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# **Pessimism, Paranoia, Melancholia: The affective life of austerity**

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*Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

*Department of Geography*

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the affective life of austerity with a particular focus on UK public libraries. It moves understandings of austerity beyond simply a fiscal policy towards conceptualising austerity as lived and felt in everyday life. This understands austerity as simultaneously an economic, social and cultural phenomenon. This does not jettison austerity as a fiscal policy, but rather emphasises that austerity is also a phenomenon that is rooted in lived experience. This research is based upon eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in a borough-wide library service, North-East England. This thesis examines a particular form in which austerity is lived and felt – namely its affective presence. It not only explores how austerity becomes individually felt, but also collectively felt and participated in. It conceptualises austerity as an affective atmosphere that envelops multiple space-times of the everyday. The thesis examines how austerity becomes the ‘background noise’ of everyday life that ebbs and flows in its intensity, how it shapes capacities to feel and act, how austerity is in some way always there, ready to make itself present. Three collectively felt affects are explored in great detail: paranoia, melancholia and pessimism. Importantly, this thesis pushes forward debates on the temporality of affect and, in particular, the temporality of affective atmospheres, through examining the ways in which atmospheres re-emerge throughout everyday life. As part of this it turns to psychoanalytic concepts to explore how they can be collectively felt. The thesis examines how psychoanalytic concepts have application beyond the ontological stance of the unconscious towards thinking about collective life. Finally, this thesis develops the concept and practice of lingering within research. The thesis examines how lingering can become a methodological tool within affective research and ethnographic research more broadly.



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## List of Abbreviations

**VR** – Voluntary Redundancy

**CILIP** – Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals



## Statement of Copyright

*The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.*



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*Meiner lieben Omi gewidmet*

*“Man wächst mit seinen Aufgaben”*



# Chapter One

## Introduction

*'There's just no end to austerity, it's wearing.'* (Margaret)

This thesis tells a story of how the persistent presence of austerity, year after year after year, is lived and felt; how it becomes shared and collectively participated in; how it is coped with and *not* coped with; how it is endured. It offers an analysis of the ways in which austerity becomes the 'background noise' of everyday life that ebbs and flows in its intensity; how encounters with austerity become one of *many* that shape capacities to feel and act; how austerity is in *some* way always there, ready to make itself felt.

In offering an analysis of austerity, this thesis also offers a new vocabulary through which to conceptualise collective affective energies which are presently a key concern for cultural geography. It draws upon and develops psychoanalytic concepts in order to understand the temporalities and spatialities of collective feeling, showing how such concepts can be applied beyond the ontological stance of the unconscious and re-orientated towards collective affective life. This thesis is thereby concerned to elaborate upon what psychoanalytic concepts can tell us about the persistence and re-emergence of atmospheres and, in so doing, facilitate an in-depth understanding of how such atmospheres shape experiences as austerity is lived.

This thesis also tells a story of the *public library service* in times of austerity. Whilst the library is often understood through its public spaces, this thesis tells a story of a particular part of the library service – namely the experience and working practices of library staff members. This is an ethical commitment to focus on the background work that produces the library as a vital public asset and enables the library service to function. The thesis focusses on spaces, space-times and practices that we rarely get access to. Importantly this is also a political commitment: a focus on the background work of the library enables an exploration of the effects of austerity that are less visible or *invisible*. This research, then, *makes visible* the effects

of austerity that would otherwise remain invisible or *be made* invisible as a result of transformations taking place under austere conditions.

### **Austerity: An ideology, a discourse, a lived experience**

The United Kingdom has been in a state of austerity since 2010, emerging as a fiscal policy response to the 2007-2009 financial crisis. However, despite the United Kingdom's current austerity programme, austerity is not a new phenomenon. Rather, "it is a derivative of a wider set of beliefs about the appropriate role of the state in the economy that lie scattered around classical and contemporary economic theory" (Blyth, 2013a, pp. 16–17). The seventeenth-century philosophical works of Locke, Smith and Hume construct what Blyth calls the "can't live with it, can't live without it, don't want to pay for it" problems of the state in liberal economic theory, paving the way for austerity as an idea (ibid., p. 17, 106). Austerity can be traced back to 1692, according to Blyth, and is a doctrine which has been repeated on multiple occasions between 1914 and the present day.

Critical and political analysis understands austerity as an idea that, despite empirical refutation, refuses to disappear (Blyth, 2013a; Quiggin, 2012; Streeck, 2013). Austerity is a "zombie economic idea" precisely because it continues to return time and time again, even though it has continually failed as a fiscal policy (Quiggin, 2012, p. 233). The persistence of austerity as an idea makes austerity so dangerous for many (Blyth, 2013a; Krugman, 2012a). Austerity has repeatedly failed as a doctrine for its implementation has led to recessionary and depressive effects on the economy. In fact, Blyth goes as far as to say that previous implementations of austerity didn't just fail, they "helped to blow up the world" (ibid.: 204).<sup>1</sup> Understood in this way, austerity thus has an ideological character, as its ostensible necessity obscures the interests that it serves and the effects that it generates.

---

<sup>1</sup> Blyth (2013) and others have attributed the rise in the National Socialist in the 1930 German election to their anti-austerity stance. Austerity as enforced throughout 1920s Europe in the aftermath of World War One. France and the United Kingdom owed the United States hundreds of millions of dollars, whilst Germany was ordered to pay billions of Goldmarks in war reparations as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. Stringent austerity policies were put in place with the aim of repaying their debts.

Following the 2007-2009 financial crisis, what was a private sector banking crisis was rechristened by political and financial elites as a fiscal crisis of the sovereign state (Blyth, 2013a). The crisis was thereby redefined in ways that placed the focus for crisis-relieving interventions on government debt, shifting policy focus away from the financial services industry and towards public spending (Clarke and Newman, 2012). This paved the way for the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom to emphasise that there was a crisis surrounding national debt, and subsequently public spending. The Conservative Party's 2010 election manifesto argued:

*“Our national finances are mired in massive debt... We want your consent for a programme of public spending control.”* (The Conservative Party, 2010, pp. vii–viii)

The outcome of the 2010 general election was a hung parliament, which led to a coalition between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. The coalition government's relentless repetition of the UK's “record deficit” (Osborne, 2010a) rendered national debt a matter of immediate concern. Not only was the notion of a “debt crisis” still performed, but also that deficit reduction was “the most urgent issue facing Britain” (HM Government, 2010, p. 15):

*“[W]e want to be equally clear about what the potential consequences are if we fail to act decisively and quickly to cut spending, bring our borrowing down and reduce our deficit... If we fail to confront our problems we could suffer worse – a steady, painful erosion of confidence in our economy... If in Britain investors saw no will at the top of government to get a grip on our public finances, they would doubt Britain's ability to pay its way. That means they would demand a higher price for taking out debt on, interest rates would have to rise, investment would fall. If that were to happen, there would be no proper growth, there would be no real recovery, there would be no substantial new jobs – Britain's economy would begin an inevitable slide into decline.”* (Cameron, 2010)

A discourse was being constructed that deemed deficit reduction an urgent necessity in response to the debt crisis. This was a neat reversal in which it was argued that suffering



would not be a consequence of austerity measures, but would arise if such measures were avoided (Clarke and Newman, 2012). Cutting back on government spending, it was argued, would impress investors, and the expectation of lower future borrowing would lead to immediate higher investment spending, or what Krugman (2012a, p. 195) calls the ‘confidence fairy.’

Constructing the discourse of austerity as ‘necessity’ enabled the coalition government to begin implementing an agenda of sharp fiscal retrenchment and deficit reduction. Indeed, despite the fact that much of the growth in sovereign indebtedness was a result of costly bank bailouts and shrinking tax revenues during the crisis, the coalition constructed the notion that there had been ‘irresponsible spending’ by the preceding Labour government:

*“[M]uch of the deficit is structural. A problem built up before the recession, caused by government spending and planning to spend more than we could afford. It had nothing to do with the recession. And so growth will not sort it out.” (Cameron, 2010)*

The coalition government constructed the notion that the certain parts of Labour government spending were particularly irresponsible, including the welfare state<sup>2</sup> and local government.<sup>3</sup> This began to legitimate an *uneven distribution* of spending reductions that claimed to “[s]cale back the waste of the state” (Pickles, 2011). The construction of the austerity discourse, then, aligned the implementation of spending reductions with “[f]iscal responsibility” (Osborne, 2010b). This discourse created the conditions for the implementation of a sharp austerity agenda.

The particular framing of the coalition government’s fiscal austerity agenda thus meant that austerity began to be felt by individuals and groups of individuals throughout their everyday lives. The discourse of austerity paved the way for austerity to become lived experience.

---

<sup>2</sup> *“This culture of irresponsible spending had its roots in Britain’s welfare system... In government, Labour hiked spending by a massive 60%, rising even before the recession hit. Worse, in 2010, just before the election, in one year, Labour spent £90 billion on working age welfare – the same as the entire education budget for that very same year.” (Duncan-Smith, 2010)*

<sup>3</sup> *“In government, we are following the example of so many good Conservative councils: Doing more for less and delivering frontline services at value for money prices.” (Pickles, 2011)*

Initially, the ‘necessity’ of spending cuts was met with little challenge from politicians or the media (Levitas, 2012). Indeed, the coalition government constructed the notion that the “unavoidable deficit reduction plan” would, at the same time, be an opportunity to bring people together, often claiming that “[w]e are all in this together” (Cameron, 2010). Nonetheless, the discourse of “collective pain sharing”(Clarke and Newman, 2012, p. 203) quickly dissipated, and gradually too did the dominance of austerity as ‘necessity’. In fact, in October 2018, the UK Prime Minister Theresa May declared that “austerity is over” (May, 2018). However, whilst the dominant austerity discourse is ever more disputed within political dialogue, and despite the claim that austerity has ended, governmental spending reductions are still unrelenting and are planned to continue into the future.

In 2010, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, targeted £83 billion worth of savings in the public sector by 2014–2015, claiming that austerity would be complete by the end of the five-year parliament (Curtis, 2010). Yet, spending reductions have been persistent and ongoing well beyond 2015, carried forward by successive Conservative administrations. For the Keynesian critics discussed above who highlight the inherent failures of austerity, this is far from surprising. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that governmental departmental spending per person is continuing to fall in real terms. In 2009–10, departmental spending was equivalent to £6,460 per person. This fell to £5,460 in 2016–17, and is forecast to fall to £5,370 per person in 2019–20 (Emmerson, 2017). Significantly, and in line with criticisms of the supposedly irresponsible spending of the pre-crisis Labour governments, spending reductions have not been evenly distributed across departmental sectors, with particular departments facing disproportionate budgetary retrenchment. The Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Department for Communities and Local Governments have all seen a disproportionate reduction in funding since 2010, with further reductions planned (Emmerson, 2017). The Department for International Development and Ministry of Defence, in contrast, have actually seen their budgets rise in real terms (see Figure 1).

The Department for Communities and Local Government have, in particular, seen deep and ongoing spending reductions since 2010. An analysis by the National Audit Office stated that grants to local councils had been reduced on average by 49.1 percent in real terms over the period between 2010-2011 and 2017-2018, making local authorities the most squeezed of all areas of state activity under the austerity programme (Chu, 2018). Yet, this has also been geographically unevenly distributed across the UK, with the deepest cuts in local spending to date being generated in post-industrial cities in the North of England (Gray and Barford, 2018). The ten worst affected councils include Salford, South Tyneside, Wigan, Oldham, and Gateshead. And, this is set to continue for the foreseeable future. The central government funded Revenue Support Grant that supports local authorities will be completely eliminated by 2020. An analysis by the Local Government Association found that funding between 2015-2016 and 2019-20 will drop from £9,927 million to £2,284 million, with almost half of local authorities (168 of all local authorities) receiving *no* government funding, as they are expected to be self-sufficient (Bulman, 2018). As such, between 2019 and 2020, UK local authorities actually face the largest spending cuts since the commencement of the austerity agenda in 2010, with a 36 percent reduction in expenditure (ibid.).

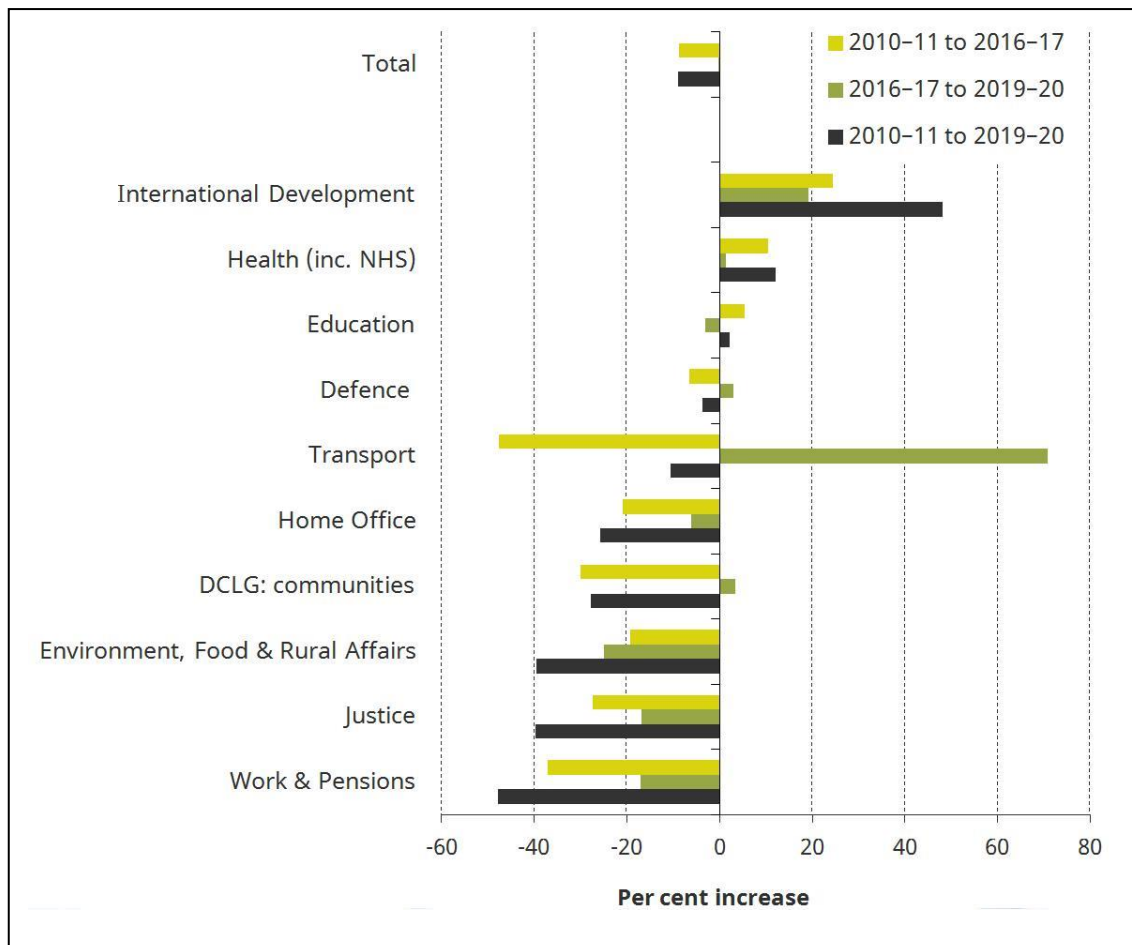


Figure 1 **Planned and real change to department expenditure limits by department** (Emmerson, 2017)

Local authorities in the United Kingdom are responsible for the provision of many services, including public libraries, swimming pools, community centres, street lighting, road maintenance and adult social care. Spending reductions, therefore, have *lived* and *felt* consequences. Lived austerity is becoming more and more significant, not only as budgets are being continually slashed, but also as its effects ripple out throughout communities in ways that extend beyond the implementation of the cuts themselves. Austerity as a *lived experience* will only become more entrenched in the foreseeable future, even as the visible constructors of the austerity discourse have all but disappeared from formal politics; as voiced by Paddy O’Connell, “a decade on, it’s all change for George Osborne, who runs a newspaper, and David Cameron, who’s run away” (“Broadcasting House,” 2018).

However, what is the lived experience of austerity and why does it matter? The ideology and discourse of austerity has paved the way for austerity to be implemented as a fiscal policy, but even as the discourse of austerity is becoming less dominant, austerity as a lived experience is ever more significant. The *implementation* of fiscal austerity transforms austerity into a very different phenomenon, namely something that is *lived* and *felt* in everyday life. Here, then, austerity is not simply something that is economic and which registers as the statistics of state expenditures, but it is also a social and cultural phenomenon. This thesis takes the everyday seriously as an object of inquiry. We do not simply live *with* austerity, but rather we *live austerity*: it becomes folded into our everyday lives so that austerity *becomes* everyday; austerity becomes mundane, ordinary, routine. In focussing on the mundane, the routine, ordinary, it points towards the ways in which the implementation of austerity has material and felt consequences for how people go about their everyday lives. Austerity becomes entangled with, and experienced and felt in, homes (Hall, 2016), children's centres (Jupp, 2013), food banks (Clope et al., 2017), libraries (Norcup, 2017), mental health services (Cummins, 2018), parks (Jorgensen, 2017), youth services (Horton, 2016), state schools (Adams, 2018), and so on.

Even as the discourse of austerity shifts and wanes, understanding austerity as an everyday experience is increasingly important. This thesis develops a micro-politics of austerity, by focussing on the taken-for-granted world (Gardiner, 2000). In doing so, it politicises austerity not as ideology that serves powerful interests, but by bringing to life the 'little things' (Stenning, 2018) that might otherwise be seemingly unimportant or insignificant. A concern with lived experience is to take seriously the multiple forms and objects through which austerity materialises, bringing austerity to the forefront of people's lives: the bare flowerbeds at the end of street (Raynor, 2016a), the empty kitchen cupboard (Garthwaite, 2016), the fear of receiving benefit sanctions (Garthwaite et al., 2018). These often remain invisible when austerity is explored at a macro-political scale (for example, Blyth, 2013; Krugman, 2012). Yet, focussing on the everyday does not necessarily make austerity easy to decipher.

Understanding austerity as lived means to focus on how it becomes embedded in lifeworlds, with all its complexities, its ambiguities, its rogue force fields (Stewart, 2011). Austerity in the

context of everyday life is experienced by living beings and, therefore, is understood *through* the lived and felt realities of individuals. This makes austerity a complex, messy and sometimes unintelligible phenomenon.

The lived experience of austerity, then, *matters*. The colossal reductions in government spending have real and meaningful effects on people's everyday lives and whether the cuts are anticipated or real they are certainly *felt* (McCormack, 2012). A wide-range of cross-disciplinary literature has turned its attention to the lived experience of austerity (for example, Bates et al., 2017; Garthwaite et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2015; Jupp, 2017); for the geographers who have contributed to this literature, such a focus is linked to a particular approach to drawing out the inherent spatiality of austerity in ways that include but go beyond the regional unevenness of fiscal retrenchment (for example, Ballas et al., 2017; Greer Murphy, 2017; Mattheys et al., 2016). Not only is everyday life a social, cultural and economic world, it is also inherently *spatial*. A geographical approach takes seriously the spatiality of austerity, including the sites, spaces and space-times in which austerity is made present. In other words, it understands austerity is always already spatial as it is lived.

### **The public library: A microcosm of lived austerity**

Everyday life is both everywhere and nowhere (Highmore, 2002); everyday life “allows no hold. It escapes” (Blanchot, 1987, p. 14). If everyday life can be characterised as everywhere and if it simultaneously escapes, it begs the question of how this can be researched. This might point towards the *multiple* sites and space-times in which and through which the everyday unfolds. As a result, it suggests, a consideration of the multiple space-times that austerity is lived (see for example, Raynor, 2016; van Lanen, 2017). However, it *also* points towards, I argue, an in-depth focus *on* and *within* specific sites and spaces. In particular, it points towards institutional spaces that have a distinct everyday life of their own; it is, perhaps, the specificity of everyday life within these spaces that come to define them as particular institutions. For example, the immigration detention centre, or the prison (Hemsworth, 2016; Martin and Mitchelson, 2009). Such spaces have their own practices, rhythms, routines and events; they

have a specificity that is rooted within such spaces that are hard to translate into other institutional spaces. Indeed, Billo and Mountz (2015) argue for a greater exploration of the quotidian practices and rhythms of life within institutional spaces. This thesis, then, rather than examining multiple spaces as part of an everyday life approach, takes a particular space as its starting point, and explores the subsequent everyday within it. This is not to suggest, however, that these institutional spaces are bounded, self-contained spaces; rather, they are also sites that also blur *with* wider lived experiences. As such, this approach to lived austerity that focuses on the everyday life of an institution, at the same time, understands that such spaces are always already porous and fluid. In doing so, it recognises that the lived experience of austerity in such spaces *blur* into wider experiences of living with austerity.

Significantly, an examination of the austerity within institutional spaces is also able to examine the *collectively* felt and experienced dimensions of austerity. It is the collective life of austerity that is central to this thesis; methodological approaches that involve an in-depth exploration of individual and familial relations to austerity (for example, Hall, 2016) may not be able to grasp austerity as it becomes collectively felt and participated in. Indeed, many accounts of austerity focus on the level of the individual (such as Hall, 2018), the household (see for example Hall, 2014) or the macro level of the public (including Forkert, 2017). Yet, there is limited attention to how austerity is made present at the institutional level (with the exception of Clayton et al., 2015; Horton, 2016). The institutional space, therefore, becomes a way in which to explore the everyday life, and more specifically, the collectively felt life, of austerity within it. In particular, however, this research offers a different account of austerity by focussing on the presence of austerity at the institutional level.

One such space in which austerity is made present is the public library. Public libraries are a vital part of local communities and an “indispensable part of people’s lives” (Proctor et al., 1997, p. 63). Functionally, libraries serve as: (a) a repository and guardian of society’s records; (b) a disseminator of information; (c) a universal educator; and, (d) a social advocate or activist through the marketing of its resources (Lees, 1997, p. 229). However, public libraries are also

so much more than their functionality. Indeed, the benefits of the library as a *space* as well as a service has been underestimated (Brewster, 2014).

Public libraries are sites of encounter; they are spaces in which people can meet “across cultural, ethnic, generational, and social lines in a complex multicultural and digitized society” (Aabø and Audunson, 2012, p. 138). The ‘micro-scale’ of library spaces results in encounters that compel people to confront and interact with one another, widening the capacity to live with difference (Peterson, 2017). Libraries simultaneously function as a “high intensive” as well as “low intensive” meeting places allowing both peripheral and active participation within the space (Audunson et al., 2011, p. 220). Libraries are sites of wellbeing. Libraries can become therapeutic landscapes as they are “simultaneously familiar and welcoming, comforting and calming” (Brewster, 2014, p. 94).

Libraries play an important role in the quality of life of both library users and non-users (Fujiwara et al., 2017); indeed, at a societal level, library usage is associated with reduced medical expenditures (ibid.). Libraries have been shown to reduce social isolation and loneliness, in particular as they are places where people come to meet others (Settle, 2016). Libraries offer an inclusive space for vulnerable individuals, such as people with disabilities (Jaeger et al., 2015), individuals with dementia (Reading Well, 2017) and people with mental health conditions (Brewster, 2014). Indeed, library staff themselves make a positive contribution to the mental health and wellbeing of those who utilise the library in their community, through informal acts such as helping people find books, discussing books with readers and fostering reading groups (Brewster, 2009). Library books are now also being issued on prescription by doctors, which aim to help users manage their wellbeing using self-help reading (Reading Well, 2013). Libraries are also sites of democracy. Within the space of the library individuals are characterised as library users, rather than through their profession or employment status (Aabø and Audunson, 2012, p. 138). In this sense libraries generate possibilities for active citizenship across social and economic and cultural difference (Aabø et



al., 2010). These qualities also make libraries socially inclusive spaces for individuals across the life course (Settle, 2016). As voiced by Lees (1997, p. 229):

*The library is seen to have power in its resources, and through their interpretation, to influence, modify, and even destroy, social, economic, politics, and physical parameters of its environment.”* (emphasis in original)

However, libraries face unprecedented challenges in times of austerity. As already highlighted, the Department of Communities and Local Government have been subjected to the biggest spending reductions out of all the governmental departments, and one of the services that local authorities are responsible for providing are public libraries. I wish not to ask the question of why libraries have become such disposable assets, for this simply re-affirms their construction as less valuable than they were before. Instead, I think it indicates Mattern’s (2019) emphasis that, “[o]ur libraries aren’t declining. They’re not failing us. We’re failing them.” Indeed, she goes on to state that “[i]f *all* libraries were sufficiently funded, staffed, stocked and maintained, they’d probably be thriving too.”

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide ‘comprehensive and efficient library services for all persons’ in accordance with the Public Libraries and Museum Act 1964 (*Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*, 1964, p. 6). Whilst the act is all too ambiguous about what a ‘comprehensive and efficient service’ means in practical terms and amidst stringent and ongoing cuts to public services, local authorities are nevertheless required to provide some sort of library service. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) reported a colossal fall in the number of libraries in the UK. In 2010, there were 4,446 public libraries in the UK, and by 2017 this number had fallen to just over 3,600 (CILIP, 2018). This reduction includes around 500 of these former public libraries that have been transformed into volunteer-run libraries. Accompanying this have been the loss of between 8,000 and 10,000 professional library jobs (ibid.). For CILIP:

*“This is not normal. This is not ‘living within our means’. This is a wholesale assault on a vital civic institution that is in turn a vital part of the fabric of an equal, prosperous and inclusive society.”* (CILIP, 2018)

This thesis, then, explores the everyday life of austerity within the library space, whilst always recognising the blurring *with* wider lived experiences of austerity. It tells a story about how the library is living with, and attempting to continue in the context of, austerity. It explores the practices, rhythms, events and also variegated spaces within the library through which austerity is made present, negotiated and related to. Significantly, it also pays particular attention to the *moments* of intensification of austerity. Additionally, this thesis takes seriously the library as a site of, paid and unpaid, working practices. It focuses predominantly on the mostly invisible background work carried out by library staff that enable libraries to be vital social institutions; it is this background work that allows the foreground of the library – or more colloquially, the public spaces of the library – to function. The thesis explores how austerity transforms and reconfigures these background working practices, and subsequently, its implications for foreground, public spaces of the library service. This marks a departure from existing work on institutional spaces in times of austerity that places user experience centrally within the lived experience of austerity (such as Horton, 2016; Jupp, 2013). Such work also places focus on the relations between institutional spaces and other spaces; this work, on the other hand, predominantly explores the circulations and relations within (and also beyond) the institutional space of the library.

### **The library service: A case study**

This research is based on a case study of a borough-wide library service in the North-East of England. For reasons of anonymity, the name of the local authority in which the service is based is omitted. However, this local authority is ranked within the highest quartile in the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation (GOV.UK, 2015); fifteen areas in this local authority are within the 10 percent most deprived areas in England (ibid.). As such, many of the libraries in

the borough are placed within areas of higher deprivation than the English average.<sup>4</sup> In line with the North-East of England as a region, the industries of mining and heavy engineering were central to the economy of this local authority. It suffered from the effects of deindustrialisation in the 1970s, resulting in unemployment, high levels of deprivation and financial and social exclusion.<sup>5</sup> Indeed the local authority itself emphasises that the effects of deindustrialisation are still being felt today.<sup>6</sup> Due to the inequalities that exist across the borough, some of the libraries in the study are situated in more affluent areas, whilst others are situated in less affluent areas.

This study involved carrying out eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork within this particular borough-wide library service. Since 2010, within this service, there have been ongoing budget reductions as a result of the continual spending reductions placed upon the local authority. Between 2010 and 2017 the authority lost 52 percent of its funding from central government and will no longer receive the Revenue and Support Grant by 2021.<sup>7</sup> The claim by the Conservative government, therefore, that “austerity is over” is simply not reflective of how austerity will be lived for many years to come.

As a response to the budget reductions imposed on this library service, there has been a strategic move to transform existing council-run libraries into volunteer-run libraries, rather than carrying out closures. At the time of the fieldwork, there were five volunteer-run libraries and one in transition from a council-run to volunteer-run library. However, the two types of libraries within the borough co-exist uncomfortably. As will be explored within the thesis, the creation of volunteer-run libraries has been seen by existing library staff as contributing to the deconstruction of the professionalism of library employment. Yet, from the perspective of the volunteers, they are keeping a service running that, without their intervention, would otherwise not exist. As a researcher I intentionally moved between and

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<sup>4</sup> The IMD rank number has been omitted to maintain anonymity.

<sup>5</sup> This information has been taken directly from the website from this local authority; however, it cannot be referenced in order to maintain anonymity.

<sup>6</sup> This is found on the local authority website, yet cannot be referenced for anonymity reasons.

<sup>7</sup> Source omitted in order to maintain anonymity.

lingered in the two types of libraries, carrying out research with multiple volunteer and council-run libraries.

To do this I conducted ethnographic fieldwork that was multi-faceted. I carried out research in multiple library spaces. I worked with multiple libraries, but more intensively with *one* council-run and *one* volunteer-run library. Within the former, I conducted participant observation within multiple spaces of the library, including the public library spaces – such as the café, the lending library and information services – and the background spaces, such as the staff room. Within the latter, I volunteered within the volunteer-run library for fourteen months. This involved carrying out daily library tasks, such as opening the library, discharging books to customers, assisting customers on the computers, replenishing bookshelves, sending overdue loan letters and generally talking to library customers. I also spent time in a library that was transitioning from a council-run to a volunteer-run library, and spent time in ten other council-run libraries throughout my eighteen months in the service. Additionally, I carried out research on multiple library practices. I spent time with library staff members on their shifts, accompanied van deliveries between libraries, escorted the mobile library throughout the borough. Furthermore, I carried out research in multiple library space-times. I distinguish this from library spaces, for they were particular ‘events’ – often reoccurring – in which austerity was brought to the fore, including anti-austerity protests, council cabinet meetings and employee engagement sessions. Within all such spaces, practices and space-times, I carried out participant observation and wrote (auto)ethnographic fieldnotes.<sup>8</sup> In addition to participant observation, I carried out numerous semi-structured interviews across multiple volunteer and council-run libraries. I carried out twenty-three interviews with library volunteers (across three volunteer-run libraries), fourteen interviews with library staff members (across five council-run libraries), seven interviews with library customers (across one council-run and one volunteer-run library) and attended five focus

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<sup>8</sup> I name this ‘(auto)ethnographic’ for I recognise within my use of ethnographic methods the researcher’s self as central to the investigation (Anderson and Austin, 2012; Stevenson and Farrell, 2018).

groups with library customers (across five council-run libraries).<sup>9</sup> Throughout the process I wrote ethnographic fieldnotes based on my fieldwork experience.

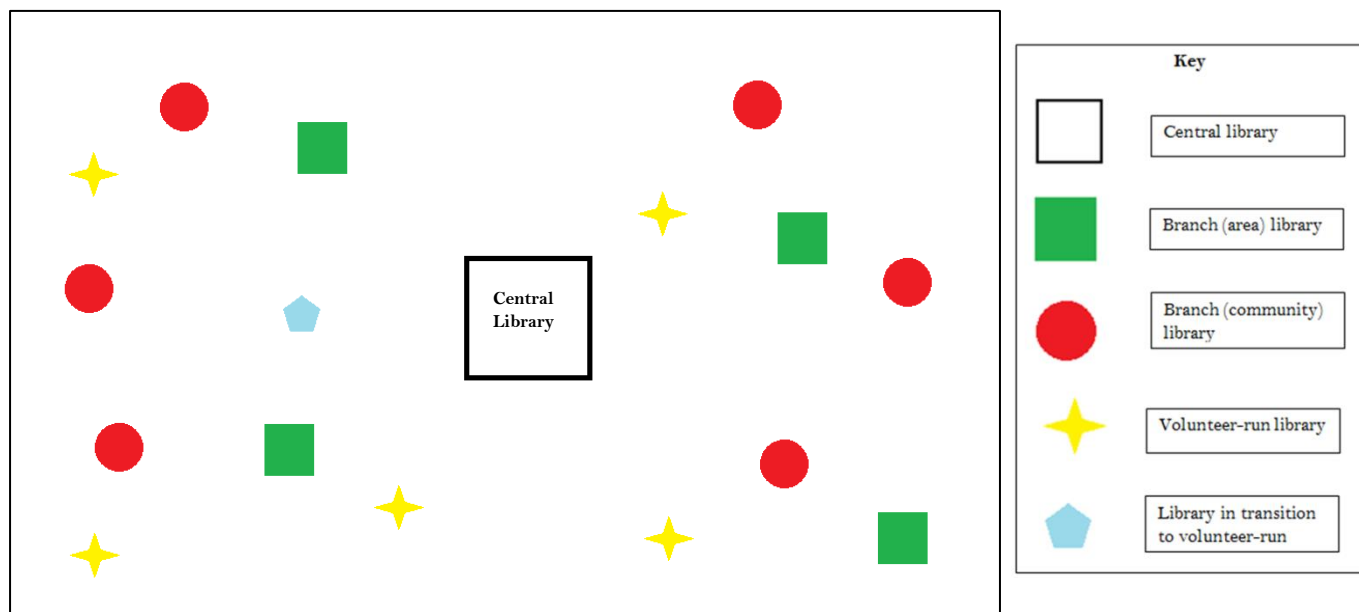


Figure 2 **Diagram of libraries across the borough, North-East England (at time of fieldwork)**

At the time of conducting fieldwork (between September 2015 and February 2017) the borough wide library service had a range of different types of the libraries in operation (see Figure 2). The types of libraries can broadly be understood in terms of the size of the libraries. The central library, where I spent the majority of my fieldwork, was the pivot of the service; this had a range of services that were transferred to and from the different libraries, such as book stocks that were moved between libraries. Second, were four area libraries that were situated across the borough, which were smaller than the central library and acted as a connection between the central library and the community libraries (although in practice they are all connected in a network). Thirdly, the community libraries were the smallest in size (in terms of physical size of the library and staff numbers). Fourthly, there are volunteer-run libraries that were created (from council-run libraries) as a result of austerity. This service

<sup>9</sup> These focus groups were carried out by the library service as part of a public consultation, but I was given consent by the library service and the library customers themselves to use the data for research purposes.

does not have an integrated system between volunteers and council library staff, but instead are run separately. However, as will be explored throughout the thesis, although volunteers do not directly work alongside library staff, their relationship is far from a dissolution of ties. Finally, there was also a library that (at the time of fieldwork) was in transition from being a council-run library to becoming a volunteer-run library.

It is widely understood amongst the library staff members that the experience of working in the branch libraries is different to working the central library:

*“[T]he culture is very different. In the branches you get to know your customers more. Erm, but obviously you're not dealing with the quantity of issues. You get more, sort of general council enquiries, people needing help, but obviously the complex book enquires tend to come in here. I think it's fair to say it's more relaxed in the branches.”* (Penny)

*“In branch libraries you tend to get to know your customers, you get to know an area, so you get to know an area well. So if, I dunno, if the shop down the road closes you can see the knock on effect on the people who come in, the people who are looking for a job. [...] You can see the effect on a community rather than just on individuals, because in a branch it all kind of links together. So the individuals who come in, you tend to know them, and you tend to get to know them quite well because it tends to be similar people... You get to know them so it becomes personal and it becomes personal to them as well - the fact that their library is under threat.”* (Jannah)

*“[I]t's a bit more regimented in central library, there's more people so you have to kind of do that task that you're set to do, otherwise everybody would be doing everything and nothing would get done. Branch library is slightly different where there's perhaps two staff or lone working where “you do everything, you've got to get on with stuff or it doesn't get done. And you build up that closer relationship with people, so I've known in the last couple of months the numbers of funerals we've attended from customers, now that's a funny situation is that you attend the funeral of a customer, or a customer's family... that's not a normal workplace thing,*

*you would perhaps go to colleagues funerals but not your customers, do you know what I mean, so you're building up that really close relationship with people all the time.” (Jude)*

*“It's completely different being here [central library] from what it was being in branch libraries. I think you've got more freedom in a branch library and it's almost like you get close to customers whereas I think you're not if you're allowed to chat to customers, you are but I think it's a bit more strict in a way here. It's regimented and I suppose it has to be cos there's that many staff. But I think I'm enjoying it more than I thought I would, cos I haven't been here for 20-odd years, like I say it's a freedom in a branch but I love the variety, you're timetabled down as somewhere different every hour and I just love the variety and the day just flies over.” (Jenny)*

Branch libraries are understood to be a more relaxed working environment than the central library, which is seen as more regimented. The branch libraries are also understood to be more personal, as there is a deeper relationship between the customer and the library staff. As a result, they see the effect austerity is having upon their customers on a much more intimate level. Austerity, however, has resulted in a drastic cut in the number of staff within the communities libraries. Community libraries now regularly have just one person operating the library at any one time. This poses a variety of difficulties for staff members, for example, when a customer requires one-on-one support. Area libraries and central library have also faced a reduction in staff as a result of austerity.

## **Contributions of the research**

There are three main contributions of this thesis.

Firstly, this thesis makes a timely contribution to how austerity is understood. This thesis takes understandings of austerity in a new direction by conceptualising austerity as lived and felt in everyday life. Dominant accounts place the economic centrally within understandings of austerity. Much of this literature struggles to see austerity as more than budgets and their deficits (for example, Guajardo et al., 2014; Jordà and Taylor, 2016; Perotti, 2013). In doing so

it re-affirms austerity as a 'thing' that is imagined through its 'economic-ness' (Clarke, 2010). Austerity as lived, however, understands austerity as always *more than* economic, as it also becomes social and cultural. This thesis, then, does not jettison austerity as a fiscal policy, but rather emphasises that austerity is also a phenomenon that is rooted in lived experience. To do this, the thesis builds on everyday geographies to explore what lived austerity looks like, how it shapes everyday spaces, practices, rhythms and habit. It complements and builds on work that explores austerity as it is made present within various everyday spaces (including Clayton et al., 2015; Garthwaite et al., 2018; Jupp, 2013; Kirwan, 2016). Where the thesis differs, however, is an explicit conceptualisation of what it means to take austerity as lived experience.

A key part of this conceptualisation is an explicit attention to how austerity is *felt*. This thesis has a particular understanding of felt austerity that is rooted in non-representational theory. This approach builds on the expansive field of affect (for example, Anderson, 2014; Bissell, 2014; McCormack, 2012), in focussing on a particular *form* of lived experience – namely its affective presence. This builds on emergent work that examines austerity's affective manifestations (Coleman, 2016; Deville, 2015; Raynor, 2016). In particular, this thesis explores how austerity ebbs and flows in intensity, how it takes particular affective forms, and how it shapes capacities to feel and act. This approach to austerity, then, provides a differing perspective to many existing accounts of austerity through placing austerity's *affective* presence centrally within lived experience. Crucially, however, this thesis also offers a new approach to many existing accounts of austerity, and many accounts of affective austerity, by examining the ways in which austerity takes the form of collective feeling. What this thesis focuses upon are the ways in which austerity becomes shared and collectively participated in, or what Anderson (2014) calls a 'transpersonal intensity'. As such, this research conceptualises austerity as an affective atmosphere that envelops multiple space-times of the everyday. It examines how austerity becomes the 'background noise' of everyday life that ebbs and flows in its intensity, how it emerges in order to make itself present. This moves forward understandings of austerity by placing collective feeling centrally within lived experiences of austerity, something that is particularly significant within institutional spaces like the library.



In doing so, this approach to austerity bridges capital-centric approaches to austerity with everyday life. This generates a new perspective that recognises that understandings of austerity need neither be one or the other, but rather that they are intertwined as austerity becomes lived. This approach is therefore useful for capital-centric understandings of austerity precisely because it complements rather than jettisons austerity as an economic phenomenon, by emphasising that austerity is always more than economic as it is lived.

Secondly, this thesis makes a contribution to conceptualisations of collective feeling, which has implications for how geography and beyond geography might understand feelings or affects that become collective. This work pushes forward debates on the temporality of collective affect, and in particular the temporality of affective atmospheres. Whilst there has been substantial focus on their spatiality (including, Lin, 2015; McCormack, 2008; Morris, 2018), less attention has been paid to the temporality of affective atmospheres. This work builds on work that takes seriously the temporal life of atmospheres (see Edensor, 2012; Shaw, 2014; Stewart, 2011; Sumartojo, 2016), through examining the ways in which atmospheres re-emerge throughout everyday life.

To do this, the thesis offers a new intervention about what a turn to psychoanalytic concepts might offer when considering a range of collectively felt affects, such as affective atmospheres, structures of feeling and moods. The turn towards psychoanalytic concepts is a way in which to consider the temporality of collective feeling. It provides resources moving debates beyond simply presence or absence of collective feeling towards a 'fuzzy' presence. It also allows us to consider *how* this felt sense of fuzziness emerges – through the continual *re*-emergence of collective feeling. Here, it finds interest in the ways in which the unconscious finds expression or make itself felt in conscious life. Yet, when taking them beyond the notion of subjective transformation and the ontological stance of the unconscious, towards collective life, they became a way in which to examine how collective feelings have a felt sense of re-emergence.

Relatedly, it provides scope for thinking about temporality through a consideration atmospheres as the 'background noise' of everyday life, as they erupt from time to time into

the foreground. Often, focus has been paid to the *moments* of intensification themselves, rather than the fact that it also indicates a repetition of intensification. Consideration of these intensifications as a seriality (Latham and McCormack, 2009) remains under examined. In other words, focus has been paid to the intensifications as events themselves, rather than thinking about the relationship *between* these events. A turn to psychoanalytic concepts, therefore, enables consideration for the seriality of intensification that again produces temporality, through a felt sense of re-emergence. This moves debates forward on the collective feeling and its relationship between past and present.

Thirdly, this thesis provides a methodological contribution, through developing the concept and practice of lingering. In doing so, it offers a methodological tool through which to carry out affective research, as well as ethnographic research more broadly. Lingering becomes a tool through which to hold onto and stay with affective presence; lingering ‘provides room’ for affects and allows them to speak. This approach complements existing work on attunement (for example, Stewart, 2011), yet with an explicit attention to temporality, as it opens up space for affects to continue or persist through the feelings and actions of the researcher.

In addition, lingering offers a methodological tool for ethnographic research outside of an affective approach. Lingering becomes a spatial practice through staying *with* a particular research site – to allow it to speak. This allows the research site to speak, and reveals its everyday life that might otherwise be swept under the taken-for-grantedness of daily life. As a result, this opens up the possibility for making visible the micro-transformations within the space(s) that would otherwise go unnoticed. Lingering is also a tool through which to stay *within* space-times themselves. This is an intentional act, in which the fieldworker spatially and temporally lengthens their presence as a means through which to generate research encounters. This has applications for researching everyday geographies. At its core, lingering involves a pushing of the boundaries of what is deemed temporally and spatially ‘usual’ within the everyday. Whilst this may superficially appear problematic, it is central to how the process of lingering occurs within an ethnographic approach. Whilst this is something that can be

attributed to conventional ethnography, lingering ethnographic practice offers a new perspective by working *with* these thresholds rather than shying away from them. In other words, this practice is attempting to explore what these thresholds might tell us about the life-worlds and space-times that we are lingering in. Seeking out these thresholds opens up worlds that might otherwise remain invisible. This has application for researchers examining everyday life across a range of sites and spaces. This also has useful application for existing feminist work on embodied research practice.

## **Structure of the thesis**

The rest of the thesis is divided into six main chapters.

Chapter two, 'Austerity: Lived and felt in the everyday' develops the theoretical and conceptual framework that grounds the thesis. The chapter examines what it means to take a non-representational theoretical approach to austerity. It explores what it means to understand austerity as lived and felt in everyday life. To do so, the chapter brings together five bodies of literature: (1) austerity (2) everyday geographies (3) affective life and (4) collective feeling. The chapter argues that when considering austerity as lived and felt in everyday life, it can form an affective presence that shapes capacities to feel and act. Yet, importantly, this affective presence can also take the form of collective feeling. This pushes forward the importance of a geographical approach to austerity, by emphasising why the spatiality and temporality of austerity matters to lived experience. The question of collective feeling also raises important debates around the relationship between singularity and the collective; in particular, when considering the movement from the individual to the collective, or more precisely, when austerity *becomes* something shared rather than simply individually experienced. To do so, the chapter brings together two bodies of literature that are usually separated in affect debates: analysis inspired by Spinozist-Deleuzian understandings of affect and psychoanalytic geographical accounts of affect. Yet, this research is not developing a psychoanalytic account of austerity. Rather, it examines what psychoanalytic concepts might be able to bring to the question of collective feeling.

Chapter three, 'Lingering: a methodological tool' is a methodological chapter that places the practice of lingering centrally within affective research and ethnographic research more broadly. It builds upon chapter one by providing a methodological tool through which to explore collective feeling and also the temporality of collective feeling. The chapter builds upon Kathleen Stewart's concept of 'atmospheric attunement.' It argues that the practice of lingering is actually very much present within the methodological concept of atmospheric attunement, yet has not explicitly been explored; the act of attuning is actually as much a temporal practice as it is a spatial one. Lingering becomes a way in which to carry out attunement, but with an explicit attention to its temporality. The chapter, therefore, argues that lingering is central to researching affective atmospheres and their temporalities. The chapter subsequently argues that lingering is a tool through to which carry out ethnographic research. It argues that by the nature of this methodological approach, ethnographers *linger*. Ethnographers spatially and temporally lengthen their presence as a means through which to generate research encounters. This reconfiguration of time and space enables the ethnographer to *be in* and also *attune* very differently *to* particular space-times; in other words, lingering allows them to engage in a space longer than would be usual or necessary within the habitual parameters or rhythms of everyday life. This chapter, therefore, provides a methodological tool which not only takes seriously austerity as *atmosphere*, but also attunes to the *temporality* of atmospheric austerity. This grounds the empirical focus, explored in subsequent chapters four, five and six.

Chapter four, 'Uncanny atmospheres and paranoid temporalities' is the first of three empirical chapters based on ethnographic fieldwork in the North-Eastern borough library service. The chapter centres on a particular space-time in the library where austerity was made intensely present – the employee engagement session. The employee engagement was a site of revelation for library staff members about future spending reductions to the service. These sessions have a particular relationship with the *unknown*, due to the previously unknown knowledge about budget reductions that emerges within them. As a result, this chapter brings together psychoanalytic and Spinozist-Deleuzian accounts of affect to explore austerity as an

uncanny atmosphere. Based on the employee engagement sessions, it argues that austerity is lived through a series of unknowns that *re-emerge* throughout the everyday (working) life of the library. The chapter then goes on to argue that paranoia subsequently emerges as a way in which to live within and resolve the uncanny atmosphere – to make known the unknowns generated by austerity. This paranoia cannot be attributed to ‘paranoid individuals,’ but to practices that become paranoid due to the blurring of reality and fiction that the uncanny generates. Here, then, the uncanny and paranoia also become a way of exploring the unknown that is central to how austerity is made present within the library space. As austerity continues year after year, the uncertainties that emerge as a result of continual budget reductions are at the same time felt as something already known. In other words, there is a felt sense that austerity will inevitably lead to the contraction of the library service. Lived austerity, therefore, now carries such weight and has a particular depth of experience due to the innumerable previous encounters with austerity.

Chapter five, ‘Austerity melancholia’, is based on ethnographic work with both council-run and volunteer-run libraries and concerns the relationship between transformation and experiential loss in the library space. It builds on the previous chapter’s focus on questions of austerity’s unknowns and also their re-emergence. To do this, the chapter introduces and develops the concept of austerity melancholia. The chapter firstly explores the practice of the ‘the cut’, arguing that it is not simply a vocabulary used to describe budget reduction. Rather, the cut is the starting point of series of complex transformations that are taking place as budgets are being shrunk. The chapter focusses on a particular transformation that is now a familiar part of library services in times of austerity – namely that of volunteerisation. Significantly, the chapter argues that these transformations generate an ambivalence within the library space about what exactly has been lost as a result of austerity. The chapter draws upon Freud’s conceptualisation of melancholia, to argue that many losses as a result of austerity have been made elusive through the process of transformation. Such losses, however, do not simply disappear; these losses have a nagging return into everyday life, but they do so in a form in which the losses are not necessarily recognisable – the re-emergent loss is

encrypted. Here, the lost object speaks, but not necessarily in a way that points it towards that which has been lost. This results in the loss of austerity becoming refracted away from austerity towards other issues and practices in the library. Not only does this become a way of examining experiential loss in times of austerity, it is also a way of holding onto that which is made unknown or unknowable with the affective life of austerity.

Chapter six, 'Pessimistic futures' is a chapter that examines the relationship between futility and a collective feeling of pessimism within the library space. It builds on the previous two chapters' focus on austerity's temporalities but in particular the previous chapter's focus on the refraction of austerity's affects and actions. The chapter firstly explores the way in which the ongoing state of austerity has generated a feeling of futility regarding the future of the library service. Collectively felt pessimism subsequently becomes an expression of this sense of futility. Pessimism becomes a way for library staff members to avoid holding onto the promise that any positive action will make a difference to the (futile) futures of the library service in times of austerity. Significantly, this results in a displacement of affects and actions. Due to the futility of the library service, staff members attach to hopes that do not promise a change in the life course of austerity (since this would fail from the outset). Hope without optimism is fostered: a belief amongst staff that they are able to continue the vibrancy of the library service. Yet, this belief is *still* placed in the context of austerity and subsequently within the overall futility of the service. Additionally, precisely because austerity itself is not deemed to be actionable, acts of resistance within the service become displaced onto more proximate and actionable issues. In other words, into issues staff members feel they have the ability to shape. Austerity's sense of futility therefore can result in a lack of action, or action that is directed away from austerity itself.

Chapter seven, 'Conclusion' brings together an account of lived austerity that is rooted in collective feeling and its temporality. It draws on main overarching themes: (1) austerity has a *re-emergent* presence (2) austerity involves living with the co-existence of knowns and unknowns (3) austerity's effects generates a displacement of affects and actions. This leads me

to conclude that austerity as an atmospheric presence can become a form of 'gaslighting.' Here austerity manipulates lived realities through a blurring of reality and fiction. For some, austerity is acutely felt, yet for others it simply is not. The conclusion goes on to argue that (negative) collective feelings of austerity, paradoxically, diminish the ability to respond to austerity collectively. Finally, the chapter concludes by suggesting how we might develop a more resonant anti-austerity politics. This might be achieved through bringing together a lived and affective account of austerity with more discursive accounts. In so doing, it bridges a visceral and discursive politics that generates the link between feeling and contemporary conditions

## Chapter Two

### Austerity: Lived and felt in the everyday

#### **Introduction**

This chapter conceptualises austerity as a phenomenon that is lived and felt in everyday life. The previous introductory chapter explored the way in which austerity was ideologically and discursively constructed as an economic necessity within the United Kingdom. Whilst this discourse of austerity is now being challenged, austerity as a lived experience is only becoming more significant. The felt effects of austerity are intensifying. Building on this move away from the discursive and the dominance of the economic, the contribution of this chapter is three-fold. Firstly, this chapter focusses on austerity as having real and meaningful effects in everyday life through conceptualising austerity as lived and felt. Secondly, it conceptualises austerity as not simply an economic, but also a social and cultural phenomenon. Thirdly, in understanding austerity as lived and felt, this chapter takes seriously austerity's affective presence. It seeks to conceptualise the ways in which austerity shapes capacities to feel and act, but also how austerity becomes collectively felt. In other words, the conceptual development across the chapter is attentive to how austerity becomes something shared and collectively participated in, but simultaneously individually and differentially attuned to.

To do this, the chapter will examine discursive conceptualisations of austerity that understand austerity as an ideology and as a cultural object. It will argue that these understandings of austerity are already bound up with questions of temporality that have not been explicitly drawn out. It also examines these accounts in order to move away from work that reduces austerity to its 'economic-ness', indicating how it becomes entangled with the cultural.

However, there are limits to discursive accounts of austerity. As a result, the chapter subsequently turns to the question of everyday life, examining what it means to take austerity as an everyday phenomenon. This allows us to consider austerity as an ambiguous presence, as



well as consider its everyday temporalities and spatialities. This indicates, therefore, that austerity is also a temporal and spatial phenomenon. However, this highlights a lacunae in existing literature on everyday austerity – how austerity is *felt*. As a result, the chapter then turns towards a conceptualisation of austerity as *affective*. In particular this enables consideration of how austerity is made affectively present, in particular how it shapes capacities to feel and act. However, the chapter argues that under-examined within geographical literature is how austerity is felt collectively. Thus, it turns to a conceptualisation of affective atmospheres as a way of considering collective affect, but also as a way of exploring the ambiguity of lived austerity. Finally, the chapter proposes what a consideration of psychoanalytic concepts might offer the question of collective feeling. Importantly, this is not a psychoanalytic account of austerity, but rather asks what the emergence and re-emergence of the unconscious that is present in psychoanalytic accounts might be able in relation to the temporality of collective feeling.

## **1. PERSISTING AUSTERITY**

For many, austerity in the United Kingdom has become a source for concern. Since the initial implementation of the austerity agenda in 2010, think tanks and research organisations have been documenting austerity's unevenly distributed effects. Particular groups within the UK have been disproportionately impacted by the austerity programme. Austerity has been understood as an inherently gendered agenda, disproportionately affecting women. Analysis by the Women's Budget Group and the Runnymede Trust estimated that the cuts have cost women approximately £79 billion compared to costing men £13 billion since 2010. Yet, these uneven impacts also intersect with other inequalities (Hall et al., 2017). The inequality of austerity intersects with race and class. The lowest socio-economic families have lost a disproportionate amount through the cuts, with a 17% drop in living standards (ibid.), and in particular lone mothers, who represent 92% of lone parents, have experienced an average drop in living standards of 18%. However, it is British Asian Minority Ethnic (BME) women who

are most disproportionately affected by austerity; Black and Asian households with the lowest fifth of incomes have experienced the biggest drop in living standards of 19.2% and 20.1% respectively (ibid.).

Austerity has been understood to have disproportionately impacted upon low socio-economic households; the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) revealed that the poorest tenth of households will lose on average 10% of their total income by 2022, compared to just 1% for the richest tenth (Butler, 2017). The impact was in particular due to the cumulative impact of austerity measures in social security, public spending policies and tax reforms, including universal credit, VAT and the national minimum wage.

Austerity has disproportionately impacted upon people with disabilities, in particular through reductions in Disability Living Allowance (or what now been transformed to Personal Independence Payment). A 2016 United Nation's report inspecting the UK's record on disability rights concluded that the UK government was guilty of "grave or systematic violations of the rights of persons with disabilities" (Lambert, 2017).

The effects of austerity have also shown to unreasonably impact upon people with mental health conditions. An independent report commissioned by the National Health Service (NHS) stated that the mental health services required an additional one billion pounds funding by 2020/21 (Mental Health Taskforce, 2016). Yet, an analysis by the Royal College of Psychiatrists indicated that government spending cuts have resulted in sixty-two percent of mental health trusts receiving less funding in 2016-17 than in 2012. Austerity, then, is a gendered, classed, racialized and ableist agenda.

Yet, how is austerity understood differently, not in terms of its impacts and effects but as an ongoing process? How does austerity reconfigure and transform everyday space-times? How can austerity be understood through its moments of intensification? How might they attune to austerity differently? In particular, this chapter examines what an attention to the everyday and the affective offers for conceptualisations of austerity. To begin, however, this section explores how austerity has been conceptualised in discursive terms, as both an ideology and as

a cultural object. Austerity's discursive existence has become a significant way in which to understand the phenomenon.

### **Austerity as the ideology of deficit reduction**

*“Austerity is a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state’s budgets, debt, and deficits. Doing so, its advocates believe, will inspire ‘business confidence’ since the government will neither be ‘crowding out’ the market for investment by sucking up all the available capital through the issuance of debt, nor adding to the nation’s already ‘too big’ debt.” (Blyth, 2013a, p. 2)*

Austerity has been dominantly understood as a fiscal policy (Guajardo et al., 2014; Jordà and Taylor, 2016; Perotti, 2013). This places centrally the relationship between the economy and the state. Austerity is understood as ‘expansionary’ in that a reduction in state spending aims to inspire ‘business confidence’ and economic growth. This is closely aligned with economic theory that centres on the concept of ‘crowding out’; here, it is understood that an increase in sovereign debt reduces private investment, capital formation, and spending by generating credit scarcity and leading the market to raise interest rates (Langley, 2014, p. 154). From this perspective, expansionary austerity becomes a way in which to mitigate the ‘crowding out’ effect of sovereign debt. Krugman (2012) calls expansionary austerity the ‘confidence fairy’, which claims that the cutting back of government spending leads to higher demand by reducing interest rates or by leading people to expect lower future taxes. Here spending cuts to reduce deficits are understood to result in economic expansion (see in particular Alesina and Ardagna, 2010; Alesina and Giavazzi, 2012; Giavazzi and Pagano, 1990). The work of Reinhart and Rogoff (2010) was significantly drawn upon as justification to making drastic cuts in the response to the 2007-2009 financial crisis, including former Chancellor George Osborne (see Osborne, 2010a). Indeed, Krugman (2013) went as far as to argue that this paper had “more immediate influence on public debate than any previous paper in the history of economics.”

The notion of ‘expansionary austerity’, however has been profusely challenged, for two main reasons: as a neoliberal project and as a fallacy. Firstly, the contemporary austerity agenda has not simply been implemented in the UK, but across many democratic capitalist political economies, and has been understood as part of a wider neoliberal agenda (Peck, 2012; Schrecker and Bambra, 2015). For Streeck (2014), even before the 2008 financial crisis, it was generally taken for granted that the fiscal crisis of the post-war state had to be resolved by lowering spending, instead of raising taxes with a particular focus on the rich. This understanding goes back to what James O’Connor (1973) calls ‘the fiscal crisis of the state,’ in which society’s demand on local and state budgets are seemingly unlimited, but people’s willingness and capacity to pay for these demands appear to be narrowly limited (O’Connor, 1973, p. 1).

Post-war Keynesianism understood that in times of recession, when confidence was low, government debt would increase in order to stimulate the economy with their own spending (Crouch, 2011). The Keynesian model thereby implied large state budgets to ensure that changes within them would have adequate effect at the level of the national economy (ibid.). This model, according to Crouch (2011) protected ordinary people from the rapid fluctuations of the market that brought instability to their lives (for example in the Great Depression). Yet, as the Keynesian model faced its own crisis in the 1970s (with the crisis of inflation), this paved the way for a challenge to Keynesianism through neoliberalism, or what Crouch (2009) calls privatised Keynesianism. Unlike a post-war Keynesian model, where the state would further their own debt to stimulate the economy, in privatised Keynesianism, low to middle income households stimulated the economy through taking on private debt. Central to neoliberalism, then, is an opposition to *public* debt.

With the ‘crisis of the fiscal state’, then, there had been rising public debt in democratic capital political economies since the 1970s, and following an initial period of fiscal consolidation in the 1990s, public debt took an “unprecedented leap” in response to the Great Recession (Streeck, 2013, p. 1). Thus, there were already renewed consolidation efforts in response to

this leap in public debt under the pressure of financial markets, in which there was a general decline in state expenditure, in particular investment expenditure and retrenchment and privatisation of state functions (ibid.). In other words, neoliberal thinking began to replace post-war Keynesian economics, most notably in the UK and the US from 1979 onwards (Castree, 2010; Turner, 2008). Thus, contemporary austerity is understood here as a continuation of the entrenchment of the neoliberal state, in which the state is rolled back and replaced by the logic of the market (Peck et al., 2018; Schwiter et al., 2018). Yet, importantly, for Streeck (2013), the 2008 financial crisis marked the beginning of a new era in the politics of public debt and the relationship between global capitalism and the state system. What was a financial crisis turned into a fiscal crisis, enabling a shift away from the actions of the financial service industry towards a focus on public spending (Blyth, 2013a; Clarke and Newman, 2012). This movement from a financial crisis into a fiscal crisis is central to austerity as a neoliberal project:

*“The objectives of ‘austerity’ neatly align with those of neoliberalism: to discipline labour, to reduce the role of the state and to redistribute income, wealth and power from labour to capital. We might therefore interpret this current turn to, or age of, ‘austerity’ as the most recent translation of neoliberal rhetoric which has a much longer history than the current crisis.”*

(Jensen, 2012, p. 23)

The construction of the sovereign debt crisis, then, and the subsequent need for public spending control opened the door for further retrenchment in public expenditure, in particular, privatisation and the withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision (Harvey, 2005). At the same time, within neoliberal states, private debt is understood as desirable (Crouch, 2011), to the extent that states, as argued by Susanne Soenderberg (2014), have become ‘debtfare states,’ in which there has been a normalisation of the use of credit to augment or replace the living wage or the government welfare support.

Secondly, and relatedly, the notion of ‘expansionary austerity’ has been disputed for being a fallacy. The myth of austerity is that it can lead to an expansion of the economy, which is

reality, it has actually has the effect of depressing the economy (Boyer, 2012; Krugman, 2015). It is not enough for the confidence-related effects to exist, they have to be strong enough to more than offset the depressionary effects of austerity itself (Krugman, 2012b, p. 196). Time and time again across history, the implementation of austerity has resulted in an economic depression, rather than an intended expansion of the economy (Blyth, 2013a). Blyth argues that austerity is based on a ‘fallacy of composition’ through the belief that states are able to cut their way to growth. He draws on Keynes’ concept of the “paradox of thrift,” which emphasised that “if we all save at once there is not consumption to stimulate investment” (Blyth, 2013a, p. 8). This Keynesian critique is grounded in the Great Depression in 1930s America, in which balancing the books was seen as a necessity following the economic crash, which resulted in the worst depression in American history (ibid.).

There is something particularly important here about both refutations of expansionary austerity. Both understand *austerity as an ideology that refuses to disappear*. With the former, austerity becomes part of a neoliberal ideology that simply persists despite the crisis of neoliberal capitalism; or what Castree (2010) terms the paradoxical continued strength of neoliberal capitalism *despite itself*. Austerity, then, becomes the “medicine” that is prescribed in response to the financial crisis, but is “more of the same” neoliberal project (Grimshaw and Rubrey, 2012; Rubrey et al., 2012). As a result, austerity becomes a “neoliberal reform cure” of its own disease that requires “stripping society of its remaining defenses and throwing it into the icy waters of an untamed market economy in the hope that it will eventually start swimming” (Streeck, 2013, p. 19).

Additionally, with the latter refutation of expansionary austerity, austerity is understood as having depressionary effects on the economy. Yet, despite repeated empirical contradiction, austerity becomes a “zombie economic idea” that continues to return (Quiggin, 2012, p. 233). Whilst the significance of austerity as an idea has been downplayed by some,<sup>10</sup> Blyth (2013b)

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<sup>10</sup> Others, however, have downplayed the significance of austerity as an idea upon the implementation of the austerity doctrine. (Jabko, 2013) argues that austerity is not simply a tool for pursuing conservative agendas, but also appealing to many political actors of all colours. Thus, he emphasises that the appeal

argues that like all ‘good’ ideologies, austerity has a defining feature: it is immune to empirical refutation. This is exemplified in the figures for UK sovereign debt as percentage of GDP. Since 2010 austerity has actually contributed to a considerable increase of UK sovereign indebtedness; in 2010 the United Kingdom recorded a government debt equivalent to 64.6 percent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product, yet this had risen to 85.3 percent in 2017 (“United Kingdom Public Sector Net Debt to GDP,” n.d.). This, however, has been lost amidst the discourse of ‘the deficit’ (as explored in the previous chapter), as austerity policies have been targeted at reducing the difference between current expenditure and current borrowing rather than reducing sovereign indebtedness overall. Austerity persists despite the evidence. Both these understandings of, and challenges to, austerity are significant, then, as they indicate that austerity as an ideology refuses to disappear.

### **‘Austerity culture’: frugality and thrift**

The persistence of austerity is not just confined to conceptualisations of austerity as an ideology. It is also part of how austerity is understood as a “cultural object” and a “subject-making discourse” (Jensen and Tyler, 2012). The work of Rebecca Bramall (2013a, 2013b, 2011) is particularly significant here. Bramall moves away from the dominant understanding of austerity as a fiscal policy arguing there is a need to recognise other meanings of austerity, and in particular meanings that can be potentially productive. In fact, Bramall argues that the dominant discourse of austerity as deficit reduction undermines and invalidates and co-opts austerity’s other meanings. For Bramall, austerity can also be a discourse of frugality and thrift that was forged in the immediate years after World War Two and is central to a contemporary anti-consumerist and environmental politics. What is significant here is that, for Bramall, central to the discourse of thrift and frugality is its historicity. There is thus a longer standing ‘austerity culture’, which Bramall argues is

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of austerity does not mean that actors adopting austerity policies harbour deeply held beliefs in the idea itself. Thompson (2013) disputes Blyth’s indignation towards the fact that a private-sector banking crisis has been blamed on the state. She argues that if the state did not cause the financial crisis, the political use that the state was put to in the pre-crisis years – which included the close relationship between politicians and financial corporations – contributed to it.

*“the historically informed practices, discourses, values, ideological elements, and representational strategies that arise in the new ‘age of austerity’, and serve to construct it.”*

(Bramall, 2013a, p. 4)

For her, the central point of reference within this austerity discourse is the historical period of ‘austerity Britain’, spanning 1939-54. What is particularly significant here is that ‘austerity Britain’ is used as a “representational resource”, and re-emerges in the discursive formation of austerity as thrift and frugality. Yet, Bramall indicates the historicity of this discourse has been drawn upon by *both* an anti-consumerist politics and the (regressive) discourse of austerity as deficit reduction. In other words, it re-emerges as a way of constructing *both* austerity as anti-consumerist and as deficit reduction in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

Ideas of frugality and rationing have become increasingly prominent (Bramall, 2013a, 2011; Hinton and Redclift, 2009). To be frugal is “to be moderate or sparing in the use of money, goods and resources with a particular emphasis on careful consumption and the avoidance of waste” (Evans, 2011, p. 552). This form of austerity politics includes an avoidance of waste and abundance (Moore, 2013). For Bramall (2013b), austerity is visualised into the ‘austerity larder’: a full cupboard that is well stocked with tinned, long-life, everyday ‘essentials’. It is significant that the larder is not empty, as it creates an affective experience in which frugality, and a move towards food sustainability, becomes appealing (ibid.). This form of eco-austerity, then, predates the meaning of contemporary austerity as welfare and public sector cuts (Bramall, 2013a). Many discussions surrounding frugality and sustainable consumption have been put into the context of the 2007-09 economic crisis, in which there has been an overlap between the crisis and issues around long-term environmental problems (Evans, 2011; Hinton and Goodman, 2010). Thus, a (re)turn to frugality in the context of the economic crisis has now become an opportunity to consume in a sustainable way (Evans, 2011). However, this does not arise out of economic scarcity as the context of economic crisis would suggest; rather, it is borne out of ethical and moral considerations to avoid excess consumerism in order to reduce the impacts upon the environment (ibid.). Importantly, for Bramall, ‘austerity Britain’



has been an important reference point in the promotion of an anti-consumerist politics. The iconography of the 'home front' – the civilian effort of the war effort – was central to this; including the policies of rationing, austerity and 'fair shares' implemented during this period to manage the scarcity of commodities and materials that follow from the war effort (Zeiniger-Bargielowska, 2000: 9-59, cited in Bramall, 2013a).

Additionally, the turn towards thrift, initially associated with anti-consumerist movements, has become more prominent and popularised since the beginning of the global financial crisis of 2007-09 (Jensen, 2012). Whilst thrift has always been a necessity for individuals and families located at the low end of the income distribution and in times of economic hardship (Holmes, 2018a, 2018b), it has now also become a source of cultural value and promoted as a *lifestyle*. In this culture of 'new thrift' or 'austerity chic', practices of thriftiness are transformed into aesthetic pleasures and art-forms that are through previous iconographies of 'austerity Britain' (Bramall, 2013a; Jensen, 2013a). This includes the increased popularity of 'Keep Calm and Carry On' posters (Hatherley, 2009), and enamelware crockery (Bramall, 2013a), 'make do and mend' (Bramall, 2011). The re-emergence of an 'austere lifestyle' goes beyond consumption to also include the rising popularity of activities now seen as 'retro' and emerge from this era of scarcity, such as knitting crocheting, as well as how to forage for food, how to grow your own vegetables, how to use up leftovers how to reduce your heating bills, how to shop strategically, how to shop around (Jensen, 2012).

Yet, this 'new thrift' or 'austerity chic', rather than emerging out scarcity, is a "self-conscious *performance* of thriftiness in a bid to further one's cultural capital" (Bramall, 2013a, p. 23, emphasis in original). A necessity of thrift, then, doesn't come into the equation, rather it is about "appearing to downshift" or "appearing to be roughing it" (ibid., p. 23). Here, an image of oneself as 'scruffy' or 'shabby (chic)' is promoted with the full knowledge that thought and effort has been made to achieve this. Again, this involves buying into an idea and aesthetic of what austerity 'looks like', which is based on 'austerity Britain':

*“in purchasing an enamelware pie dish from Labour and Wait, the consumer is recognizably buying into a scenario of ‘austerity’, even though he or she now has ‘more stuff’”* (Bramall, 2013a, p. 28)

The ambiguity of austerity as thrift comes to the fore here, as the themes of scarcity and consuming less that are apparent in austerity chic are held in tension with the consumption that is involved in literally ‘buying into’ austerity (ibid), or what Hatherly (2009) calls austere consumerism. Previous accounts of austerity becomes re-inscribed as a way in which to produce new meanings of austerity and is drawn upon to generate a ‘lifestyle of austerity’ that is paradoxically both anti-consumerist and consumerist. It is again the historicity that is central to understanding austerity as a cultural object. Austerity as frugality and thrift is formed through the *re-emergence* of discourses <sup>11</sup> from a previous historical period of scarcity.

### **The entanglement of ‘austerity culture’ and deficit reduction**

Whilst Bramall (2013a; 2013b) argues that conceptualisations of austerity as thrift and frugality can become a means through which to live more sustainability, she also recognises such conceptualisations have also worked to construct and entrench austerity as deficit reduction:

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<sup>11</sup> I approach discourse through Michel Foucault’s engagement with the notion of ‘discursive formation.’ Foucault emphasises discourse as not simply a concept, but a *practice*. Foucault (1972, p. 38) states:

*“Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such as system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions, and functionings, transformations), we... are dealing with a discursive formation.”*

A discursive formation is an ordering process through generating uniformities between discursive and non-discursive elements. This suggests that discursive practices are a way of ordering the social world. Foucault (1972, p.38) argues that these discursive and non-discursive elements are subjected to rules of formation, which are the conditions of their existence (but also of their coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance). As such, discourses exist, coexist, maintain, modify and disappear in a “densely overlapping, networked, and often contested discursive web” (Philo, 2011, p. 365). For Foucault (1972, p. 28), discourse asks how it is that one particular statement appears over another. Asking why one particular statement takes preference over another indicates that the emergence of knowledge claims is not a neutral process. Rather, discourses are spatially, culturally, socially and temporally contingent (Rose, 2007), meaning that discourses undergo constant change as new utterances are added to them (Foucault, 1991a). As contexts change, so too may discourses. As Foucault (1972 p. 25) states, “[d]iscourse must not be referred to the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs.” Precisely because discourses are contingent, they must be analysed in the context of their emergence, as it is this milieu that allows certain discourses to appear over others. It is in specific regimes that mean some discourses assume to be common sense, whilst others appear unnatural.

*It is arguably the case that in establishing a connection between notions of sustainability and thrift, the popularization of slogans such as ‘dig for victory’ and ‘make do and mend’ has served to enable the current, dominant articulation of the notion of austerity to an argument about the morality and necessity of welfare cuts, and to a critique of the Labour Government’s spending practices. (Bramall, 2011: 82)*

The construction of austerity as a cultural object, and the re-emergent post-war nostalgia (Hatherley, 2009), is also entangled with the “retrogressive” (Biressi, 2015) politics of austerity. Unlike Bramall, who offers alternative and progressive meanings to austerity through post-war frugality, for Jensen (2013a, 2012) it is precisely this re-emergence of the past that is so regressive. For her, the romanticisation of post-War restraint and the re-animation of thrift practices and frugal living is central to the cultural politics of the current austerity regime (Jensen, 2013a). Indeed, Jensen (2016), in response to Bramall, argues that whilst there is complexity and multiplicity in the austerity culture, not all disparate strands hold equal weight: there is a clear hegemonic version of austerity that cannot be neutered by alternative or radical counter-discourses. The discourses of frugality and thrift, then, particularly within welfare imaginaries, work to construct classed Others as ‘undeserving’ (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Nunn and Biressi, 2009):

*“As such the ‘new thrift’ has become/is becoming a site where classed Others are produced and symbolically shamed for not being austere enough: those who do not re-use, recycle, upcycle, who are wasteful, who pay full price for the new consumer goods they want but do not ‘need’ and so on. The cultural politics of thrift is certainly about taste and taste cultures: yet its concerns are also broader than taste. ‘New thrift’ culture produces and circulates fantasies of the classed Others against whom austerity is positioned as necessary, and who need to re-learn the lessons of frugality.” (Jensen, 2012, pp. 15–16)*

What this suggests, then, is that the construction of austerity as a cultural object, in particular through post-war nostalgia, is entangled with the austerity as deficit reduction. Significantly, however, within this literature, austerity as a cultural object is something *discursively*

*constructed*. However, this does not mean that austerity as a cultural object is always something that is formed through discourse. In fact, as will be explored later in the chapter, austerity as a cultural phenomenon can be formed through its presence in everyday life; in this sense as austerity takes multiple forms, including the form of the affective. The discursive culture of austerity, however, has been used to discursively construct the ‘necessity’ of austerity as a fiscal policy with UK (Jensen and Tyler, 2012). In particular, the discourses of thrift and frugality have become a “moral register” (Allen et al., 2015, p. 908), both for the state and the individual.

Importantly, this is something that Blyth (2013a) also examines in his emphasis of austerity as ideology. Blyth makes the parallel between the financial management of the state and household, in which the problem of sovereign debt is approached with the same logic as addressing household or individual debt. Paul Langley (2014) draws on Blyth to emphasise that this was not always the case; prior to the ‘financial revolution’ in Britain during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, ‘public credit’ was not common as sovereigns often went back on their debt obligations. As modern finance developed, however, frugality, thrift and prudence began to appear as virtuous for all debtors, including the sovereign. In this sense, at the level of the state, thrift becomes virtuous, in the form of “tightening our belts and living within our means” in the same way that the household is understood to do so (Stanley, 2014a, p. 3). Indeed this was something that former Prime Minister David Cameron himself emphasised:

*“The only way out of a debt crisis is to deal with your debts. That’s why households are paying down their credit card and store card bills. It means banks getting their books in order. And it means governments – all over the world – cutting spending and living within their means.”*

(Cameron, 2011, cited in Langley, 2014, p. 162)

Blyth’s (2013a) parallel between the household and the state are central to constructing austerity as the “common sense” solution to public debt. For it generates an understanding of the state financial management through the prism of household financial management (Allon,

2009). State economics and “home economics” becomes aligned (ibid.). The sensibility of austerity draws on a morally laden understanding of what should be done in the case of excessive indebtedness of any form: reduce spending and pare down the debt (Langley, 2014, p. 161). This is in contrast to the Keynesian response to recession, as explored earlier, in which it is understood that the state should do precisely the opposite to the household – increase spending in order to stimulate the economy, as the household is tightening their belt. A Keynesian understanding, then, comprehends the state and the household as fundamentally different. Significantly, the parallel between state and household is a significant way in which austerity as deficit reduction and austerity as a cultural object become entangled, for it generates a common sense understanding of the “frugal government” (Allon, 2009, p. 139) in the same way that frugality becomes a common sense in the household.

In the construction of austerity as a cultural object, thrift and frugality becomes a form of moral conduct, in particular through the construction of the thrifty, home-front housewife (Allen et al., 2014; Biressi and Nunn, 2013; Bramall, 2013a; Negra, 2013). Indeed, Allen (2015, p. 912), drawing on Jensen (2013a), argue that the thrifty housewife is emblematic of the cultural coding of fiscal prudence, as she figures as a solution to the family’s and nation’s waste. This classed and gendered construction (Allen et al., 2014; Littler, 2013) works to construct particular individuals (and families) as ‘work shy’, ‘shirkers’, or ‘welfare dependant’ when not adhering to this morality (Allen and Taylor, 2012; De Benedictis, 2012; Jensen, 2014). Jensen (2013b, p. 66) terms this the “spendthrift” family, caricatured as welfare dependant, workless and fiscally impotent, spending beyond their means; the spendthrift family is symbolically opposed to the thrifty housewife, who is deemed happy in her fiscal restraint. Both the state and the individual (and household), then, become implicated within (post-war nostalgic) austerity culture that constructs fiscal restraint as necessity.

Paradoxically, the post-war period that has been most fantasied and fetishized in the cultural politics of austerity, was also a pro-welfarist period offering a vision of equality through re-

distribution (Jensen, 2016, p. 523). Yet, as the cultural object of austerity has been constructed, social security has become a target of deficit reduction:

*“The austerity architects have rapidly put the financial crash to ideological work, arguing that the post-war social contract – the commitment by the state to support its citizens from cradle to grave via the provision of welfare in times of need – has become too costly to continue to fund publicly. The welfare state has been (re) imagined as a negative form of ‘big government’, distended by ‘welfare culture’ and a sense of entitlement that must now be purged. Austerity policies are thus ‘necessary’, not because of a failure of capitalism or the excesses of global neoliberalism, but because we have had it too good.”* (Jensen, 2013b, pp. 60–61)

What this suggests, therefore, is that austerity as an ideology and as a cultural object is based on repetition or re-emergence of austerity. When austerity is understood as an ideology, it re-merges time and time again despite empirical refutation. Indeed, austerity becomes a part of continuation of a neoliberal project, in which neoliberal austerity is a cure for a neoliberal disease. When austerity becomes a cultural object, austerity – as both progressive frugality and as “retrogressive” deficit reduction – is constructed *through* the re-emergence of discourses of ‘austerity Britain.’ This historicity is central to the construction of the culture of austerity. This is particularly significant, for it indicates that conceptualisations of austerity are already bound up with questions of temporality that have not been explicitly drawn out. Importantly, however, both conceptualisations of austerity here – as ideology and as a cultural object – are understanding austerity as discursively formed. Both are ways in which to understand the discursive formation of austerity as a “common sense” solution to public debt. This is important, for it takes seriously austerity as a discursive presence, which, as already explored, has significant consequences for the implementation of austerity as a fiscal policy. However, its discursive existence is not equivalent to understanding austerity as lived. For example, how does austerity become individually and collectively felt? In what ways does it shape everyday practices and rhythms? How does austerity become materially and ethereally present? How does austerity configure and reconfigure social and spatial relations? Conceptualising austerity

as discursive does not enable a consideration of these kinds of questions, which indicate significant ways in which austerity is manifested. Such questions, then, point towards the importance of taking lived experience as a legitimate form of knowledge.

A gap in existing austerity literature is an explicit attention to how austerity is made present throughout everyday life as it becomes lived and felt. This research turns towards questions of austerity and everyday life, to explore what it might mean to consider austerity as persistent, re-emergent or refusing to disappear when it forms part of lived experience. This becomes a way in which to consider the temporality of contemporary austerity as it has returned year after year after year. This is particularly important within the context of austerity as it reaches its ninth year in the United Kingdom. For the need to develop a vocabulary through which to understand austerity as persistent and re-emergent has arisen *precisely because* austerity simply has not disappeared. This is in stark contrast to the initial statement – by former Chancellor George Osborne in particular – that austerity would be short lived.<sup>12</sup> In fact, David Cameron’s (2010) notion of a “steady, painful erosion of confidence in our economy” if the deficit was not dealt with was placed in contrast to the (supposedly) much shorter time-geography of the deficit reduction plan itself. Austerity as a short-lived phenomenon simply has not materialised. As a result, there is a need to conceptualise austerity that takes into account its temporality, which has now become central to how austerity is experienced. It allows an attention to the ways in which austerity is made present in different *forms*, and in forms that are different from the discursive. It is consequently the question of everyday life and everyday geographies to which this chapter now turns.

## **2. EVERYDAY LIFE: AMBIGUITIES AND TEMPORALITIES**

This section examines what it means to take the everyday and everyday life seriously within (geographical) research and as a site in which austerity is made present. This is central for

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<sup>12</sup> In 2010 George Osborne argued that the deficit reduction plan would only last until 2014–2015 (Osborne, 2010c).

understanding how austerity becomes lived and felt. Locating austerity within the everyday enables us to think about austerity as simultaneously an economic, social and cultural phenomenon. Central to this is placing austerity within the ambiguities, temporalities and spatialities of the everyday.

### **The ambiguity of everyday life**

Everyday life as an 'object' and mode of inquiry became increasingly prominent following the cultural turn in the geographical discipline (Clayton, 2017). Everyday life is the most self-evident, yet the most puzzling of ideas (Felski, 2000). It is a terrain of struggle and negotiation as lived experience, but also as a realm of academic debate (Clayton, 2017). It has been understood as pervading, but also transcending, spaces, such as the home, the workplace, the high street, the playground, the park, the library, the community centre, and so on (Gregson et al., 1997; Gregson and Crewe, 1997; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014; Holmes, 2018a; Horton and Kraftl, 2017; Langley, 2008; Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Watson, 2009).

What is clear, here, is that there is no coherent understanding of what the everyday *is*. However, creating a coherent understanding of everyday life is not only impossible, importantly, it also not desirable. Taking everyday life seriously is to understand the everyday as an ambiguous 'object' of enquiry. For Gardiner (2000, p. 13), the everyday by its very nature is "contradictory and fractured." Yet, it is precisely these contradictions that expose the hidden potentials of the everyday. It is through these contradictions that Gardiner (2000, p. 6) emphasises the need to move beyond the everyday as ordinary and treat it as a domain that is potentially *extraordinary*:

*"The ordinary can become extraordinary not by eclipsing the everyday, or imagining we can arbitrarily leap beyond it in some 'higher' level or cognition or action, but by fully appropriating and activating the possibilities that lie hidden, and typically repressed, within in it."*



Again, this is particularly significant. For it indicates that the ordinary, paradoxically, is *at the same time* extraordinary (Featherstone, 1992). It is precisely that which is taken for granted that is so extraordinary; and an attention to the everyday is about making visible the extraordinary that lies hidden *within* the ordinary. In other words, the everyday's special quality is its lack of qualities that are precisely, unnoticed, inconspicuous and unobtrusive (Highmore, 2002). The ordinary – familiar, routine, repeated – is at the same time something that becomes out of the ordinary – unfamiliar, disruptive, exceptional. Highmore (2002) draws upon Freud to argue that it is *strangeness* that is at the heart of the everyday – the familiar is at the same time strange, and the strange that is at the same time long familiar (through the procession of repression). As a result, engaging with the everyday is a process of making the banal strange and estranging the mundane (ibid.). Fundamental to the everyday as an 'object' of inquiry, therefore, is its paradoxical nature: "both ordinary and extraordinary, self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic" (Highmore, 2002, p. 16).

It is the relationship between the self-evident and the opaque that is of particular interest here. For, the paradoxical nature of the everyday extends to its *ambiguities*. As voiced by Lefebvre (1996), the everyday is everywhere and nowhere, and it is precisely this that fascinates individuals that are immersed in the everyday. Blanchot draws upon the later writings of Lefebvre to argue that the everyday has an essential trait:

*"it allows no hold. It escapes. It belongs to insignificance, and the insignificant is without truth, without reality, without secret, but perhaps also the site of all possible signification. The everyday escapes."* (Blanchot, 1987, p. 14)

For Blanchot (1987) it is this ambiguity that actually makes the everyday strange. For, central to the everyday is its elusiveness. Even while it is taken-for-granted, the everyday escapes attempts to pin it down. The everyday escapes all coherence, all regularity amongst its banality. Significantly, then, the ambiguity makes the everyday strange, yet it is the *banality* of the everyday that is at the root of its ambiguities. The everyday is banal, but it is the banality

that generates, paradoxically, its elusiveness, which in turn makes the familiarity of the everyday strange:

*“The everyday is platitude (what lags and falls back, the residual life with which our trash cans and cemeteries are filled: scrap and refuse), but this banality is also what is most important, if it brings us back to existence it is very spontaneity and as is live – in the moment when, lived, it escapes every speculative formulation, perhaps all coherence, all regularity.”*

(Blanchot, 1962, p. 36)

Ironically, in emphasising that the everyday is by its very nature elusive, ambiguous, always escaping, I am doing exactly what such conceptualisation of the everyday attempts to avoid – pinning it down. Yet, it is central to understanding how austerity is understood as lived and felt in everyday life. When austerity is lived and felt throughout the everyday, it *becomes* something ambiguous, fuzzy and difficult to hold down. This is important for considering austerity as it is made present in its various forms throughout everyday life. It allows consideration for how these forms might be, on the one hand, ordinary and obvious, yet on the other, can also be elusive. Relatedly, these forms are also *multiple*; thus, there is an endlessness to the forms we are able to recognise and be aware of. As will be explored later in the chapter, and throughout the thesis, this is central to how austerity is experienced, yet has been underexplored within existing research on austerity. This research draws upon a particular kind of ambiguity; namely, the ambiguity of austerity in everyday life as it is made affectively present. This will be explored later in the chapter.

### **Everyday temporalities and austerity**

According to Felski (2000), everyday life is above all a temporal term. Time can be ruptured (Badiou, 2001), in constant change (Bergson, 2004) or suspended (Baraitser, 2017). Yet, the everyday often conveys the fact of repetition rather than the singular or unique, such as the event. Activities such as walking (Mason, 2017; Wylie, 2005), cooking (Giard, 2002) shopping (Gregson et al., 2002; Miller, 1998, 1995), commuting (Bissell, 2018, 2016; Laurier et al., 2008; Laurier and Lorimer, 2012), eating (Matthee, 2004), sleeping (Kraftl and Horton, 2008), even

playing (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014; Horton and Kraftl, 2017), conform to day-to-day rhythms that are in term embedded with larger cycles of repetition. These include the weekend, the annual holiday, the start of the academic year (Felski, 2000). This is something that Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1987, p. 10) argued was central to everyday life:

*“In the study of the everyday we discover that the great problem of repetition, is one of the most difficult problems facing us.”*

For Lefebvre (1987), the everyday is situated at the intersection of two modes of repetition: the cyclical and the linear.<sup>13</sup> The everyday implies on the one hand, cycles, nights and days, seasons and harvest, activity and rest, hunger and satisfaction, life and death; on the other hand it implies the repetitive gestures of work and consumption. The two are in contradiction with one another, for the linear is time of modernity (fast-moving, and forward moving), whilst cyclical time has changed very little over centuries (Lefebvre, 1961). Indeed, linear time includes the strict linear time of the Fordist obsession with productivity, creativity and a flexible work-force, in which all leisure time was constructed in relation to the logic of work (Baraitser, 2017). Cyclical time, includes the cyclical nature of domestic work, in which time is repeated over and over again:

*“woman clings to routine; time has for her no element of novelty, it is not a creative flow; because she is doomed to repetition, she sees in the future only a duplication of the past.”* (de Beauvoir, 1988, p. 610, cited in Felski, 2000, p. 82)

Attending to the everyday, then, involves a focus on the repeated, the habitual (Bissell, 2011; Dewsbury and Bissell, 2014), the ongoing. It involves focussing on the actions that have a temporal relation, such as enduring, dawdling, rushing or waiting (see for example, Bissell, 2007). But it also indicates the importance of attending to the more linear, such as the “temporality of downward mobility” that is central to the conditions of late capitalism

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that the context in which Lefebvre was writing was the emergence of mass consumer culture in post-World War Two French society. Lefebvre gives a Marxist orientated account of everyday life, in which he argues that everyday life is a material by-product of capitalism (Felski, 2000). For Lefebvre, post-World War Two modernization of French capitalism was producing new forms of alienation that was colonizing daily experience (Maycroft, 2001, p. 117).

(Baraitser, 2017). Indeed, it is this downward mobility that also marks the contemporary conditions of austerity:

*“the temporality of downward mobility under conditions of economic austerity... the search for diminishing viable accommodation, healthcare and welfare; the temporality of the disabled and the under or unemployed who are kept permanently busy being assessed for dwindling benefits, or working in low-paid jobs that maintain steady states of poverty; and work that maintains and services debt that is designed not to be repayable in the lifetime of the individual concerned.”* (Baraitser, 2017, p. 9)

It is this interplay, then, between the cyclical, the habitual, the repeated – such as in acts of ‘getting by’ – and the more linear time of downward mobility – the futile future – that is central to understanding austerity in the everyday. Yet, it is also the non-linear temporalities that is also central to understanding everyday temporalities (of austerity); the ways in which time jumps back and forth, as time is lived: for example in the anticipation of unknown futures (Horton, 2016; Sedgwick, 2002) and in the re-emergence of lost objects (Freud, 2005). It is this entanglement of the cyclical, linear and non-linear temporalities that marks the ongoing contraction and relentless (budget) reduction in times of austerity. This is particularly significant, for the question of temporality is central to understanding the concept of austerity. Austerity is a future-facing response to public deficit, in which it is deemed to be ensuring future confidence in the economy. This is placed in contrast to the “devastating” consequences if the deficit is not dealt with – something that David Cameron argued threatened “to loom over our economy and society for a generation” (Cameron, 2010). With austerity, then, the future is folded into the present, where a certain *kind* of future is secured through its implementation:

*“Austerity [is] securing a valued form of life – a mode of existence in which the opportunities for wealth and well-being, apparently afforded by uncertain circulations, are embraced by investors by the excessive indebtedness of the sovereign and burdensome levels of taxation.”*  
(Langley, 2014, p. 166)

Austerity's temporalities, therefore, are important for considering how austerity is lived.

Equally as important, however, are the *spatialities* of austerity in everyday life. The spatial is a central component to austerity's lived manifestations. It is to the question of the spatial that this section now turns.

### **Everyday spatialities and austerity**

As explored earlier in the chapter, austerity's effects are differentiated across gender, class, race and (dis)ability. Yet, its uneven impacts are also *spatially* manifested. Throughout the UK austerity has geographically been unevenly distributed. The north of England has received a disproportionate amount of budget reductions compared to the south of England. A recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) suggest that spending in the north of England has fallen by £6.3 billion in real terms – more than any other region – whilst the south east and south west together have received a £3.2 billion *rise* in public spending during this period (Raikes et al., 2018). Naturally, the spatial inequalities of austerity have been a concern for geographers (see for example, Ballas et al., 2017; Greer Murphy, 2017). In particular, geographical research has examined the way in which austerity has exacerbated health inequalities, including across the North-South divide (see Bambra and Garthwaite, 2015; Dorling, 2018; Mattheys, 2015; Schrecker and Bambra, 2015). Austerity's effects on health outcomes has seen a disproportionate impact upon Northern regions in England, the North-East of England in particular (Mattheys et al., 2016). Indeed, many of the gendered, racial and class impacts of the austerity agenda are exacerbated by the geographical inequalities in the UK (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013; Hamnett, 2014; MacLeavy, 2011; Sandhu and Stephenson, 2015). On a societal scale, then, austerity has significant spatial manifestations.

However, how might we understand austerity's spatialities when considering austerity in the everyday? Taking the everyday as our point of departure offers a very different account of austerity's spatial manifestations. It enables consideration of the effects of austerity at increasingly localised scales; this includes the scale of the community (van Lanen, 2017) and

the familial (Hall, 2016; Jupp, 2017; McDowell, 2017). This enables exploration of everyday spaces of austerity, such as households, parks, children's centres, libraries, youth services, foodbanks, and the ways they face transformation under conditions of austerity (Browne, 2007; Garthwaite, 2016; Garthwaite et al., 2018; Hall, 2016; Horton, 2016; Jorgensen, 2017; Jupp, 2013; Norcup, 2017). A consideration of the everyday also enables attunement to the *micro*-scalar impacts of austerity; austerity is *embodied*, including 'going hungry' (Garthwaite, 2016), 'feeling the squeeze' (Stenning, 2018), or experiencing physical exhaustion (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2018). Thinking about everyday spatialities of austerity, enables consideration of how austerity is manifested within everyday spaces, but also how such spaces are configured and *re*configured through austerity. Spatiality, therefore, matters to the lived experience of austerity.

The particular strength of this geographical work, then, is that they give rich accounts of austerity as it becomes situated within everyday spaces. However, whilst this intersects with lived experience, this is not the same as conceptualising austerity as lived. What has remained under examined, therefore, is an explicit consideration of what it means to take austerity as lived and felt. In other words, to conceptualise austerity as lived, rather than as a fiscal policy, an ideology, or as a cultural object. A notable exception of this is the emergent work of Sarah Marie Hall (2018), who conceptualises austerity as an everyday phenomenon. Another notable exception is the work of Ruth Raynor; however, her work will be explored later. For Hall (2018, p. 2), a conceptualisation of 'everyday austerity' involves "understanding everyday relationships, intimacies and social interactions and the relational spaces within which and across austerity takes place." Drawing upon conceptualisations of relational space and relational practices of care, Hall argues for a further exploration and application of relational thinking in order to consider austerity as lived experience. For her, the relational within everyday austerity considers how social relations are being reworked by and through austerity, in particular the reconfiguration of family, friendship and intimate relations. She argues for the need to pay attention to

“not only to geographies of everyday life, by attending to questions of difference through, across and between spaces, but to geographies in everyday life, by addressing the interactions, relationships and spatial practices that configure and are configured by the everyday.” (Hall, 2018, p. 15)

However, there are three things in particular missing from Hall’s account of everyday austerity that I argue are central to how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life.

Whilst Hall examines the spatial practices that are configured in and by everyday austerity, the significance of austerity’s temporalities as it is lived remains unexamined. Not only is this important because an everyday life approach is fundamentally temporal, multiple temporalities of austerity are central to how austerity is made present within the everyday. Lived austerity is repetitive, re-emergent and cyclical. There is a sense of ongoingness that comes with living austerity in a UK context. This gives austerity a depth of experience that is rooted in its temporality. As the previous section has explored, the temporality of austerity as an idea has not been explicitly teased out; yet it is also austerity as *everyday* and the temporality that is central to this that has been underexplored.

Hall’s conceptualisation of austerity as rooted in everyday life also omits the significance of austerity as an *ambiguous presence* when it becomes something that is lived and felt. As already explored, it is this elusiveness that is central to everyday life. Whilst her work examines how austerity becomes routine, mundane, ordinary, it does not delve into the ways in which this also makes austerity something elusive and difficult to pin down. It is this non-coherence and ambiguity that is not only important for an examination of everyday life, but more precisely austerity as it becomes imbedded within the everyday. Relatedly, Hall’s account does not take into account the everyday as a multiple and contradictory phenomenon; this is vital to understanding the complexities and contradictions that are central to austerity’s lived manifestations.

Whilst Hall (2018, p. 15) emphasises the importance of examining “everyday austerity as it is lived, felt and experienced,” underdeveloped here is *how* we might go about examining

austerity as *felt*. In doing so, it does not acknowledge existing, and emergent, work that conceptualises lived austerity through a non-representational lens, in particular its affective presence (Raynor, 2016a, 2016b; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2018). It is the *felt* presence of austerity, I argue that is an important, but under examined area of research. In particular because felt austerity and austerity's ambiguities in everyday life are intimately intertwined. The ambiguous presence of austerity, I argue, is particularly significant, for it explores the ways in which individuals experience austerity through fluctuating, non-coherent affective relations that come to shape how they feel and act throughout the everyday. Consequently, considering *how* austerity is felt becomes a way in which to consider the ambiguity of austerity and, inversely, to consider how austerity as an ambiguous presence becomes a way in which to explore the ways it becomes felt throughout everyday life. To examine austerity as felt, this chapter turns to the question of the affective.

### **3. THE AFFECTIVE PRESENCE OF AUSTERITY**

This chapter has examined the way in which austerity has been understood as a discursive presence, specifically an ideology and as a cultural object. The chapter has also indicated how they have already had a particular temporality implicated within them, through a refusal to disappear despite empirical refutation, as well as through a re-emergence of 'austerity Britain' discourses. However, this thesis has argued that these conceptualisations are not sufficient for understanding how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life, principally because they fail to understand the ways in which austerity experienced; in particular the different forms through which austerity is made present as it is lived.

As this section will argue, it is a turn to the affective that is central to developing austerity as lived and felt in everyday life. In situating austerity after the affective turn, this thesis will recognise that austerity is not sufficiently understood as ideology or discourse but rather we must also consider them as *felt* (Finn, 2016, p. 44). The previous section has emphasised the importance of developing a conceptualisation of austerity that takes everyday life as its point



of departure. Yet, missing from these existing accounts are the felt, ambiguous, and temporal dimensions of austerity as it is lived. It is austerity as *felt* that is of particular significance in this section, for what the rest of this chapter indicates is that the temporality, spatiality and ambiguity of austerity emerge out of a conceptualisation of austerity as a felt presence.

Theories of affect are an overwhelming field of study, of which many of the different vectors can never fully be reconciled (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010). They include, Silvan Tomkin's psychobiology of differential affects, Gilles Deleuze's Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities, psychological and psychoanalytic inquiry such as Sigmund Freud, feminist and queer theorist approaches to affect, and affect located in science practices and studies such as Alfred North Whitehead (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 5-9), many of which overlap with one another.

Whilst there are many facets to these different approaches, the main division in affect theory is separation between theorists who are interested in feeling and emotion and theorists who are interested more generally in the way forces affect each other, of which feeling and emotion are just one (Murphie, 2010). Silvan Tomkin's psychobiology as well as psychoanalytic inquiry, such as Freud, could be recognised as the former, for they understand there to be to be categorical affects, which can be named (Murphie, 2010; Seigworth and Gregg, 2010). Here, affects have clearly defined boundaries in that they are nameable and form part of subjective experience. This approach has been translated into human geography, in particular through the expansive sub-field of emotional geographies (see, for example, Anderson and Smith, 2001; Bondi, 2005; Davidson and Milligan, 2004). Yet, importantly, emotional geographies do not see these as *entirely* interiorised subjective states (as in other approaches, such as Silvan Tomkins' psychobiology <sup>14</sup>); rather, this sub-field seeks to understand how emotions are socially and, significantly, spatially mediated (Davidson et al., 2005). A Spinozist-Deleuzian understanding of affect could be recognised as the latter, for affects here are broadly understood as capacities to affect and be affected. Importantly, here, whilst affects find

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<sup>14</sup> Tomkins (2008), for example, argued that there were nine identifiable affects: surprise-startle, distress-anguish, anger-rage, enjoyment-joy, interest-excitement, fear-terror, shame-humiliation, dismissal and disgust. Such affects are identifiable through bodily expressions.

“corporal expression in bodily feeling” (Anderson, 2006, p. 736), unlike the former approach to affect, affects here extend *beyond* the human body. A Spinozist-Deleuzian approach to affect is theorized “in relation to technologies that are allowing us both to ‘see’ affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body’s organic- physiological constraints” (Clough and Halley, 2007, p. 2). In other words, this approach to affect marks an ontological shift from the personal to the *transpersonal*, in which affects are expressed in bodies, but are always exceeding them (Anderson, 2014).

Both broad approaches to affect have been taken up within the geographical discipline. Affect theory as confined to feeling and emotion can be seen within the sub-discipline of psychoanalytic geographies, and was particularly influential following the ‘psychoanalytic turn’ (Bondi, 2005; Callard, 2003; Philo and Parr, 2003; Pile, 2005, 1996). This field of study insists that we take unconscious life seriously within human behaviour (Kingsbury, 2014), and will be explored later in the chapter. Approaches to affect that are more interested in the way forces affect each, and not confined to feeling and emotion, has been taken up within the development of non-representational theory within the geographical discipline (see for example, Anderson, 2006; Bissell, 2010; Lorimer, 2008; McCormack, 2003). It is here that the Spinozist-Deleuzian approach to affect has been particularly influential.

Non-representational theory makes an epistemological commitment to challenge the priority of representation as the grounds of sense-making or as a means by which to recover information from the world (McCormack, 2003). This involves producing knowledge by “generating difference, divergence, and creation” (Deleuze, 1991, p. 97) through a practice, percepts, affects and sensations, not just language (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). This approach is not “anti-representational”, but rather recognises that representations are simply “presentations” (Anderson, 2009a; Dewsbury et al., 2002, p. 439); therefore, this form of research is always in a “double-bind of the representational and the non-representational” (Dewsbury, 2010, p. 322).

This is interested in a particular element of the non-representational – namely the affective. Therefore, it is the Spinozist-Deleuzian account of affect that is the point of departure of this thesis. This approach to affect is particularly significant, for it enables consideration of how austerity is felt, but, importantly, how it *shapes* individual and collective capacities to act. Thus, the affective presence of austerity is not confined to affective states, but rather is always ongoing as “passage form one state to another” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 49). This enables consideration of how austerity as an affective presence extends *beyond* the human body, and, therefore, how its affective intensities flow between entities, shaping and moving between different space-times.

Affect is an “impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces and intensities” (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, p.1). Taking a Spinozian ontological underpinning, affects are inherently *relational*, for affects are “intensities of feeling” that shape bodily capacities to affect and be affected (Thrift, 2004, p.57). The affective power of a body – by this I mean *any* body – is understood in terms of its capacity to *form relations* with other bodies (McCormack, 2007, p. 367). Deleuze (1978), argues that affect – what Spinoza calls *affectus* – is different from an idea, for it indicates “any mode of thought which doesn’t represent something... a hope for example, a pain, a love.” Yet, he also draws upon Spinoza’s term *affectio*, which he calls an affection. For Deleuze an affection is a state of body insofar as it is subject to the action of another body; in other words, the action that one body produces on another. Thus, to recognise that affects shape bodily capacities to affect and be affected is to understand that a body is “always already wholly implicated in its milieu” (Gatens, 2004, p. 115). Or as Deleuze (1988, p. 127) puts it, “a body affects other bodies, or it is affected by other bodies; it is capacities for affecting and being affected that also defines a body individually.” There is power *between* these relations (Anderson, 2011, 2010; Massumi, 2010). They can result in productive or “joyful” encounters that combine to produce a “more powerful whole” or they can be inhibitive or “sad” encounters when the encounter results in a decomposition of one

body (Deleuze, 1988, p. 18; Woodard and Lea, 2010).<sup>15</sup> Taking this form of affect recognises, what Clough and Halley (2007, p. 3) describe, as the “changes in ourselves, circulating through our bodies, our subjectivities, yet *irreducible* to the individual, the personal, the psychological.” This is particularly significant, for affects are felt *within* bodies (human or otherwise), yet they always *exceed* them. Affects are not bounded by bodies, but are always “pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation... forces of encounter” (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010, p. 3). Affects embody possibilities for creation, change and transformation (Kristenen, 2016), particularly as intensities are central to a body that is continually *in becoming* (Deleuze, 1995).

As this form of affect is irreducible to the personal, it raises an important point surrounding the relationship between the individual and the collective when considering the affective. Precisely because the affective is formed *through* relations, these feelings are never truly one’s own, despite the fact they might be felt as such. Bodies are affected by the world around them, whilst at the same time affecting it (Hardt, 2007). As voiced by Seigworth and Gregg (2010, p. 3), with affect “a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in its relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter.” Bodily capacity is never defined by a body alone, but in the context of its force-relations (*ibid.*). Affects, then, do not belong to a subject or an object, nor do they reside in the mediating space between subject and object (Anderson, 2010, p. 161). However, as will be explored later in the chapter, they are never truly collective, for when affects become collective affects, they are always *in some way* individualised.

### **Non-representational everyday life**

Everyday life has been of particular interest within non-representational theory. Non-representational approaches place *practice* centrally within understandings of the everyday, “mundane everyday practices that shape the conduct of human beings towards others and themselves in particular sites” (Thrift, 1997, p. 124). Like other approaches to everyday life

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to note here that Spinoza’s emphasis of ‘joyful’ encounters is not the same as the emotion we could commonly name as joy. Rather, that it is termed ‘joyful’ as it is understood as an enhancement of bodily capacities that can be felt in many different ways.

already explored in this chapter, non-representational approaches focus on the extraordinary within the ordinary, or what Thrift (2008, p. 2) calls “taking some of the small signs of everyday life for wonders.” The ordinary holds potential. Where this work differs from many everyday life approaches – such as de Certeau (1984) – is that these (extra)ordinary practices are not inevitably linked to resistant and subversive tactics of resistance. Instead, they seek to re-examine the habitual, repetitive and non-intentional aspects of everyday life (Pinder, 2009; see also Bissell, 2011; Dewsbury and Bissell, 2014). Thus, a non-representational examination of the everyday has a particular focus on “the elusive, phantasmic, emergent and often only just there fabric of everyday life” (Thrift, 2000, p. 407). What is particularly significant here is the everyday as an *emergent* force. Here, the everyday is always *in becoming*, where the mundane is what it is by continually becoming anew (Dyer, 2009; Johnstone, 2008). An attentiveness to the everyday sees the world as in a constant state of change, no matter how minute (Cichosz, 2014). In this sense, the non-representational approach to the everyday calls into question if there is indeed an everyday as an ‘object’ of inquiry when it is always in formation:

*“how does one present everyday life critique – in its movements and moments, processes and rhythms – without reducing it to a ‘some thing’, without presenting it as a ‘some thing’ to be known, or, that is, a clearly demarcated object of knowledge (as if it every could be)?”*

(Seigworth and Gardiner, 2004, p. 143)

A non-representational approach to everyday life, then, attempts to understand everyday life through the (extra)ordinary, non-intentional acts that always hold potential, whilst also holding this in tension with the desire *not* to generate an ‘object’ that can be known and studied. Everyday life is emergent:

*The focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions. Attentions to these kinds of expression, it is contended, offers an escape from the established*

*academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation.* (Lorimer, 2005, p. 84)

In this sense, a non-representational approach takes seriously the *life* of everyday life, including how it is made present within living beings. For Eugene Thacker (2010), fundamental to every ontology of life are their contradictions. In each ontology of life, Thacker argues, a contradiction is revealed that is fundamental for that ontology itself. These contradictions do not indicate a flaw in the ontology itself, but rather are “logically coherent” and “ontologically necessary” (Thacker, 2010, p. xiii). Thacker draws upon Aristotle’s concept of *psukhe*, or ‘soul’, to distinguish between life as a life-principle (theory) and life as a manifestation in living beings. Life as theory, Thacker (2010, p. 16) argues, can only become evident in its particular instances; in other words, life “appears unthinkable except in its manifestations. For Thacker (2010, p. 14), Aristotle’s concept of *psukhe* must perform contradictory functions, for “it must account for life without itself being life, and yet it cannot be separated from life.” This highlights the following contradiction: “What is common among the living is Life, but Life in itself has no properties, attributes, or characteristics. Thus, what is held in common among the living is itself nothing in particular” (Thacker, 2010, p. 21). This is particularly significant, for taking an everyday life approach means to understand it as already incoherent and contradictory. These contradictions make such an ontology of life possible, but at the same time, also ultimately undermine it. An ontological turn towards *life* in everyday life, then, is to emphasise the necessity of contradictions when considering life. Life is life-as-principle, but it is also life as it is lived in living beings. For Thacker, there are three major modes in the philosophical engagement with ‘life:’ the politico-theological, the biopolitical, and the affective-phenomenological. It is the latter that is central to a non-representational theoretical approach, for it seeks to understand how life comes into being, rather than a pre-existing entity –not what life *is*, but what life *does*. And whilst the affective is

just one approach to non-representational theory,<sup>16</sup> when thinking about life in the affective, it is

*“neither a quality that a body has, nor a vital force separate from a thing that is vitalized, but the priority of immanence in itself, a continuum or network of affects in which individuated subjects are more effects than causes.”* (Thacker, 2010, p. xiv)

Life in the affective is a continual formation in which the body – human, non-human, part-body, and otherwise (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010) – is continually formed through its relations with other bodies. In this sense, questions of life and affect are inseparable from one another. Affects are intensities that emerge through the relations between bodies that in turn shape capacities to affect and be affected; and it is these intensities that generate a particular vitality that is central to life. In this sense, a non-representational everyday has questions of temporality at its core. Deleuze’s ontology of continual becoming indicates a temporality of everyday life that is in continual change. Here, life is in constant movement and stasis is the antithesis of life (Baraitser, 2017). Affect is part of the body and life in formation. In other words, the continual becoming of a body is inseparable from the emergence of affective intensities, similarly affects are inseparable from the life-worlds that it produces and is entangled with. Central to everyday life through a (non-representational) affective lens, then, is the emergence of multiple intensities that shape bodily capacities to feel and act. In this sense, affects are not simply a part of the everyday, they *produce* everyday as a life force, and in its continual transformation. In other words, the everyday is produced by the flow of intensities that emerge through the relations formed between bodies (bodies understood as *any* body). Yet, the everyday as life *force* does not necessarily mean forceful, but rather that it is produced by intensities, whether this be vigorous or subtle moments of intensification:

*“The term ‘force’, however, can be a bit of a misnomer, since affect need not be especially forceful... In fact it is quite likely that affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities.”* (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010, p. 2)

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, a non-representational approach to performativity (Dewsbury, 2000).

## Everyday austerity through an affective lens

So why is it significant to take seriously the affective in the conceptualisation of austerity as lived and felt? This form of research is particularly important, for the effects of austerity, whether “anticipated or real... are *felt*” (McCormack, 2012, p. 1539, emphasis added). Put simply, austerity as an affective presence is precisely a way in which to take seriously austerity as felt. When the everyday is understood as a life force, this indicates that lived austerity can be examined through the presence of, and ebbs and flows of, austerity’s affective intensities. Thus, considering the affective presence of austerity becomes one way in which to conceptualise austerity as lived and felt in everyday life.

A small, but emerging, body of literature has examined the ways in which austerity is made present through its affective modes of relation. These affective modes of relation to austerity include, anxiety (Horton, 2016) fear (Clayton et al., 2015), disaffection (Gilbert, 2015), weariness (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2018), pessimism (Coleman, 2016), feeling squeezed (Stenning, 2018), acquiescence (Stanley, 2014b) and so on. Here, austerity is not a pre-existing entity that produces particular affects; rather austerity is *brought into being* through particular affective relations. Austerity, as it takes the form of affective intensities, is continually in becoming. In other words, austerity is continually in formation as it *becomes* anxiety, pessimism, fear and so on. In this sense, austerity as an affective force enables consideration for how austerity is made present through its intensities, or more precisely, an *emergent* presence through its intensities. Here the affective presence of austerity “act on bodies, are produced through bodies and transmitted by bodies” (Lorimer, 2008: 552). Austerity as it is made present though anxiety, for example, is produced through bodily relations, transmitted through them, but they also *act on bodies*.

The affective presence of austerity matters, therefore, precisely because it shapes capacities to feel and act. Lorimer (2005) emphasises the importance of attending to affective relations that lead to the *reduction* of bodily capacity, rather than simply enhancement:



*“Lest anyone forget, the emotionally charged, performing body is not an ecstatic subject, tout court. What of anger, disgust, hatred, horror, stress, isolation, alienation, fear, terror, dread, decay, loss, denial?”* (Lorimer, 2005, p. 90, emphasis in original)

Indeed, a Spinozist-Deleuzian approach can be critiqued for the predominant turn towards joyful or affirmative encounters. As initially argued by Anderson (2004) and also Harrison (2007), the Spinozist-Deleuzian emphasis on bodies continually in becoming can downplay the relations that are not constantly becoming anew. Rather, they ask, what about the relations that are not becoming anew, such as suspended or broken relations? Thus, an emergent body of literature (see Harrison, 2015; Gerlach, 2017; Rose, 2014), asks what might be negated, or suppressed through a turn to the joyful. Indeed, Sara Ahmed (2010) writes that the affirmative ethics turns the Deleuzian example of the joyful encounter into a call *for* joyful encounter. Yet, for Paul Harrison (2015, p. 286) the automatic turn towards affirmation that is common among all philosophies of life comes with a risk: “a risk of forgetting dying, forgetting finitude, and forgetting the give and take of living.” In response to the promise of affirmation he states,

*“I cannot help feeling the deck has been stacked before the game has begun, for what monster would ever choose anguish over generosity, fatalism over love, the past over the future, resentment over joy?”* (Harrison, 2015, p. 289, emphasis in original)

Harrison, here, offers an alternative account of life, one that is a rebellion against the idea of life without death, against those who would say ‘yes’, ‘yes’ without hesitation. The turn towards the negative is a move away from affirmation without justification (ibid.), such as compulsory happiness (Ahmed, 2010; Love, 2007), the “moronic consequences of the doctrine of creativity” (Osborne, 2003, p. 507), and the resilience agenda (Neocleous, 2013). Instead this work takes the negative seriously, including cosmic pessimism (Thacker, 2015), queer negativity (Caserio et al., 2006) and black nihilism (Warren, 2015). Therefore, there is a broader ethical potential of the turn to the negative; it offers an account of life that is not automatically affirmative, such as the dying, the taking of living, anguish, resentment and so on.

However, there is also an ethical *need* to produce on a negative account of austerity, precisely because the lived experience of austerity is anything but affirmative. Questions of the negative are particularly significant in the context of austerity as it is lived and felt in everyday life. Drawing upon the initial emphasis by Anderson (2004) and Harrison (2007), the turn to the negative in the context of austerity it asks what it means to focus on the relations that are not simply coming anew; but rather ones that may be fraying, broken, somehow enduring, diminishing, and relations that are prolonged although slowly dying. It is these ‘negative’ affective relations that are significant, precisely because of the “violent conditions” (Laurie and Shaw, 2018, p. 8) that austerity produces. The violent conditions of austerity “forcefully constrain, traumatise, and poison the very resources of our becoming” (Laurie and Shaw, 2018, p. 8). Through its regressive policies, austerity prevents individuals from flourishing: as they go hungry, as they fear unemployment, as their local library is shut, as their adult social care provision diminishes, as their as their school budgets are slashed. Austerity produces fear, anxiety, pessimism, disaffection, anger, exhaustion. To focus on ‘joyful’ encounters in times of austerity might work to reinscribe the neoliberal logics expressed in times of austerity, such as those expressed through ‘Big Society’ or the Localism Act (Hancock et al., 2012; Levitas, 2012; Williams et al., 2014); in other words, the notion that austerity is a possibility for ‘collective pain sharing’ and can bring local communities together. Indeed, Hall and Holmes (2017) warn against the romanticisation of hardship and practices of ‘getting by.’ As such, the turn towards negative affective relations is an ethical question as much as an empirical one, for many of the affects of austerity reduce the capacity to act. Yet, Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar (2018) seek to add complexity to the dominant emphasis that austerity’s affects reduce the capacity to act, such as through diminishing the possibility for political action against austerity (Gilbert, 2015). In their conceptualisation of weariness and austerity, they argue for the “right to be weary”, which involves a potential retreat from the relentless drive to move forwards. Weariness here becomes a form of passive dissent. Thus, negative affective relations can also be *reclaimed* in times of austerity, and produce, for example, resistance that isn’t necessarily active or intentional (Hughes, 2016). This might problematize the relationship between

'negative' affects and a diminished capacity to act. Nevertheless, a focus on negative intensities of austerity is ethically important, in order to make visible the violence of austerity that might not be immediately obvious without lived experience as our point of departure.

Importantly, these negative relations of austerity are folded into the everyday practices, rhythms, spaces, habits and so on that make up lived experience. Consequently, as everyday life ebbs and flows, so too does the affective presence of austerity. Austerity is not a continual and ongoing intensification; instead these intensifications vary throughout the everyday. Austerity ebbs and flows in intensity. Austerity as an affective presence might dissipate, only to re-emerge with an immense affective force within another encounter. Here austerity is made present through its moments of intensification (Raynor, 2016b). However, austerity does not have to be an acute intensity for it to be felt; austerity can also be a 'low level hum' (Dawney et al., 2018) that permeates the everyday. Such affective intensities of austerity, however, remain under-examined. The transformation of intensity – how austerity moves between absence and presence through its ebb and flow of intensity requires further investigation. Indeed, the temporality of austerity's intensities has also been under-explored, including how they endure, or how they re-emerge; this requires further consideration. As already highlighted, Seigworth and Gregg (2010) emphasise that affect can be a *momentary or sustained* relation. Thus, it is the temporality of these intensities that can have meaningful effects. The ebb and flow of austerity's intensities, as well as their temporalities require further examination.

However, the work that has already been done on the affects of austerity has largely focussed on the level of the individual affects (if it is even possible to call it 'individual affects' given that such intensities reside in the relations between bodies). This has largely been due to the research focus being mainly upon smaller scales, such as the individual or the household. The presence of the affective intensities at the *collective* level, therefore, remains under-examined. This is not to suggest that research on the scale of the individual or the household is unable to raise important questions around collective intensities, but rather that the interplay between

individual and collective feeling becomes a much more prevalent lived experience of austerity at larger scales, such as institutional spaces, the workplace or community spaces (Clayton et al., 2015; Jupp, 2013).<sup>17</sup> It is the question of collective feeling to which this chapter now turns.

#### 4. COLLECTIVE FEELING

The question of collective feeling matters to the conceptualisation of austerity as lived and felt in everyday life. It is important to consider this form of affect within the lived experience of austerity in institutional spaces (see Horton, 2016), for within these spaces the relationship between the individual and the collective is particularly significant. Austerity may be individually felt, but it is also collectively experienced and participated in; and vice versa, austerity may be collectively felt, but it is also simultaneously individually experienced. Yet, the examination of austerity as collective feeling (see Raynor, 2016) and the exploration of austerity in institutional spaces (for exceptions see Clayton et al., 2015 and Jupp, 2013) are both underexplored, even less so the entanglement between the two. This section examines what a turn towards collective feeling enables, focussing on a particular *form* of collective feeling – namely that of affective atmospheres.

Collective feeling is broadly used to define the ways in which feelings extend beyond the individual, or more precisely, relations between bodies, towards broader structures or envelopments of feeling. For Sara Ahmed (2004a) collective feelings are not feelings that the collective ‘has’, as if the collective was a subject. Rather, they are a way of examining how individuals become caught up in feelings that are not their own (Ahmed, 2014a). This is not to suggest that individual affects are confined to the personal, for as already examined, they are always relational. Yet, collective feelings exert pressure on or envelop subjects and/or objects in a way that individual intensities do not.

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<sup>17</sup> Clayton et al. (2015) and Jupp (2013) do not conceptualise their work through affect, but their work raises important questions around the relationship between the individual and the collective in times of austerity.

## A turn to affective atmospheres

Like the affective, affective atmospheres create a space of intensity that overflows a represented world into subjects and objects or subject and other subjects (Anderson, 2009a, p. 79). There are three things that are of particular significance to the concept of affective atmospheres: their emergence and in-betweenness, their materiality/ethereality, and their spatiality.

Affective atmospheres emerge from but *exceed* the assembling of bodies. Atmospheres are transpersonal and always in formation. What this means is that atmospheres form through the relations between subjects and objects or subjects and other subjects. Importantly, however, they emerge *through* the relationship between the assembly of elements and the subject that is apprehending them (Anderson, 2014). Atmospheric intensities, on the one hand emanate from the ensemble of elements that make up an atmosphere, yet on the other hand require completion from the apprehending subject (*ibid.*). Atmospheres neither belong to an environment, nor a subject (Duff, 2016). For Dufrenne (1973, p. 168), atmosphere is “a matter of a certain quality of objects or of beings, but a quality which does not belong to them in their own right because they do not bring it about.” It is in this in-between space, and the interaction between subjects and objects, that generates a sense of “life space” of atmospheres (Böhme, 2014, p. 42), for they are always in transformation. Atmospheres are

*“perpetually forming and deforming, appearing and disappearing, as bodies enter into relation with one another. They are never finished, static or at rest.”* (Anderson, 2009b, p. 79)

The openness of atmospheres means that they are continually changing, as new relations between subject and objects are formed. Atmospheres, then, are inherently ambiguous and indeterminate; for they are difficult to pin down precisely because they are emergent. This is very different to the way in which ‘structures of feeling’ modify actions, which exert palpable pressure and set limits (Williams, 1977). For Finn (2016) this presents a particular challenge for how an atmosphere comes to be felt and known and named amongst such indeterminacy (see chapter three for a methodological discussion of atmospheric ambiguity). In this sense, it

is easy to question how atmospheres are different from ‘individual’ affect, for they too are formed through the relations between bodies, and are continually in formation. However, it is their materiality and spatiality that distinguish atmospheres from simply transpersonal intensities (although they are of course also transpersonal intensities). Secondly, then, atmospheres are thoroughly materialist (Anderson and Wylie, 2009). Atmospheres have a very particular materiality that is “distributed yet palpable, a quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through sensing bodies while also remaining diffuse, in the air, ethereal”(McCormack, 2008, p. 413); affective atmospheres are simultaneously affective and meteorological. Yet, affective atmospheres become a spatial phenomenon as much as an affective and material one:

*“Atmospheres foreground the body in space, even as their analysis confirms how bodies are assembled and reassembled with other bodies, human and nonhuman, in their varied atmospheric encounters.”* (Duff, 2016: 63)

Atmospheres, then, have a very particular spatiality in which they can ‘surround’ or ‘envelop’ subjects and objects (Anderson, 2009). In doing so, affective atmospheres are collective forms of affect that modify possible field of actions, shaping capacities to feeling and act (Bissell, 2010). Yet, the spatiality of affective atmospheres is unstable and ambiguous, for the circumference of atmospheres is not fixed, especially if an atmosphere is taken not only to occupy a space but to *permeate* it (Anderson, 2009). For Brennan (2004, p. 1), this transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry of the subject – “[t]he ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual.” This is particularly significant, for it indicates the way in which atmospheres always become individualised, as it simultaneously is collectively felt. Böhme (1993, pp. 113–114) uses the example of entering a room: “On entering a room one can feel oneself enveloped by a friendly atmosphere or caught up in a tense atmosphere” (Böhme, 1993, pp. 113–114), atmospheres on the one hand *surround* subjects and objects; but they are always taken up by, and enter into relation with an apprehending subject. Affects become sticky (Ahmed, 2004). Yet, as indicated by Ahmed (2014b) this

individualisation is not a universal experience. For Ahmed, the models of sociality of emotion assume that feelings are transmitted rather smoothly between bodies. Ahmed calls for a model of emotion that does not assume that social equates to a shared encounter: “An atmosphere can be how we inhabit the same room but in a different world” (Ahmed, 2014b). This is particularly, important, for it indicates that while atmospheres are collective forms of affect, they are always differentially attuned to. For Ahmed (2010, p. 40), as bodies do not arrive in neutral, then, “how we arrive, how we enter this room or that room, will affect what impressions we receive.”

For Finn (2016: 33) this challenges the indeterminacy of atmospheres, for they “are not as spontaneous as they may feel.” However, rather than challenging atmospheres as an indeterminate presence, perhaps it points towards the temporality of atmospheres and our attunement to them. For they can be experienced as *having been here before* – there is a history or timing to them (Ahmed, 2014a). This temporality does not necessarily negate the emergence or continual becoming of an atmosphere, but rather generates a *felt* sense of re-emergence, a felt sense of ‘here we go again.’ However, whilst atmospheres have primarily been understood through their spatiality – how intensities become grounded in space – they have as much a temporal life (Closs Stephens et al., 2017; Shaw, 2014; Stewart, 2011; Sumartojo, 2016). Atmospheres are learnt (Adey, 2014), they have life spans (Stewart, 2011) and a temporal flow (Edensor, 2012). Yet, compared to atmospheric space, this has been less explored in geographical literature; what about atmospheric time or time as atmosphere? The temporality of collective feeling, both conceptually and as a methodological approach, warrants greater examination.<sup>18</sup>

An emergent field of work conceptualises austerity as an affective atmosphere (see Raynor, 2016a). Understanding austerity as atmosphere becomes a way in which to conceptualise austerity as lived and felt, for atmospheres are above all *experiential*. Austerity here is understood as the “background noise” of everyday life that can disrupt and even interrupt

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<sup>18</sup> The temporality of collective feeling will be explored in the following chapter.

everyday experience by slowing down or accelerating rhythms of the everyday (Closs Stephens, 2016). Austerity is also felt as a series of fragmented encounters that produce a diffusely felt atmosphere, or what Raynor (2016a, p. 197) calls smog:

*“[S]mog: a cold haze settled over the place. Smog, smoke, pollution, fumes, gas, human effects that escape their cause. Sometimes austerity escapes its cause too, sometimes its sources are difficult to identify, it gets everywhere, it disorients, it settles, it muddies connections between us, I try to grab it and it escapes. It is breathed and gets inside, it sticks to the lungs. Its harm escalates.”*

Raynor emphasises that austerity is incoherent and elusive. What is significant here is that there is a particular kind of violence that the diffuse nature of austerity as atmosphere produces. Austerity is on the one hand elusive, yet on the other hand it is also *sticky* and inescapable. Indeed, for Raynor, austerity cannot be fully registered by *one* kind of atmosphere or smog in a way that it becomes coherent. What conceptualising austerity as an atmosphere – or more precisely, multiple atmospheres – enables, however, is a consideration of the fluctuating, non-coherent and sometimes conflicting affective relations that come to shape how people feel and act in the everyday. When considering austerity as atmosphere(s), it is precisely its ambiguity and incoherence throughout everyday life that is so significant. Austerity becomes a complex, messy and sometimes unintelligible phenomenon. Yet, it is also a recognition that, throughout the everyday, austerity is made affectively, materially and ethereally present.

However, what has been underexplored in existing literature, is the temporality of atmospheric austerity. It is not simply that atmospheres of austerity are temporal as well as spatial, but also that temporal life of austerity is central to how austerity is lived and felt. However, how this research addresses temporality is different to existing work on the temporality of atmospheres (such as Edensor, 2012; Sumartojo, 2016) who focus on subjective memory. For Edensor (2012, pp. 1103–1106) a focus on *affective* atmospheres generates a “mute attachment to place”, and instead draws upon Böhme (2008) to argue that “without



sentient subject they are nothing.” It is the sentient subject, Edensor argues, that generates the memory of atmospheres, rather than its affective quality. Indeed, others have argued that the “relentlessly performative” account of human subjectivity found in geographies of affect makes it hard to grasp the obduracy of past experiences (Rose et al., 2010, p. 345). Rose et al. (2010) argued that affect theorists have very little to say about that which has been, or will have been and its relationship to the present. I argue, of course, that this critique is now defunct; there has been emergent literature since this paper was published that explores affect’s relationship with the past, present and future, which includes both individual and collective feeling (see, for example, Bissell, 2014, 2010; Closs Stephens et al., 2017).

Collective feelings, then, have a temporal life, but importantly, this is *not* in spite of, but as *part* of the continual transformation of atmospheres. To do this, however, this chapter turns towards questions of the psychoanalytic, and how bringing psychoanalytic concepts into the realm of affective geographies can help grasp the temporality of collective feeling. This may appear ontologically problematic. However, this is not an attempt to produce a psychoanalytic account of collective feeling (for this would be impossible) or austerity; rather it considers what the psychoanalytic might be able to offer in relation to the *re-emergence* of (collective) affects.

### **The psychoanalytic and collective feeling?**

Felicity Callard (2003), in a paper named ‘The taming of psychoanalysis in geography’, argued that (social and cultural) geography had tamed psychoanalytic theory by downplaying its more political and unpalatable aspects. For Callard, the ‘psychoanalytic turn’ in social and cultural geography had avoided the psychoanalytic unconscious, and instead opted for cultural interpretations of the unconscious, which have been more malleable to questions of subjective transformation. Yet, Callard (2003, p. 305) argues that in doing so, it ignores the ways in which “the unconscious throws up large, intractable obstacles in the path of the hope for achievement of subjective transformation.” This has meant that more pessimist ideas posited by Freud have been neglected in the aim of finding possibilities for resistance in the context of

achieving social-cultural transformation (Philo and Parr, 2003). With the risk of doing exactly what Callard critiques – taming psychoanalysis by offering a cultural geographical interpretation – this section wishes to explore what the unconscious might offer, not at the level of transformation of the subject, but rather the transformation and temporality of collective feeling. It asks what the unconscious might enable in terms of considering the re-emergence of collective affects. This provides resources for considering the presence and absence of collective feeling, which I argue is important to understanding austerity as lived and felt. It enables us to consider collective feeling as something beyond simply absence and presence, towards a ‘fuzzy’ presence; yet, it also allows us to consider *how* this felt sense of fuzziness emerges – through the continual *re*-emergence of collective feeling.

It is important to note that psychoanalytic understandings of affect have different ontological underpinnings compared to Spinozist-Deleuzian conceptualisations of affect. As already explored, the Spinozist-Deleuzian approach understands bodies as always in becoming. There is no pre-existing body, for bodies are always in formation, always becoming anew. The psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious, however, takes seriously a pre-existing subject with unconscious and conscious thought, originating in the late nineteenth century through the work of Sigmund Freud (Clough and Halley, 2007). Psychoanalytic geographies is an expansive field of study and has been drawn upon throughout the discipline, including emotional geographies, such as the relationality of emotion (Bondi, 2005), feminist geographies, such as critiquing the dominance of masculinist knowledge (Nash, 2000; Rose, 1996), urban geographies, such as the psychogeography of cities (Pile, 2005, 1996), and in disability studies, such as the construction of ableist environments (Wilton, 2003). Yet there has also been a “squeamishness” towards psychoanalytic work in geography:

*“The clear focus on sexuality and repression of sexual desires; the spectre of child sexuality and abuses thereof; the attention to acts (real and symbolic) of castration, with references to clitorrectomy and the complex ‘geography’ of the female orgasm; the concerns with death,*

*aggression and the like: all of these have perhaps proved, and may continue to prove, simply 'too much' for many geographers."*

Whilst psychoanalytic work has been taken up more recently with renewed enthusiasm (see Kingsbury, 2017; Kingsbury and Pile, 2014; Proudfoot, 2015; Straughan, 2014), it has still remained a field that has been met with critique and scepticism, in particular due to the insistence that the unconscious is central to behaviour in conscious life (Kingsbury, 2014). Yet, it is also this theoretic manoeuvre that is also why psychoanalysis continues to thrive across disciplines, including social theory, feminism, and cultural studies (ibid.). Whilst this research does not offer a psychoanalytical critique, it wishes to explore how the expression of the unconscious might become a way of thinking about the temporality of collective feeling.

For Freud, only a small proportion of the human mind is knowable through rational thought (Bondi, 2007). Crudely, "the unconscious is an area of psychological functioning that is not accessible to the subject, but which nevertheless has a motivating influence on their everyday lives: their thoughts, feelings and actions" (Pile, 1996, p. 7). For most psychoanalysts, the unconscious is made up residues of infantile experience and the representatives of the person's drives, sexual drives in particular (ibid.). The child develops defences against painful experience by keeping them away from consciousness and hiding them in the unconscious, known as repression (Pile, 1996). What is particularly significant here is the ways in which the unconscious finds expression in the conscious:

*"Most importantly, while the unconscious does not determine what goes on in the mind, it continually seeks to find expression by fighting a kind of guerrilla war with the conscious: this is most vividly experienced in dreams."* (Pile, 1996, pp. 7–8)

The unconscious makes its presence felt in a variety of ways, such as in dreams, and in the slip of the tongue, known as the 'Freudian slip' (Bondi, 2007). Emphasised again here is that the unconscious *continually* attempts to find expression or make its presence felt. The unconscious, then, never disappears but rather *re-emerges* into conscious thought throughout everyday life. It is this re-emergence that is of particular interest, for it has some similarities (although

ontologically unaligned) to the way in which atmospheres have been conceptualised. The expression of the unconscious is similar to the way in which atmospheres become the 'background noise' of everyday life (Closs Stephens, 2016). As they form this background noise, atmospheres erupt from time to time into the foreground, so that they emerge into awareness. However, the continual expressions of the unconscious point to towards a temporality that has not explicitly been explored when considering this notion of atmospheres as 'background noise.' Instead, focus has been paid to the *moments* of intensification themselves, rather than the fact that it also indicates a repetition of intensification. In other words, focus has been paid to the intensifications as events themselves, rather than thinking about the relationship *between* these events. Consideration of these intensifications as a seriality (Latham and McCormack, 2009) remains under examined.

Considering the ways in which the unconscious finds expression, then, can become a way in which to consider the temporality of atmospheres, for example in Freudian understandings of the uncanny and melancholia (Freud, 2005, 2003). In the uncanny, it is the re-emergence of an unknown that has long been familiar to the psyche, yet has been repressed (see chapter four for greater discussion on the uncanny). Similarly, in the concept of melancholia, it is the question of loss that remains unconscious to the psyche, yet re-emerges in encrypted forms into psychic life (see chapter five for greater discussion on melancholia). There is a temporality to both the uncanny and melancholia, through the re-emergence of unconscious desires or losses respectively. This might enable a consideration of how atmospheres extend beyond particular moments of intensification and allow us to consider them as part of a series of intensification. This *matters*, for it can have qualitative effects on the *experience* of such atmospheres. In other words, when atmospheres are felt as *one of many* or *one of a series* this might significantly alter how these atmospheres are experienced, compared to when each moment of intensification is taken in isolation. This is not, however, to suggest that each moment of intensification re-emerges in the same form, for atmospheres are always in transformation (Anderson, 2009b). Rather, their re-emergence, as they become part of a *series* of moments of intensification, generates a felt sense of temporality. It is in this re-emergence,

then, that offers a way of considering the temporality of collective feeling. Instead this research considers how it might generate a depth of experience, and in doing, argues that collective feeling has a temporal life that warrants greater examination.

## **5. SUMMARY: AUSTERITY AS LIVED AND FELT IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

In what ways is austerity made present throughout everyday life? How does it ebb and flow in intensity? How does austerity shape capacities to feel and act? In short, why does austerity as lived and felt *matter*?

This research conceptualises austerity as lived and felt in everyday life. It builds upon, but offers a different account to conceptualisations of austerity as a discursive presence, through austerity as an ideology and as cultural object. Despite empirical refutation, austerity refuses to disappear.<sup>19</sup> Indeed as austerity becomes a cultural object, it is discursively formed through the re-emergence of discourses from ‘austerity Britain.’ Both provide an account of the way which austerity has been discursively formed as a ‘necessary’ response to public debt. In contrast, this research wishes to explore how austerity, persists, re-emerges throughout, and reconfigures, everyday life when conceptualised as lived and felt. It is also austerity as it persists within the everyday, I argue, that will become an increasingly significant way in which austerity is made present.

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<sup>19</sup> However, in the context of the UK, it is also important to note that whilst the discursive presence of austerity it has also changed over time. As explored in the previous chapter, the dominant discourse of austerity as ‘necessity’ has changed over time as it has begun to be challenged; this disputation of austerity has come with the emergence of multiple discourses of austerity that emphasise austerity as a political choice rather than a necessity. In particular, this emerges, but of course exceeds, discourses from the Labour Party that construct an explicitly anti-austerity narrative. This was a central component of the 2017 Labour Party election manifesto, emphasising that Labour would “ease the underlying pressures in any areas struggling to cope with seven years of austerity” (Labour Party, 2017: 29). However, this change also makes an account of austerity as it is lived and felt in everyday life ever more important. For even as the discursive presence of austerity changes, and as the dominant discourses are being challenged, austerity still persists, re-emerges throughout, and reconfigures, everyday life.

When conceptualising austerity as lived and felt in everyday life, it is not simply situated in the everyday, but it *becomes* everyday. Austerity *becomes* the (extra)ordinary that is central to how everyday life unfolds; austerity becomes the ‘at risk letter’ arriving through the door, the reduced opening hours at the leisure centre, the pay freeze at work, the closure of a Sure Start centre. There are three things in particular that is central to understanding austerity as it becomes everyday that are in need of further examination. Firstly, this research explores, when everyday life is taken as our point of departure, how austerity becomes something ambiguous; it seeks to examine the ways in which austerity becomes a complex, incoherent and sometimes contradictory phenomenon as it becomes lived. In short, it seeks to examine austerity, paradoxically, as it becomes hard to pin down. Secondly, when austerity becomes everyday, this research understands austerity as always *felt*. It therefore seeks to explore how austerity emerges *through* its felt presence, such as through anxiety, fear, disaffection, hope, pessimism and so on. Whether anticipated or real, austerity is *felt* (McCormack, 2012). Thirdly, austerity as it becomes everyday has a temporal life that warrants greater exploration. This research seeks to examine how austerity forms part of everyday rhythms, habits and practices; but also how it persists, refuses to disappear, re-emerges, and in so doing how it reconfigures everyday space-times.

How, then, do we find a way of thinking about austerity as a lived phenomenon, with a particular focus on its ambiguous, felt and temporal presence? In short, through examining austerity’s *affective life*. Importantly, however, this has an affective life that intersects individual and collective feeling; exploring how austerity is collectively felt and participated in, but also individually and differentially attuned to. This is an affective life that is simultaneously an atmospheric life. This research understands austerity as a series of affective atmospheres that form the ‘background noise’ of everyday life. It explores how they ebb and flow in intensification, how they envelop different space-times throughout everyday life, and how they shape capacities to feel and act. In particular, however, these moments of intensification are not examined in isolation, but rather they form part of a *series* of atmospheric intensities. This research seeks to examine how they relate to one another, how

they find expression through their re-emergence, and how they subsequently generate a depth of experience. It is through its atmospheric life that we are able to explore the ways in which austerity is lived and felt throughout the everyday. In doing so, austerity simultaneously becomes an economic, social, and cultural phenomenon.

## Chapter Three

### Lingering: a methodological tool

#### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces and develops a new methodological tool for affective research. As conceptualised in the previous chapter, austerity is lived and felt in everyday life. Austerity is made affectively present, which shapes capacities to feel and act. Importantly, this affective presence is also something collectively felt as austerity becomes shared. This atmospheric austerity has both a spatial and temporal life, yet it is the temporality of collective feeling that has remained relatively underexplored. As a result, this chapter explores how the practice of lingering can become a methodological tool with which to attune to affective atmospheres and their temporalities. In particular, it draws upon Kathleen Stewart's (2011) conceptualisation of attunement and argues that it is a temporal concept that has not been explicitly drawn out. As a result, this chapter examines how lingering is already bound up with the practice of attunement. Subsequently, the chapter explores what lingering offers for affective research. Using the body as an instrument for research, lingering attempts to prolong the presence of affect; this attempts to hold onto affects just enough to say something meaningful about them. The chapter then asks what it means to linger within a research site, the library space in particular. The chapter goes on to argue that lingering can also be a methodological practice within ethnographic research more broadly. Lingering ethnography involves working with, but never surpassing, the thresholds of acceptability within space-times in order to open up (affective) life-worlds. Lingering also becomes a way in which to remain 'in-between.' This can produce discomfort for the research, yet it is this discomfort that is central to lingering as a research practice and therefore understood as productive rather than something to be avoided.



## **The methodological challenge (1) Austerity as lived and affective**

Taking austerity as lived as our point of departure means attuning to the multiple *forms* that austerity takes as it becomes present throughout everyday life. Austerity is not a coherent phenomenon limited to a fiscal policy, but instead is always and already multiple as it is lived. Austerity's presence within everyday life is both differential and multiple. For example, austerity stretches across multiple everyday sites, such as the food bank (Garthwaite, 2016), the job centre (Patrick, 2017), the Citizens Advice Bureau (Kirwan, 2016), the children's centre (Jupp, 2013). It is also made present through, and shapes, a multiplicity of relations, such as the familial (Hall, 2016; Jupp, 2017), indebted relations (Deville, 2015; Kirwan, 2016; Kirwan et al., 2016; Stanley et al., 2016), and relations with the present and future (Coleman, 2016; Horton, 2016). Thus, to move beyond austerity as a fiscal policy is to recognise that austerity can take multiple forms. As voiced by Ruth Raynor (2016a, p. 195), austerity is "an empty flowerbed at the end of the street... a taxi no longer [taking] a disabled child to school... the implementation of the 'bedroom tax' and a threatened eviction... a closed autism support group, and a choice between food and heating."

Despite the growing work within the geographical discipline taking seriously the lived experience of austerity, still underexplored is the way in which it is *felt* throughout everyday life. Austerity is indeed an empty flowerbed, the implementation of the 'bedroom tax', a threatened eviction. Importantly, however, such encounters with austerity are lived *as they become felt*. Here, austerity is made present as it becomes registered in bodies. As a result, this research focusses on a particular form in which austerity is made present: austerity as *affective*. Taking affective presence seriously means attuning to the ways in which austerity shapes capacities to feel and act (Bissell, 2010). In this sense austerity can *become* paranoia, melancholia, or pessimism as it is registered within living bodies. Thus, not only can austerity take the form of affect, but there is also a multiplicity in the kind of affective presence. The various ways in which austerity is registered in sensing bodies, therefore, also generates the multiplicity of austerity as it is experienced throughout everyday life. The methodological

challenge here becomes about attempting to attune to the multiple ways in which austerity is made affectively present.

However, I do not simply understand austerity as something that is individually felt. Rather, it also argues that austerity takes the form of collective feeling. This presents a very different methodological challenge to that of individualised affect. When austerity is made present through collective feeling, we are required to attune to *transpersonal affect*. In other words, attuning to the affective presence of austerity that emerges but also *exceeds* the assembling of bodies (Anderson, 2014). This is significant, since austerity here it is not simply a phenomenon that is shared; rather, it is *formed* precisely through the relations *between* subjects (and objects). In doing so, it enables us to understand austerity as something that is collectively felt and as it shared it is also collectively participated in. In other words, austerity here collectively shapes capacities to feel and act. This is not to suggest that every subject is affected in the same way; rather, it is to recognise that collective feeling is always differentially attuned to as the feeling becomes registered in sensing bodies. Thus, it is not simply a way to think about the significance of collectively felt austerity, but it also becomes a way to think about how austerity is made present through the relationship between individual and collective feeling.

Whilst there is more than one conceptual approach through which to explore the question of collective feeling – see for example Raymond Williams’ (1977) concept of ‘structure of feeling’ – this research draws upon the concept of affective atmospheres. Affective atmospheres here become a tool through which to explore the lived experience of austerity. Austerity is not a phenomenon that can easily be separated through its presence or absence. Rather, austerity is instead something that is present with varying degrees of resolution. Austerity becomes the ‘background noise’ of everyday life that ebbs and flows in intensity (Closs Stephens, 2016). Exploring austerity requires an attunement to the varied moments in which austerity is present, which can range from the intense to the undramatic (Raynor, 2016b). Thus, exploring austerity as lived involves recognising that it is not always an easily identifiable presence.

Austerity is not easily recognisable, yet, *somehow* we know it is there – we *feel* its presence (Gordon, 1997). The ambiguous presence of austerity, then, is a significant reason why affective atmospheres have been drawn upon here. Atmospheres by their very nature are ambiguous in that they are “an ill-defined indefinite something” that can condition life by giving spaces, episodes or encounters a particular feel (Anderson, 2014, p. 140;137). We can *feel* atmospheres, yet we cannot necessarily place *how* we know this. As a result, atmospheres run the risk of being understood as common sense: that we know what they are simply because we feel them. As voiced by Adey (2014, p. 837), “atmospheres are difficult to pin down, yet they are often talked about and decided upon as if they were not.” What this suggests is that the ambiguity of affective atmospheres is often erased, precisely because they are talked about with a particular solidity. Taking the atmospheres for granted, then, can have the effects of critical thought about them not extending beyond the fact that we feel them. This shuts down what atmospheres can do within critical geographical research, including their methodological potential.

Consequently, this research takes the ambiguity of atmospheres seriously, in particular by exploring what it can do methodologically. Precisely because atmospheres are ethereal and ambiguous, they can become an important tool through which to explore phenomena that go beyond absence and presence and are as a result difficult to pin down. Whilst austerity can be very clear in its effects, austerity can *also* be difficult to pin down and ethereal in its presence.

## **The methodological challenge (2) Researching the temporality of austerity**

However, austerity is not simply an ambiguous presence. Austerity’s temporality is also central to the way in which it is lived and felt. The UK has been in a state of austerity since the implementation of austerity by the former Coalition government in 2010. In June 2010, former chancellor George Osborne set out the austerity agenda in an emergency Budget:

*“This emergency Budget deals decisively with our country's record debts. It pays for the past. And it plans for the future. It supports a strong enterprise-led recovery. It rewards work. And it protects the most vulnerable in our society. Yes it is tough; but it is also fair.”* (Osborne, 2010)

Whilst it was initially claimed that the budget deficit would be balanced with four years in 2014, within three years this forecast was pushed back to 2017/18 (Harris and McCrae, 2013). And whilst the Conservative government claim that austerity is now over, analysis by the New Economics Foundation that the government plans further austerity “by stealth” (NEF, 2018). This includes vital areas of service provision that are now facing continuation of cuts between 2019/20 to 2023/2024 (ibid.). As such, the UK has been in a state of austerity since 2010, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. This is particularly important. The length of time that austerity has been lived in the UK suggests that austerity encounters now have a particular depth of experience that is central to how austerity is lived. Austerity’s ebb and flow of (transpersonal) intensity does not always occur as isolated or ‘fragmented’ encounters (Raynor, 2016a). In other words, the moments in which austerity intensifies are simply one of a *series* of affective encounters (Latham and McCormack, 2009). This gives austerity’s encounters a felt sense of re-emergence. Austerity, then, is ongoing as it refuses to disappear and is re-emergent within people’s everyday lives. The methodological challenge here, therefore, is to understand and examine (atmospheric) austerity through its temporality. Importantly, affective atmospheres are a transpersonal intensity; they emanate from but also exceed the bodies from which they emerge (Anderson, 2014). Affective atmospheres generate intensive space-times by enveloping particular bodies, including sites, objects and people (2014, p. 160). Yet, this envelopment is generated through the relationship between the collective and the individual:

*“On the one hand, atmospheres require completion by the subject that ‘apprehend’ them. They belong to the perceiving subject. On the other hand, atmospheres ‘emanate’ from the ensemble of elements that make up the aesthetic object. They belong to the aesthetic object.”* (Anderson, 2014, p. 145)

This form of collective feeling is made up of transpersonal intensities, but at the same time must also be 'completed' by the individual apprehending it. It is this gap between the collective and the individual that is particularly significant to this chapter, as it indicates a temporality to affective atmospheres that has been under-explored within existing literature. As examined in the previous chapter, whilst there has been substantial focus on their spatiality (Morris, 2018), atmospheres are also learnt (Adey, 2014), have life spans (Stewart, 2011) and a temporal flow (Edensor, 2012). Affective atmospheres, then, have a temporal life.

In particular, this chapter argues that it is the gap between emanation and completion of the atmosphere where a particular temporality emerges. In the gap between ensemble of elements from which the atmosphere emanates from and the subject that comprehends and therefore completes the atmosphere. This in-between space means that atmospheres are always in transformation (Anderson, 2009), but it also gives them a particular memory. A memory that neither belongs to the objects nor subjects. Importantly, this memory too is transpersonal in that it emerges from, but exceeds, individual subjects. A memory is created from both the transformation of affective atmospheres and by their re-emergence. This is a memory that not only results from ongoing commitments to austerity, but importantly, is a feature of all atmospheres. Firstly, transformations leave residues and are shaped by that which is enveloped. Secondly, and relatedly, as atmospheres re-emerge they bring with them a memory of previous envelopments. This is not to suggest that atmospheres ever re-emerge in the same affective state, but rather that the subjects enveloped within it – that make up and complete the atmosphere – have a particular affective memory of what it feels like.

As voiced by Edensor (2012, p. 1114) 'affective experience of space is usually conditioned by previous experience, by habit, by familiar emotions and sensations.' Yet, whilst the individual subjects do shape this atmospheric memory, I argue that this memory is by no means limited to the subject; rather, it is a memory that emerges precisely from the relationship between the eminent elements and apprehending subjects. As voiced by Sumartjo (2016, p. 550) 'our own actions, thoughts, feelings and memories contribute to atmospheres that might draw others

into shared experiences of collective events.’ This notion of ‘drawing others in’ to an atmosphere is significant in that it indicates a tipping point where these memories are no longer simply confined to the subject, but become transpersonal. Indeed, Closs Stephens et al. (2017, p. 45) note that atmospheric memories are ‘an attempt to think about memory not as something that is individualised in bounded persons... but as something that is transmitted through affective forces that is felt in and across bodies.’ In other words, the temporality emerging is an atmospheric memory that is shaped by, but extends beyond, the individual. Just as atmospheres ‘belong neither to an environment nor a subject’ (Duff, 2016, p. 63), neither does its memory.

Consequently, it is also the *temporality* of atmospheres that will become part of this methodological approach. The methodological challenge, therefore, is finding a tool in which to not only takes seriously austerity *as atmosphere*, but also to attunes to the *temporality* of atmospheric austerity. As a result, this chapter examines the way in which the concept and practice of *lingering* can become a tool through which to carry out atmospheric research. It argues that lingering is a way in which to ‘hold onto’ the affective. This in turn lengthens affective presence just enough to allow us to say something meaningful about it. Further, it examines how lingering is central to ethnographic research more broadly, and therefore, should be taken seriously as a methodological tool both within and beyond affective research.

### **A case study approach to austerity**

This research takes a case study approach to researching the atmospheric life of austerity. A case study approach has become a significant qualitative research approach cross multiple disciplines, but originated in particular in anthropology, history, psychology and sociology (Merriam, 1998; Simons, 2009; Stewart, 2014). On a broad methodological note, the case study approach enables in-depth research in ‘real life’ settings (Harrison et al., 2017); thus, it enables the immersion needed – in the lifeworlds of research participants – to carry out ethnographic research. A case study approach is also an argument for staying with the case – to allow it to speak. Lauren Berlant (2007, p. 664) emphasises that the case hovers above the singular and

the general. She argues that deciding what defines the surplus to singularity is now the province of the expert – it is the expert who makes the case. However, it is the case that is the agent here, for it is often the impact of the case that makes the expert:

*“[A]s an expressive form of expertise and explanation the case points to something bigger, too offering an account of the event of the world.”* (Berlant, 2007, p. 665)

In other words, it is the case that speaks, rather than the expert that speaks about the case. Whilst Berlant distinguishes between the case and the case *study* (although it is not entirely clear what the distinction is) this raises important considerations about a case study approach to research. It highlights the importance of staying with the case, in order to allow it to speak. This involves what we might call both staying *within* the case and staying *without* it. Staying within the case indicates the importance of the singularity of the case – its situated, contextual nature that is central to the case itself and the knowledge it produces. But it indicates also staying *without* the case is its ability to point towards more general questions that the case might produce, stand for or represent. Of course, these generalities are never truly without the case, for it is always produced through the singularity of the case itself; instead, staying with the case, involves simultaneously staying within and without the case.

The library network as a case study, then, becomes both singular and general when considering the atmospheric life of austerity. On the one hand, the research is situated within this specific library service and the lived experience of austerity within it. On the other hand, it points towards much larger questions about how austerity is lived and felt, including in institutional settings, how it is felt both individually and collectively, how austerity as an affective presence can circulate, how it shapes capacities to act, and the multiple forms that austerity takes as it is made present in everyday life. It allows consideration of situated knowledge whilst at the same time saying something beyond it's the context of the library.

### **Lingering as a tool for atmospheric research**

*Linger (verb)*

*To dwell, abide, stay (in a place).*

*To stay behind, tarry, loiter on one's way; to stay on or hang about in a place beyond the proper or usual time, esp. from reluctance to leave it*

*'To remain long in languor and pain'; to continue alive, though oppressed by sickness or other distress.*

*To be tardy in doing or beginning anything; to hesitate, delay; to dawdle.*

*To remain, to be slow to pass away or disappear; to stay or persist, though tending to wane and dwindle. to linger on, to continue to linger.*

*To be protracted (wearisomely or painfully), to drag on.*

*To draw out, prolong, protract by lingering, tarrying, or dallying. to linger away: to waste (time) by lingering.*

(“linger, v.,” n.d.)

Lingering is largely invoked as a descriptor or metaphor for crafting other thematically related concepts – in particular, haunting (Edensor, 2008), absent-presence (Wylie, 2009), trauma (Preser, 2017), residues (Krupar, 2013), traces (Hetherington, 2004), fragments (DeSilvey, 2006), ruin (DeSilvey and Edensor, 2013), and discards (Crewe, 2011; Stanes and Gibson, 2017). However, it has not been conceptualised in and of itself, nor has been considered as a methodological practice. Etymologically, to linger means to reside or dwell, but also, to delay going, to depart slowly, and unwillingly (“linger v.,” 1988). The idea of delaying, departing slowly, or unwillingly indicates an attempt to re-shape relationships with time and space. They are not merely descriptors but are also performative – departing slowly or unwillingly not only describes a refusal to disappear but also brings this into being. And in doing so, lingering lengthens time and reconfigures space. Importantly, there is an intentionality to this lengthening and reconfiguration. Lingering is a purposeful act; it is



something that is *acted upon* time and space, pointing towards an agent – or multiple agents – that is enacting the practice of lingering. Yet, the agents within this lingering are not limited to subjects; they can also be objects, affects, ethereal. As will become clear throughout this chapter, this temporal and spatial reconfiguration is central to how lingering can be used as a research practice.

This section examines the way in which lingering can become a tool for carrying out affective research. Whilst not explicitly explored in affective geographies, implicated within affective research is the concept and practice of lingering. In particular, lingering becomes a way in which to explore the temporality of affect. Taking lingering seriously in relation to affective research is important for two reasons: (1) individual and collective affects can linger, which enables us to think about temporality of affect (2) researchers can use lingering as a way in which to ‘hold onto’ affect as a mode of inquiry.

#### **i. Lingering – thinking about the temporality of affect**

Lingering has a temporal relation in that it lengthens time; lingering is an extension of action, such as a delayed departure, a reluctance or unwillingness to leave. Thus, lingering is an active process in which the presence of subjects, objects, affects and so on are lengthened. It might be possible to suggest that atmospheres, by their very nature and formation, linger. Affects can emerge throughout the body ‘unbidden’ (Wetherall, 2012); for Wetherall (2012, p. 21), “bodies are suffered rather than acted, and the tears, blushes, fainting and jolting have their own involuntary motion.” In this sense the expression of affective force could be understood as the outwards signs of lingering affects. However, atmospheres can themselves linger in a different form. Atmospheres can linger through their re-emergence, and as they remain or delay departing:

*If an atmosphere is around, if it seems to float above and beyond this or that person, it is still generated by those who are around, becoming something that can be picked up as well as put down. A cheerful mood is thus ‘out and about’, but it is not without those who are cheerful.*

*Sometimes, a cheerful mood dissipates when some bodies leave the room. Other times cheerfulness can linger, as a trace of a body left behind.*" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 15)

For Ahmed, mood functions like an atmosphere in that they form an envelopment that generates a sense of 'witness.' She suggests that whilst it is not guaranteed, atmospheres can persist beyond the objects and subjects that make up the envelopment. In other words, the transpersonal affect emanating from particular bodies can lengthen beyond the presence of the body itself, "as a trace of a body left behind." What is particularly useful with the concept of lingering, here, is that it allows consideration of the affective that is not necessarily affirmative. Whilst Ahmed draws upon the example of lingering cheerfulness, when considering the question of negative affects, atmospheres can also be oppressive as they linger. This is particularly significant within the following chapters, as the (negative) atmospheres persist in different forms throughout the everyday. Within chapter four, this persistence takes the form of a re-emergent uncanny atmosphere; with the continued threat of contraction, the uncanny atmosphere refuses to disappear, therefore lingering through its repeated return. Chapter five explores the emergence of an atmospheric melancholic condition, in which the losses that have been brought about as a result of austerity re-emerge in encrypted forms. Thus, central to austerity melancholia is the effects of lingering losses. Chapter six explores the way in which a shared sense of futility for the future of the library service brings about a collectively felt pessimism that persists throughout the library space. As the following empirical chapters will demonstrate, there is a particular cruelty and violence to this persistent austerity, in particular because lingering is diffuse, not easily recognisable or immediately identifiable, yet at the same time, is felt and experienced.

What a conceptualisation of lingering enables, therefore, is a consideration of the way in which affects persist that are both affirmative and negative. Whilst atmospheres are "dynamic qualities of feelings" (Stern, 1998, p. 54) that are always in transformation, this does not necessarily negate questions of negative states of being that are about the dying or the taking of living (Harrison, 2015). As the following chapters will show, the persistence and re-

emergence of (negative) atmospheres are symptomatic of wider experiences of loss and violence in times of austerity. Indeed, for Harrison, (2015, p. 285) “life is always already involved with loss.” The question of lingering atmospheres is not necessarily always about the ‘giving of life’, rather about what *lives on*; this is an important distinction, for ‘living on’ can also mean barely surviving, a steady breakdown, or a slow death. In other words, “to remain alive... although gradually dying” (“linger, v.,” n.d.). Thus, attending to lingering atmospheres can be used to diagnose lived austerity, and in particular the violence of contraction and loss within the library service.

## ii. **Lingering – a temporal research practice**

Secondly, however, is the methodological consideration of how researchers enable affects to linger as a way in which to do affective research. Unsurprisingly, affects shape capacities to feel and act. When a phenomenon like austerity is made affectively present we are attempting, as researchers, to understand how it makes us feel and act. This requires what Kathleen Stewart (2011) calls ‘atmospheric attunement.’ For Stewart, atmospheric attunements involves an acute attention “to the matterings, the complex emergent worlds, happening in everyday life” (Stewart, 2011, p. 445). Attunements are a mode of inquiry that attempt to grasp the vitality, yet ambiguity of lived experience:

*“Atmospheric attunements are palpable and sensory yet imaginary and uncontained, material yet abstract. They have rhythms, valences, moods, sensations, tempos, and lifespans. They can pull the senses into alert or incite distraction or denial.”* (Stewart, 2011, p. 445)

Taking attunement as a research practice enables us to grasp the multiplicity and ambiguity of austerity as it becomes rooted in everyday life. Attunement develops attention to austerity’s rhythms, moods, sensations, its materiality and ethereality. This form of affective research involves an entanglement of the multiple elements of everyday life and how we as researchers become folded within this entanglement. What this section wishes to specifically focus on, however, is the *temporality* of attunement through the concept of lingering – something currently under examined. The practice of lingering is actually very much present within the

methodological concept of atmospheric attunement, yet has not explicitly been explored. This warrants greater examination, for the act of attuning is actually as much a temporal practice as it is a spatial one. In other words, this section argues that attunement has a temporality, and lingering is this temporality, so that lingering is a form of attunement. Thus, lingering becomes a way in which to carry out attunement, but with an explicit attention to its temporality.

Brigstocke and Noorani (2016) locate three significant theoretical roots for the concept of attunement, namely from attunement as active, free play through Immanuel Kant, phenomenological ideas of dwelling and worlding through Martin Heidegger and more psychologically inspired work, such as Daniel Stern's understanding of vitality affects. Stern is useful here, for he understands attunement as vitality affects that enable one person to be with through sharing likely inner experiences (Stern, 1985, cited in Brigstocke and Noorani, 2016, p. 3). The notion of *likely* inner experience is important, for it indicates a *sense* of something *shared*: a particular reading that an emotion or affect is shared by another. In this sense attunements are subject-oriented, embodied ways of tracking emotions or affects (ibid.).

However, it is the phenomenological sense of attunement that is particularly significant within the methodological tool of lingering, for it is about being "affected by or calibrated by our environment" (Brigstocke and Noorani, 2016, p. 3). And it is from this perspective that Stewart (2011) explores the concept of atmospheric attunement. Stewart indicates that atmospheric attunements have lifespans or durations. And attunement involves gaining "a sense of something coming into existence or something waning, sagging, dissipating, enduring" (Stewart, 2011, p. 445). What Stewart indicates here is that atmospheres themselves have a particular temporal life, and the practice of attunement is about generating an awareness of this temporality. Less explored, however, is the fact that attunement itself is actually also a temporal practice. Stewart draws on Heidegger to argue that attunements are a process of worlding – they are an intimate and compositional process of "dwelling in spaces that bears, gestures, gestates, worlds" (Stewart, 2011, p. 445). This can be read two ways.

Firstly, it points towards the spatiality of attunement, through paying attention to the ways in which space bears, gestures, gestates, worlds. Secondly, however, it also indicates that attunement has a very particular temporality, for it is about *dwelling* in space. In other words, it is about a *lengthening* of one's engagement with and within space. It is the question of lengthening that is of interest here, for it appears central to how this form of affective research practice is carried out. This is not to suggest that all affective research practice lingers in an attempt to prolong or lengthen; creative methods, for example, often place value in the process with its associated ephemerality (for example see Raynor, forthcoming).

What I attempt to do, therefore, considers more deeply regarding how atmospheric attunement is also a temporal practice through the concept and practice of lingering. As Stewart indicates, attunement involves in-depth attention to the lived affects that emerge throughout everyday life:

*“What happens if we approach worlds not as the dead or reeling effects of distant systems but as lived affects with tempos, sensory knowledges, orientations, transmutations, habits, rogue force fields...?”* (Stewart, 2011, p. 446)

Attunement enables us to dwell on lived affects as they form part of the world of our research participants and, as researchers, our entanglement with it. Thus, when exploring how a phenomenon – like austerity – is made affectively present we are examining how it shapes capacities to feel and act. Yet, importantly, we do this through being caught up in feelings that are not our own (Ahmed, 2014a). We primarily do this through our own bodily engagement within ‘their’ worlds, meaning that our body becomes an instrument for research (Longhurst et al., 2008). Thus, whilst we are caught up in transpersonal intensities we nevertheless feel them *through* our own bodies. Central to carrying out affective research is precisely to allow oneself as a researcher to *be affected*, to allow oneself to be moulded by the world around us. We *feel* the world around us through our own body.

As such, when researching affective presence we are attempting to understand how it makes *us* feel and act in order to understand the affective world in which we have become entangled.

This requires us to “stay with” such affects and “follow the threads where they may lead” (Haraway, 2016, p. 3). This approach to research requires us, as researchers, to hold onto affects just enough to say something about them. Affective inquiry, then, is about ‘providing room’ for these affects and allowing them to speak. This is how lingering is central to attunement, as it opens up space for affects to continue or persist through the feelings and actions of the researcher. Attunement, therefore, also involves holding onto affects that little bit longer in order to say something meaningful about them. Through lengthening our attention to the affective, we are willing affects to linger or to linger further. Making lingering a tool for affective research, therefore, extends beyond an identification of lingering affects. We, as researchers, are also *prolonging* the life of affects in the act of attuning to them. Importantly, however, Ahmed (2014a, p. 16) notes that attunement *registers* that we are affected by what is around, but it does not necessarily decide *how* we are affected. This prolonging of affect, therefore, always involves some form of transformation. In doing so, researchers are not only drawing attention to, but also opening up, affective worlds.

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to the practice of lingering as it becomes a methodological tool for affective research. In particular the chapter focusses on the rhythms and space-times of lingering, and the significance of lingering in-between. Folded within these practices is the profound discomfort of lingering. But as will be concluded in the chapter, this discomfort is a necessary part of this methodological tool.

### **Lingering in the research site**

Bringing together a conceptualisation of lingering and a case study approach to research, then, requires us to consider how specifically we linger in sites. Whilst this research examines the library as a research site, lingering can apply to multiple research sites. A case study approach provides the conditions that enable lingering to be a methodological tool. This approach means that site (like the library service) becomes a “bounded system” (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 245), which can work to heighten the felt sense of spatiality and temporalities within it.

Importantly, atmospheres do not simply exist within space, rather, atmospheres and the spatial are co-constitutive. Atmospheres are spatial in that they envelop space-times, but are also produced and transformed through space. Thus, atmospheres and space are inseparable. As a result, one cannot think about space without considering the atmosphere that it simultaneously produces and is enveloped by. In this sense it is possible to argue that all spaces have atmospheres. Spaces are moody:

*“Moods are like weather, they have their own pressure systems, there is never a possibility of having ‘no weather’, and they exist as an atmosphere.”* (Highmore and Bourne Taylor, 2014, p. 8)

Some spaces could be understood as having ‘no atmospheres’, for example, in a restaurant or a bar where an individual considers the atmosphere dead or absent; yet, this is still always an atmosphere, for an envelopment emerges that produces a felt sense that what an atmosphere is or should be in that particular space is missing. Thus, it is an atmosphere of absence. This is significant, for it indicates that in choosing a research site, it enables a consideration of atmosphere. The case study becomes a bounded site of attunement to atmospheres and their temporalities.

Importantly, however, just as important with the methodological tool of lingering, is not simply the research site, but also *staying with* the research site. This allows the research site to speak, and reveals its affective and everyday life that might otherwise be swept under the taken-for-grantedness of daily life. Or, turning back to Berlant (2007), enabling the site to have agency. As a result, this opens up the possibility for making visible the micro-transformations within the space(s) that would otherwise go unnoticed. Yet, conducting lingering research within particular sites, then, is as much as about *space-time* as it is about the space itself. In particular, it enables consideration of the micro-transformations over time and within different space-times. This is particularly important when considering both the questions of ambiguity and temporality that I argue are central to atmospheric life. It allows us to consider beyond simply absence and presence, precisely because it enables us to attune to

the ebb and flow of intensity. For example, how something might become diffusely felt within one space-time and yet intensely felt in another. It also enables attunement to the way in which atmospheres might dissipate, yet re-emerge within another space-time, or how they subtly shift in and out of the foreground of an encounter, how they persist beyond particular spaces or space-times.

Yet, it is also important to recognise that there are limits to the boundedness of the case study as a methodological tool for lingering. Encounters become stretched beyond the particular spaces-times themselves; traces of atmosphere travel beyond particular spaces-times and into others. They therefore extend beyond the scope of fieldwork encounters. Thus, whilst the case study approach produces sites in which lingering can become a methodological tool, it is important to recognise that there are also of course limits to where this lingering can occur. In other words, it does not enable lingering within sites that are out of reach of the case study itself, but where an atmosphere might also have travelled to. However, this is a challenge that concerns geographical research more broadly, for every phenomena in some form will escape attempts to hold onto to it or will slip out of grasp.

### **The library as a site of lingering**

In England and Wales, the Vagrancy Act of 1824 deems it an offence to sleep or beg in public space. Any individual carrying out the act of begging and sleeping rough holds the potential to be arrested. The act states that “every person wandering abroad and lodging in any barn or outhouse, or in any deserted or unoccupied building, or in the open air, or under a tent, or in any cart of waggon...and not giving a good account of himself or herself” can be deemed as an “idle and disorderly person” (*Vagrancy Act 1824*, 1824). Particularly significant is the final phrase that focusses on the inability for the person in question to give an adequate account of themselves, as it is central to the classification of an individual as idle or disorderly. They are deemed as such precisely because they are not able to provide a purpose for wandering or lodging in public. According to the act, therefore, it is an offence to be considered loitering in



public. What this indicates, then, is that individuals seen to be without purpose in public space are understood as both undesirable and threatening.

The public library, on the other hand, is one of the only spaces within urban space where a purpose or justification is not needed for one's right to be there. On the one hand we have particular common-sense understandings of what a library is and does – as a reading space – yet on the other hand, libraries are wonderfully without purpose; or more precisely its purpose is not defined by others, but by the individual library user. In the library one is simply able to dwell without being asked to move on. This wonderful purposeless is shaped by the atmosphere of the library:

*“It's just a well-known thing about libraries, you get all sorts, and quite a few crazy people [laughs] and strange people. I mean in a way it is much more social work than a reading place. That's one of the great things about libraries is that they are places that everybody feels able to come into. They're not exclusive, they are very inclusive. It's always been, you know, drop outs and everybody comes in libraries, because we're open to everybody. And I love that about libraries – it's very sort of welcoming and democratic.”* (Alice)

*“[Y]ou have to hope that somebody sees sense and realises the importance and the need cos once they're gone, just as a democratic open space for people to access and a space people can come in without judgement”* (Josephine)

*“Libraries have always been a community space, so you've always had your sort, your hub. It's often elderly men who come in and read the paper and have a chat together. But now you have a lot of people coming in, who come it because it's warm in here. And it means they don't have to put the heating on for a few hours at home. Because they can come in and they can read the paper, and it's even little things you think, you know, they can't afford to buy their own chronicle.”* (Jannah)

This particular atmosphere of the library is a collective feeling that the library is open to everyone – it feels welcoming. Whilst Alice description of certain library users as ‘crazy’,

‘strange’ or ‘drop out’ might on first reading seem offensive, the use of such words is particularly significant; for libraries are open to individuals who within other spaces outside of the library may be constructed as ‘idle’ or ‘disorderly’ according to the Vagrancy Act. As indicated by Jannah, libraries are also one of the remaining spaces in urban space that is not premised on an economic subjectivity. In other words, the right to be in the library is not based on one’s ability to pay. In many spaces outside the library such individuals would have been asked to move on.

The ability to simply *be* in the library without purpose is in many ways political. It is a rejection of the neoliberal logic of productivity that infiltrates the economic, social, and familial everyday (Baritser, 2017). It is a shout out to the ‘strange’ and the ‘drop outs’ that they *matter* and are valued within the envelopment of the library. It is also a rejection of everyday rhythms and temporalities that dominate everyday space-times outside of the library. As individuals are simply able to dwell if they wish to do so, the library is reconfiguring time in a way that does not adhere to the logics of the working day. Although there are ambiguities within this,<sup>20</sup> it suggests that the library becomes a site of lingering as it pushes the boundaries of what is deemed usual *in relation to* other urban spaces. The ability to pass time in the library is not dependent upon particular economic, social or cultural capital. For Jannah, this is why libraries *matter*:

*“I think the biggest thing about libraries is that the people whose lives you affect most in a positive way are the people who are least able to articulate it. They’re the people who are least likely to be heard I think. So, you can have a positive effect on a lot of people’s lives but I think they’re the people who tend to go under the radar a lot. So it’s not a glamorous service, you*

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<sup>20</sup> For example, the library offers a weekly Job Club, a weekly supervised club, whereby members of the community looking for work could write, and gain support with, job applications. The job club, however, is an ambivalent space. The Job Club is in regularly contact with the local Jobcentre, in order to help prove that customers receiving Jobseekers Allowance have been actively looking for work. What was often told to me was that many job seekers as a result found themselves applying for jobs for fear of being sanctioned (temporarily losing welfare support), rather for hope that they would gain employment:

*“David, I don’t know if you know him, but he’s been coming for years and he must get through about 30 applications a week... They have to do an hourly contract almost for the Job Club now. They have to prove that they’ve spent, so and so hours, they have to say, ‘this is what I’ve done all week’ looking for work.” (Alice)*

*know, you don't have any way of possibly quantifying the social benefit of your library... And I think the people in the community who benefit the most aren't the people who can necessarily make their voices heard or get asked about how useful it is for them. So when they're talking about closing libraries it's more affluent areas where people will come along and the volunteer to take it over, and will run it or whatever. And those areas probably, not that they don't need it as much, but those people can speak and can find a way to be heard, whereas I think the people who benefit most don't."* (Jannah)

## **The lingering ethnographer**

Taking lingering seriously within methodological practice matters, for as ethnographers we *linger*. On the one hand, through the temporality and rhythm of ethnographic research and, on the other hand, through lingering within particular space-times and research encounters (or perhaps more precisely as a tool through which to *generate* research encounters). This is not to suggest that it is only through ethnography that lingering occurs; as will be explored later in the chapter, lingering also occurs in interviews as a way of re-living affective experiences. Yet, lingering is something particularly central to ethnography that has been under-examined.

### **i. Lingering as a temporality and rhythm of ethnographic research**

An ethnographic approach is premised upon an in-depth understanding of the life-worlds in which we are conducting research, often gained through developing an “intimate familiarity” with those of our research participants (Herbert, 2000, p. 560). Importantly for Herbert, this is only developed after “sustained exposure” (ibid.). Thus, to practice rigorous ethnography means to lengthen time with participants within their life-worlds. Not only does this require carrying out fieldwork for a longer period of time, but also repeat encounters (Davies, 2008; Hall, 2014).

I conducted eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork within a borough-wide library service in the North-East of England. In order to ensure anonymity for research participants the name of this library service has been made anonymous. In the library service, at the time of conducting research, there were eleven council-run libraries in operation, five volunteer-run

libraries, and one library in transition from a council-run to a volunteer-run library. As will be explored throughout the subsequent chapters, one of the library service's response to austerity was an increasing reliance upon unpaid labour through the volunteerisation of particular community libraries.<sup>21</sup> During fieldwork I spent approximately three days a week at council-run libraries and at least one day a week at volunteer-run libraries. As part of my ethnography I carried out repeated visits to all eleven council-run libraries, however, I spent significant time within the Central Library. This was a strategic decision, as it was the largest library in the borough with the highest number of staffing requirements and the pivot for the wider network. As such, it enabled me to gain a more in-depth understanding of both background and customer-facing work within the service. It also allowed me to build relationships and trust with a wider number of library staff. However, it was also important to spend time within the community libraries (smaller libraries that were imbedded within a local community) that offered a very different kind of library service to that of the central library. I also spent time in the library in transition from council-run to volunteer-run library. Additionally, I volunteered one morning a week in a volunteer-run library for fourteen months as part of my fieldwork. Between all libraries I also conducted fifty semi-structured interviews, with library staff, volunteers and library customers.

Spending sustained periods of time within these spaces was not only important as an ethnographer but also as an ethnographer *researching austerity*. As this chapter has already indicated, and as the empirical chapters within this thesis will explore, austerity's temporalities are central to how austerity is lived and felt. Carrying out a lengthened period of fieldwork enabled me to examine the way in which austerity is made present, in different ways, within everyday life. It allowed me to explore the way in which austerity's atmospheres persist and re-emerge, how repeated and cyclical budget cycles bring about a re-emergent threat of contraction (chapter four), how and to what effect losses re-appear beyond a spending cut (chapter five), and the diffuse violence of austerity as it never appears to end (chapter six).

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<sup>21</sup> However, as will be explored in chapter five, the creation of volunteer-run libraries was anything but a severing of ties. They are still very much entangled with the existing council-run libraries.

Repeat encounters were also important, as they allowed me to be attuned to the micro-transformations taking place within the library space(s) over time (Bissell, 2014). This was particularly significant within a context of austerity, as a lot of the way in which austerity itself lingered in the library was through its ebb and flow of intensity. For the former, in many research encounters I witnessed austerity forming the ‘background noise’ of everyday life that momentarily intensified into the foreground (Closs Stephens, 2016). In the library staff room, for example, seemingly unrelated conversations between staff transformed into ones about the library service in times of austerity. It often felt as though austerity was never too far below the surface, ready to make itself present once more.

## **ii. Lingering within research space-times**

Not only do we linger through the length and rhythm of ethnography but also *within* research space-times themselves. This is an intentional act, in which the fieldworker spatially and temporally lengthens their presence as a means through which to generate research encounters. The process of lingering is fundamental here, for this reconfiguration of time and space enables the ethnographer to *be in* and also *attune* very differently *to* particular space-times; in other words, lingering allows them to engage in a space longer than is usual or necessary within the habitual parameters or rhythms of everyday life. As such, lingering automatically takes the researcher outside the rhythms of the everyday, enabling a new attunement to their surroundings. Even if this is the subtlest of transformations, this slight reconfiguration of space and time allows the researcher to ‘make the familiar strange’ (Gardiner, 2000). The notion of being *slightly* outside the usual rhythms is particularly important here; it ensured that I, as a researcher, was not losing the experience of the everyday life of these library space-times, whilst also being removed *just enough* to enable me to attune to its specificity and uniqueness. This is allowed me to attune to particular space-times as both familiar and strange, something that is particularly important within repeat encounters.

During my time at the library service, not only did I linger within the different libraries, but also within different space-times in the service itself, including the staff room, the lending library, the café, information services, the job club, the mobile library, the delivery van that moved between libraries, and the employee engagement sessions.<sup>22</sup>

What lingering in particular within space-times enabled me to, was to attune to the subtle, but also sometimes stark shifts in atmosphere throughout particular space-times. These shifts and transformations in atmosphere were particularly significant to the experience of one particular space-time, namely the employee engagement session.<sup>23</sup> The atmosphere could transform from anticipation to shock, or from warmth to anger. One particular example was an employee engagement session when it was revealed to staff members that staff were being made (voluntarily) redundant and council-run libraries were being made volunteer run. The shift in atmospheres with these meetings were central to how austerity was made present:

*“So why have I put parties and cake here? You must be thinking, what are we celebrating? We are celebrating Ava’s departure.” There was widespread laughter at this. I remember Dennis telling me once that Ava consistently asked for voluntary redundancy and it had been rejected multiple times. It felt heart-warming that everyone could laugh in a situation like this. It genuinely failed to amaze me, time and time again, the dignity at which the staff approached the Employee Engagement Sessions. When the laughing died down, Dennis carried on, “We have really valued members of staff who are leaving the service and we need to celebrate with them and thank them for their contribution to the service. I worked out that the people taking Voluntary Redundancy have 360 years of service between them.” I let out ‘gosh’ in response to this, and other people in the audience murmured. “And 120 years of these are from Betty and Nellie.” Again there an outburst of laughter from the rest of the staff members. This laughter then turned into a prolonged clapping to mark their appreciation for Betty and Nellie. The atmosphere now was unlike anything I’d ever experienced before in an Employee Engagement*

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<sup>22</sup> Employee engagement sessions were meetings in which it was made known to staff members about future spending cuts to the library service. They will be explored in further detail in the chapter four.

<sup>23</sup> See chapter four for further discussion and explanation of the employee engagement session.

*session. In this moment there was no hostility or anger, but an intense warmth that spread across the room. I couldn't quite put my finger on the feelings that were currently being shared within the room, but I suddenly felt intensely emotional. I felt a warmth for all the people sitting in the room, but also a melancholy for the fact that such lovely people would be leaving the service" (Fieldnotes, 16.2.2017)*

Within this meeting, austerity was made present through an intense feeling of warmth in response to the staff that had given so much to the library service. Yet, within the same meeting, the atmosphere transformed from warmth to an atmosphere of anger:

*'Another staff member put their hand up. "The problem is, to the public, they don't see the difference between council libraries and volunteer libraries." Her voice sounded strained, which conveyed a tone of anger, and other people murmured in agreement as she said this. The nostalgic and emotional atmosphere had well and truly dissipated now, replaced by a tension brought about the ever increasing number of questions relating to the prospective volunteer libraries.'* (Fieldnotes, 16.2.2017)

Lingering within this space-time, therefore, enabled me to attune to and also hold onto these atmospheric transformations. This is particularly important for considering austerity as an ambiguous presence; for austerity does not become a stable or easily nameable phenomenon when it is lived. Rather, austerity is a shape-shifter that generates ambivalent, complex and sometimes contradictory affective relations to austerity. Additionally, lingering enables attunement to the temporality of austerity, for it brings the seriality of affective encounters with austerity. In other words, the way in which affective encounters build on, and form part of previous encounters with austerity.

Importantly, at its core, lingering involves a pushing of the boundaries of what is deemed temporally and spatially 'usual' within the everyday. Whilst this may superficially appear problematic, it is central to how the process of lingering occurs within an ethnographic approach. Precisely because lingering is a refusal to disappear, or a mode of dwelling that is longer than deemed usual, if we are not 'lingering' then we may not be in those space-times in

the first place or we would simply be enacting our own habitual routines without any particular attunement to them. In other words, we would not be lingering if we were *not* at the threshold of acceptability or convention within these spaces. In doing so it allows us to say something meaningful about the life-worlds of our research participants. Whilst this is something that can be attributed to conventional ethnography, lingering ethnographic practice works *with* these thresholds rather than shying away from them. In other words, this practice is attempting to explore what these thresholds might tell us about the life-worlds and space-times that we are lingering in. Seeking out these thresholds opens up worlds that might otherwise remain invisible.<sup>24</sup> In working with these thresholds, we might over time, also change the 'position' of the thresholds themselves; for example when greater familiarity is developed in a particular space-time or more trust is gained by research participants. As a result, however, it raises important ethical questions about our responsibility as researchers to stay on the right side of such thresholds, in order to ensure that we not exploiting our position or the access that we have been granted. Whilst this may seem more straight-forward in abstract terms, such ethical questions can become more difficult to decipher in 'real time' as research encounters unfold.

One such example from my fieldwork occurred during an employee engagement session, in which there was an ambiguity about whether I had lingered too long in the space-time of the meeting. I was sitting amongst library staff members and as the meeting itself was drawn to a close I entered into conversation with the member of staff next to me. As we were in conversation preparations were being made for another meeting that was taking place in response to the employee engagement session organised by the Union. Before I was able to make an informed decision about whether I was allowed to be there, I became caught up in the

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<sup>24</sup> Working with the thresholds of acceptability in the practice of lingering, however, is very different to Harold Garfinkel's (1967) conceptualisation of 'breaching experiments' in ethnomethodology. Breaching experiments involved the conscious exhibition of 'unexpected' behaviour in order to observe social reactions that such behaviour violations engender (Rafalovich, 2006). Central to this method, then, is the breaching of thresholds of acceptability. With the practice of lingering, however, it is certainly not about surpassing thresholds, rather about accepting that these thresholds exist with ethnographic research and therefore productively attempting work with them, whilst also maintaining comfort for research participants.



flow of people sitting back in their seats. As both of us were standing in the middle of the row, we simply sat back down:

*'As we were chatting a person made an announcement, "We should get started with the Union Meeting." I didn't realise that there would be a Union meeting after the Employee Engagement Session. Without thinking I simply sat back down in my seat. By the time I questioned whether I was allowed to be in the meeting or not it was too late – the meeting had already started.'*

(Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)

After a conversation with one of the Union representatives afterwards, I established that they knew about my research and had expected my presence at the meeting. Yet, this ambiguous encounter indicates the way in which lingering *within* particular space-times always holds the *risk* of surpassing what is deemed to be appropriate. For the question of what is deemed appropriate is often through shared conventions within a particular space; thus, it often through encountering that space that we learn about these thresholds. In doing so, with learning about these conventions also comes with the risk of getting them 'wrong' as well as 'right'.

This example raises questions about the ambiguous process of consent within the practice of lingering, but it also a question of *discomfort*. Whilst access had been granted at the collective level (by management) for me to be present at meetings and in the library space more broadly, this is no guarantee that individuals *within* the collective are comfortable by default within the consent given to a researcher. This becomes particularly uncertain when carrying out research within institutional spaces like the library, as there are many shared spaces made up of multiple individuals. And whilst I never was aware of this, there may well have been library staff uncomfortable by my presence within the library space.

### **iii. The discomfort of lingering**

The question of discomfort is of further significance when considering the practice of lingering *within* particular space-times. Lingering can also generate a *perceived sense* that we, as

researchers, are on the threshold of acceptability within research encounters. Here it is more our *own* discomfort within a particular space that generates a felt sense of ambiguity about whether we are ‘allowed’ to be there, rather than a question of consent. There were innumerable occasions where I felt uncomfortable being in a particular space, despite the fact I had gained consent to be there. Again, this was precisely because my presence reconfigured that space-time, therefore pushing at the threshold of what was deemed temporally and spatially acceptable. During such encounters I found it particularly important to ensure that I stayed on the right side of this threshold; even if this threshold was one that was simply *felt*, this does not mean that this threshold was not real. I found that I often tried to mitigate the discomfort of lingering by providing a sense of *purpose* within these spaces, or more specifically a *visible* sense of purpose. As such, I gravitated towards spaces and space-times in which my purpose within it was more clearly defined or I was able to carve out a reason to be there. Such purposes were contingent and consistently renegotiated in practice. Consent therefore doesn’t necessarily account for, or doesn’t always allow for consideration of this threshold, or the grey area of what is deemed acceptable. For this is constantly being renegotiated in practice.

One space-time that I gravitated towards in particular was the staff room at lunch time. Many staff members would bring a packed-lunch and eat it communally in the staff room, and I quickly started doing the same. I saw this as an opportunity to simply be around library staff without feeling a sense of being ‘out of place.’ This is not to suggest that my different positionality was eliminated, as being an ‘outsider’ is simply part of conducting ethnography (Hall, 2014). Instead, it eliminated my feeling that I was carrying out an activity that was ‘out of place.’ As lingering is a relational practice – one is lingering *in relation to* a particular time or space – I would carry out actions to minimise my *feeling* of dissonance with my surroundings. As such, bringing and eating lunch in the staff room would allow me to be part of some of the library staffs’ everyday routines without feeling like I was overstaying my welcome.

Such actions, although subtle, also provided me with a sense of safety in particular space-times where my feeling of being ‘out of place’ was intensified. In other words, I was seeking actions that would help me feel like I was doing *anything other than* lingering. For example, I sometimes felt this intensification in the library staff room, but on the morning of the employee engagement sessions:

*‘[The staff room.] felt a little bit like being in a morgue or a sombre museum, where there was a feeling that the silence should be preserved. I quietly drunk my mug of water, but only drank a few sips before pouring the rest away and washing the mug up. I was more drinking the mug of water to give me something to do and to give me an excuse to remain in the staff room without feeling as though I am standing out.’ (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

The sense that the mug was ‘giving me something to do’ is significant, for it highlights my own discomfort at potentially being seen *by others* to be lingering. In space-times where there wasn’t a clearly defined purpose I was more prone to *feeling* as though I was lingering, even though this is exactly what I was doing. Thus, whilst the ethnographer is by their very nature lingering, my actions suggest that I felt it important to reduce its visibility. Yet, this is not always possible when the practice is contingent and always being negotiated in space:

*‘[After the meeting] some people had gone back to the coffee and tea stand to pour themselves more hot drinks. I felt awkward in this moment. Most of the people here I didn’t know or knew very little, and I did not want to intrude on conversations. I decided to head over to the tea and coffee and pour myself a cup of tea. Four people were standing in pairs chatting to one another near the coffee table. Yet, I stood by myself and drank the cup of tea, as I did not feel comfortable joining their conversation – it was also not the time or place for it. So I awkwardly drank my tea and left the room.’ (Fieldnotes, 5.2.2016)*

In this encounter I attempted to lengthen my time in the meeting room after the employee briefing had taken place. Yet, my delayed departure was abandoned after I felt uncomfortable approaching conversations that I did not believe were appropriate to join. My feeling of

awkwardness, and therefore my desire to escape, was an expression of that fact that I felt I had been visibly lingering: drinking a cup of tea on my own when everyone else had either left, in the process of leaving or were in conversation. Thus, this might suggest that to be *seen* to be lingering within such space-times could actually be understood as a failure in the act of lingering itself. Perhaps successful lingering is to carve out reasons to delay, dawdle, or prolong.

### **Lingering ‘in-between’**

Etymologically the word ‘between’ comes from Old English *betweonum* and Mercian *betwinum*, meaning “in the space which separates, midway, in the midst, among” (“between (prep., adv.),” n.d.) To be *in-between*, then, is to inhabit this between-space. The notion of “the space that separates” suggests that ‘in-between’ is relational, as it is formed through the relation between two particular things. This also indicates that there is an indistinctness or ambiguity to the concept of in-between, since it is never quite a position, state or thing; and as a result, its transformation is determined and shaped by the forces around it. As a consequence, the concept of being ‘in-between’ is often thought about as transitory, as a position that is fleetingly occupied, something to cross or move through. It is also perhaps not considered desirable to reside within the in-between, precisely because of its uncertainty, its vagueness, its fluidity. This section, however, explores the value of *staying with and within* these spaces, positions, and states. This section explores the value of *lingering in-between* – what this might look like and what it enables us to do as researchers. However, this section also explores the discomfort that is generated in the embracing of this liminality.

Being in-between is inherent to carrying out ethnographic research. By the nature of ethnography, researchers generate a liminal position for themselves by occupying the threshold between different worlds. Thus, to carry out ethnography means to *linger in-between* different worlds – between our worlds, both in and beyond our position as researchers, and the worlds of our research participants. There are therefore multiple forms of ‘in-betweenness’ within ethnographic research, including being in between insider and outsider (Dwyer and

Buckle, 2009), between our lived reality of researchers and the lived experience of participants (Hall, 2014), between the life world of a social group and the geographic world they construct (Herbert, 2000). This allows us, as researchers, to say something about the world of our research participants, but importantly, it also allows us to say as much about our own worlds (Crang and Cook, 1995). This section, however, explores a particular form of lingering in-between that was specific, but central to my ethnography within the library service. This was lingering in-between two different kinds of libraries: between the council-run libraries and volunteer-run libraries.

Perhaps the most uncomfortable experience of my fieldwork was carrying out research at both council-run libraries and volunteer-run libraries. Before starting fieldwork this was not something I had considered to be a problem. However, I very quickly had the realisation that there was a substantial amount of tension between the two types of libraries. This is a significant point to recognise; my lack of awareness towards this was not (I hope) through a lack of preparation, but because I was very much at that point an uninformed outsider, or put more simply, a member of the public. As such, to a library customer who might use the library from time to time, they may not be conscious or mindful of the tensions between them:

*“We’ve even had people come in here and ask us if we’re volunteers. [I give a laugh and Penny laughs in response] I know! Errr [Penny laughs] And they find, I, you know, the customers find the volunteer service quite difficult, they can’t quite understand the difference. The staff in here don’t approve of volunteer libraries at all.” (Penny)*

Indeed as chapter five will explore further, the difference between the libraries also remains ambiguous and in some cases unnoticed. Yet, as I began fieldwork the tension soon became palpable. In my first meeting with the volunteer-run library I was researching with, a member of the trustee committee stated: *“The tension between council-run and community-run libraries is very sensitive. So just be wary of that”* (Fieldnotes, 7.9.2015). And as my fieldwork began in the council-run libraries I started to feel the tension between the two libraries:

*'To make conversation, I mentioned that I would also be spending time in other libraries throughout the network, probably starting with [Library name] at the end of October - November time. The staff member looked at me in a bemused way, "[Library name]? That's a controversial one! It's going to be closed. Well, volunteer run.'*" (Fieldnotes, 8.9.2015)

The library in question was a council-run library at the time, but soon to be transitioning into a volunteer-run library. The force of the tension was so palpable that I almost felt slightly overwhelmed by the research I would be undertaking:

*'I had started to feel the tension between the two types of libraries whenever it was mentioned, as though it was in the air. My body tensed up and there was a definite knot in my stomach. I had come to the realisation, 'Oh my God, this research project is going to be a lot more contentious and difficult than I first thought.'*" (Fieldnotes, 8.9.2015)

My discomfort was at the realisation that my research, and therefore I as a researcher, was positioned at the threshold of volunteer and council-run libraries *at a time* where there was an uncomfortable coexistence between the two. Lingering in-between is something in and of itself unsettling, but lingering in-between the two libraries was particularly unsettling, as it brought with it a real risk of unravelling the trust that I had built up:

*'Dennis mentioned to me that he had said to his team of managers that I was also volunteering at [Volunteer library name] Library. "The managers just looked taken aback and said, 'That's controversial'. But I said to them that it was for the purpose of doing research to get the bigger picture." I was completely caught off guard with this. It made me very anxious that this would damage the trust that I had built up with the managers and the employees if this sort of information went round the library. Of course I didn't want to hide this fact, but I also didn't want to shout about it either. Since experiencing the extent of hostility towards library volunteers, I didn't want to be seen as one of them. I said to Dennis, "I'm worried they may look at me different now." He responded, "I think it will be fine, so long as you emphasise that you are volunteering for the purpose of doing research [he emphasised the word purpose]. It's not*

*like you have been volunteering for two years and you live in [area of volunteer library]. You are not taking their job as such, you are volunteering on a temporary basis, whilst doing research.” Still, I felt worried. I worried that the managers who have found out will identify me as a volunteer and the trust that I had manage to build up would be broken.’ (Fieldnotes, 23.9.2015)*

Interestingly, it was the trust built up with the council-run libraries that I was particularly concerned about, rather than that of the volunteers. This was partly because I was myself volunteering within one of the volunteer-run libraries as part of my fieldwork, something the professional library staff fundamentally opposed in principle.<sup>25</sup> I was therefore anxious about staff members’ feelings towards me if they discovered I was volunteering on a weekly basis at a volunteer-run library. It is important to stress that I never hid my engagement with the volunteer-run libraries from any research participant. Yet, I was also fearful of people discussing it without being able to represent myself and my reasoning behind volunteering, as I felt it important to stress that I was volunteering for *research purposes* as Dennis had done to other library managers.

However, moments arose where the ability to represent myself and my research was taken entirely out of my control. Playing a large role in this was the fact that my fieldwork was not simply based in the library spaces themselves, but in library spaces that were also imbedded in local communities. As such, volunteers and library staff overlapped as the former would also regularly visit other council-libraries in the area as part of their everyday routines:

*‘As we were opening the [volunteer] library, Sabine said to me, “I spoke to that person at [Library name] Library, Yasmine. And I said you were here doing research, and that you wanted to speak to library employees.” This took me completely by shock and my body just filled with horror. She carried on, “So she said, ‘I know you have different opinions to me.’ And I said, ‘I know you do.’”*

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<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that the library staff were opposed to ‘additionality’ volunteers rather than ‘added value’ volunteers: “There are ‘added value volunteers’. People love them; these are support volunteers that do things that the staff members otherwise wouldn’t be able to do. They are volunteers without the threat to staff members’ jobs. There are also ‘additionality volunteers’; these are volunteers that are replacing the jobs that have to go. The jobs are going anyway regardless of whether a volunteer steps in. If the community wants to step in they can.” (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 11.9.2015)

*She gave a little huff and a chuckle. "Because, you know, I had that run-in with her." On a previous occasion Sabine had argued with Yasmine about volunteer-run libraries.<sup>26</sup> "But I said to Yas,ome, 'I think that's what she wants'. And then she said, 'there's a girl at the Central library', and I said 'that must be her because I know she works a lot with Dennis.'" The more I heard of this, the more I was horrified that she had actually approached this employee, especially when I hadn't asked her to, and especially when the relationship between volunteers and employees was so sensitive... There was so much tension within me now. I went over in my head all the consequences this could have: [Library name] wouldn't want to speak to me, my rapport with the branch libraries wouldn't develop. I felt like Sabine didn't have a clue at all how sensitive volunteer libraries were to council library staff. She knew employees weren't happy but she obviously couldn't see it from their point of view, otherwise she wouldn't dreamt of mentioning it to the library staff.' (Fieldnotes, 28.1.2015)*

Within this encounter, a volunteer I was carrying out research with had approached a council-run library staff member about my research. This inability to control how my research was being represented by others generated anxiety for me as a researcher. However, this anxiety was intensified in the context of being at the threshold of two (uncomfortably coexisting) libraries. My anticipation of the potential outcomes of this encounter – including losing trust and rapport with council-run library staff – was an expression of my own discomfort about how I would be perceived by others as I lingered in-between both libraries. This raises interesting questions about the relationship between lingering and exposure. Lingering can expose oneself as being different or acting differently within a particular space-time – as not

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<sup>26</sup> *I've got to tell you what happened in [name of council-run] library." [Sabine] seemed very excited about the prospect of telling this story. "I was in [council-run] library with my granddaughter and they were doing the Bear Book reading challenge where they giving stickers away. But to get them you need a council library ticket. I mentioned that I was a volunteer at [volunteer-run] Library, and they were not happy when I said this. So they asked me 'do you have a library card?' And I said I had a library ticket from [volunteer-run] Library, and said 'that doesn't count, you need to get a library card from here.'" She said this in a way to mimic an angry voice. "So I went to the counter to sign up to a council library ticket. And I asked the lady at the counter, 'is this going to take long? Because I haven't got long and I know how long it takes at [volunteer] Library.' And she was so angry when I said this, she said 'We are not like [volunteer library], we are professional librarians'." Sabine laughed as she was telling this. "And you know what, she made so many mistakes, she did the print screen wrong – it took her ages. And my husband was behind me and whispered to me, 'is she doing it right?' because it was taking so long. They claim they are professionals, but they can't sign up a member of the library." As I heard this, I felt really angry and disappointed at Sabine's behaviour. Why would she find her encounter with a council library staff member so amusing? Did she not know how sensitive this topic was for existing council libraries? I made a point of not laughing a long with her story and I simply busied myself in the overdue loan letters due to be sent out to customers.' (Fieldnotes, 11.2.2016)*



quite fitting in (central to the lingering ethnographer). This in turns opens up the possibility of the representation or judgement of others. Perhaps this is also why lingering is so uncomfortable; it exposes oneself as *not belonging* – whether this be not belonging in space or to a particular group. Lingering – and in this case lingering in-between – exposes the researcher to the interpretation and representation of others. Yet, perhaps it is ethically important for the researcher to experience the discomfort of exposure; for, as researchers, we exercise the privilege of representing our research participants. In the act of taking part in the research, participants themselves are opening themselves up to exposure to the researcher. Thus, the discomfort of lingering in-between the two types of libraries was also productive, as it generated moments that *temporarily* disrupted the binary between the researcher/researched, ‘representer’/represented.<sup>27</sup>

The feeling of being ‘exposed’ often emerged during my weekly volunteering sessions at the volunteer-run library. In particular, the feeling arose during moments when the working practices of the volunteer-run library would entangle with the working practices of the council-run library,<sup>28</sup> as it brought my ‘inbetweenness’ into visibility. For example, every week during my shift at the library, there was a delivery from the central library (a council-run library). I spent a lot of time during my research at the central library and therefore knew a lot of people working there. Likewise, I also spent a lot time at this particular volunteer-run library. I enjoyed spending time at both libraries, particularly because of the friendly and welcoming people who worked or volunteered at them. However, the working practices within two libraries were still very much entangled, and the moments when this entanglement became visible also became moments of exposure for me as a researcher; or more precisely, they exposed the way in which I lingered in-between the two libraries. The weekly delivery from the central library was a van delivery driven by one of the janitors; they delivered

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<sup>27</sup> However, within this particular encounter, my anxiety was further intensified by the fact that I had information that I knew other volunteers did not have; here, it was the intensity at which library staff resented the existence of volunteer-run libraries. Therefore, it was not simply about the exposure that was part of being in-between two libraries, but was also being exposed to knowledge from one side (library staff) that I did not feel ethical to share with the other side (the volunteers).

<sup>28</sup> This entanglement between the two types of libraries is explored in further detail in chapter five.

various materials supplied by the council-run library service, including books and overdue loan letters. The materials were delivered at the same time every week, yet this time became an intense moment of anxiety for me as a researcher, as I felt exposed through my own liminality:

*'Today I found myself worrying about the delivery van coming from the central library. I knew that Rudy (the janitor) was driving the van, as I had spoken to him the day before when I was at the library. I now knew that the library van would begin driving at 10am, so from 10am I was continually nervous, anticipating when the van would come to the library. I kept on keeping my eye on the library entrance when I was upstairs, trying to find reasons to do jobs downstairs where I knew Rudy wouldn't see me. As I was upstairs I worked out that the corner next to the coffee machine was a space that wasn't visible from the service desk. I realised that if I hung around there, there would be less chance that Rudy would see me... I was so anxious about Rudy seeing me in [the volunteer library] and then telling staff in the central library. I also wondered whether the other volunteers – Alan, Eleanor and Thomas – had noticed that I had hidden myself. But none of them said anything. I felt very relieved after Rudy had delivered the library box. Between 10am and Rudy arriving I felt extremely on edge, precisely because I know that Rudy could arrive any time after 10am. But now I knew I could properly relax, as I knew that no-one else would come that day from the council-run libraries. It therefore meant I could walk around the whole of the library without the fear that a janitor would walk in.'* (Fieldnotes, 18.2.2016)

My behaviour in this encounter was most definitely shaped by the discomfort I felt of being in-between the two libraries. Whilst my research was not covert and it was known by members of the council-run libraries that I was also researching with volunteer-run libraries in the borough, it was when the two research spaces, participants and practices overlapped that generated significant discomfort. It suggests that both the act and visibility of lingering in-between can be affectively charged. It was often affectively charged with anxiety, which in turn shaped my capacities to feel and act; my actions were shaped by anxiety that I would be

judged by others for carrying out research with both library volunteers and staff members. This was a low-level anxiety that intensified at particular moments. Or more precisely, the act of lingering in-between generated a pervasive low-level anxiety throughout the fieldwork process, yet my anxiety dramatically intensified in moments when this ‘in-betweeness’ became more visible or felt more present.

I read back on my ethnographic fieldnotes with a degree of shame here. The library volunteers who I was doing research with were highly committed to the idea of ‘saving’ their library service. Their intentions were always to continue providing a service to their local community and did so through dedicating a significant amount of time. And in many ways they were filling in the gaps left by neoliberal austerity (further explored in chapter five). Yet, my actions say something significant about intensity of feeling that was generated by me attempting to linger in-between the two libraries. Perhaps the anxiety that I felt – that significantly shaped my capacity to feel and act – has transformed into shame precisely because I am no longer ‘in the field’ (Proudfoot, 2015). Thus, the affective charge of lingering inbetween has ebbed away as it is no longer a lived experience. In doing so, my reflexivity upon the fieldwork process leads to lingering (and transformation) of feelings beyond the field itself. For what it is worth, I eventually managed to face my anxiety about being seen to be volunteering by the library janitor(s):

*‘At around 10.30 Gregg came into the library. It took me a little by surprise, but I had decided in my head that I would confront this and not try hide from the janitors. I hadn’t seen Gregg in a while, so when he came in I greeted him like an old friend and Gregg did the same. We clasped each other by the arm, which I took that he was also happy to see me. He asked me how I was doing and vice versa. I replied, “I’m doing some research at [Library name].” I wanted to make it clear to him that I was here for research purposes and not simply as a volunteer. He didn’t seem to be judging me for being here, however.’ (Fieldnotes, 21.4.16)*

## **The interview encounter – a site of lingering affects**

As part of this ethnographic fieldwork this research also conducted 43 semi-structured interviews across a range of staff, volunteers and library customers (see Table 1). Whilst the library is often understood through the public spaces of the library, this thesis has chosen to focus on a particular part of the library service – namely the experience and working practices of library staff members. As a result, my research interviews predominantly focussed upon the experience of library staff, rather than library customers. I argue this is an ethical commitment, and for two reasons in particular. Firstly, this is an ethical commitment to focus on the background work that enables the library to function; in other words, the work carried by the background practices and spaces that produce the well-known public spaces of the library, and that also produce the library as a welcoming and open space. This thesis, therefore, focusses on the work and individuals that enable the library to be an important public asset. Secondly, and relatedly, a focus on the background work of the library enables an exploration of the effects of austerity that are less visible or invisible, precisely because they occur in the spaces and space-times that we do not usually get access to. This thesis, therefore, has an ethical commitment to making visible the effects of austerity that remain invisible. This is, therefore, also a political commitment, in order to expose the effects of austerity that remain beneath the threshold of perceptibility.

Interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 115 minutes in length (see Appendix for additional information of key research participants). Interviews have often been used within qualitative research as a way in which to elicit information from another person through verbal exchanges (Dunn, 2005, p. 79). They have been used as a standalone method, or in conjunction with other methods. Expansively used since the cultural turn in geography, interviews have often been drawn upon to explore issues in greater depth, as well as exploring the complexities and contradictions of research participants' experiences (Valentine, 1997). They have, therefore, become an important way in which to gain a variegated understand of viewpoints and lived experiences (Longhurst, 2010).

Importantly, however, this chapter argues that the interview encounter can also become a site of lingering affects. In particular, it becomes a site within which to create scenes where affects can be made present again. This is different to the lingering within participant observations as explored earlier. Within participant observation, lingering becomes a prolonging of affect as its presence emerges *in situ*; in other words, it is an attempt to hold onto the affective as it is experienced in ‘real time.’ Lingering within the interview encounter, on the other hand, becomes a site within which affects can be *re-lived* for the research participant. This, in turn, produces particular kinds of atmospheres that envelop both participant and researcher.

Research participant	Number	Where	When
Professional library staff	14	Across 6 council-run libraries	September 2015 – December 2016
Library volunteers	23	Across 3 volunteer-run libraries	December 2015 – June 2016
Council-run library customers	3	Across 1 council-run library	April 2016 – June 2016
Volunteer-run library customers	3	Across 1 volunteer-run library	April 2016 – June 2016

Table 1 **Basic information about semi-structured interviews conducted**

The role of the interview encounter has previously been criticised for being too rooted in the verbal, and not accountable to the non-representational (see for example Katz, 1999). Yet, this research takes on Bissell’s (2015) emphasis on the renewed potential for speech in general. For him, different forms of speech have various performative powers that assemble and recompose relations:

*“Different forms of speaking can crystallise a mood, provide relief, instruct, console, berate, organise or bring something inchoate into sharper focus.”* (Bissell, 2015: 148)

What this indicates is that speech as action can have various performative and also affective consequences that have previously been overlooked. The interview encounter, then, can be *affectively performative* in that it produces a space-time where feelings can openly be felt and attuned to. The interview encounter is therefore also phenomenological, as it is also the affects that emerge (or re-emerge) and are attuned to within the experience of the interview that is of significance. Whilst they might emerge from particular narratives they are nevertheless in some way *felt* within the encounter itself. The interview enables a particular form of lingering in that within this encounter affective experiences can be re-lived. Thus, affects can linger through their re-emergence in the encounter itself.

This act of re-living affective experiences is particularly important within the context of the library. The interview encounter allowed research participants to dwell on particular affective experiences that they did not feel comfortable doing or in particular space-times outside of the interview. The interview encounter enabled a re-living of affective experiences that were suppressed for not being deemed appropriate for expression within the public library itself. Whilst austerity is indeed affectively present in multiple ways, staff members emphasised that they saw the expression of austerity to customers as unprofessional. In other words, staff are not able to express their feelings towards the effects of austerity to the library customer:

*“I mean, we're quite good, we do keep it away, erm, we're probably the most well behaved service I think, because you know, anything that is doom and gloom, it's only discussed in the staff room, you don't in Central hear anybody talking, you know, to the customers. But I know in the leisure services, they're quote vocal and they tell people, you know, 'we're really, sort of, not very happy with what's happening to us' and 'this is what's happening to us' where I think we've always been a very well-behaved service. And very tightly controlled.”* (Penny)

As such, interview encounters – along with the staff room – were space-times in which austerity could be openly discussed and its affective presence could be actively acknowledged

and attuned to. The interview generates a sense of enclosure – in part through anonymity that it ensures – that allows feelings to be explored without fear of repercussions:

*“I think nearly every meeting I have has an agenda, and by that I might be trying to convince councillors of something difficult, I might be trying to convince Vanessa, senior management of a view, or being given work, with my own management team it might be trying to motivate them to do something, with employees it might be trying to reassure or pass on something really difficult, and I know we joked earlier on about it being therapeutic but in all honestly it’s a non-judgemental conversation. And by it being non-judgemental – and I know you’ve got empathy about the whole service and you care about libraries – that it’s been positive because it is it an outlet to talk about what’s going on without criticism. Without, ‘well you’re gonna have to do this Dennis.’” (Dennis)*

Dennis suggests here that within the library – as a workplace – feelings and actions had to be moderated at all times, yet the interview encounters became space-times where this began to fall away. Dennis’ emphasis on the encounter as an outlet without criticism indicates the comforting role that individual interviews can play within institutional settings. However, it is important to note that all interviews took place after a sustained period of time in the library service, after trust and rapport had been built up with research participants. Thus, the ability for the interview encounter to become a space for expression and attunement to the (often negative) affective presence of austerity was perhaps dependant on previously built trust. As a result, the interview encounter became a site of lingering affects, for two reasons in particular. Firstly, the interview can become a site within which particular affective experiences can be re-lived. Secondly, in the context of the library, interviews also enable the presence and dwelling of *negative* affective experiences that are central to the lived experience of austerity, yet are not deemed appropriate within the public library spaces.

### **Concluding remarks: Why does lingering matter?**

Lingering is a methodological tool for affective research, but can also be used within ethnographic research more broadly. Lingering becomes a tool through which to attune to

atmospheres and their temporalities. Lingering is central to attunement, as it opens up space for affects to continue or persist through the feelings and actions of the researcher. It involves holding onto affects that little bit longer in order to say something meaningful about them. Through lengthening our attention to the affective, we are willing affects to linger or to linger further. Making lingering a tool for affective research, then, extends beyond an identification of lingering affects. We, as researchers, are also *prolonging* the life of affects in the act of attuning to them. Yet, in the act of lingering, we are not only drawing attention to, but also opening up, affective worlds. This is slightly different to attunement as a desire to be ‘in sync,’ such as psychological notions that understand attunement as a tracking of emotions or affects (Brigstocke and Noorani, 2016).

In the context of austerity, lingering enables the consideration of the temporalities and ambiguities of austerity. It enables us to attune to ways in which austerity’s affective presence ebb and flows in intensity, how austerity extends beyond something that is recognised through its absence or presence; it enables attunement to austerity’s fuzzy, diffuse presence, yet that is at the same time something that is inescapable. Additionally, lingering allows attunement to the re-emergence of atmospheric intensities from one space-time to another. Lingering enables us to not only attune to the research encounter itself, but also delve into the depths of previous research encounters as an affective memory shaping the present encounter. This explicitly non-linear form of attunement involves holding on to the affective, letting go *and holding on again* with more affective weight added. In other words, it is a form of attunement that draws on *previous* attunements so that ‘present’ affects linger *with* the previous occasions where they have been felt. This becomes evident throughout the following three empirical chapters. This is particularly apparent through my ‘reading’ of certain researcher encounters, where I carried out ‘paranoid’ and ‘pessimistic’ readings.<sup>29</sup> As a researcher I developed affective readings of encounters precisely because of the depth of (affective) experience generated over time within the library space. In other words, I read particular encounters through a paranoid or pessimistic lens because I was shaped by their

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<sup>29</sup> See chapters four and six for paranoid and pessimistic readings respectively.



affective presence in *previous* research encounters.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, my attunement to affective depth of experience became central to identifying the way in which affects linger through their re-emergence. This is particularly significant within a mode of research inquiry that takes seriously the temporality of affect.

As explored throughout the chapter, lingering within ethnographic research involves negotiating the boundaries of acceptability within particular space-times. Without this, it would not be considering lingering. Precisely because lingering is a refusal to disappear, or a mode of dwelling that is longer than deemed usual, if we are not lingering then we may not be in those space-times in the first place or we would simply be enacting our own habitual routines without any particular attunement to them. In doing so it allows us to say something meaningful about the life-worlds of our research participants. Yet, this can produce discomfort for the researcher, precisely because of the felt experience of hovering on this threshold of acceptability and constantly negotiating it in practice. But rather than trying to minimise this discomfort, it is important to tolerate and also embrace it; for it is this discomfort that enables researchers to open up, make visible and create affective worlds.

Finally, it is common place, unremarkable and routine for emotion work to be informally discussed when conducting research (Davidson et al., 2005, p. 231). This research predominantly became about the way in which the negative affective presence of austerity lingered throughout the everyday (working) practices of the library space. As already explored, in this form of affective research I attempted to hold onto particular affects in order to say something meaningful about them. This is an embodied process, in which the body becomes an instrument for research. What has been under examined, however, is the impact

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<sup>30</sup> The following quote is an example from chapter six where I carried out a pessimistic reading: [Dennis] *“But I can see, in a few years’ time that we will only have the Central library left.” I looked at him, not quite sure what to say, because he had never admitted this to me before. “Because, in the next year or so, we will be down to the area libraries, so I expect around 5 to 7 libraries left. But this isn’t the end of austerity; there will be more cuts for years to come. So I can just see there being only the Central Library left. Because the council is in such dire financial straits – they’re just stuffed.” I wasn’t sure what to say. The saddest part was that I wasn’t particularly shocked when he said this. I had not expected him to say this, but at the same time, it was almost (but not quite) expected for this to be the future of the library service.’* (Fieldnotes, 18.3.2016)

upon the researcher when that which we are holding onto are predominantly negative affects. And in particular when these negative affects have a temporality that means they persist, re-emerge and refuse to disappear. Precisely because I attempted to hold onto (negative) affects as a way of doing affective research, such affective experiences do not simply disappear after the fieldwork has finished. Whilst the field is never 'out there' (Massey, 2003), affects from fieldwork can linger beyond the fieldwork process itself, so that they become worlded into the everyday life of the researcher. More exploration is needed into what we as researchers do with these (negative) affects so that we can turn them into something productive. Asking such questions runs the risk of turning the attention away from the lived experience of research participants; indeed, they live with the (negative) affective presence of austerity on a daily basis and do not have the privilege of being able to 'rid' themselves of these individual and collecting feelings. Yet, this is not an attempt to make these negative affects disappear. Rather, it is an ethical and methodological question of how we are able to convey the depth and persistence of (negative) feeling that living with austerity generates. In short, how do we tell a story that does justice to this experience?

In an attempt that will never fully do justice to the experience of my research participants, the following three chapters turns towards particular occasions and space-times in which austerity became both intensely and diffusely present, as well as the ebbs and flows of intensity. This includes the employee engagement session, the staff room, the public library spaces, the 'Save our libraries' campaign, to name but a few. In different ways, austerity is making itself present, and also reconfiguring these space-times, which is having a significant effect on the everyday lives of staff working in the library service.



## Chapter Four

### Uncanny atmospheres and paranoid temporalities

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the affective life of austerity through its intensifications. Austerity isn't a linear presence throughout the everyday; instead, austerity is felt in peaks and troughs, in which intensities increase, accumulate, decline and dissipate. An intensified presence of austerity can shape everyday life in a very different way, for example, to that of incremental transformations (the focus of the next chapter). This chapter, therefore, explores a significant space-time within the library in which austerity intensifies, namely that of the employee engagement session. Both the day of the meeting and also the space-time between its announcement and its enactment are significant space-times in which austerity becomes intensified. As will be explored in greater depth, the employee briefing is a meeting in which staff members are for the first time exposed to both future spending cuts and subsequent proposals that have been created in order to meet this funding shortfall. Thus, employee engagement sessions are a mediator between decisions to shrink (and transform) the library service, the operationalisation of these decisions and also the effects of this operationalisation upon library employees.

What also makes employee briefings significant is their particular relationship with the unknown. The announcement of an upcoming engagement session generates a space-time of waiting, in which a collective feeling of uncertainty emerges; this is due to the certainty that knowledge about future spending cuts has emerged, yet the details of this new information remain unknown. Yet, importantly, this is not simply a fear of the unknown, this is a feeling of uncertainty that emerges as a result of the unknown that is at the same time acutely *familiar*. In this sense, this chapter turns to Freud's (2003) conceptualisation of the uncanny, in order to unpack the relationship of the familiar and the strange that emerges throughout the space-

time of the waiting, both before and on the day of the meeting. Importantly, whilst Freud focusses on the uncanny as a phenomenon connected to the individual psyche, unpacking the employee briefings shows that the feeling of the uncanny emerging here is a *collective feeling*. Thus, this chapter develops Freud's essay, and draws on the work of Mark Fisher (2016, 2013) and Avery Gordon (1997) to argue that the uncanny can also take the form of an affective atmosphere. It is through conceptualising the uncanny as an atmosphere that we are able to explore the way in which the space-time of waiting becomes a shared experience (Bissell, 2007).

This chapter then goes on to argue that *paranoia* emerges as a manifestation of the uncanny atmosphere. Paranoia becomes an attempt by staff members to live *within* and also *resolve* the uncanny atmosphere within the space-time of waiting. In particular, it is the non-linear temporality of the uncanny atmosphere that enables paranoia to emerge in the library space. This is a temporality that looks both *forward* and *backwards*: forwards through the unknown knowledge that remains absent, and backwards through knowledge imparted from all previous employee engagement sessions that have taken place prior to the present one. This shapes a paranoid mode of waiting, since paranoia is an organization of knowledge that relies on a relationship between the past and future, the known and the unknown, in order to *make known* the knowledge about the multiple possible futures of the library service. As paranoia is performative, this also means that paranoia is not simply an expression of the uncanny but also constitutive of it. A focus on the non-linear temporality of both the uncanny atmosphere and emergence of paranoia further enables this chapter to explore austerity's intensifications, since the movement backwards and forwards bring the affective charge of *both past and future* into the present; the affective charges of past and future form relations in the present that generate a new vitality.

Consequently, through a focus on intensifications, this chapter can explore an important way in which the affective life of austerity shapes and in turn reshapes the library space. The next

section is dedicated to exploring the function of employee engagement sessions in austere times and within the wider context of local government.

### **The employee engagement session**

Employee engagement sessions are a key space-time in which austerity is made present in the library. A focus on these meetings *matters*, since they significantly shape the everyday working experience of library staff in times of austerity; they, therefore, provide an important account of the affective life of austerity within the library space.

Employee engagement sessions are meetings designed to inform staff members in the library service about future plans for the service. They are led by both library management and a representative from the local authority. Staff members from all libraries across the borough are encouraged to attend, and ranged in number from approximately 30 to 50 staff. The meetings take place in the Central library, and often take the format of a presentation by management that is listened to by library staff. Staff are subsequently encouraged to ask questions and provide feedback. The duration of the meetings ranged from half an hour to an hour and a half.

The employee engagement session is a site of revelation; as central government imposes budget reductions onto local authorities, these meetings reveal the translation of these reductions into proposals to meet the funding shortfall. Employee engagement becomes the intermediary between the local government decisions and the library staff members. The facilitators of the meeting – library manager, Dennis, and a representative from the department of Leisure and Culture, Vanessa <sup>31</sup> – are given the difficult task of reducing the library budget.

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<sup>31</sup> Within this local authority the library service is situated within the Department of Culture and Leisure.

Since the introduction of the UK austerity agenda by the former Coalition government in 2010, which has seen a decimation of local government funding,<sup>32</sup> the *role* of the employee engagement has changed:

*“Well we have had employee briefings for many years – they have often been driven by budget issues, but not always. We have had briefings called ‘summer seminars’ that were a genuine celebration of all the good things we had done in the preceding year. But they were years ago, we have been making cuts for way too many years.”* (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 28.2.2017)

The increasing focus on budget issues has led to the engagement sessions becoming an important intensification of library staff’s everyday experience of austerity. Staff are now ‘used to having an annual doom and gloom meeting before Christmas’ (Olivia, Fieldnotes, 23.10.2015). Yet, the meetings are just one part of the *process* of budget reductions that result both in the contraction and transformation of the library service. For Dennis, who is responsible for both creating and implementing budget proposals, this process now dominates the year:

*“[I]ncreasingly my job over the last number of years has become review-driven, shrinking the service, and I suppose yeah, that’s probably the last four years. Before then there were cuts but they were so small it wasn’t, it didn’t dominate your year, it probably dominated a month or two, say 50,000, whereas the saving of a half million, that dominates a whole year long process... it’s different components of that, so it might be developing the proposals, the public consultations, the political consultation, and then what we’d be into in March, April, May, June time next year will be the implementation, there’s the whole HR side.”* (Dennis)

Consequently, meetings have become stretched out over the course of the year, with a total of eight meetings during fieldwork (between September 2015 and February 2017) taking place in autumn, winter, spring, and summer. Yet, due to the annual budget cycle, in which proposals

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<sup>32</sup> Between 2010/11 and 2015/16 English local authorities cut spending by 27 percent in real terms. Yet, these cuts were unevenly distributed; the most deprived authorities saw cuts of more than £220 per head compared with under £40 per head for the least deprived (Hastings, Bailey, Bramley, Gannon, & Watkins, 2015). In 2017 spending for Local Government and Communities is expected to be 22 percent lower than in 2010 (“Britain’s local councils face financial crisis,” 2017)

on budget reductions are implemented in April, meetings clustered between November and February.<sup>33</sup>

Usually employee engagement sessions are announced approximately four weeks prior to the meeting itself. New information that emerges throughout the process of budget reduction is revealed during these meetings. During this ongoing austerity, implementation of the cuts has taken many forms, including salami slicing of budgets,<sup>34</sup> an At Risk process in which staff were considered for redundancy, and potential closure or volunteerisation of professional libraries.<sup>35</sup> For the majority of staff members, this information was unknown before prior to their revelation in the engagement sessions. These unknowns, then, have become an important way in which the cuts are felt. This has also been argued by John Horton (2016, p. 355), as anticipated futures of service withdrawal have ‘a range of troubling, continuing, lived, felt consequences.’ Importantly, he argues, these impacts are not caused by the materialisation of the funding cuts themselves, but instead by their *anticipation*. Central to this chapter, then, is this relationship between the employee engagement sessions and the (re)emergence of unknowns; the affective presence and temporality of these unknowns leads me firstly to Freud’s conceptualisation of the uncanny.

## 1. THE UNCANNY

### i. The uncanny

This section argues that austerity can be experienced as an uncanny atmosphere, in particular due to the temporality of austerity. Firstly, there is a feeling amongst library staff members that further austerity measures are inevitable; austerity isn’t a temporally finite state – it is cyclical and ongoing.<sup>36</sup> For staff, it is not a question of *if*, but *when* the library service will contract again. Every employee engagement session holds the potential for future cuts to the

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<sup>33</sup> “Generally you’d have this kind of flurry of meetings around September, October, November-time every year since about 2010.” (Alice)

<sup>34</sup> Salami slicing involves an incremental whittling away of budgets over time.

<sup>35</sup> The empirical evidence of these various forms of cuts will be clearer throughout the chapter.

<sup>36</sup> By ‘cyclical’ I am referring to the annual budget cycle.



library service to be declared. Thus, the *act* of announcing an upcoming employee engagement session is significant; it generates the feeling that knowledge about future spending cuts has been brought into being, which has not been imparted yet:

*“We usually get about two months’ notice to a meeting, and it kinda puts people on high alert and again it’s the uncertainty is that if you’re not really knowing but kinda knowing what’s gonna happen, so yeah so I mean it builds and builds and builds and I think a lot of people start of [sic] envisage worst case scenario”* (Clora)

This gap between the generalised idea of knowledge being brought into existence and the particularity of the knowledge itself generates an unknown that unsettles the everyday working practices within the library space. However, this act of announcing an employee engagement session does more than simply unsettle through the emergence of an unknown. It is within this gap, I argue, that the uncanny emerges (Freud, 2003). The concept of uncanny has been extensively explored within psychoanalytic geographies, in particular as a lens through which to explore urban space and city life (Hook, 2005; Pile, 2005). It has often been used to explore seemingly everyday encounters and phenomena, such as the beauty salon, crowds, darkness, but also that which is deemed to be ‘extraordinary’, such as ghosts, déjà vu and fate (Pile, 2011; Royle, 2003; Straughan, 2014). Yet, the uncanny has also become a mode of analysis outside of the psychanalytic (Kraftl, 2007).

For Freud, the uncanny ‘belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread’ (Freud, 2003, p. 123). Yet, not everything that is new proves frightening – something must be added to the novel if it is to become uncanny. For Freud, to become uncanny is for an unknown to emerge that has long been familiar, yet has been repressed. Whilst there are ontological tensions between psychoanalytic and affective geographies, this chapter does not seek to explore the uncanny as something that is repressed; rather, as a tool through which to think about the unknown, its entanglement with the known, and the subsequent blurring of reality and fiction.

The unknown continually re-emerges within the affective life of austerity in the library. The unknown can be, but not necessarily, in and of itself frightening. Yet, the *uncanny* emerges here precisely due to the temporality of austerity. The cyclical nature of austerity, its ‘ongoingness’, and the multiple previous engagement sessions that have taken place as a result, has had two important consequences. Firstly, it has made the unknown an acutely familiar feeling for staff members that generates an eerie sense of having ‘been here before’. Secondly, this temporality means that the unknowns are now experienced as *always more than* unknowns. In other words, staff experience unknowns *through* previous years of austerity, so that they are at the same time felt as known:

*‘I hadn’t seen Jude in a while so I asked her how the last couple of months were going.*

*“They’ve been OK actually. We are waiting for the review [employee engagement meeting], so it’s been quite uncertain. But we are enjoying this period of calm. But it is also hard not knowing what’s coming.”*

*“Is it kind of like the calm before the storm?” I asked.*

*“It is. But the thing is, we know it’s coming... It’s also quite nice having this time not knowing, because we know what’s coming will be bad.” (Fieldnotes, 3.5.2016)*

As will be explored later in the chapter, these ‘more than unknowns’ blur the distinction between reality and fiction that is so central to how the uncanny is experienced.

Between September 2015 and February 2017 alone eight engagement sessions took place, and staff have experienced six years of austerity prior to my research. Within each of the repeated processes of employee engagement session the space-time of waiting is opened up. Yet, this is not simply a waiting for the unknown, it is the uncanny experience of its re-emergence that blurs reality and fiction.

## **ii. The uncanny as an affective atmosphere**

This chapter extends beyond Freud’s conceptualisation of the uncanny as acting out of an individual’s psychic state (Gordon, 1997). Whilst Freud recognised that the uncanny is

broader than simply what has been repressed by the psyche, he emphasised that a call for an aesthetic study of the uncanny ‘would open the door to doubts about the value we can actually claim for our finding that the uncanny derives from what was once familiar and then repressed’ (Freud, 2003, p. 153). This limited conceptualisation of the uncanny has been problematized. For Gordon (1997), Freud minimizes the significance of other forms of the uncanny before the discussion even begins. Fisher (Fisher, 2013), too, asks, what if ‘the whole drama of the essay consisted in Freud’s attempts to continually contain the phenomena he explores within the remit of the *unheimlich*?’ (Fisher, 2013, p. 10). If we explore the phenomena beyond a psychoanalytic framework, what *form* can the uncanny take?

Gordon’s (1997, p. 50), point of departure becomes not one of neurosis, but one of uncanny experiences. For Gordon,

*“Uncanny experiences are haunting experiences. There is something there and you ‘feel’ it strongly. It has shape, an electric empiricity, but the evidence is barely visible, or highly symbolized.”*

Gordon’s emphasis on the uncanny *experience* is particularly significant, firstly because she understands it to be ‘qualities of feeling’, indicating the importance of the affective within lived experience. Secondly, for Gordon, it becomes a *social* experience; this enables us to bring the uncanny into the realm of the lived and felt that is not restricted to individualized affective experiences. The uncanny for Gordon (1997, p. 54–55) is about ‘being haunted in the *world of common reality*.’ This does not dismiss Freud’s emphasis of the uncanny as connected to the individual psyche, but shows that the uncanny is not limited to this form. If the uncanny can be socially felt, this points towards an intensity that is transpersonal – a shared affective experience. Gordon likens the uncanny to Raymond William’s (1977) ‘structure of feeling’ yet for Anderson (2014), *both* structures of feeling and affective atmospheres are a response to the problem of collective feeling. Gordon’s account of the uncanny above, however, is able to describe the materialist nature of affective atmospheres in that it has shape, an electric empiricity; and whilst this evidence is barely there it is nevertheless palpable – we *feel* its

presence (Gordon, 1997; McCormack, 2017). This again points towards the ambiguity of affective atmospheres as ‘an ill-defined indefinite something’ that can condition life by giving spaces, episodes or encounters a particular (uncanny) feel (Anderson, 2014, p. 140;137). By re-reading Freud through the lens of affective atmospheres we are able to take seriously the uncanny as both individual and collective affective experiences, since atmospheres emanate from, but *exceed* the assembling of bodies (Anderson, 2009, p. 77).

Freud (2003, p. 123) identifies the uncanny as a ‘specific affective nucleus’ within the realm of the frightening. For Freud, we can understand the uncanny through assembling ‘whatever it is about persons and things, sense impressions, experiences and situations, that evokes in us a sense of the uncanny’ (Freud, 2003, p. 124). Significantly, this indicates the formation of an *envelopment*. We can suggest here that the uncanny departs from Raymond William’s ‘structure of feeling’ and is more aligned with the form that affective atmospheres take; the former sets ‘limits’ and exerts ‘pressures’, whilst the latter is able to condition life by ‘surrounding’ and ‘enveloping’ things, sites and people (Anderson, 2014, p. 139). The uncanny does not ‘set limits’, rather there is an ongoing openness and ambiguity to the feeling of the uncanny; Freud (2003, p. 124) draws upon the work of E. Jentsch to emphasise ‘that people differ greatly in their sensitivity to this kind of feeling.’ Thus, when the uncanny becomes a collective feeling, we cannot predict how this will be taken up by individual bodies that form part of this envelopment (Ahmed, 2014a). In other words, there is always differential attunement to the affective atmosphere as the collective feeling is registered in living and feeling bodies; it is partly through this process that the atmosphere of the uncanny is always emerging and transforming. Freud’s own words further indicate that the uncanny can become a collective feeling, as he goes onto state that ‘one need not... give up hope of finding cases in which the feeling in question will be unequivocally acknowledged by most people’ (Freud, 2003, p. 124).

Thinking about this in relation to the library space, it suggests that the space-time of waiting that emerges as a result of the announcement of the employee engagement session

becomes something *shared*. The space-time of waiting here is not a collection of feeling individuals, but instead a social event in which ‘the affectivity of waiting becomes transpersonal’ (Bissell, 2007, p. 291). This does not negate the significance of individualized affective experiences, but instead emphasises that the uncanny also exceeds the body’s capacity to affect and be affected. The following section will return to the uncanny within the space-time of waiting to explore the way in which staff members live within the uncertain future of the library service – namely through paranoid practices.

## **2. PARANOIA**

### **i. Living within the uncanny – a paranoid mode of waiting**

Within this space-time of waiting a particular *mode* of waiting emerges. Paranoia emerges as a way of living *within* and also as an attempt to *resolve* the uncanny atmosphere. Turning back to Horton (2016), it is the imagined futures of cuts that can have felt consequences within the present. Paranoia is one playing-out of these futures, precisely due to the unknown that inhabits and defines this space-time of waiting. However, paranoia as a response to an unknown manifests itself differently to that of anticipatory anxiety in Horton’s work. Whilst anticipatory anxiety generates space for contingency and multiplicity within the imagined futures of austerity, paranoia’s aversion to surprises forecloses the potential for multiple possible futures, through the aim of gaining ‘big truths’ (Love, 2011). Significantly, in naming this mode of waiting as paranoid, I am carrying out a paranoid reading of these encounters with austerity for two reasons. Firstly, because in doing so I am closing down contingency and solidifying this affective state; secondly, because for Sedgwick (2002, p. 127), drawing on Bersani, ‘[p]aranoia is an inescapable interpretive doubling of presence...it takes one to know one.’ Inhabiting the paranoid position is necessary here, precisely because it enables consideration of how paranoia becomes part of the lived experience of austerity. Indeed, Sedgwick (2002, p. 130) argues that paranoia should be viewed as one of many affective

theoretical practices, since “practicing paranoid strategies...represent *a* way, amongst other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge” (emphasis in original).

The paranoid mode of waiting emerging in anticipation of the employee engagement session, emerges in part due to the certainty that knowledge has been brought into being, but the absence of the knowledge itself. Here, the uncanny as *atmosphere* shapes the emergence of paranoia. For Freud (2003, p. 144), it is through the process of *repetition* that ‘transforms what would otherwise seem quite harmless into something uncanny.’ Due to the *repetition* of the employee engagement process, a temporality emerges that looks both *forward* and *backwards*: forwards through the unknown knowledge that remains absent, and backwards through knowledge imparted from all previous employee engagement sessions. This temporality aligns itself with the functioning of a paranoid form of waiting. For Sedgwick (2002, p. 130), the ‘unidirectionally future-orientated vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows backward and forward.’ There must be ‘no bad surprises’, meaning that paranoia requires that ‘bad news be always already known’ (Sedgwick, 2002, p. 130). The uncanny enables paranoia to delve into the depths of previous employee engagement sessions in order to help make the ‘bad news’ known. At the same time, however, there is a relationship with the future through the unknown.

One way in which paranoid knowledge is organised is through a heightened sensitivity to new information emerging amongst staff members:

*“The rumour mill has started again Esther, because there’s a meeting coming up.”* (Gregg, Fieldnotes, 20.4.2016)

*‘Not long after we had started chatting Brendan the Janitor came with the red boxes. Almost as soon as he came in, Brendan asked them, “have you heard about the meeting on Tuesday?” Straight away I knew he was talking about the Employee Engagement Session. Both indicated that they had heard about it. “Are you going to go?” Brendan asked. Joanne seemed reluctant, “Well it’s a trek from here isn’t it just to go from 8.30 till 9.30. I think I’d stay here and open at 9.” Brendan replied, “Come on, come and support your co-workers. I’m not going mind.” He*

*laughed at his own joke. "Well there are meant to be loads of changes afoot," Brendan said slyly indicating that he knew something that the other two didn't. Juliet and Lilianne looked at him in a not very serious/jokey way. It was as though Brendan enjoyed spreading this kind of gossip and both didn't seem to be taking it very seriously. Olivia asked, "Well are you going to tell us, because if you aren't you can pssst" (she made a noise with her lips and signalled to the door). Brendan gave a smug yet secretive look, "I can't tell you that." This made me think of what Gregg told me on the second trip in the van. He said that as soon as the meetings are scheduled "the rumour mill starts" and staff begin discussing what will likely be in the upcoming meeting. This scene seemed to epitomise this.' (Fieldnotes, 10.5.2016)*

A paranoid mode of waiting, then, is an organization of knowledge that relies on a relationship between the past and future, the known and the unknown, in order to *make known* a possible future of the library service. As voiced by Clora earlier, this state of "high alert...builds and builds" within this space-time of waiting, indicating an intensification of paranoia that has the potential to reach and surpass affective thresholds:

*"[T]here is a lot of, you know, paranoia that can start to happen and seeing things that aren't there, and again I think it all goes back to lack of communication, when there are gaps in peoples understanding or the strategy or austerity as a whole, the budget cuts, people start to fill in the gaps. I mean I know there was recently... a meeting that was coming up about austerity and about the budget cuts and it was like Chinese whispers how it went through the library service and it eventually happened where by the time it got up here [upstairs offices in the Central library] that the meeting had already happened and all these things had been agreed to and this was the crack now duh-duh-duh, and in reality the meeting had never happened, there'd been no emails sent, it wasn't a big sort of secret conspiracy; and it was like, how on earth has that got through sane rational adults and it's just spiralled and a lot of people become really, really worried and were obviously on the phone to management being like 'what's this?' And stuff like that can be quite common and you can just imagine that someone's heard something and then its gradually just got bigger and bigger through the day; but it was*

*literally over the space of about 48 hours and I had to get like an email, blanket email, to everyone being like, 'There has been no meeting, there's been no agreement, I don't know where this has come from but I want to quash this rumour now'. And again I just think it's if you don't hear anything or there's gaps in understanding then people start to, not make up stuff, but they start to reason different things or to say different things and then put a rationality on it."*

(Clora)

Here, paranoia, through reasoning 'different things' can become a different way of seeking and organising knowledge. Her emphasis on there being *gaps* in staff member's understanding about the budget strategy within the library and about austerity more broadly indicate an *unknown, multiple unknowns* even. The process of 'filling in the gaps' relies on the non-linear temporality of what Sedgwick (2002) calls burrowing backwards and forwards; the movement between past and future enables the staff members to organize knowledge so that the unknown is *made known*. For example, the 'rumour' generated amongst staff members that the employee engagement session had already taken place, and that budget agreements had been decided upon relies on *prior* knowledge about what this meeting *is* and *does*, as well as previous experience of the library budget cycle in a time of austerity. As Clora describes "this was the crack now", this prior knowledge can become part of this dual movement of burrowing backward and forward. In doing so, the unknown is *felt as known* through practices of paranoia.

In addition, Clora describes how the 'rumour' became bigger and bigger and eventually spiralled out of control; thus, a paranoid form of waiting is also *performative*, as the adoption of paranoid strategies seek and organize knowledge in a way that bring into being and further paranoia within the act of waiting. The transformation of staff members to a 'high alert' state to new knowledge also means that bodies are more susceptible to being affected by the affective charge of the emergence of new information about an upcoming employee engagement session; there is a less of an affective barrier between this new stimulus and a body's capacity to be affected. The *mobility* of the rumour also furthers the performative nature



of the paranoia. Clara indicates that the rumour gained a greater vitality as it moved from the ground floor of the library to the first floor where she works. Thus, the rumour moved between the different spaces of the library by being transferred between staff members; it is in the gap between subject and subject that the rumour is able to gain a greater vitality by transforming within this 'inbetween' space. The use of the phrase 'Chinese whisper' perhaps indicates the way in which the rumour takes on new vitalities through transformation as it is transferred subject to subject.

Importantly, whilst paranoia within this space-time of waiting is cultivated and moves through bodies, it is not people themselves that are simply 'being paranoid'. The term 'being paranoid' is often placed upon individuals as a means of judgement or to delegitimise a particular knowledge claim. Yet, turning back to Sedgwick, paranoia is less diagnosis, than a prescription. It is not people, but mutual practices through which paranoid readings emerge (Sedgwick, 2002). The paranoia that circulates within the library space, then, cannot be attributed to a collection of individualised affective experiences. Instead, paranoia's relationship to the *atmosphere* of the uncanny highlights again that it is in fact collectively participated in. Precisely because the uncanny is felt as an atmosphere, or what Gordon (1997, p. 54) would call 'being haunted in the 'world of common reality', this 'troubles or even ruins our ability to distinguish reality and fiction.' In fact, Freud (1997, p. 221) himself argued that 'an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced.' Central to the uncanny, then, is this blurring between reality and fiction.

Thus, attempts by staff members to make the unknown *known* is not paranoid from the outset, but *becomes paranoid*. The re-emergent nature of these unknowns generates an uncanny atmosphere precisely because it blurs distinctions between imagination and reality. Practices emerge that attempt to live *within* and *resolve* these re-emergent unknowns. As argued by Sedgwick paranoid *practices* are changing and heterogenous.<sup>37</sup> Precisely because this is an

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<sup>37</sup> Sedgwick (2002, p. 128) draws upon Melanie Klein's concept of positions – the paranoid/schizoid position and depressive position – to argue that paranoid and reparative critical practices are changing and heterogeneous relational stances.

uncanny atmosphere, the envelopment generates an environment that can transform these mutual practices into *paranoid* practices. In other words, as these practices are in transformation they are shaped by the uncanny atmosphere to become paranoid. Not only this, but when the uncanny is a collective feeling the emergence of paranoid practices also become shared and collectively participated in.

This is suggested by Clara's earlier verbalisation of a paranoid encounter, the moment staff members rang management to ask 'what's this?' to the rumour that a meeting had already taken place. The moment in which it was *believed* amongst staff members that the meeting had occurred, reality and fiction were *one and interchangeable*. Even though the meeting had never taken place, in the act of calling library managers this had already been brought into reality. The *atmosphere* of the uncanny, as well as the non-linear temporality of the uncanny – the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown – enables this effacing of imagination and reality, and for it to be collectively participated in. Clara's subsequent actions to quash the rumour indicate an attempt to 'reset' affective thresholds and attempt to both separate and solidify reality and fiction; in other words, back to the understanding that '[t]here has been no meeting, there's been no agreement' – *not yet*. Paranoia emerging out of this encounter cannot be attributed to 'paranoid individuals'. Instead, the uncanny *conditions* the encounter, so that the staff collectively invested in paranoid practices in an attempt to make the unknown *known*.

In this sense, the emergence of paranoid practices means that the unknown isn't simply experienced through its re-emergence. At the same time it becomes *felt as known* through practices of paranoia. This in turn shapes the atmosphere of the uncanny, as staff feel they *know* how these unknowns will materialise. Consequently, the uncanny is not singular here, but becomes present in two forms: firstly, through a re-emergence of an unknown; secondly, through an unknown that is at the same time felt as known, due to paranoid practices that attempt to live within and resolve the uncanny reshapes this atmosphere. As the uncanny and paranoia become intimately intertwined, these two forms of the uncanny do not have a coherent solidity to them – they are nebulous as the uncanny is lived.

## ii. The day of the meeting – an intensified uncanny

As the employee engagement sessions gets closer, the atmosphere of the uncanny intensifies. This intensification is a particular mode of relation to the looming materialisation of the unknown:

*“I think we’re gunna have a big meeting in a week and then another one and you can almost feel the building tension again and what’s kinda gunna happen, and it’s the feeling of not knowing and I think as well it’s the feeling of lack of transparency and not really understanding, a lot of the, cos I know there have been issues in the past where strategies have been revealed and they’ve apparently already been told to staff but it’s been told in a way that’s veiled in a type of wording that people haven’t realised what its actually meant, so when the strategy is then talked about in immediate sort of terms people are suddenly like ‘What?’, like this has never been talked about.” (Clora)*

The looming engagement session becomes a ‘double movement’ of making the familiar strange and also finding familiarity in the strange (Fisher, 2016, p. 10). The latter is expressed through the combination of ‘kinda’ knowing what is going to happen due to the repeated return of the meetings, *combined* with the feeling of *not knowing* what will be actualised in the meeting – the unknown. The former is shown through her emphasis on her feeling of a lack of transparency; thus, the familiarity of the employee engagement process also is *made strange* due to there being a gap in understanding between management and staff members. The intensified atmosphere brought about by an ever looming engagement session isn’t simply a fear of the unknown, but *specifically* of the uncanny. In other words, the closer to the materialisation to the unknown, the more intensely this *familiar/re-emergent* unknown is felt. It is on the day of the meeting that the uncanny atmosphere becomes heightened further. The non-linear temporality of the uncanny means that with every re-emergence of an employee engagement session, the relationship between the familiar and the strange has the potential to intensify, since there is greater interplay between past and future. On the day of the meeting, the atmosphere of the uncanny is felt in different spaces of the library, in particular in the staff

room and in the room of the meeting itself. Before the meeting, a tension is felt in the staff room that is familiar to the days where an employee engagement session is scheduled. As the visceral experience of waiting intensifies, a usually open and expressive space becomes something entirely different – anxious and oppressive:

*'I arrived at the Central Library through the staff entrance at the back door. I wasn't sure whether to expect anyone there yet at it was still half an hour before the start of the meeting. I went into the staff room and it was completely empty. There was an eerie silence that felt rather uncomfortable – a bit like the calm before the storm... It felt a little bit like being in a morgue or a sombre museum, where there was a feeling that the silence should be preserved.'*

(Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)

*'There was a slight pause and another staff member who I didn't recognise burst out, "I just want to get it over and done with. We've been doing this for six years now. And they've kept on moving it back and moving it back haven't they? I want to know."' (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

*'June came into the staff room. She had evidently already put her things into the cloak room as she didn't have a coat or a bag with her. She sat down, sighed and said, "Here we go again." She said this with a reluctant resignation, which seemed to suggest that she didn't want to attend the meeting and also perhaps that she didn't want the meeting to be going ahead in the first place.'* (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)

This form of transformation is also evident for the space in which the meeting takes place, in particular its materiality:

*"You can see the true extent of austerity in these meetings – there are always less and less seats at these meetings. The first meeting it was at the leisure centre and it was packed with standing room only. It's a bit disconcerting."* (Olivia, Fieldnotes, 1.12.2015)

Within this space, it is the continual reduction of chairs that contribute to the ethereal presence of the uncanny. The chairs "in their absence" become "constitutive of the entire

[uncanny] experience” (Wylie, 2009, p. 282). They also become an absent-presence of former job losses that have been part of the annual budget reduction cycles.

What this empirical encounter can potentially tell us here is that *as the uncanny atmosphere intensifies, so too do paranoid practices in response to the unknown*. Olivia’s experience of the absent chairs is in many ways a paranoid reading – she is closing down contingency in an attempt to make the overwhelmingly felt unknown more manageable. Again, the non-linear temporality of burrowing backwards and forwards is at work here, since the absent-presence of chairs become folded into previous job losses and the unknown that could materialise in the impending meeting.

Yet, austerity here is more than simply an absence or a presence; instead it can be thought about as something fuzzy or with varying degrees of resolution. The *seriality* of the employee engagement sessions is significant to this fuzziness, as it entangles the known with the unknown. They are ‘things’ in themselves, but importantly they are also *one in a series of engagement sessions* that ‘conjure[s]... the set of relations in which this thing is a participant’ (Latham and McCormack, 2009, p. 256). These meetings carry such *weight* precisely because they are one of many other meetings; this gives them a density that comes from all previous meetings that have previously taken place. In other words, the repeated nature of these engagement sessions means that, for staff members, the unknown is inseparable from the known, as previous meetings invoked as ‘evidence’ of what is to come. In fact, I found myself reading upcoming employee engagement sessions through a paranoid lens, due to my previous experience of such meetings and the intensified uncanny that was so palpable at the time:

[Edna emphasised] “You know, if they do make any more volunteer libraries, people will think that this is what they were planning all along... It’s just awful, ‘We’ll get rid of your job to be replaced by someone untrained for free.’ But we will see tomorrow won’t we.” This made me incredibly nervous. For the past week simply thinking about the employee engagement session had filled me with dread. It felt a bit like tomorrow would be ‘D-Day’ (using Dennis’ words) and I had already been anticipating what the meeting would be like: anger, shock, tears,

*sadness; people voicing their anger without any barriers anymore as everything would be laid on the line.'* (Fieldnotes, 16.5.2016)

*'As I opened the doors in the reception onto the stairs I glanced at a poster on the door that stated, 'On Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> November the library will open at 10am. We're sorry for any inconvenience.' I felt a pang of nerves when reading this. If the library opened at 10am this meant that the meeting would be an hour and half long, which indicated really bad news. Staff members were used to predicting the severity of the meeting based on how long it was.'*

(Fieldnotes, 1.11.2016)

In my encounter with Edna, the impending meeting became a site of revelation of what she felt was already known. I also participated in this reading through my sense of dread at how the meeting may be experienced by staff members. Indeed, the closing down of contingency that is so central to paranoia is evident in my reading of the meeting's length; its duration becomes a barometer for the severity of the revelations, which I learnt through previous encounters with staff and engagement sessions. Given that I only experienced eight employee engagement sessions during my time at the library, and given that austerity had been ongoing for six years prior to my research, it is not hard to speculate the density at which staff members experience these unknowns:

*['Jillian] "It's the uncertainty. I didn't know whether I should go and book my holiday, because I don't know whether I'll have the money for it. Sometimes you think, just get on with it already, just get rid of our jobs." She gave a little laugh. Jannah responded, "Yeah, it's just been the not knowing, year after year after year."'* (Fieldnotes, 8.2.2016)

### **iii. Bodies enveloped within the uncanny – differentiated attachments**

The atmosphere of the uncanny that is formed in the meeting room of the employee engagement session indicates an affective nucleus in which subjects and object are enveloped through the relations they form with each other. However, the uncanny is formed through a shared and acutely familiar feeling of uncertainty generated by the emergence of unknown

knowledge about future spending cuts to the library service. Thus, Dennis and Vanessa, who are responsible for imparting this unknown knowledge, do not seem to be enveloped within this uncanny atmosphere in the same way as staff members, as they have been responsible for constructing the proposals for budget reduction. And, yet, Vanessa's role within the employee briefings indicates that she is a significant part of the uncanny atmosphere, since her *physical presence* in the meeting room brings a very particular affective charge that is constitutive of it; unlike Dennis, Vanessa does not have an everyday presence within the library space, and as such, her presence is synonymous with the employee engagement session (and the subsequent unknown). However, whilst forming part of the envelopment, Vanessa at the same time has a lack of attachment to it, due to the absence of the unknown for her. Significantly, her association with the civic centre makes her 'other' in relation to library staff members, and *also* means that staff have a lack of attachment to *her*:

*I noticed, however, that Vanessa hadn't turned up yet, which seem a little unprofessional considering the meeting was due to start at 8.30. Olivia noticed this too and said to me, "so when's our lovely Vanessa going to turn up?" She was obviously being sarcastic, I knew from the previous meetings that she wasn't fond of her at all [...] [Vanessa said] "[w]hilst there have been changes one thing we can guarantee is budget reduction. I know this is unsettling and unnerving, I hope we can give you some stability today. I like to think the best approach is to 'Keep calm and carry on'." This last catch phrase did not go down well with the staff at all. There was a collective sigh from many of the staff, and a subsequent murmuring amongst some people, yet it was still quite quiet and it couldn't be made out exactly what people were saying. I found myself frowning by accident when she said this, and thought 'did she just say that? I can't believe she just said that'. As soon as I realised that I was frowning, however, I quickly stopped, and hoped that she wasn't looking at me. Vanessa's presenting style was really different to any other staff members in the library who had presented before. She had a very corporate presenting style, cold even, and liked to use little soundbites that made her sound almost like a robot. The staff members didn't warm to this, and I didn't either; it created a barrier between*

*the library staff and Vanessa, as it clearly differentiated her as a member of the civic centre and not somebody who worked in the library.’ (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

*‘[Vanessa spoke] “I know this is an important issue for you, but don’t get fixated on volunteer libraries.” This comment did not go down well at all. There was a lot of murmuring in response to Vanessa’s answer, and the person behind me who had been quite vocal throughout the meeting let out a quiet laugh in response. It was clear that Vanessa had noticed this, as she looked for the first time throughout the meeting slightly flustered. Throughout the whole meeting she had given the cool, corporate appearance, yet she blushed slightly as she realised that her answer was not taken well by the audience. She changed tact slightly as a result, choosing to focus on the financial situation of the rest of the council: “it is difficult for us to work with other services because all partners in the council have had their budgets slashed as well.” (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

Library staff’s lack of attachment is made visible through moments of bodily transformation, such as sighs, outbursts of laughter and frowns from the audience. Yet, these transformations are not simply expressions of a lack of attachment to her, but are also performative by their shared nature, in turn reshaping the uncanny atmosphere. Vanessa, here, becomes part of the envelopment of the uncanny through both her own lack of attachment to it – the lack of the unknown – and library staff’s lack of attachment to her. For Sara Ahmed (2014a) bodies can become affectively ‘out of tune’ with others, in which they are out sync with a particular world:

*“A woman of colour can just enter the room and the atmosphere becomes tense. Perhaps moods become shared when there is an agreement about the causes of this tension. Tension is also experienced here as a loss of prior attunement. Some bodies become the cause of this loss of attunement” (Ahmed, 2014a, p. 22)*

Importantly, Ahmed’s work indicates that bodies can become enveloped in a particular atmosphere precisely *through* their lack of attunement with it. This is relational, since Vanessa is out of tune precisely because there is a collective lack of attachment to her by staff members;



this constitutes reshapes staff members' collective feeling of the uncanny through an affective sense of difference. In particular, this difference is constituted through a feeling of disjuncture between the affective life of austerity in the library space and that of the civic centre:

*‘The conversation quickly moved onto Vanessa in the Employee Engagement Session. Penny imitated Vanessa, “I understand this is really difficult.’ Yeah, course you understand, you in your office in the civic.” The manner in which she said this was nothing short of sarcastic. “She has no idea, none of them over there do.” There was nodding and ‘mmmm’ of agreement from the others. Alice chuckled and said, “I think I’m going to put a prank ‘At Risk’ letter through her door.” The whole room laughed at this, and I found myself laughing out loud as well; it took me slightly by surprise that I had laughed so abruptly, but Alice seemed to enjoy the fact that I found it so funny. “I could forge one and put her name on it.” (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

Thus, Vanessa’s lack of attachment is specifically constitutive of the uncanny by reinforcing the staff’s familiar feeling of the unknown. Precisely because Vanessa “has no idea” of the uncertainty library staff face – she will not be receiving an ‘At Risk’ letter from the council this year, for example – this reinforces their own sense of precarity.

#### **iv. Bodies enveloped within the uncanny – a lack of agency in the employee engagement session**

As emphasised earlier, the employee engagement session is the moment in which proposals for future cuts to the library service are made known to staff members. Thus, library staff members are present in the employee engagement session in order to be at the event in which this unknown knowledge is made visible. The cyclical nature of the budget cycle has meant that staff members have gone through this process multiple times before:

*“And I think we’re not naive, we know, you know, the government wasn’t particularly great, we know it’s not gonna be get the flags out everything’s gonna be hunky dory. I think everybody knows, it’s not a question of if, it’s a question of when we contract again” (Penny)*

Again, for staff members there is a familiar feeling of the unknown, but this is also combined with a sense of inevitability due to cuts that have come before. Yet, this temporality of moving backwards and forwards indicates a lack of *agency* over the process of budget reduction felt by staff members. Whilst the term ‘employee engagement session’ indicates a relationship between management and personnel in which the latter have an active role in the process, a lack of control is felt by staff members instead. The employee engagement session, which holds a key function within the process of budget reduction, is something staff feel is enacted *upon* them, rather than an active engagement. This lack of agency is felt particularly in relation to the potential operationalization of cuts: “*All these consultations that they had, they were probably just for show.*” (Edna, Fieldnotes, 16.5.2016). This lack of agency felt by staff is also fed by a disjuncture between management and staff members about what the employee engagement session *does*. For (library manager) Dennis, the meetings play a key role in creating transparency in a process that is riddled with unknowns:

*“A key thing in this meeting I’m trying to get across is that we will be fair, honest, open, compassionate throughout this whole process. It is really important that employees feel that we are.”* (Fieldnotes, 13.11.2015)

Dennis, here, has a particular mode of relating to the staff throughout the process of budget reduction. Whilst the act of shrinking the library service is a “grim” prospect for Dennis,<sup>38</sup> for him, the employee engagement session becomes a medium through which to engage staff in the decision-making process. Yet, as highlighted by Edna, many staff feel that they have a lack of agency within the meetings, in particular due to the feeling that they are “just for show.”

The intensified atmosphere of the uncanny on the day of the meeting also intensifies this lack of agency. Whilst a paranoid mode of the waiting enables staff to live within, and attempt to resolve the atmosphere of the uncanny, this isn’t possible on the day of the meeting itself; since the meeting takes the format of a giver and receiver of knowledge, staff are simply forced

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<sup>38</sup> “*The number of cuts that will happen to the library service are going to be grim. And I think I underestimated quite how grim it is going to be. The library service is going to substantially shrink in size.*” (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 17.2.2016)

to wait for this unknown knowledge to become known, rather than *making known* for themselves (Sedgwick, 2002). Throughout the meeting the lack of agency is, too, made visible through bodily transformations:

*‘Dennis emphasised to the audience, “We want to keep you engaged through managers. We will be open and honest. We will treat you with respect and compassion.” A staff member who was sitting behind me burst out a quiet, yet defiant “no” in response to this. I felt awkward when I heard this – my body tensed up and I hoped that Dennis hadn’t heard.’ (Fieldnotes, 1.12.2015)*

*‘[Vanessa emphasised] “[t]hank you also for endlessly filling out public consultations, I know you’re probably sick of them. But we want to you be part of this process, so please feel empowered to engage.” As Vanessa never worked on a day-to-day basis with the library staff, this came across rather hollow. Again, some of the staff gave out a sigh in response to this and began shifting in their seats. I suspected this was because the word ‘empowered’ came across very strange – the last thing people were feeling right now was empowered.’ (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

Again, this palpable lack of agency constitutes and reshapes the intensified atmosphere of the uncanny during the meeting itself. As indicated, an unknown can become something that feels acutely disempowering. Thus, when words such as ‘respect’ or ‘empowered’ are used in the context of the employee engagement session, they are met with ambivalence and sometimes hostility by staff members, due to the disjuncture between the affective implication of such words and how the staff themselves feel.

### **3. A PARTIAL MATERIALISATION OF UNKNOWNNS**

Perhaps most significantly to the atmosphere of the uncanny within the library space, the employee engagement sessions offer only a *partial materialisation of the unknown*. Whilst the meetings are a site of revelation, both new unknowns emerge or existing unknowns continue,

which staff members are again forced to live with. This section explores the atmosphere of the uncanny, not only when an unknown is materialised, but also when this is only partial:

*‘ [Vanessa] “But I need to be really clear that it will mean library closures if we have to make this amount of cuts; there is no way we can avoid it if we need to find 700,000 worth of cuts. I am not going to say which libraries they are this stage, as it would be irresponsible of me to do this, as we don’t know ourselves. And the public need to know this and they can decide when we put it out to public consultation.” Vanessa emphasised forcefully ‘I need to be really clear that it will mean library closures’. The strength of her statement felt unnatural, as though almost labouring the point second-time she said it. Nobody said anything when she said this, yet the audience were deathly silent, no murmurs, no sighs, nothing. That felt unnatural too, the silence felt so unbelievably loud. It felt deeply uncomfortable to be in the room; my body was tense, my stomach felt tight, my legs muscles were contracted. I felt an urge to run out of the room, a desire to escape. There was no murmuring at all. Usually, there is someone whispering inaudibly to another person – a bit like Edna did at the beginning – yet the meeting was now listened to with deathly silence. There were no people shifting their position in their seats, no one was huffing or sighing. Perhaps people were taking in the news the same way I was, letting the enormity of the proposals wash over them and sink in.’ (Fieldnotes, 5.2.2016)*

In this particular engagement session it was made known to staff that the library service was required to make seven-hundred thousand pounds worth of savings in the upcoming budget, which was to be implemented in April the following year. The implication of this was that a number of libraries in the borough would be at risk of closure. This materialisation was palpable: the deathly silence, the absence of murmuring, the tension in my body, my desire to escape. My own bodily transformations were a registering this materialisation. There was disturbance in the atmosphere of the room – what could perhaps be named a collective paralysis due to the enormity of the knowledge that emerged of potential library closures and the inferred job losses accompanying this.

However, whilst unknowns have materialised here, it is still only *partial*. Within this particular meeting, whilst it was known that libraries were under threat of closure, yet another unknown emerged – which particular libraries would close. It would not be until nine months later that particular libraries were selected for closure. This *partial* materialisation was also something palpable across other engagement sessions:

*‘[Olivia] “That meeting was so vague. That didn’t tell you anything. But what annoys me most is that they’re always so vague. It’s always 20 FTE, every time.” She flicked through the book and showed me in each meeting from previous years the places where it said ‘20 FTE to be cut.’ (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

*‘Penny began in quite a blasé manner, “So is anyone any clearer about what came out of that meeting this morning? Because as far as I’m concerned it was clear as mud. Dennis probably thought that he was being really clear, but I know a few of us were sitting there thinking, what?” (Fieldnotes, 1.11.2016)*

Consequently, despite some feeling of resolution emerging as a result of a meeting having been completed,<sup>39</sup> unknowns about the future of the library service are still overwhelmingly present. The partial knowledge about future budget proposals for the library service *stretches* the space-time of waiting beyond the meeting itself and into the post-employee engagement space-time:

*“We’re just waiting. That’s what it feels like. We’re in a permanent waiting situation.”*  
(Penny)

Paradoxically, it is *also* the fact that some knowledge has materialised within the employee engagement session that enables the continuation of the uncanny atmosphere. The partial *materialisation* becomes a confirmation that the unknowns are at the same time known; the emergence of knowledge about the future of the library service becomes confirmation for staff members that they ‘knew what was coming.’ As such, unknowns that (re)emerge out of each

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<sup>39</sup> “[T]here’s like a big exhale afterwards because I think there’s just the relief that people now understand and they can now see the direction that we’re going in.” (Clora)

employee engagement session continue the uncanny atmosphere *precisely because* the knowledge that did emerge confirmed their belief about what was to come. This works to entrench paranoid practices as a successful form of ‘seeking, finding and organizing knowledge’ (Sedgwick, 2002, p. 130):

*[“Olivia” “And you’ll see that they had the same ideas all along. They had the plan to have 5 area libraries remaining and cut the rest or hand them over to volunteers and I bet you anything that’s what they are going say now.” “Really?” I asked. “Oh yeah. I think they’ve always had an idea of what they want to do, and these meetings are just for show.” I was struck by this, as it was the second time I had heard this opinion in about half an hour.’ (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

*“There’s nothing we can do about it, we know the cuts are coming, we’ve had them hanging over our heads for so long; I think it was awful at first but we’ve kind of kept hanging on, kept hanging on. We know they’re gonna be worse this time, but there’s nothing we can do about it, and were taking the attitude well keep doing what we’re doing, we’ll keep planning until we’re told not to plan any more, because they’re the enjoyable bits of the job and we want to make a difference.” (Joan)*

Consequently, the stretched space-time of waiting means that library staff’s own position within the library service remains uncertain. Despite their best efforts to live with and resolve these re-emergent unknowns within the library space through paranoid practices, for staff members, austerity becomes something that is *“biting at your heels, which is always there...”* (Penny). Therefore, austerity always holds the potential for the unknowns to make itself present:

*‘Library staff member, Judith, came near us as she re-shelved a book. The customer seemed to know her, as he asked her informally, “Hey, do you know whether they’re going to cut anything here?” Judith turned round to respond, “I don’t know. We don’t know anything yet. We’re always the last to know.” The customer looked at me and replied in a casual manner, “Isn’t*

*that awful that the staff are the last to know? You know, you used to see loads of mobile libraries, but they're all gone. Have you still got yours?" She replied quickly, "We've still got ours, yes." The customer responded matter-of-factly, "Well I reckon it's going to go, and I think the cuts will keep coming and coming." Judith replied with her fingers tightly crossed pointing up to the ceiling, "We haven't found anything out yet. So we've got to keep our fingers crossed."* (Fieldnotes, 23.9.2015)

Library staff member Judith was immersed in re-shelving a book. Whilst I can only speculate that austerity was not in her thoughts at the time, the uncanny finds its way back into the present through her encounter with myself and a library customer. Again, a paranoid reading emerges, as the non-linear temporality of burrowing backward and forward is made evident in the customer's own prediction of future cuts to the library service; his emphasis that mobile libraries have been cut in the past become 'evidence' of further cuts to come.<sup>40</sup> In this sense the atmosphere of the uncanny can become a profoundly oppressive experience, as it always holds the potential to re-emerge – it is always looming, ready to strike at any moment.

## **Conclusion**

A conceptualisation of the uncanny as atmosphere indicates that austerity is often lived through a blurring of reality and fiction. Austerity has a very particular temporality – it is cyclical and ongoing, and there have already been eight years of austerity within the UK. Austerity is not a temporally bounded event; it is ongoing with no clear end or resolution. This means that the uncertain futures that emerge as a result of continual budget reductions are at the same time felt as something already known. In this chapter collective feeling has become a tool through which to explore the non-linear temporalities of austerity. Significantly, as it becomes felt through the re-emergence and partial materialisation of unknowns, everyday austerity has a particular depth of experience. Both individual and collective encounters with austerity now carry such weight precisely because of previous cycles and experiences of austerity. The employee engagement sessions in the library indicate

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<sup>40</sup> I assume this library customer was referring to other councils where mobile libraries have been cut.

how such encounters are simply one of many. Their seriality mean that austerity has a particular familiarity, in which previous experience becomes ‘evidence’ of spending cuts to come. In this sense it is not surprising that paranoid practices become a way in which to live with austerity. This generates an affective environment in which practices that gather and organize knowledge about these unknowns *become* paranoid. And why ever not, ‘[i]n a world where no-one need be delusional to find evidence of systematic oppression, to theorize out of anything but a paranoid critical stance has come to be seem naïve, pious, complaisant’ (Sedgwick, 2002, pp. 125–126). This is an important step beyond geographical literature that focuses simply on the uncertain futures generated by austerity (Clayton et al., 2015; Horton, 2016); there is a now a particular knowability to these austere futures due to the particular non-linear temporality that austerity takes here. This also generates a feeling of knowability that is both collectively felt and produced.

Developing the uncanny as an affective atmosphere has also important implications for austerity is lived, not simply for the temporalities of austerity but also the spatiality of austerity. Austerity is more than an absence or presence – instead it has *shape*. Austerity here is *fuzzy*, in particular due to the blurring of reality and fiction that the continual re-emergence of unknowns generates. This paper has attempted to hold onto this fuzziness just enough to allow it to speak, but whilst also keeping its integrity as something ambiguous. Austerity’s ambiguity, its continual ability to re-emerge throughout everyday life, means that attempts to escape austerity’s reality are never quite achieved. In other words, individuals who are living and feeling austerity are *never quite* free from it.

Building upon the re-emergence and significance of unknowns throughout the lived experience of austerity indicated within this chapter, the following chapter explores the emergence of unknown *losses*. The following chapter also builds upon the exploration of non-linear temporalities of austerity in this chapter. The following chapter, ‘Austerity melancholia,’ explores the relationship between transformation and experiential loss in the library space. It explores the ambivalence within the library space about what exactly has been



lost as a result of austerity, as a result of the transformations taking place. The chapter draws upon Freud's conceptualisation of melancholia, to argue that many losses as a result of austerity have been made elusive through the process of transformation. Such losses, however, do not simply disappear; these losses have a nagging return into everyday life, but they do so in a form in which the losses are not necessarily recognisable. This generates an inability to *mourn* that which is lost through the process of austerity.

## Chapter Five

### Austerity melancholia

#### **Introduction – The cut as transformation**

The previous chapter explored the re-emergence of unknowns and the non-linear temporalities implicated within this in times of austerity. This chapter builds on these non-linear temporalities to explore the experience of austerity when cuts are implemented. The previous chapter primarily explored the anticipation of cuts, yet this chapter explores the experience of the cuts themselves. In other words, what it *feels* like, and how space-times are reconfigured, when we see an *implementation* of cuts.

Central to understandings of austerity has been the imaginary of ‘the cut’. ‘The cut’ has typically been used to explain and account for the way in which austerity policies have been implemented in the UK and wider afield. Here, austerity is “(supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state’s budgets, debt, and deficits” (Blyth, 2013a, p. 2). The idea of ‘the cut’ has been expressed through notions of dismantling (Krugman, 2012b), “fiscal purges” (Peck, 2012, p. 629), and fiscal retrenchment (Krugman, 2015). Central to these arguments is the way in which austerity is a neoliberal phenomenon, which results in a shrinking of the state, and in particular the social state. Importantly, they indicate a particular understanding of what the cut *is* and *does*. To dismantle means to strip off apparatus (“dismantle, v.,” n.d.), a purge is a physical removal of something unwanted (“purge, v.1,” n.d.), and to retrench indicates an act of cutting down or diminishing (“retrench, v.1,” n.d.). What brings these together is that the cut here is a *reduction*; it works through removing part of the whole, which in so doing makes the whole lesser in size. The cut as a reduction or removal has become a significant way through which the implementation of austerity measures has been conceptualised, such as in the salami slicing of budgets, in the closure of public services, in the reduction of welfare payments (Clayton et al., 2015; Patrick, 2017).

However, what the notion of *reduction* suggests is that the cut has a finite temporality; the cut *ends* when the part is removed from the whole. Whilst it is important to emphasise that austerity is indeed a shrinking of budgets, austerity does not necessarily lead to a visible removal of something as the cut is materialised. In other words, the cut as *simply* reduction is not sufficient in exploring the range of ways austerity measures are implemented. This chapter, then, explores the value of thinking about the cut in relation to *transformation*. In fact, the cut in its very definition enables this kind of conceptual move. In the act of removal from something larger, it does not only mean a reduction of the whole, but it *also* creates something new.<sup>41</sup> What this also indicates is that the cut as transformation has a temporality that far exceeds the moment of cutting; austerity's temporality here is both stretched and non-linear. In other words, instead of considering cuts as particular finite moments or events, this chapter explores the cut as the *starting point* of a series of complex transformations as a result of austerity. Central to this argument, therefore, is that the imaginary of the cut is not a sufficient explanatory tool for austerity *without* thinking about the role that transformation plays.

Central to this chapter is the cut as transformation and its relationship with loss. This chapter's point of departure is a conceptualisation of loss when it isn't easily identifiable, concealed or is left unnoticed. In other words, when the lost object remains elusive. To do so, this chapter draws upon the concept of melancholia. This chapter, however, does not wish to consider melancholia in relation to unconscious and conscious losses that are rooted in the psychic state. Instead, it takes the concept beyond the psychanalytic to explore how it is useful for thinking about loss in the context of the transformations taking place in times of austerity. Melancholia enables the consideration of how particular losses (through the process of transformation) are made elusive.

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<sup>41</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines the cut, amongst others, as, "To divide into two or more parts with a sharp-edged instrument; to sever. Used simply of cord, string, and the like, and of bread, wood, or other articles cut for use. Const. in two (†a-two), asunder, etc.; in, into parts or pieces; also with adjective complement." ("cut, v.," n.d.)

This emphasis on visibility is significant, since this chapter argues that these losses occur regardless of whether they are identifiable as lost. This is a movement away from the idea of loss as being created through its recognition. For Adi Ophir (2005, p. 89), loss is a singular type of disappearance: “the irreversible of some irreplaceable, and as long as it has no replacement, it is a loss.” For him, there must be an interested party for that which has disappeared to become a loss. When the interested parties are lost, “[t]here is no one to testify to the loss, there is no one to mourn it, the position of the disappeared as lost is cancelled, the loss itself is lost” (Ophir, 2005, p. 109). Here, the emphasis is on the recognition of loss – the identification of a loss becomes the loss itself. In doing so, it implies that the loss is brought into being when it is recognised as an irreplaceable disappearance. Instead, however, this chapter argues that losses occur, and can also be felt, despite the fact they are not recognisable as a loss, in particular as they (re)emerge in the present and future.

The cut as transformation results in losses through the process of austerity that are not easily identifiable. In fact, this chapter argues that the transformations taking place actually work to *make* these losses elusive. This chapter draws on the work of Sigmund Freud and Ranjana Khanna to argue that these elusive losses generate a condition of ‘austerity melancholia’; here there is an inability to process that which is lost through austerity as result of the transformations taking place. Yet, these losses do not simply disappear, but re-emerge throughout the everyday. Importantly, these losses are *encrypted* as they re-emerge, forming a *haunted presence*. Importantly, this encryption results in a refraction away from austerity itself into other issues and practices that work to *keep* these losses elusive.

This chapter, then, tells the story of a particular kind of transformation taking place within the library service as a result of austerity – namely that of volunteerisation. This is the transformation of council-run libraries into volunteer-run libraries as the service increasingly relies on unpaid labour in the running of the service. Whilst there are losses as a result, they are made elusive as they become folded into this process of change. Subsequently, this chapter explores the transformations taking place in the existing council-run libraries as a result of

volunteerisation. This explores the experience of staff members remaining in the service and the ways in which their working practices are significantly changed as result of the reduction in paid labour. Again, however, these transformations actually work to make particular losses as a result of austerity elusive. This denies the ability for a collective mourning to take place. As a result, austerity is able to continue relatively hidden, as criticisms of the lost objects are turned away from a politics of austerity and the violence it generates.

### **Transformation through volunteerisation**

A particular form of transformation is now very familiar within many library services across the UK –volunteerisation. As already highlighted earlier in the thesis, since 2010, approximately 500 public libraries in the UK have been transformed into volunteer-run libraries (CILIP, 2018). Accompanying this have been the loss of between 8,000 and 10,000 professional library jobs (ibid.). For many councils this has generated an uncomfortable coexistence between volunteer-run and professionally-run libraries. Central to this chapter are ambiguities about what is being lost through the process of transformation from a professional to a volunteer-run library. Volunteers see their intervention as a way in which to enable the library service to *continue*. Yet, for staff this comes with multiple losses – the loss of expert labour and knowledge in particular.

Within the North-East council on which this story is based, five volunteer-run libraries were created in 2012. Here, five communities within this local authority were informed that their local libraries were at risk of closure, yet they had the option of volunteering to keep their library service running. Local meetings were set up to recruit volunteers, and a process of training commenced to transition these libraries to becoming volunteer-run. The turn towards volunteers has the cutting of budgets as its core aim, in particular as human resources make up two-thirds of the library service budget.<sup>42</sup> Yet, this is more than simply the cut as reduction; it is also the starting point of a series of complex transformations as the service

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<sup>42</sup> “It’s important to emphasise that this this didn’t come from Dennis [Library Manager]. He isn’t reducing the service because he wants to. It was a decision from Central government to impose budget cuts on local Councils year after year.” (Vanessa, Fieldnotes, 16.2.2017)

increasingly relies upon unpaid labour. Importantly, for library staff members the turn towards volunteerisation is leading to a deprofessionalisation of the library service:

*“I think we feel it's a betrayal really. That's how people feel. It's a betrayal of our service that it's so easily been passed to people, where you don't get people saying 'oh well an architect, well you could just do it as a volunteer.' You know, it almost feels as if, well anybody could do this. That's how it feels, that the job has been devalued.”* (Penny)

*“It denigrates all the workers... it denigrates the whole profession. I wouldn't say well I'm a volunteer brain surgeon.”* (Gerrard, Fieldnotes, 16.7.2016)

*“It's a shame, it's very sad, but I think staff feel like that, they feel very undervalued, library staff are, in my opinion, the greatest asset of the service, you can have all the flash computers, the stock and everything, but it's the people that drive the service forward and I think a lot of people feel like that.”* (Barbara)

With the creation of volunteer-run libraries, then, also brings substantial job losses, albeit through voluntary redundancy. Despite the fact that the reduction of paid staff has been achieved through voluntary redundancy, staff feel the transformation of previously local-authority services into services led by unpaid staff devalues their position as professional subjects. Paradoxically, the transformation to volunteer-run libraries makes ambiguous the extent to which the service has changed. That which is traditionally and also visibly recognisable as a library service still exists: the physical building still stands, customers are still able to borrow books, read the newspaper, use the computers, and simply dwell in the library space. Many customers are able to use the library in the same way that they always have. In other words, there is a detectable continuation of the service.

For staff members, however, these budget cuts have resulted in a loss of expert labour as paid library employees have reduced through voluntary redundancy. Implicated within this is a loss of *knowledge*. As volunteer libraries rely on unpaid labour in the running of the service, there is now a significant gap in knowledge that was gained from professional qualifications and

experience. This became evident in my own research experience of volunteering in the library. Regularly I felt that my own knowledge about the library service was significantly lacking despite the fact I was partly responsible for keeping library doors open once a week. Often I encountered moments in which I, and sometimes the volunteers around me, were unable to meet the requirements that a functioning library service demanded. These frequently emerged as a result of a lack knowledge about particular protocols or procedures:

*'[A] woman entered the library; she made her way to the desk and asked what the prices were to book the community room...I knew the prices of the bookings had been lowered recently to compete with other rooms in [name of local area]...But I didn't know exactly how much they were now. I looked in the community booking book and there was no sheet to make the pricing clear. I informed the woman that we had recently changed the pricing and that I wanted to make sure I had the correct pricing. I asked Alan who was near me if knew what the new pricings were (there was no point asking Eleanor because her knowledge of the library was limited). He also acknowledged that the pricing has recently changed, "I think it's ten pounds an hour, but I'm not hundred-percent sure." He began rummaging around the shelves for an answer, "I remember getting an email about it not long ago." I also remembered getting the same email so I went onto the computer and on the library emails and tried to find the minutes of the meeting. I couldn't find it. At this point I felt quite embarrassed because neither Alan nor I knew something so simple about the library and we were desperately trying to find out. It made me think of the professional librarians – this is something they would have known off the top of their head without even thinking.'* (Fieldnotes, 28.4.2016)

*'Alan called me over as he was going through the overdue loan letters. "Look at this membership – it doesn't have an address or a telephone number. I'm not sure how we are going to contact them to ask for the books back." It was clear that one of the volunteers hadn't filled in the membership form in correctly when this customer had signed up for a new membership. On the overdue loan letter there was a note from Central library, saying 'address needed!' with an*

*exclamation mark. I could just imagine the staff at Central despairing at this kind of mistake, since staff members probably wouldn't have made this kind of error. (Fieldnotes, 15.9.2016)*

It is important to emphasise that this is not a criticism of the volunteers themselves for this lack of knowledge. Instead, it is a reflection upon the transience of volunteers that is central to the way in which the library is able to sustain a service based upon unpaid labour. The library relied on a large number of volunteers that worked a relatively small numbers of hours per week. There were also, of course, a number of volunteers that devoted a significant amount of time to the library. Yet, working one morning a week – as I and many other volunteers did – was not enough consistency to build up and consolidate library knowledge. This was also voiced by Marlene, a former library staff member who had taken voluntary redundancy:

*“You know, I have nothing against any of them, but the knowledge and their ability, even some things like issuing and discharging books. I know some of them are only in two or three hours a week and I think that's half the problem, they're not there long enough to really get to grips with it... I find it quite frustrating and saddening that the service has changed. And I'm sure they're all doing their best but if they're only work 2 or 3 hours a week, you can't absorb the same amount of knowledge and skill as if you're working 3 days a week for instance.”*

(Marlene)

Importantly, however, the fact that the (now volunteer-run) libraries still have a physical presence within the community actually works to obscure the difference between volunteer-run and the existing professionally-run libraries. The transformations, paradoxically, make the losses ambiguous to the library customer. Staff members feel that the loss of knowledge as a result of budget reductions is actually made elusive as a consequence of the transformation to volunteer-run libraries:

*“[T]he public, they don't know the intricacies. They're not interested, you know, they've got their own lives, they got their own careers and whatever. They don't really know, when you're saying 'Oh it's a volunteer library' and whatever, I think sometimes the council over-estimate*



*peoples involve[ment] – you know they don't really, they just want to know 'where's my library?' Erm, and, they don't see the defining lines between the two.” (Penny)*

*“I think that what they've done by developing those volunteer libraries is that they've kept every library building there. There hasn't been one single one that's actually closed. They've kept some kind of a service there, a little bit of a cut down one, they won't be open as much perhaps. And as far as the public know the same thing's happening because behind the scenes the people in materials are supplying the books, ICT is supplying the computers.” (Alice)*

Staff members, then, are acutely aware of the loss of expert labour and knowledge as a result of budget reductions, but these are made elusive as a result of the transformation to volunteer-run libraries. This deepens the argument that the imaginary of the cut is not a sufficient explanatory tool for austerity *without* thinking about the role that transformation plays.

It is also important to explore the transformations taking place in that which is *left behind* as a result of budget reduction; in other words, the experience of the existing council libraries and the staff that run them. In particular, these transformations relate to an entanglement between the two ‘types’ of libraries, as the staff left behind are increasingly required to support volunteers. Staff also transform their working practices in order to attempt to maintain a *visibly* similar service to their customers.

## **Transformation of working practices**

Initially, library staff members within the service were informed that the new volunteer-run libraries would be separate from the council-run libraries. However, the creation of volunteer-run libraries was anything but a severing of ties; instead, it can be seen as a complex entanglement and a transformation of relations between the two ‘types’ of libraries:

*“We're given assurances, you know: 'They're going to be quite separate to you, nobody will have to work with them', you know, but our van drivers do all the routes, so, you know, straight away they're not quite separate because they're using our janitors” (Penny)*

The council libraries service still owns many of the buildings, owns the books for each volunteer-run library, provides stationary and is responsible for their computers. Yet, staff members resent their role in supporting the volunteer-run libraries, in particular as they feel this as enabling job replacement:

*“I think there was a lot of anger in the library, amongst library staff. Volunteers were brought in, had been brought in to do our job, which sort of de-valued the work that you did, do you know what I mean? ... Yeah, I think it was sold that they would be funded for so long and then eventually have to be self-funding, and that never happened and I think a lot of people were a bit taken aback by that, that really the stock, the building, everything was gonna be the same, it’s just it was gonna be manned by, you know, volunteer staff rather than paid staff. And I just thought, well, you know, people thought it was just job replacement really and that seemed a bit unfair really.” (Joan)*

*“It’s sad that there are sides between volunteer and council libraries, because ideally you’d want to be all on the same side. But it’s difficult not to be bitter when library staff are losing their jobs. And staff do a lot of work to support the volunteer libraries.” (Darren, Fieldnotes, 15.6.2016)*

In the everyday running of the volunteer-run libraries, there is a continual reliance upon the work carried out by professional library staff, the central library in particular. Significant background work involved in the running of the volunteer libraries are carried out by library staff, including I.T. support, refreshing book stocks and transferring them between libraries, and day-to-day technical difficulties.

This entanglement can be made visible through an attunement to everyday library practices. Take, for example, the volunteer-run library where I volunteered as part of my research; there was a particular procedure when a library customer has an overdue loan. The overdue loan letters were produced at the central library and subsequently brought to the volunteer-run libraries. The envelopes for the letters were paid for by the council service through stationary deliveries. Yet, the stamps that were placed on the envelopes were purchased by the volunteer

library. The letters were then packaged at the volunteer-run library and sent to respective customers. Yet, there is added complexity in that the letter itself was produced by a paid library employee, brought to the volunteer-run library by a council library janitor (as voiced by Penny earlier) and then packaged and brought to the post by a volunteer. Even through this very mundane act, it opens up the possibility that the cut is not simply a reduction; it is the starting of a series of complex transformations, in which the creation of volunteer-run libraries are central. Here, the volunteerisation has transformed relations between paid and unpaid labour in the running of the library service in that the two are now deeply intertwined.

This form of background work carried out by council library staff to support volunteer-run libraries, however, remains invisible to the library customer. Both the everyday support, and the provisioning as volunteers face difficulties has placed an increased work-load upon existing library staff; yet, this is also in the context of a *reduced* expert labour force. As such, library staff have been caught in a pincer movement between an increased work-load and increasingly fewer individuals available to carry out these tasks.

This heightened pressure has resulted in a transformation of working practices within the existing council libraries. Staff are working *harder*, but there has also been an explicit attempt to focus on demands that are publicly *visible*. In other words, on the activities and tasks that are noticeable to the library customer:

*“Well what happens when you've got this is that certain things take a priority and other things that you used to do don't get done anymore. The priority is the customer. And because we're a customer led service everything is about getting enough people on the desk and getting people what they want. And, er, the stuff that is not customer focussed, back office stuff, which is processing, collections, getting them ready, getting the website ready, doing IT and scanning, digitisation of materials, preparing materials that that the public can enjoy local history - all that stuff - that is very very slow. It's not really happening. We're doing as much as we can.”*

(Alice)

*“I’m not sure the public would realise how hard, how much harder the staff are working to make sure everything appears to be running exactly the same, so if they looked at our events brochure, if they looked at everything, everything appears to be the same, but everybody’s working that much harder and behind the scenes everything is much more chaotic because everybody’s struggling to keep up because what we want to do is keep the frontline and the appearance of everything as normal whilst not quite being able to do it, we’re doing much more on the surface and much less in-depth because there isn’t the time to do in-depth.” (Margaret)*

Prioritising work that will be visible to the customer works as a protective cushion for staff members against the increased work load. Yet, it also works to make particular losses as a result of austerity elusive to the library customer:

*“I don’t think that library customers are aware of how much cutting has happened to the library service, purely because the staff have been very good at still offering what they always offered, do you know what I mean? So the customers aren’t aware of it as much as they perhaps should have been made aware. Because they still get the kids clubs, they still get their story times, their rhyme times, the stock, everything is still there but the staff are like sort of covering for it, do you know what I mean? They still, they’re just doing more than they used to and so I don’t think the customers are aware of the degree of cuts that has happened in the library service.” (Barbara)*

In summary, then, central to this chapter is the cut as a starting point of a series of transformations. The point of departure here is the transformation from council-run to volunteer-run libraries as the service increasingly relies upon unpaid labour. Further transformations become folded within this: existing staff members are forced to work both harder and change their working practices through focusing on customer facing activities; existing staff members also support volunteer-run libraries, both with everyday maintenance and arising difficulties. These transformations actually work to keep particular losses – the

loss of expert labour and knowledge – elusive.<sup>43</sup> This work of *making* losses elusive will be explored further, but the question of unrecognisable losses brings us firstly to Freud's conceptualisation of melancholia.

### **The elusive loss – A turn to melancholia**

Sigmund Freud (2005) explored the distinction between the concepts of mourning and melancholia. Both mourning and melancholia concern the response to a lost object, yet differ in one fundamental way – whether the lost object is conscious. For Freud (2005, p. 203), mourning is commonly thought of as “the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on.” Mourning involves the psychical work of narcissism in order to rebuild oneself; here, the lost object is taken in and assimilated, including the feelings of loss associated with it (Khanna, 2003, p. 21). Central to this assimilation is the fact that the lost object is identifiable and can be processed as a result. For Freud (2005), reality-testing shows that the loved object no longer exists and demands that all libido is to be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. When the work of mourning is completed, the subject is able to move forward again as the ego becomes free and uninhibited again. Mourning, then, involves a processing of loss through bringing the lost object into consciousness.

Whilst mourning is able to process the lost object, Ranjana Khanna (2003, pp. 16–17) draws on Freud to argue melancholia as an “affective state caused by the inability to assimilate loss, and the consequent nagging return of the lost thing into psychic life”. Khanna (2003, p. 22) uses the metaphor of digestion to explore this; unlike with mourning, where there is a slow digestion of the lost object, with melancholia the object is “swallowed whole.” In doing so, the lost object is made *elusive*. For Freud, as a result of this swallowing whole, the subject is effectively stuck with the lost object and begins to criticise it (Khanna, 2003). Yet, precisely

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<sup>43</sup> “Yeah, I think, I guess customers in this building wouldn't, would not think anything had changed at all. I guess where the customers notice is if you're, if suddenly the library that you use becomes either an option for closure or an option for reduction in hours or the staff that you see every day become eligible to lose their jobs, I guess that's when the customers really see, it's what they actually see every day. Because they're not interested in the wider service are they, they're interested in the bit that they see really, and the place that they know. But here I don't think that anybody would see any difference at all.” (Margaret)

because of the lost object's elusiveness, the subject cannot recognise what they are criticizing. As such, this criticism is internalised so that the loss of love object is transformed into the loss of ego (Freud, 2005). With melancholia, then, precisely because the object is swallowed whole, this leads to an extraordinary reduction in the self-esteem and an impoverishment of the ego. This means that the subject criticizes him or herself for attributes that would be associated with the lost object, known as critical agency (Khanna, 2003).

Importantly, both mourning and melancholia have the same traits, including inhibition and apathy, painful mood, and loss of interest in the outside world. There is one exception: in mourning, the disorder of self-esteem is absent (Freud, 2005). Melancholia's critical agency here can be seen as a refraction away from the lost object onto the ego. This refraction *away* from the lost object is central to this chapter and will be further explored later. Whilst Freud (2005, p. 205) understands melancholia as a pathological condition, he argues that the only reason why mourning is not seen in the same way is that we are easily able to explain it. The central difference between the two affective states, then, is that with melancholia "the loss of an object...is withdrawn from consciousness, unlike mourning, in which no aspect of the loss is unconscious" (Freud, 2005, p. 205).

Whilst the work of Freud and Khanna are rooted in the psychoanalytic, this chapter wishes to take the concept of melancholia beyond the notion of the unconscious. The contribution of melancholia is two-fold. Firstly, this chapter argues that melancholia is not reducible to an affective state. Rather, melancholia is also a *practice* through which losses are made elusive. The notion of *making* elusive is significant here, since this is an active process involving multiple subjects, materialities and practices. Thus, elusive losses are not shaped around the notion of that which remains unconscious but rather losses that undergo a process of being concealed. Secondly, this chapter brings melancholia into the realm of affective geographies to explore the experiential dynamics of loss – both through collective and individualised affective experiences – in times of austerity. As a result, this chapter develops the concept of 'austerity melancholia' – a practice through which the losses brought about by spending cuts are

concealed, and their subsequent re-emergence throughout everyday life. The cuts as transformation suggests that these elusive losses do not simply disappear, but instead make a “nagging return” (Khanna, 2003, pp. 16–17).

### **A haunted presence: Encrypted re-emergence of the lost object(s)**

Loss and temporality are intimately intertwined (Middeke and Wald, 2011), since accompanying the lost object is a lengthening of time. When the lost object is identifiable, mourning is carried out “bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathartic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged” (Freud, 2005, pp. 243–244). Abraham and Torok (1994) call this ‘introjection’ – an ongoing process that occurs through the passage of time. For them, the loss is assimilated into the self over time and in so doing, nourishes the ego. Mourning lengthens time, then, through the *prolonging* of the lost love object. When the lost object remains elusive, however, melancholia involves the lengthening of time that can go far beyond mourning (Freud, 2005). For Freud, melancholia’s critical agency “drags it back and forth at the same time” (Khanna, 2006, p. n/a). In doing so melancholia is “future orientated as much as attached to a past that cannot be forgotten or recognized within the logic of knowable memory” (ibid., p. n/a). The lost object does not simply disappear even though it remains elusive; the non-linear temporality of melancholia means that such losses *re-emerge*.

Yet, why does it matter to think about the re-emergence of the lost objects of austerity? The re-emergent loss is central to how atmospheric melancholia comes into being and is experienced. For Khanna (2006) symptomatic of melancholia is the re-emergence of (elusive) losses, but they re-emerge in *encrypted forms*. In other words, the losses haunt. Haunting occurs when the encryption is at risk of being deciphered (Khanna, 2003). This is important, since the risk of being deciphered is precisely why the lost object re-emerges. Yet, it remains just that – a risk. When haunting occurs, then, the lost object speaks, but not necessarily in a way that points it directly towards that which has been lost. What this suggests is that encounters with the (re-emergent) lost object can be refracted away from the loss itself. This is significant since

it indicates that austerity can be made present in such a way that its effects are not always identifiable as the consequence of spending reductions. In other words, in austerity melancholia, the question of causality is broken as the relationship between cause and effect becomes obscured. The temporality of the (elusive) loss, then, can work to obscure the causal links between austerity and its effects; this always comes with the *possibility* that this encryption will be deciphered, since this is precisely why the lost object haunts in the first place:

*“While mourning abandons lost objects by laying their histories to rest, melancholia’s continued and open relation to the past finally allows us to gain new perspectives on and new understandings of lost objects.”* (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003, p. 4)

The openness of melancholia to the past is central to its critical agency and therefore its politics; yet it also suggests this ambiguity of melancholia can actually work to also re-inscribe the lost object as elusive. Thus, whilst this potential can and does “eclipse conventional understandings of melancholia as pathological and negative” (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003, p. 23), it can also just simply *remain* potential, in which the loss is still concealed.

How, then, does this form part of the experiential dynamics of loss in the library service – the losses through the cut as transformation in particular? The losses brought about through the process of transformation form a *haunted presence* as they re-appear beyond the implementation of the cut itself. Of course, this re-appearance is encrypted:

*“I’ve got this huge great backlog of local studies collection that should be out there, that people should see. We get customers coming in getting angry that they can’t see it. And there’s like two of us doing it, this gigantic huge job [...] One of the difficulties we have with the public is that [pause] they know from years ago that we’ve got stuff; they come in and say ‘I want to see it, I know you’ve got it’. And there’s almost a kind of ‘you’re keeping it from me on purpose aren’t you?’ And you say, ‘if we have, a) I’m not sure where it is and b) it’s not on our catalogue yet.’”*



*We can't actually publish it until that's done and that causes friction sometimes. Because they just think you're deliberately hiding it.” (Alice)*

This encounter sees the re-emergence of the loss that is expert labour. As explored earlier, the loss of staff has caused a reduction in the number of staff available to carry out library functions. This has come with a transformation in working practices in order to prioritize customer facing services. Background tasks, such as archival work, that is not visible to the library customers is de-prioritized as a result, which in so doing obscures the loss of expert labour. Here, the customer is not aware of the reasons *why* they are not able to access particular archives – because there is no longer enough staff to digitise the catalogue quickly enough. Yet, since this kind of activity is not front-facing work, the losses here are not visible to the customer. This elusive loss makes a “nagging return”, yet crucially it is coded into other issues and working practices. Whilst the loss returns to speak, the loss becomes present in the frustration of library customers towards staff members, as they are accused of “deliberately hiding” or withholding archival material. The cut as transformation, then, means that austerity cannot be reduced to a finite moment of cutting. Instead, the temporality of austerity is both stretched and non-linear as the loss re-emerges. This re-emergence forms a *haunted presence* of austerity as the effects of austerity are both present and felt, yet are not necessarily attributed to spending cuts. This is significant since these encryptions refract the affective impact of such losses away from austerity itself, leaving austerity as a fiscal policy under-examined.

The loss of expert labour also forms a haunted presence within the volunteer-run libraries. As explored earlier, precisely because of the entanglement between volunteer-run and council-run libraries this transformation is not always recognisable to the average customer. In other words, the dividing lines between the two types of libraries become blurred. In so doing, there is a feeling amongst staff that the difference in experience and expertise between the libraries is not recognised as a consequence of lost expert labour:

*“I mean volunteers can come and go as they please. People are volunteers, you know, how would you set standards of work, how would you manage it? How would you, and if they're on these premises, they are a reflection of us. If they don't do the job very well then the public aren't going to know, they'll just say 'oh well the library staff are hopeless'.”* (Penny)

For Penny, the loss of knowledge and experience that enabled a certain level of service to be maintained remains elusive to the library customers. Instead, the criticism is directed at *all* people representing the library service, without distinguishing between professional and non-professional workers. In other words, professional staff have the potential to be criticised for mistakes made by volunteers. Instead of being recognised as the result of austerity, staff members feel the difference in type and delivery of service will be attributed to “hopeless” library staff. For Penny, the haunted presence of austerity could be made visible through decrypting the elusive loss:

*“I think the two types of libraries need to be kept totally separate... We could do something like, ‘If you need a book you can go to the volunteer library, but if you need professional advice go to a council library’.”* (Penny, Fieldnotes, 16.02.2017)

I do not wish to suggest that the work of volunteers is hopeless – far from it. Volunteers are stepping in to a gap left by an austerity agenda that leaves public services in an ongoing state of contraction; this transformation enables *some form* of library service to continue. In doing so, however, their practices become (part of) the work of *making* losses elusive. Yet, as will be explored in the following section, in trying to maintain a functioning library service, both volunteer and professional library staff actually become the *work* of an atmospheric melancholia.

## **The work of melancholia**

### **i. Patch-ups**

As already argued, the cut as transformation is a central way in which the losses as a result of austerity are made elusive. Yet, there are many elements within these transformations that

form the practice of *making elusive*. In particular, it is the practices carried out by volunteers and professional library staff that unintentionally become the work of melancholia. As explored in the previous chapter, the cyclical and ongoing nature of austerity has meant the library service experiences austerity as a series of unknowns that continually re-emerge. Austerity has taken away the ability for the library service to plan ahead, in so doing forcing it to work on an annual basis:

*“[W]e want to know what the future holds, but the problem is, it's only holding the future for a year. It's not sort of saying, 'this is the 10 year [plan]' I can, you know, well nobody can be promised anything, but, you know, there's not assurances. You know, we were all pretty confident 20 years ago that we'd all still have a job. Because the public sector was always seen as a safe place.” (Penny)*

The transformations taking place, therefore, could be understood as a form of ‘patch-up.’ A ‘patch-up’ is often thought of as “something done in a hasty or makeshift manner” (“patch-up, n.,” n.d.) The notion of ‘makeshift’ is significant, since it suggests a particular temporal relation: acting as an interim and temporary measure (“makeshift, n. and adj.,” n.d.). In this sense, a patch-up is a reactive, short-term fix in an attempt to keep something (like a library service) moving. By their very nature, then, patch-ups are precarious – they are used to allow the library service to carry on functioning in some form, yet their ‘make-shift’ quality makes the patch-ups futurity ambiguous. In other words, when the cut as transformation becomes a ‘patch-up’ it is not foreseen how successful or durable it will be.

Graham and Thrift’s (2007) work on maintenance and repair is helpful here; they argue that breakdown and repair should be seen not as atypical, but as a means by which societies learn and learn to reproduce (Petroski, 2006). Thus, repair and maintenance does not have to be complete restoration: “Think only of the bodged job, which still allows something to continue functioning but probably at a lower level” (Graham and Thrift, 2007, p. 6). Whilst the patch-up in times of austerity is not necessarily a response to failure or breakdown, the practice of patching-up does involve filling in a gap left by a budget short fall. Yet, this process generates

a different form of 'thing' (or service) than it was before – hence the cut as *transformation*. Additionally, like maintenance and repair, central to the patch-up is human labour and ingenuity (ibid., 2007). Volunteer-run libraries, for example, rely on the resourcefulness of the volunteers, such as drawing upon skills gained from previous employment. For example, Emma, a volunteer who ran rhyme-time sessions for toddlers, drew upon skills gained from a career as a nursery school teacher. Jillian, a volunteer who took on the role of library treasurer, drew upon skills gained by a career in business. Thus, the patch-up, as it develops, results in a library service that is “becoming more complex and becoming composed from an ever greater range of materials” (ibid., 2007, p. 3). Crucially for Graham and Thrift, this increasing complexity results in further maintenance and repair. This suggests that precisely because of the patch-up, ever more maintenance and repair within the library service is required; yet, as explored earlier, it is the existing library staff that are often responsible for this. In fact, in the training process, volunteers are taught to contact paid staff for support:

*‘Matilda said to Dylan that if there was a query that he couldn’t work out himself he should send an email to ‘Volunteer Enquiries’. She showed him how to write such an email, added the Volunteer Enquiries email address and sent it off. “So that’s what you do when it isn’t urgent. If it is urgent then you call someone at the Central Library like Joan.” I was struck, and slightly bemused by the fact that part of the training was learning how and when to contact the Central Library. This seemed to be a core part of how the volunteers were able to function. Matilda showed Dylan the blue procedures folder. On the first page were all the key contacts to ring if there any issues or queries. These names were mostly based at the Central Library... In fact all of the contacts were professional library staff.’ (Fieldnotes, 9.5.2016)*

The patch-up enables some kind of library service to continue in times of austerity, albeit transformed. In this sense, the patch-up becomes a form of getting-by within institutional settings like the library. However, enabling the patch-up to become a form of getting-by is the support of existing library staff. As the reliance on volunteer-run libraries generates more maintenance and repair, these libraries can only continue to function as a patch-up through

the support of professional library staff. This is significant to the generation of an atmospheric melancholia. In supporting volunteer-run libraries, staff members are actually *enabling* the loss of expert labour and knowledge, as a result of austerity, to be made elusive. In other words, the staff members themselves, are unintentionally becoming the *work* of melancholia.

The work of melancholia, however, can also be located at the practices of volunteers. Volunteers voiced their motivation for volunteering as a way in which to keep library doors open in a context where they otherwise would have closed. Rejecting the narrative of deprofessionalisation, volunteers see their intervention as a way of saving their local service:

*“I know people at council libraries don’t like volunteers and think we took their jobs, but the fact of the matter is, if we didn’t step in, this building would be derelict.” Richard said this with defiance.’ (Fieldnotes, 21.9.2015)*

*‘Sabine became defensive of the library. “What people don’t get is, if we didn’t volunteer this library wouldn’t exist anymore. So it’s not like we took anyone’s job, we wouldn’t dream of doing that.” Alan who was standing at the desk on the computer next to Sabine joined the conversation. “We wouldn’t have volunteered if we knew we were replacing someone’s job, we asked that at the very beginning... in principle I don’t agree with volunteer libraries, but what can you do when they’re going to close them.” Sabine quickly signalled, “Yeah in principle I don’t. But you’re seen as the devil incarnate to a librarian.” (Fieldnotes, 21.4.16)*

Importantly, in attaching to the idea of ‘saving’ their local library service, volunteers see their unpaid labour as a way of reducing the effects of austerity. In other words, volunteers feel that they are preventing their library from being lost through closure. However, in enabling unpaid labour to keep library doors open, volunteers themselves are actually becoming the work of melancholia through *making* and *re-affirming* particular losses as elusive – the loss of expert labour and knowledge. As explored in the previous section, these elusive losses form a haunted presence within the library space, which in so doing refracts the affective impact of such losses away from austerity into other issues and working practices. Within these

encounters and spaces, therefore, the violent effects of austerity remain unchallenged. Part of the violence of austerity, then, is that through these re-emergent losses, attention is refracted away from austerity and its effects. Thus, it is not simply the losses themselves that are violent, it is also the fact that some of these losses are simply not recognised, and the consequences of their subsequent encrypted return into everyday life.

## ii. Collective silence

However, it isn't simply the cut as transformation that becomes the work of melancholia; it is also the construction of a collective silence by professional library staff about the loss of expert labour and knowledge. The lost object is not elusive for everyone; for library staff members the loss is known and also felt. Yet, their collective silence about the losses actually contribute to the work of melancholia. For Jay Winter (2010, p. 4), silence is a "socially constructed space in which and about which subjects and words normally used in everyday life are not spoken." For him, the circle around this space is described by groups of people who deem it appropriate that there is a difference between the sayable and unsayable. What this suggests, then, is that silence is collectively constructed and participated in. Staff members see it as part of maintaining their professional standards to withhold the effects of austerity to library customers:

*"I think people are quite professional. Certainly in here. I think people, erm, you know, when self-service came in, the customers used to say to us, 'Oh is this going to put people out of jobs?' and we just used to laugh and say, 'Oh I don't think so, it will just enable us to do other things' or whatever, the writing [is on the wall], the answer is yes. But nobody ever said that... but we've always kept, we've never been party to spreading rumours or pretending that things, you know 'you could be losing your library service' or anything like that. We've never, it's always been something we've been very professional about." (Penny)*

This collective silence generates a disjuncture between how the staff and customers are experiencing the library. Whilst there are always differentiated experiences between the two subjectivities, staff are often now experiencing their engagement with customers through the

effects of austerity; and whilst austerity is very much present within these encounters, customers' experience of austerity become refracted into other issues. As explored earlier, austerity, therefore, forms a *haunted presence*:

*"[Y]ou've got a constant stream of people coming in who don't know what to do. You try and support them, to the public they don't know there's any different. And they just expect the same service, so that's quite hard to deal with for me personally. And it is very frustrating that you can't tell them. You can't seem to sort of say, 'look can you just appreciate that everything's changed here?' It's not how it was."* (Alice)

For both staff member and customer, then, austerity is a felt presence, yet felt differentially. Whilst the staff are aware of this differential experience, customers within these encounters are not – this is precisely why austerity haunts. For Alice, frustration emerges as a result of the fact that she is not able to make customers aware of this. Her reluctant participation in the collective silence, however, reconstructs the boundaries around the unsayable. In doing so, staff members are reluctantly and unintentionally becoming the work of melancholia by reaffirming the loss of expert labour and knowledge as elusive. When the elusive loss re-emerges, the collective silence about the effects of austerity maintains the loss as encrypted. However, for staff members this collective silence extends beyond the library service to the council more broadly:

*"And I think what really annoys us is the, we know it's not the councils fault that these cuts are being made, but what I do blame the council for is not admitting to the public that there have been cuts and that these are your cuts, and I think they try to say oh it's business as usual, everything going on as it always was – it's not, admit to the public ... And do people, when they voted at the last election, did they really understand what had already happened and how bad the cuts had been and how much worse was to come if the Conservative government were elected? And I don't think they did. And I think Labour councils have done a fantastic job of putting David Cameron's Big Society into action."* (Joan)

*“And most people when you ask them say they don't want to give up libraries, and I mean again that's why [the council] doesn't want to say that it's cutting libraries, because they don't want to be the ones that cuts the libraries, which they know are popular. So they pretend that they haven't been cut and they take all the staff out of it.” (Alice)*

This is particularly important, for it indicates the way in which multiple actors have become implicated within and unintentionally produced an atmospheric melancholic condition. This implicates staff, volunteers and the local authority. The local authority have attempted to adapt to austerity through using innovative strategies to keep the library service running, whilst emphasising “business as usual”; library volunteers have responded to austerity through filling in the gap left by the state, in an attempt to keep public services in their local communities; staff members, through their professional conduct as library staff, have remained silent to library customers about the extent of losses felt by the library service as a result of austerity. It is important to emphasise that this is not to attribute responsibility to any of these actors for an atmospheric condition. Rather, it indicates the diffusive violence of austerity. As individuals or groups of individuals attempt to adapt and respond to the effects of austerity, they unintentionally enable the effects of austerity to be made unknowable. This creates the possibility for austerity as a fiscal policy to continue relatively unnoticed. This suggests that austerity's distributed agency functions in such a way that responses to austerity – ‘getting by’, adapting, innovating – paradoxically *disable* the ability to respond in a way that enable alternatives to austerity to arise.

### **Conclusion: Austerity melancholia**

This chapter has argued that the cut as transformation has made losses a result of austerity elusive, the loss of expert labour and knowledge in particular. As volunteers and staff members have become part of these ‘patch-ups’ within the library service, they have become the *work* of melancholia by affirming such losses as elusive; the collective silence around such losses has also worked to keep the haunted re-emergence of these losses encrypted. This is not to suggest there are no recognisable losses as a result of austerity, but instead that when the



cut is a transformation, there are particular losses that *become* unrecognisable as a loss. This has generated a collective inability to mourn that which is lost through the process of austerity.

There are, of course, individualised and localised acts of mourning, such as the library staff themselves. In fact, it could be argued that their mourning is made pathological in that they are never able to move forward from the loss itself. Yet, precisely because the losses are made elusive on a collective level, this removes the ability for them to be mourned collectively. In an atmospheric melancholic condition, then, many of the effects of austerity are *made* unknowable. Importantly, such losses of austerity may haunt through their re-emergence into everyday life. Yet, precisely because they return in encrypted forms, the presence of austerity is refracted into other issues and working practices. This refraction of austerity's losses into other issues is particularly important to the melancholic condition. Here, austerity's effects are made present, yet there is not necessarily an awareness of it. For example, austerity has a presence in a frustrated encounter between library staff and customer, in accusations that staff are withholding archives, in a long queue at the front desk. Such encounters are easy to attribute to other issues or causes rather than to austerity:

*“Erm, I think that [Pause] as far as the public knows, there isn't any difference. You know, they might feel it in roads and in parks and they might see the effects of it there, or waste is the classic one isn't it. Erm, they come into a library, the sort of ethos of the library is that we keep our customer services as good as we possibly can, so we'll try and retain the same kind of standard even though there's probably only one member of staff when there was three. Erm, which is hard when you've got a big long queue” (Alice)*

This works to *diffuse* the affective impact of austerity itself. To diffuse typically means to spread over a larger area or group of people (“diffuse, v.,” n.d.). Thus, the affective impact of austerity does not disappear, but since many losses as a result of austerity become refracted into other issues, it means that the impact on a *collective* level is diluted. In an atmospheric melancholia, then, the effects of austerity are ambiguously felt. Whilst the losses make

themselves present, importantly, they are not experienced as a loss nor as a consequence of austerity. The causal links between austerity and its effects, therefore, become broken:

*“If you’re like me, perhaps living in [North-East County], child who goes to school and obviously is performing well... seem to have pots of money to do lots of things, you’re mixing with people who aren’t relying on benefits, most of them are employed, if they’re not employed it’s cos their husbands have got really really good jobs, you know, your family aren’t claiming benefits for any reason, you know, I might pop into the library in [North-East town] now and again but I’m not doing it regularly, you’re using the leisure centre, you’re not using public transport. You do not notice in the same way. And I’m not alone in that, there’ll be lots of people like me, but because of my job here [as a library staff member] I know what there are lots of people who are really struggling, and people are in employment relying on food banks to get through, there are people who have had benefits cuts, it’s really really hard for people. But as you say, your average voter like me probably wouldn’t notice.” (Joan)*

It is possible to suggest, then, that this atmospheric melancholia extends beyond the transformations in the library space; and it as a result, has a significant impact on the politics of austerity. A collectively felt melancholia reduces the possibility of generating a sufficient anti-austerity politics. This is not to suggest that an anti-austerity politics is not present; indeed, the discursive construction of austerity as ‘necessity’ is now being challenged, in particular through the anti-austerity politics of the Labour government. However, precisely because many of austerity’s losses are made unknowable and therefore unmournable, collectively we do not experience them as a loss. In other words, the losses as a result of austerity are indeed *felt*, but not felt as a loss. Thus, affects such as anger, sadness, frustration that come with a collective feeling of loss are not able to linger. Such affects could be productively channelled into developing a stronger anti-austerity movement. Whilst this work has been based upon the relationship between library staff, volunteers and library customers, at a broader level, austerity melancholia might deny communities the feeling of loss needed to mourn their public services and channel this feeling into a productive politics. Instead,

however, as many cuts are made unknowable, the fantasy about what the state is expected to offer remains disproportionately intact relative to the material means needed to actualise this promise. When the promise of the state is not met, it is not austerity that becomes subject to critique, but rather the encounters, spaces and services in which austerity is encrypted within. In doing so, it generates the conditions of possibility for austerity to remain relatively unopposed. As the experiential dynamics of loss are made unknowable, an atmospheric melancholia allows the fiscal policy of austerity to continue.

## Chapter Six

### Pessimistic futures of austerity

#### **Introduction: Futile futures of the library service**

*“The council are always optimistic” he said, giving a hearty laugh. “But then if the people at the top said, ‘we’re stuffed’, then the rest of the council are completely stuffed.”* (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 17.2.2016)

Dennis imagines a downward trajectory of the library service. Whatever the future holds, one thing is certain, the council is “stuffed.” For him, this means that the library service is, as a result, “completely stuffed.” The ongoing state of austerity has generated a feeling of futility for the future of the library service. When something is understood to be futile, such as an action, a future, a desire, it is thoroughly incapable of producing any result (“futile, adj.,” n.d.). Futility points towards a general ineffectiveness or uselessness (“futility, n.,” n.d.). For Eugene Thacker,

*“Futility arises out of the grill suspicion that, behind the shroud of causality we drape over the world, there is only the indifference of what exists or doesn’t exist; whatever you do ultimately leads to no end.”* (Thacker, 2015, p. 15)

As something becomes futile it is “failing utterly of the desire end through *intrinsic defect*” (“futile, adj.,” n.d., emphasis added). This is particularly significant, for it indicates that futility is intrinsic, and therefore failure is not a question of *if*, but a question of *when* (Thacker, 2015). Futility, by its very definition, fails (ibid.). Futility, therefore, results in a rejection of positive action, in which there is a refusal of the notion that the application of human reason is able to lead to change (Dienstag, 2009). In other words, since everything is destined to fail, it is futile to feel that human action is able to alter this inevitable end.

As will be explored throughout the chapter, futility pervades the library service in times of austerity; not only in a sense of a futile future, but also in a sense that any positive action towards attempting to ‘save’ the library service from further contraction under austerity is destined to fail. Emerging as a result of this futility is a collective feeling of pessimism.

Pessimism becomes a mode of relation to, and a way in which to live with, futility.

Pessimism, then, is deeply entangled with futility and questions of temporality. In fact, pessimism does not exist without a sense of futility. In expecting nothing, we are denying a sense that time means progress (Dienstag, 2009). Whilst optimism has a linear concept of time and equates it with progress, for pessimism, time becomes a burden, not least due to the ultimate futility – fatality (Thacker, 2015). In other words, a consciousness of time also generates a consciousness about eventual death (Dienstag, 2009). Thus, both pessimism and optimism have a linear sense of time, yet the former sees this both as a burden and as regressive. In this sense, “the nonprogressive yet linear view of human existence is profoundly discomfiting” (Dienstag, 2009, p. 18).

Pessimism is often regarded as a philosophy of second rank (Dienstag, 2009). Pessimism is also often understood as a feeling to be rejected, suppressed or ashamed of. For Eugene Thacker (2015, p. 56), “[o]ne always *admits* to being a pessimist” (emphasis in original).

Pessimism is something that, drawing on Fisher (2016, p. 15), is understood as ‘weird’ because it involves a sensation of *wrongness*; in other words, “a weird entity or object is so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist, or at least should not exist here.” Pessimism, then, is not welcome. Pessimism is easily identifiable, since “we’ve heard it all before – and we didn’t need to hear it in the first place” (Thacker, 2015, p. 9). In doing so, it is easily stifled and understood as a mere complaint (Dienstag, 2009). Indeed a pessimistic reading is often translated into the need for optimism, such as a change of attitude, a new outlook, a shift in perspective (Thacker, 2015). And due to its endless belief in progress, optimism becomes something that is hard to argue against (Eagleton, 2015). Thus, pessimists are seen as dissenters from the prevailing rather than contributing to an alternative (Dienstag, 2015).

However, Dienstag argues that pessimism is, despite not appearing to be so, in fact deeply political. It asks us to radically alter our opinion of ourselves and what we can expect from politics. It does not simply tell us to expect less, but to expect *nothing*.

The inclination towards optimism, therefore, negates the possibility for meaningful conversation about what a pessimistic reading may afford. In particular, what it might tell us about the phenomenon at hand – *austerity*. As this chapter will explore, pessimism is a way through which austerity is experienced and therefore made present. Yet, much of existing work on austerity could actually be described as an ‘anti-pessimistic’ reading of austerity, in emphasising the significance of the transformative potential of action against austerity (see for example, Arampatzi, 2016; Forkert, 2016; Jupp, 2017). This kind of austerity work, although very important, indicates a tendency to focus on the moments of contestation; yet, in the lived experience of austerity, these explicit moments of contestation might be few and far between in relation to other modes of living (with austerity). Thus, when the lived effects of austerity are anything but progressive there is an ethical need to allow pessimism to speak.<sup>44</sup> A pessimistic reading of austerity has been under explored, with the exception of Rebecca Coleman (2016). Importantly, Coleman conceptualises pessimism as a *mood* characteristic of austerity in the UK. Drawing on Berlant, she rejects a demarcation between optimism and pessimism and instead offers an ambivalent account, in which pessimism becomes a complex phenomenon that both livens and flattens affects. She argues that pessimism is a productive means of understanding the affective qualities and atmospheres of austerity (Coleman, 2016, p. 84). It is both pessimism’s ambivalence that is of particular interest in this chapter; but also of particular interest is pessimism’s presence as a collective feeling. For Thacker (2015, p. 9), “pessimism always has a membership of one – maybe two.” For him, pessimism is above all individually felt – a self that is projected as a world in itself. Whilst it is indeed individualised, I argue that Thacker overlooks the spatiality of pessimism. In particular, how pessimism is made present and felt *in space*. This is important, since feelings of pessimism explored in the chapter do not emerge in a vacuum, but are instead situated. As such, whilst pessimism might

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<sup>44</sup> Chapters four, five and six are important examples of the regressive effects of austerity.

emerge from an individual, to feel pessimism in space means to always open up potential for this to become shared.<sup>45</sup>

As a result, this chapter explores the ambivalently and collectively felt pessimism as a result of a pervasive sense of futility for the future of the library service. This is explored through a ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign that was set up by the local Union in an attempt to prevent the latest round of budget reduction to the service. However, as will be explored, this campaign was understood to be ‘too little too late’, and subsequently was related to with pessimism. There is a felt sense, therefore, that austerity is simply not actionable. The chapter then goes onto argue that this futility has resulted in both displaced affects and actions away from austerity itself, towards more actionable issues that staff feel they have some control in changing. Hope becomes displaced onto smaller and shorter-term promises, precisely because austerity has made more ambitious and longer-term desires impossible. Resistant acts that emerge as a result of austerity’s effects become *displaced* onto more proximate and actionable issues, rather than to austerity itself. Central to this chapter, therefore, is the (im)possibility of action as a result of, and as a response to, austerity.

### **‘Save our Libraries’**

After nine months of carrying out fieldwork, it was made aware to staff members that £700,000 pounds of spending reductions were required in the library service within this budget cycle. The savings to the service was just one part of wider proposals in the council to meet the budget shortfall. As part of these savings it emerged that four branch libraries were at risk of closure.<sup>46</sup> In response to these proposals the Union representing the library service headed a local ‘Save Our Libraries’ campaign, aiming to raise awareness to the public that particular libraries were under threat, whilst also attempting to prevent library closures. This included having an online presence, protesting outside council buildings, and raising

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<sup>45</sup> Schopenhauer argued for the existence of an unconditional pessimism – a suffering that is synonymous with life itself (Thacker, 2015). Yet, lived experience always occurs in place, and therefore still opens up the possibility for pessimism to become shared.

<sup>46</sup> Branch libraries are part of the library network and are smaller in size than area libraries or the Central library.

awareness through public consultation. Explicit within this campaign was the promise that human action would lead towards change:

*“The Union representative spoke with a palpable sense of urgency, “You have to campaign really hard. We need campaign on all channels – Twitter, Facebook [...] We’ve got 4 months to save the library service – doing nothing is not an option. We have to fight. It starts now. Can you consider joining the campaign – Bessie will be around at the end of the meeting if you would like to join.” (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

The sense of urgency temporally compresses this promise, so that the ability for human action to enact change is limited to the proximate future. In other words, the promise to save the library service can only materialise if action is taken *now*. However, as this section will explore, this notion of positive action is considered futile. This takes two particular forms: a feeling of futility for the future of *paid* staff and a sense of futility for the wider council. Both forms of futility result in a pessimistic response to the ‘Save our libraries’ campaign, namely a subsequent resignation to inaction.

#### **i. The futility of saving paid staff**

Firstly, there is ambiguity towards what the ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign is attempting to save. Many staff members feel a sense of futility at the campaign’s ability to save paid library positions. They feel that the campaign provides the conditions for the council to create volunteer-run libraries, rather than saving professional positions:

*“[Penny] The Union’s ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign works right into the Council’s hands. Because they can say they’ve saved libraries by replacing us with volunteers. The Council have got the Union rapped round their little finger. The Union didn’t do anything for us when the other volunteer libraries were created. They did the same kind of campaign, which didn’t save our jobs. I remember [leader of the Council] celebrating that five libraries had been handed over to volunteers, saying ‘we’ve saved our libraries!’ He didn’t think about the fact that we lost our jobs.” “This is thing that annoys me” said Joseph, “is the Union there to save libraries*



*or are they there to save our jobs? Because so far they haven't saved our jobs." Julia who had been sitting quietly up until now said, "A campaign that says 'Save our Libraries' doesn't mean save our professional library service, it doesn't mean save our jobs." Penny added firmly, "The Union have done nothing for us. CILIP are doing a campaign with Stephen Fry that's about saving libraries, run by librarians." She pointed at the poster on the notice board. I took the poster off the board to have a look. "But it's too little too late" added Penny. The poster had a large picture of Stephen Fry with a quote from him: 'Libraries are where minds flourish and grow. They are like a kind of water supply. Without libraries a country can become a kind of desert.' The bottom of the poster had 'Powered by librarians' in large font. Penny carried on, "The campaign won't be about saving the professional service, which means our jobs will be replaced by volunteers. That's exactly what happened last time." Joseph added, he sounded quite angry now as his voice was raised and he was speaking faster. "And last time the public consultation questions were all loaded towards introducing volunteer libraries.<sup>47</sup> And half the document was filled with space for people to put their contact details down to volunteer! So what difference does the public consultation make anyway?" (Fieldnotes, 1.6.2016)*

Library staff members feel that their position within the 'Save our Libraries' campaign has remained invisible. Despite the fact that the Union exists to represent professional library positions, staff feel that previous campaigns have focussed on keeping library doors open – something that does not necessarily represent their interests. As such, the wider council narrative of the campaigns was one of success, precisely because no library officially closed its doors. Less visible, however, was the number of staff members who had lost their jobs, albeit through voluntary redundancy.<sup>48</sup> The act of 'saving' a library highlights the ambiguity about what a library service *is*. Is a library defined by its physical there-ness, such as the presence of a building for people to dwell in? Is it defined by the ability to offer and lend books? Or is it the presence and work of professional library staff that make up the library? Many staff

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<sup>47</sup> Since libraries are a statutory service, it is a legal requirement for local authorities to generate a public consultation for proposals to change the frontline service.

<sup>48</sup> Turning back to an atmospheric melancholia in chapter five, such library campaigns also work to keep austerity's losses elusive, precisely because the campaigns were deemed to have 'saved' local libraries from closing.

members voiced the feeling that “without the staff, the library is nothing” (Joseph). For them, the work of professional staff has come to define the library service.

However, the question of what a library service is, is much more ambivalent as it becomes situated within the wider council, particularly as there are coexistent and conflicting interests about how the library service budget should be reduced:

*“There was a lot of unhappiness when the initial volunteer libraries were established and a lot of questions needed to be answered so there was a lot of anger then. It didn’t, there wasn’t the threat of industrial action but there was real discontent. It’s very difficult for people elsewhere, because in the council, you know, I went to service directors, group directors, who literally said, ‘Dennis, brilliant job done, brilliant job done.’ It was a news story on BBC Look North, libraries still open, and it cut back to Carol Malia in the news desk, ‘There’s a good news story’, she actually said ‘There’s a good news story, five libraries volunteer run’. If I come up the road from the civic centre to [the Central library], oh my God, the difference in view, and I’d never experienced that, but hang on, the boss is going ‘brilliant’ and the employees, who I love, you know, were kinda going, yeah I went round people, I went round all libraries after that news story and I went round to just try and talk to people and I can remember getting to [name of library] library where there’s a really, you know, long serving good library employee, crying because of what had happened. Management don’t get that, you know, because, hang on they were just, because for the council services being made the savings, service sustained, communities engaged, they’ve stepped forward...” (Dennis)*

*‘Dennis brought out a photocopy of a newspaper article from 2012, when the five libraries became volunteer, “In 2012, when the volunteer libraries were created, the council didn’t get any bad press. Because it was portrayed as ‘look, we’ve managed to save five libraries from closing!’ And the whole process of libraries being at risk of closure turned campaigners into volunteers. Because people who were really passionate about libraries and didn’t want them to close came to the initial meetings and were turned into volunteers.” (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

As indicated by Dennis, for management in the wider council, a library is a material presence within the community. Thus, the notion of ‘saving’ libraries means to continue this presence by keeping library doors open. Precisely because human resources make up two-thirds of the service’s budget, enabling libraries to be materially present comes at the expense of paid library positions. Yet, for library staff, the removal of professional staff eliminates what it means to be a library:

*“The volunteers don’t do as much. The libraries are more like community hubs than libraries. They sell tea and coffee n’ that.”* (Gregg, Fieldnotes, 15.2.2016)

This is significant for thinking about a shared feeling of pessimism. The ambiguity around what it means to *be* a library service, generates ambivalence about what it means to *save* a library. Precisely because this is a more visible part of the service (see chapter five), the council has prioritised keeping library buildings themselves open. Additionally, members of the local community who campaigned against library closures transformed into library volunteers. Not only has this rendered the experience of staff members invisible within the ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign, but it has also generated a shared sense of futility around their paid positions being spared from budget reductions. In other words, for them, the ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign will ultimately fail, as it will inevitably lead to more volunteer libraries:

*‘Before the [Union] meeting could end, however, another person shouted out, “We want to save our professional library service. Not just our library service – our professional library service.”* (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)

Pessimism here, then, becomes a rejection of a (misplaced) promise of positive action; a promise that inadvertently furthers the deprofessionalisation of the library service, both through the loss of library staff and the creation of unpaid positions. As explored in chapter five, this enables particular losses as a result of austerity to remain unnoticed. In this sense, pessimism can become a rejection of an atmospheric melancholia, as it becomes a refusal to submit to the conditions that enable particular losses (produced by austerity) to be made elusive. In other words, rejecting the promise of the ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign is a

rejection of the transformation to volunteer-run libraries and of the inevitable elusive loss that is expert labour.

Yet, this also points towards the overall futility of the ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign and the inability to respond to austerity. On the one hand, attaching to the notion of positive action within the campaign, means to further enable the creation of volunteer-run libraries – which in turn contributes to a melancholic condition. As explored in the previous chapter, this enables austerity to continue relatively unopposed. On the other hand, to hold onto pessimism means to reject a further deprofessionalisation of the service. Yet, this mode of action actively chooses *not* to attempt to interrupt austerity, for pessimism involves “raising problems without solutions... posing questions without answers” (Thacker, 2015, p. 5). In doing so, this *also* holds the potential to enable austerity to continue relatively unopposed. This inability to respond to austerity will be explored later in the chapter.

## ii. The futility of the council

Not only is there a shared futility towards saving paid library positions, there is also a sense of futility towards the future of the wider council. As voiced by Dennis earlier, the council is understood to be financially “completely stuffed.” Between 2010 and 2016 the council this library service is situated in has seen a fifty percent reduction in their Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from central government. By 2020/2021, this grant reduction will become one hundred percent as the government propose to eliminate the grant from all local authorities.

Significantly, the continual reduction to the RSG means that services that come under local authority funding – including libraries, leisure centres and adult social care – face the *shared* burden of meeting this budget shortfall:

*‘There was a slight pause and another questioner put their hand up. “If we are expecting customers to come to the area libraries, this will put further pressure on area libraries without the resources to manage this. Do savings have to be made, come what may?” This was more of a comment than a question. Vanessa’s reply was made in a matter-of-fact tone. “Because of the*

*amount of cuts to local government, if money isn't saved in libraries the money has to be saved elsewhere in the council.”* (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)

*“The Library Taskforce are bringing out a report later this year about what it means to have a statutory service. But the statutory service will tie the councils in knots, because if there aren't as many cuts in the library service the money will have to come from somewhere else. And the government have been quite clever in that they have said, ‘We support libraries, we will uphold the 1964 Act’, but without anything to support libraries. And this ties the council in knots because it's financially stuffed.”* (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)

*“The Union representative began by comparing the library budget cuts with other service cuts in the council. “The adult social care cuts are 10 times the library budget cuts. In previous campaigns libraries have slightly been hidden because of this. Libraries are up against these big hitters meaning that we need to campaign hard.”* (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)

There are two paradoxical relationships at play here between the library service and the rest of the council. Firstly, a collective feeling of futility is generated by the understanding that if particular services are spared from budget reductions, additional savings are required within the remaining services throughout the council. Both Dennis and Vanessa's words indicate the complex relationship between the desire to lessen budget reductions in the library service and the guilt about its subsequent impact upon the wider council. A collective and felt sense of futility, therefore, is not simply felt within library service itself, but also *between* different public services. The well-established discourse of 'collective pain sharing' (Clarke and Newman, 2012) in austere times uncomfortably re-emerges here; but interestingly it also emerges alongside the understanding that the council themselves are one of those disproportionately affected by austerity. This works to generate a sense of futility of the 'Save our Libraries' campaign, precisely because the cuts to the library service are felt as just one part of wider collective pain, which should *remain shared*.

Secondly, however, as suggested by the Union representative, there is also a felt sense of competition between public services in times of austerity. As local authority services are sustained by the same funding source, such services become contestants placed against one another, whereby they both compete for the same funding, and also against each other to be *spared* funding cuts. For the library service, there is a palpable sense that it is “up against” other services, including the “big hitters” of adult social care. This sense of competition emerged in my own experience of a rally that was part of the ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign:

*“A woman from The Socialist Party (who were handing out newspapers before the rally) took the megaphone from Alison to replace the lead chanting. Her chanting was very loud, and her chants were against cuts more generally, rather than libraries. She chanted: “[council name omitted] council here our plea, fight the Tory cuts” and “No ifs, no buts, no public service cuts.” This seemed to blur the focus of the lobby, since the rally was for specifically for libraries service cuts rather than council wide cuts. I felt slightly frustrated by this, since all services were pitted against each other within the budget cuts, and therefore this kind of rhetoric actually had the potential to damage libraries’ chances of getting a ‘better’ or more favourable outcome within the budget decisions.” (Fieldnotes, 8.11.2016)*

My frustration at the rally indicates something important about how austerity functions. My own broader anti-austerity politics was momentarily lost as I became attached to the promise of the ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign. I felt that a focus on public services more broadly – “No ifs, no buts, public service cuts” – jeopardised the library service’s chances of receiving fewer spending reductions. Austerity, then, sets services in opposition with one another; here, a collective contestation against austerity is seen as reducing the efficacy of more localised campaigns, including that of the library service. The two paradoxical relationships between the library service and the wider council generates an atmosphere by which, on the one hand, staff members in the library service are made to feel in competition with other local authority services, yet, on the other hand, are also made to feel that their sense of futility is shared and should *remain shared*.

### iii. Resignation – ‘what’s the point?’

The futility of saving the library service, and also the staff within it, can generate a particular pessimistic response: resignation. Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy placed emphasis on resignation as a way in which to live with futility (Dienstag, 2009). Both he and Rousseau advocated a kind of retreat where suffering is minimised; for as Leopardi argued, suffering is maximised by striving (ibid.). Thus, resignation can become a form of active disengagement when the outcome is already understood as futile, by questioning ‘what’s the point?’:

*‘The male Union representative added, “This is the fight of our lives now.” Again, there was a real sense of urgency when he said this. Penny then spoke without putting her hand up. “I don’t know how we are going to achieve anything. People don’t understand the difference between volunteer libraries and council libraries, they just don’t. Customers have actually come up to us in Central and thanked us for volunteering!” A few people laughed at this last remark – not because Penny meant it to be funny, but because she obviously made no effort to hide how she was feeling. The tone of her voice came across sceptical but there was also clear anger in her voice as she talked about the volunteer libraries.’ (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

*‘[In the staff room] Alice chuckled again and said to Penny, “You could tell that you weren’t too happy with the Unions this morning.” Penny replied with frustration, “Well what are they going to achieve? It’s all too little too late. They suddenly want us to campaign when it’s too late. Where were they when the community libraries were made volunteer? They were saying what a good thing that there were no compulsory redundancies.” Jill added said, “But the councillors don’t care either. All they care about is their job and their community. They don’t care whether professional librarians have lost their jobs.” There were more ‘mmm’ of agreement at this... The staff seemed be resigned to the fact that these cuts were now going to happen. Whilst they were clearly not content with this, Penny and others seemed to be thinking that the campaigns organised by the Union would not make any difference to the outcome of the proposals.’ (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)*

*“Because you would need to have the support of colleagues across the council and services across the council are also facing massive cuts, so I guess I would say it’s unlikely, I would say it’s unlikely [for industrial action to occur]. And I think because it’s, because everyone’s quite aware that the cuts are coming from central government, industrial action I think would have virtually no effect whatsoever.”* (Margaret)

For Penny and other staff members, the library campaigns were meaningless, since they felt the budget proposals would be implemented regardless of whether the campaign existed or not. Yet, the feeling that the campaign was ‘too little, too late’ indicates a particular temporality to this futility. The ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign may have held a promise at one stage; yet not only would this *current* promise not materialise, but the promise never existed in the first place. In other words, for Penny and others the promise of saving the libraries would have been present if this form of activism had existed in previous budget cycles.

This is also indicative of what Thacker (2015) calls a ‘lethargy of discontent’. Staff members feel discontented with austerity, yet there is an absence of *energy* to both carry out an attempted change and more significantly to *feel* that they can enact change. Interestingly there is an awareness to lethargy – for something to know that it is lethargic, it firstly has to *act*. Thus, the temporality of austerity is significant here. As explored in chapter four, austerity is ongoing and there have been multiple previous years of austerity. Lethargic discontent relies on the past as well as the future. In the case of Penny, she has learnt that the campaign is ‘too little too late.’ This lethargy, therefore, is something gained over previous years of austerity. Whilst the ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign in previous years may have been able to channel collective discontent into positive action, this is discontent is now so lethargic that it simply has become resignation. The *repetition* and ‘ongoingness’ of austerity, therefore, works to wear down potentially productive discontent into resignation brought about by exhaustion. This works to generate a sense that positive action is futile, precisely because the fatigued body (Bissell, 2014) has a diminished capacity to act:



*“It’s much more exhausting for the staff... you just know people are running ragged, they really are, they really are.” (Margaret)*

### **A pessimistic reading – the result of futility**

Significantly, my own my position as a researcher meant, that over time, I began to take a pessimistic reading of and within fieldwork encounters. A felt sense of futility pervaded particular encounters, which became simultaneously shared and individually attuned to:

[Dennis] *“I can see in a few years’ time that we will only have the Central library left.” I looked at him, not quite sure what to say, because he had never admitted this to me before. “Because, in the next year or so, we will be down to the area libraries, so I expect around 5 to 7 libraries left. But this isn’t the end of austerity; there will be more cuts for years to come. So I can just see there being only the Central Library left. Because the council is in such dire financial straits – they’re just stuffed.” I wasn’t sure what to say. The saddest part was that I wasn’t particularly shocked when he said this. I had not expected him to say this, but at the same time, it was almost (but not quite) expected for this to be the future of the library service.’*  
(Fieldnotes, 18.3.2016)

For Dennis, the ongoing state of austerity has generated a feeling of futility regarding the future of the library service. Dennis’ imagined downward trajectory of the service points towards the temporality of pessimism – both linear and regressive (Dienstag, 2009). My lack of surprise at his prediction is indicative of my own pessimistic reading within this encounter. Prior to this encounter I had already carried out six months of fieldwork in the service, which was enough for me to build up a particular affective memory of the service in times of austerity. Not only had I felt Dennis’ pessimism, but I had also accumulated previous affective encounters that worked to shape my reading of this encounter. My already established affective memory, therefore, had the effect of dampening a sense of shock to Dennis’ revelation. Yet, my dampened response also worked to generate an intense sadness, precisely because my own affective reaction was not what I would have expected or deemed desirable.

My own response highlights something particularly important about how austerity manifests itself over time. My previous fieldwork experience in the library service meant that Dennis' prediction – that only one library would eventually remain – reduced my capacity to be affected. For Felix Ravaisson (2008, p. 37), “impressions lose their force the more frequently they are produced. They become more and more slight, affecting the physical constitution of the organs less and less.” David Bissell (2014) draws upon Ravaisson to argue for a need to consider the micro bodily transformations that can build to tipping points over time. For Bissell, such affective capacities shift in subtle, ‘slow creep’ ways. Both the rhythm and temporality of these bodily transformations are significant here. For Bissell they hold the potential to surpass bodily thresholds; but as my own bodily transformations suggest, they can also work to dull or even diminish the capacity to be affected. Crucially, it is my previous encounters with austerity in the library that meant I was not affected by Dennis' narrative of linear decline of the service in the same way. This might suggest that as austerity continues over time, and as encounters with austerity build up, the affective response to the effects of austerity can become diminished, as it reduces our capacity to respond. Yet, as chapter four suggests, the seriality of encounters can *also* work to blur distinctions between reality and fiction so that particular affective responses, through paranoid practices, become *intensified*. Yet, this chapter suggests that austerity can also *lose its affect* through a build-up of austere encounters. Whether or not these encounters are one of a series or simply an accumulation of similar encounters, both are defined through their repetition. This diminishes the capacity to respond to the effects of austerity; the continued presence of austerity can lead to affective exhaustion. And it is austerity's ongoingness that can work to dull the affective response to its repeated encounters. Pessimism, therefore, like paranoia, becomes another way of living within the *repetition* and *ongoingness* of austerity.

Turning back to Thacker's assertion that pessimism is predominantly an individualised experience, I argue that this also overlooks the way in which pessimism emerges within institutional spaces like the library, as well as the wider government structures this institution is connected to. Pessimism in this context is transpersonal through its *mobility*:

“[Dennis] I was in a meeting last week with the council they used the word ‘overhead savings’. Well, they used the word ‘overhead savings’ rather awkwardly, they sort of shifted in their seat as they said it.” I was slightly confused at this. “What does overhead savings mean?” I asked. “Well, I sort of put two and two together and it made me think, ‘will I have a job in a few years’ time?’ I was not expecting this at all, and my face definitely showed it. I simply stared and then blurted out, “really?” Dennis replied, “Well if they are going to merge the library service and the leisure service, then inevitably my position may not be needed anymore. I don’t expect my job to go anytime soon, but do I think I will have this job at 60? Definitely not.” At this point I had the realisation that no job was safe in the service. If Dennis’ job wasn’t even safe, then none of the service was certain.’ (Fieldnotes, 17.2.2016)

Dennis suggests here that pessimism can *travel*. Significantly, the library service is reliant on funding from the local authority in which the service is situated in. The service is therefore solely shaped by the financial situation of local government and the subsequent budget proposals that emerge as a result. Due to the feeling that the council is financially “stuffed”, this futility travels to services within the council like the library. Precisely because the library service is reliant on council funding, this intensifies feelings of the futility of human action as a contributor towards change. Importantly, this works to intensify Dennis’ feelings of pessimism within the library service. In other words, the feeling that the effects of austerity on the library service are out of Dennis’ control. This pessimism is also intensified by the sense of futility of Dennis’ *position* within the service. Interestingly, however, the way in which Dennis gathered and organised this knowledge could also be interpreted as a paranoid reading, due to the act of putting “two and two together;” this indicates the practice of burrowing backwards and forwards that is central to paranoia (Sedgwick, 2002). Yet, crucially, it is *also* a pessimistic reading for two reasons. Firstly, this encounter is shaped by his overall sense of futility of the service so that he expects there to be ‘bad news’; secondly, because he is resigned to the fact that his job as library manager within the service will eventually no longer exist. In this sense a paranoid reading and a pessimistic reading become intimately intertwined, and perhaps even

align. What makes the two affective states distinct, however, is pessimism's linear temporality – the future as regressive – and paranoia's non-linear temporality – burrowing backwards and forwards. Additionally, the latter is a response to an unknown, whereas with the former, unknowns do not exist precisely because everything ultimately leads to no end. Here, however, Dennis' feeling of futility (of the library's future) works to deepen paranoid ways of knowing; this in turn works to intensify feelings of pessimism by confirming "that all is for naught" (Thacker, 2015, p. 5).

### **Futility and hope**

The previous sections have explored the emergence of a collectively felt pessimism towards the library service in times of austerity. This is felt by library staff and emerges as a result of a shared sense of a futile future. This collective pessimism coexists, and also intensifies, with the promise of positive action – the promise of the 'Save our Libraries' campaign in particular. Significantly, the feeling of futility towards the library service in times of austerity forms a particular relationship with *hope*. Exploring austerity's presence through pessimism suggests that within the library service, library staff feel that they have no control over the impacts of austerity, nor do they feel as though they are able to interrupt or disrupt its life course. Austerity, therefore, is not deemed to be actionable; whatever their actions, staff members feel it will not make any difference to the outcome of budget decisions and their implementation. What this means, then, is that staff members do not attach to hopes that involve a promise that their actions will contribute towards a change in the course of austerity, nor that change is even possible. There are two consequences to this: a pessimistic mode of action that can be understood as political and a displacement of hopes away from austerity. As will be explored, present within both is a sense of hope without optimism.

#### **i. Pessimism as political**

Futility can generate another particular kind of pessimistic response that is different to that of resignation. This response is a mode of action that is taken *without* the promise of positive

action – without the promise that their actions will lead to change. In other words, here particular actions are considered futile, yet they are carried out any way:

*“[June] But the thing is, what’s the point in striking? Last time we struck, we lost a full day’s pay and everything still went through, nothing changed.” Andy responded, “Well it’s about getting your feelings known, and showing them you’re not happy about it.” Jill said defiantly, “Well if I’m getting the sack, I’m going down fighting.” There was a general grumbling of agreement amongst the members of the library and one chimed, “here, here.” (Fieldnotes, 23.10.2015)*

*“They say, ‘well what’s the point’ [with strike action] we lose a day’s pay; well we’ve been on strike before, not because of, because of pay actually, and we all lost a day’s pay and then when you look at the settlement, you know, you just think, what’s the point? I mean, maybe some people do vote for strike, but I think generally speaking, people think it’s all a lost cause... But other people say, well you’ve got to make a stand and show, you know, that you’re not just gonna take everything lying down.” (Penny)*

There is something inherently political about this pessimistic mode of action. Within this encounter, staff members were discussing the possibility of striking in response to particular budget proposals. Despite the fact that library staff feel their actions will make no difference to the outcome of budget decisions, the action itself is significant as an expression of their feelings towards austerity. The action itself becomes a way in which to express their negative feelings towards the process of austerity, even if they feel no control over its life course. This particular mode of action is indicative of a particular pessimistic response that rejects resignation in favour of more life-affirming acts – such as Nietzsche’s emphasis on ‘Dionysian pessimism’ (Dienstag, 2001). This is not, however, a last minute rejection of pessimism; rather it is a *detachment* from hope altogether and instead becomes a “form of self-conduct that values the life we are given in spite of the pessimistic diagnosis of its condition” (Dienstag, 2009, p. 40). Thus, Jill’s emphasis that she is “going down fighting if she receives “the sack” is indicative of Unamuno’s declaration: “I will not resign from my life; I must be dismissed”

(Dienstag, 2009, p. 38). The acceptance, therefore, that austerity is not an actionable concern does not result in a retreat away from action here, but instead in a decoupling of that action from a particular promise. Thus, this can be understood as political, precisely because it becomes a non-positive action – an action without any promise or desire that it will lead to a change in austerity’s life course.

## ii. Pessimism displacing hope

The previous sections have explored both the feeling of futility of the future of the library service and the futility of positive action – that action by library staff will not lead to change in the life course of austerity. This has a significant impact upon the hopes of staff members as austerity is lived, both within the library service and as they become stretched into other parts of everyday life. Due to the futility of the library service, staff members attach to hopes that do not promise a change in the life course of austerity, since this would fail from the outset.

Importantly, whilst pessimism has been collectively felt within the library service,<sup>49</sup> the hopes that staff members attach to are often *individualised*. Thus, whilst their hopes have been shaped by a shared futility towards the library service, their hopes become nurtured and felt by the individual. Within a pessimistic reading, hope compounds suffering, “since most of our hopes are bound to be disappointed” (Dienstag, 2009, p. 23). Here, however, it is not a detachment from hope altogether, but rather from particular *kinds* of hope. As a result of a collective pessimism, hope becomes *displaced*.

Hopes are displaced temporally as they are shaped by the compressed futures of austerity. As already examined in chapter four, staff members find themselves living on a year-by-year basis, as budget decisions only guarantee the future of the service for one budget cycle. As the future becomes compressed through austerity, so too do the hopes of staff members:

*“I think everyone's hoping, the good news would be that we're going to survive this year and there will be changes, redundancies, closures next year in 2017/18. That would be the best. People feel that is sort of going to happen. I think what they are alarmed about is if all these*

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<sup>49</sup> I recognise here that collective feelings are always differentially attuned to.

*meetings gunna say, actually the settlement from government from libraries is much worse than we anticipated and things could happen this year and people could be losing their jobs this year. But I think people are reconciled to 2017/18. Not happy, but reconciled, you know? Because we don't think there's anything major going to happen [this year]."* (Penny)

For Penny and others, hopes become placed upon "surviv[ing] this year" whilst also being resigned to the fact that significant budget reductions will be proposed the following budget cycle. Yet, what this also suggests is that, not only do hopes become compressed temporally, but they also become *diminished*. As voiced by Coleman (2016), austerity is felt through pessimism that involves a dampening down of expectations of the future. Here, then, hopes become displaced onto smaller and shorter-term promises, precisely because austerity has made more ambitious and longer-term desires impossible:

*"I think it's worrying for them [staff] certainly people with young children. They just wonder what the future's gunna hold and what kind of job, I think it's depressing and it's hard to move forward. And it's hard to be optimistic about the future and about any commitment financially because you just don't know what kind of position you are going to be in."* (June)

Consequently, hopes become displaced and re-shaped to fit within the collective feeling of futility within the library service in times of austerity. In other words, to fit within the transpersonal feeling that the library will ultimately continue to contract as a result of austerity and any action attempting to change this becomes futile. For library manager, Dennis, this sense of futility means that rather than placing hope in the service being spared from budget reductions, he hopes that *compulsory* redundancies for library staff can be avoided:

*"Well we'll see in the spring. I mean if, hopefully we'll avoid compulsory's so I think in the spring we will be into the realms of more volunteer libraries, but, yeah, who knows. That's the critical one to try and avoid, is compulsory redundancies, but it's not, it's not good for the service."* (Dennis)

As human resources make up two-thirds of the library budget, for Dennis, it is also futile to hope that job losses will be avoided. Yet, for him, placing hope in avoiding compulsory redundancies means that he personally will not be required to erase a staff position that has not asked to take voluntary redundancy (VR):

*“We will be distributing At Risk letters by mid-November. The level of VR interest is promising. We’re not there, but at the same time we’re not a million miles away. I probably shouldn’t say this, but I’m cautiously optimistic. We will still need to have an At Risk process, but I’m cautiously optimistic that we won’t need compulsory redundancy.”* (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 1.11.2016)

*“[Dennis] That’s just until 17/18. It may mean more cuts the year after. But if we get away with it, it’s better because it allows people to get older.” There was widespread laughing and chatter in response to this comment. Nellie who was sitting on my row leaned to the person in front of her and said with a smirk, “Yeah it means people like us who need to get older.” Dennis laughed and said, “No, but in all seriousness, it allows people’s situations to change, so some people may consider VR further down the line.”* (Fieldnotes, 1.11.2016)

Again, the temporality of hope alongside futility is significant here. For Dennis, austerity means that the library service will continue to contract for the foreseeable future.<sup>50</sup> Yet, ‘surviving’ one more year without compulsory redundancies enables hope to be placed upon the following year’s job losses to be achieved through voluntary redundancy. Pessimism’s assertion that time is a burden is evident here, both due to the overall sense of futility and as futures subsequently become compressed. Yet, time also *becomes* a source of hope here; time allows staff member’s circumstances to change – it allows particular staff who may not have been in a position to take voluntary redundancy previously to potentially be able to do so in the near future. Importantly, however, this hope still emerges *within* a collective feeling of

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<sup>50</sup> For example, in the final employee engagement session when the budget proposals for the library service were finalised, it was made clear to staff members this was not the end of austerity: *“[Vanessa] carried on talking. “Unfortunately, where we are is not the end. We will continuously have to review all our services over the following years.” Vanessa was painting a pretty bleak picture and there was absolute silence as she spoke.”* (Fieldnotes, 16.2.2017)



pessimism. Dennis is not hoping that there will be an absence of redundancies in the future (for it would be futile to do so), but instead is placing hope on a *renewed* ability to achieve enough voluntary redundancies in order to avoid compulsory job losses. This is not simply a dampening down of expectations of the future (Coleman, 2016), but it is also a *temporal compression* of such expectations.

*'It was reaching the end of our introductory meeting. I added, "I'm looking forward to getting to know you all over the next coming months and visiting your branch libraries." Nicola responded with a laugh, "That's if we are still in our jobs. We may not have a job soon! That will be awkward, you may be staying longer than the staff members." Although Nicola was laughing, her face turned red and her eyes were not conveying the laughter that she was expressing. It did not mask the seriousness of the situation, and I suspected that, despite the laughter, she was upset by this possibility.'* (Fieldnotes, 8.9.2015)

Not only do such hopes hold year-to-year, but they can only *emerge* from one year to the next, as they are brought into being and shaped by the previous budget cycle. This can work to further diminish expectations, as hopes in times of austerity, again, only ever become short-term promises. Longer-term hopes become near impossible.

### **iii. Hope without optimism**

Alongside the temporal compression of hope, however, a continual belief in the vitality of the service remains. There is still a belief amongst staff that they are able to continue the vibrancy of the library service. Yet, this belief is *still* placed in the context of austerity and subsequently within the overall futility of the service. Pessimism here remains – through their expectation that the service will contract – but at the same time, staff attach to the idea that the *remainder* of the service will continue to thrive:

*'We'll still be here. We need and want to make the library service work. We are a brilliant service and we must focus on what we are, what we still have. We will probably need to be better than ever, just not in the same way we used to.'* (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 16.2.2017)

*“I think there's hope, erm, but I think we're being diminished. I think there's a lot of talent here, and I think people do recognise what needs to be done, I just hope that the hope isn't diminished by lack of funding. I think that somebody's got to believe in us in that and think this is a vibrant [service], you know. I mean I can see all the reasons, you know, closing small branches and we all had different views on that and I don't share a lot of my colleagues views. I can see the business reason why a lot of them aren't sustainable. But I think a core library service could be very vibrant if we retain enough money in the budget. And that remains to be seen. I'm still hopeful of that.” (Penny)*

*“Yeah, it's not all doom and gloom in the library. There's loads of stuff going on in the library that makes it relevant to people. We need to innovate and re-imagine the library, to think how things can be different and keep the creativity going. There's loads of technology in the area, and we are tapping into that. We need to think, do we sink or do we make the library more relevant? I'm quite a positive person, so I don't see the negativity. I only see the ways the library can innovate, and I'm always thinking about new ideas. This office is always filled with experiments and stuff. It does keep the creativity going; doing these things means I can keep going and keep enthusiastic about the monotonous things as well.” (Leonie, Fieldnotes, 16.9.2016)*

This indicates an ontological shift about what hope is in times of austerity. Here, hopes are not boundless promises, but instead are always shaped, restricted and compressed by austerity. As hopes become displaced within an overall futile future, the promise(s) of the library service are now always brought into being within the context of austerity. Within such an austere environment, therefore, it becomes futile to place hopes outside of the lived experience of austerity. Terry Eagleton's (2015) understanding of 'hope without optimism' is helpful here. For Eagleton, optimistic hope is inauthentic, since “even when optimism acknowledges that the facts do not support it, its ebullience can remain undented” (Eagleton, 2015, p. 3). Hope without optimism, on the other hand, is both fallible and conditional. Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, Eagleton explores the concept of 'tragic hope.' Whilst optimism has an

endless belief in progress, for Benjamin, progress must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. Tragic hope is hope in extremis (ibid.). Hope without optimism acknowledges that loss or destruction is unavoidable. In doing so, it enables us to attune to the emergence (or displacement) of hope as it becomes present within an overall sense of futility. For “[o]ne can have hope without feeling that things in general are likely to turn out well” (Eagleton, 2015, p. 2). In the context of austerity, then, hopes in the library service become conditional upon austerity’s rhythms, temporalities and ambiguities. Whilst there is a belief in a continued vibrancy of the library, it exists *within* an expectation that the service will also continue to contract. In other words, the hope of vibrancy is placed in whatever remains of the service after austerity has diminished it.

The relationship between pessimism and hope in times of austerity, therefore, is particularly significant. This section has suggested that a collective feeling of pessimism has resulted in the emergence of hope that does not attach to the promise of austerity being overturned or interrupted. Here, hopes have diminished expectations of the future, have been temporally compressed, and have also been displaced away from austerity itself. Thus, hopes themselves have adapted to an austere environment, rather than attaching to the promise of ending austerity. As austerity is ongoing, the future of the library service is understood to be futile – through continued contraction – and therefore hopes have been shaped around the feeling that any positive action of staff members is fruitless. In other words, a rejection of the notion that the actions of staff members will lead to a change in the life course of austerity. This is particularly important, since it further indicates that austerity as a phenomenon is not deemed to be actionable. Any belief that austerity is actionable is also considered futile. As this chapter has already explored, this can both result in a sense of resignation towards the impacts of austerity, and also result in non-positive action that is inherently political; an understanding amongst staff members that their actions will not disrupt or interrupt austerity, yet are carried out regardless. Both are responses to pessimism itself; either through the distinction in a pessimist philosophy between resigning from life in order to minimise suffering, or to embrace human existence in spite of a pessimistic condition (Dienstag, 2009). Yet, they are

also a response to austerity as it becomes present *through* the collective feeling of pessimism. The latter point may seem obvious, yet, crucially, *neither resignation nor non-positive action directly impact upon the life course of austerity*. This chapter indicates that the responses to the collective feeling of pessimism – whether it be, resignation, non-positive action or displaced hope – do not attempt to change the course of austerity. Whilst there may be localised or temporary disruption, none of these responses challenge austerity – they become adaptations to the shared feeling that austerity cannot be halted. Or more precisely, they become adaptations to the feeling that the *actions of staff members* cannot halt austerity. The multiple responses to austerity as it is made present through pessimism, therefore, may (unintentionally) have the effect of leaving austerity as a fiscal policy relatively intact.

### **Displaced action**

This chapter has indicated that austerity becomes intimately intertwined with collective pessimism as austerity itself is not deemed actionable. Austerity disables the possibility for positive action by breaking the relationship between human action and change; in other words, it disables the idea that staff members can enact change onto the life course of austerity. This becomes particularly significant with the emergence of resistant acts in the library space. Here, acts of resistance emerge as a result of the effects of austerity. Yet, crucially, because austerity itself isn't actionable, such resistant acts become *displaced* onto more proximate and actionable issues. Again, this relates to the Eagleton's notion of 'hope without optimism,' for this displaced action becomes a form of action that exists within an overall sense of futility. In other words, the action carried out does not change the overall life course of austerity, for this kind of promise would be futile. In particular, this displaced action became significant as proposals were created to integrate volunteer-run and professionally-run libraries.

#### **i. Professional-volunteer integration**

Within the first two months of carrying out fieldwork, it was made known to staff members that an additional volunteer-run library would be created as part of the annual budget reductions. Whilst this budget cycle did not require as many budget reductions as the

following year, it still resulted in a sixth library within the service being handed over to volunteers. Crucially, however, *also* proposed as part of these changes was the integration of volunteer-run libraries with existing council-run libraries. Whilst chapter five explored the invisible entanglement between the two forms of libraries, this proposed integration was a step further.

To provide some context, all libraries within the council library service offer a universal library card. This means that customers are able to borrow and returns books from and to *any* of the council-run libraries. This also means that books can be moved between libraries if a customer requests a book that is not stocked in their local library. Volunteer-run libraries, however, each have their own individual library card, meaning that customers are only be able to borrow and return books to the same library; there is also no possibility to order books from the wider service. The new proposals, however, proposed that both types of library would use the same library card, resulting in the integration of book stocks:

*‘[Dennis] “So today we have to the meeting at [library name].” Dennis said this with a palpable sense of apprehension... “We’re chatting about having the first integrated service between council libraries and the volunteer libraries.” He grimaced as he said this. “That is going to be hell quite frankly. I mean, we’re on the verge of industrial action. The next two weeks are going to be really interesting, a lot is going to happen.”’ (Fieldnotes, 9.10.2015)*

Significantly, this form of integration would result in regular contact between volunteers and staff members. Prior to this, the contact between volunteers and staff members was all indirect, such as through email or via library janitor deliveries. These plans, however, would mean that they would be *direct* and daily telephone contact as a result of the integration of book stocks. These proposals reached a tipping point, as indicated by a Union meeting <sup>51</sup> after an employee engagement session:

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<sup>51</sup> As I had only been carrying out fieldwork for a short time I did not have permission to attend the Union meeting.

*[Lunch time in the staff room] Steph then asked Ava, "How did it go this morning?" She gesticulated with her arms, "not good"... June responded, "Everyone got really angry [in the Union meeting]. People were really angry at the way [library name] had been handled." Ava interjected loudly to the rest of the group in the staff room. "Yeah, the rebels are out in force now. No-one told us anything, and now they're telling us that [library name] is going to be integrated with the council libraries. Well I'm sorry but I don't want to be integrated"... The atmosphere was nothing like I'd ever experienced before in the library. People were visibly angry, livid even, and were not attempting to hide it. People were shouting across the room to each other, with no attempt to keep their voices down."* (Fieldnotes, 23.10.2015)

*"Friday was an odd day because the meeting went OK and the employees seemed perfectly fine. But then the Union person rang me up after the Union meeting and he said that he had never come across such an unhappy bunch of employees. They were so angry... I think it was [library name] that did it and the plans for integration between volunteer and council libraries. They didn't want any contact with volunteers. They didn't want to speak to volunteers on the phone, or be involved with them for book reservations."* (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 28.10.2015)

The threat of industrial action as a result of the proposals to integrate the library service suggests that there was a surpassing of thresholds, in which staff members were not willing to accept the latest changes to the service as a result of austerity:

*"So we are having a human resources meeting on Friday and I reckon that they will decide to scrap the integration programme and make [library name] a stand-alone library with the rest of them. Because with all the cuts we are going to have to make, it's not worth industrial action."* (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 28.10.2015)

Significant about this collective act of resistance, however, was that the staff were not resisting the loss of yet another library. Instead, they were resisting the potential integration between the two types of libraries. Again, the futility of the library service in times of austerity is central here. Precisely because austerity itself is not deemed actionable, staff members were

resigned to the fact that the library would be transformed into a volunteer-run library. This is something that they feel that they themselves could not alter. Yet, the integration of the library service became a 'step too far'. This collective act of resistance, therefore, became displaced into more proximate and actionable issues; the integration of volunteer-run and council-run libraries becomes an actionable object of resistance around which intensities gather, and generating a coherent attempt to keep the remaining council library service professionally run. Library integration became something library staff felt they could have an impact upon. Whilst library staff expressed intense feelings of anger towards the process of a sixth volunteer library being created, they nevertheless related to the loss through feelings of resignation. Thus, their absence of consent to austerity is combined with an absence of feeling that an opposition could emerge. Again here, austerity and pessimism are intimately intertwined, as the issue of integration becomes a manifestation of the fact that austerity itself is not considered a potential object of resistance.

## ii. 'Postergate'

As austerity itself is not an actionable object of resistance, acts of resistance were also displaced into everyday objects in the workplace. Take what is now known as 'postergate' amongst library employees. As the sixth library was in the early stages of being transformed to being volunteer-run, posters were distributed around the library network that stated

*"[Library name] needs volunteers!  
If you think you are interested in  
volunteering or would just like to  
find out more, please leave your  
contact details with a library*



*employee so we can get in touch with you.”*

This poster caused an intensification of anger amongst staff members. The poster asked potential volunteers to give their details to library employees, and in so doing was involving library staff in the recruitment of volunteers. Employees felt that in taking potential volunteer's details, they were participating in, and facilitating the loss, of paid library positions:

*“The posters were put up on Friday and people were not happy with them at all... Nicola rang me up on the Friday and said, ‘I’ve just had 4 emails from employees about the posters.’ And at the start of the week we’ve had loads more. The big issue with them is that it says on the poster that people who are interested in volunteering should leave their details with library employees. And the staff members don’t want to take anyone’s details because they don’t want anything to do with it. They’ve said ‘we shouldn’t have anything to do with this’, it should be entirely separate from employees. They have said the poster should have an email address or a telephone number you can contact, somewhere that is centrally managed so the employees don’t have to take their details. Because essentially it’s like asking Turkeys to vote for Christmas. And that’s not fair. Staff shouldn’t be expected to take people’s details.” (Dennis, Fieldnotes, 30.9.2015)*

For Coleman (2016, p. 96), pessimism “is a ‘complex phenomenon’ that involves enlivening as well as flattening affects.” Here, intensities gather around the poster, as it implicates library employees in the recruitment of volunteers. Whilst the creation of the poster is as a result of austerity, significantly, the affective impact of austerity is not located at the fiscal policy itself, but instead is displaced onto the presence of the poster. It is in this displacement, I argue, that there is an enlivening of affect; precisely because there is a refraction of affective impact of austerity, this works to intensify feelings around other everyday moments and objects as affects become displaced onto them. As a result of the posters, staff members refused to be involved in the process of recruitment, such as not answering phone calls from volunteers.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “So I reckon the meeting this Friday we will decide to make [library name] a stand-alone library. Or at least scale back whilst we continue our discussion. Vanessa said, ‘Well if the employees aren’t co-operating with the



Significantly, however, as the affective response to austerity becomes displaced onto the poster, this again channels affects away from austerity itself. Thus, just as a dampened affect can reduce our ability to respond to the effects of austerity, as explored earlier in the chapter, so can an enlivened affective response; in the latter, the affective response to austerity becomes directed elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> As a result, whilst the acts of resistance resulted in the posters being removed from all libraries, the fact that this action is *displaced* means that austerity itself remains uninterrupted. In other words, the budget reductions still were implemented and the library service still continued to contract.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter points towards action and its (im)possibility in times of austerity. Austerity has produced a pervasive sense of a futile future for the library service. This has generated a sense that any attempt to disrupt or interrupt the life course of austerity within the institutional space of the library is destined to fail and is ‘too little, too late.’ The notion of ‘too little, too late’ is particularly significant, for it indicates that it is the temporality of austerity that has led to this sense of futility. The repetition and ongoingness of austerity has removed any attachment to the promise that any form of action could lead to change in the life course of austerity. Here, the promise of positive action may have been attached to in previous cycles of austerity, yet precisely because of these multiple previous cycles of austerity, the promise of positive action is now futile. Here, a particular form of pessimism emerges, taking the form of resignation. In this sense, a paranoid reading and pessimist reading become aligned. Yet, whilst the former takes a non-linear temporality of burrowing backward and forward, the latter takes a linear temporality, in which time is both regressive and a burden. Additionally, the latter is a response to an unknown, whereas with the former, unknowns do not exist precisely because everything ultimately leads to no end.

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*volunteers, we will have to give out disciplinaries.’ You know, if they don’t answer the phone calls of the volunteers, stuff like that. But I was thinking, what a ridiculous idea. What you probably have noticed is that employees do a lot out of their enthusiasm for the place. And that enthusiasm and good will would just evaporate if there were disciplinaries.” (Dennis, 28.10.2018)*

<sup>53</sup> This displacement of affect can also be seen in atmospheric melancholia explored in chapter five.

Secondly, the impossibility of action has led to different forms of displacement. Hopes have become compressed and displaced away from austerity. Hopes have emerged that are not attached to a changed outcome of austerity (for it would be futile to do so). Resistant acts have also emerged that place promise into issues that are deemed actionable, rather than to austerity itself. And thirdly, a pessimistic response has also resulted in action that does not place promise in any form of change. In other words, actions are carried out, whilst at the same time rejecting the promise that the life course of austerity can be altered.

Importantly, there is something that all these pessimistic responses to austerity have in common. In all responses – resignation, displaced affects and actions, action without promise of change – the life course of austerity remains unaltered. In this sense the implementation of the fiscal policy of austerity, whilst opposed by staff members, remains relatively intact. Staff members’ absence of consent to austerity is combined with an absence of feeling that an opposition can emerge. Like austerity melancholia, therefore, this chapter raises important questions about the ability to respond to austerity. Again, austerity is made present in such a way that responses to austerity actually diminish the ability for alternatives to austerity to emerge. Interestingly, a pessimistic reading can actually become a rejection of a melancholic condition; for holding onto pessimism within the ‘Save our Libraries’ campaign means to reject further volunteersation of the library service that work to make losses elusive. Yet, even this mode of action actively chooses *not* to interrupt austerity in rejecting the notion that there can be positive change. In this sense, pessimism involves “raising problems without solutions... posing questions without answers” (Thacker, 2015, p. 5). The violence of austerity is indisputable here. For it is made present in such a way that any response to austerity – unintentionally and reluctantly – provides the conditions of austerity to continue relatively unopposed.



## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

#### **Austerity as lived experience**

This thesis has developed a new understanding of austerity; I have moved beyond austerity as confined to a fiscal policy, in which it is often reduced to its ‘economic-ness,’ towards conceptualising austerity as lived and felt in everyday life. This understands austerity as simultaneously an economic, social, and cultural phenomenon. This approach does not jettison austerity as a fiscal policy, but rather emphasises that austerity is also a phenomenon that is rooted in lived experience. In doing, so this approach to austerity bridges capital-centric approaches to austerity with everyday life. This generates a new perspective that recognises that understandings of austerity need neither be one or the other, but rather that they are intertwined as austerity becomes lived.

This thesis has examined a particular form in which austerity is lived and felt – namely its affective presence. Significantly, this research has not only explored how austerity becomes individually felt, but also something that is collectively felt and participated in. As a result, this thesis has conceptualised austerity as an affective atmosphere that envelops multiple space-times of the everyday. It has examined how austerity becomes the ‘background noise’ of everyday life that ebbs and flows in its intensity, how it shapes capacities to feel and act, how austerity is in some way always there, ready to make itself present. This moves forward understandings of austerity by placing collective feeling centrally within lived experiences of austerity, something that is particularly significant within institutional spaces like the library.

#### **i. Paranoia, melancholia, pessimism**

Chapter four explored the way in which austerity has been felt as an uncanny atmosphere. Here austerity takes the form of a series of unknowns that continually re-emerge throughout the library space, and as such have become a collective and acutely familiar feeling. This was

explored through the multiple employee engagement sessions that took place in the library service. These sessions had a particular relationship with the unknown, since they were a site of revelation for staff members to future spending cuts in the service. Importantly, the announcement of an employee engagement session generates the feeling that knowledge about future spending cuts has been brought into being, which has not been imparted yet. This gap between the generalised idea of knowledge being brought into existence and the particularity of the knowledge itself generates an unknown that unsettles the everyday working practices. But it is here where the uncanny emerges precisely because of the temporality of austerity. The cyclical nature of austerity, its 'ongoingness' and the multiple previous engagement sessions that have taken place as a result has had two important consequences. Firstly, it has made the unknown an acutely familiar feeling for staff members that generates an eerie sense of having 'been here before.' Secondly, this temporality means that the unknowns are now experienced as *always more than* unknowns. Staff experience unknowns *through* previous years of austerity, so that they are at the same time felt as known.

Significantly, within the space-time of waiting – between the announcement of an employee engagement session and the meeting itself – a particular mode of waiting emerges, namely a paranoid mode of waiting. Paranoia emerges as a way of living *within* and also an attempt to *resolve* the uncanny atmosphere. Again, this emerges in part due to the temporality of austerity. Due to the repetition of the employee engagement process, a temporality emerges that looks both forward and backwards: forwards through the unknown knowledge that remains absent, and backwards through knowledge imparted from all previous employee engagement sessions. This temporality aligns itself with the functioning of a paranoid mode of waiting. For Sedgwick (2002, p. 130), the 'unidirectionally future-orientated vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows backward and forward.' There must be 'no bad surprises', meaning that paranoia requires that 'bad news be always already known' (Sedgwick, 2002, p. 130). The uncanny enables paranoia to delve into the depths of a previous employee engagement sessions in order to help make the 'bad news' known. Yet, there is also a relationship with the future, through a heightened sensitivity

to new information emerging. A paranoid mode of waiting, then, is an organization of knowledge that relies on a relationship between the past and future, the known and the unknown, in order to make known a possible future of the library service.

Importantly, whilst paranoia within this space-time of waiting is cultivated and moves through bodies, it is not people themselves that are simply 'being paranoid'. The term 'being paranoid' is often placed upon individuals as a means of judgement or to delegitimise a particular knowledge claim. Yet, turning back to Sedgwick, paranoia is less diagnosis, than a prescription. It is not people, but mutual practices through which paranoid readings emerge (Sedgwick, 2002). The paranoia that circulates within the library space, then, cannot be attributed to a collection of individualised affective experiences. Instead, paranoia's relationship to the atmosphere of the uncanny highlights again that it is in fact collectively participated in. Precisely because the uncanny is felt as an atmosphere, or what Gordon (1997, p. 54) would call 'being haunted in the 'world of common reality', this 'troubles or even ruins our ability to distinguish reality and fiction.' Austerity here, therefore, is lived through a blurring of reality and fiction.

What is particularly important here is that whilst the meetings are a site of revelation, they only offer a partial materialisation of unknowns. Both new unknowns or existing unknowns continue beyond the meetings themselves. This stretches the space-time of waiting beyond the meeting itself into the post-employee engagement space-time. Paradoxically, it is also the fact that some knowledge has materialised within the employee engagement session that enables the continuation of the uncanny atmosphere. The partial materialisation becomes a confirmation that the unknowns are at the same time known; the emergence of knowledge about the future of the library service becomes confirmation for staff members that they 'knew what was coming.' As such, unknowns that (re)emerge out of each employee engagement session continue the uncanny atmosphere precisely because the knowledge that did emerge confirmed their belief about what was to come. This works to entrench paranoid practices as a successful form of 'seeking, finding and organizing knowledge' (Sedgwick, 2002, p. 130)

Chapter five explored the way in which austerity was felt through an atmospheric melancholia. Here, the notion of ‘the cut’ was not simply conceptualised through the practice of reduction, but rather also through transformation. I argued that whilst austerity is indeed a shrinking of budgets, austerity does not necessarily lead to a visible removal of something as the cut is materialised. In other words, the cut as *simply* reductions is not sufficient in exploring the range of ways austerity measures are implemented. The cut is the starting point of a series of transformations throughout the library space. As a result, I focussed on a particular form of transformation that is now very common within library services at a time of austerity – namely that of volunteerisation. Central to this chapter were the ambiguities about what is being lost through the process of transformation from a professional to a volunteer-run library. Volunteers see their intervention as a way in which to enable the library service to *continue*. Yet, for staff this comes with multiple losses – the loss of expert labour and knowledge in particular. The transformations taking place within the library space, however, actually work to make these losses *elusive*. In particular, the fact that the (now volunteer-run) libraries still have a physical presence within the community actually works to obscure the difference between volunteer-run and the existing professionally-run libraries. Staff members feel that the loss of knowledge as a result of budget reductions is actually made elusive as a consequence of the transformation to volunteer-run libraries.

Additionally, the volunteerisation has transformed relations between paid and unpaid labour in the running of the library service in that the two library services are now deeply intertwined. Staff still support volunteer libraries on a daily basis through background work that again is not visible to the library customer; this includes I.T. support, refreshing book stocks and transferring them between libraries, and day-to-day technical difficulties. Both the everyday support, and the provisioning as volunteers face difficulties has placed an increased work-load upon existing library staff; yet, this is also in the context of a *reduced* expert labour force. As such, library staff have been caught in a pincer movement between an increased work-load and increasingly fewer individuals available to carry out these tasks.

This heightened pressure has resulted in a transformation of working practices within the existing council libraries. Staff are working *harder*, but there has also been an explicit attempt to focus on demands that are publicly *visible*. This works as a protective cushion for staff members against the increased work load. Yet it also works to make particular losses as a result of austerity elusive to the library customer. These elusive losses as a result of transformation generate an atmospheric melancholia, in which losses are not known or are made unknowable. However, these losses do not disappear, but make a “nagging return” (Khanna, 2006, pp. 16-17) into everyday life. This re-emergence of the lost objects of austerity is central to how an atmospheric melancholia comes into being and is experienced. The lost object haunts as it returns in *encrypted* forms. When haunting occurs, then, the lost object speaks, but not necessarily in a way that points it directly towards that which has been lost. What this suggests is that encounters with the (re-emergent) lost object can be refracted away from the loss itself. This is significant since it indicates that austerity can be made present in such a way that its effects are not always identifiable as the consequence of spending reductions. In austerity melancholia, the question of causality is broken as the relationship between cause and effect becomes obscured.

Unintentionally, both staff and volunteers also become the work of melancholia. Through becoming ‘patch-ups’ of the library service, volunteers enable some kind of service to continue; they become a form of getting by within institutional settings. Volunteers see their unpaid labour as a way of reducing the effects of austerity and supporting their local communities. Library staff also become the work of melancholia, through a collective silence in the public spaces of the library about the extent of transformations taking place in the service. Both practices, inadvertently work to keep losses elusive.

This atmospheric melancholia, then, generates a collective inability to mourn that which is lost through the process of austerity. Whilst there are localised acts of mourning, like the library staff themselves, this melancholia removes the ability for them to be mourned at a collective level. In an atmospheric melancholic condition, then, many of the effects of austerity



are made unknowable. Importantly, such losses of austerity may haunt through their re-emergence into everyday life. Yet, precisely because they return in encrypted forms, the presence of austerity is refracted into other issues and working practices. For example, austerity has an encrypted presence in a frustrated encounter between library staff and customer, in accusations that staff are withholding archives, in a long queue at the front desk. Such encounters are easy to attribute to other issues or causes rather than austerity. Part of the violence of austerity, then, is that through these re-emergent losses, attention is refracted away from austerity and its effects. Thus, it is not simply the losses themselves that are violent, it is also the fact that some of these losses are simply not recognised, and the consequences of their subsequent encrypted return into everyday life.

Chapter six explored the ambivalently and collectively felt pessimism as a result of a pervasive sense of futility for the future of the library service. In doing so it examines the relations between futility and a collective pessimism within the library service. This was explored through a 'Save our Libraries' campaign that was set up by the local Union in an attempt to prevent the latest round of budget reductions to the service. However, this campaign was considered a futile attempt to save the library service from the effects of austerity. This was considered futile, due to the ambiguity at what or who the 'Save our Library' campaign was attempting to save. Many staff members felt a sense of futility at the campaign's ability to save paid library positions, due to the continual transformation to volunteer-run libraries. The campaign was also considered futile due to the sense that the future of the wider local authority in which the service was situated was also futile. Precisely because the library service budget was determined by the local authority, and because the local authority budgets were being continually reduced, attempts to avoid budget reductions were understood as fruitless by staff members. This futility produced a particular kind of pessimistic response – that of resignation. This resignation is indicative of what Thacker (2015) calls a 'lethargy of discontent'. Staff members feel discontented with austerity, yet there is an absence of energy to both carry out an attempted change and more significantly to feel that they can enact

change. Interestingly there is an awareness of lethargy – for something to know that it is lethargic, it firstly has to act.

This futility, then, results in a felt sense that austerity is simply not actionable. Futility has also resulted in displaced affects and actions away from austerity itself towards more actionable issues that staff feel they have some control in changing. Pessimism as a result of futility displaces hope onto smaller and shorter-term promises. There is no attachment to changing the life-course of austerity, but instead attachments such as ‘surviving’ another year in employment or avoiding compulsory redundancies for staff members. In addition to the temporal compression of hope, there is also a continual belief in the vitality of the service remains. There is still a belief amongst staff that they are able to continue the vibrancy of the library service. Pessimism here remains – through their expectation that the service will contract – but at the same time, staff attach to the idea that the *remainder* of the service will continue to thrive. Hope becomes displaced onto smaller and shorter-term promises, precisely because austerity has made more ambitious and longer-term desires impossible. Additionally, pessimism also results in displaced *action* away from austerity itself. Austerity disables the possibility for positive action by breaking the relationship between human action and change; it disables the idea that staff members can enact change onto the life course of austerity. This became particularly significant with the emergence of resistant acts in the library space. Here, acts of resistance emerge as a result of the effects of austerity. Yet, crucially, because austerity itself isn’t actionable, such resistant acts become *displaced* onto more proximate and actionable issues. The relationship between futility and pessimism, then, points towards the impossibility of actions in times of austerity, for it has generated a sense – that any attempt to disrupt or interrupt the life course of austerity within the institutional space of the library is destined to fail and is ‘too little, too late.’

## ii. Interrelations between paranoia, melancholia and pessimism

Whilst these collective affects have mainly been explored in isolation from one another throughout the chapters, they are also very much interrelated. Collective feelings of austerity,

which include, but are not limited to, uncanny and paranoia, melancholia and pessimism. Collective affects *co-exist* with one another, both comfortably and uncomfortably. As explored in chapter two, everyday life is both ambiguous and contradictory. Taking lived austerity as our point of departure indicates that there is an ambiguity to the affective life of austerity; thus, affective experiences, individual or collective (or of course both, as collective feelings are always in some way individualised) can be present *with* one another simultaneously. In addition, when considering lived austerity as a multiplicity (as explored in chapter three), it indicates the way in which multiple affects can co-exist with one another throughout everyday life. Indeed, as atmospheric austerity forms the background noise of everyday life these collective affects can emerge into the foreground at different moments or space-times. This is particularly important when understanding austerity as lived experience; as its ambiguities are central to lived austerity, austerity is difficult to decipher or pin-down, yet it is nevertheless *felt*. As such, we must always approach with some caution when attempting to name a particular collective feeling. For naming an atmosphere as paranoid, as melancholic, or as pessimistic is not only performative, but it is also the quality of such collective feelings that is always difficult to decipher, decrypt and untangle; atmospheres (of austerity) always already exceed the ability to name them. This is particularly significant when considering the way in which collective affects of austerity become individualised, for collective affects are differentially attuned to as they become shared.

It is also the *temporality* of austerity that is central to, and binds these collective feelings of austerity. The cyclical nature and ‘ongoingness’ of austerity means that austerity now has a depth of experience. The previous years and multiple previous encounters with austerity work to produce the *depth of affective experience*. Collective feelings are felt with depth due to the temporality of austerity. Yet, at the same time, it is also this depth of experience that works to *produce* these particular forms of affective experience. It is the temporality of austerity that produces a paranoid form of knowing, the re-emergence of encrypted lost objects in atmospheric melancholia, the emergence of pessimism as a result of a futile future. This depth of the experience, therefore, is now central to the lived experience of austerity and produces a

particular affective experience of austerity that might not have been felt as austerity was in its infancy.

Each affective state, however has their own relationship with past, present and future in times of austerity: the burrowing backwards and forwards of paranoia, the melancholic hauntings in which the past re-emerges, the linear futures of futility in pessimism. Central to the emergence of these particular affective states, I argue, is the paradoxical simultaneous sense of knowability and unknowability that austerity produces. Austerity produces a sense that the future is both known and unknown (expressed through collective paranoia and pessimism); it also produces a sense of past that is simultaneously made knowable (as expressed in paranoia and pessimism) and *unknowable* (as expressed through an atmospheric melancholia). In this sense, then, there is something particularly violent about the process of austerity: austerity becomes a form of gas-lighting. Typically, gas-lighting is understood as a form of manipulation by psychological means, resulting in a questioning of a person's own sanity ("gaslight, v.", n.d.). The term stems from the 1938 play *Gaslight*, in which a man deliberately attempts to make his spouse believe she is losing her mind through manipulative strategies (VandenBos and American Psychological Association, 2015). This form of manipulation is emotional, in which the "gaslighter tries (consciously or not) to induce in someone the sense that her reactions, perceptions, memories and/or beliefs are not just mistaken, but utterly without grounds... so unfounded as to qualify as crazy" (Abramson, 2014, p. 2). Gaslighting has a particular temporality; it involves multiple incidents that take place over long periods of time (ibid.). Importantly, Abramson (2014) relates the act of gaslighting to the social and political sphere, such as the way in which it has been used as a response to women's protestation against sexist (or other discriminatory) conduct. In this sense, Abramson argues, when gaslighting is successful, it works to *reinforce* sexist norms which the target was attempting to contest.

This is particularly significant when considering austerity as a form of gaslighting. Austerity blurs the boundaries between that which is known and unknown so that it becomes unclear

what is reality and fiction. The boundaries between reality and fiction become blurred. At an atmospheric level, this results in a questioning of collective ‘sanity,’ in which we are made to feel that we are ‘mad’ for resorting to paranoid forms of knowing, or the sense that the future in times of austerity is already determined. In particular, it is the *unevenly* distributed and differentiated effects of austerity that produces this sense of ‘madness’ at a more collective level. For some, austerity is acutely felt and knowable, yet for others, austerity simply is not felt, or is felt in a way that is not attributed to spending reductions, but refracted to other issues. The case study of the library is an important example of these differentiated felt effects. As such, on an individual level or a group level – such as the library staff members in this thesis – people certainly are not ‘mad’ for using paranoid strategies through which to make unknowns *known*, or for feeling that the future is already determined and therefore futile. In fact, in the context of violent effects of austerity and the now ongoing and historicity of violent effects of austerity, this can be understood as entirely normative. Yet, the unevenly distributed effects of austerity mean that on a societal level, this becomes irrational, illogical, absurd. Austerity generates an ‘ontological insecurity’ for particular individuals whilst at the same time others are ontologically secure (Harris and Nowicki, 2019). This works to sow seeds of doubt about the damaging effects of austerity and also works to reproduce the sense that fiscal restraint is necessary; since for many, these lived realities of austerity simply are not tangible, palpable or felt.

There is a particular intentionality here: the process of austerity manipulates so that its effects at a broader collective level are *simultaneously* knowable and unknowable, visible and invisible, real and fiction. This collective form of gas-lighting, then, works through both a *denial* of feeling – a denial that these affective experiences of austerity even exist – and a *misrecognition* of feeling – through a refraction of felt effects of austerity towards other issues. Austerity gaslights, therefore, through a manipulation of felt realities. However, there is also an additional layer of this gas-lighting that works to further the violence of austerity. As emphasised by Abramson (2014), gaslighting frequently involves multiple parties playing the role of gaslight or cooperating with the gaslighter. Precisely because this manipulation occurs

at an atmospheric level, it raises the question of accountability. The accountability of austerity's manipulation is distributed, rather than attributed to particular individuals or institutions. We could point towards some of the actors at this atmospheric level: the Conservative government, neoliberals, the establishment. However, these are simply suggestions, since there is an ability to hold anything in particular to account. This also means that there is no particular way in which affirming or disproving whether these manipulations are real or fiction. The relationship between the individual and the collective that is so central to atmospheric austerity is particularly important here. For austerity here is both collectively felt and individually felt; both are felt realities in themselves and therefore it is not possible to claim that a particular experience as more 'authentic' than the other. In this sense, the "violent conditions" (Laurie and Shaw, 2018, p. 8) of austerity are both the manipulation of lived realities of austerity and the fact that it is very difficult to hold any individual, institution, or group to account for this manipulation. The latter works to reproduce the austerity as a form of gas-lighting, for it further blurs the distinction between what is real and fiction, known and unknown, visible and hidden in the lived experience of austerity.

Additionally, and relatedly, the interrelated collective affective experiences of austerity point towards an important provocation: *collective feelings of austerity, paradoxically, diminish the ability to respond to austerity collectively*. Or more precisely, negative collective feelings of austerity like paranoia, melancholia and pessimism can diminish the ability to respond to austerity in such a way that helps develop an anti-politics of austerity. With each collectively felt affective state, a particular form of displacement is taking place that diverts affective intensities away from a collective and productive anti-austerity politics. With a collectively felt paranoia, energy is devoted to making unknowns *known*, meaning that affective intensities are diverted towards particular events, scenes, objects that become 'evidence' of spending cuts to come; energy, for example, becomes directed towards the 'rumour mill.' With an atmospheric melancholia, lost objects are made unknowable and, therefore, unmournable, and make an encrypted return into everyday life. The encrypted returns mean that affective intensities are refracted away from austerity itself towards more proximate issues. This also diffuses the affective impact of

austerity, but it also works to intensify other encounters, such as the frustrated library customer standing in a long queue. Perhaps this could also be applied to other events and encounters, including in encounters where there is an intensification of resentment towards other individuals, groups or institutions; this might include the EU, ‘immigrants,’ ‘shirkers,’ the ‘undeserving poor’ or ‘entitled snowflakes.’ This displacement of affective intensities away from austerity works to dull and diffuse resentment towards austerity that can do vital political work in the construction of an anti-austerity politics. Again, the unevenly distributed effects of austerity are significant here, since particular individuals, groups and institutions are disproportionately affected by austerity, whilst others simply are not. Austerity as unevenly felt works to hide the visibility of austerity, and therefore dulls its affective impact, at the collective, societal level. An anti-austerity politics is diminished by collective feelings of austerity, precisely because they diffuse and refract affective intensities, so that they become displaced away from the violence of austerity itself.

### **iii. Implications of lived austerity for how austerity is researched**

Developing an understanding of austerity as lived experience has particular implications for how austerity is researched. Researched austerity as lived means to attempt to attune to austerity as it takes multiple forms. Here, austerity is not a coherent phenomenon, limited to one thing, but instead can become multiple ‘things’, objects, atmospheres, moods and so on. Researching austerity here becomes about having an openness to the multiple ways austerity is made present throughout everyday life. Relatedly, understanding austerity as lived means to take seriously the ambiguities and contradictions that are so central to everyday life. It involves exploring the simultaneously ordinary and *extraordinary* as austerity is lived. It involves examining the ways in which lived austerity is seemingly everywhere, but also how it is at the same time elusive – how it escapes our ability to locate it.

Importantly, in taking lived experience as our point of departure means also taking seriously the ways in which austerity is *felt*. This involves taking seriously the presence of, and ebbs and

flows of, austerity's intensities. This involves an attunement to the varied moments in which austerity is present, which can range from the intense to the undramatic.

It involves attuning to not just individually felt, but also a collectively felt presence of austerity. Affective atmospheres here become a tool through which to explore the lived experience of austerity. Austerity is not a phenomenon that can easily be separated through its presence or absence. Rather, austerity is instead something that is present with varying degrees of resolution. Exploring austerity as lived involves recognising that it is not always an easily identifiable presence. Austerity is not easily recognisable, yet, *somehow* we know it is there – we *feel* its presence (Gordon, 1997). This also becomes a way in which to consider the ambiguity of austerity. It involves exploring the ways in which austerity is experienced through non-coherent, affective relations that shape capacities to feel and act throughout everyday life.

Additionally, understanding austerity as lived mean also to attune to the everyday spatialities. It means attending to the everyday spaces where austerity is made present, such as the community centre, the household, the library, the foodbank and so on. And in particular it involves exploring the ways in which such spaces are reconfigured and transformed under conditions of austerity. A consideration of the everyday also enables attunement to the *micro-scalar* impacts of austerity; it enables exploration of how austerity becomes embodied, such as through hunger (Garthwaite, 2016), exhaustion (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar, 2018) or feeling squeezed (Stenning, 2018). Yet, this form of understanding also enables consideration of the temporalities of austerity. It means attending to the ways in which austerity becomes habitual, how it forms part of everyday habits and routines. It involves focussing on the actions in times of austerity that have a temporal relation, such as enduring, waiting, anticipating and so on. It involves examining the interplay between different temporal relations; the interplay between the cyclical, the habitual, the repeated, co-existing with more linear time, such as questions of the futile future. It also involves exploring the non-linear temporalities of austerity; the ways in which time jumps back and forth, as time is lived: for



example in the anticipation of unknown futures (Horton, 2016; Sedgwick, 2002) and in the re-emergence of lost objects (Freud, 2005). This entanglement of the cyclical, linear and non-linear temporalities that marks the ongoing contraction and relentless (budget) reduction in times of austerity.

### **Psychoanalytic concepts and collective feeling**

This thesis has developed conceptualisations of collective feeling, which has implications for how geographers might understand feelings or affects that become collective. This thesis has explored what a turn to psychoanalytic concepts might offer when considering the question of collectively felt affects. It asked what the psychoanalytic understanding of conscious and unconscious thought can offer as a way of considering the temporality of collective feeling.

The thesis explored what the unconscious might enable in terms of considering the re-emergence of collective affects. This provides resources for considering the presence and absence of collective feeling, which I argue is important to understanding austerity as lived and felt. It enables us to consider collective feeling as something beyond simply absence and presence, towards a 'fuzzy' presence; yet, it also allows us to consider *how* this felt sense of fuzziness emerges – through the continual *re-emergence* of collective feeling.

The unconscious makes its presence felt in a variety of ways, such as in dreams, and in the slip of the tongue, known as the 'Freudian slip' (Bondi, 2007). What is particularly significant here is the emphasis that the unconscious *continually* attempts to find expression or make its presence felt. The unconscious, then, never disappears but rather *re-emerges* into conscious thought throughout everyday life. It is this re-emergence that is of particular interest, for it has some similarities (although ontologically unaligned) to the way in which atmospheres have been conceptualised. The expression of the unconscious is similar to the way in which atmospheres become the 'background noise' of everyday life (Closs Stephens, 2015). As they form this background noise, atmospheres erupt from time to time into the foreground, so that they emerge into awareness.

However, the continual expressions of the unconscious point to towards a temporality that has not explicitly been explored when considering this notion of atmospheres as ‘background noise.’ Instead, focus has been paid to the *moments* of intensification themselves, rather than the fact that it also indicates a repetition of intensification. In other words, focus has been paid to the intensifications as events themselves, rather than thinking about the relationship *between* these events. Consideration of these intensifications as a seriality (Latham and McCormack, 2009) remains under examined. Considering the ways in which the unconscious finds expression, then, can become a way in which to consider the temporality of atmospheres.

As already summarised, this thesis explored the psychoanalytic concepts of the uncanny, paranoia and melancholia. When taking them beyond the notion of subjective transformation and the ontological stance of the unconscious, towards collective life, they became a way in which to examine the temporality of collective feeling. Throughout the thesis, these three affective states became ways in which to consider affective presence as re-emergent.

Implicated within this was an exploration of how the past relates to the present. A central part of the uncanny, for example, is the way in which a particular quality of feeling has been felt before, generating eerie feeling or a feeling of *déjà vu*. Indeed, for melancholia, it is about the re-emergence of particular lost objects; and whilst such feelings are not attributed to the lost object itself, it is still very much felt. This feeling has a re-emergence, yet without an awareness of its origins. Additionally, paranoia as an affective practice becomes about borrowing backwards and forwards in order to make the ‘bad news’ known; again the relation between past and present is central. Such psychoanalytic concepts, then, when taken beyond the individualised affects, become not only a way of thinking about collective feeling, but also the temporality of collective feeling, that has a past and present. They have a particular layering and depth to them; this also provides a response to critiques of affect theorists who argue that questions of continual becoming omit the relationship between past and present.

This might enable a consideration of how atmospheres extend beyond particular moments of intensification and allow us to consider them as part of a series of intensifications. This *matters*,

for it can have qualitative effects on the *experience* of such atmospheres. In other words, when atmospheres are felt as *one of many* or *one of a series* this might significantly alter how these atmospheres are experienced, compared to when each moment of intensification is taken in isolation. This is not, however, to suggest that each moment of intensification re-emerges in the same form, for atmospheres are always in transformation (Anderson, 2009). Rather, their re-emergence, as they become part of a *series* of moments of intensification, generates a felt sense of temporality. It is this re-emergence, then, that offers a way of considering the temporality of collective feeling.

### **Lingering as method**

This thesis has developed the concept of lingering as a way in which to carry out research, which has implications for geographical research practice. Lingering is a methodological tool for affective research, but can also be used within ethnographic research more broadly.

Lingering becomes a tool through which to attune to atmospheres and their temporalities. Lingering is central to the concept of attunement, as it opens up space for affects to continue or persist through the feelings and actions of the researcher. Lingering is the methodological consideration of how researchers enable affects to linger as a way in which to do affective research. Yet, in the act of lingering, we are not only drawing attention to, but also opening up, affective worlds. Lingering becomes a form of attunement, but with an explicit attention to the way in which it becomes a temporal practice.

It involves holding onto affects that little bit longer in order to say something meaningful about them. Through lengthening our attention to the affective, we are willing affects to linger or to linger further. When researching affective presence we are attempting to understand how it makes *us* feel and act in order to understand the affective world in which we have become entangled. This requires us to “stay with” such affects and “follow the threads where they may lead” (Haraway, 2016, p. 3). This approach to research requires us, as researchers, to hold onto affects just enough to say something about them. Affective inquiry, then, is about ‘providing room’ for these affects and allowing them to speak. This is how

lingering is central to attunement, as it opens up space for affects to continue or persist through the feelings and actions of the researcher. Attunement, therefore, also involves holding onto affects that little bit longer in order to say something meaningful about them.

Making lingering a tool for affective research, then, extends beyond an identification of lingering affects. We, as researchers, are also *prolonging* the life of affects in the act of attuning to them. We primarily do this through our own bodily engagement within 'their' worlds, meaning that our body becomes an instrument for research (Longhurst et al., 2008). Thus, whilst we are caught up in transpersonal intensities we nevertheless feel them *through* our own bodies. Central to carrying out affective research is precisely to allow oneself as a researcher to *be affected*, to allow ones to be moulded by the world around us. Our bodies here become porous 'vessels' for the affects of others, which, in turn, become our individualised affects.

Lingering can also become a methodological tool for ethnographical research more broadly. Lingering is both a temporal and spatial practice. As ethnographers we *linger*. Through lingering we are able to not simply stay in a research site, but also to *stay with* a research site. This allows the research site to speak, and reveals its everyday life that might otherwise be swept under the taken-for-grantedness of daily life. As a result, this opens up the possibility for making visible the micro-transformations within the space(s) that would otherwise go unnoticed. Conducting lingering research within particular sites is as much about *space-time* as it is about the space itself. In particular, it enables consideration of the micro-transformations over time and within different space-times.

However, we also linger *within* space-times themselves. This is an intentional act, in which the fieldworker spatially and temporally lengthens their presence as a means through which to generate research encounters. The process of lingering is fundamental here, for this reconfiguration of time and space enables the ethnographer to *be in* and also *attune* very differently *to* particular space-times; in other words, lingering allows them to engage in a space longer than is usual or necessary within the habitual parameters or rhythms of everyday life. As such, lingering automatically takes the researcher outside the rhythms of the everyday,

enabling a new attunement to their surroundings. Even if this is the subtlest of transformations, this slight reconfiguration of space and time allows the researcher to 'make the familiar strange' (Gardiner, 2000).

At its core, lingering involves a pushing of the boundaries of what is deemed temporally and spatially 'usual' within the everyday. Whilst this may superficially appear problematic, it is central to how the process of lingering occurs within an ethnographic approach. Precisely because lingering is a refusal to disappear, or a mode of dwelling that is longer than deemed usual, if we are not 'lingering' then we may not be in those space-times in the first place or we would simply be enacting our own habitual routines without any particular attunement to them. In other words, we would not be lingering if we were *not* at the threshold of acceptability or convention within these spaces. In doing so it allows us to say something meaningful about the life-worlds of our research participants. Whilst this is something that can be attributed to conventional ethnography, lingering ethnographic practice works *with* these thresholds rather than shying away from them. In other words, this practice is attempting to explore what these thresholds might tell us about the life-worlds and space-times that we are lingering in. Seeking out these thresholds opens up worlds that might otherwise remain invisible. In working with these thresholds, we might over time, also change the 'position' of the thresholds themselves; for example when greater familiarity is developed in a particular space-time or more trust is gained by research participants. As a result, however, it raises important ethical questions about our responsibility as researchers to stay on the right side of such thresholds, in order to ensure that we are not exploiting our position or the access that we have been granted. This can produce discomfort for the researcher, precisely because of the felt experience of hovering on this threshold of acceptability and constantly negotiating it in practice. But rather than trying to minimise this discomfort, it is important to tolerate and also embrace it; for it is this discomfort that enables us as researchers to open up, make visible and create affective worlds.

Finally, lingering in ethnographic research practice also involves lingering ‘in-between.’ Being in-between is inherent to carrying out ethnographic research. By the nature of ethnography, researchers generate a liminal position for themselves by occupying the threshold between different worlds. Thus, to carry out ethnography means to *linger in-between* different worlds – between our worlds, both in and beyond our position as researchers, and the worlds of our research participants. This allows us, as researchers, to say something about the world of our research participants, but importantly, it also allows us to say as much about our own worlds (Crang and Cook, 1995).

### **Contribution to the geographical discipline**

This thesis presents four main theoretical, conceptual and methodological contributions to the geographical discipline, with particular implications for how we understand spatiality and temporality. Firstly, this thesis has generated theoretical development in understandings of collective feeling – affective atmospheres more precisely – which in turn furthers how we might understand questions of space and time. It is widely understood within geographical thought that space is relational and always in formation. What taking an understanding of spatiality through the lens of affective atmospheres does, here, is understand the simultaneity of feeling as spatial and space as produced *through* collective feeling. It also enables us to take seriously spatiality as an *ambiguous* and incoherent process. Atmospheres by their very nature are ambiguous in that they are “an ill-defined indefinite something” that can condition life by giving spaces, episodes or encounters a particular feel (Anderson, 2014, p. 140;137). Through understanding the ambiguity of atmospheres, we can understand spatiality (of conditions like austerity) as more than simply absence or presence. Instead, it can be thought about as something *fuzzy* – existing with varying degrees of resolution.

Secondly, this thesis furthers what collective feeling can do within the geographical discipline by not only having spatial implications, but also *temporal* implications. This thesis has explored what a turn to psychoanalytic concepts might offer when considering the question of collectively felt affects. It asks what the psychoanalytic understanding of conscious and

unconscious thought can offer as a way of considering the temporality of collective feeling. As explored earlier, the unconscious makes its presence felt in a variety of ways, such as in dreams, and in the slip of the tongue, known as the ‘Freudian slip’ (Bondi, 2007). What is particularly significant here is the emphasis that the unconscious *continually* attempts to find expression or make its presence felt. The unconscious, then, never disappears but rather *re-emerges* into conscious thought throughout everyday life. This is inherently *temporal*.<sup>54</sup> This enables us to think differently from evental understandings of temporality within geographical thought; instead of paying attention to fragmentary moments or encounters, it allows us to think about the relationship *between* moments and encounters. Thus, it allows us to think about the *seriality* (Latham and McCormack, 2009) of moments or encounters; this can become a way in which to think about temporality in terms of its non-linearity (through its re-emergence). By bringing together psychoanalytic and Spinozist-Deleuzian accounts of affect, therefore, this thesis contributes to geographical thought by offering a way in which to think about spatiality (as ambiguous and fuzzy) and temporality (as non-linear).<sup>55</sup>

Thirdly, bringing together psychoanalytic and Spinozist-Deleuzian accounts of affect also contributes to the question of affective politics within geographical thought. A Spinozist-Deleuzian approach has been critiqued for the predominant turn towards joyful or affirmative encounters. As initially argued by Anderson (2004) and also Harrison (2007), the Spinozist-Deleuzian emphasis on bodies continually in becoming can downplay the relations that are not constantly becoming anew. An emergent body of literature (see Harrison, 2015; Gerlach,

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<sup>54</sup> This also has spatial implications; as explored earlier in the chapter (see section ‘Psychoanalytic concepts and collective feeling’) it also contributes to an understanding of spatiality as beyond absence and presence, by generating a felt sense of re-emergence.

<sup>55</sup> As already summarised, this thesis explored the psychoanalytic concepts of the uncanny, paranoia and melancholia. When taking them beyond the notion of subjective transformation and the ontological stance of the unconscious, towards collective life, they became a way in which to examine the temporality of collective feeling. Throughout the thesis, these three affective states became ways in which to consider affective presence as re-emergent. Implicated within this was an exploration of how the past relates to the present. A central part of the uncanny, for example, is the way in which a particular quality of feeling has been felt before, generating eerie feeling or a feeling of *déjà vu*. Indeed, for melancholia, it is about the re-emergence of particular lost objects; and whilst such feelings are not attributed to the lost object itself, it is still very much felt. This feeling has a re-emergence, yet without an awareness of its origins. Additionally, paranoia as an affective practice becomes about borrowing backwards and forwards in order to make the ‘bad news’ known; again the relation between past and present is central.

2017; Rose, 2014), asks what might be negated, or suppressed through a turn to the joyful. Indeed, Sara Ahmed (2010) writes that the affirmative ethics turns the Deleuzian example of the joyful encounter into a call *for* joyful encounter. Thus, a Spinozist-Deleuzian account has been understood to push forwards an affirmative (affective) politics at the expense of a negative (affective) politics. Bringing a Spinozist-Deleuzian account of affect into conversation with psychoanalytic geographies, however, offers the possibility of transgressing the dichotomy between an affirmative and a negative affective politics. Psychoanalytic accounts of affect could be understood to be neither affirmative nor negative. The emphasis of the unconscious attempting to find expression in conscious thought (or make its present felt) transgresses an affirmative or negative affective politics. For this process can generate both 'sad' or 'joyful' encounters; it can enable consideration of suspended or broken relations (Harrison, 2007); it can allow us to think about loss and the dying (Harrison, 2015). As a result, it offers the possibility to think about affective politics outside of the binary of affirmative and the negative.

Fourthly, the thesis also offers methodological contributions to the geographical discipline through the concept of lingering. The concept and practice of lingering has implications for *how we do* geographical research. In particular, it offers new ways of thinking about the temporality and spatiality of research practice. Not only is lingering is a methodological tool for affective research, but can also be used within ethnographic research more broadly. Lingering is explicitly a *temporal* research practice in that it involves holding onto affects that little bit longer in order to say something meaningful about them. Lingering offers a way in which to carry out research through a temporal lens: we are *lengthening* affective presence in order 'provide room' for these affects and to allow them to speak. Importantly, here, this has implications for how we might carry out *performative* geographical research, for this research is not attempting to 'capture' the world in question; rather, through the act of lengthening affective presence, lingering reconfigures space-times in order to *open up* (affective) worlds. Finally, and relatedly, the practice of lingering has implications for ethnographic research practice within the geographical discipline. It enables us to explicitly think about *thresholds*,



and how we might work with them in research practice. Explicitly attending to thresholds (and the discomfort implicated within this), lingering speaks to, and furthers, in particular, existing feminist work on embodied research practice.

## **Looking forward**

### **i. Looking towards similar conditions**

The conceptual and methodological approaches that have been developed throughout this thesis are not only relevant to the empirical setting of austerity. Rather, they can be used to examine and develop similar conditions.

The development of the temporality of collective feeling set out in the thesis could be drawn upon in the conceptualisation of similar conditions. It can be used in conditions that are not confined to temporally bounded events, rather have a particular sense of ‘ongoingness’ and without a clear sense of resolution. It can be used as diagnostic tool for conditions, in which constancy marks this kind of lived experience. This might include, for example, ‘Brexit conditions,’ conditions of housing precarity, fuel poverty or other conditions of scarcity. This conceptualisation can also be used to explore the ebb and flows of intensity that marks many (or arguably any) forms of lived experience. Yet, what this conceptualisation *also* offers is an understanding of how these ebbs and flows relate to one another, rather than simply events in themselves. Thus, it be drawn upon to explore the way in which particular intensifications have a seriality to them that works to produce a *depth* of experience. This could be used to understand particular research encounters that are always *more* than the encounter itself; this might include the repeated fear of an asylum letter being delivered through the door (Darling, 2014), re-emergent hunger pains (Garthwaite, 2016), or the day-to-day morphologies of black geographical life in everyday academia (Tolia-Kelly, 2017). It is the relationship between past and present that become part of these affective experiences that shape capacities to feel and act.

The methodological approach developed within this thesis can also be drawn upon beyond the empirical focus of lived austerity. The concept and practice of lingering can be become a way

in which to consider other formations of collective feeling beyond affective atmospheres, for example what might be termed ‘public moods.’ It can be a tool through which to, not simply consider public moods, but also to *stay with* them. This might involve following the threads of these moods, order to explore where they may lead (Haraway, 2016). It might also involve attempting to stay with them to consider what it might mean to be in an ‘age’ of a particular mood, such as an ‘age of anxiety’ (Stossel, 2014), to consider public moods and the contemporary conditions through which they are formed or made present. In this sense, lingering as a methodological tool becomes a way in which to think about the relationship between collective feeling – such as mood, atmospheres or structures of feeling – and the conditions, which they emerge through. It becomes a question of our point of departure within research; lingering also offers potential to *start from* a particular mood, rather than starting from the condition itself. This opens up the possibility to think differently about the contemporary condition in question; for example, what might it mean to take the *moods* of Brexit as our point of departure, rather than Brexit itself? In addition, *starting with* a particular mood – such as boredom, playfulness, anxiety, rage and so on – opens up the possibility for considering the entanglements of contemporary conditions. This might be the entanglement between austerity and Brexit that are made evident *through* particular moods, such as disillusionment or anger. Lingering as a methodological tool, then, is a way in which to *start with* and also *stay with* particular forms of collective feeling in order to open up new avenues for understanding the (entanglement of) contemporary conditions within which these collective feelings are produced.

Finally, and relatedly, lingering as a methodological tool can be drawn upon ethnographic research more broadly beyond affective research. Lingering can be used as a way of doing in-depth longitudinal research. Lingering pushes forward the value of, again, staying *with* and staying *within* particular research sites. It allows us to enliven the case study, through allowing the research site to speak. Indeed, staying within the research site also enables exploration of micro-transformations that are visible as a result of dwelling in that particular space; this can be drawn upon in a range of sites and spaces, such as the high street, the park,

the home, and the workplace. The reconfiguration of thresholds that come with the practice of lingering also allows us as researchers to be in space-times differently; this might allow us to attune to spaces in a different way, such as the practices and encounter, as we become implicated within them.

## ii. The futures of austerity

Since carrying out the fieldwork for thesis, the political discourse around the visibility of the effects of austerity in local authorities has somewhat shifted. Many local authorities in the UK are understood to be in crisis, due to the chronic underfunding since the beginning of the austerity agenda in 2010. Various local authorities in the UK have come out publicly to emphasise the crisis they face due to the continual pressure of budget reductions; Lancashire County Council, for example, has stated that their financial position is at “tipping point” (Sleator, 2018). Indeed some local authorities, such as Northamptonshire County Council and Barnet County Council, have stated that they will now only provide the legal minimum of services due to funding pressures (Chakraborty, 2018). A Special Rapporteur UN report on extreme poverty and human rights emphasised in November 2018 that austerity had inflicted “great misery” unnecessarily on UK citizens. Professor Philip Alston stated:

*“[L]ocal authorities, especially in England, which perform vital roles in providing a real social safety net have been gutted by a series of government policies. Libraries have closed in record numbers, community and youth centers have been shrunk and underfunded, public spaces and buildings including parks and recreation centers have been sold off. While the labour and housing markets provide the crucial backdrop, the focus of this report is on the contribution made by social security and related policies.” (Alston, 2018, p. 1)*

This suggests, then, that local authorities are understood to have reached a tipping point in their ability to provide public services. Indeed this was also emphasised by the library manager in my own fieldwork (bearing in mind this research took place between 2015 and early 2017). Dennis stated the 2016/17 round of budget reductions – which saw a further four

libraries transitioning to volunteer-run libraries – pushed the boundaries of what was deemed a statutory library service:

*“I think this review takes us to the brink of what is statutory and what’s not, so it’s really, in terms of the future, oh well, but whether that will, you see the council have had that legal advice that really cuts beyond this, will really take you into a non-statutory area.”* (Dennis)

The recent emergence of the discourse of crisis in local authorities is particularly significant. For it leads me to propose that the affective presence of austerity, in particular the melancholic condition of austerity is a contributing factor to local authorities reaching and (perhaps now inevitable) future surpassing of thresholds in the capacity to perform public service functions. As argued within chapter five, austerity melancholia is an inability to mourn that which has been lost as a result of austerity, and its subsequent nagging return into everyday life. These elusive losses have resulted in a doubling of the violence of austerity, firstly, as a result of austerity’s violent effects and, secondly, the violence of these losses remaining unnoticed. These elusive losses, I have argued, leave austerity as a fiscal policy relatively unchallenged, for the effects of austerity become refracted into other issues and working practices. Indeed, chapter six also indicated that the sense of a futile future for both the public library service and also local authorities. This sense of crisis was something that the library staff themselves had felt long before it had been constructed on a more discursive level. Indeed, they emphasised that budgets can only be whittled down so far before local authorities begin to fail in their ability to function:

*“I don’t think any of us can see an improvement in the economic situation for councils, I think there’ll be very little left at the end of the government’s term which is really really sad, I mean we’re just trying to just do the best we can, and at the end of it I think a lot of us feel we’ll end up with central library and four area libraries and the others will either be closed or handed over to volunteers.”* (Joan)

For staff, local authorities were undergoing what Berlant (2007) calls “slow death” – a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life. Staff emphasised a sense of

futility, in which they expected local authorities budgets to be further reduced and the library service therefore to continue to contract. The sense that local authorities (and the services that make up them) were in crisis was felt *long before* it was discursively constructed as a crisis.

This is why a consideration of austerity as lived *matters*. Considering the lived and felt dimensions of austerity enables a consideration of that which is *not* visible, and that which may only become visible when tipping points are reached. Indeed, it also enables exploration of that which may never become visible through discursive means.

The violent effects of austerity that were not made visible, I argue, has contributed to local authorities reaching tipping points in which they soon may no longer be able to meet their statutory requirements. Precisely because many of the effects of austerity have been made invisible, it has enabled further austerity measures to be implemented as the fantasy of the state has remained intact, even as the material means to provide it has continued to be whittled away. Yet, we are now perhaps witnessing a transformation in this fantasy, as the material means have reached a tipping point, and as local authorities as a result are now being financially stretched beyond their ability to function. Yet, this is not the end of austerity. The effects of austerity will be felt for the foreseeable future, for example, as the losses brought about by austerity continue to re-emerge throughout everyday life, as individual and public services face ongoing precarity and as austerity continues to transform the social and urban landscape. It is not unreasonable to suggest, therefore, that austerity is having a truly devastating impact upon the “fabric of British society” (Alston, 2018, p. 3).





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## Appendix

**Table to outline background information of key research participants**

Name	Background information
Library staff	
Dennis	Dennis has been working in the library service for many years, and emphasised that the service was previously a “libraries and art service” before it became a stand-alone library service. Dennis emphasises that the library has always carried out “amazing” and “creative stuff” but increasingly his job over the last numbers of years has become increasingly review driven, and focussed on shrinking the service. This now dominates his whole working year. The job of reducing the library budget took a whole toll on his health, in which he was forced to take time off work due to stress two years previously.
Penny	Penny is in her 60s and has been working in the library service for more than twenty years. She has worked across various libraries in the borough during her time at the service, progressing from assistant positions through to more senior roles. She has been in her most recent post for 6 years. Throughout her time at the service she has seen an incredible amount of change, from the introduction of computers to libraries to the transformations under austerity.
Joan	Joan has been working in the library service for twenty years. She started working in the service on a temporary contract. She then gained a permanent position six months later. After taking maternity leave, Joan took on a more senior managerial role. She emphasised that her work-load has increased greatly over the last few years as other staff members have taken voluntary redundancy, in which their job roles have not been replaced. She, therefore, has taken on extra roles including running reading groups.
Margaret	Margaret has been working the library service (in her own words) “for a very very very long time.” She started working in the service at the age



	<p>of 18 and was sponsored through University by the council to gain a degree in Librarianship. She is now in a managerial role. She emphasises that the Librarian is the “original search engine” in which library staff have fantastic research skills to find out customer queries. She states that what makes the library service is that it is consistently innovating, for example introducing coding clubs for children.</p>
Alice	<p>Alice first joined the service in the late 2000s. Her first post at the library was made redundant when her service was shut down as a result of a round of budget reductions in 2010-11. She now works in a different service but feels pressured to take voluntary redundancy (VR) due to her age, as she feels that VR places pressure on older members of staff to leave. However, she cannot afford to take voluntary redundancy, as she had a mortgage and she has not a large enough pension to support it.</p>
Josephine	<p>Josephine started working in library service over 20 years ago and holds a Master’s degree in Information and Library Management. She has worked across several externally-funded projects, and has worked with numerous libraries across Europe as a result. She secured a permanent managerial role within 5 years and remains in that post today and works across multiple management duties.</p>
Clora	<p>Clora is in her late twenties and began working in the library four and a half years ago. She has a background of working in university libraries, as well as in retail. She now leads various community and art-based projects, as well as exhibitions within the service. Alongside working in the library she lectures at the local University.</p>
Jude	<p>Jude has worked in the library service for thirty-three years. She started working as a library assistant, and then was promoted to a more senior role. She was also sponsored to study for a degree in Librarianship, which she carried out part-time alongside working in the library. She emphasised that the library service is a “trailblazer” by being at the forefront – including award winning – of library services across the country.</p>

Jenny	Jenny has worked in the library service for twenty-seven years, and has worked across many libraries in that time. She worked in the branch libraries for many years. She has also been involved with training volunteers for libraries in transition (from council-run to volunteer-run), although with hesitancy. She had many worries about losing her job in the service through austerity and thought that this position would help her stay in the service. She is extremely passionate about her work, and hopes that her training in some way can pass on knowledge and experience, in order to give a good service to customers, despite the training being to volunteers.
Jannah	Jannah works between four different libraries across the borough. The years she has been working in the library service Jannah has seen many changes. She emphasises that the changes have often reflected the changes throughout wider society “as the world changes”. This includes the decline in CDs and the digitalisation of the service. In particular, however, she has seen a shift in the use of the library, away from entertainment towards a predominant use of the library as a support and help when individuals have no-where else to turn. On a weekly basis she encounters individuals turning to the library for support because they fear being sanctioned by the Job Centre.
Barbara	Barbara first starting working in one of the area libraries as a part-time member of staff. She quickly moved to a more senior role and worked in this role for ten years. She has recently taken up a new role that is linked to other council services, as she feels this will give her a greater chance of keeping her job in times of austerity. She emphasised that library staff are very proud of their job and the service they give. She emphasises that libraries are much more than books; for her the social aspect is vitally important, and emphasises that the customers value the interaction, as well as being somewhere safe.
Volunteers	
Sabine	Sabine is retired and has been volunteering in the library since the library was made volunteer-run in 2012. She is a member of the trustee committee and regularly organises arts and crafts activities for children

	in the library, such as when there are library events.
Brandan	Brandan has been volunteering in the library for approximately two years. He was made redundant from his job as a result of the effects of austerity. He now volunteers at the library, and hopes to gain experience of working in the library to eventually be employed in the council library service.
Eleanor	Eleanor is a new member of the library volunteers. She is retired and has been volunteering in a local charity shop for a number of years prior to volunteering at the library. She has relatively recently lost her husband and greatly values volunteering as a way in which to meet other people, and as a way of managing the difficulties of losing a loved one.