

Jackie Orr

Panic Diaries: A Genealogy of Panic Disorder.

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Jackie Orr's *Panic Diaries* is a richly detailed cultural history of the play of ideas, interests, research, technologies and experiments involved in the constitution of panic as an object of scientific, governmental, military, corporate, and individual enquiry and preoccupation. Subsequent to its initial expression in 19th century social thought, another moment of intense research and experimentation into panic was spurred on by the population's literal interpretation of and frightened reaction to the 1938 broadcast of H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. On the eve of World War II, a particular interest lay in developing techniques to help recognize and induce collective terror. Another wave of activity in the postwar period pertained to fears about public mass hysteria in reaction to the tense atmosphere of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear disaster. During the Second World War, the treatment of traumatized soldiers eventually led to the dominance of individualised biopsychiatric conceptions of panic and its corresponding psychopharmacology. Panic disorder was first identified in the late 1950s as a result of pharmaceutical effects on institutionalised mental patients suffering from "episodic anxiety" and "panic attacks" (206). In the wake of dissatisfaction with traditional diagnostic methods, the quest to identify individuals' biochemical makeup within psychiatric populations was established as well as the search for a "drug-relevant" way to classify psychiatric disorders. As a result of these and other factors, panic disorder was officially recognised in the 1980 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the DSM-III).

Jackie Orr links the constitution of panic as an object of knowledge and intervention to larger social preoccupations, such as those of managing the destructive effects of collective panic in the aftermath of a war or nuclear disaster, or of safeguarding collective national and international mental health through the promotion "of a humanistic global psychiatry" whose goal was to ensure "international order and world peace" (197). Thus while panic was initially of concern as a destructive collective social phenomenon, caused by either the malfunction and dissolution of the social bond or on the contrary its proper functioning, it was later reconceptualised as an individual pathology whose effect through aggregation could bring about widespread social disorder.

The author looks at the role of governmental and military agencies, social scientists, psychiatrists, corporations, and the mass media in their support for specific approaches and research into the ways to simultaneously (and suspiciously) produce and discipline, simulate and prevent, collective and individual panic. This is a story that she describes as "slightly paranoid" — the story of "traumatized or panicked or hysterical bodies [which] mark a symptomatic site of what Foucault calls 'subjugated knowledges'" (18-19).

Rather than analyse panic as a social and historical problem whose study might yield relief for sufferers, the author takes a Foucauldian approach to apprehending panic as a socially and historically constituted object whose meaning derives from the discourses which give it voice and whose import lies in its being enmeshed within webs of power/knowledge. The author remains true to the spirit of Foucauldian genealogical enquiry by paying attention to the forms of resistance to the configuration of panic and of panicked subjects as objects of knowledge of a certain kind (for instance she notes early resistance to the development of psychopharmacological studies, which are viewed by some as a fad) and to the subjugated knowledges — the marginalised, local, popular knowledges — which serve to produce the truth and legitimacy of the newer models for

understanding and more importantly predicting, manipulating and controlling human behaviour. The author maps the rise to dominance of the cybernetic model of information and control, and its view of “the circuiting and exchange of information” (196) which displaces, without completely eliminating, the psychoanalytic model of energy flows which preceded it.

Performance is also at the heart of this book and the author disseminates this notion in a number of ways. For example, through the use of experimental writing techniques such as collage the flow of the text is disrupted and our attention is drawn to other kinds of stories. Metaphors of performance to characterise the creative effects of the techniques and technologies used by the social sciences are also deployed.

Orr develops the concept of ‘psychopower’, which can be distinguished from Foucault’s concept of biopower inasmuch as it aims more specifically to manage individuals’ and populations’ psychological life, health and disorder through discipline and normalisation, while also seeking to produce its effects through simulation. Here the importance of the mass media, which Foucault mostly glossed over, is made apparent:

Michel Foucault meets Alfred Hitchcock in a post-Cold War shower of screened sacrifices, prime-time terrorisms, televisual warfare with a CBS news anchor embedded in an army tank — regimes of normative truth encounter the phantasmatic artillery in Norman Bates’s psycho mind — in the dark, in the desert, in the latest digitally relayed storm. (16)

Given that the view of the panic object and the strategies for acting upon and through panicked subjects change rather drastically from a collective to an individualised orientation within the space of a few decades, one might be given to expect a more detailed discussion of the shift in the exercise in power to which this break corresponds. While Orr does introduce the concept of psychopower to account for the increasingly psychologised nature of life management from the Second World War onwards, more attention could have been paid to the modalities of this rupture. For instance, to explain the shift from the spectacular and arbitrary mode in the exercise of power which characterised the *ancien régime* to the more economical and calculated mode of power exercised in disciplinary societies, Foucault points to a number of motivating factors in the context of the rise of capitalism, including reducing the political and economic cost of the exercise of power, increasing the efficiency and reach of power’s effects, and promoting individuals’ docility and utility. Moreover these imperatives are situated within a particular historical combination of material events.

This triple objective of the disciplines corresponds to a well-known historical conjuncture. One aspect of this conjuncture was the large demographic thrust of the eighteenth century; an increase in the floating population (one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an anti-nomadic technique); a change of quantitative scale in the groups to be supervised or manipulated (from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the eve of the French Revolution, the school population had been increasing rapidly, as had no doubt the hospital population; by the end of the eighteenth century, the peace-time army exceeded 200,000 men). The other aspect of the conjuncture was the growth in the apparatus of production, which was becoming more and more extended and complex; it was also becoming more costly and its profitability had to be increased. The development of the disciplinary methods corresponded to these two processes, or rather, no doubt, to the new need to adjust their correlation. (Foucault, 1979, p. 218)

Contemporary work on neoliberal governmentality might also have been of use in thinking through this shift. Nikolas Rose, whose work the author points to when coining the concept of psychopower, has along with others (Alan Petersen, Patrick O'Malley, Sarah Nettleton, etc.) conceptualised neoliberal governmentality as a de-centered mode of exercising power which is reliant upon highly individualised and enterprising subjects, and whose beginnings can be traced back to the Second World War period.

Outside the introductory chapter, arguments which would help the reader make sense of main developments, their conditions and effects, are not systematically made explicit, and as such it is somewhat difficult for the reader to develop an overall picture of this complex and multifarious field. More could have been done to provide the reader with an overall analytical view of the various factors tied to the constitution and transformation of the panic object and panicked subject — and indeed of the interdependence between these two. Jackie Orr's book is nonetheless well worth the read for scholars and graduate students interested in this field.

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