

Megan Kennedy



## The Nervous Cloth

*Anxiety and Shifting Forms in Textile Practice*

## Introduction

Over 2023, the practice-led research I undertook for my master's degree in contemporary art practice has examined the question: *in what ways can anxiety drive textile work to shift forms?* Grounded in lived experience, this project investigates how disordered and anxious states can be channelled and challenged through material process to reshape structural, surface, and spatial dynamics. Rather than positioning anxiety solely as pathology, I explore its capacity to influence disruption, fragmentation, and material transformation. The resulting works, *LEVO I* and *LEVO II* comprise of two large, wall-hung textile panels constructed from recycled sheets and fabrics. Arranged in a loose patchwork grid, each work is marked by rust, burns, ink, and natural dye, and bound through coarse machine stitching and hand embroidery. Soldered metal masses, rings, and crotal bells are interspersed over the surface. Embroidered red text punctuates white textile pannels. Excess fabric drapes from *LEVO II*, proposing an ongoing expansion rather than a static declaration.

This research is framed through three key terms established early in the project: *precarity*, *dissociation*, and *fragmentation*. These concepts function as both psychological descriptors and strategies to guide the conceptual and material development of the work. In the context of this query, "shift" refers not only to aesthetic change but to the feeling and transferral of anxious experience into altered textile

structures, surface instability, and the larger audience. The project is situated in dialogue with artists including Tracey Emin, Elizabeth Parker, Agnes Richter, Louise Bourgeois, Yves Klein, and Haegue Yang, whose practices foreground material experimentation, embodiment, and emotional intensity. Their work provides a contextual framework for considering textiles as sites of rupture, repair, and self-articulation. Alongside these references, I engage with theories of philosophical wonder, selective attention, and the observer effect as metaphorical tools for understanding how directed focus alters psychological experience. Drawing in part on Tim Lomas's writings on positive art, I also consider how artistic making can realign anxious attention rather than trying to stifle it.

While anxiety remains profoundly destabilising, this practice-led research proposes that it can also function as momentum, concentrating perception, intensifying detail, and compelling artistic action. The following exegesis traces the development of this position through process, analysis and critical reflection.

## Section One - Semester One

Nicholas Hilliard, court painter to Queen Elizabeth I once wrote that art “*removeth melancholy... cureth rage and shorteneth the times.*”<sup>1</sup> From early modern theory to contemporary practice, art has been positioned as a means of mediating sorrow, grief, and psychic disturbance. While not all artists suffer for their work, many have rendered distress as form. *The Scream* (1893) by Edvard Munch depicts anxiety as a feverish landscape of existential dread. *The Sea of Ice* (1823–1824) by Caspar David Friedrich stages grief through a fractured seascape, where a wrecked ship is swallowed by jagged reams of Arctic ice. In both cases, emotional turbulence alters form and composition: distortion, fragmentation, and environmental enmity become structural rather than entirely illustrative.

Named after the Latin *Levo* (“to raise” or “to relieve”), *LEVO* expands on this line of transcription. The project marks my first sustained commitment to examining anxiety through practice-led research. Rather than treating anxiety as background condition, I

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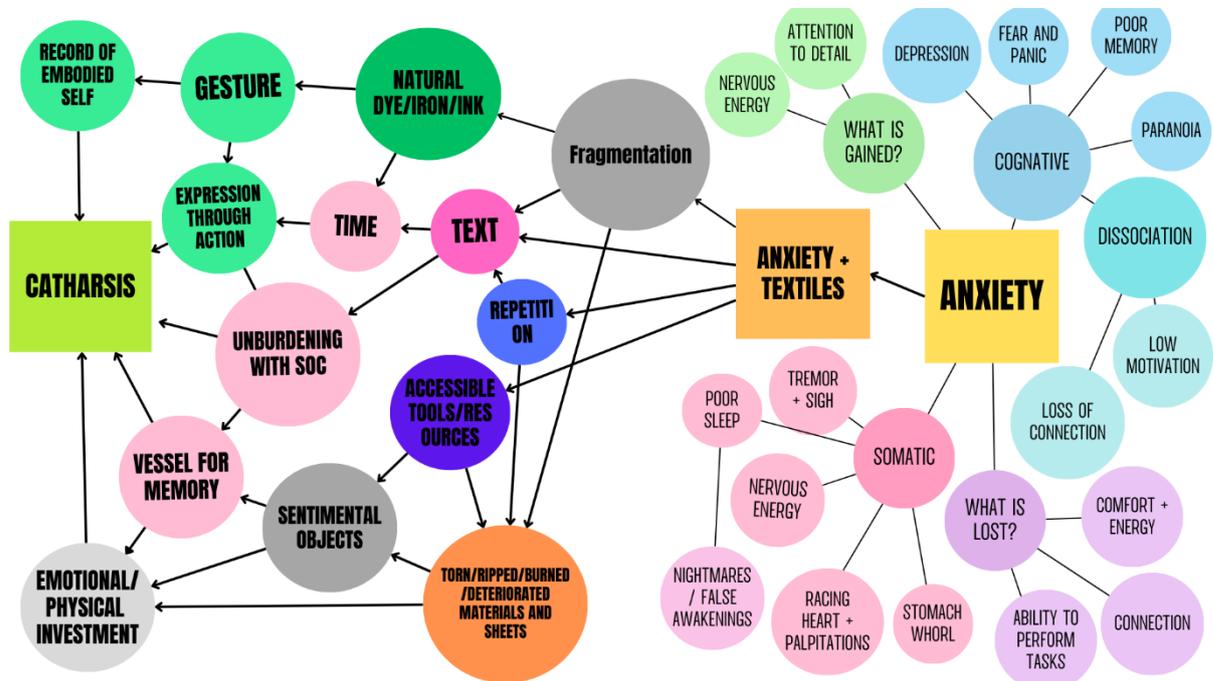
<sup>1</sup> Judith A. Rubin, *Introduction to Art Therapy: Sources and Resources* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=668457>.

positioned it as generative weight, testing how persistent apprehension and pressure might impact textile resources.

I live with generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), a chronic condition characterised by intensified vigilance, intrusive rumination, and physiological dysregulation. Beyond its neurobiological substrates, GAD manifests experientially as agitation, insomnia, cognitive fatigue, and persistent and unnecessary anticipatory dread. The desire to understand and possibly recalibrate these patterns became central to the development of *LEVO*. In initiating this research, I turned to the brain's capacity for selective attention. The "cocktail party effect" describes the ability to filter ambient noise and isolate a single conversational thread within a crowded room. This neurological partitioning suggests that attention can be trained, redirected, and intensified. From this I theorised that sustained artistic focus might similarly reorganise anxious cognition, not by eliminating distress, but by funnelling it into productive material process. Through this conscious making, I postulated that anxiety could be observed, studied, and theoretically lessened.

To open the project, I attempted to externalise and map my experience of anxiety. By translating inner sensations into a diagrammatic form, anxious states became clearer

and more consciously observable. This early stage was deliberately heuristic, a testing ground rather than a resolved outcome. A foundation, rather than a finished resource.



Textiles are the primary medium for this investigation. In many ways, cloth, fibre, and thread can be understood as lines under tension, constantly responding to movement, gravity, and environmental forces - a robust metaphor for anxious experience. A nervous cloth trembles before material change, anticipating the moment it will receive intervention and become something else. As a porous and responsive material in sustained proximity to the body, cloth carries both historical and personal resonance. Conscious of textile waste, I worked predominantly with recycled and donated fabrics, approaching the material as a body with existing cycles of use, memory, and care.



Rust dyeing formed a central material strategy. Iron, essential to oxygen transportation and cellular function, provided a biological parallel to the project's psychological focus. Recovered railway bolts, screws, tent pegs, shelving fragments and metal sweepings were soaked in vinegar and sun-aged before being transferred onto cloth. The

resulting orange-to-brown stains bear the slow corrosion of metal to a pigment. The process is durational, unstable, and oftentimes unpredictable - qualities that mirror anxious existence.

As a mordant, iron also fixes, changes or intensifies other dyes. Boiled black tea bags squeezed directly onto rusted sheets bond and blacken through this chemical relation. Chance and intention operate together: drips, folds, and saturation marks produce unpredictable markings soaked into the structural textile surface. Though evidenced visually, these are not decorative dyes. Like the stain, they behave and are read more as events that have happened to the cloth.

The sheets of *LEVO* were dyed individually over a period before being assembled into a larger hanging structure. A slowed method allowed each textile plane to undergo a period of scrutiny, creating a work that accumulates time and connection. These stains operate as evidence. They track contact, tension, and experience. They also resist erasure, they are stubborn. While conventionally associated with contamination or blunder, in *LEVO* these stains are welcomed, preserved and elevated. In this context, the stain becomes a formal analogue for anxiously driven intrusion and activity. In addition, these unpredictable stains align with philosophical accounts of wonder as a catalyst for attention and inquiry.



Rather than passive awe, wonder operates as heightened perception, or a concentrated state that both excites and sharpens focus. In *LEVO*, intuitive

mark-making and chemical reactions converge, distracting or displacing rumination with concentrated engagement.

The bedsheet, a material substrate, prepares and provides the ground for such undertakings. As Beverly Ayling-Smith observes, bed linen is “a material witness to

birth, puberty, pleasure, disease, decay and death.”<sup>2</sup> Sheets hold the residue of rest, illness, intimacy, and insomnia. On anxious nights, they are strained and creased, marked by restless movement. By severing, staining, and reassembling bedding materials, *LEVO* activates this domestic surface as both a site of vulnerability and potential.

Black ink also contributes the reading of the surfaces of *LEVO*. Where natural dyes suggest organic spread, ink introduces sharper intrusions. These gestures produce densely activated visual pressure, extending the metaphor of intentionally expelled anxiety. From grassy marks to wine spillage, stains are evidential, physically linked to something that exists in the material world.<sup>3</sup>



Although the stain is typically concealed, I foreground these markings as catalysts for small and intense revelations or wonder-inducing evidences of change and embodied action.

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<sup>2</sup> Beverly Ayling-Smith, “The Bedsheet: From Linen Cupboard to Art Gallery,” unpublished research paper, 2019, <https://beverlyaylingsmith.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The-Bedsheet-from-linen-cupboard-to-art-gallery.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Baert, ‘Stains. Trace-Cloth-Symptom’, *TEXTILE* 15, no. 3 (2017): 270–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759756.2017.1294366>.

Across millennia, wonder has operated as a symbol of inquiry and wisdom, and as a precondition for the related 'Sublime'.<sup>4</sup> Philosophers Kaulingfreks, Spoelstra and Ten Bos all observe that for Plato and Aristotle, wonder marked the seed of philosophy: the Greek term for wonder suggests a mode of seeing that 'elicits thought'.<sup>5</sup> Wonder may therefore be understood as a restorative arena of perception through 'attention, fixation and absorption',<sup>6</sup> often manifesting as joy, discovery, bewilderment and further curiosity. "*I wonder what would happen if...*" was a common refrain throughout the making of this work.

In *LEVO*, the orientation toward wonder is enacted through intuitive and somewhat unpredictable methodologies, particularly in the translation of mark-making on textiles. From a personal perspective, the aesthetic outcomes of wonder resonate with the words of artist Lindy Lee, who reflects on her work with flung bronze at the UAP foundry in 2020:

*"But if you work with the entirety of what you are, which is your heart and your body and your mind, the deepest level can Find the unknowable. And in that not knowing, you get surprised. All of a sudden, things that you might have overlooked have virtue,*

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<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Lynn, 'Reclaiming Wonder: After the Sublime', *Contemporary Political Theory* 19, no. 2 (1 June 2020): 138–40, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-018-00297-6>.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Mieves and Irene Brown, *Wonder in Contemporary Artistic Practice* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=4786531>.

<sup>6</sup> IBID.

*power and curiosity.... I have no idea what to expect – every shape is unique. It's like Christmas, it's so much fun".<sup>7</sup>*

Lee's emphasis on not knowing or genuine, generative surprise parallels my own material approach. Through physical intervention and repurposing, textile forms are driven toward unforeseen configurations. This process temporarily displaces anxiety, meeting exploration with reinvigoration and further curiosity.

The selection of material itself constitutes as a site of wonder. In Beverly Ayling-Smith's '*The Bedsheet: From Linen Cupboard to Art Gallery*', she describes bed linen as "a material witness to birth, puberty, pleasure, disease, decay and death".<sup>8</sup> Bed sheets conventionally signify comfort, cleanliness, relief and restoration: *retire to bed and wake up energized*. However, bed linen can equally evoke notions and experiences of discomfort or precarity. On sleepless nights, or amid anxiety-induced nightmares, paranoia and paralysis, the bed sheet is encoded with both strain and stain. Bearing repetitive performances of anxious inhabitation, sheets are an active site rather than a passive cradle. Unlike the canvas, which claims a dedicated and expectant association with painting, the sheet retains the charged authority of personhood. My use of bed linen, therefore, commits to a narrative of expectation or vulnerability met with either

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<sup>7</sup> 'Lindy Lee at the UAP's Foundry | Stories & Ideas | MCA Australia', accessed 23 October 2023, <https://www.mca.com.au/stories-and-ideas/lindy-lee-at-the-uaps-foundry/>.

<sup>8</sup> Beverly Ayling-Smith, 'The Bedsheet: From Linen Cupboard to Art Gallery', *TEXTILE* 16, no. 3 (3 July 2018): 287–300, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759756.2018.1432142>.

frustration or restoration, articulated through processes of physical deconstruction, intervention and reassembly.

The originally intended design of the fabrics in *LEVO* further contributes to this reading.

Factory-printed fabrics sourced from charity stores and my childhood home contrast with plain bedlinen. These printed fabrics appear mundane, perhaps comforting or

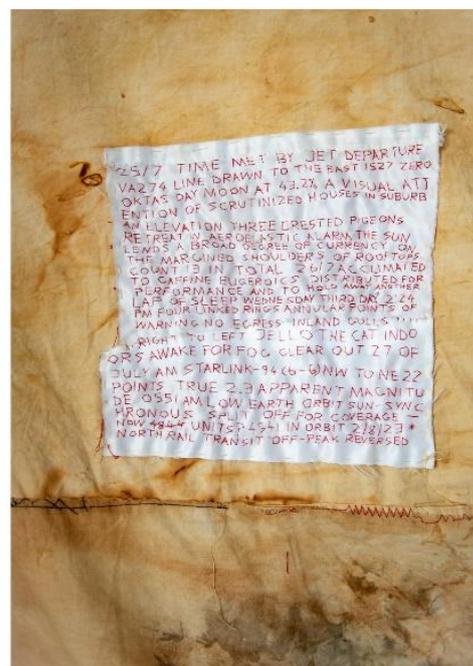
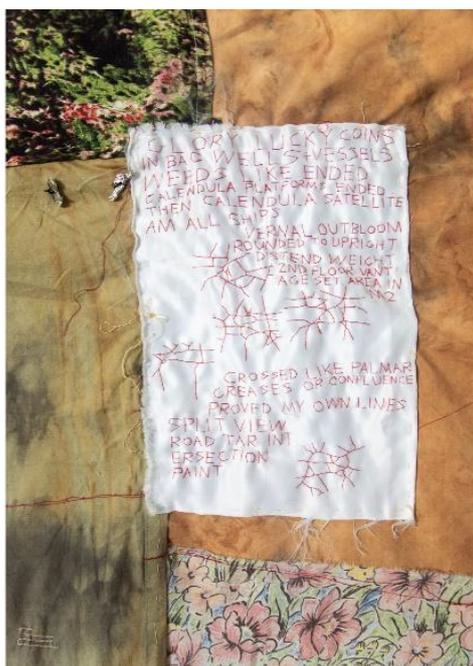
familiar, offering a friendly entryway into the work. Floral motifs evoke a seasonal spirit of renewal while also concealing stains. I recall my mother changing these sheets to announce spring. As flowers bloomed outdoors, the bed became a space of intention, making real the palpable lift with the prospect of warmer months. When these fabrics are paired with



plain sheets disrupted by aggressive material interventions, a tension emerges: clean and comforting versus tainted and worried. As in Tracey Emin's *My Bed* (1998), the combination invokes the expectation of rest confronted by an undoing. Both *My Bed* and *LEVO* stage a tension between expectancy and reality, the promise of rest manifestly denied.

The experimental integration of ink with rust-dyed fibres introduced contrasting plains of material and psychic being. While natural dyeing suggests organic obscurity or earthen grounding, modern ink introduces a synthetic or more industrialised intrusion - producing expansions, flare-ups, and ruptures. Performed on immersive proportions, this approach echoes the pervasive duality of anxious existence through the nature of clashing materiality.

During this early phase of my practice-led research, three guiding terms crystallised: *fragmentation*, *dissociation*, and *precarity*. These function not only as psychological descriptors but as strategies manifested in torn edges, disrupted grids, suspension and unstable surfaces. Naming these manifestations sharpened the conceptual framework of the process and directed further material decisions and techniques like automatic writing, which has long functioned as a personal method of psychological unburdening.



My approach to diaristic writing has developed over time and loosely mirrors the automatism of the Surrealists,<sup>9</sup> while also drawing on the “54321” grounding technique prescribed for panic management and mindfulness.<sup>10</sup> In uneasy periods, I attempt to transcribe ambient sections with brevity and honesty. Much of this documentation is erratic, but therapeutic. And Like Joan Miró, who layered on his own automatism by adding geometry over automatic marks,<sup>11</sup> I also review and alter my observations while embroidering them to cloth. In this way, the stitched text becomes both a record and a plane of reconsideration.

Although of visual interest, the text is not decorative, but evidential. Rendered in red thread, the embroidered texts compress embodied experience through the physical and lexical constraints that frame written language. The labour-intensive process extends the therapeutic reach of writing alone: the duration of stitching occupies attention and can temporarily suppress anxious escalation.

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Tapping the Subconscious: Automatism and Dreams | MoMA’, The Museum of Modern Art, accessed 22 October 2023, <https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/surrealism/tapping-the-subconscious-automatism-and-dreams>.

<sup>10</sup> ‘5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique for Anxiety’, accessed 22 October 2023, <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/behavioral-health-partners/bhp-blog/april-2018/5-4-3-2-1-coping-technique-for-anxiety.aspx>.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Joan Miró. The Birth of the World. Montroig, Late Summer-Fall 1925 | MoMA’, The Museum of Modern Art, accessed 22 October 2023, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79321>.

By the close of the first semester, two roughly queen-sized, collaged, inked and naturally dyed textiles had emerged. Temporarily bound with pins and hung on the wall with nails, the pair functioned provisionally as spaces for scrutiny and dialogue.

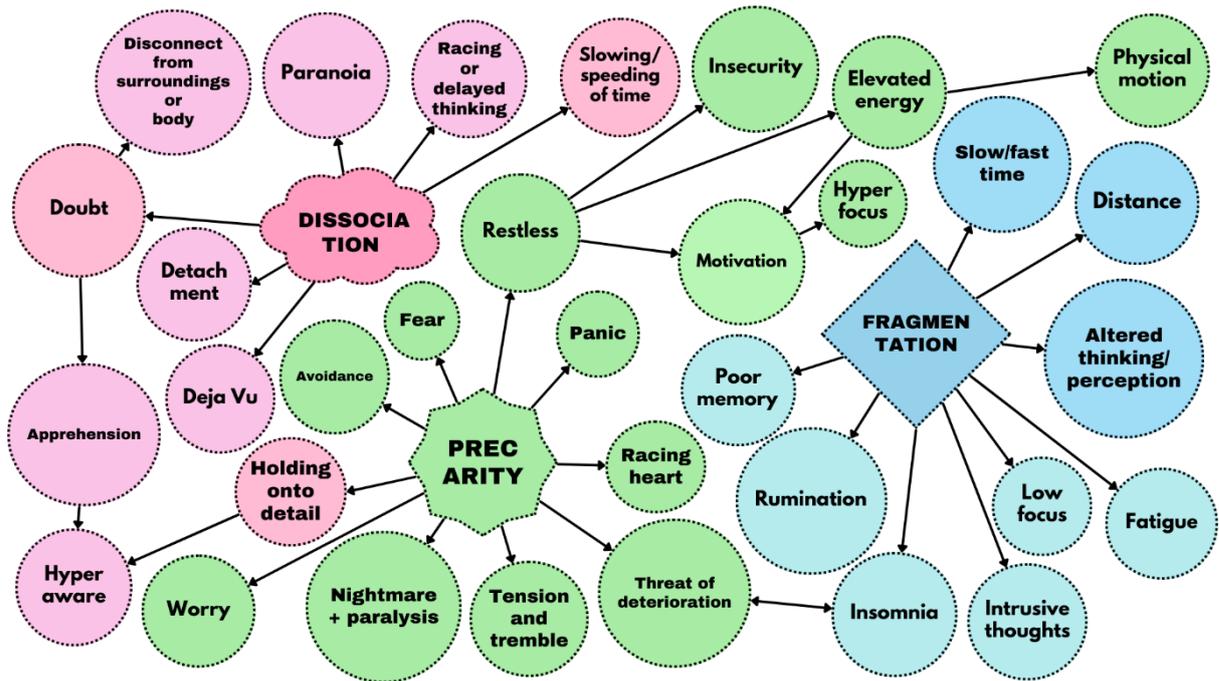


These early iterations reaffirmed my alignment with research examining the capacity of artmaking to support positive mental health. Through intuitive creative action, the works not only countered anxiety but visibly indexed its influence within textile substrate. But it was also at this juncture that uncertainties surfaced. Technically, the scale and method of binding remained unresolved - the works appeared suspended between states of unfinish and completion. I also questioned my relationship to them.

*Were they portraits of anxious experience? Or objects enlisted in its management?*

## Section Two – Semester Two

Like semester one, I began the second session with a mind map, charting my three touchstone descriptors to identify where I might manoeuvre in articulating and shifting anxious experience.



The branching constellation of symptoms associated with each keyword suggested an expansion of the techniques established previously. With increased material fluency, I reasoned, comes an enhanced opportunity to express an idea honestly. It had become apparent that I was expressing both anxious experience and its management. However, anxious experience was not the sole presence on the cloth. Inevitably, a portrait of my larger self was also staking claim. This push to undertake artistic intervention in the pursuit of anxious mitigation is inextricably autobiographical.

Therefore, *LEVO* began to read as both instrument and portrait - an object that serves and symbolises, an apparatus of intervention and an essential representation. While the fabric carries the pursuit of spiritual alleviation, it simultaneously reflects the toll and condition of the artist. In this sense, *LEVO* resides as multifaceted, documenting the creative vessel with its joy, fear and curiosity, as well as the pain and the pressure of anxiety.



A key experimental development in the new semester involved the targeted application of flame to fabric. Historically and contemporarily precarious, fire emerged as a compelling metaphor while I attempted to untangle several unresolved conceptual leads. As visual shorthand, fire parallels with anxious psychology in several symbological ways. It is foundational to human evolution and devastating when uncontained. Like an overactive amygdala or dysregulated neurotransmission, fire can

accelerate beyond control, quickly. Utility and regulation therefore became central metaphorical moments.

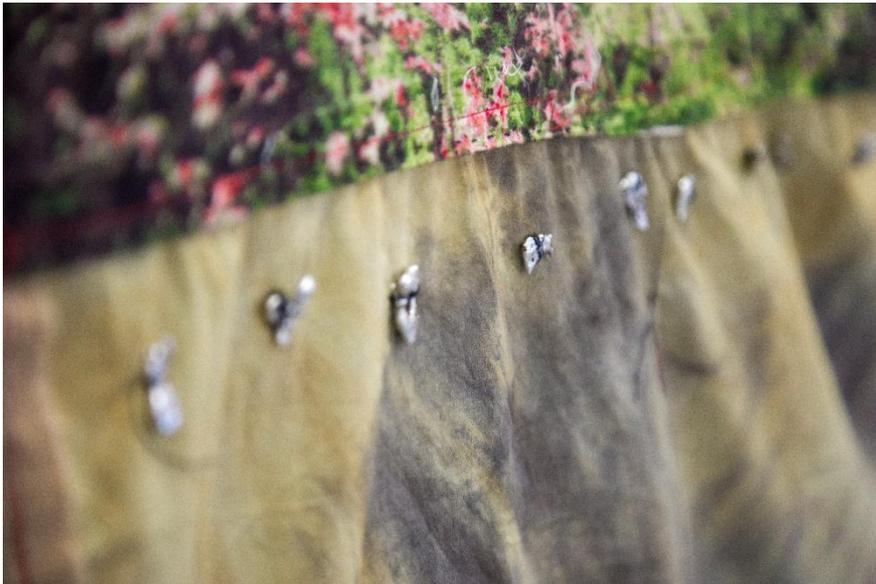
Initially cautious, I started with lit incense sticks and laboriously pressed the burning coating into test fibres, producing small apertures. After each mark, I relit the stubbed stick and repeated the process. As time compressed, I enlisted my father's assistance. Armed with a miniature butane torch, he taught me how to apply controlled jets of flame - of up to approximately 1300 degrees Celsius - to dampened fabric.

In *The Iliad*, Achilles' rage is likened to a destructive fire consuming all in its path. In contrast, on a bright Australian July afternoon, my father and I worked with the torch beneath the gum tree I once climbed as a child. The experience marked a welcome return to place, and I committed to the material push and pull, what is taken vs. what remains. As I worked, I considered the flame and its mark as a metaphor for psychological flux. I also thought about Yves Klein, blasting canvases with an industrial blowtorch.

By exploiting an element known for precarity and visible residue, metaphorical links also emerge between artist and viewer - through the collective perception of risk. Something unstable was negotiated. The act gestures toward pressing forward, taking

calculated risks in the face of apprehension, or asserting agency within metaphorical contexts.

From earlier experiments in binding, the use of metal weights, blobs, and rings began to work their way into *LEVO*. Seeking to refine the provisional pinning method of semester one, I fabricated several textural bars using a soldering iron, lead-free solder, and a handmade mould. Though I enjoyed their intricate construction, the bars proved impractical for attachment and were ultimately put aside for future projects. However, during a test installation, I observed an undesirable ballooning across the fabric panels. To remedy this, I devised several soldered masses to function as weights on selected sheets. Anxiety, too, carries weight. Yet when regulated, this weight has the potential to ground. This visual allusion prompted the addition of smaller dangling weights suspended by red thread - luminous, awkward, and functional points of tension. Subsequently, I fabricated twenty-eight thickly soldered rings to suspend both works on the wall. These elements compel the viewer to shift between intimate detail and panoramic scale. The oscillation between proximity and distance fosters active viewing behaviour, instilling restless movement while rewarding slower observation.



The act of collecting, curating, and affixing objects to *LEVO* stems from a desire to consolidate and preserve memory - a faculty often destabilised by volatile psychology. I intentionally embedded several objects of personal significance to anchor traces of selfhood within the work. These include fragments from my partner's shirt, textiles from travel or prior projects, and a cloth sample once submerged in seawater at a beloved coastal location.

Finally, after encountering the work of Haegue Yang at the National Gallery of Australia, I integrated bells into both iterations of *LEVO*. The suggestion of sound introduces rhythmic possibility and evokes the subtle calm of miniature instruments. Conscious listening can function as a self-regulating practice, performed deliberately or subconsciously. Although the bells are unlikely to be activated frequently within the

gallery context, their delicate presence gestures toward pause and balance. In this way, the barbs of anxiety may also be reframed as cues for restorative attention.

While anxiety has undoubtedly shaped the material and conceptual decisions within *LEVO*, the project has simultaneously illuminated adaptive patterns and creative strategies developed not merely to mitigate anxiety, but to synthesise experience into material form.

### Section Three - Surveying the Field

In his publication *Positive Art: Artistic Expression and Appreciation as an Exemplary Vehicle for Flourishing*, Dr Tim Lomas outlines five beneficial outcomes of artistic production – *enriching experience, sense making, aesthetic appreciation, entertainment* and *bonding*.<sup>12</sup> His framework enabled me to articulate anxious experience with greater specificity.

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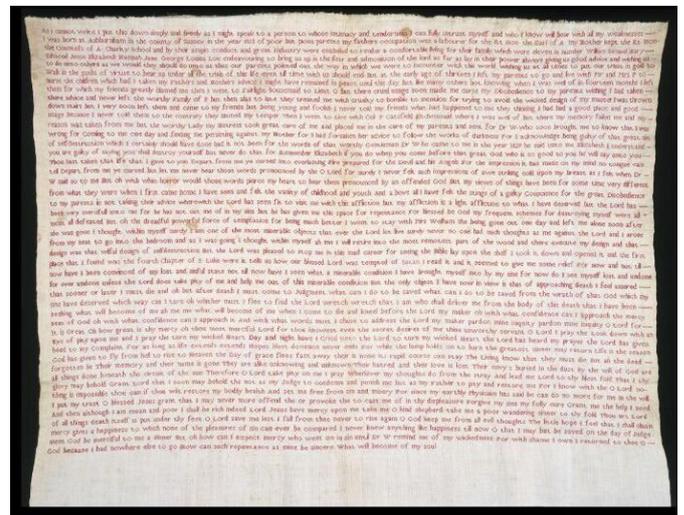
<sup>12</sup> Tim Lomas, 'Positive Art: Artistic Expression and Appreciation as an Exemplary Vehicle for Flourishing', *Review of General Psychology* 20, no. 2 (1 June 2016): 171–82, <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000073>.

Regarding sense-making, Lomas argues that art assists practitioners in understanding their own existence through processes of appreciation and expression. Even responses to art grounded in basic attraction or repulsion help establish the “I am” and “I am not” of individual personhood. Visual art can also communicate complex or otherwise inexpressible states with a potency that goes beyond spoken language. Lomas references religious iconography as a vehicle for theological broadcast and Picasso’s twentieth-century portraiture as reflective cultural commentary. In such cases, meaning operates beyond verbal communication, fostering a spiritual recalibration that may shift or relocate a sense of self.

In the making of *LEVO*, artistic engagement, as described by Lomas, was also a method of processing disorder and locating coherence within upheaval. Fundamentally, I was compelled to draw from interior phenomena through writing, gathering, and material action. When life is a murky span of mental distress, reaching for visual and tactile articulation has become a profound personal need, offering alternative perspectives to help navigate and engage with the world. Furthermore, it is this engagement, combined with Lomas’s third outcome, aesthetic appreciation, that concerns the transformative capacity art through beauty, awe and wonder.

Keltner and Haidt argue that aesthetic experience can generate profound shifts in perception.<sup>13</sup> Within *LEVO*, moments in which I uncovered visually compelling or materially satisfying results created motivation to continue. This iterative pursuit of impactful aesthetics generated what could be described as an “aesthetic loop” or a state of artistic flow in which anxiety temporarily recedes, giving way to focused engagement.

Throughout the year, I have also worked in dialogue with key artistic figures including Elizabeth Parker, Agnes Richter, and Louise Bourgeois. Examining these practitioners expanded my understanding of textile history and



situated *LEVO* within a lineage of embodied and emotive creative works. In semester one, I encountered Elizabeth Parker’s 1830 text-based sampler, made in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. Embroidered in red silk thread on linen, the text documents Parker’s own perceived sins, mistreatment by employers, and suicidal ideation.<sup>14</sup> The motivations behind the seventeen-year-old’s diaristic embroidery remain uncertain:

<sup>13</sup> Keltner, D., & Haidt, J. (2003). Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion. *Cognition and Emotion*, 17, 297–314. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02699930302297>

<sup>14</sup> Clare Hunter, *Threads of Life: A History of the World through the Eye of a Needle*, History of the World through the Eye of a Needle. (New York: Abrams Press, 2019).

however, it may have functioned similarly to a handwritten journal as catharsis, memory-keeping, and self-expression. Composed in tidy cross-stitch, the sampler conveys deep anguish and longing, yet Parker herself went on to become a teacher and lived until 1889. Her survival and the preservation of her textile record offer reassurance that successful catharsis can manifest materially.



Agnes Richter's embroidered jacket, produced during her incarceration at the Hubertusburg Psychiatric Clinic in Germany, similarly survives as an intimate testimony. Admitted in 1895 and institutionalised for twenty-three long years, Richter densely stitched largely illegible text across clothing, reflecting her experiences of psychological distress and confinement.<sup>15</sup> Now housed in the Prinzhorn Collection in

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<sup>15</sup> Gail A. Hornstein, *Agnes's Jacket: A Psychologist's Search for the Meanings of Madness. Revised and Updated with a New Epilogue by the Author* (Gordonville, UNITED STATES: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=5041461>.

Heidelberg, the jacket bears witness to both individual anguish and the broader mistreatment of psychiatric patients.

In appropriating a traditionally feminised craft, Richter transformed textile labour into resistant expression. Here, the historic works of Richter and the modern approach of artists like Louise Bourgeois intersect in this reclamation of fabric as a site of embodied articulation. Bourgeois frequently espoused the therapeutic necessity of making, stating: "*I need to make things. The physical interaction with the medium has a curative effect.*"<sup>16</sup> In the 1990s, she began incorporating garments she had worn into sculptural assemblages, underscoring the body's presence across the roles of daughter, mother, artist, and woman. But Bourgeois also posits that healing does not restore an original state but reconfigures the wounded form. Similarly, while I do not anticipate the complete eradication of anxiety, my engagement with textile processes aims to cultivate resilience through ongoing material dialogue. The cumulative, additive nature of *LEVO* emphasises continuous healing, a diaristic accrual that situates maker and viewer within a persistent practice.

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<sup>16</sup> Tate, 'The Art of Louise Bourgeois', Tate, accessed 19 September 2023, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/louise-bourgeois-2351/art-louise-bourgeois>.

Living with anxiety necessitates alternative negotiations of the world. Perspective shifts, attention sharpens. Limitation and possibility become entangled. The guiding keywords - *precarity*, *fragmentation*, and *dissociation* - functioned to stabilize touchstones throughout my practice-led research. Raw edges, coarse collage, irregular embroidery, uneven dyeing and lumpy metalwork reflect material decisions modulated by conscious and unconscious anxious perception. As with Parker's sampler or Richter's jacket, textile labour becomes a means of temporarily dissecting a condition. *LEVO* materialises anxiety for scrutiny - not to eradicate, but to situate.

#### Section 4 - Reflections, Discoveries and Resolution

I have felt both the pull of art and the pressure of anxiety since childhood. Recognising their entanglement, I chose to undertake a practice-led research project specifically examining anxiety's impact on my artistic process. My aim was not eradication, but discovery, identifying ways in which anxious cognition might shift textile form and, potentially, be redirected or harnessed. Predictably, my anxiety has not disappeared, its complete abolition was never a realistic expectation. Instead, over the course of the year, four approaches to negotiating anxiety through textile practice emerged: *attention/analysis*, *utilisation* and *expression* and *occupation*.

## *Attention / Analysis*

The sustained study and making of the *LEVO* diptych revealed that concentrated attention directed at anxiety can diminish its dominance. Metaphorically, this resembles the “observer effect” in physics<sup>17</sup> wherein the act of observation alters the observed phenomena. While psychological experience differs from quantum behaviour, directing deliberate scrutiny toward anxious states reframed them as something to be examined rather than a crisis to be eradicated.

## Utilisation

Anxiety disorders should not be romanticised as “superpowers.” Although anxiety is fundamentally an adaptive survival mechanism, in a generalised anxiety disorder, this mechanism remains chronically active, producing exhausting hypervigilance and rumination. However, in my experience during the making of *LEVO*, I found this heightened sensitivity to detail and pattern could sometimes enhance material awareness and conceptual rigour. Within *LEVO*, anxious cognition often operated as internal critique - interrogating decisions and demanding coherence. When directed toward artistic problems, this pressure sometimes generated analytic intensity rather than paralysis.

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Baclawski, ‘The Observer Effect’, 2018, 83–89, <https://doi.org/10.1109/COGSIMA.2018.8423983>.

Similarly, chronic worry involves complex future-oriented visualisation. While often distressing, this recursive mental rehearsal can support strategic planning, risk assessment, and the testing of outcomes. In the development of *LEVO*, anxious cognition frequently operated as internal critique: questioning decisions, anticipating structural weaknesses and demanding conceptual clarity. While intrusive at times, this persistent interrogation generated a rigorous reflex that strengthened the work's theoretical and material coherence.

## Expression and Occupation

Artmaking externalises interior turbulence. The translation of anxious manifestation into material form establishes dual perspectives - interior and exterior - allowing reflection and reconfiguration. Furthermore, immersion in creative flow prioritises positive making, redistributing cognitive attentional allocation and deflecting hazardous rumination. *LEVO* has therefore been shaped by anxiety while simultaneously reframing it. Anxiety probes, destabilises and insists on justification. When trained toward a specific artistic target, this pressure can be harnessed as analytic intensity, easing areas of chronic worry through immersive occupation. The same force that can amplify threat, can amplify inquiry or inspiration.

As I stated before, anxiety is not a 'superpower'. However, without it, I submit that my work might have been less intense or less personally charged. *LEVO* has become both object and voice, absorbing anxious scrutiny and returning it in material form. Yet rather than glorifying the condition, I have aimed to make evident the ways in which psychological precarity can shift material form, revealing ongoing potential for further iteration.

## Conclusion

From the vantage point of fragmentation, precarity, and dissociation, my research question asks: *in what ways can anxiety drive textile work to shift forms?* *LEVO I* and *LEVO II* operate as material evidence of psychological states altering textile substrates. Through the scrutiny of inner precarity enacted via textile intervention, I have developed a more grounded and embodied understanding of my own anxious experience. The works have emerged simultaneously as topographical renderings of a worried landscape and as accumulations of mechanisms designed to resist, redirect, or harness precarious psychology. Encountering *LEVO I* and *II*, the viewer is met with two expansive collaged surfaces of dyed, stitched, soldered, and painted textile panels. The invitation to move between proximity and distance - to undulate between detail and panorama - mirrors the fractured perceptual shifts characteristic of anxious cognition.

Across their surfaces, evidence of bodily enactment accumulates in frenetically machined lines, precarious rows of embroidered stream-of-consciousness text, scorched apertures and weighted interventions. These gestures index a chronically apprehensive practice without illustrating it directly. Anxiety is not depicted: it is embedded as evidence. The two works compress anxious experience into spatial form, externalising and recontextualising interior turbulence. In doing so, they create the potential for recognition, connection, and reconsideration. Rather than romanticising anxiety, *LEVO* examines the capacity to generate intensity, pressure, and persistence, qualities that can destabilise but also drive material transformation.

For the viewer, the sensory field of *LEVO* may operate like a map. Forms and ruptures become markers to trace, interventions become keys to decoding anxious practice and restorative response. This cartographic reading does not offer resolution but invites inquiry - suggesting that anxious making is neither fixed nor singular. There are innumerable ways in which anxiety can drive textile work to shift forms. Through the transmission of embodied anxious experience into artistic action, I have produced a body of work that is analytical, expressive, and sincere. Situated within a lineage of sanative textile practices, *LEVO* does not function as a static portrait of disorder. Instead, it charts the negotiation between anxious impulse and restorative intervention.

The outcome is not a cure, but reconfiguration: sustained psychological upheaval examined, compressed, and momentarily steadied through a remedial artistic practice that beckons further iteration.

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