

# Excursions

Volume 10, Issue 1 (2020) | Chaos



Cover photo: Unbenannt #3 by Felix Spiske | Photo by [Markus Spiske](#) on [Unsplash](#)

*Essays: Research in Times of Chaos*

**Matt C. Smith**  
Disruptive Notes

[www.excursions-journal.org.uk](http://www.excursions-journal.org.uk)

# Disruptive Notes<sup>1</sup>

**Matt C. Smith**

*University of Brighton*

I was going to start this reflective piece on affective atmospheres by talking about chaos, disruption and the absurd, but the academic part of me wants to define and quantify what chaos and disruption is and so what may be particular about the disruption caused by Covid-19.

I have a section of my research diary titled “Disruption Notes” where I log what the disruption to my research has been (as requested by the funders), in particular how my data collection has been halted, delayed, mutated, but also the conditions of working from home. In this, I have included the bass from the flat below vibrating through my feet, or the door slamming and arguments that climaxed with the police being called one evening and the man from the flat downstairs being arrested.

[Pause]

[Breathe]

[Sigh]

The prevalence and increase in domestic violence during the Covid pandemic needs more serious treatment than my reflexive writing can grant it.

---

<sup>1</sup> This piece was originally written during an online writing workshop held by the Centre for Transforming Sexuality and Gender at the University of Brighton.

I feel and see this inability of academic writing to treat violence with the feeling it deserves when reading journal articles where trans lives, but more often trans deaths, more precisely murders, are used to make points. There needs to be more humane treatment of people's lives than what academic writing can or usually affords them. As Talia Mae Bettcher (2007) has written "Dare we forget the sheer value of one human life that is lost? And can we bring about the changes that are needed within so that we may undo the distortions that blind us to this?" (p. 60)

There is perhaps no way to give the time and recognition deserved but if you are using trans lives and deaths to make theoretical points (don't), then more compassion, recognition and feeling is needed. The cold voice of academia can send a shiver down my spine when objectivity comes before care. I do not know how to do this but giving time for the reader to feel and properly think may be a start.

Propinquity to domestic violence is affective. It is disruptive and chaotic.

[Pause]

[Think]

[Feel]

This wasn't what I intended to write – what did I come here to accomplish? I need to reread my steps and refocus.

[Pause]

[Empty Stage]

[Find focus]

[Arrive back on stage with a chair]

The absurdist ontology I am using in my research seems particularly pertinent with being able to comprehend the chaotic context this research is taking place in. Perhaps chaos is too strong and 'research-as-mess' fits better. It has precedent (Cook, 2009; Law, 2004), resonates with the absurdist ontology and facilitates the integration of the work of Anderson

(2009) on affective atmospheres that has been applied to planning theory and practice by Buser (2014; 2016). Anderson's use of

[Door slams in the flat beneath; Thudder of vibrations through my chair]

Anderson's... [LOUDER, find focus] Anderson's work builds on Deleuze's reading and reworking of Spinoza...

## References

- Anderson, B. (2009) 'Affective atmospheres', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2, 77-81.
- Bettcher, T. M. (2007) 'Evil deceivers and make-believers: on transphobic violence and the politics of illusion', *Hypatia*, 22(3), 43-65.
- Buser, M. (2014) 'Thinking through non-representational and affective atmospheres in planning theory and practice', *Planning Theory*, 13(3), 227-243.
- Buser, M. (2017) 'Atmospheres of stillness in Bristol's Bearpit', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 35(1), 126-145.
- Cook, T. (2009) 'The purpose of mess in action research: building rigour through a messy turn', *Educational Action Research*, 17(2), 277-291.
- Law, J. (2004) *After method: mess in social science research*. Abingdon: Routledge.