn’t breathe anymore.

While the corpomaterial agency of the lungs that were coughing out black spit has enacted many torments of what it means to live coughing and spitting black dust from within the lungs, it has also been an active force in resisting the conditions of Marek’s work, the way social power relations and norms regulating concepts of health in relation to specific occupations and class positions did not recognize Marek’s obstructed breathing as relevant. And while some of Marek’s colleagues died because of the black lung, what brought Marek further away from the dusty air was not state recognition of the resisting power of his lungs but the heart attack he endured.

Within the social norms of health that operate “on the surface,” “dusty lungs” were not recognized enough as a disease that required a change of a coal miner’s position. Dusty lungs were considered to be a calculated risk of the profession. And while heart attacks these days are often related to high levels of stress, often associated with professions of “higher social status,” the agency of the heart attack is considered relevant for professional change. Intersectional positioning – for example, coal miner versus CEO – therefore makes specific corpomaterial agencies and resistances intelligible or not. As Marek mentioned, “sometimes the environment you have on the ground can be even worse than the one down there.”

In another context, intersectionality is also enacted corpomaterially in the prosodic breath work that controls or changes a phone sex narrative, in the call duration it extends in order to provide more income for the phone sex worker, and in an orgasmic hyperventilation during the call. Anna, for instance, told me she liked to experience herself in the different roles she played, and she enjoyed a wide range of men who called her and told her their stories. Sometimes, as already mentioned, her breathing and moaning practices, the intensity of breath and its speed and forcefulness brought her to hyperventilation. Not only did she lose control in a way that she experienced as pleasant, but this state led her to having an orgasm herself during the phone conversation. Such breathing was already a part of her breathing experimentation as a phone sex worker, but it was enacting her sexuality in new and unexpected ways.

Losing her breath in hyperventilation – a very different phenomenon to losing one’s breath smothered in coal dust – was for Anna, therefore, a matter of sexual empowerment, of developing and learning about her own sexuality, and of the pleasure of phone sex work.
Simultaneously – and not in a binary way – sex work can be also about losing breath, specifically through deadly violence against many cis, trans, hetero, queer, crips, migrant, of color sex workers. It can be about violence that takes the breath away temporarily or permanently. It takes it through social stigmatization of cultural discourses of sex work and their violent enactments. Physical and symbolic as well as material and discursive violence are not only enacted from the embodied positions of intersectional privilege but also have corpomaterial consequences for phone sex workers because their work, even if it takes place on the phone, is always embodied. As the Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes argues, the primary space in which we exercise [sex work] is our bodies. We expose ourselves through our bodies on the sex markets. Bodies, upon which others can exercise the power of exploitation exactly like they do in factories, or worse than in factories. Bodies of women, trans, migrants ... upon which gendered, racist, and institutional violence are enacted. The lack of recognition of sex work as work as well as its moral condemnation and stigmatization facilitate, above all else, uncontrolled exploitation, abuse and coercion, unacceptable working hours, unhealthy working conditions, and irrational restrictions on the freedom of movement. These are forms of violence! (2016, paras. 12–13)

Moreover, the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe adds that sex workers’ bodies and minds are an individual economic resource for many people in many different forms. All forms of sex work are equally valid, including dancing, stripping, street or indoor prostitution, escorting, phone sex or performing in pornography. (2005b, 7)

Being agential forces of labor, bodies are resources of economic survival. Simultaneously, they are forces that in their enacting power can also challenge and transform the stereotypes of sex work – as in the case of Anna’s breathing when the matterwork of her breath enacted sex work as a matter of self-determination and pleasure when she was hyperventilating into an orgasm. The resistive power of the proletarian lungs articulates how human corpomateriality and more-than-human forces such as coal dust and the material, structural and political infrastructures of the coal mine are agential in incorporating, enacting and resisting social power relations. And as Anna’s prosodic breathing shows, proletarian lungs are not limited to the coal-mining industry or to lung pollution.

Proletarian lungs are enacted through intersectional matterwork, where specific spatiotemporal situatedness and enactments of dynamics of power relations, and their dispersed structural operations, materialize specific positions of discrimination and privilege as well as enacting specific resistances and transformations that are saturated with the ambiguity of the complexity of the simultaneous empowerment and lack of privilege such positions enact. They enact and transform the toxicity of an environment that is a matter of unbreathable air – full of pollution as well as nationalism, racism, sexism, the cisgender system, ableism, global power relations, inequality and gendered violence, among other contemporary discriminatory social structures. Matterwork as intersectional and intersectionality as corpomaterial analytical and lived phenomena articulate the suffocating environmental and social toxicity that are enacted in daily operations of such deadly norms and ideologies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter argued for an understanding of matterwork as an intersectional practice and intersectionality as embodied. Thinking though intersectionality corpomaterially allows for the development of politics that work with situated, temporary and contextually aspired affinities that are not fixed but strategic and oriented through the particular phenomena those affinities enact in their interventions. Such a notion of politics could allow for different ways of engaging with power, which do not work with social power relations but challenge them through the phenomena the latter are becoming-with.

Rethinking intersectionality in such a way can also offer new ways of thinking about feminist politics of resistance. In this approach, resistance is enacted not only ideologically or in corpomaterial collective
actions (such as demonstrations) but also in terms of quotidian material agentiality, where human corpomateriality and more-than-human agencies constitute political forces that are not only productive and reproductive but also resistive of social power relations. This resistance is complex in its ambivalence, as in the case of dusty lungs. Feminist politics, therefore, can be understood not only as matters of categories but also as enacted in the quotidian corpomaterial dynamics of intra-active daily performative metabolizations of power relations.

Intersectionality is therefore also amongst other articulations of struggle that are constitutive of intersectional politics — a matter of what Heidi Safia Mirza calls “embodied intersectionality” (2014, 2). This term refers to the “weight of living” in toxic environments of dusty air, global climate change, environmental disasters and structures of discrimination such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, or binary gender systems that constitute being and becoming a (minoritarian) subject and also build the (architectural, scientific, biochemical, environmental) fabric of the world. In resonance with Mirza’s interest in embodied experiences of negotiations of social positions, I believe that embodiment is instrumental as well as constitutive for an intersectional analysis of power dynamics. As I have argued in this chapter, intersectional power relations are not only embodied but corpomaterially enacted, negotiated and resisted (see also my discussion of combat breathing in the part 2 of Breathing Matters).

With this approach, I have argued for the agential forcefulness of corpomaterial processes and their intra-active constitutiveness with power relations and their individual and simultaneously structural character. Such a situated and dispersed approach allows for an understanding of Marek’s “spitting black” as an individualized matter of health regulations, in relation to the regional pollution of air and massive presence of asthma and respiratory diseases in the coal-mining region, and in relation to the affinities and accountabilities enacted when Marek’s “spitting black” transforms into a light switch. It also allows for an understanding of Anna’s breathing as a process of strategic political affinities that challenge social norms and taboos.
CHAPTER 6

INHALE: BREATHING
CORPOMATERIALITY
INTERSECTIONALLY
As chapter 4 discussed, in contemporary feminist debates intersectionality is an appreciated and contested concept. Although within those debates it is possible to, for example, rename or move away from the concept, I believe it is important to stay with the complexity and ambiguity of its development and its presence. In particular, because of the importance of the development of intersectionality in Black women’s political struggles, as well as how it has transformed feminism and articulated its multiplicity and multidimensionality, I believe intersectionality is too vital to be left behind or replaced.

Such persistence is embedded in my understanding of concepts as not static, historically fixed or always bounded in the same way. Rather, as I have argued in chapter 4, I understand them onto-epistemologically as dynamic, situated while intertextual, multiple in their operations and productivity, and transformative in the intra-active and differential dynamics of the work they do. Onto-epistemological understandings of knowledge production, intra-active understandings of relationalities and the processual and dynamic understandings of the forces of worlding necessitate, for me, the need to conceive of concepts beyond fixity and pertaining to only one strictly delimited capacity.

It is precisely the space of onto-epistemology and feminist politics in general (and in their broad and differential understanding) in which rethinking of the notion of intersectionality should take place (and does, as in the case of the works of Puar [2005] and Lykke [2006]). In the previous chapters, I therefore discussed that in order for intersectionality to be a theoretically, politically and socially accountable concept, it is important to attend to both its epistemological and ontological – or as Barad says, ethico-onto-epistemological – enactments and effects. It is necessary to engage with intersectionality not only as a method of inquiry but as an onto-epistemological productive and relational conceptualizing practice which creates space for politics of intra-active constitutiveness and differentiation of corpomaterial agentiality and societal power relations.

**CORPOMATERIAL RESISTANCE**

This understanding of intersectionality allows for an analysis of power relations’ dynamics in which bodies are not passive and awaiting social inscription but agential forces of the production, reproduction and resistance of power relations. This resistance has a complex character. Marek’s breathing with dusty lungs, for example, allows for an articulation of the complexity of the politics of resistance, in which resistance is not only a productive force in terms of the social justice politics it enables but is also enacted – as is a matter for other forms of social justice resistance – in the ambiguity of its fight for breathable lives while suffocating. Resistance is something that must not merely be glorified for the potentiality of change it offers. Resistance is also embedded in the painful, tormenting and exhausting practices of living in suffocating social power relations that matter as much – and intra-actively with – as the suffocating settling of dust particles in the lungs and the unpleasant, bothersome resistance of the respiratory system when it expels the dust through coughing or spitting it out. Although Marek’s “spitting black” took place during socialist times, it is also relevant for analysis and political inquiry into contemporary social, economic, and geopolitical structures – to name a few – of exploitative neoliberal markets and consumerism. It is literally a matter of differential breathing when the daily work that bodies do – for example, filtering the air before it gets down into the lungs – is both a resistive practice and a deadly materialization of local and global power relations. It is a practice where human and nonhuman materiality matters.

Simultaneously, as Anna’s prosodies of phone sex work brought forward, breathing politics are also matters of the resistance,
challenge and demand for the transformation of social norms and material-discursive realities of daily lives, which render some lives stigmatized, degraded and persecuted. As the passion of her breath work and the politics of sex workers and sex work organizations articulate, the prosody of breath is also a way of claiming political existence and resistance as material-discursive practices of social justice politics.

A corpomaterial understanding of intersectionality, therefore, clarifies how material-discursive practices of – for example, expulsive, stigmatized, deadly, globally and locally discriminated and simultaneously also passionate and norm-critical – living are as political as the quotidian practices of bodies coming to matter and mattering in intersectional differentiation as well as in shared situated and dispersed specificities. It also offers an analytical approach in which individual and structural operations of power are intra-actively constitutive and differencing. As chapter 5 argued, in matterwork, work is an agential process of worlding in the individuality and structurality of (human and nonhuman) production, reproduction, transformation and destruction.

Understanding intersectionality not only categorically but also corpomaterially also elucidates the dynamics of socioeconomic power relations in an agentially material-discursive way. “Spitting black” and the prosodies of phone sex breath allow for an understanding of, for example, socially, economically, culturally, sexually, nationally, and geopolitically specific as well as global power relations in terms of the dynamics of their situated and dispersed, material-discursive enactments and operations – which, again, are productive, reproductive and transformative – of (capitalist as well as socialist and postsocialist), for example, ideologies and materialities of consumption, national energy security, industrial commodification of land, and struggles of local people and activists against environmental, social and political individual and structural oppressions. It also includes working with the ambivalences and contradictions – of corpomaterial intersectional empowering, resisting and suffocating living – as political forces.

INTERSECTIONAL INTRA-ACTIVITY AND DIFFERENCING

In Breathing Matters, intersectionality is put to work as an analytical and political concept and practice that also operates through the relationality of intra-activity and differencing. This approach is grounded in the critique of an understanding of intersectionality based merely on separate categories (understood as clearly bounded, static and representational) coming together and apart, adding to each other without having an effect on one another. Instead, I prefer to understand intersectionality and conduct intersectional analysis as very particular (situated in material, corpomaterial, social, cultural and political ways of becoming) and simultaneously dispersed (e.g., intertextuality, global and structural power relations, and normative and exclusionary standards of “proper human subjectivity”) material-discursive dynamism. In such a practice, I engage intersectionality in specific enactments of human and nonhuman agentiality, material-discursivity and power relations.

Simultaneously, the goal of my analysis is not to argue for a complete refusal of categories, as I do believe they – in their intra-active understanding as proposed by Lykke (2006) – have been and will be very productive in feminist political strategies. But I want to imagine what feminist analyses and politics that focus on a material-discursive dynamism of power relations could look like. Therefore, instead of asking what categories constitute particular configurations of power relations, I have in part 1 of Breathing Matters discussed how the dynamics of power relations are enacted and materialized corpomaterially and socially.

For Breathing Matters, intersectionality is, therefore, not merely a tool that shows the intersections of categories. It is, instead, something that can become an apparatus (understood in the Baradian sense) of agential analysis of intra-active and differential relationalities: relationalities of bodies, subjectivities, environments, cultures, social power relations, technologies, geographies, and particular historical and geopolitical moments that also have dispersed relevance. Such an approach also problematizes the idea of stable boundaries, both bodily and conceptual.
By engaging with the phenomena of Marek’s and Anna’s breathing I have discussed intersectionality as enacted, materialized and intelligible through the intra-active becoming of human and nonhuman materialities, discourses and social power relations. Their breathing showed how intersectionality is enacted not only in the intra-action of categories but how intersectional becoming is enacted corpomaterially, how societal power relations have material enactments through different embodied subjects, and how bodies positioned in a particular way within societal power relations enact (and resist) power relations. My analysis of breathing, then, articulates that it does matter what societal position one (transformatively – as a position is never static) lives and what air one breathes, as well as how those power relations are embodied in and enacted corpomaterially. Individual or group positions are categorical but also particularly material (e.g., the air one breathes and geopolitical relations) – in this understanding of power relations, positions of privilege and lack thereof go beyond “simple categories” and articulate a particular material and cultural situatedness and dispersal of, for example, global and local power relations (e.g., air pollution in the Ostravsko region being a matter of environmental justice or the toxicity of social norms that are matters of social justice).

My analysis of breathing also articulates that intersectional dynamics are matters of intra-activity and differencing. In different instances, different configurations enact different differentiations and different intra-actions. The work that bodies do, the matterwork, is a work of enactment and resistance, production and reproduction, materialization and socialization, failing and challenging, breaking and breaking away. Intersectional power relations materialize and are enacted, reproduced, transformed and resisted every day, in variable breathing rhythms, in the flows and metabolizations of oxygen and other chemicals and elements of air. And all those – and far more – matterwork dynamics materialize in multiple ways in intra-active relationality with, for example, dynamic power relations.

The intersectional work that Breathing Matters aspires for consists, therefore, of working with particular intersectional lives, with the complexity of their onto-epistemological, corpomaterial, material-discursive enactments and analyzing this complexity in its specificity – an analysis of situatedness. Simultaneously, such specificity has to be related to an onto-epistemological, material-discursive analysis of the social structures and power relations and the way they operate in local, global and structural ways – an analysis of dispersal. In such a practice, intersectional enactments and operations of power relations can be analyzed in the intra-active and differential constitutiveness of phenomena and categories, and they can develop space for affinities and critical and affirmative politics. In such a perspective, it is possible to attend to the specificities and complexities, intra-active relationality and particular differential enactments of power relations on both individual and structural “levels.” Working with such an approach in relation to categories then means that analysis can focus, for example, on only one category (e.g., sexuality) but this category must be analyzed in a manner in which other categories (e.g., class, ethnicity, dis/ability etc.) are already intra-actively constitutive of the particular way the category is enacted onto-epistemologically. The analysis itself must recognize this relationality and engage with the category from the perspective of its intra-active constitutiveness, while acknowledging its particular differentiation. And finally, all these processes are enacted corpomaterially and are also matters of nonhuman agentiality.
PART 2
CORPO
AFFECTIVE
POLITICS
OF VULNERABILITY
EVERYONE IS FUCKING FINE

THE FOLLOWING TWO SHORT STORIES CONTAIN PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF PANIC ATTACKS – THEIR BODILY, MENTAL, AND SOCIAL ENACTMENTS. THE FIRST ONE IS BASED ON MY OWN EXPERIENCE AND THE SECOND ONE IS DEVELOPED FROM AN INTERVIEW CONVERSATION WITH MATT. THIS RESPITE ALSO INCLUDES A BREATHING EXERCISE, WHICH IS NARRATED BY MATT. IT IS MATT’S TOOL FOR METABOLIZING HIS ANXIETIES AND PANIC ATTACKS. THE EXERCISE IS INCLUDED HERE IN ORDER TO BRING INTO THE RESPITE BOTH THE BREATHING ENACTED IN PANIC ATTACKS AND THE BREATHING THAT IS PART OF THEIR METABOLIZATION. THE EXERCISE CAN ALSO BE A TOOL FOR THOSE READERS WHOSE ANXIETY OR DISCOMFORT MAY BE ACTIVATED WHILE READING THE FOLLOWING TWO STORIES.
out of control. My hands are cold - very cold - and mildly sweaty, shaking invisibly. I am clenching my teeth so hard it hurts; the pain occupies my oral cavity, it sediments in my teeth, chin, ears and muscles, flows through my face into my eyes and spreads in the skull. My breath is shallow, almost suffocating. The air can hardly reach my lungs and flow through my body; there is no air to breathe out; my lungs are balancing the void of the sensorial mutiny of my sense of self in the world. My neck and arms are stiff, their muscles stone-hard, tight up to

bursting. I am exploding in my implosion. I am numb while feeling it all. I want to cry but I have no tears or force to let them roll. I feel alone but I cannot let anyone in. I feel scared but I cannot take any action or accept the fear. All I can try to do is take a deep breath; but how, when the body crumbles into itself, when the curve of the chest limits expansion of the lungs, when the arms are tensed and rising high? Now and then my heart races faster and I can breathe even less. My heart beats harder, my throat closes up, I feel even more suffocated, more immobilized, more exploded.

If I could only release the tension ... but I can't ... and if I could, what would happen then?
FOUR-COUNT BREATHING EXERCISE

The exercise can be practiced while seated or lying down, alone or in the company of others. Closing the eyes helps to concentrate and calm down. But the exercise can be also undertaken with the eyes open.

Matt:

Breathe in on a four-count. Slow, steady breaths. Try to fill your belly up with air before filling your lungs—what you are doing is kind of controlling your diaphragm. And by the time you are at four you should be filled with air.

Breathe in through your nose [on a four-count] hold your breath for four seconds

One
Two
Three
Four

Release on a four-count through your nose or mouth now hold the space of no air for four seconds [and now repeat the whole process on the four-count as in the cycle before]

Breathe in
Hold
Breathe out
Hold
Breathe in
Hold
Breathe out
Hold

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CHAPTER 7

BREATHING ON: ANXIOUS AND PANICKY BREATHING
I wrote the first story of the “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPITE while I was having a panic attack. It took me by surprise. I was sitting at home, alone. I was supposed to leave the apartment and do errands. But I couldn’t. With my shoes and jacket on, prepared to leave, I stayed seated in the chair in my kitchen, unable to move. Having a panic attack. Usually I try to shake panic attacks off as soon as possible, push them into the back of my consciousness, focus on other things once they are over. Despite their persistence and high occurrence at that particular time, I kept forgetting the depth of how they feel. Every day, I forgot how immobilizing and explosive panic attacks are, even while I was having them daily. I got surprised when I was tired, when my capacities were, all of a sudden, limited. I underestimated the amount of energy anxiety and panic attacks take. Once a panic attack was over, I wanted to continue on with my life. But this time, during this panic attack, I decided to remember. I started writing it down.

A stream-of-consciousness form of writing followed in which I attended to my tensions – the bodily and mental dynamics that were happening simultaneously. I kept on writing. At some point I couldn’t write anymore. Writing had ambivalent effects. It intensified the experience while calming it. I was exhausted, but the panic attack was slowly going away. I closed the notebook and left it closed for a while, for several days, weeks. But one day I decided to open it again. I looked at the sketchy notes. I decided to write them into a story. I edited them; I made them more concise. Then I closed the notebook again. After more time had passed, I showed the story to a friend. I was curious if the text carried intensity, if the story actualized affects with the reader. After the meeting, I worked with the story a little more – I wanted to unpack the words.

While I was writing during the panic attack, the words I put down on paper were simple but, for me, they vibrated with tensions, contradictions, paradoxes. I needed to make those contradictions and tensions more explicit. And while the RESPITE story stays very close to the text I wrote during the panic attack – in terms of meaning, structure, narrative – I condensed some parts to highlight their relationality, to let the contradictions be the productive forces of corpomaterial and affective (or rather corpo-affective) meaning making and to let the words resonate with the way I experience those paradoxes myself, in that and many other panic attacks.

This story is also part of my autoethnographical analytical practice within which this part of Breathing Matters is situated. Autoethnography, however, is not mobilized here in the form of a method that produces a “research object.” It, rather, provides a specific corpo-affective attention and sensitivity through which I ask questions, intervene, and analyze. It tunes my attention to the ambivalences and contradictions, to the actual and potential, empowering and debilitating power of anxieties and panic attacks. I employ an autoethnographic approach as a corpo-affective research tool that fuels the way I engage with the uncontainability of my and my interviewee’s experiences and practices, work with the ambivalences of delimitations (as in chapter 8), and search for a nonreductive and situatedly dispersed approach, where vulnerability is a political matter (chapter 9 and more generally the whole of part 2).

The second story and the four-count breathing exercise that are part of the “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPITE are other enactments of that with which this part of Breathing Matters engages when discussing panic attacks and anxieties. The story is a quotation from the first interview Matt and I conducted together in 2013, sitting on a porch of his house with his therapy-dog-companion Tarik lying on the lawn close to us, on a sunny afternoon in California. Throughout the interview, Matt talked about aspects of life with anxieties and panic attacks, his personal story that relates to his anxieties and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), visions of the future, his activism and politics, and
social power structures. While Matt’s words are accurately transcribed here, I have edited the section into one continuous narrative, leaving out the parts of our conversation that focused on other aspects of life with anxiety and panic attacks – such as, for example, perception by others or mechanisms of what Laurent Berlant calls “living on” (2011, 8). All of part 2 is formed through this particular story about the corpo-affective dynamics of Matt’s panic attacks, as well as through the second interview we conducted online in 2015.

Furthermore, the breathing exercise, which is another fragment of Matt’s story in the RESPITE, also enacts this part of Breathing Matters and the intersectional vulnerable politics for breathable lives for which it argues. It was relayed and taught to me by Matt, who uses it – among other breathing techniques – as a practice for taking care of himself during panic attacks or intensified states of anxiety. We conducted it together during our first interview. Apart from the introductory note about the context in which the technique can be practiced, the exercise in the RESPITE is quoted here as Matt narrated it, as he guided me through it during our conversation. Breathing is often understood as a tool for metabolizing panic attacks and anxieties – a method of taking control and “recovering back” into what is socially and culturally determined to be an “appropriate human subjectivity.” But as the two following chapters argue, there is more to breathing than instrumentalization for the sake of renormalization.

THE BREATHERS OF POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY

Apart from the preceding RESPITE that articulates the panicky and breathing matters that are diffused in part 2 the following chapters are embedded in two interview conversations – with Matt, a piece of whose story was just introduced, and Lina, who also engages with panic attacks and anxieties, but in a different way. While Matt lives and breathes anxieties and panic attacks daily with his dog-companion Tarik, Lina is a physio- and psychotherapist who engages with panic attacks and anxieties (amongst many other corpo-affective ways of living) in her professional practice. I got to know them more than a year apart and in very different contexts and geopolitical locations.

I met Matt in 2013; at that time, he was a PhD student at a US university and a leftist activist; a US Marines conscientious objector; struggling with PTSD, anxieties, panic attacks, and chronic pain; a US health system and administration fighter; and a martial arts lover. When I met Tarik, he was a seven-year-old Labrador retriever, mellow yet aware of his environment, Matt and other people – a dog who gave attention but had his priorities set (on Matt), who transformed into a puppy, jumping through gigantic ocean waves at the beach.

I met Lina, a physio- and psychotherapist who works for a well-being advisory and counseling company, a year earlier. We met not only on a different continent but in a very different (e.g., in terms of social welfare systems and forms of engagement in contemporary global politics) and yet similar (e.g., in terms of shared Western cultural capital and global privilege) country – Sweden. For Lina, who is an experienced professional in her field, her work is a means to help people live their lives differently. In our interview conversation in 2012, Lina shared with me her psychosomatic ways of engaging with anxiety and panic attacks. As both a therapist and a bodywork advocate, her therapeutic practice combines working with affect and corpomateriality. As Matt has his companion Tarik, and I have the pleasure of spending time with my part-time dog-companion Bobby, Lina also has a dog-companion who helps her with processing her investment in therapeutic sessions through being a passionate dog walker. But before introducing Lina, and the role her approach plays in addressing corpo-affective dynamics of panicky and anxious breathing as well as articulating their feminist relevance, I will first continue with a story of Matt and Tarik, whose life together is indispensable for shaping the ethics, politics and sensorial attunement of the following chapters.

MATT AND TARIK

The story of Matt and Tarik has rhizomatic roots in US military politics – in their colonialism, violence and power outside of and within US borders. In a way, it starts with the 1992 LA Rodney King riots that
took place as a fight against state racial discrimination and police racist structures and repressive practices. The riots started with the acquittal, by a mostly white jury, of four white police officers who brutally assaulted Rodney King, an African-American man – a repressive practice that marks US racial politics not only in the 1990s but to this day, with the ongoing racialized police brutality that is one of many deadly forces of US racist structures.\textsuperscript{37} At that time, Matt was a very young white cis boy living with his mother in the LA neighborhood where the riots occurred. With explosions everywhere, gas stations on fire, gunshots and helicopters, and the sound of sirens and alarms all around him, Matt was terrified. As the National Guard and Marines were called in to repress the protests, Matt associated their intervention with safety, help and protection. As Matt told me, that the military represented help and protection for him – an idea which Matt now critiques and rejects in his activism and academic writing – shaped his desire to join the Marines himself.

As soon as he could, at the age of 13, Matt became a Naval Cadet, which is the US professional military youth group that has a congressional character – in other words, in case of World War III, the youth from the group would immediately be drafted for war. In this group, Matt obtained military training on bases across the US, from Hawaii to Ohio. The cadets not only wear US military uniforms (which are exactly the same as regular military uniforms apart from a distinguishing patch), they also receive training on how to shoot, work security, operate jet engines, fight, make bombs, and work in submarines. At 16, Matt officially joined the Marines through the Delayed Entry Program and became an active member at 17, when he went to boot camp, where he turned 18.

Due to his experience as a cadet, the training, military culture and the physical and psychological challenges of the camp were not initially a problem for Matt. But what made him slowly change his understanding of the military was seeing his two friends – with whom he had joined the military and with one of whom he shared a platoon – change, to accept the military conditioning designed to break people down physically and mentally, which taught them to follow the path of the military and to kill.

Such training starts with physically breaking individuals through their immersion in an uncomfortable environment where they do not feel safe or secure. They are subjected to yelling, screaming and overwhelming aggression. Not fulfilling perfectionist standards gets recruits in trouble – for example, if they do not stand exactly the way the commander demands. The punishments consists of, for example, extreme physical exercises, the execution of which is purposely sabotaged by the commanders or other soldiers who receive orders to do so. The physical punishments are intended to make participants fail – their rapid speed and succession is designed to run them out of breath. As a result, recruits are constantly overwhelmed; the conditioning is meant to break them down, make them cry, humiliate them. Matt gave a particular example of such a practice:

One time we all had to strip naked. There is like eighty of us in this room. And then everyone had to put their left sock in one pile and their pants in one pile and their undershirts in one pile in front of us. And then they made us drink eight canteens of water – a canteen has like a liter of water. And eventually people started throwing up. And they were throwing up all over each other’s clothes and were all completely naked. [At the same time] we’ve been just yelled at and having duties, physical drills. And then we were told to dress in these clothes covered in vomit. And it’s just like that. It’s horrible. ... But this is just training. This is just normal, you know. And in kind of a way it wasn’t fun but this actually wasn’t a big problem. Because, what the fuck, what do you expect.

Such practices were not a surprise for Matt, and he had no problem working through them. But after breaking down its recruits, the military offers a clear path of order and discipline as a way out from this harsh treatment and insecure environment and moving to another level of training. It is after accepting this conditioning that training how to kill begins.

Because of the enforced acceptance of the conditioning and of the military paths designed to teach killing skills and following orders, training became unacceptable for Matt. Seeing his friend accepting the conditioning, Matt said he saw himself mirrored, and learned what he did not want to become. After the recruitment training was over, on a week off at home, he made up his mind to leave the military and to refuse deployment to Afghanistan. He began a conscientious objector (CO)
process to leave the Marines, a process that started a turmoil of physical and mental torture, trauma, and social disavowal by his two best friends and other military recruits and instructors. This process has had lifelong effects for Matt.

After starting the CO process, Matt was mistreated for over a month. He got extra duties, was deprived of food and sleep, and made (under the threat of military jail) to stand at attention for hours in the squad base while others came by to harass him. Standing still and straight for many hours made his knees swell and his feet fall asleep; sometimes he fell over and had to quickly struggle back up into position. He was forced to sit for hours at a time and was put into many other stress positions. Sometimes he was physically attacked by others. The attacks were well thought through – hit all over his body but never in his face, he was left with no clear visible marks in order to prevent questions. Every day consisted of harassment. And if he didn’t comply, for example by not standing perfectly upright, he would be considered to have disobeyed the order and therefore broken the law, and hence he could be expelled from the military under different regulations. Had that happened, he would have lost the status of CO and become, as Matt phrased it, “somebody else’s problem” – a big win for the platoon, as having a CO reflects badly on its leaders.

Additionally, Matt was interrogated for hours and asked questions designed to provoke him to say something that would challenge and disprove his conscientious objection and lead to a denial of the application. The interrogators took turns – when one was tired a new one took over. Sometimes Matt was placed outside the interrogation room to hear how other COs – who knew about the CO process from Matt – were interrogated, and he had to see them leave the room sobbing, covered in bruises. Making Matt witness the interrogation of others was designed to make him regret his decision, feel responsible for the suffering of those he told about the CO process, and withdraw his application.

It was during his own interrogations that Matt started disassociating and compartmentalizing – a strategy that allowed him to survive the torture but tormented him later in his life. During that time, however, he described the compartmentalization being helpful:

> [It made] it so that my anger and my fear or my happiness or my love and my joy are all separate from each other. And if someone is talking to me about one specific thing I don’t bring in anything else to that conversation. ... And because I never go into any place with my full self it makes relationships of any kind difficult [now]. ... And what is important about compartmentalizing when you are being tortured is that they can’t get any information from you. You know, what they wanted me to do was get really angry. They were trying to provoke anger, and they were trying maybe to provoke me into hitting one of them [by] saying really horrible things. Because if I hit them I am not a pacifist. ... And so [I used compartmentalization for] forcing myself to accept whatever they are saying at me and responding with only one part that is controlled enough.

But the problem with turning emotions off is turning them back on again. It not only takes a long time but is a painful process to start feeling a full range of emotions again – as the main survival strategy has been until that point not to let oneself feel those emotions, and especially not in relation to each other. Though now it has been more than ten years since Matt left the military, he still has strong associations with smells, tastes, places, and anything else that reminds him of that time. While he used to have flashbacks, now he experiences that time through sensorial associations – certain sensations bring back specific feelings or response mechanisms. These processes complicate Matt’s daily life significantly, especially in relation to, for example, many kinds of authorities.
In addition to the psychological consequences of the torture, something happened to Matt’s hip as a result of bad treatment and deprivation at the Reception Platoon, where Matt was transferred after starting the CO process. For a while he was denied any kind of treatment, which resulted in lifelong daily pain. After the Reception Platoon, he was transferred to a Rehabilitation Platoon that consisted of, as he called them, “broken boys” – people who had attempted suicide, suffered injuries or hurt themselves in order to get discharged. After staying there for four months, he was transferred to a Medical Platoon from which he got released from the military. But due to his hip injury, he was released not as a CO but as an administratively separated marine – without any reparations for his injury or entitlement to any compensation or benefits such as health care or college funding.

After the subsequent first two years of disassociating from events, compartmentalizing his pain and trying to live life as – as Matt put it – “nothing was wrong, nothing happened,” Matt needed to engage with his increasingly urgent questions about the nature of the Middle East, violence, conflicts, his identity and the ideas of cowardice imposed on him by his friends and fellows in the military. Engaging with those questions brought him to refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon, where he lived and established friendships in Arab and South Asian communities. In the oppositional logic of the war machine, his behavior, life and friendships (considered unusual for a white cis male US citizen and former member of the military) became suspicious for the Syrian government, and he was deported by Syria back to the US under an accusation of espionage. And this is where Matt and Tarik’s story begins, a story that will be discussed in more detail in chapter 9.

**LINA**

In contrast to Matt and me, Lina herself does not live with panic attacks and anxieties. But her approach to anxieties and panic attacks is an example of a practical and theoretical relational understanding of corpo-affective dynamics with which *Breathing Matters* engages. For Lina – a white cis woman who lives in Sweden – body and mind, matter and society, corpomateriality and knowledge are mutually transformative. This approach is central for her as a therapist who specializes in both psycho- and physiotherapy.

While Lina usually meets her clients because of particular bodily symptoms they experience and would like to change – such as a backache – her approach is not to focus on the symptoms but, as she put it, to “talk a little bit around the symptoms.” A backache can mean, for Lina, many things. In order to understand the complexity of a physical problem, she needs to understand the complexity of someone’s life. So while, as Lina told me, the most common understanding of a backache relates it to lifting heavy things, injury, accident, or wrong movement, for Lina the backache tells a complex story of bodily and mental life – of dynamics that are not the effect of a singular occasion but developed in psychosomatic temporality. As Lina explained, a backache can be a bodily sensation that one has been experiencing for many years without even realizing it; it is enacted in the way one walks, sits, works or – in everyday tensions and stress – in the way one breathes.

Lina engages with her clients not only psychologically but also physically. She touches them, feels them and performs what she calls a “clinical examination.” In this process she “comes a little bit closer” to her clients and, in her experience, the bodily contact makes it easier for them to open up. Through touch, closeness and talking, she and her client get to know each other, which makes it easier for Lina to get closer to them. In this dance of touching and closeness, they meet affectively and corpomaterially. The relationality of, for example, stress and backache – or anxiety and muscle tensions, or tiredness, trauma and panic attacks – brings to light the complexity of the corpo-affective existence and potentiality of change, where neither body nor mind is merely a symptom or cause for the other. Instead, they work together (or intra-actively, as I argue) both in enacting unease, pain or a breakdown and becoming potentialities for their transformation.

Along with touch and physical examination, Lina practices listening as another form of mutual learning. Usually she sits with her client and listens to their problem and how they describe it; she asks questions and weaves the answers and hints together. Her practice takes time, and she does not make a diagnosis or choose interventions
right away. While clients usually do not have problems talking about physical issues, talking about their daily feelings proves to be generally much harder. She, therefore, sits quietly and listens between the lines. Listening and proceeding slowly facilitates a process that aims to empower her clients to, as she put it, “figure things out for themselves.” Lina’s practice has no clear procedure; it is a relational improvisation of mutual meeting – where listening and touching, coming close and giving space come together.

Talking, listening and touching is, however, just the beginning, and once the time is right Lina starts to work with her clients through their own body awareness, or what she calls “body knowledge.” Conceptually important for Breathing Matters and chapter 9 specifically, in this practice the focus of therapist and client leaps to direct corpomaterial movement and transformation through movement (which, simultaneously, is enacted relationally via listening and talking). Lina and her client work through, for example, lying on the floor and feeling the body meeting the ground, walking, feeling how the client stands or uses their body, or following muscle tensions. As Lina said,

> [this approach is] not gymnastics, it’s something totally different because … I want you to use the part of the body that you need … [for example] postural muscles … that hold you up. … You can do that with easy movements.

In her practice, Lina doesn’t usually give her clients sets of daily exercises to follow, and she very rarely gives them a written program. Instead, she shows them how to move, how to sit, how to hold their body, how to breathe. She also tries to sneak in a few practices that should become part of their daily life – the way they walk, sit, stand, or breathe. Her goal is not to introduce separate interventions but to change corpo-affective dynamics and corpomaterial practices of everyday living.

In such a practice, vulnerability is part of everyday life. Lina understands panic attacks as a way of letting things out (an approach I, in the following chapters and especially in chapter 8, argue needs rethinking in terms of politicization through articulating the transformative character and potential of corpomaterial agentiality). As she put it, If you are sad or depressed, you are vulnerable, you fall much easier; you can fall but you can just get this panic attack because maybe I lose control, maybe I lose something else. It doesn’t have to be a very “sick” way of reacting. It’s a little bit normal. Who is normal? Everyone is on the edge and it’s a mix. If you weren’t neurotic, what kind of human being would you be?

And simultaneously, her understanding of “the way we are” is not only a matter of psychological processes. For Lina, it is important to recognize that living with anxieties is a matter not only of psychological suffering but also of physiology (a process that becomes significant for the discussion of the politics of matterwork in chapter 9). Anxious becomings change breathing patterns – one breathes superficially, and the oxygen does not enter the bottom of the lungs. Such breathing makes one tired. And being anxious can, on the other hand, quicken the breath and, as Lina put it, “waste” energy while the body gets activated and one is not able to, for example, fall asleep. Therefore, for Lina, living with anxieties or panic attacks, one has to understand the mutual constitutiveness of the bodily, affective, social, cultural and material processes of one’s life.

Although working with Lina’s approach provides helpful insights into the mind and body as relational dynamic processes, it constitutes an approach that focuses predominantly on the individual aspects of anxious becoming. Through working with Lina’s relational psycho- and physiological approach, as well as with the multidimensional experiences shared by Matt and myself, I attend to individual narratives (which also dominate contemporary mainstream understandings and discussions of anxieties and panic attacks) while formulating a situated and dispersed, individual and structural, politicized understanding of vulnerabilities and a vulnerable understanding of politics that are the matter of concern of this part of Breathing Matters.

### ANXIETIES, PANIC ATTACKS AND BREATHING

As chapter 8 will discuss further, anxieties and panic attacks are understood here as uncontainable phenomena that resist conventional delimitations. The “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPIRE and Matt’s, Lina’s,
and my experiences, therefore, do not figure here or in the following chapters as a representation of panic attacks and anxieties as bounded, clearly delimited and homogenous phenomena. They articulate particular corpo-affective processes of panicky and anxious breathing and becoming that start vibrancies that become meaningful in their situated-dispersal throughout the following chapters; they breathe the specific corpo-affectivity of life. The **RESPITE** stories contain two voices that are both separate and overlapping, resonating and dissonating in their specificity and dispersal. They are situated stories that in their individual linearity and transversality, their uniqueness and comparativity, tell of worlding. They word the worlds of the intra-active simultaneity of the clashing-together dynamics of life of suffocating hyperventilation, imploding explosions, immobilizing activation – of worlds collapsing unnoticed while they are shared in loneliness. The **RESPITE** stories tell of temporalities simultaneously shrinking, expanding and leaping in the moments where panic attacks bring past and future into the present, present and future into the past, and past and present into the future as they stop one in the ongoing flow of life – as Matt articulated it in his story, in the bus continuing to drive, in the people around going on with their lives. On the bus, they breathe airful and airless worlds of invisible, separate and separating panicking; of shared air metabolized in different paces and intensities, infused with different chemical molecules of affective life, with panic invisibly articulated in the air semiotics and understood only by a few beings such as Tarik and other dogs, for whom the air is full of biosemiotic communication. In the following chapters, therefore, panic attacks and anxieties act not as representations but as imploded knots, as Donna Haraway (2004c) articulates these onto-epistemologies, that are the unwinding phenomena of **Breathing Matters**.

But why are anxieties and panic attacks relevant for breathing? They constitute particular, intensified enactments of breathing. These enactments materialize contradictory, tense, nondualistic yet differential affective corpomaterial actualities of intersectional living. As such, they inspire questions about vulnerabilities (and negotiations of politics) that should be, and to some extent already are, constitutive parts of feminist theoretical, empirical, methodological, pedagogical, scholarly and activist discussions.

In a panic attack, breathing is a force that enacts it through hyper- or hypoventilation and bodily relationality that makes the world spin “out of control;” or, to put it differently, it crashes the boundaries, categories, rationales and practices that materialize life as being to some degree knowable and predictable. Simultaneously, breathing is a force that can take an active role in metabolizing panicky dynamics. Focusing on regular rhythmic breathing during a panic attack, doing breathing exercises (as found in the four-count breathing exercise in the **RESPITE**), even sitting differently, with your shoulders back and down, with the chest moved forward to open the chest cavity and breathing deeply down into your lungs – as Lina explained it – can help you through panic attacks. With regular practice, breathing can shorten panic attacks or even decrease their explosiveness (cf., Brown and Gerbarg 2012). In the ambivalence of its enabling as well soothing force, breathing is a constitutive corpomaterial part of panicky becoming.

Breathing is also constitutive of anxious living. As the temporalities of panic attacks and anxieties are different – the former taking place unexpectedly and abruptly, the latter in different intensities but in an omnipresent way – so too the temporality and intensity of anxious breathing differs. Enacted relationally with circular and haunting thoughts, with extreme intensities of senses and perceptions, breathing enacts the suffocating power of anxieties. Anxieties can take your breath away slowly, metaphorically and literally. They can torment daily life in the inhabiting breathlessness of immobilization. But as in panic attacks, with anxieties, breathing can be a transformative force as a corpo-affective practice (and not simply a tool) of reconfiguring the presence, the intensity and the temporality of anxious becoming. It is such specificity, ambivalence and complexity of panicky and anxious breathing that is of interest here, as it allows for the articulation of not only the affective politics of vulnerability, but also – and this is an aspired contribution of the part 2 and of the chapter 9 in particular – the corpomaterial politics of vulnerability, politics where corpo-affective dynamics become their constitutive agencies.

Panic attacks and anxieties are enacted in multiple ways and often also in constitutive companionship with other ways of vulnerable being such as – to use medical terms whose logics and stigmatizing
effects are problematized in the following chapter – depressions, PTSD, obsessive compulsive disorder and agoraphobia, to name a few. In the interview conversations with Matt and Lina, and in my own experience, panic attacks are entangled predominantly with anxieties. And while I understand the multiple enactments of anxieties and panic attacks as relational with forms of being that are categorized as different in kind, it is the particular entanglement of anxieties and panic attacks that is the center of attention here.

I focus on the entanglement of the two not only because panic attacks may sometimes be called anxiety attacks and are often considered to constitute a “subcategory” of anxieties, but because of the way they enact and are enacted by breathing. And while breathing is an irreducible force of all corpo-affective processes and is enacted in those processes in diverse ways (and therefore enables equally significant engagements with panic attacks not only in relation to anxiety but also with diverse processes such as the already mentioned depression or trauma, or muscle tensions for that matter), it is the intra-active constitutiveness of panic attacks and anxieties which often brings breathing into attention. In working with anxieties and panic attacks my intention is not to argue for the exceptionalism of anxieties or panic attacks in contrast to, for example, depression and many other corpo-affective processes, but through the particularity of my focus to show their relatedness (which may or may not be constitutive for everyone, as it depends on their individual enactments) in a situated way.

Furthermore, anxieties and panic attacks enact particular affective corpomaterial becomings which, as I argue, articulate the importance of understanding politics in terms of corpomaterial agentiality in the specificity of their enactments, and in terms of intra-actively constitutive and differencing dynamism. In the two RESpite stories, for example, panic attacks articulate states of being where personal and physical boundaries are simultaneously strong, impermeable and all-encompassing and fragile, permeable and volatile – where the sense of being is numb and without control while extremely alert and watchful. They enact dynamics that are simultaneously immobilizing and activating, explosive and implosive, connective and disjunctive. They articulate narratives that are coherent and partial, linear and messy – that are expressive and affective as well as vague, alienating, rapturous and muting. The stories describe relationalities that break with an essentially binary understanding of mind and body, matter and meaning, individualism and social power relations while simultaneously articulating dynamics of differencing. The two RESpite stories articulate also dynamics and processes of mattering where organs, body parts, senses, affects and social states of being flood each other, express their presence and urgency through each other, and are infused in each other in an intra-actively constitutiveness manner. These contradictions, states of disarray, confusions, multiplicities, emergences, silences and raptures, connections and disconnections are at stake in imagining and articulating corpo-affective politics of vulnerability in the following chapters.

In Breathing Matters I claim that such vulnerable politics matter. As the following chapters argue, they articulate politics where corpo-affective dynamics bear political (individual and structural) significance – in terms of practicing feminist theorizing, developing affinities that work with dynamics of resonances and dissonances of diverse issues of relevance and intersectional positioningings, and challenging neoliberal forces of normative human subjectivity. The explosive and implosive forces of anxious and panicky becoming articulate an ethics of a transformative encounter where affective corpomaterial dynamics transform the world, changing everything and nothing at the same time. While one’s world falls apart, “everyone is fucking fine,” and yet the world will never be the same.

It is such ambiguity – the tension of productivity and destructiveness, of actuality and potentiality, of hopefulness and hopelessness, of radicalization and resignation – that articulates political significance and transformative (but not in a teleological or necessarily progressive, “improving” sense) forcefulness of corpomaterial agentiality.

INQUIRING INTO CORPO-AFFECTIVE POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY

The specificity of the preceding RESpite stories and the situatedness of Matt, Tarik and Lina make them powerful co-narrators of the “Corpo-Affective Politics of Vulnerability” part of Breathing Matters.
The corpo-affective dynamics articulated in the RESPITE saturate the following pages, which inquire into the political actuality and potentiality of corpo-affective processes. The opening RESPITE haunts the text while remaining predominantly unseen, unaddressed in the following chapters. But it is present in the air of the text, in every line that breathes-with the corpo-affective dynamics of intersectionally situated anxious and panicky becoming. The RESPITE diffuses through the following chapters, stays there as residual volume that spreads through the streams of lines while keeping the chapters open in the intratextual tides. It enacts the corpo-affectivity of anxious and panicky becomings as an inspiration and aspiration for the material-discursive visions and hopes for politics I am looking for in the following chapters – politics that are embodied and embedded in a search for breathable living, which are moist with the vulnerability of suffocation of affective exploding implosions soaking through the capillaries of everyday life, that beat in a vulnerable velocity of suffocation and hyperventilation, that work with momentary explosions and steady rhythms, that bring life into a movement where hyper- and hypoventilation breaks the world apart in the corpomaterial demand for not only politics of vulnerability but also for vulnerable politics of becoming.

The search for such politics takes two different forms in the following two chapters. Chapter 8 discusses conventional ways of understanding anxieties and panic attacks and the problem of bounding an object of a study. Its problematization of delimiting practices is saturated with the ambiguities, contradictions and corpo-affective dynamics articulated in the RESPITE. The text is haunted by my own frustrations in comprehending my own experiences as well as the concepts, definitions and cultural specificity of anxieties and panic attacks in the context of the Western cultural scape. It articulates the uncontainability of the phenomena and a need for nonreductive knowledge, affinities and politics that are both critical and affirmative – a need for politics that not only include corpo-affective processes but which are enacted through such processes.

Chapter 9 looks for such politics in the specificity of the interview conversations with Matt and Lina and is, as well as chapter 8, saturated with Matt’s RESPITE story and the importance of breathing in anxious and panicky living. The chapter is carried by my passion to employ feminist materialist and posthumanist theory for engaging with the uncontainability of the phenomenon of anxious and panicky breathing. The chapter is situated in a discussion of Matt and Tarik’s sensorial companionship, Lina’s corpo-affective methods, and a discussion of the structural relevance of breathing for understanding how intersectional power structures enact and are enacted corpomaterially and affectively. It provides an account of uncontainable engagement with the phenomenon of anxious and panicky breathing and argues for its situately dispersed political relevance.

The final chapter 10 of this part of Breathing Matters summarizes the political character of corpo-affective dynamics. Relating to the politicization of affect within feminist affect studies, it articulates the specific contribution anxious and panicky breathing as a corpo-affective phenomenon makes for feminist studies. Drawing on chapters 8 and 9, it articulates the political relevance of affect and corpomateriality as intra-actively constitutive.

All of the chapters are, moreover, guided by my own vulnerabilities of life with anxieties and panic attacks. As mentioned earlier, my experiences saturate the following pages and dissolve in between the following lines, and in the particular corpo-affective attunement that helps me pay attention to the conflicting or contradictory dynamics that are addressed throughout this part of Breathing Matters. My autoethnographic corpo-affective attention and the interview conversations with Matt and Lina are the guiding forces of the articulation of the anxious and panicky breathing discussed here. They also formulate the intra-actively constitutive understanding of affectivity and corpomateriality and the politicization of vulnerability in the complexity of its ambivalence.
CHAPTER 8
WHAT’S THE MATTER?
DELIMITATION AND UNCONTAINABILITY
Every panic attack is different, and each person experiences panic attacks differently – that is what Lina, a psycho- and physiotherapist, underlined throughout our interview conversation. Yet the multiplicity and uncontainability of their enactments as well as the intersectional situatedness and dispersal that make anxieties and panic attacks political matters are usually not incorporated in the practices of delimitation and conceptualization of these corpo-affective phenomena. Asking another person or yourself “What’s the matter?” while they/you experience or metabolize anxiety or a panic attack is a complex process that matters in multiple ways. It matters personally, as it is often hard for a person, particularly one who has just started experiencing anxieties or panic attacks, to realize what is happening – to conceptualize it in a meaningful way or into a personal narrative and to start working-with those ways of being that take over as part of their own life. It also matters structurally, as panic attacks and anxieties are more than individualized phenomena. And, finally, it matters conceptually, as wording is a worlding practice, and “what’s in a name” is an onto-epistemological matter of concern.

While the first two issues are discussed in chapter 9, the chapter at hand focuses on the problem of the delimiting concepts and experiences of anxieties and panic attacks. In other words, this chapter engages with what it means to have anxieties and panic attacks in relation to the ways they are conceptualized in medical, popular scientific, and self-help resources – resources that fundamentally shape the meaning; experience; and social, cultural, and economic (de)valuation of anxious and panicky living. In critiquing some effects of such delimiting practices while acknowledging some of their benefits, I also search, in this chapter, for alternative forms of engagement.

This chapter, therefore, has a double – inherently tense and conflicting while simultaneously synergetic – goal. On the one hand, it engages critically with practices of delimiting, bounding and explaining panic attacks and anxieties in a homogenizing manner. Motivated by broader questions (that punctuate all of part 2 – How do panic attacks and anxieties matter politically? How they are enacted and become materially-discursively intelligible? What effects does this materialization and intelligibility have on developing intersectional politics of vulnerability?), this chapter asks how panic attacks and anxieties are generally understood, and it attempts to challenge boundary-making, homogenizing and depoliticizing effects that the discourses discussed here enact. Understanding how panic attacks and anxieties matter politically – as will be explored in the next chapter – also requires engaging with the ways they matter conceptually.

Simultaneously, the chapter attempts to introduce and understand anxieties and panic attacks as corpo-affective, uncontainable phenomena that require nonreductive approaches. The particular enactments of anxieties and panic attacks discussed in Breathing Matters are spatially, materially, temporally, historically, geopolitically and sociopolitically situated while also dispersed in the interviews with Matt and Lina, as well as in my autoethnography and theoretical and political affinities, inspirations and metabolizations within which Breathing Matters is situated and for which it aspires.

**UNCONTAINABILITY**

Before proceeding to the discussion of practices of delimitation, I would like to discuss what constitutes the multiplicity and uncontainability at stake. As Lina said, “You can sweat, you can be dizzy, breathe heavily or fast. It depends on the person and how they describe it and what they feel during the attack.”

As Lina explained, for some, panic attacks enact eruptive states of hyperventilation, extreme heart palpitations, dizziness and bodily and affective states that are often experienced as or feared to be a heart
attack. For others, as they are for me, they can be immobilizing in the suffocating inability to breathe they enact as well as in their mobilization of the freezing incapacity to move, take control, feel and understand oneself and one’s body and affect. Sometimes panic attacks occur singularly or rarely, in situations of stress, fear or performance anxiety, for example. When they are a persistent part of one’s life, they are often lived alongside anxieties, depressions or a wide variety of sensitivities that include particular engagements and vulnerability in social interactions, in spaces, with artifacts or with bodily processes (ways of being which are, within psychological and psychiatric discourse, often marked as phobias, neuroses and disorders).

For Matt, as for me, panic attacks have been entangled with more or less intensive but omnipresent anxieties. While the experience of anxieties is not as explosive and dramatic as panic attacks, anxieties are forces of being that are haunting, debilitating (Puar 2009; Shildrick 2015a, 2015b). They constitute one’s everyday ability to relate to others and to oneself, to participate in the social and natural environment. They are forces that bring specific light and shade to the constitution of one’s world. As much as the panic attacks that figured in the “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPITE, anxieties can shred a person to pieces – not as eruptively and surprisingly as panic attacks do but, for me, they feel like a coated glass plato shattering while keeping its form, staying in place while I live and move and feel through a kaleidoscope of distorted figures, unusual permutations, diffractions, and a blurring of light and shade.

Anxieties distort reality – not into an “improper,” “broken,” “failed” representation of reality in the traditional, stigmatizing and devaluing meaning of these terms. In my experience, they distort reality by cracking open spaces for the actualities and potentialities of difference, and in doing so enact multiple ways of being in the world. They are protective, resistive and political in breaking the world down. They are forces of failure that challenge expectations in order to enact vulnerability as a possibility. Anxieties enact a deviation from the norm, which I see – as it will be discussed later – not as a space for stigmatization and pathologization but as a reconfiguration, an opening for possibilities of change, for norm breaking and for spaces of multiplicity and resistance within apparatuses of hegemonic normativity – deviation which simultaneously is not simply joyful and happy but often excruciatingly painful, hopeless, tormenting, destructive and scary.

The anxieties and panic attacks discussed in this part of Breathing Matters are specific to my, Matt’s and Lina’s accounts. In our accounts, the two phenomena share many transverse intra-actively constitutive forces, but they also differ significantly. While panic attacks may be recognized through their forceful peaks, living with anxieties and panic attacks is a matter of both sharp edges and blurred lines. Living with anxieties and panic attacks is messy, contradictory and hardly condensable matter.

As the following discussion will show, panic attacks and anxieties are often delimited as separate entities that may occur together. The practices of delimitation, however, create an illusion of the boundedness of anxieties and panic attacks, as if they were entities with clearly delimited boundaries, meaning and materializing processes. As the RESPITE opening this part of Breathing Matters reveals, panic attacks and anxieties are, however, ambivalent and relational phenomena. They are enacted simultaneously – or rather intra-actively, as the causal dynamic of such processes is mutually constitutive – with many other corpo-affective processes such as an upset, sensitive and reactive stomach and irritable bowel, or in my experience with vast muscle tensions, hearing and skin problems, and many other corpo-affective processes. Such intra-active constitutiveness of diverse affective and corpomaterial processes enacts a corpo-affective multiplicity of panic attacks and anxieties across a diverse individual, social, cultural and geopolitical range. It makes them transformative, multilayered and diverse phenomena – never permanently bounded, never the same, always surprising.

How, then, can anxieties and panic attacks be delimited if they constantly change in terms of their physical, affective, social and conceptual (but also cultural, historical, scientific, cosmological, etc.) enactments? And how is it possible to articulate the uncontainability and multiplicity of anxieties and panic attacks when they, for example, enact many similarities and convergences (such as, in case of panic attacks, sudden and short duration, hyper- or hypoventilation, heart palpitations, muscle tension, alertness, dizziness) across all the differences they
enact and are enacted by? These questions motivate this chapter, which
discusses conventional resources for delimiting anxieties and panic
attacks – such as medical, popular scientific, and self-help – while
arguing for the need for a nonreductive approach.

TRANSFORMATIVE WOR(L)DS

“What’s the matter?” What am I experiencing and talking about when
I experience and talk about anxieties and panic attacks? Many people
living with, counseling, and researching anxieties and panic attacks ask
this question in order to understand what happens during panic attacks
and anxiety, how people experiencing such ways of being can relate to
themselves and others, how others can relate to a person experiencing
them, and also how a person can minimize or live with the torments
these forces of being bring into life. But the answer to these questions
is not simple, at least not in a sense that provides a neatly bounded
corpo-affective object with a clear material-discursive definition.

As discussed on the following pages, it is my claim that the
articulations and definitions of anxieties change intra-actively with the
cosmologies and discursive apparatuses of different times and spaces.
These processes of articulation and materialization do not only enact
particular conceptual articulations of corpo-affective lives but they
also come into being through the ways anxieties and panic attacks are
experienced and roles they play personally and socially. I find support
for my claim of intra-actively changing definitions of anxieties in My
Age of Anxiety, by Scott Stossel (2014) – an insightful, vulnerable
popular-scientific monograph with an extensive interdisciplinary scope
that discusses historical and contemporary social and scientific research
of anxieties and the related pharmacological and therapeutic industries,
which is entangled with the author’s autobiographical observations,
stories and experiences of grappling with anxieties – that engages with
such conceptual changes through the author’s search for the meaning of
anxieties in their historical, social, intellectual, scientific and therapeutic
contexts. While the book itself tries to delimit anxieties in relation
to Stossel’s own experiences and concerns, it is simultaneously an
example of one of many contemporary discursive grappling with the
transformativeness of anxieties across time and space.

In his search for the roots and meanings of anxieties, the author,
for example, notices the proliferation of historically specific ways of
delimiting, defining and categorizing anxieties as a term and as a quality
of experience:

The species of unpleasant emotion that twenty-five hundred years ago
was associated with melaina chole (ancient Greek for “black bile”) has
since also been described, in sometimes overlapping succession, as
“melancholy,” “angst,” “hypochondria,” “hysteria,” “vapors,” “spleen,”
“neurasthenia,” “neurosis,” “psychoneurosis,” “depression,” “phobia,”
“anxiety,” and “anxiety disorder” – and that’s leaving aside such
colloquial terms as “panic,” “worry,” “dread,” “fright,” “apprehension,”
“nervousness,” “edginess,” “weariness,” “trepidation,” “jitters,” “willies,”
obession,” “stress,” and plain old “fear.” And that’s just in English,
where the word “anxiety” was rarely found in standard psychological or
medical textbooks in English before the 1930s, when translators began
rendering the German Angst (as deployed in the works of Sigmund
Freud) as “anxiety.” (2014, 34–35, italics in the original)

Terms such as “hysteria,” “psychoneurosis” or “melancholy,” and
affective vocabulary such as “worry,” “nervousness” and “jitters” are
historically, conceptually and materially situated articulations and
enactments of states of being that resonate with how anxieties are
defined and categorized today. These articulations have materialized
through constantly changing, shifting and transformative experiential
articulations of bodily and affective processes and how they were
understood in terms of symptoms, social and cultural visibility and
invisibility, proliferating ideas about their causes, their diverse
classifications (e.g., understanding panic attacks as symptoms of
anxieties, a subcategory of anxiety or an independent phenomenon).
They are also enacted through geopolitically and historically specific
cultural understandings and treatment approaches (Stossel 2014, 34).

However, the spatiotemporal multiplicity and transfor-
mativeness of the phenomena and the homogenizing practices of
their delimitation are not only matters of the “far past” or a subject of historical analysis. They are also subjects of contemporary discussions of the “what’s the matter” of anxieties and panic attacks. The most common example of contemporary (Western) practices of delimitation is a discourse of anxieties as a scientific invention of modern times. In this discourse, anxieties are understood as an invention that started five to six decades ago – an invention that was messy and chaotic but, “in the end,” had a progressive and “successful” effect in the delimitation of the phenomenon.

In his search for the meaning of anxieties, Stossel also engages with a narrative of modern processes of their scientific categorization. As he humorously points out, the diagnoses his grandfather received and was hospitalized with in 1948 no longer existed by 1980, and his own diagnoses have changed throughout his lifetime. Whereas multiple experiences called anxieties today were part of daily life for many individuals and societies throughout the centuries (and have been experienced and transforming in their particular worlding situatedness), a prevailing dividing line exists in contemporary discourses of anxieties as a scientific invention. The line is said to separate the past and present material and discursive enactments through the power of scientific progress that gave rise to anxiety in its clinical form known today (even such fixation is contestable, as there are diverse, co-existing conceptualizations nowadays), an understanding that did not exist fifty years ago (see Stossel 2014).

In Stossel’s historicizing delimitation and attempts to define and contextualize the current meaning of anxieties, he discusses the discursive ascription of the emergence of the contemporary recognition and categorization of anxiety (and, I would argue, also panic attacks) in medical and psychiatric terms to the pharmaceutical industry and its (often accidental) development of medication.40 However, as Stossel also notices – in his own unsatisfactory attempts to clearly delimit, categorize and bound – the medical practices that are said to establish anxieties and panic attacks as the “categories as we know them today” have been multiple and mutable in terms of their patterns of explanation, definition and treatment of anxieties. Indeed, hundreds of definitions of anxieties exist despite (or perhaps because of) the rapid growth of research that focuses on the issue.

The poststructuralist and postmodern reconceptualizations of the positivist notions of history and knowledge (e.g., Kuhn 1962; Foucault 1971; Lyotard 1984) have shown that the diverse historical enactments of phenomena (and this, I argue, is relevant also for conceptualizing anxieties and panic attacks) are not simply equivalent – in fact they do not create coherent and linear objects but matter in their specificity and multiplicity. Also, as queerfeminist historians of sexuality have argued (e.g., Laqueur 1990; Fausto-Sterling 1995; Katz 2002), it is highly problematic to assign contemporary terms that are embedded with current meanings and enactments to ways of living and experiences in socially, culturally, geopolitically, and temporally diverse contexts. And while it is possible to create genealogies of affective histories, it is crucial not to reduce their complexities and specificities in an attempt to delimit a stable and historically linear affective (as well as, for example, scientific, medical or social) categorization of anxiety or panic attacks. The diverse historical delimitations of anxieties – as melancholy, angst or hysteria – inform the ways they intra-actively constitute contemporary cultural imaginaries and scientific conceptualizations of anxieties (and panic attacks, for that matter). But their usefulness does not extend to, for example, Freud’s notion of hysteria being simply equated with contemporary conceptualizations (and the plural is important here because today many parallel delimitations of anxieties and panic attacks exist and continue to transform) of anxiety, and such an equivalence creating a historically homogenous and clearly bounded object.

What matters in engaging with the historical multiplicity, I believe, are the dynamics of the intra-actively (re)connective and disconnective flows, resonances and dissonances of diverse articulations throughout time and space, and the transformative onto-epistemologies of those corpo-affective enactments. Analytically, it is significant that what is called anxiety today resonates with particular embodiments and affectivities across diverse societies, cultures, times and spaces – resonances that are, however, to be understood not as linear, progressive and homogenizing but as having come into being through differentiating affective matterings in space and time.
The multiplicity of diverse approaches may inspire a different method. Researching corpo-affective processes, such as anxieties (and panic attacks), can consist of a practice of delimiting through situated-dispersal of resonating and differencing. It can be a practice that delimits phenomena in spatiotemporal and cultural specificity, and only temporarily, without “cleaning up” multiplicities and stabilizing past or present understandings and material enactments. This practice involves skepticism about coherent, all-encompassing truths and – as is the focus in the next chapter – working-with anxieties and panic attacks in particular onto-epistemological intra-active spatial and temporal materializations. The temporalities of these materializations necessarily have to be not linear but, rather, dispersive. Spatiality does not have to depend on the distance or depth but can be enacted through particular dynamics of geopolitical power relations. And the intelligibility of phenomena can be enacted not only linguistically, historically and socially but as a material-discursive-affective process. In such a perspective, uncontainability is not an attribute of pre-existing, essential and ontologically coherently bounded elements but rather an onto-epistemological, transformative materialization of worlding of intra-activity and differing that may be specific, particular and situated as well as create diverse patterns, (dis- and re-)orientations and dispersions.

DELIMITATIONS – CATEGORICAL DYNAMISM AND PRACTICES OF HOMOGENIZATION AND DEPOLITICIZATION

But let’s stay for a little longer with the question “What’s the matter?” regarding anxieties and panic attacks. How and what materialities, conceptualizations and apparatuses intra-actively enact contemporary onto-epistemological materializations of anxieties and panic attacks? Typically, official scientific resources such as dictionaries, glossaries or manuals attempt to define phenomena and draw their boundaries. Specifically for anxieties and panic attacks, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association enacts that role. The DSM as a categorizing apparatus holds worldwide authority for diagnostic and medical professions, as it enables the delimitation of objects of scientific and therapeutic concern. As the successive number 5 attached to the most recent DSM edition, published in May 2013, indicates, those boundary-making practices delimit anxieties and panic attacks only temporarily and permeably. The practices of delimitation and effects are matters of ongoing negotiation and critique of the DSM (see, e.g., Blashfield et al. 2014; DiMauro et al. 2014) and, as feminist and queer interventions show, also of a politically structural (e.g., Sennott 2010; Marecek and Gavey 2013), economic and anti-colonization struggles (e.g., Cosgrove and Wheeler 2013; Suarez 2016).

The manual constitutes a specific intra-active apparatus that enacts agential cuts (Barad 2007) within which material-discursive explanations, categorizations and pathologizations of anxieties and panic attacks (and other ways of being that are delimited there as “mental disorders”) are enacted. Whereas such manuals may be helpful in personal moments of searching for a meaning and in social structures when clearly bounded definitions have, for example, economic power (such as social security and health support), they are also practices of the codification of stigmatization and of a homogenizing understanding of panic attacks and anxieties. Simultaneously, as phenomenal apparatuses, they are also materializations of the transformativeness of the boundary-making practices of anxieties and panic attacks, when each new volume defines them slightly differently and combines them with or separates them from newly established categories. For example, as Stossel notices, the DSM-IV separated obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) from “anxiety disorders” and placed it into a new category of “impulsive disorders,” which disconnected OCD and anxiety, which often occur together, while assembling OCD with many other, sometimes qualitatively very disparate, experiences (2014, 49).

Though produced by diverse scientific groups with diverse perspectives and investments - see, for example, the discussion of financial conflicts of interest in the practices of delimitation of the DSM by Lisa Cosgrove and Emily Wheeler (2013) – the delimitations do not articulate the complexity of their production. They also do not include the multiplicity with which anxieties and panic attacks are experienced, conceptualized
and approached in therapeutic practice and in the daily lives of those who live through them. The delimitations often also enact separations of experiences of anxieties and panic attacks from the complexities of their intra-active situatedness of intersectional power relations and from a political potential of corpomaterial and affective agentiality and vulnerability. In drawing boundaries, these delimitations found in the DSM separate experience from social, economic and political context; they make boundaries that often isolate, stigmatize and pathologize. Figuring anxieties and panic attacks as disorders – as phenomena outside of spectrum of “normalcy” – the boundaries become markers of stigmatized difference, which in the Western normative sociocultural understanding of human subjectivity, is seen not as productive and valuable but as hierarchical, exclusive, pathologizing, normative and Othering (for a discussion of stigma and anxiety see, e.g., Anderson et al. 2015).

The DSM, however, is not the only space where such practices of delimitation take place – each scientific discipline, school of thought, perspective and understanding of mind, body and their relationship offer different understandings of what anxieties and panic attacks are. In general terms, psychology, psychiatry, neurology and biochemistry – to name a few scientific disciplines – tell diverse stories of anxieties and panic attacks. Their narratives have various points of entrance, for example, emotional suffering, social exclusion or brain chemistry. They also have different apparatuses of explanation (and often pathologization) in terms of mental disorders (generalized anxiety disorder, “normal” vs. “clinical” anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder etc.), social and environmental factors (stress, loss, trauma, illness, and various social and economic pressures) or physical determinacy and heredity (brain chemistry or DNA). They often operate within particular normalizing discourses such as ideals of mental and physical health, appropriate and desirable human subjectivity, success, standardized human physiology and concepts of nature. These heterogeneous scientific disciplines also offer their particular forms of interventions, such as psychotherapy, medication, exercise, or mind- or body-oriented treatments and counseling practices.

These contemporary strategies of delimitation – that are enacted in diverse schools of thought, research and counseling surrounding anxieties and panic attacks – can be classified in various ways. Briefly, the most common approaches to understanding and counseling anxieties that exist today – although this summary is also problematic –, are outlined by Stossel and his anonymous therapist as (1) psychoanalytic, (2) behavioral and cognitive-behavioral, (3) biomedical and (4) experiential.

The psychoanalytic approach focuses mainly on issues of repression and inner psychological conflicts, and its therapeutic aim is to bring what is repressed into awareness and to gain insight. For practitioners of the behavioral approach, anxieties are a conditioned fear response, and their intervention focuses on correcting faulty thinking, exposure therapy and cognitive restructuring. In the biomedical approach, the main interest lies in biological dynamics: in brain structures (organs such as amygdala, hippocampus, locus coeruleus, anterior cingulate, insula), neurotransmitters (serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine, glutamate, gamma-aminobutyric acid, neuropeptide Y) and genetics. Its practitioners’ main treatment methods focus on finding the correct and most responsive medication or combination of various medications. For those who follow the experiential approach, anxieties are understood in an existential sense as coping mechanisms, as responses to threats to one’s self-esteem and integrity. This approach focuses on the content and meaning of anxiety, and its practitioners aim to understand and handle anxiety through guided relaxation and engaging with hidden traumas, negative self-perceptions and hidden existential conflicts (Stossel 2014, 51–52).

While delimiting those four approaches, Stossel also points out that apart from their conflicts, competition and contradictions, the dominant discourses are not completely mutually exclusive and they share, in fact, many convergences. For example, the biomedical view has started to recognize the successes of the therapeutic benefits of cognitive-behavioral or experiential approaches, such as guided relaxation and meditation and their concrete effects on the structural changes of the brain (Stossel 2014, 53).

The diversity of scientific approaches, their growing cross-pollination and the extensive range of differing personal experiences (as discussed in the previous chapter and articulated in the “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPITE) indicate the multiplicity of material-discursive enactments of anxieties and panic attacks as phenomena. But through
the homogenizing narrative structures most of these disciplines apply to the points of convergences of the heterogenous multiplicities of panic attacks and anxieties, their practitioners develop narratives that bound, systematize and explain their causalities in a “cleaned up,” linear, chronological and merely interactive manner.

Furthermore, in the attempt to create a homogenizing approach to anxieties and panic attacks, these diverse delimiting and categorizing practices erase the conflicts and contradictions that anxieties and panic attacks enact not only as particular phenomena of corpo-affective experiences but also as “institutionalized and scientific phenomena;” conflicts between psychiatrists and psychologists about the relationship of anxiety and fear; conflicts between those who understand anxieties and panic attacks as experiential, social, spiritual, behavioral or biologically determined phenomena; conflicts between those who understand them as disorders, diseases or psychological inclinations; conflicts between those who understand them as real or subjective or struggles in differentiating anxiety and fear or locate their source in mind or in the body (see a rich discussion of these conflicts in Stossel 2014).

Rollo May’s (1996) foundational publication *The Meaning of Anxiety* also displays the phenomenal heterogeneity of disciplinary delimitations (as well as the interdisciplinary character and political potential) of anxieties. The book was initially released in 1950 as the first coherent overview of anxiety. With it, May attempted to delimit anxiety as a phenomenon and a field of newly and quickly developing scientific inquiry and therapy. The book engages with anxiety as a mental, physical, social, philosophical and literary phenomenon; as a domain of psychological, neurological, psychiatric, biochemical and social research (among others); as a phenomenon that crosses ages, genders, classes, races (while, to mention some of its limitations, being very American and Western oriented); and as a phenomenon not limited to the human species. May’s synopsis and juxtaposition of diverse conceptualizations of anxiety (including a few case studies and their psychological analysis) articulate anxiety as a complex phenomenon that troubles divisions between mental health and mental illness, failure and creativity (Kierkegaard [1980] also discusses this issue in his philosophical meditation on anxiety’s relation to creativity), body and society.

May’s book is an example of practice of delimitation which engages with the phenomenal multiplicity of anxiety as an object of inquiry while applying what science and technology studies scholars John Law and Vicky Singleton (2005) call an epistemological approach. Such practice of delimitation pays attention to diverse scientific approaches – their specific narratives and delimitation of objects – and compiles them, as May did, to create a kaleidoscopic understanding of a singular phenomenon, as May described it. In such an approach, the conflicts and convergences between, for example, mental and physical delimitations, are accounted for. But they are understood as different explanations of a phenomenon that is ontologically independent of its epistemological interpretations.

This chapter, however, argues for an onto-epistemological (Barad 2007) approach – or what Law and Singleton (2005) call a fiery approach, but with a focus on the issue of ontology – that does not reduce phenomenal complexity and uncontainability to a mere difference in stances and perspectives that exist next to, complement or compete with each other. Multiplicity, difference, contradictions, cracks, silences, multivocalities and transformativeness are not mere effects of the body (as in biomedical approaches), mind (as in psychoanalytical approaches) or scientific disciplines and their different perspectives and organizing and categorizing strategies. They are an immanent part of anxieties and panic attacks as onto-epistemological phenomena.

In such an approach, multiplicities, conflicts and contradictions, as well as situated coherences and boundaries, are not mutually exclusive as long as the delimitations and categories that are enacted are not understood as epistemological representations of ontologically separate phenomena. Phenomenal uncontainability and delimitation are practices of material-discursive intra-active differencing where boundaries are provisional, transformative and simultaneously meaningful and productive (as well as failing and confusing).
ORIGIN STORIES OF CORPOMATERIAL AND AFFECTIVE ERRING

As is pertinent within the previous discussion, the diverse ways of approaching, systematizing and bounding anxieties enact and are enacted within the specific stories they tell. But the differing of the understandings, explanations, treatments and materializations takes place not only in terms of onto-epistemological multiplicity of the stories but also through the multiplicities within the stories. Such diversities articulate the onto-epistemological, material-discursive uncontainability and transformativeness of the phenomenal becoming of anxieties and panic attacks and the spatiotemporally situated practices and effects of their delimitation. In relation to practices of delimitation of panic attacks, the multiplicity within the stories is especially pertinent in the origin narratives within which they usually operate. Such narratives enact specific social imaginaries of human corpomateriality and affectivity.

Having a panic attack is often, for me, a confusing and contradictory experience, as it enacts explosive, implosive, immobilizing, perplexing, altering and alerting dynamics that erupt in their multiplicity and specificity. When I attempted to comprehend what happens during a panic attack and why, one particular story usually emerged during the search for answers – a fight-or-flight narrative. This story appears across diverse narrative genres in multiple forms, ranging from behavioral explanations of popular self-help-oriented approaches to neurological accounts focusing on parts of the brain or nervous system as a whole.

Below, I center three different explanations of the fight-or-flight narrative, not only because it is the most popular conceptualization of panic attacks across scientific disciplines, therapeutic practices and the pop-cultural social imaginary but also because it shows yet another aspect of the multiple material-discursive mattering dynamics of panic attacks – the wide range of approaches that can be enacted within one seemingly coherent and particular narrative.

The following story is an example of the most popular narrative strategy that can be found amongst generally accessible, online, popular self-help explanations of panic attacks. It explains the way they operate mentally, biologically, neurologically and biochemically. Most commonly, this type of narrative starts with a historical evolutionary perspective such as this one:

Hundreds of thousands of years ago a panic attack was a very useful thing. We led much more physically challenging and dangerous lives then. We didn’t have sharp teeth or claws and so we had to be able to react very quickly to a threat. And in those days there were two simple choices. We could either run or, if desperate enough, we could fight. In this case, a panic attack is called the “fight or flight response.” ... The fight or flight response can be seen as one of the most important parts of our make-up – a highly efficient survival response for dangerous times. Back then, threats were simple and straightforward but often very dangerous – a wild animal, or member of an enemy tribe for instance. That is why the mind of a human being can trigger a panic attack fast and unconsciously. This is highly important. People who suffer panic attacks often report that “they come from nowhere” and this is an essential part of the fight or flight response. (Uncommon Knowledge 2014b, paras. 1–3)

Human evolution has taken approximately 135 million years. Modern life can only be said to have existed for the last ten thousand years or so – less than one thousandth of one percent (.001%) of our evolution. This is not nearly long enough for us to adapt. So, in a very real sense, we are stuck in a modern world using ancient tools. (Uncommon Knowledge 2014c, para. 2)

A vast proliferation of this type of evolutionary narratives of panic attack exists on self-help-oriented platforms that offer explanations, trainings, breathing programs etc. for dealing with panic attacks. Some of those platforms are free of charge and focus on education, destigmatization and “first help” suggestions. Others are part of an extensive self-help industry where panic attacks are not only a matter of concern but also a very profitable commodity. The quotation above belongs to a free “Panic Attacks Online Course” offered by the Uncommon Knowledge team, which consists of psychiatrists, therapists and trainers who work towards spreading knowledge about what they call “common psychological difficulties” (Uncommon Knowledge 2014a, para. 1). While this initiative is indeed helpful – as it provides comprehensive and
informed explanations about panic attacks and offers different programs (some free of charge, some for purchase) for dealing with and preventing panic attacks—it reproduces an omnipresent and highly problematic approach to panic attacks as a mental “difficulty” for which individuals, their isolated body parts or the defective (or temporarily faulty) evolution of the human species is responsible.

The wider program of which the course is a part focuses on three different areas: “fear of the unknown,” “over-stimulated nervous and hormonal systems caused by heightened general anxiety,” and “conditioning” (Uncommon Knowledge 2014d). Whereas focusing on these areas is only one of many therapeutic approaches, that they become sole focus of the program is symptomatic of how panic attacks are understood as depoliticized individual problems, failures of atomized and objectified body parts or processes and “difficulties” that can be—should be—changed (in this example through training, in others through medication, “suggestions” to change careers etc.). Such an understanding of panic attacks, however, is not merely a methodological and therapeutic issue. It is a political problem that shows the underlying assumptions—that are part of widely accessible self-help approaches to panic attacks—are about who counts as a proper human subject, how they should act, and who deviates from the norm and “requires” fixing, reprogramming or forced compliance (without critical assessment of the social norms and power structures).

Furthermore, as the pop-cultural imaginaries of evolution mobilized in the quotation above indicate, narratives of human evolution used as primary explanations for the existence of panic attacks offer a simplified understanding of such complex, interdisciplinary, intersectional and onto-epistemological phenomena as panic attacks and anxieties (and of evolution itself—for feminist accounts of evolution and biodiversity see, e.g., Hird 2002, 2004, 2009; Grosz 2004; Ah-King 2009, 2010; Ah-King and Nylin 2010). While the quotation starts with acknowledging the usefulness of panic attacks “ages ago,” it concludes that panic attacks are “ancient tools” in the “modern world.” Adopting evolutionary approach to panic attacks, however, does not have to mean leaving “tools” behind or that certain actions are inadequate. What makes the modern world “less dangerous” and humans less vulnerable now than they were before? While the material conditions of life have certainly changed and bodily materialities have transformed and are transforming every day, cannot panic attacks be understood as useful—while also very painful—corpo-affective forces for navigating, negotiating, and reconfiguring the vulnerabilities and power relations of the contemporary world?

The second typical storytelling practice of the fight-or-flight narrative focuses on understanding panic attacks in their contemporary materializations and in relation to the development of scientific conceptualizations of the brain and its assigned controlling function in the body. The quotation below is part of a short instructive video by a US-based psychological counselor, Gordon McInnis (2014), which I found online while researching self-help-oriented websites. The video is available both on YouTube and on eHow, the latter of which provides short instructive videos about how to cope with diverse “life issues” ranging from health and disabilities to personal economy, lifestyle, food and technology. While the website is exemplary for its vast range of self-help-oriented online platforms, in this particular case panic attacks clearly become one amongst many issues and “mental commodities” specifically delimited in terms of causes and solutions, capitalized on by a growing self-help and well-being industry that sustains the contemporary neoliberal economy and human resources management. Such “mental commodities” are subject to management, control and modification according to particular standards and visions of normative humanity, embodiment, subjectivity, “good life” and “well-being.” While the video—and its below quoted transcription available on eHow—aims to explain the importance of therapy for understanding panic attacks and learning how to identify causes of anxieties in an individual-centered way, it also provides a particular neurological explanation of panic attack dynamics:

A lot of time anxiety, it starts as, it’s a brain issue. It starts out as a brain issue. You have various parts of your brain. One is called your Amygdala, and it’s a small, almond-shaped, size portion of your brain that is your early warning detection device, and what it does is it basically picks up things from the environment and it starts the fight-or-flight symptoms. It starts the fight-or-flight process going, whereas if, like, let’s say you see a
bear in the woods. Your Amygdala is going to fire off. That’s danger. It’s going to give you a shot of adrenalin so that you get prepared to either fight or flight. Well, you’re probably not going to fight the bear, you’re going to run from the bear, okay? And sometimes, your Amygdala will fire off in situations that there’s no bear, and it misinterprets cues within your environment. Well, your Amygdala kind of sits next to what’s called your Limbic System, which is where your emotions are processed, and your Hippocampus, which is where your memories are processed. So, your Amygdala looks at when have we ever been in a situation like this before, what are the feelings that were supposed to go along with this, and it does it all, what’s called preconsciously, or does it before your conscious brain can kick in and say, “Oh, no, we don’t really have to worry about the situation.” It’s already started this whole process going. You’ve already got this adrenalin rush going. You’re already starting to have the symptoms, your palms are sweating, maybe you feel keyed up. Maybe you’re starting to breathe funny and there’s a variety of different physical issues that are going on, that therapy helps you to identify what those are, and kind of take the mystery out of them. (McInnis 2014, video transcript)

This storytelling practice localizes panic attacks in a singular body part, a part of brain called amygdala that is understood in neuroscience as responsible for the fight-or-flight reaction and that starts and controls processes of infusion of a human-embodied subject with adrenaline and “chemical cocktails” that are part of bodily processes that intra-actively enact experiences of panic attacks. The problem with such an interpretation of corpomaterial biochemistry is that it presents a relatively deterministic understanding of the dynamics of panic attacks – an understanding that is based on centrally directed causal interactions. Not only do such explanations enact hierarchical understandings of the functions of the human organism (i.e., the brain as the center of the whole human being) that are embedded in the rationalistic and mechanistic tradition of understanding human body but they also do not account for complex entanglements of mind and body and materiality and social reality. In such a narrative, panic attacks are “misinterpretations” followed by inappropriate actions explained, moreover, in military terms (such as a “detection device” that “kicks in” and “fires off”).

The third fight-or-flight story, which circulates frequently as an explanatory narrative of panic attacks, is also a neurological account that locates operational power in amygdala while, in contrast to the previous quotation, simultaneously sedimenting the phenomenon by delimiting its boundaries through the complexities of the nervous system as a whole and addresses how the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems of the autonomic nervous system work together within the body and relate to the social environment and experiential processes. While this narrative is closely related to the previous one and the two may be based on the same type of research, logics and neuroscience, how these stories are told is crucial because their narrative differences and the ways they delimit and explain the dynamics of panic attacks indicate what kind of popular-scientific knowledge, ideals of human subjectivity and embodiment are enacted in understandings of panic attacks that are made accessible to the general public.

Matt told me the story below in our interview conversation, and he learned it from his personal research about his own panic attacks – specifically from an understanding of panic attacks and ideas about emotional and bodily control in martial arts and in the soldier training philosophy of the US military in particular. While Matt finds some of the explanations below helpful, he is also critical of the controlling discourses and military roots of the narrative, which he learned in the book by Dave Grossman (1996) On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society:

In the autonomic nervous system you have two branches: you have the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system. One controls voluntary actions (tie a shoe, open the door, contextualizing something that you see) and the other part controls those functions that are not conscious (like our breathing, our strength or our adrenaline flow). And so in our “normal days” we are, you can say, in parasympathetic dominance: we can have conversations with people, we can do fine skills, fine motor control skills with our fingers, we can tell stories, we can do all those things. When an event happens that causes the body to be in a heightened state of emotions, so in an aroused state, usually associated
with fear, danger, stuff like that, the body is flooded with these chemical cocktails depending on what the event is and a shift happens that turns off the ability to contextualize the event and to give meaning to the world and it’s putting us in this more basic, more primal place we are having to respond, to react to context. ... And so, what happens is that the information that your body is processing about the event – so your felt sense – your appropriate reception, your eyes, your ears, your nose, all these sensory information that gets processed, in [your] mind get stuck in this part of the brain that doesn’t have the ability to get context, get meaning, do all these things the situation is asking for.

While the second fight-or-flight narrative is embedded in a deterministic and hierarchical understanding of corpomaterial dynamics, this third story, told by Matt, opens up a space of tension where some aspects of determinism (the controlling function of the nervous system) mix with individual and social dynamics. The idea of the nervous system that is dynamically reacting to “normal” daily life, or to events that bring life out of the ordinary and cause shifts in perception of reality and therefore in behavior, clearly articulates a more dynamic approach.

Such a perspective, however, still maintains the separation of mind and body (as well as nature and culture) by articulating their relationality as causally interactive. Though in such a narrative different shades of life are possible – those that are more culturally “adequate” because of the ability to contextualize and those that are more “primal” because of the turning off of that capacity in a state of panic – the separation it maintains, which is combined with the implicit idea of failure, reproduces hierarchical ideas of the mastery of mind (ability to contextualize) over body (more primal states of being) that constitute the abelist, classist, masculinist, heteronormative, racist, ageist discourses that in turn compose the normative Western ideals of proper human subjectivity.

Moreover, as the “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPIE articulated, one of the scariest materializations of and becoming through panic attacks is that the forces of being in a panic attack take you over, stop you, explode and immobilize you, and change and reconfigure the onto-epistemologies of your being and the spacetimemattering (Barad 2007) of your “here-and-now” and of the horizon of your life. In my experience, panic attacks change you, or rather becoming-with panic attacks reconfigures your sense of embodiment and of self, of the way time comes to matter and of your spatial, cultural, social, political, economic, bodily and affective (non)belonging. It is these tensions, paradoxes, contradictions of the forces “taking over” and the ideas of one’s “own self” that are at stake in the enacted split between the mind and the body, between the ability to contextualize and the “primal mode.”

As Matt’s description above designates, sometimes the moment of being in a panic attack is an existential, experiential or physiological “shift” that makes no sense, is unpredictable, uncontrollable and cracks open what appears to be clearly bounded, stable, sedimented and known. This shift is agentially entangled and intra-actively enacts affective states of danger, fear, being lost or out of bodily and mental control. This shift is mobilized by and mobilizes scientific research and popular-scientific explanations and practices of articulating, bounding and delimiting dynamics of panic attacks as corpomaterial misinterpretations, inadequate responses, temporal gaps and corpo-affective desynchronization where the body is, paradoxically, understood as lagging behind human evolution. Such an understanding is embedded in concepts of human subjectivity as solid, coherent and progressively developing – an ideology that has been challenged by (feminist) poststructuralist, postmodern and psychoanalytical thinking (e.g., Braidotti 1994; Grosz 1994; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Haraway 2004a, to name only a few important feminist contributions). Furthermore, explanations of the shift articulate and materialize panic attacks in terms of failures, which do not fulfill the idealized norms of human subjectivity, embodiment, rationality and productivity.

**ONTOP-EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPARATUSSES OF CORPO-AFFECTIVE PRODUCTION**

Despite their homogenizing efforts to coherently, clearly and reactionarily delimit, the fight-or-flight narratives of panic attacks discussed above enact diverse phenomenal materializations and intelligibilities of panic
attacks and anxieties. The definitions and conceptualizations produced within these apparatuses of knowledge production clear away the multiplicities, contradictions, ruptures, transformativeness and political actualities and potentialities of panic attacks and anxieties. As enacted in my own experiences and Matt’s and Lina’s stories, the corpo-affective phenomena of panic attacks and anxieties materialize and become intelligible as uncontainable, confusing, noncoherent, surprising and without pattern, and they are enacted and experienced in multiple ways.

They are also hard to articulate and explain for those who experience them, and they are also messy matters for those who try to research them (i.e., as discussed above, panic attacks and anxieties are enacted and explained in multiple and differencing ways in a wide range of practices of naming, researching and handling in multiple onto-epistemological apparatuses – from social constructivism to biological determinism, from psychoanalysis to biomedicine, and within the prevailing social imaginaries of the origin stories of fight-or-flight).

In order to make panic attacks and anxieties more understandable, such narratives explain them in terms of merely interactive causal relations. They systematize, “clean up,” homogenize and flatten panic attacks which become less ambivalent and contradictory, and their relationalities and enactments become surprisingly – in contrast to how they are often described by those who experience them – logical. In these approaches – whose operating logics resonate with scientific practices Law and Singleton (2005) call “managerial” – “the body” (or “the nature”), rationally organized and systematized, is ascribed centrality in the narrative, discursive and material coherence while the intra-active operations of explanatory reason that eliminate the confusions, cracks and contradictions of panic attacks remain invisible. Consequently, such apparatuses of knowledge production enact a split between exteriority and interiority of matter and meaning where “the body” is understood as essential, linearly causal and coherent in its enactments. Whereas each scientific apparatus intra-actively enacts a specific narrative and materialization of panic attacks and anxieties, when compiled together, these narratives create a kaleidoscope of several different, autonomous narratives that tell a coherent, seemingly all-encompassing and complete story of panic attacks and anxieties.

However, the multiplicity of these narratives indicates that the coherence and exhaustiveness of the individuated scientific stories is a fiction, as it excludes all the other narratives and existential enactments of anxieties and panic attacks. Furthermore, the homogenizing explanatory practices of such narratives exclude multiple constitutive elements of the phenomenal becoming of panic attacks and anxieties – their messiness, ambivalences, contradictions; the role of the apparatuses of their explanation and delimitation and their intra-active agentiality in the dynamics of the phenomenal becoming; the intra-active relationality of body and mind and nature and culture; the coconstitutive and interdependent dynamics of embodied subjectivities and social power relations; and the politics, ethics and social criticism enacted through panic attacks and anxieties in their actuality and potentiality.

Moreover, the difference between the multiple scientific narratives should not be reduced to mere epistemological differentiation (as Law and Singleton [2005] show in their own engagements with messy subjects) nor to a difference in stances and perspectives that exist next to each other, compliment each other or compete with each other. Multiplicity, difference, contradictions, cracks, silences, multivocalities and transformativeness are not mere effects of “the body” or scientific disciplines and their organizing and categorizing strategies – they are an immanent part of panic attacks as onto-epistemological phenomena (Barad 2007).

The productive power of phenomenal onto-epistemological transformativeness and uncontainability is already striking in the already discussed various attempts to define, bound and classify anxieties and panic attacks. The appearing, disappearing, transforming and reconfiguring practices of conceptual and material boundary making, discussed earlier in relation to delimiting practices of anxieties, through diverse naming and conceptualizing practices across time, are not mere progressive narratives of a linear and more accurate scientific representation of reality. They are, historically and currently, situated and differential materializations of bodily, cultural, social, geopolitical and scientific enactments of anxiety. As agential apparatuses of phenomenal intelligibility and materialization processes, they are practices of worlding and spacetimemattering; they expire anxiety (and understandings of the
world) as a process that is intra-actively embedded, embodied and enacted through (as well as intra-actively embedding, embodying and enacting) particular social, cultural and geopolitical situatedness and dispersal.

**MAKING ANXIETIES AND PANIC ATTACKS MATTER**

My engagement with anxieties and panic attacks is, therefore, not aiming for the development of a clear and coherent understanding of anxieties and panic attacks in a universalizing manner. Simultaneously, however, I acknowledge and affirm that in many instances a systematic, clear and coherent understanding of what happens during anxiety or a panic attack can be very helpful in comprehending one’s own situation, in recognizing it as a legitimate way of being and in learning how to deal and how to live. Finally, not only in individual but also within different structural and institutional contexts (e.g., health systems, un/employment), systematization and classification of anxieties and panic attacks may become a source of empowerment as they enable one to claim a position of vulnerability that requires support and recognition.

As much as it is important to attend to the multiplicity of panic attacks as phenomena it is, therefore, also crucial to work with the multiple politics they mobilize and require. Following feminist disability scholar Alison Kafer’s articulation of diagnosis and definitions of (physical and mental) disabilities and disorders as neither oppressive nor politically neutral (2013, 125), in the context of anxiety and panic attacks it is important to stay and play (though sometimes there is nothing playful about it) with the tension of the ambivalent – pathologizing and stigmatizing but simultaneously empowering and enabling – role of scientific and medical discourses, definitions, categorizations and diagnoses that delimit, explain, and handle anxieties and panic attacks.

The necessity of a complex political conceptualization of anxieties and panic attacks – and politics of everyday embodiment and affectivity in general – is also enacted in the omnipresent tensions between their productive, norm-breaking actuality and potentiality; the excruciating pain they enact; and the desire for life that is bereft of the way they shape it into unexpected, difficult and unwanted forms. This necessity is also enacted in the tension between opening possibilities for and recognition of alternative subjectivities, and the desire for a normative existence. Such political conceptualizations should, therefore, “stay with the trouble” (Haraway 2010) of the dynamics of uncontainability, ambivalences, contradictions, ruptures and silences as well as explosions, voices and dreams that are enacted in anxious and panicky living.

Crucially, a majority of those who experience panic attacks and anxieties do not want to “simply” and “joyfully” embrace them or live with them, and they do strive to find ways to live without panic attacks. Such politics should, therefore, acknowledge, support and respect this necessity while dreaming and problematizing the depoliticized and individualized manner in which the phenomena of anxieties and panic attacks are delimited and enacted. They should also address what norms of human subjectivity and ideals of “the human” as a bounded, rational and in control being such delimitations are embedded in and reproductive of.

As the previous discussion of practices of delimitation of anxieties and panic attacks articulated, left in the domain of individual matter and responsibility, a vulnerable life of anxious and panicky becoming is isolated from and is not analyzed and addressed as part of social, cultural, economic and geopolitical structures and power relations. As chapter 9 will deliberate further, panic attacks and anxieties should be understood not as “ancient tools” but as painful, disabling, debilitating as well as hopeful, enabling and motivating forces for imagining a future otherwise. As a corpo-affective force, they breathe questions like the following: What politics could material-discursive engagement with panic attacks and anxieties mobilize? What issues, social structures and power relations do they materialize? What understandings of embodied, material subjectivities can panic attacks open up as forces that crack open normative, hegemonic, Western notions of subjectivity and embodiment? How do panic attacks challenge the hierarchical binary between nature and culture? Though *Breathing Matters* does not address all of the questions above, it strives to articulate the importance of a discussion where corpo-affective, material-discursive, biopolitical issues are part of explaining, living, counseling and researching panic attacks, anxieties
and many other corpo-affective, sociopolitical lived realities. The abovementioned issues are mere openings into the feminist theoretical, political and ethical potentialities of taking anxieties and panic attacks – and their breathing becomings – seriously. What *Breathing Matters* argues for is that anxieties and panic attacks – in the ambivalence of their transformative forcefulness – matter politically.

In resonance with these questions and with the importance of attending to the multiplicities of panic attacks and anxieties as phenomena and to the ambivalences and tensions of their delimitation, categorization and (de)politicization, it is, therefore, also crucial to work with the multiple politics they mobilize and require – politics that are strategic, intersectionally coalitional and provisional. As Kafer’s book makes clear, working through the ambiguities, complex negotiations and contradictions of definitions, categorizations, stigmatizations and empowerment becomes a field for multiple coalitions and affinities. I join Kafer’s call for feminist, queer, crip strategic cross-movement politics as well as her broad articulation of disability that does not rely on homogenizing identifications (such as “we,” “they,” “us”) and binarizations (disabled/able-bodied or physical/mental disability) but works through exclusions, contradictions, differences, tensions, and contesting conversations in a never fully finished, never exhaustive and never complete manner (2013, 16–19). Making anxieties and panic attacks matter marks, in *Breathing Matters*, my political investment in strategically building such affinities in an (ontologically, ethically and conceptually) nonflattening and nonhomogenizing way.45 I strive to make analytical and political interventions that have dispersed effects and possibilities, which are simultaneously necessarily always incomplete or even irrelevant in relation to other ways vulnerabilities and empowerment materialize in different intersectional enactments of lived material-discursive realities of individuals, groups, collectives or activist and political affinities.

In such an analytical and political practice, it is important not to understand panic attacks as an “ancient tool” for the “modern world” (as some of the popular self-help fight-or-flight narratives do) or as a mechanism of “misinterpreting the danger” (as articulated in the neuroscientific account of fight or flight discussed above). Panic attacks and anxieties are not tools that are “out of our time,” temporally and contextually desynchronized phenomena with little relevance or importance. On the contrary, they are legitimate dynamics of being and particular intra-active enactments of situatedness as well as resistance within social power relations. As such, they offer possibilities to ask questions about and articulate reconceptualizations of operations of social power relations, as well as about their dynamics and intersectional processes. They also offer possibilities for developing material-discursive articulations of intersectional coalitions, affinities and communities. In their multiplicity, contradictoriness and messiness, they also enact the importance of a material-discursive and intra-active understanding of human subjectivity, body and mind, nature and culture and human and nonhuman relationality.

Vulnerable becomings, of which anxieties and panic attacks are specific examples, are matters of situated and dispersed intersectional politics of corpo-affective agency. The following, and final, part of this chapter articulates an example of an alternative approach that such politics of daily corpo-affective agentiality enact.

**THE POWER OF ERRING**

Politics of quotidian corpomaterial agentiality are, however, not “innocent” matters. While in *Breathing Matters* I advocate for particular vulnerable intersectional politics, like breathing, anxieties and panic attacks can enact politics that are repressive and further discrimination or sustain diverse practices of (bio)political control, domination and exploitation. For example, Matt’s neurological account, discussed above, has very different and politically diverse consequences in different contexts of its enactments.44 In the context of the military – where Matt’s references come from and of which both Matt and I are critical – the logics of the narrative and the mobilization of breath as a tool of control in their usage in the military context create the desired and disciplined soldiers who are in control of their minds and bodies. The usage of breathing exercises allows the military to create embodied subjectivities that are a controllable and constitutive part of war machines, neocolonialism, capitalism, state violence and repression. In such practices, the four-count
breathing exercise – part of the “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPIRE and an example of the possibilities of enacting sustainable self-care when living with anxieties and panic attacks – agentially enables and enacts the development of human killing embodied-subjectivities, who mobilize breathing as a mode of control and sustainable maintenance of military human power. Simultaneously, the same type of narrative allows for an understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon of panic attacks, how they are an integral part of the socio-natural world and how their dynamics can enact resistive potentials and possibilities of political (individual and structural) change.

The case of the neurological account narrated by Matt, therefore, articulates clearly that situatedness, ethics and politics should be a crucial and integral part of contemporary conceptualizations of the relations and intra-active constitutiveness of minds and bodies, nature and culture, materiality and discursivity, embodiment and power relations. A material-discursive and corpomaterially agential understanding of the world does not automatically imply ethics and politics that resonate with multiple goals, voices and struggles of the diverse scope of feminist politics, activism and scholarship. Scientific stories can have multiple delimitations and materializations, and it is their situatedness, politics and ethics that make them accountable for the effects they enact.

In reconnecting with the above discussed discourses of panic attacks as enacted in the fight-or-flight narratives, and in order to give examples of the political potentialities of material-discursive feminist politics of vulnerability, I want already here to draw attention to two aspects of these discourses, where they, despite their overall limitations, open up towards alternative engagements with materialities and transformative possibilities – two aspects which I will examine in more detail in the following chapter. The first engagement discusses the potentiality of failure as a political practice, while the second one addresses the intra-active relationality of mind and body, nature and culture, materiality and discursivity in developing a nondeterministic and nonhierarchical understanding of corpomaterial dynamics.

The fight-or-flight narrative discussed second, which examines neurological causalities of panic attacks, provided an understanding of panic attacks as a “misinterpretation” of objective reality – as a biochemical wrongdoing of an erring body and a failure of the body to react appropriately. But the way of thinking, living and engaging with panic attacks that motivates my project – a conceptual and political approach discussed above – opens up possibilities for a different understanding of such failure by asking, for example, what are failures constitutive of and what issues are they enacting as at stake?

Not only in the fight-or-flight narratives but also in my and Matt’s daily lived realities, failure is a constitutive material-discursive norm that is intra-actively enacted within panic attacks and anxieties. Anxieties and panic attacks as onto-epistemological phenomena materialize and become materially and discursively intelligible through intra-active materialization and the semioticization of social and cultural norms and material enactments of subjectivity (that include such ethically, economically and politically saturated concepts as humanity, productivity, success, acceptability and failure, to name a few), corpomateriality and affectivity. Reiterative, ongoing material-discursive rearticulations and reconfigurations of norms and their material enactments and reconfigurations intra-actively constitute phenomenal norms and phenomenal ways of being a (“proper” but also “improper”) human subject while simultaneously enacting actualities and potentialities of norm-breaking practices, subjectivities, materialities and events – dynamics of differing that enact possibilities of change. The issue of failure will be discussed more in the next chapter, but what is at stake here – in relation to the previously discussed prevailing, normative, popular-scientific and self-help-oriented discourses and practices of delimitation of anxieties and panic attacks – is the constitutive workings of failure in social, cultural and individual understandings and practices of de/valuing panic attacks and anxieties as ways of being and affective dynamics of subjectivity.

Within the specificities of material-discursivity of panic attacks, they are embodied, experienced, explained and enacted through pain, fear, desperation, debilitation, immobility. In the similar flow of affective grappling-with panic attacks, at the end of the third consecutive fight-or-flight narrative discussed above, Matt articulates his own experiences of panic attacks (and implicitly also their relation
to failure) in terms of “being stuck.” Feelings of failure and stuckness are crucial and constitutive forces of panic attacks. Though they are often understood as articulations of subjective and corpomaterial erring, such erring can have a vast political and transformative power (in actuality and potentiality). Erring does not only enact the operative power relations that constitute (and are enacted through) desired human subjectivities and corpomaterialities but, as an agential matter of differing, erring enacts different configurations of embodiments and subjectivities.

Through the dynamics of material-discursive differing, through reconfigurations of idealized norms and within the process of differing itself, panic attacks enact the actuality and potentiality of change. “Being stuck,” failing and not being able to “process the context” – as Matt puts it – and act as the situation normatively requires opens up the possibility for a different way of conceptualizing and living panic attacks. The possibility includes a material-discursive articulation that is not contained in a representationalist understanding of reality and embodiment that understands panic attacks as a misinterpretation or an inadequate reaction but, instead, is a way of becoming that is ambiguous, shaky, painful in its reconfigurations of material-discursivity of human subjectivity, embodiment, affect and enactments and the constitutiveness of social power relations; that is simultaneously resistive and normative, opening and foreclosing, enabling and immobilizing, transformative and stabilizing. In these contradictions, confusions and disabling abilities, the failure enacts a space for vulnerability and for breathable lives.

The second example of an issue at stake in the practices of delimiting, bounding and categorizing panic attacks is the relationality of mind and body, nature and culture, materiality and discoursivity. The second fight-or-flight narrative discussed above offered a neurological explanation of the causalities of panic attacks and was embedded in a deterministic and hierarchical understanding of corpomaterial dynamics and corpo-affective relationality. However, as contemporary research in neuroplasticity indicates (for an overview of contemporary feminist debates see, e.g., Schmitz and Höppner 2014), operations of the brain may not be hierarchical but rather a dynamic, processual entanglement of forces, processes and materialities that constitute the body as an organism that does not “end at the skin” (Haraway 1991, 178).

In such a perspective, the amygdala does not have to be understood as a hierarchical, computer-reshaping organ that (“inadequately”) detects danger, swiftly collects data, fires off and gives orders to shoot and attack or run. It can be engaged with as an agential part of the intra-active enactment of a phenomenon that is constituted through material-discursive, corpo-social forces, rather than being simply reactive to environment (in, moreover, an “adequate” or “misinterpreting” manner). In such an approach, bodily processes are constitutive parts of and enacted through social and material realities, as well as past and present physical and affective ways of being. Furthermore, in the section where the quotation hints at the role of one’s own historical genealogies and social realities – “your Amygdala looks at when have we ever been in a situation like this before, what are the feelings that were supposed to go along with this, and it does it all, what’s called preconsciously, or does it before your conscious brain can kick in” (McInnis 2014, video transcript) – it is possible to find those kinds of onto-epistemological possibilities.

These narrative openings are crucial for understanding panic attacks not in a deterministic and mechanistic manner but as a phenomenon that is biological and social, material and discursive, corpomaterial and affective. Focusing on multiple material-social, corpo-affective, natural-cultural intra-active constitutiveness (and differentiation) that enacts panic attacks and anxieties helps to account for the lived, experiential, social, cultural, biological, geo-economic and intersectional complexity of panic attacks and anxieties rather than bounding, systematizing and “cleaning” them up from their messiness and contradictions.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The issues of failure and corpo-affective, natural-cultural relationality are merely two examples of possible alternative means of engagement with anxieties and panic attacks. Though they will be further elaborated in the following chapter, the goal of this chapter was to argue for the uncontainability and need for politicization of panic attacks and anxieties.
and to discuss diverse discursive practices that – in attempts to structure understandings and categorizations, coherent knowledge and counseling practices – attempt to contain the uncontainability and create coherence at the expense of contradictions, ruptures, confusions. They understand anxieties and panic attacks as individualized and depoliticized affective states that are separate from the operations of social power relations and norms of “proper” human subjectivity. While staying with the tension of the benefits that practices of delimiting anxieties and panic attacks bring, I have argued for alternative practices of engagement that focus on the political importance and power of anxieties and panic attacks as well as on the constitutive importance of vulnerability they enact.
CHAPTER 9

TAKE SPACE, BREATHE: ETHICS AND POLITICS OF MATTERWORK
Breathing isn’t usually associated with politics or with taking space socially or politically, nor are anxieties and panic attacks. The mere possibility of engagement in most conventional forms of political protest such as demonstrations and gatherings can be, however, restricted by vulnerability of the breath. The capacity to take space can also be suffocated through the daily operations of the systemic forces of social discrimination. Taking space may, moreover, result in the temporary or final loss of breath, which can be taken away in the deadly chokeholds of structural power relations. Fighting for breath and for breathable lives is, therefore, a matter of not only acts of and aspirations for change but also recognition of differential forms of political practices. (Loss of) breath calls for social change grounded in attention to differential operations of power relations and differential practices of political resistance and transformation. It does matter whose lives (do not) matter; it does matter whose lives are (un)breathable; and it does matter whose lives and what practices of resistance and transformation are (not) considered political.

This chapter, therefore, invested in politicizing vulnerable becomings and articulating their feminist political actualities and potentialities. It focuses on the complexities and ambivalences of anxious and panicky dynamics of quotidian corpomaterial and corpo-affective agencies – on the dynamics of the extraordinary force of ordinary practices that are both immobilizing and transformative. Simultaneously, it continues the ongoing discussion of politics of vulnerability, running through Breathing Matters, and the insistence on understanding politics as also vulnerable. “Taking space” can denote divergent practices, temporalities and spatialities. Anxieties and panic attacks bring about counterintuitive practices of taking space that also include practices of withdrawal from spaces as well as implosions of social, economic, political and material presence and relating. The chapter, thus, strives to imagine what vulnerably taking space means politically and practically. How can anxious and panicky breathing be a material-discursive way of taking space? And how can it enact a politics where the work of bodily matter (matterwork) – the way panicky breathing blows the world apart and anxious suffocation demands change – is a political matter?

Taking space, however, is not an “innocent practice.” It may be performed through divergent acts and with radically different consequences. This chapter searches for the ways in which anxious and panicky breathing can take, create and transform spaces for breathable lives beyond neoliberal individualized notions of subjectivity, shaming understanding of failure and erring, and a depoliticized approach to vulnerability. The chapter seeks spaces that are matters of dynamic relations rather than stable boundaries and exclusive belongings. It engages with two interviews that have been introduced in chapter 7 – with Matt, who lives with anxieties and panic attacks and shares his life with his dog-companion, Tarik; and with a psycho- and physiotherapist, Lina. Drawing on Matt’s and Lina’s experiences, as well as my autoethnography of living with anxieties and panic attacks, the chapter discusses lived spaces where materialities, subjectivities, ethics and politics materialize in temporary meaningful, ethical and political configurations, which are simultaneously matters of constant renegotiation and resignation.

And while those spaces – of olfactory communication, suffocating isolation, specific practices of breathing – are usually not understood as political, the chapter argues for their political relevance and for the necessity to understand matterwork as politically forceful.

**RESPONSE-ABILITY IN DIFFERENCE**

“To be one is always to become with many” (Haraway 2008, 4, italics in the original). Anxious and panicky becomings, in their isolating, alienating and withdrawing power, are also dynamics of multiple becomings. They take this form not only by enacting particular
resistances and reconfigurations of lived and performative power relations and cultural, social and material norms but also through the particular companionships of vulnerable existing. Just as there is no singular way in which anxieties and panic attacks can be experienced, understood and engaged with, so too there are no singular forms of companionship that can be mobilized (or lost) in these processes. In the deepest isolation one may, but also may not, find unforeseen connectivity with given and chosen families, collectives, political groups, individuals etc. while simultaneously being deeply disconnected in many other ways. But companions – as Haraway’s (2004b, 2008) analysis of multispecies becoming makes clear – do not have to only be human.

Matt and Tarik met after Matt’s return to the US from Syria. At that time he didn’t have any money, as Syria – after forceful deportation – had frozen his accounts, and Matt had said goodbye to his friends and family in the US because, when he had left, he had not intended to return. He got back to Los Angeles, a place he did not want to be and where he felt uncomfortable, still struggling with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the effects of his earlier treatment as a conscientious objector by the US Marines.

While experiencing panic attacks and anxieties, depression, destructive behavior, sadness, deep anger and difficulty concentrating and living, Matt learned that animals could be helpful companions for some who struggled with – what he called – the “trouble of being human.” He had always loved dogs, and he needed grounding to encourage him to rise in the morning and sleep at night. His father’s dog had recently had puppies, and Matt decided to take one of them and train the dog to help him to be human. Tarik and Matt started living together when Tarik was about three months old. He was a crazy little puppy at the beginning of their companionship, and Matt just let him be a puppy. After a year and a half they started training together. But they had already started learning each other’s patterns and behaviors by responding to one another – by showing and recognizing that if one of them acted in a certain way he needed the other to respond.

Already during the first year of their companionship, when Matt was feeling horrible, experiencing heightened anxiety or having a panic attack, he held Tarik in his arms. At the beginning, Tarik did not “get it,” and he interpreted Matt’s embrace as an invitation to play. He often responded, as Matt articulated it in our interview, “Oh yeah, we are wrestling? Ok! I’m gonna bite your fingers!” Learning and communicating, seeing and recognizing, respecting and reacting are complicated processes regardless of the species involved. For Tarik and Matt, it was not a matter of misunderstanding but rather a matter of learning response-ability through each other, through material, affective and lively intra-active in-differences – an ongoing process of trans-corporeal (Alaimo 2008) sensorial response-ability in-difference.

Being a puppy and an adult, being happy and panicky, playing and suffering were parts of the mutual learning process of “not getting it.” It was a process wherein Tarik was learning Matt’s behaviors while Matt learned about Tarik and the sensorial quality of their play. And in the process of “not getting it,” Tarik’s play would bring Matt out of his panic – not right away, but gradually. As Matt said,

> Often times, literally, there is that somatic quality where instead of being in my brain – that was sort of dictating the sensations of my body – I was more in my body because this little sharp-toothed dog thing is being a puppy, biting my fingers or running away from me when I'm trying to get him 'cause he thinks it's a game. And so I am on all fours and I feel the pressure of my body on the wood floor, which hurts my knees, which centers me. It brings me pain. But it's not a bad pain; it's just a very intense sensation.

Through “not getting it,” through new sensorial experiences, they were learning the play of intra-active sensorial transspecies companionship, response-ability in-difference and respect even before the systematic training – during which Matt taught Tarik rules and structure, that he should wait at the door etc. – began.

In the difficult affective moments, Matt kept on grabbing Tarik. And slowly, as time passed and their knowledge and recognition of each other increased, Tarik started to come to Matt right before or as Matt began to notice his rising anxiety or the beginning of a panic attack. While the training they underwent was methodical, it wasn’t only the training that taught them to see each other, “it was just presence and attention
and respect." And that respect and negotiation of recognition took place not only in situations of mutual resonance but also in those when Tarik did not see or recognize Matt’s needs, when he didn’t come to Matt and Matt had to respectfully indicate, grab him and show him that he needed Tarik to give him love or play with him.

Tarik accompanies Matt everywhere he goes, so he is often around when Matt’s anxiety rises or he has a panic attack. By now, Tarik senses it. He senses it with his nose, as Matt’s body chemicals change and shift. He can also read it from Matt’s tone – he recognizes increased stress in Matt’s voice and understands that it indicates anger or pain. He sees it by reading Matt’s body language. In the dynamic composition of all these sensorial skills and practices of knowledge and response-ability (and, as Matt adds laughingly, maybe also their “psychic connection”), Tarik recognizes what is happening and immediately comes up to Matt. He tries to lock eyes or make eye contact – an act that, in such challenging states and especially around people, is extremely difficult for Matt. He usually leans on Matt’s feet or against his body. In situations when Matt feels cold and hard, Tarik is warm and soft. In their sensorial engagement, Tarik brings a warm, furry and friendly presence, and he responds to Matt’s need without making him seek it out, giving him comfort and creating a bond of trust that there will always be someone who will respond favorably when Matt is in trouble. Such intimacy, in the mutual ability to respond and be vulnerable, immediately changes the way Matt feels. As Matt said, when he feels very tight and heavy in his chest, Tarik makes everything seem light and cloudy. When Matt’s fingertips become cold and sensationless, Tarik’s actions change Matt’s somatic sensations; these dynamics stop disassociation through Tarik’s sensorial appellations: “No, no, no, no! Feel this!”

As for Tarik’s sensorial demands, what he usually asks for is to be touched and pet. So, as Matt put it,

[While panicking] I pet his head, and his head is warm and my fingers [become] very sensitive. ... By touching him my hand gets warmer, ‘cause my fingers are usually really cold when I am in the middle of a panic attack ‘cause all of the blood comes to the core. And I can start feeling things in my hands again. And then as I am petting him, I can smell him. Not that he is a stinky dog but dogs have this certain musky odor and I’ve learned that’s comforting. Having that smell means that he is near me; and having him near me means I am safe. And so, through touching and feeling him my body is feeling him. I can smell him. I can hear him. His breathing is rhythmic. And I don’t match my breathing to him cause he breathes faster than I do. But it becomes like a drumbeat or something that is constant and I can tell from his breathing that he is not afraid, he is not scared. And then visually I can see that he is enjoying himself and he is happy and he is in front of me. And so all of my senses are focused on him. And it’s not that I stop feeling as horrible as I was. It slowly starts to change. That badness is still there but it’s lessened. It’s less sharp, less pronounced. Sometimes I’ll give him a big old hug or we come face to face. And he’ll start making noises, comforting noises and then I will respond making comforting noises and it’s a really intimate process. It’s easier that he is not human.

Tarik and Matt’s sensorial engagement is an act of intimacy, openness and vulnerability, which for Matt is much harder to achieve with other human beings, who are, in contrast to animals, constitutive agents of his trauma. The response-ability, ethics, vulnerability and recognition their companionship mobilizes is not merely a human skill and capacity but a dynamic of recognition and ability to respond-in-difference – coming face to face, smell to smell, resonating in different speeds and rhythms of breath that, in their differencing, enable vulnerability within which the response-ability in-difference is possible.

The response-ability in-difference is not about symbiosis, merging, becoming One. It is, rather, recognition of the intra-active difference that creates situated affinities and embodied change. The response-ability in-difference is about dynamics of opening up to the difference – “to the hospitality of a difference from [oneself] or of a difference with [oneself]” (Derrida 1993, 10). Becoming together through the contrasting states of softness and hardness, warmth and cold, fast and slow breath, playfulness and panic – these states do not meet as binary oppositions but intra-actively enact sensorial becoming-otherwise, where breath, smell, touch, voice and sound enact spaces of sensorial, corpo-affective transformation.
Becoming human becomes an embodied process of becoming-with that challenges concepts of disembodied and normatively embodied, individualized, successful and happy subjectivity. Instead, for Matt, it is a process of sensorial companionship and response-ability in-difference with Tarik where the work of matter matters. It takes place, for example, in sensorial transformations of touch when Matt’s numb fingers meet Tarik’s soft fur. Their touch becomes a transformative sensorial force that changes corpo-affective states as well as reconfiguring the proximity of self and Other in the dynamics of becoming-with (see Barad 2012b).

Becoming human is also enacted in the material-semiotics of air – for example, in the smelling sensoriality of (not only) humans and dogs. As the field of biosemiotics makes clear, the air is full of ongoing communication (see, e.g., Sebeok 2001; W. Wheeler, n.d.). It is not surprising, then, that Matt and Tarik live an olfactory life together. While for humans, sight is considered to be the primary world-orienting faculty (but this is not the case for everyone, and ocularcentrism has been widely criticized within both feminist critical disability studies and feminist visual cultures studies, [see, e.g., Marks 2000]), Matt’s olfactory relationship with Tarik is also crucial, if initially less pertinent. And for Tarik, smell is even more important – it is the nose that orients him in the world. While both humans and dogs actively work with smell in everyday life and in biosemiotic communication, dogs’ and humans’ senses of smell, and the way they sniff, are not only different in intensity and primacy but also in process. Horowitz (2012), a scholar whose work focuses on animal cognition and olfactory acuity, explains this difference between human and animal sniffing:

Sniffing is the action of inhaling air, but it is more active than that, usually involving short, sharp bursts of drawing air into the nose. Everyone sniffs – to clear the nose, to smell dinner cooking, as part of a preparatory inhale. Humans even sniff emotively, or meaningfully – to express disdain, contempt, surprise, and as punctuation at a sentence’s end. Animals mostly sniff, as far as we know, to investigate the world. … [A dog’s] sniff is nothing to be sniffed at. In fact one could make the case that it is neither a single nor a simple inhalation. The sniff begins with muscles in the nostrils straining to draw a current of air into them – this allows a large amount of any air-based odorant to enter the nose. At the same time, the air already in the nose has to be displaced. Again, the nostrils quiver slightly to push the present air deeper into the nose, or off through slits in the side of the nose and backward, out the nose and out of the way. In this way, inhaled odors don’t need to jostle with the air already in the nose for access to the lining of the nose. Here’s why this is particularly special: … the slight wind generated by the exhale in fact helps to pull more of the new scent in, by creating a current of air over it. This action is markedly different from human sniffing, with our clumsy “in through one nostril hole, out through the same hole” method. If we want to get a good smell of something, we have to sniff-hyperventilate, inhaling repeatedly without strongly exhaling. Dogs naturally create tiny wind currents in exhalations that hurry the inhalations in. So for dogs, the sniff includes an exhaled component that helps the sniffer smell. … The sniffing method of dogs enables them to avoid habituation to the olfactory topography of the world: they are continually refreshing the scent in their nose, as though shifting their gaze to get another look. (2012, 76–78)

Tarik’s olfactory communication allows him to relate to Matt in ways Matt may not perceive. As such it is a kind of sensorial response-ability in-difference that shows that companionships and response-ability are matters of differential coming-together. And the response-ability in-difference is not merely a human concept; it is also a matter of multispecies and multisensorial differential relating.

The human olfactory world has a rich cultural history (Howes, Synnott, and Classen 1994) with vast medical, imaginary and political implications (Corbin 1988). Smell can be also understood as a practice of knowledge, as described in Serre’s (2008) philosophical exposé The Five Senses. And in Matt and Tarik’s response-ability in-difference, smell also becomes a posthumanist ethical practice of biosemiotic communication and relating. As Horowitz points out, not only in our presence but also in our absence we leave traces of ourselves (e.g., skin tissue) that create our particular scent. This scent is created not only by our breath, sweat, fluids and oils but also by what we eat, how we digest,
who we spend our time with (in diverse intensities of intimacy), what we’ve accidentally touched etc. (2012, 84–85).

The relatively stable while simultaneously transformative composition and complexity of scent continuously produces olfactory meaning, which can help Tarik recognize Matt’s anxiety or upcoming panic attacks sometimes even before Matt does. The specificity of human social, cultural, economic, biological and affective life is a saturating olfactory presence (and absence) specific to an individual, and it is recognizable by a dog. This ability informs many scientific studies of dog behavior as it relates to them smelling human emotions. As Horowitz argues,

It is likely that dogs do smell fear, as well as anxiety and sadness. ... The very feeling of alarm, fear, and every other emotion correlates with physiological changes, from changes in heart rate and breathing rate, to sweating and metabolic changes. ... One might say that animals’ noses “work” by being sensitive to them. ... How does that strange, menacing-looking dog smell our apprehension or fear as he approaches us? We spontaneously sweat under stress, and our perspiration carries a note of our odor on it: that’s the first clue to the dog. Adrenaline ... is unscented to us, but not to the sensitive sniffer of the dog: another hint. Even the simple act of increased blood flow brings chemicals more quickly to the surface of the body, where they can be diffused through the skin. Given that we emit odors that reflect these physiological changes accompanying fear, and given the budding evidence of pheromones in humans, chances are that if we’ve got the heebie-jeebies, a dog can tell. And ... dogs are skilled readers of our behavior. We can sometimes see fear in other people in their facial expressions; there is sufficient information in our posture and gait for a dog to see it, too. (2012, 89–90)

As Horowitz shows, Tarik’s and Matt’s noses work differently in intensity and, as mentioned earlier, in process. Tarik’s smell-work becomes a way of becoming response-able in relation to Matt and his corpo-affective changes. Through his sense of smell, Tarik can perceive Matt’s approaching panic attack or rising anxiety and be able to relate with it, to respond by leaning against Matt’s feet or coming to cuddle. While Matt’s smell-work is different than Tarik’s, being less sensitive and informative, Matt is also response-able in an olfactory sense. As Matt mentioned in our interview, Tarik’s scent provides him with comfort and a feeling that everything will be all right, which transforms Matt’s momentary corpo-affective state. Matt’s anxious and panicky corpo-affective matterwork – the change in heart rate, blood flow, sweat and the smell composition of his breath – moreover, is part of Tarik and his olfactory practice of communication, a practice of response-ability in-difference. Such response-ability in-difference can take place in different ways and in diverse configurations of actors, and Matt and Tarik’s is only one of them. What is important, then, is the difference of ability to respond to differential worlds that are simultaneously intra-actively constitutive of each other, and of their companionship in differences. This differential ability is constitutive of the companionship’s material-semiotic ways of responding.

But the dynamics of such difference matter in yet another way. The response-ability in-difference of Matt and Tarik’s companionship also works through the possibility of not responding, or the incapacity to respond – a transformative dynamic that challenges the dichotomy of failure and success. Such relationality enacts vulnerable dynamics (and changes) of becoming-in-difference, where difference means not only differing as it has been articulated above, but also indifference, as the following discussion suggests.

**INDIFFERENT RESPONSE-ABILITY**

The debilitating indifference and incapacitation that is also part of Matt and Tarik’s companionship is constitutive of the dynamics of response-ability in-difference. These corpo-affective processes may be painful, sometimes unbearable and challenging in both their momentary and horizontal temporality. Often, when Matt feels very low, Tarik looks at him with an expression that says, as Matt put it, “Oh, something is wrong, you are not stressing out in a normal way, let’s go for a walk.” And he gets up, walks around, scratches himself, stands by the door, makes noises. He tells Matt in his own material-semiotic communication, as Matt phrased it, “Get out
of bed! And walk me! I’ve got to poop, come on! Let’s do it!” And usually, in such situations, Matt and Tarik start their routine: Matt grabs Tarik’s leash and poop bags, they hop in a car, and they both know right away where they are going. And this routine helps Matt to emerge slightly from his overtaking depression, because he is forced to engage with the outside world. But how he is being forced to engage with the outside world is focused on Tarik, because Matt’s role in their companionship is to protect Tarik and get him to the place he needs to be in order to be happy. And, of course, it is actually the place they both need to go.

But Tarik’s mobilization is not always met with Matt’s affirmative response. Response-able becoming-in-difference doesn’t enact the potentiality of change only in a mobilizing, positively responsive or affectively relieving sense. Once, when Matt was going through a bad period, he didn’t leave the house for about three days. He had Tarik go to the back yard to do “his business.” And finally, one day, Tarik came up to Matt, sat on his bed, and as Matt put it, “If he had arms to cross, he would have crossed his arms [we are both laughing], and he is like: ‘You! You need not to be so selfish! And you need to take care of me right now!’” In such moments, Matt’s depression, anxiety and panic attacks not only constrain Tarik’s needs but resonate with Tarik. Tarik is trained to respond to noise, and if someone knocks on the door he barks, once, so that Matt won’t be surprised that someone is there. But after Tarik’s intervention and after staying home for three days, Matt noticed that Tarik was responding to every single noise in the house – he was hyperanxious. He was hyperaware. And while part of the reason for Tarik’s behavior was that his needs include activity, running and exercise, his hyperawareness and elevated reactions are part of the dynamics in which Matt and Tarik metabolize anxious and panicky living together.

Companionship is not a one-way street. Apart from basic needs like affective contact, food, water, walks etc. that are generally associated with domesticated animal companions, Tarik also has other needs that are part of his companionship dynamic with Matt, as well as the anxieties, panic attacks and depressions they metabolize together.

And so we found out – him and I – that [working with Matt’s affective life] means [for Tarik] going swimming. He loves to swim. When we are on our walk he is not wearing his vest, he is not wearing a leash. It’s an off-leash dog park so he is not being constrained, he becomes free. And when we are at the university, that’s not the case. He is in a vest, he is in a harness. For walking from place to place he is attached to a leash. He walks very slowly. He doesn’t respond to squirrels or other [distractions]...

Matt assists Tarik with access to nature and freedom because, while Matt’s need is to be comforted during his vulnerable times, Tarik’s need is to have the space to be free, to run, to swim in the ocean, to be away from everyday duties.

And while sometimes their needs meet, a dynamic of prioritizing and power relating is at play in negotiations of both their needs and the in-ability to respond. Although the walks by the pond or ocean are activities and places Tarik and Matt both need to be happy, leaving the house or moving at all can be unimaginable when one is experiencing heightened anxiety or depression, or when one is exhausted after a panic attack, or a series of panic attacks. The response-ability is, therefore,
not only a vulnerable process of recognition and openness. It is also
vulnerably enacted in an inability to respond and becoming indifferent in
companionships, as well as in the renegotiation of one’s own boundaries
and capacities.

The relationship of response-ability is, therefore, a dynamic
where power relations are both topological (e.g., Tarik’s dependence
on Matt in satisfying his dietary or physiological needs) and continually
changing (e.g., the mutual negotiations of daily support for affective
well-being). While Tarik’s existence depends on Matt’s response-ability
daily care, Matt depends on Tarik’s everyday support and response-ability. Such a relation of co-dependency and becoming-with is
neither flat nor rigidly hierarchical. In the practices of daily negotiations
and sensorial relating, Matt and Tarik’s human-nonhuman power
relations are continuously re-configured, and their lived realities are
transformed. Their daily sensorial flows (touches, smells, listening to
and seeing each other) enact (and transform) their companionship in
the ongoing negotiation of response-ability. The response-ability whose
simultaneously differential potentiality and indifference becomes a force
of failure and change – an ethical engagement of vulnerability wherein
what is considered a failure (e.g., the inability to respond) and improper
human subjectivity (e.g., living with depression, anxieties, panic attacks)
creates the possibility, for Matt, of being human-otherwise.

In such becoming, sensoriality is not an attribute but a
transformative force that enacts the (political) potentiality of diverse
(intraspecies) becomings – a process that is about not equalization
or hierarchization of power relations but dynamic operation through
intra-active differencing (which, simultaneously, in a social and cultural
context, do have hierarchical implications). Response-ability, then,
is not a “flat dynamic” but rather a differential process of intra-active
affecting and sensing (as well as other dynamics of becoming). It not only
mobilizes change but also recognizes stickiness, immobility, numbness
and the debilitating processes of anxious and panicky becomings. These
mutually constitutive while simultaneously differing dynamics of – to
name a few – change and stickiness, activity and passivity, care and
indifference (as well as individuality and structurality, to be discussed
below in relation to combat breathing) constitute a corpo-affective
ethics of sustainability. In such ethics, not only visibility and recognition
but also becoming imperceptible and not being seen are constitutive
ethical processes. It is crucial for ethics to include the dynamics of
imperceptibility and invisibility, as they are frequently constitutive of
anxious and panicky living, living that is often invisible and leads to
losing (or never having any) social and cultural space, losing breath in
suffocation, or disappearing from the physical spaces of the political.

Sensoriality has further consequences for developing alternative
forms of change and transformation, and for recognizing that alternative
relationalities of the self and Other matter. In a trans-corporeal (Alaimo
2008, 2010) manner, Matt and Tarik’s sensorial practices of smelling
each other, touching each other, leaning on each other and making
sounds with each other are not merely intentional acts of two separate
entities meeting in close proximity. They are enactments of material
intra-active relationality, cobecoming, and corpo-affective changes
and transformations through sensorial affective dynamics that contest
stable boundaries of self and Other and reverberate a de-essentializing,
de-singularizing, de-encompassing, de-knowable and de-familiarizing
challenge to the notion of “self.” This challenge articulates the notion
of self as a dynamic process that is both situated within singularity and
dispersed in the multiplicity and plurality of becoming.

In trans-corporeal sensorial response-ability in-difference,
the notion of ability is also at play in a specific way. The -ability
in response-ability is not merely a signifier of a normative and
privileged productive capacity, corpo-affective ability and always
active successful relating. The ability to respond is always-already
embedded in incapacity – in indifference and in-ability to engage that
are equally powerful, constitutive and at play within the dynamics
of response-ability in-difference and in politics of vulnerability.
Matt’s incapacity to leave the house is not a failure (in its classical
understanding) of companionship, but it is part of the companionship.
Matt and Tarik’s relating is a dynamic of response-ability where the
ability to respond also includes patience and space to take a breath and
time, and respect for the in-ability to move, to take space, to go forward,
to be active, to enact normative concepts of responsibility, care and
activity. Sometimes the biggest success is to breathe. Matt’s incapacity
Simultaneously, the incapacity to respond is a necessity with consequences. It is a process wherein the consequences of the companionship-relating materialize intra-actively and boundaries are negotiated in a situated, affective trans-corporeal intra-active relationality. Tarik's accumulation of anxious energy, for example, is not merely a process of taking on someone else's burden or energy. Rather it is a process of existing in an anxious and panicky space of becoming in-difference, in different intensities, in different practices of metabolization and companionship-relating. Such a process of intra-active metabolization of the frozenness, stuckness and indifference – that were enacted in Matt's inability to respond to Tarik – not only enacts anxious becoming where the flow of anxiety intra-resonates and constitutes Matt and Tarik's momentary, situated companionship dynamic but also enacts particular boundaries where the corpo-affective saturation necessitates a break. Tarik's articulation of the boundary and demand for recognition of his needs is enacted with Matt's – at that point temporarily transformed – incapacity, which becomes activated, through Tarik's needs, into action and response-ability. The dynamic of affective and trans-corporeal becoming-with is embedded in difference, in indifference, as well as in the situated intra-active configurations of the urgency of needs and boundaries and the actions they necessitate.

Such dynamics also reconfigure a binary understanding of success and failure. Prevailing Western notions of success are embedded in ideas of a linear and monodirectional temporality, in concepts of productivity – of economic, affective and creative character, to name a few – and in normative ideas of what constitutes desirable subjectivity, ability or happiness. But Tarik and Matt's dynamic, when Matt is not able to leave the house and Tarik eventually demands that his needs be acted upon, offers a different conceptualization. Such a conceptualization doesn't merely turn things upside down and celebrate failure as if it were weightless, bearable or a stumble and step in the successful and progressive learning curve, nor does it shame or demand success. It reconfigures relationality and the meaning of failure and success – as relational processes – through a space of “elsewhere.”

Matt and Tarik do not submit to dominant norms; the story of Matt's incapacity to respond is not a story of neglect and Tarik's mere reactivity. It is a story of patience, of recognition of in-abilities, in-capacities and boundaries, and of a demand for space and time. It is also a story of grappling with immobility, pain, implosive explosions and indifference as well as finding an elsewhere beyond dominant understandings of happiness and success – a process of searching for a space of breathability, of ongoing trips to the pond and becoming human and becoming (an old, limping) puppy in a scene of trans-corporeal, transspecies and affective play. The space of elsewhere is not only a happy place but – as in the case of Matt's need to stay in bed for three days – a space where anxious and panicky suffocation can take place in a less suffocating way. The breathability of such a space is not about welcoming suffocation as embraceable but about taking space for the pain, implosive explosions and breathing convulsions that are metabolized – taking space for the world to break apart. Elsewhere – in bed, at the beach, or on the floor when Tarik bites Matt's fingers, misrecognizing his anxiety for a game – becomes a breathable space because of the dynamic process of it becoming a part of breathable existence. What is at play is the intra-active dynamic of being that is enacted affectively, sensorially and trans-corporeally (but also intersectionally). The reconfiguration takes place in the intra-active spaces of daily living, in the breathability and unbeathability of spatial, temporal, cultural, social, material, corpo-affective and trans-corporeal relationalities. Elsewhere becomes everywhere in the ambivalence, joy and painfulness of this (im)possibility.

**THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MATTERWORK**

Matt and Tarik's companionship creates the possibility of thinking of alternative ways of taking up space – ways in which becoming human is a matter of response-ability involving not only the ability to respond but also differentiation and indifference. Their practices of response-ability in-difference are an example of how matterwork dynamics – of, particularly, the senses of touch and smell – are enacted in sensorial play. But, as the following discussion will articulate further,
matterwork takes place through not only sensorial processes but also other corpo-affective dynamics. It is enacted through, for example, physical forces such as the diffusion of oxygen in the lungs; intra-actively relational neurological processes such as the amygdala's more or less intensified workings; changing hormonal levels such as increasing or decreasing volumes of stress hormones; or even bacteria, as bacterial life enacts not only human metabolism but also corpo-affective life.\(^1\)

Importantly, then, the concept of matterwork isn't intended to imply that, for example, panic attacks are essentially biological (e.g., located primarily in the amygdala's operations, as they are often understood in the fight-or-flight discourses discussed in the previous chapter). The concept of matterwork instead emphasizes that what is considered human behavior is locatable not merely in materiality, or in only one “kind” of materiality (or in a psychological trait, for that matter), but in a complexity of material-cultural intra-active relationalities. Panic attacks and anxieties are, therefore, not biological or psychological disorders but rather complex corpo-affective, natural-cultural, material-discursive phenomena and differential ways of being.

For my second interviewee, Lina – who does not live with panic attacks and anxieties herself but has devoted her life to learning the psychosomatic techniques that she uses in her psycho- and physiotherapeutical practice – corpo-affective relationality is at the core of her engagement with anxiety and panic attacks. In the body knowledge approach she practices, she always starts with movement. When working with Lina, you have to walk, lie down on the floor, feel how you stand and how you move – how it feels to be embodied. You pay attention to, for example, the tensions that you are not aware of and the way only certain postural muscles are mobilized when you move, stand or sit.

In such a practice, one of the goals of working with anxieties and panic attacks is to transform them by understanding not only their psychological processes but also their physiology, and easing corpomaterial tensions integral to them. By using small, easy movements, shifting your weight and changing tensions, corpo-affective relationalities transform. And those transformations can take place in everyday, ordinary moments. As Lina showed me during our interview, if a person keeps their weight on the front of their feet, their shoulders relax; but as soon as they put the weight back on their heels, they become tense. Panic attacks and anxieties are often enacted together with (and through) many tensions and body pains that are experienced not only during enhanced peaks or periods of stress but also in everyday life, such as during work, at a meeting, on a walk in a park or while grocery shopping. Shifting weight and learning how to move, stand or sit in a way that mobilizes new muscle supports may ease those daily tensions and pains.

Moreover, while panic attacks can surprise and overtake a person, breathing is a force that may give them a certain directionality. As Matt told me, “Somewhere along the way I learned to breathe. Breathing is the most important thing.” Working with breathing exercises can transform anxieties and panic attacks, decrease panic attacks as they begin, release some bodily tensions, breathe air into circular thoughts and create a short RESPITE. In working with breathing and relaxing his body, Matt attempts to feel grounded and have a space for somatic presence. Through breath, he can take space within his chest cavity, within thoughts, within social spaces. And while during a panic attack he can feel his heart beating violently and distinctively and not feel his toes or fingers at all, breathing can breathe the sensation of toes and fingers back in again and exhale some of the explosiveness of his heartbeat.

In panic attacks breathing is, therefore, a crucial force, as it can transform the attack and bring directionality into a disorienting moment. As Lina explained it, during a panic attack, you can breathe either very heavily or very fast. Dyspnea is the term that describes difficulty in drawing breath. Breathing rapidly, on the other hand, is called tachypnea. While both of these processes may vary in intensity and duration, what happens in the moments of panicky breathlessness or hyperventilation is a particular metabolization of air that deepens the experience of a panic. As Lina argued,

When you breathe you have a [certain] level between oxygen and carbon dioxide. When you breathe too fast and shortly you blow out too much carbon dioxide and then you have too much oxygen (in your body). And when you have too much oxygen, the regulators don’t feel that you need more and then you can feel dizzy.
... And so usually you can feel dizzy during the attack and then if you drive a car and have such a panic attack you have to stop. But you can [also] have panic attacks when it is hard to breathe. [It is similar to] when you have an asthma attack. It’s not [exactly] like it but in both cases you don’t get enough air into the alveoli and then you can panic. And then you use your help muscles up here [on the shoulders] and you blow yourself up. And when you use those muscles you don’t get enough room for the air and you kind of strangle your bronchi [and] you don’t get air down [into your lungs]. And the more you feel it the worse it gets. So the first thing you have to do if you see someone sitting like this [having a panic attack, breathing heavily or fast, being tense] is that you have to put your hands on their shoulders, just embrace [them], lower the arms and take care of [them] and help [them] to breathe and follow [their] breath.

The work of breathing in panic attacks is crucial because, as Lina continues,

When you breathe and you inhale, you need to get air to the bottom of your lungs because there are the arteries, which you are supposed to fill up with oxygen. ... So if you breathe short [inhalations] you don’t get any oxygen, which is supposed to go into your heart with the blood. And so the brain doesn’t get enough of oxygen and that’s why you get dizzy. ... That’s why you are supposed to breathe down here, with use of diaphragm to breathe, and to have your shoulders low.

These breathing practices are part not only of panicky but also of anxious living, when the breath is often constrained, muscles are tense, arms are held high and pressed to the chest, and stiff intercostal muscles limit the movement of the ribs. And while breathing is not the cause of a panic attack or of anxiety, it is part of what Lina calls “a package” – an entanglement of corpo-affective tensions and breathing that is sufficient to create a peak of a panic or anxiety. Because, as Lina explained, “When you are afraid, anxious or stressed you breathe in a certain way,” and if this process continues for a long time it can even change your daily breathing pattern. You start breathing into the top of your lungs and “more on the surface;” your inhalations are constrained by muscle tension and you don’t oxygenate enough. Such breathing can make you tired and energy-less; it can transform your life.

The breathing matterwork in panic attacks (as in states without panic attacks) is, therefore, an intra-actively relational process. While breathing is usually associated solely with lungs or oxygen and carbon dioxide, it is understood here as a complex intra-active corpo-affective dynamic where, for example, fears, PTSDs, oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, muscles, highway traffic and urban, suburban or rural scapes enact the particular work of material-affective life. And as much as their entanglement can produce peaks and break worlds apart, they can also transform, calm or prevent the peaks.

Such breathing matterwork in panic attacks – in its enabling, incapacitating as well as transforming forcefulness – problematizes the understanding of panic attacks and anxieties in terms of mere psychological disorders, physical misinterpretations of objective and neutral reality (as in the case of fight-or-flight narratives discussed in the previous chapter), or pure physiological processes that can be transformed only by breathing exercises. Additionally, breathing matterwork performatively materializes the corpo-affective, material-discursive, situated and dispersed dynamics of anxious and panicky becoming.

**FAILING THAT BREAKS WORLDS APART**

The matterwork dynamics of anxieties and panic attacks discussed above are also enactments of transformative and erring practices in the complexity of their political and individual ambiguity. Such ambiguity is enacted in the simultaneously immobilizing and empowering, alienating and metamorphic force of anxieties and panic attacks – force that also transforms understandings of human control, voluntarity and involuntarity (and hence also the ways in which space is taken up).

Ordinarily, (able-breathing) humans don’t think about breathing, inhalation and exhalation, diaphragm contractions, expansion of the intercostal muscles etc. In a way, in terms of breathing, an (able-breathing) person’s everyday life is about being out of control.
Matterwork enacts a rhythmic dynamic of breathing, a rhythm of being a particular human subject of a particular situatedness and dispersal of and within power relations. During panic attacks, when breathing is considered to be significantly “out of control” – it fails and errs – matterwork enacts an uncontrollable rhythm of breathing that is multiple and intra-actively dynamic rather than ontologically stable. Such operations of breathing challenge the notion of control as an attribute of a voluntary subject and transform it into a dynamic of a flow of intensities.

Breathing matterwork dynamics also challenge an understanding of embodiment and subjectivity in terms of their voluntariness and involuntariness, and in relation to hegemonic social norms. As has already been mentioned in the previous section, during a panic attack, one often experiences hyper- or hypoventilation, and while those states of breathing begin involuntarily (because usually breathing is an involuntary process), their dynamics can be shifted through voluntary breathing practices and exercises through which panic attacks can be stopped, minimized or prevented (but also started or intensified). During panic attacks – but not exclusively then – breathing is a force that simultaneously enacts and blurs the boundary between voluntary and involuntary actions. It materially articulates that the actions, processes and dynamics considered involuntary are always-already intra-actively agential of particular material-discursive realities; they are not “out of context,” “misinterpretations,” a “friendly fire” of the amygdala’s “misfiring.”

Panic attacks articulate that involuntary actions are dynamics that are intra-actively constitutive of material-social realities. They articulate that breathing is political. While panic attacks often come unexpectedly, have no logic of occurrence and make no sense, they simultaneously enact breaks in the particular social and material realities of the lives of those who experience them. They are transformations that materialize the urgency of change, actualize limits and reconfigure potentialities. The matterwork dynamics (enacted through intra-active corpo-affective forces of, for instance, breath and PTSD) are practices of the agential materialization of, for example, oppressive power relations and social and personal vulnerabilities and struggles (within the operations of the hegemonic norms of subjectivity, racialization, classization, ableization etc.).

The concept of matterwork, therefore, articulates that bodies indeed do not end at the skin – they are not tabulae rasae, passive within or separate from abstract power relations. Rather, bodies are intra-actively enacted by and agentially enacting intersectional power relations. Or, to articulate it differently, the matterwork of panic attacks articulates that bodies not only enact and are intra-actively enacted discursively but, as material-discursive phenomena that are worlding naturalcultural worlds, bodies intra-actively and agentially reconfigure material-discursive realities.

The fear of breakdown and failure that is often associated with panic attacks is not only related to the fear of public humiliation but also enacts the break and failure of Western normative standards of “proper human subjectivity” (of the normative ideas and ideals about what constitutes, and who counts as, a valuable human subject). As Lina mentioned, if you are driving a car in the moment of a panic attack, you have to stop immediately and then, as often happens in Matt’s life, you arrive late to a meeting, to work, to a seminar; or you push through, trying to keep your vulnerabilities to yourself, and you are continuously exhausted by the corpo-affective work that such practices require; or, if you are at a meeting, you may have trouble performing professionalism, which is often associated with composure, confidence, focus and communication.

Such breaking apart of the world and subjectivity is often considered a failure. Failure usually has negative and condescending connotations. I, however, would like to work with the notion of failure as a process that is both ambivalent and politically transformative. In the daily troubles breathing, living, being social, or being “being human” (as Matt put it), anxieties and panic attacks, as I have mentioned earlier, enact continuous muscle tensions, explosive implosions, sensitivities and suffocations. They enact daily failures and erring of the performative materializations of the norms and ideals of “functioning” sociality, materiality and human subjectivity. In those failures, anxieties and panic attacks articulate particular and momentary sites of pressure, which also have structural character and create (painful and highly ambivalent) moments of resistance. Matterwork of what is considered failure – of bodily processes (see the previous chapter) or of “proper subjectivity,”
which remains defined in normative discourses as a lack and a negative difference (rather than differencing, as I prefer to think of it) – enacts a resistance, challenges normative discourses, and demands change and alternatives. Anxious and panicky matterwork is a corpo-affective way of recalibrating and politicizing what it means to be human. It enacts ways of being that demand alternatives, dreams and utopias; and failures where negativity and erring hold both their painful and ambivalent actualities and their transformative potentialities. In panic attacks and anxieties, failure is an articulatory power of matterwork dynamics – dynamics that are performative materializations and reconfigurations of the forces of social norms, cultural power relations and configurations of privilege and discrimination.

Simultaneously, failure is a dynamic whose political potentiality and embrace also figure as ambivalent attachment (Berlant 2011). Thinking of anxieties and panic attacks merely in terms of positive potentialities reproduces ideologies of optimism. In the logic of optimism, failure is considered a stumble in the path towards success, an approach that reproduces the failure-success binary rather than reconceptualizing failure not as a stigmatized state but as one of many (while, in its socially transgressive and erring force, also politically transformative) differential dynamics of worlding. Living with anxieties and panic attacks is exhausting and debilitating, and it enacts ways of living whose scope and intensity may differ significantly from what is considered normal life. The ambivalent attachment to the political potentialities of the matterwork of anxieties and panic attacks is therefore a constant process of negotiation of vulnerability, strength and desire for change — change that is about reconfiguring social power relations and normalizing discourses of human subjectivity, and change that is about wishing the constant struggle, exhaustion and debilitating pain would go away. Understanding of politics, hence, has to be reconfigured. Political practices, protest and conceptual alternative cultures take place not only in the streets but also in everyday life.

COMBAT BREATHING AND STRUCTURAL OPERATIONS OF POWER

The transformative actualities and potentialities that have been discussed are, however, not merely individual matters. While in psychological, physiological, psychiatric, cultural, social and historical discourses, anxieties and panic attacks are perceived as individual problems, individual failures and individual disorders (see the previous chapter), I propose a different – corpo-affective, material-discursive, intersectional and situatedly dispersed (i.e., intra-actively individual and structural) – politicization of anxious and panicky dynamics.

The trans-corporeal sensorial response-ability in-difference that was discussed earlier has articulated, in specific situatedness, a differential ethics of a politics of vulnerability. The discussion of matterwork argued for an understanding of vulnerability in corpo-affective, material-discursive situated intra-activity. Those dynamics, however, must also be analyzed simultaneously in terms of what is considered in feminist studies to be a structural dimension – or, specifically, what I call situated-dispersal, an approach where individual and structural power relations are understood as intra-actively constitutive.

While matterwork transformations both break and transform the world as one knows it, matterwork also shows that corpo-affective processes are (intra-actively) structural matters. Matterwork matters. It matters how you breathe, how you stand, how you walk, how you sit, how you sleep, because the muscular matterwork (but also breathing matterwork, sensorial matterwork etc.) can be both productive and destructive, relaxing and stress-inducing in its power. And this practice is intra-actively enacted through and enacting situatedly dispersed configurations of power relations. It matters – it literally matters – how lives are enacted materially, environmentally, socially, emotionally, culturally, economically, intellectually and corpomaterially.

The pressure Matt feels in his chest every morning, the everyday struggle and particular vibrancy of anxious energy that intra-actively resonates in Tarik, enacts the situatedly dispersed intra-active relationality of matter, mind and power. The pressure of anxiety and the waiting and not-knowing of panic’s arrival intensify – because of his torture in the
US military – in Matt’s body in relation to particular situations, feelings, experiences, positionings within power relations (e.g., institutions, social hierarchies or human interactions). The omnipresent anxieties and the intensity of not-knowing signify and actualize matterwork in its discursive, biopolitical, structural and intersectional actuality; as well as in matterwork’s materialization, metabolization, (re)configuration and signification of power relations. It is this actualization – the extreme discomfort of anxious becoming, the muscular tensions, the pressure in the chest and the imperceptible suffocation – that enact political matter and agency of corpo-affective dynamics and material, intersectional and discursive workings.

The situatedly dispersed corpo-affective understanding of matterwork resonates with what philosopher Frantz Fanon (1965) called, as part of his criticism of the French colonization of Algeria (and in relation to colonial transformation of the meaning and practices of veiling in Algeria), combat breathing. For Fanon, breathing and spatiality, breathing and politics, embodiment and subjectivity, individual situatedness and power structures mutually relate:

> There is not occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual’s breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing. (1965, 65)

The notion of combat breathing articulates the suffocating operations of social power relations. As Perera and Pugliese argue, “Combat breathing names the mobilization of the target subject’s life energies merely in order to continue to live, to breathe and to survive the exercise of state violence” (2011, 1). The Fanonian concept of combat breathing articulates the embodiment of state violence and governmental, colonial, capitalist, racist and gendered – to name a few of the somatechnics of – necropolitics.29

In the operations of colonialist state violence, individuals are compressed to, as Fanon terms it, “target bodies,” which are disposable. A target body is “reduced to a soma of such utter political and economic vulnerability that the very possibility of respiration becomes the ultimate challenge. As such, the target subject’s energies are fully committed merely to surviving; as such, the logic of state violence is predicated on ensuring that the subject cannot begin to expand their energies in resisting, contesting or subverting the power of the state” (Perera and Pugliese 2011, 2). Such operations of state violence are also vital political matters of the contemporary deadly operations of structural racism, for example, in the US and in the contemporary expanding fortification processes of Europe, in the suffocating effects of the practices of privilegization and deprivilegization of whose lives matter and what ways of living matter. Combat breathing becomes a matterwork as well as a material analytical tool for understanding dynamics of contemporary – and in the context of my discussions, Western – necropolitics. Simultaneously, what Black Lives Matter protests make clear is that necropolitics operate in a differential manner that cannot be reduced into humanistic claims of sameness, which overlook differential structural power relations.

Combat breathing therefore materially articulates how power relations are incorporated, “how colonialism is far from being only applied on a territory’s resources – in this sense, colonialism is still extremely operative through globalized industries – but also enacts itself onto the colonized bodies and their daily lives. Throughout The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon talks about the ‘muscular contraction’ of the colonized body, who is ‘constantly on his guard’ [Fanon 1961, 16]” (Lambert 2014, para. 3). The muscular matterwork, the omnipresent tensions, pressures and suffocations in anxious and panicky living are corpomaterial materializations of intersectional power relations – materializations that share matterwork dynamics while articulating differential structural powers, as anxious and panicky living is enacted intersectionally.

Those processes, moreover, are always-already enacted corpo-affectively. As Oliver argues, linking combat breathing and psychoanalysis, “the circular ... movement between skin, emotions, psyche, muscles, sores, and values undermines any ‘black and white’ distinctions between mind and body or between economic and psychological oppression, and suggests that the colonization of the body and the material world is also always the colonization of psychic space.
... Colonialism affects the economy, the infrastructure, the physical environment, but it also affects the psyche, the sense of self, the bodies, and the very being of the colonized" (2004, 49). And it is within such politics – and in this chapter, in the case of the suffocating powers of anxiety and panic attacks – where breathing becomes an ambivalent attachment to continuing to live in the ambivalence of survival, endurance and resistance as well as in the ongoing negotiations of desire for normative positionality and subjectivity.

The Fanonian notion of combat breathing helps to articulate the dynamics of power relations’ incorporation – how operations of power enact human corpo-affective realities. And while power incorporation is a crucial part of matterwork processes, matterwork enacts even more complex dynamics of the relationality of the mind, body and power. Power is not only incorporated but also enacted, metabolized, transformed and resisted corpomaterially and corpo-affectively. These processes are mutually intra-actively constitutive, and in these processes power and corpomateriality agentially and intra-actively enact the dynamism. The processes of the intra-active materialization of individual and structural dynamics of social power relations are crucial for understanding the discursive, social and political workings of matterwork. Simultaneously, the concept of matterwork also underlines the political significance of the material dynamic processes in which power relations are intra-actively materially-discursively enacting and enacted as well as resisting and urging change.

The daily muscle tensions, pressures, suffocation, the circular thoughts and fears, and the pain in the jaw are anxious performative materializations of corpo-affective agential struggle with social power relations and a demand for reconceptualization of the dominant notions of human subjectivity and transformation of social, political, economic, cultural and ecological power relations. Simultaneously, these processes of resistance and transformation are forces that can make life breathable. Not only can the matterwork of breathing exercises bring breath into the suffocation of panic attacks and anxieties but the demand that it poses also forces individual and social immediate and future change. Importantly, such reconfigurations can take place actively and passively. The world exploding and the change it necessitates can take place in activating panic attacks as well as in the immobilizing anxious forces of staying in bed for days.

THE MATTERWORK POLITICS OF BREATHING

Pertinent in the previous discussion was that corpo-affective matterwork politics are enacted multiply. While breathing matterwork is usually not associated with street politics, it is intrinsically part of them – not only as a necessity of life but also as a way to enact alternative protest practices. In his activist political practice, Matt uses breathing exercises to minimize the potential harm of violence at protests. In the civil disobedience medic trainings he gives, the first thing he teaches is the four-count breathing that was introduced in the “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPITE. Four-count breathing helps to maintain the composure of first-aid providers (and care recipients) in extreme situations. As Matt described,

When things go [down] ... when tear gas, concussion grenades start to pop and explode and everyone starts yelling and running, the first thing I do is ground myself, look around and breathe. ... ‘Cause the most important thing is not how you put pressure [to stop the bleeding] or how you mix good anti-tear gas solution, it’s keeping yourself safe from harm. You are not going to be helping anybody if you can’t be calm. And you can only be calm in a crazy situation if you remember to breathe. ... One of the things people say after the training and then after the event, if I see these people again, is, “Hey, you know, this happened ... and I totally remembered to breathe!” ... And they are like, “And it worked! And I was fine! And I was telling them to breathe and then they were fine [too]!”

Today, however, breathing techniques as an integral part of political protests are still very rare, and Matt is one of the few champions of their introduction. As he says, “All this build up of energy, not breathing, seeing horrible images ... hearing about people getting hurt ... and no one is protecting themselves. People are walking into this very contentious and violent environment, completely unprotected. It would be like walking
into a nuclear reactor without a radiation suit. Violence is real, you just may not be able to see it until you do, but its mere presence can affect you.” In political protests, breathing matterwork can become a tool that saves lives, a shield that protects from harm, minimizes trauma, enables the maintenance of focus, composure and presence in high-stress situations. Such breathing becomes a different kind of combat breathing – a combat breathing of affinities, resistance and protection. 33

Simultaneously, breathing matterwork politics are not limited to street protests. As Lambert points out, “Bodies and the administration of their breathable atmosphere ... are at stake in the colonizing and decolonizing combat. The decolonizing violence does not only comprise bullets and bombs, but also the various means that forces out the colonial control on the colonized body and its individual and collective ‘biosphere.’ Economic, legal, cultural, sartorial, social radical disruptions therefore constitutes as much a valid emancipatory strategy as military means do, depending on each situation, and each phase of decolonization” (2014, para. 6). Decolonization practices – but also resistance within other political contexts – therefore take place not only in terms of armed resistance, street protests and political organizing but also in diverse social, cultural, eco-critical or alternative-economic activities. Matt’s experiences of corpo-affective pain and social injustice, as well as the politics of his daily and activist life, take place not only through his street protests but also in his community work, academic writing as a current PhD student, and his creation with Tarik of breathable atmospheres of living.

But breathing matterwork politics can take place in forms other than Matt and Tarik’s companionship or Matt’s breathing practices of resistance. It can take place, for instance, in artistic forms. Malin Arnell’s performance Setting the Scene – that I witnessed during its enactment in Gothenburg (2015a) and in which I performed together with Arnell and New York based performer and choreographer Vanessa Anspaugh (Arnell 2015b) in Stockholm – is an example of how breathing matterwork politics are enacted not only in mundane daily practices that I’ve been discussing so far but also in other aspects of politicized living such as art. Arnell, who is a feminist interdisciplinary artist, researcher and educator and whose work makes crucial interventions into Swedish and international feminist cultural, political, and academic debates (e.g., Yes! Association 2010; Arnell and Zuleta 2011), shows clearly how breathing matterwork and art make politics. Arnell’s (2015a) affectively explosive performance Setting the Scene articulates the power of material agentiality, vulnerability and strength of breathing. The performance’s contagious affectivity fills the show room with vibrating anxious tension, fear and worry; its citational practice of Barad’s articulation of material agentiality circulates in the air, mixing with several minutes of Arnell’s anxiety-inducing breath blowing up enormous plastic balloons while moving through the space, across, under and over the audience. The sound and rhythm takes the audience into her lungs, into the circulation of air in her body, into an omnipresent danger of hyperventilation exploding her in the exhaustion of breathing’s imperceptibility. The performance articulates the material-semiotic-artistic relationality of breathing while fleshing out how breath can take space; how it can fill the space in multiple forms and in-visitibilities; how it may be explosive in its spatial movement through the material spaces of architecture, bodies, and plastics. In her overwhelming spatial presence, the strength of her breath and her hazardous proximity to hyperventilation, Arnell articulates the simultaneity of corpo-affective strength and vulnerability. In her engagement with audience (who become readers of the citations of Barad’s Meeting the Universe Halfway [2007], as supporters holding the balloons and those who finish blowing up some of the balloons while she inflates others), Arnell mobilizes engagement and affinity of trust as much as she provokes insecurity, support as much as dependence. The performance recalibrates the proximities of others and internal-external boundaries through mixing up breath in the shared inflation practices; Arnell’s balloon-contained breaths enter the lungs of the active participants, where their metabolized inhalations mix in new concentrations and in new constellations of bacteria and saliva. I understand the performance is an enactment of the vulnerable political practice of matterwork, which employs affective and respiratory contagion, and anxious and panicky trans-corporeal transference; it also tears apart binary conceptualizations of inside and outside, of material and semiotic, of self and Other.

With the concept of matterwork I articulate moreover, one more
dimension of such politics. It shows that politics also take place in everyday corpo-affective processes (while, again, those practices inherently enact the former forms of protests) and – as has been discussed – in how matter works. Olaniyan’s discussion of the notion of combat breathing that was discussed earlier, for example, articulates that breathing can be a way of resisting normative ideas of human subjectivity, which in their hierarchization practices and material effects, make their alternatives unlivable or suffocating:

“Combat breathing” is agnostic breathing. Harassed, pursued, and intimidated but nevertheless confounding all attempts to unravel the secrets of its resilience, combat breath is characteristically tactical. Neither are its contours carved in stone nor are its modulations predictable. A veritable weapon in the hands of the dominated against, in Shange’s words “the involuntary constrictions n amputations of their humanity” (Shange 1981, xiii), combat breath resists recuperation by the dominant by being a “hazard to definitions” (Shange 1981, 115). It confronts the oppressor as a “problem,” “incomprehensible,” utterly ambivalent and inaccessible. (1995, 121)

In such an understanding, combat breathing matterwork becomes a way of resisting dominant norms (of, for example, “proper human subjectivity”), and materially articulating repressive, constraining, Othering and exclusive power relations. As such, the matterwork politics of panic attacks and anxieties – in their painful capacities – are also enactments that call for change: they show vulnerabilities, enact raptures in appropriate performances and norms of human subjectivity and in (empowering and devastating) inappropriations of the subject. When you fail, your failure is always embodied. Anxiety – amongst many bodily enactments of the (corpo-affective) dynamics of failure, hurt, deprivilegization, exploitation, trauma or loss, to name only a few – can also be enacted in stomach pain, through skin breaking in acute neurodermatitis, chin pain because of clenched teeth, neck, arm and back tension, or tinnitus. All these states of embodied experiences and affective becomings are moments of bodily resistance – sensations that Western human subjects are usually socialized to ignore, suppress, separate from their own notions of self and the social, economic and cultural ways of relating and performing (“proper human”) subjectivity. Matterwork dynamics are ways of enacting bodily forces of resistance. Those forces are materially political and are not mere reactions to the world but forces of the world (see such an understanding of materiality in Barad 2007). They are performative materializations of the intra-actively relational becomings of bodies, affects and social power relations, as well as of the intra-active agentiality of multiple human but also nonhuman agents such as air gasses or bacteria (as has been discussed previously in relation to the human and nonhuman response-ability in-difference).

Simultaneously, as I argued in relation to breathing’s directional and control-enabling effects in panic attacks or street protests, matterwork is also a transformative, empowering and enabling dynamism. Or, rather, it is a process that performatively enacts the ambivalences of the intra-active constitutiveness of lived oppression, resistance and empowerment. As such, the corpo-affective processes of anxieties and panic attacks are enactments of politics of ambivalence – politics of desperation and longing, debilitation and empowerment, immobility and activation, and incorporation and resistance. In such ambivalence, matterwork enacts resistance and the negotiation of becoming within power relations (in terms of affirmative and resistive but also sustaining, complicit and reproductive practices). And while Fanon’s understanding of living as combat breathing articulates the processes of incorporation of power, where the ability to take a breath is merely a short RESpite, I argue also for a politically agential, not merely indiciative or incorporative, dynamic relationality of breathing and power – an approach where respiration is a way of living in vulnerability, or rather a vulnerable living, where politics do not take place only on the streets or in forms of organized governmentality but also in quotidian corpomaterial and corpo-affective practices; where politics are not descriptive of vulnerability but are inherently vulnerable.

In such vulnerable politics, searching for alternative ways of living necessitates alternative corpo-affective ways of being of the world. As feminist queer and postcolonial theorist Sara Ahmed articulates, queer aspirations for alternative futures necessitate the
possibility of breathing, and breathing freely, where any political and ethical aspiration is a matter of breathing:

We could remember that the Latin root of the word *aspiration* means “to breathe.” I think the struggle for a bearable life is the struggle for queers to have a space to breathe. Having space to breathe, or being able to breathe freely, as Mari Ruti describes (2006, 19), is an aspiration. *With breath comes imagination.* With breath comes possibility. If queer politics is about freedom, it might simply mean the freedom to breathe. (2010, 120, italics in the original)

Breathing, therefore, is also an ethical and political force for feminist political struggle. As such, breathing is not a mere metaphor – for life and freedom or for a force that keeps breathing beings alive. It is a political process of matterwork – of corpo-affective, material-discursive and situatedly dispersed agential intra-active enactments, metabolizations, transformations and resistances of intersectional power relations, and an enactment of alternatives. It is quotidian corpomaterial and corpo-affective practice where respiration is a way of living in vulnerability, or rather, it is a way of vulnerable living and politics. For such a vulnerable politics anxieties and panic attacks, in different ways, are enactments of corpo-affective and material-discursive dynamics which – through tensions, changing breathing patterns, blood pressure, hormonal balances etc. – intra-actively enact changes in and resistances to dynamics and forces that make life suffocating, immobilizing, traumatizing, unbearable. In order to imagine and enact change, it is necessary to understand politics not only in terms of protest politics, violent conflicts, or social, cultural and economic critique, to name a few, but also (in their intra-active relationality) in terms of matterwork and the search for spaces of breathability.

**POLITICS OTHERWISE**

The goal of this chapter was to discuss possibilities of life and politics otherwise – possibilities that are not simply joyful, happy, optimistic but lived and imagined through the ambiguities, tensions and contradictions of the vital and deadly dynamics of empowerment and immobilization, capacity and incapacitation, pleasure and pain, loneliness and companionship. The articulation of anxious and panicky ways of living otherwise and the actualities and potentialities they materialize are immersed in vulnerability – that is also contradictory, orienting and disorienting, situated and dispersed, differencing and affinity-making. Such vulnerability has been discussed here through Matt’s narrative regarding living with anxieties and panic attacks and in companionship with Tarik and their sensorial play of response-ability in-difference; and through Lina’s psychosomatic understanding of corpo-affective relationality. The discussion was also saturated – mostly in terms of the affectivity of the text and my way of engaging the stories and my writing – with my own experiences of anxieties and panic attacks as well as a few autoethnographic comments and observations.

The notion of sensoriality, formulated in a specific way here, is not simply a process of registering through senses. Rather, it addresses forces and capacities of sensing and intra-active dynamics of becoming and companionship whose relationality is intra-actively differential, affective and corpomaterial, connective and disconnective and enacted in the sensorial processes of coming-together-apart. In this sense, sensoriality becomes a dynamic of relating, of sensing that changes the world through an affective play. In Matt and Tarik’s case, it is for example touching and smelling that enacts companionship where the notions of self and Other are reconfigured through intra-active differencing and resonating, and failing and sustaining response-ability in-difference. Significantly, the sensorial dynamics that the concept articulates are not limited to the human; they operate through intra-active processes of sensing and transforming (as well as stabilizing) through differentiation, which has been articulated here in relation to the anthropo-situated questions of my research that are posthumanist at heart.

As such, Matt and Tarik’s companionship can be inspirational for feminist politics where response-ability resonates in the complicated, vulnerable and challenging dynamics of (intra-active) negotiating, politicizing and enacting both affinities and provisional separations in in-difference and in-complexity – a practice whose dynamics simultaneously challenge self-contained, essential and clearly bounded
understanding of self and other, of political groups and affinities.

And while the notion of sensoriality discussed here focuses on a particular affective dynamics and companionship relationality – which are only a few amongst many sensorial dynamics that the concept can enact – the discussion of matterwork in relation to Fanon’s concept of combat breathing draws attention to the corpomaterial agentiality of material-discursive, corpo-affective dynamics of becoming and their political relevance. The discussion of the matterwork of voluntary and involuntary processes articulates how the concept is embedded in a material-discursive, corpo-affective understanding of corpomaterial dynamics. From such onto-epistemological situatedness, the concept of matterwork shows and argues for the analytical, theoretical and political significance of corpomaterial processes.

In the context of the previous chapter 8 – which discussed the fight-or-flight narratives that dominate contemporary understandings of panic attacks, and which mechanize and depoliticize the understanding of panic attack dynamics – the concept of matterwork discussed in this chapter argues against an understanding of panic attacks as inadequate, archaic biological responses that have not managed to “catch up” with our contemporary and advanced times. This chapter, instead, argues that panic attacks are powerful temporal moments – and anxieties are powerful temporal durations – that break normative worlds apart in their captivating, exploding and immobilizing, failing, exhausting and reconfiguring dynamics. While such affective and corpo-affective dynamics are often interpreted merely as effects of stress, trauma, oppressive and discriminatory social realities, this chapter argues that they are not merely passive incorporations of these realities but instead performative materializations, enactments and reconfigurations of social power relations; they are spaces of corpo-affective, material-discursive, voluntary-involuntary struggles. In this sense, the chapter argues, the breathing dynamics of hypo- or hyperventilation of panic attacks and anxious suffocations are political matter, a matter of corpomaterial and corpo-affective agentiality, of matterwork.

The power relations that are interpellated through the demand for change enacted in anxious and panicky becomings are not understood here as universal, static or unitary. Rather, they are situated and dispersed in their intersectional specificity and structuration. In this sense, corpomaterialities and subjectivities are also discussed here in intra-active relationality “with” the specificities of the configurations of (performatively materialized) power relations and are not understood as essential and universal but as intra-actively differential. Intersectional corpomaterial and subjectivized situatedness enacts lively specificities of materializations and performative (normative and transformative) intra-active enactments of power relations. Those material-discursive power relations are simultaneously dispersed, and they materialize topologies of power relations that are enacted in cultural norms, social stratifications, hierarchizations, governances, disciplinizations etc. These simultaneous dynamics of situatedness and dispersal enact possibility for differential politics, transformations, conceptualizations and embodiments of resistance.

Such situated and dispersed dynamics open up possibilities for diverse affinity politics across differential, strategically oriented and temporary resonances and dissonances. Such politics then work with the notion of difference that is neither hierarchical, flat nor binary but rather a matter of dynamic intra-active differing (and its particular enactments as well as potential challenge and transformation of intersectional power relations and social, geopolitical, cultural, etc. structures of privileging and deprivileging).
CHAPTER 10

EXHALE: BREATHING CORPO-AFFECTIVITY AS A POLITICAL MATTER
As I argued in chapter 8, mainstream Western discourses that delimit anxious and panicky dynamics simultaneously delimit normative notions of “proper human subjectivity” – notions which value and privilege certain forms of human subjectivity and embodiment in relation to particular concepts of success, health, happiness etc. These same notions lead to disregard, depreciation and stigmatization of diverse forms of mental, emotional and physical vulnerability – forms then understood as subjective problems or signs of weaknesses, failure, not being able to “deal with life,” or not being strong enough, good enough, or determined enough. Anxious and panicky dynamics, in the same discourses, are often described as the mere effects of objectified and essentialized bodily dynamics – of hormonal and chemical disbalances, of bodily misreactions, of diverse insufficiencies and lacks. If vulnerable dynamics are recognized and accepted within these frameworks, they are often tolerated as only temporary “phases,” reactions to difficult life events or vulnerabilities to be quickly overcome through specific therapeutic practices and/or medication that is hoped to put the trouble aside in order that the person experiencing the vulnerability may “go on” with life.

Within such delimitations, it is then common to either blame yourself or blame your body, especially if the temporality of vulnerability is impulsive, stretching over long periods of time, or recurring. “My brain chemistry is fucking with me,” said someone close to me once; “I just need to learn not to trust my brain, take distance. ... Now I know that all that happens is not true.” But is it not? In the daily negotiations of the anxious and panicky dynamics of corpo-affective actions, one might struggle to believe in what is happening to oneself and in the significance and relevance of such dynamics of corpo-affective becoming. Often these states of being need to be enacted, configured, narrated and materialized through scientific, poetic, activist, artistic and other kinds of material-discursive apparatuses in order to become intelligible at all, not to mention accepted as relevant or politically significant.

Furthermore, blaming, shaming, disassociating and compartmentalizing are only some of many ways of living and dealing with anxieties and panic attacks. One can also grieve for the “previous self” lost to anxieties or panic attacks; rage about the anxious states, about falling back, over and over again, into feelings of desperation; live in the anguish of exclusion, loneliness and incapacity to connect, to be with others, to enjoy a ray of sun. There may be a lot of grief, loss and rage, as well as denial and resentment in being what is normatively seen as an “erring human subject.” And as chapter 9 has shown, there is also a lot of strength, desire, courage, sensitivity, kindness and daring in anxious and panicky living.

But the mechanism of self-blaming for living with anxieties and panic attacks is particularly strong because, within the prevailing notions of “proper human subjectivity,” the intensity of panic attacks or anxieties – of breaking apart in multiple ways, of the world as one knows it crashing down – is perceived as a weakness, failure or incapacitation in these characteristics’ stigmatizing and othering sense. Such breaking apart articulates a dynamic of fragmentation that is threatening to the narratives of normative, coherent – and economically productive – human subjectivity produced, reproduced and negotiated through specific delimitations of anxieties and panic attacks as errors and failures. Therefore, one of the goals of this part of *Breathing Matters* was to problematize normative “proper human subjectivity,” criticize stigmatized understandings of vulnerabilities, incapacitations and failures, and argue for the political relevance of daily corpo-affective actions which are, in the case of my discussion, enacted through breathing.
INTERSECTIONAL DIFFERING

The corpo-affective processes such as those addressed in the “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPITE that diffused through this part take place in multiple, differing and even contrasting ways for different people living with anxieties and panic attacks within divergent intersectional power relations. The different intensities, temporalities, spatialities, embodiments and intersectional positions tell different stories of anxieties and panic attacks. For example, the ability to allow yourself to be vulnerable, to (afford to) see a doctor, to obtain medication (or not) are matters of intersectional positioning within particular local and global power relations. Such positionality also enacts diverse ways of (not) coping and living and dying with anxieties and panic attacks.

Some bodies, therefore, can breathe smoothly and some can breathe less. For some, suffocating or hyperventilating are extraordinary matters, while for others they are commonplace matters of structural operations of power. Some bodies – for example Eric Garner’s – get killed in the chokeholds of racism, by others ignoring the need to give space to breathing and to respect people taking spaces in resistance to dominant social orders and prevailing material-discursive dynamics of oppression and discrimination. While all living human bodies metabolize diverse air composition, pollution and toxicity, due to the dynamics of the global economy of labor and industrial production, many live with severe lung diseases caused by local air pollution while others can benefit from the products of their work, breathing clean air in other parts of the world. In other instances, as has been discussed in the previous part of Breathing Matters, some bodies – in the dynamics of local distribution of coal miners’ labor in the Czech region of Ostravsko – live with and die of dusty lungs while others turn on the lights in their living rooms with no respiratory constraints. Other bodies may suffocate invisibly and silently, suffocated by self-shaming and the intra-active corpomaterial materialization of the intersectional norms of appropriate subjectivity (the processes which Berlant [2011] articulates in her discussion of ambivalent attachments) or by a lack of structural and individual support. Other bodies can hyperventilate to the point of losing consciousness, their minds, the ground under their feet.

These diverse processes of anxious and panicky breathing are not only individual but structural matters. While for some, anxious and panicky living may lead to loss or transformation of privilege (see research about the sharpening decline of mental health amongst white Americans [Case and Deaton 2015]), for others – as exemplified in the discussion of combat breathing in chapter 9 – anxious and panicky breathing may be a condition of living from the first breath onwards. A mere ability to recognize, name and deal with anxieties and panic attacks is, therefore, a matter of dynamics of intersectional privileging and deprivileging that materializes in differential ways and with differential effects.

Still, as argued in chapter 8, the normative and hierarchically privileging and deprivileging Western ideas and economies of “proper human subjectivity,” which delimit anxieties and panic attacks, provide their homogenized, universalized, depoliticized understandings. This part of Breathing Matters has, however, argued that it is now time to work with corpo-affective dynamics as political matters of intersectional differing.

POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CORPO-AFFECTIVITY

Whereas the diversity of everyday enactments of anxieties and panic attacks across miscellaneous human (but not only human) individuals, populations and positions of power relations – not to mention their bacterial, viral, fungal and protist life— is often overlooked and undermined in normative homogenizing discourses, the workings of corpo-affective processes of anxieties and panic attacks and their multiplicity reveals not only differences but also significance.

The significance of such corpo-affective dynamics is political. The existing body of scholarship of affect – exemplified in works of such scholars as Cvetkovich (2003, 2012), Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), Ahmed (2004, 2010), Ngai (2007), Love (2009), Berlant (2011) and Halberstam (2011), as well as groups such as Public Feelings or Feel Tank Chicago and art projects such as The Alphabet of Feeling Bad (Michalski 2012) or An Unhappy Archive (Michalski and Baumann 2014) – have already demonstrated the significance of affective dynamics such as depression,
ideals of happiness, affective attachments, shame, trauma and failure and their political and conceptual potential. Such affective processes have become understood to be a part of the operations of power that, as Cvetkovich argued regarding depression, are

manifestation(s) of forms of biopower that produce life and death not only by targeting populations but also more insidiously by making people feel small, worthless, hopeless. [Depression] is another form of the “slow death” ... of an even less visible form of violence that takes the form of minds and lives gradually shrinking into despair and hopelessness. (2012, 13)

Today in feminist scholarship, affective dynamics have become recognized as part of the dynamics of social power relations, and as manifestations and effects of diverse oppressive structures such as racism, classism, colonialism, heteronormativity, sexism and ableism as well as their multidimensional temporal enactments in the entanglements of histories, contemporary cultures and politics, corpomaterialities and subjectivities. Affective dynamics become recognized as valuable responses to particular global, cultural, social, economic, political and oppressive conditions. Though it is necessary to identify those relations, affective dynamics are also more than just reactions, manifestations and responses to social conditions. As Ngai argues, the transformative role of affect in politics – from once-powerful emotions of anger or fear to emotions that have classically been considered less politically powerful or even depoliticized – shows that vulnerable affects possess sociopolitical significance and analytical power (2007, 3–5).

Focusing on anxieties and panic attacks does not, however, contrast with or exclude the significance of, for example, anger or laughter that have been powerful tools of feminist politics and scholarship. Rather, via a focus on breathing in general and anxieties and panic attacks in particular – in affinity with contemporary affect scholars – I argue for their inclusion into the realm of the political.

Moreover, apart from joining the analytical scope of affect studies, in this part of Breathing Matters I have been also arguing for the political significance of anxieties and panic attacks for feminist studies, because of the relevance of their not only affective but also corpomaterial actions. Hypo- and hyperventilation in panic attacks and suffocation in anxieties are timely materializations of contemporary Western intersectional biopolitics and ideologies of (un)desirable human subjectivity. Such biopolitics increasingly trans/form (and are trans/formed by), for example, human biochemical, affective and corpomaterial – or as I call it, corpo-affective – formations (e.g., high and still growing numbers of anti-anxiety and anti–panic attack medication). They also transform dynamics of living as they require different survival strategies in relation to their stigmatization (for a discussion in an academic context, see, e.g., Academics Anonymous 2014; Muller 2014; Shaw and Ward 2014).

Not only affect but also corpomaterial actions (or matterwork, to use my term) are constitutive forces of performative materializations of normative discourses of what has been, in affect studies, discussed as the (hetero-) temporalities of life (Halberstam 2011), compulsory happiness (Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011), slow death (Berlant 2011) or future and good-feeling-oriented concepts of freedom and liberation (Love 2009).

Although the opportunistic capacity of capitalist structures to absorb and incorporate resistance is now widely recognized not only in cases of, for example, pinkwashing and homonationalism (Puur 2007) but also in terms of incorporation of negative or ambivalent feelings (Ngai 2007; Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011), I have been attempting to imagine possibilities of life otherwise that are oriented towards inspiring feminist discussions that search for politics of vulnerability not only as matters of potentiality but also as matters of the daily actuality of struggles – in terms of intersectional corpo-affective processes that take up space for diverse (inclusive or separatist) politics and affinities.
CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION:
TOWARDS
BREATHABLE LIVES
In the Angela and Fania Davis’ interview for Yes! Magazine, Angela Davis argued that in the contemporary world “self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension — all of this is now a part of radical social justice struggles” (A. Davis and Davis 2016, para. 50). Breathing Matters has engaged with the political forcefulness of corpomaterial (part 1) and corpo-affective (part 2) processes, whose power to break worlds apart offers actual and potential change in its destructive and transformative effects. It offers possibilities to imagine lives and politics otherwise where intersectional living, self-care and response-ability in-difference are matters of individual and structural reconfiguration of the world. On another occasion, Angela Davis also made a point about the need to start imagining worlds that are different from the worlds we currently know (Castellina 2016). Breathing Matters is an attempt to articulate the importance of imagining futures otherwise, in which attention to the corpomaterial and corpo-affective agentiality matters personally and structurally and forms quotidian politics of intersectional resistance and change, where vulnerability is an inherent part of politics (rather than its object).

INTERSECTIONAL POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY

In Breathing Matters, therefore, I have argued that in dreaming of lives otherwise and of utopian futures it is necessary to develop an understanding of politics where matter matters. The matterwork dynamics of dusty lungs, breathing prosodies, and anxious and panicky breath enact specific materializations, productions as much as transformations and alternatives to the dominant social norms and power relations. Those differential ways of breathing, often very painful, unbearable and undesirable, are not alternatives in the ideational sense of desired ways of being, but they are states whose agencies articulate how intersectional power relations are intra-actively enacted corpomaterially and corpo-affectively. In cases of anxieties and panic attacks, for example, erratic breathing enacts a break from the normative, which is terrifying, but also opens potentialities of being otherwise. These potentialities are not easy, happy and optimistic in themselves or for the sake of being alternatives, but they are enactments of different directionals. They enact change in the form of radical disruption, immobility and rejection of the normative pressure of being an intersectional embodied subject of the neoliberal political, social and cultural economy. They claim what it means to be a human-embodied subject in a differential way. In their suffocating forcefulness, they are also articulations of the necessity to take space, to take a breath and to live a breathable life.

As Jack Halberstam points out, “alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal” (2011, 2). And although imagining lives otherwise may involve engaging with a wide range of affective vibrancies of resistance, the ambivalence and intra-active differentiation of immobility and potentiality and of painfulness and empowerment is at the core of the complexities of matterwork politics, which enact ruptures, transformations and negotiations of hegemonic norms of embodiment and subjectivity. Such alternatives dwell in these ambivalences.

The relation of the ambivalence of breathing with dusty lungs, toxic social norms, and anxieties and panic attacks is a matter of individual and structural differential enactments in which politics lie not in a universalized but in a differentiated while affinitive approach. For Matt, for example, it is hard to imagine how his anxieties and panic attacks can be productive in the way they torment his life. In my experience as well, anxieties and panic attacks become unbearable, as they catch me by surprise or bring me to places I do not want to be in. They constantly reconfigure my social, cultural and personal relational capacities. On most occasions, similarly to Matt, if I could wish my anxieties and panic
attacks away I would, as the daily practice of living with them and the
diverse intensity of their presence is often unendurably exhausting
and limiting. Sometimes taking space and breathing feels like constant
stumbling, sometimes like deep falling, sometimes like a rollercoaster.
And sometimes, for me, panic attacks and anxieties become forces of
change and, paradoxically, also self-care. They become corpo-affective
reconfigurations of reality that open up new modes of engagement – new
ways of being that are exhausting and inspirational, painful and hopeful,
debilitating and empowering, immobilizing and activating.

Although living with anxieties and panic attacks, with “dusty
lungs” and in the suffocation wrought by social norms is political, the
ambivalence of such living is central in order not to “romanticize” the
time of those material-discursive phenomena. Matt – whose life
with anxieties and panic attacks has been much longer than mine, a
temporal aspect that should not be underestimated, and for whom those
corpo-affective ways of being are related to violence he experienced –
pointed out that for him living with anxieties and panic attacks does
not mean “being ok” with them. Living with anxieties and panic attacks,
with “dusty lungs,” and in suffocating social norms, local and global
power relations, and environmental pollution may enact resistance, but
such resistance is not what one wants to embrace unconditionally. It
is not merely resistance but the change (understood as processual and
dynamic) that is necessary in the end – a change in which resistance is
necessary but needs to be enacted sustainably. As Matt articulated it, in
relation to his own daily living and negotiation of anxieties and panic
attacks through a figuration of a wound and scars,

I like the imagery of a wound or scars, scars are ok. I want scars. Scars
show a history, scars come with stories. Before the scar was a scar it was
a scabbed wound. You wanna protect this scab, you don’t want to pick
at it, you don’t want to open it back up. … And before the wound was a
wound it was a healthy tissue, healthy bodies, healthy minds… And… I...
totally think it’s possible to be settled and at ease with past experiences
and present conditions; that’s possible. (But) when a trauma continually
brings up panic attacks or anxiety that to me is the picking at the wound
or not cleaning the wound and so it actually never heals. And so a tree

can get a horrible gash from an ax or something, it will bleed sap to
protect the wound and it will grow with that wound. And in a generation
it just becomes part of the tree. And that’s fine and it makes the tree
textured and beautiful and unique, against all the other trees – it shows
what this tree has been through. You can substitute the human in place
of the tree if you want. ... I see a panic attack as the body’s very natural
reaction to an unnatural condition. I don’t think we are supposed to
have panic attacks.

The political potential of panic attacks and anxieties, of “dusty lungs”
and the suffocation of social norms that stigmatize phone sex breath
and moaning in Anna’s work, for example, is not simply to embrace
them as phenomena of resistance – it is also why the reconfiguration
of the relationality of failure and success is crucial here. Their political
importance is in the dynamics of the complex and ambivalent articulations
they open up in the matterwork of the incorporation and enactment
of intersectional individual and systemic power relations. Political
interventions of vulnerability are not done through a simple acceptance
of failure to achieve the norm – even though social and individual
acceptance and recognition are important on yet another “level” of their
political potentiality – but through the recognition of the political power
such failure enacts calling out of individual and systemic intersectional
operations of power relations as well as calling in (Trân 2015) for
affinities through similarities and differences. The political potential
of intersectional politics of vulnerability is not about adjusting to dominant
power relations but about recognizing and enacting differential practices
through which power relations are challenged by intersectionally
differential processes of living towards breathable lives. This is, for
example, what Anna did when developing affinities with her coworkers,
or what Matt and Tarik did when finding their ways of being otherwise.

Such politics call for structural, social, cultural, geopolitical,
corpomaterial, affective, material, medical, discursive and paradigmatic
changes as well as for matterwork changes in which mobilized politics
and change do not idealize resistive phenomena (e.g., combat breathing
or proletarian lungs) but work with their simultaneous potentiality and
unbearability, painfulness and undesirability. Such politics also call
for affective and corpomaterial changes in matterwork dynamics when breathable futures are also about the tensions in the chest being released at least for a second; when chronic pain decreases; when social relationality can flow in lighter and breathable ways; when relationships may obtain different forms, forces and meanings; when “dealing with oneself,” as Matt puts it, can have new meanings and material enactments; when the temporality of life gets a different dynamic and when the sensoriality of daily life obtains different qualities.

The way matterwork is political, therefore, cannot be generalized and unified. It is always situated in particular intra-active and differential intersectional enactments. Simultaneously, the intersectional matterwork and corpo-affective dynamics are dispersed in terms of, for example, structural operations of power relations and political potentialities, which may be mobilized in a structural and also an individual manner. When, for example, Matt and I talked about his experiences, in particular moments I could hear Matt’s throat narrowing, his voice getting a little bit higher. And I responded with my own resonance of feeling: my breath got shallower, the tension in my chest increased, and the tension in my body and mind accumulated. In such instances, quotidian corpomaterial and corpo-affective processes can become infective in their capacity to resonate vulnerabilities, demand change though care, respect and support, and create affinity through recognition of situated and dispersed similarities and differences and dynamics of diverse forces and speeds. These infective potentialities are simultaneously situated and dispersed, individual and structural, and they are always intra-actively differential and intersectional. The matterwork politics that I have been arguing for throughout Breathing Matters, therefore, do not aim to turn contradictions into homogenized solutions, erring and failing into productivity and success, or confusion into clear orientation.

Moreover, the notion of the politics of vulnerability that has been articulated here is not advocating for vulnerability as a qualifying characteristic but rather as an intrinsic part of political dynamics. This project is not about the politics of living with open wounds but rather about the politics of life as being in a continuous process of ambiguous transformations towards change – never fully complete but always in motion around ambiguities, failure and potentiality, pain and pleasure, affinities and separations, empowerment and weakness. This vulnerability is always intersectionally situated in terms of global and local power relations. It is a situatedness that materializes power dynamics not only in terms of human corpomaterial and corpo-affective becomings (a focus of Breathing Matters) but in terms of the broader implications regarding materializations of diverse natural, social, chemical, biological, genetic, microbial, material and imaginary (to name a few) environments.

The goal of Breathing Matters, therefore, is not to develop a universal understanding of vulnerability and politics. Instead, I wanted to articulate vulnerable politics that are situated in the specificities of the interviews and autoethnography that have enacted this project. Although situated in such a manner, the previous chapters have not aimed to propose an all-encompassing narrative. Simultaneously, however, they have aspired to create vibrations as well as moments of dispersed intra-connections for possible affinities in and through and across resonances and dissonances, similarities and differences. That double movement is at the core of the politics I propose in Breathing Matters – politics that matter in a quotidian, individual and structural manner as well as in terms of affinities, solidarity and utopian visions that are always provisional, under constant negotiation, in which positions of privilege and lack thereof matter and shift as part of the dynamic coalitional and separatist vulnerable politics. These visions are embedded in differential ways of being, in a world where the guiding force is differencing rather than normalization and where vulnerability and failure are equally valid and important as happiness and well-being.

**MATTERWORK**

In developing the intersectional politics of vulnerability of quotidian bodily agentiality, the notion of matterwork has become a central concept for the analysis – a concept which I unfolded through Breathing Matters, and which has allowed me to argue that breathing matters,
and how it does. Matterwork has helped me address corpomaterial and corpo-affective dynamics and their political forcefulness, enabling me to discuss the material work of bodily agentiality in materializing, challenging and transforming social power relations. The notion of matterwork has become a tool for tracing corpomaterial, corpo-affective, material-discursive agential dynamics. In matterwork, work is understood as an agential process of worlding in the specificity and structurality (or, as I call it, the situated-dispersal) of (human and nonhuman) production, reproduction and transformation but also destruction. Matterwork also has become an articulation of ethical and political corpomaterial processes, as its agentially relational dynamism operates through (not merely human but also, again, nonhuman) practices of material-discursive production, reproduction and resistance (part 1), and of response-ability in-difference, transformation, and erring forcefulness (part 2). Matterwork, therefore, is discussed in *Breathing Matters* as a specific (situatedly dispersed) agential working ethical and political corpomaterial practice.

In articulating the agentiality of mundane, often unperceived, unacknowledged and taken-for-granted corpomaterial practices such as breathing, matterwork problematizes the understanding of bodily processes, dynamics and flows outside of (or as products of) social power relations, and the cultural and discursive forces of human life. In that sense, matterwork is a concept that articulates dynamics of worlding, in which materiality (and discursivity) are understood as agential but not necessarily voluntary, and they are simultaneously intra-actively constituted by and constitutive of material and social intersectional realities.

Discussed specifically in relation to corpomateriality and corpo-affectivity, matterwork has addressed bodily dynamics that are predominantly categorized as involuntary – for example, the way bodies perform the expulsion of coal dust from the lungs; the dynamics of filtering, moistening and heating up the air flows in the body through the intra-active enactments of air, cilia and mucous secretions; and the rhythms of breath in contraction and expansion and the exhaling and inhaling dynamics of the diaphragm, intercostal muscles and chest cavity during panic attacks. The aim of matterwork as a concept, however, is not to support the binarization of the categories of voluntary and involuntary actions. Rather, it strives to address the multiple ways in which human corpo-affective subjects live, as well as the diverse forms of embodied cognition, work and politics, while simultaneously acknowledging the processes of differing and problematizing categorical and clearly distinct, and delimited divisions.

The matterwork of the material-discursive and corpomaterial and corpo-affective relationality of dusty lungs, sex work prosodies, and anxieties and panic attacks is an ambivalent work which enacts vulnerable ways of living as well as politics that in their specific actualities and potentialities are enabling and hindering, resistant and normalizing. As such, matterwork has also been analyzed in *Breathing Matters* as a dynamic of intra-active enactment and resistance, of production and reproduction of intersectional power relations, of materialization and socialization, of failing and challenging, of breaking and breaking away. Matterwork, therefore, also articulates that politics do not happen only on a voluntary, conscious and conspicuous level. Politics also take place in everyday life; in invisible, taken-for-granted practices; in the ways we breathe, digest, sleep; in the tensions of the muscles between our ribs; in the oxidation levels of our blood; in the chemicals that are constantly transferring within and forming our bodies; in the (quality of) air we breathe; in the spaces we inhabit and are excluded from and in our everyday practices of (non)belonging.

As such, matterwork – corpomaterial, corpo-affective, individual, structural – operations reconfigure an understanding of politics as also taking place in quotidian material actions; they become a force that embodies and enacts social power relations by incorporating power and resisting it (as I discussed in relation to combat breathing and using breath in street protests). They are also a process that performatively enacts the ambivalences of the intra-active constitutiveness of lived oppression, resistance and empowerment. As such, the corpo-affective processes of anxieties and panic attacks, for example, are enactments of a politics of ambivalence – politics of desperation and longing, debilitation and empowerment, paralysis and activation, and incorporation and resistance. In this ambivalence, matterwork enacts resistance and the negotiation of becoming within power relations (in terms of affirmative and resistive but also sustaining, complicit and reproductive practices).
Whereas Fanon’s (1965) understanding of living as combat breathing articulates the processes of incorporation of power, where the ability to take a breath is merely a short respite, I have argued for a politically agential, not merely indicative or incorporative, dynamic relationality of breathing and power – for an approach in which respiration is a way of living in vulnerability, or rather a vulnerable living, and in which politics do not take place only on the streets or in forms of organized governmentality but also in quotidian corpomaterial and corpo-affective practices. In fact, I have argued that politics are not descriptive of vulnerability but are inherently vulnerable.

Finally, although in *Breathing Matters* I have focused on corpomaterial matterwork dynamics related predominantly to human issues, matterwork as a concept is not limited to human embodiment. The matter in matterwork is not an essential entity of human versus nonhuman or natural versus cultural character; rather, it is an agential dynamism of intra-actively constitutive and differencing forces (e.g., biological, geological and chemical as well as cultural, social and economic). It is a concept in which human corpomateriality is a matter in multiple spaces and companionships – from bacteria to companion animals, from partners, friends and families to the technologies we breathe, live and die with. It also allows for an analysis of material practices which in their intra-active and differential operating also problematize universal understandings of corpomateriality and address corpomaterial specificities and the particular intra-active relationality of corpomaterial, affective and power dynamics. Matterwork, moreover, allows for an understanding of humans’ lived realities and politics as entanglements of voluntary and involuntary actions, and although this distinction has scientific explanatory significance, it is also a distinction that is both bounded and unbounded in its phenomenal enactments and onto-epistemological practices of breathing’s worlding.

**PUFFING**

Breath – as well as politics – is enacted multiply. *Puff* is one of the possible enactments, entangling political potentialities, actualities and breathing dynamics. Puffs are processes of exhalation, the circulation of air through the body, an inside-out dynamic that challenges the binary itself. Simultaneously, they are not limited to breath, and indeed they expand to diverse intra-active dynamics of air and bodies, tissues, spaces, textures and matters, such as wind puffs across cityscapes or the voice and sound of dynamic air movement through the vocal cords. *Puff* as a noun signifies the strength and concentration of air in the lungs, which in its expiration makes noise and blows things apart. In the context of politics of breathing, the notion of puff mobilizes the nonbinary dynamics of inhalation and exhalation, which address particular directional movements while being simultaneously always intra-actively entangled in the intersectional dynamics of existing politics where norm, abject and resistance are understood as mutually constitutive in terms of their enabling as well as constraining, privileging and deprivileging, critical and affirmative actualities and potentialities.

Puffs enact changes in the air, bring change into movement and movement into change. In air’s constant circulations and metabolization throughout the globe, plants and animal bodies – in the case of human bodies, the estimated lifetime average breathed amount of air is minimally 265 million liters (Adey 2014, 8) – and in its transportive strength of moving and dispersing carbon, oxygen or particles of dust across spaces, spheres and times (2014, 11), puffs make the materiality, discursivity and vulnerability of life moved and moving, transformed, transforming and transformative. Puffs can be divergent in their strength, direction and composition – in panic attacks, for example, hyperventilation changes the concentration of oxygen and CO2 in the body and in the environment. Puffs can also be violently stopped and can have not only productive but destructive effects. While in this work I advocate for particular vulnerable intersectional politics, such as breathing and puffs, breathing can enact politics that are repressive and further discriminate or sustain diverse practices of (bio)political control, domination and exploitation.

I want to think about feminist politics as puffing – dynamics of affinities and separations that are temporally, spatially, socially, culturally, materially and bodily situated yet dispersed in terms of global naturalcultural materializations and enactments of power relations.
I would, therefore, like to argue that in the puffing dynamic of political actualities and potentialities of breathing it is crucial to engage the diverse politics they mobilize and require – politics that are strategic, intersectionally affinitive and provisional, and which embrace ambivalence as a political force rather than a problem to be overcome. In *Breathing Matters*, I have attempted to articulate such a nonflattening and nonhomogenizing approach in order to inspire feminist politics in which corpomateriality is not a passive surface on which power relations ascribe their meanings or a matter that is confined to a specific place in politics (e.g., in street protests), but a force which agentially enacts politics.

In *Breathing Matters* I have, therefore, attempted to imagine possibilities of living otherwise that are oriented towards inspiring feminist discussions that search for politics of vulnerability as matters of the daily actuality and potentiality of struggles for change – in terms of intersectional corpo-affective processes that take up space for diverse (inclusive or separatist) politics and affinities.
My following discussion of breathing, and of the actors and processes that enact breathing are developed through my reading of their descriptions in physiology (West 2000) and with their pop-cultural explanations found on the HowStuffWorks website (“Respiratory System” 2010).

In Pranayama, another method for understanding breathing, breathing consists not of two parts (inhalation and exhalation) but of four parts: inhalation (Puraka), a full pause after inhaling (Abhyantara Kumbhaka), exhalation (Rechaka), and an empty pause after exhalation (Bahya Kumbhaka) (“The Four Stages of Breathing” 2016). Such an understanding of breathing is also part of the four-count breathing exercise that is part of the “Everyone is fucking fine” RESPITE in part 2 of Breathing Matters. For a phenomenological discussion of four-part breathing, see chapter 6 in Lenart Škof’s Breath of Proximity (2015).

Breathing cannot be captured or explained in simple and static ways. For example, the rate of breathing changes in human bodies according to their age: the “normal” breath rate is 30 to 60 times per minute for infants, 24 to 40 times per minute for children of ages one to six, and 12 to 20 times per minute for “healthy” adults (younger adult bodies tend to breathe closer to about 12 times per minute, while the older the adult bodies get, the faster they breathe, reaching closer to twenty breaths per minute). During stress or exercise, the breath rate can increase significantly, even up to seventy times per minute (Jackson 2016).

An agential realist approach produces a specific type of agency that is enacted performatively and is anti-anthropocentric and anti-humanistic. Agency is not understood as an attribute of the world, objects or humanistic subjects but as “the ongoing reconfigurations of the world” (Barad 2003, 818). In other words, it does not reside in intentionality or subjectivity but in the processes of intra-activity and differencing.

While sometimes the notion of intra-activity is used as synonym for entanglement or assemblage (concepts that are central in contemporary materialist and posthumanist discussions), I prefer to mobilize it in terms of “intra-active constitutiveness.” This term articulates how breathing, but also other phenomena discussed here, is enacted in situated material and discursive specificities and agential relationalities that are mutually constitutive and differing. Such engagement works with breathing as a matter of relationality, of doing, of becoming, of “congealing of agency … which is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity” (Barad 2007, 210).

Criticism of positivism and development of its alternatives is, however, not merely a feminist project. It has also been developed within philosophy by, for example, Kuhn (1962), Feyerbend (1978, 1988), Lyotard (1984) and Foucault (1977, 1978). Positivism has been also criticized within the field of sociology of science by, for example, the so-called Strong Programme of the Edinburgh School (e.g., Bloor 1976) or, as sometimes the two are distinguished from each other, the Bath School (e.g., Collins 1985). Also, science and technology studies, understood sometimes as a part of the field of the sociology of science, has contributed significantly to challenging positivism and offering alternative actor-network oriented theories – see, for example, the works of Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1979), Bruno Latour (1987, 1993, 2005), John Law (1994, 2004) and Annemarie Mol (2002).

For a further explanation of positivist ways of writing and for an explanation of the ways the God Trick is enacted, see Nina Lykke’s introduction to Feminist Studies (2010).

For a more in-depth discussion of the issues of the delimitation of feminist thinking and the temporal and generational aspect of feminist debates see Lykke (2010) and Iris van der Tuin (2015).

While the term “worlding” is often related to Martin Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world, I use the term to articulate a posthumanist, entangled, intra-active dynamic of world-making – a dynamic that is not an attribute of an entity (e.g., humans) but is an agentially productive process. Furthermore, although worlding is a power-embedded process (see part 1), I use this term to highlight an understanding of the world as a constant dynamic of becoming rather than a container in which one is either situated or by which one is produced, or else which is produced through human productive or destructive actions (simultaneously, as anthropocene
or ecofeminist research clearly indicates, the human agency of the worlding
dynamics has to be recognized beyond power-flattening ontologies).

I would like to thank Nina Lykke for drawing my attention to the concept of
chiasm and to the chiasmic aspect of my argument, which shows how the
world and language are enfolded in each other. A chiasmic aspect, however,
does not assume the separation of the world and language; on the contrary,
knowledge enacts the world and the world enacts knowledge.

Importantly, as shown for example in the canonization of certain historical
events and not others, or of certain knowledge and not others, science has
always been a political matter.

For a contextualized introduction to intertextuality see, for example, Graham
Allen’s *Intertextuality* (2000) or Martina Alfaro (1996) who analyzes the
diverse ways that what is today understood as intertextuality was articulated
before Kristeva coined the term.

Barad defines representationalism as follows: “The idea that beings exist as
individuals with inherent attributes, anterior to their representation, is a
metaphysical presupposition that underlies the belief in political, linguistic,
and epistemological forms of representationalism. Or, to put the point
the other way around, representationalism is the belief in the ontological
distinction between representations and that which they purport to
represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent
of all practices of representing. That is, there are assumed to be two distinct
and independent kinds of entities — representations and entities to be
represented” (2003, 804).

This power discrepancy is clearly manifested in the contemporary mobility
to and within Europe and in exclusionary practices of the fortification of
Europe; its formation of first- and second-class citizenship; and its growing
nationalism, racism and xenophobia.

While for Foucault, the body is deeply entangled with dynamic social power
relations that are not always necessarily conscious and dependent on the
voluntaristic subject (see, e.g., his concept of somato-power discussed by
Lkke [2010, 119]), and his analysis provides tools for understanding how
bodies and power are connected, as Barad points out, his understanding
of embodiment and materiality does not account for their agentiality
and does not question the relation to or challenge the dichomization
between discursive and nondiscursive practices (Barad 2003, 809). It is
also embedded in interactive causality rather than intra-active dynamics,
which are essential for an onto-epistemological and material-semiotic
understanding of processes of worlding.

For a detailed discussion of social constructivist approaches – and the role
of Butler’s approach to materiality that is part of the material-discursive
analytical approach developed in this chapter – see Lykke’s chapter “Making
Corporealities Matter” (2010).

For Hill Collins, “intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting
oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality
and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot
be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together
in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how
these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the
particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic,
and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of
oppression” (2000, 18).

For the extended debate on the danger of exclusionary knowledge
production practices of intersectional approaches see Hornscheidt (2009).
Hornscheidt’s concerns are also voiced by Erel at. al. (2008, 273).

The alibistic dimension of intersectionality is crucial especially for feminist
scholarship. Hornscheidt argues that mobilization of the intersectionality
discourse often results in nonreflexive research and reproduction of the
hegemonic position of white knowledge production and securitization of
the privileged white, financially secure positions of (feminist) academic
researchers (2009, 39).

Bilge works with Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s notion of *White habitus* as “a
racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates
whites’ racial taste, perceptions, feelings and emotions and their views on
racial matters” (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 104).

Hornscheidt themselves does not use this term.

There are many conceptual parallels between Hornscheidt’s and Nina
Lykke’s approaches (2006).

The authors differ, however, in their position regarding the optimal
methodological approach for intersectional research. While Hornscheidt
is critical about the reinstallation of a macrosociological perspective within
an intersectionality paradigm (2009, 36), McCall is concerned precisely
about the development of methodology that enables (complex and also context-sensitive) macrosocial analysis (2005, 1785–1787, 1791).

25 Although I find McCall’s discussion very fruitful, I do not share her opinion that the deconstructive approach to categories is anticategorical.

26 While, again, I share Puar’s focus on dynamic processes that enact power relations and the problematization of the idea that they can be simply assembled and disassembled, it seems that Puar’s approach challenges separability while operating with the implicit assumption of pre-existing entities which are simultaneously inseparable in their “meetings” of, as Puar puts it, interweaving, merging and dissipating (2005, 128).

27 Lykke does not use the term “intrasexuality” herself, and the association of her work with this neologism is a matter of my doing.

28 The Appalachian region comprises about 330,000 square meters spread across the US from southern New York to northern Mississippi, and it has a human population of more than 25 million. It is a predominantly rural region, which has historically depended on coal mining, forestry, and the chemical and agricultural industries. Today, its economy is diversifying and has extended to professional services and manufacturing. Although the region is currently undergoing some economic development, it has historically been a poor region, and its general poverty rate has been decreasing only recently (between 2009 and 2013). Poverty, however, is one of the crucial contemporary issues for local communities, especially as the decrease of the poverty rate and diversification of economy have been taking place differently in different counties (which number 420 altogether and are located across 13 states) and creates a multitude of vast economic contrasts across the region (The Appalachian Regional Commission 2015).

29 Which also links coal with the US military complex which is one of the biggest energy consumer in the US.

30 And in a temporal sense these displacements have yet another aspect when the constantly improved coal extraction technologies replace workers and the power of unions which, nowadays, have far fewer members than they once had.

31 E.g., the food industrial complex, pets or wild animals, plants or elements – for example water. Not only humans are implicated in fuel consumption in multiple ways – the lives of the wild animals are protected by industrially produced fences along the highways and the air transforms into a commodity and becomes a source of energy by being entangled with the energy supplies that are required to produce wind-powered electricity plants.

32 Although the notion of energy should not be reduced only to its commodification and technological usage. For example, as a water filter, coal also produces certain forms of energy.

33 “You are a part of this story. So are we. From our dependence on coal-powered electricity to our collective ability to organize for climate justice, we are each implicated in the struggle for the mountains, which is really the struggle for all places. Though we cannot pretend to speak for the daily lived realities of the coalfields of Appalachia, we are listening to the wisdom of those that do, and are striving to create a tool to help us all decipher these overwhelming times we are living through. Each of us has a unique piece of the story, and each of our communities has a different kind of power. As we harness that power – and leave the coal in the ground – we are remaking the world” (Beehive Design Collective 2010b).

34 Or limitation of consumption as it was enacted during socialism, when the accessibility of certain goods was limited or restricted to particular groups of people.

35 I understand the problem of stability of boundaries as temporal. Boundaries can appear as very stable (e.g., feminist discussions of categories of sex and gender as discussed by, for example, Judith Butler [1990, 1993]) and often unchangeable, but because power relations are dynamic processes I would argue that boundaries have a temporal and always dynamic and changeable character as well.

36 For more breathing exercises see, for example, a breathing program developed by Richard Brown and Patricia Gerbarg (2012), or go online and try to breathe in the rhythm of the breathing GIF that was developed to calm down anxiety and is available on Tumblr (2016).

37 Recently published Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) – a substantial literary work and academically relevant analysis – is an example and important articulation of the complexity of US racist structures in a contemporary and historical context.

38 Lina uses the term body knowledge inspired by the concept and therapeutic practice of body awareness developed by a Swedish physiotherapist Gertrud Roxendal (1985, 2002).

39 Margrit Shildrick’s (2015a) definition of debility, related to Laurent Berlant’s
(2011) notion of cruel optimism, is especially pertinent here, as it addresses ambivalent attachments to life relevant for anxious and panicky living: “debility … must be understood as the universal and inherent condition of worn-out bodies in late capitalist society. At the very same time, ‘cruel optimism’ … describes and explains why those enduring slow death are compelled to keep going. It speaks to a state in which each individual is carried along in the face of adversity by the seductive promise of something better that justifies living on” (2015a, 157).

For an extensive discussion (and Stossel’s historization) of the role of drugs and the pharmaceutical industry in the emergence of anxiety, see chapter five of My Age of Anxiety (2014). Stossel’s historical account of the development of anxiety drugs is notable, as are his anecdotes about Freud’s experimentation with cocaine, and the role opium and heroin used to play as anxiety-curing drugs. As Stossel points out himself, these developments raise important questions about the character of contemporary medication and the confidence with which they are prescribed.

I use the word “mental” here in a reappropriating and politicizing sense. As a term referring to “mental illness,” “mental disability,” or offensive and stigmatizing language, it mobilizes historical and present struggles for reappropriation and resignification strategies of queer, antiracist and crip politics and as such highlights and articulates possibilities for developing diverse affinities, coalitions and politics. In other parts of the chapter I use terms such as corporeal-affective or psychosomatic which are part of the politicization strategy I am offering; however, here I offer a perspective where mental processes are understood not as a separate sphere of human life but as a constitutive part of the intra-active relationalities of mind and body – where mental and physical health are not separate and their relationalities are not binary but intra-actively constitutive.

Popular culture offers some characteristic imaginaries of panic attacks and anxieties, such as people experiencing panic attacks being easily overwhelmed, weak individuals who, under a lot of pressure (but also without any externally perceptible reason), collapse on the floor or (in a typical US-produced style) grab a brown paper bag and breathe into it until they regain control. Those delineations are often ridiculing, offensive and stigmatizing in their assumptions, depictions and effects, creating a portrait of people experiencing panic attacks as individuals who are “overdramatic,” “freaks,” and “not suited for life.” Although these images prevail in popular imaginaries, panic attacks are experienced, enacted and perceived in diverse and multiple ways, which may appear even contradictory. For example, they can be rapturous as much as discrete, subtle or invisible; they can be grasped and recognized as panic attacks or as other phenomena (such as heart attacks, stress and nerves). There is no one single way in which panic attacks are experienced nor in how they become recognizable for those who experience them or those who witness them.

Kafer’s book is an excellent example not only of the ways such affinities can be strategically built but also of how such politically invested analysis – that holds on to multiplicities, discrepancies, contestations while developing nonflattening, nonhomogenizing potentialities for conversations, coalitions and futures – can be conducted.

Whereas here I discuss only one aspect of the diverse consequences of the narrative, the discussion may be complicated and extended further with yet another political potentiality in conversation with, for example, (feminist, queer) neuroscience and its accounts of corpomateriality and subjectivity (Wilson 1998, 2004; Einstein 2007; Jordan-Young 2011; Bluhm, Jacobson, and Maibom 2012; Kraus 2012; Rose and Abi-Rached 2013).

I use the notion of change openly in order to articulate the possibility of thinking through differing. However, without particular – in my case norm-critical, feminist – politics and ethics, change can have multiple, not always desired, effects.

While explaining the constitutiveness of in-difference (which is fundamental in anxious and panicky becomings) in the dynamics of response-ability, the concept of response-ability in-difference developed here shares the ethico-onto-epistemological investment articulated in Haraway’s (2008) notion of response-ability, understood as “multidirectional relationships,” which recognizes the differences amongst human and nonhuman animals and their capacity to respond (2008, 71), and where ethics are understood in terms of practices rather than rules and imperatives (2008, 89).

The recognition of different ways and intensities of smelling and sniffing – e.g., Tariq’s ability to simultaneously smell what in human terms is understood as past, present and future – demonstrates that response-ability in-difference may take place also outside of conventional anthropocentric understandings of temporality.
The politics of failure take multiple forms and have diverse content, and they enact diverse resistances and transformations. I do not engage with Halberstam’s notions further, and I am critical of a predominantly optimistic or embracive approach to failure. I do, however, agree with Halberstam’s understanding of failure “as a refusal of mastery, a critique of the intuitive connections within capitalism between success and profit, and as a counterhegemonic discourse of losing” (2011, 11–12) and with the redefinition of the relationship between failure and knowledge, not simply in terms of lack but as a form of addressing “the limits of certain forms of knowing and certain ways of inhabiting structures of knowing” (2011, 12).

Importantly, in such dynamics, beings that are traditionally constructed as human Others (in this case Tarik) are not objectified and reduced to what Haraway calls “raw material for human self-affirmation” (2004b, 140). Also, Matt and Tarik’s communication reconceptualizes language. This also resonates with Haraway’s—and also Vicki Kirby’s—approach, which inspires readers to think about language as a matter of life, a material-semiotic process where conversations across species cannot be thought of anthropocentrically, as they construct a form of life and language that is neither purely animal nor purely human (Haraway 2004b; Kirby 2011). In such a context, the response-ability can be understood as a dynamic of intra-activity that challenges humanistic and anthropocentric understandings of agency, relating and communication. It also problematizes the subject-object dichotomy while respecting dynamics of differing and reconfiguring notions of radical difference (see also Alaimo’s notion of trans-corpo-reality, 2008).

Trans-corpo-reality does not signify here only Matt and Tarik’s relationality but also the agentiality of the oceanic breeze in the air entering their lungs, of the sun, sand, other dogs and humans on the beach, of the abundant and versatile marine life of the Californian coast, of the political force of the recognition of the need for humans and animals to share public spaces without constraints (a leash-free dog beach) etc.

See, for example, research according to which mycobacterium vaccae, a bacterium commonly found in the soil, can reduce anxieties and improve learning (Matthews and Jenks 2013). As gardening blogger Grant, in her popularizing interpretation of Matthews’ and Jenks’ research, argues, “The bacterium appears to be a natural antidepressant in soil and has no adverse health effects. These antidepressant microbes in soil may be as easy to use as just playing in the dirt. … Gardeners inhale the bacteria, have topical contact with it and get it into their bloodstream when there is a cut or other pathway for infection. The natural effects of the soil bacteria antidepressant can be felt for up to 3 weeks if the experiments with rats are any indication. So get out and play in the dirt and improve your mood and your life” (Grant 2015, paras. 4, and 8). Furthermore, such bacterial corpo-affective relationality is another example of trans-corpo-reality (Alaimo 2008).

Another case that addresses human-bacterial corporeal-relationality may be found in the article by Kramer and Bressan “Humans as Superorganisms: How Microbes, Viruses, Imprinted Genes, and Other Selfish Entities Shape Our Behavior” (2015). The concept of the human organism as a superorganism proposed by the authors is, however, highly problematic. Instead, I would argue for an understanding of a human organism in terms of intra-active becoming-with that is more-than-human. Also, the article’s concept of selfish entities needs to be challenged in terms of the hegemonic discourses of selfness, sameness and otherness it implies (see the work of Shildrick [2002] for a norm-challenging approach). Also in light of neuroplasticity research and feminist scholarship in neurology, the brain gendering that takes place in the article is highly problematic. What, however, is important about this work are the empirical insights it provides which challenge the anthropocentric understanding of a human not only in physiological but also in psychological and affective terms.

For a discussion of becoming subject, sovereignty, nation-states, death and power in terms of necropolitics, see, e.g., M’bembe (2003).

But as I argued in the previous chapter, the potential of such breathing is inherently embedded in the ethics within which it is enacted. For example, the US army uses the same breathing exercises to train soldiers how to kill.

Even though it is in a different context, such an understanding corresponds with Kirby’s understanding of the body as differentiated. See for example Kirby’s discussion of the body and sound and how different bodies are differently sensate and attuned to sound and rhythm (1997).

For an analysis that problematizes generalized, anthropocentric and exceptionalist notions of “the human” see, for example, Tsing (2009, 2012), Haraway (2008), Chen (2012) or Braidotti (2013). While in Breathing Matters I explicitly don’t discuss, for example, the bacterial, viral, fungal,
Protist becoming-with – which could, however, be yet another possible and inspiring way of engaging with breathing – it is deeply embedded in such understandings and problematization of the notion of “the human.”

As Matt later told me, his thinking about the image of the tree was inspired by the zine Entropy (Peregrine 2011).

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Breathing is not a common subject in feminist studies. *Breathing Matters* introduces this phenomenon as a forceful potentiality for feminist intersectional theories, politics, and social and environmental justice.

By analyzing the material and discursive as well as the natural and cultural enactments of breath in black lung disease, phone sex work, and anxieties and panic attacks, *Breathing Matters* proposes a nonuniversalizing and politicized understanding of embodiment. In this approach, human bodies are conceptualized as agential actors of intersectional politics. Magdalena Górska argues that struggles for breath and for breathable lives are matters of differential forms of political practices in which vulnerable and quotidian corpomaterial and corpo-affective actions are constitutive of politics.

Set in the context of feminist poststructuralist and new materialist and postconstructionist debates, *Breathing Matters* offers a discussion of human embodiment and agency reconfigured in a posthumanist manner. Its interdisciplinary analytical practice demonstrates that breathing is a phenomenon that is important to study from scientific, medical, political, environmental and social perspectives.