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THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

**Intimate shaping: The embodied self and activist therapeutic
practices during the Greek economic crisis**

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of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Declaration of originality

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Christina Sachpasidi

November 2021

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Abstract

The social transformations that have transpired in Greece during the period of the economic crisis have altered the social fabric of living through the imposition of austerity politics, economic hardship, and work insecurity. These social shifts have created complex utterances of loss and vulnerability, but also resistance. This thesis examines the ways in which the self is enveloped and shaped by the power dynamics of the economic crisis and the feelings and experiences that permeate it, in order to advance a deeper understanding of how the crisis becomes embedded into the self. Aiming to identify ways of moving beyond the impasse and hopelessness of precarious living within the crisis, this study also explores the capacities for action and movement that the crisis can generate, in the context of social clinics and the psychotherapeutic practices embedded in them. Social clinics are a grassroots solidarity movement created by volunteer health professionals where practices of care provision and economic activity are performed in ways that challenge the neoliberal and austere.

This thesis creates a theoretical space that can hold together the in-between space of entanglement where the personal meets the economic. Drawing upon Foucauldian and governmental perspectives, I examine subjectification processes within neoliberal realities. Thinking with Judith Butler, I focus upon vulnerability, loss, and dispossession, within the context of the crisis. Through cultural theory, I examine the affective textures of everyday lifeworlds during the crisis. Imagining other worlds and economies, I draw on Gibson-Graham to examine social clinics and the practices they incorporate as activist projects that can unsettle the present economic world.

This thesis employs a critical autoethnographic approach, as I delve into this space of in-betweenness through my own experiences of precarious living, while entangling my stories with those of volunteer psychotherapists who offer their services in social clinics of Athens. By using writing as inquiry and thinking with theory as my analytical approach, I foreground my body as an instrument of research and advance an understanding of theory as an embodied and dynamic process that connects thinking and doing.

Lay Summary

The imposition of austerity politics, economic hardship, and job instability have transformed life in Greece throughout the era of the economic crisis. Complex expressions of vulnerability, as well as resistance, have resulted from these societal transformations. This thesis investigates how the power dynamics of the crisis, as well as the feelings and experiences that pervade it, shape and permeate the self, in order to get a better understanding of how the crisis becomes a part of the self. This research examines the capacities for action and movement that the crisis might create by using social clinics as an example. Social clinics are part of a solidarity movement founded by volunteer health professionals. By looking at how the practices and psychotherapeutic practices within social clinics are performed, this thesis investigates how possibilities for imagining different worlds and economies might also emerge from the economic crisis.

This thesis creates a theoretical framework for exploring this space where the personal and the economic meet and entangle. I investigate subjectification processes under neoliberal realities using Foucauldian and governmental perspectives. I think about vulnerability, loss, and dispossession in the context of the crisis with Judith Butler. I investigate the feeling textures of daily lifeworlds amid the crisis using cultural theory. In my exploration of the practises that are part of activist initiatives like the social clinics, I draw on Gibson-Graham's imagination.

In this thesis, I explore my questions through my own personal experiences of insecure living, while also connecting my stories with those of volunteer psychotherapists who offer their services in social clinics of Athens. For my analytical framework in this study, I use writing as inquiry and thinking with theory, and thus use my body as an instrument of research, while advancing an understanding of theory as an embodied and dynamic process.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background of study

In April 2012, a Greek pensioner distraught over his financial state took his own life in Athens' busiest main Square located across the Parliament building. According to witnesses, he positioned himself under a tree and cried out "I don't want to leave debts to my children", before pulling the trigger. In his suicide note that circulated in the media the days following his suicide, he wrote that he did not want to "scavenge through rubbish for food and become a burden to my family" (New York Times, 2012). Some days after this dire event, I happen to pass from the exact same spot and the tree under which he died. The tree was covered in colourful ribbons, handwritten letters and other small offerings that have been hidden in its branches and testified to this tragic and public loss of life. The experience of being on this site and sensing the violence of what has transpired moved me deeply and left me with different questions: Why did this loss feel so close to me? Why did I start weeping as I walked next to the tree? How did austerity politics and the multifaceted precarious conditions they generate permeate this person's story to move him towards publicly ending his life? These questions stayed with me and became part of the questions that I ask in this thesis.

There are also other experiences that drove me towards this research, like that of spending several years of my life as an unemployed young adult and the hopelessness that accompanied this living. Within this harsh everyday reality of the economic crisis, I came across experiences of resistance that also moved me towards this research, as they drove me to explore spaces from which hope emerged unexpectedly in different forms. During my encounter with unemployment, there were times when I saw this hope manifesting as a form of action that materialized in the formations of bodies that flooded the streets in protest. Besides constituting a site in which my encounter with this public loss of life affected me deeply, the Parliament Square has also been a space of other experiences

where the personal, the economic, but also the collective have intertwined in my life. The same Square has also been a space of resistance in which the austerity measures and crisis politics were publicly contested through the demonstrations and protests that took place between 2010 and 2012, in which I also took part.

Through all these different experiences and the feelings that they produced in me, I started recognising the close connection between economic realities and personal lives in ways that were different from prominent understandings of the economy as an abstract system, or an autonomous entity which is disembedded from personal lives (Hess, 2004). Through unemployment, I became aware that rather than being an inanimate object, money gives life as it can grant us access to whatever complex experiences we seek (Konings, 2015) and on the grounds of its absence, I became unable to access the world outside the confines of home. Similarly, I realised the existence of an array of complex experiences that are hidden behind impassive accounts of austerity policies and emergency measures geared towards salvaging the markets, with which economic crises have been most closely associated (Athanasίου, 2018). For instance, these depictions don't account for the despair that becomes an intrinsic part of the everyday experience of people whose needs are ignored, whose grievances have no impact, and for whom politics is synonymous to an abuse of power (Berlant, 2011). Nor do they account for the uncertainty, loss and confusion that accompany living in a state of emergency (Agamben, 2005), where exceptional measures that thoroughly restructure social life are endorsed and legitimised on the grounds of a crisis like the one that has transpired in Greece.

As I left Greece to move to Scotland in search of a better life beyond the difficult reality of the economic crisis, I realised that unemployment as an experience that was accompanied by intricate losses in my life has become a part of me, and that I carried all these losses with me. Despite being in a new place that allowed me the freedom and the means to create a different kind of living, I continued to experience insecurity and fear about the future, as well as the sense of inhabiting a fragile and dangerous present. Unemployment has somehow become woven into myself, and it has *shaped* me, as it shaped the way that I felt about myself and the way in which I related to those around me, but also to living itself. This sense of inhabiting a precarious and fragile present resembled a sense of imprisonment; a

way of being into the world that was devoid of the right to create my own future, but also an ever-present sense of personal failure, as I held myself responsible for things that I identified as personal shortcomings in my life, the most significant one being my inability to obtain secure employment and the structured kind of life that would go with it.

As I tried to get closer to these painful yet fleeting senses and articulate them, I thus became more aware that it wasn't just unemployment that has become a part of me, but rather unemployment as a part and a product of the economic crisis and the everyday realities it created, which were also encompassed by a multitude of other experiences. Austerity measures as part of networks of economic and political power (Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1998), restructured my everyday living by not just cutting off my access to the workplace, but by creating collective experiential landscapes of material destitution and insecurity for myself and those around me in various forms, including those of economic hardship, work insecurity and an overall precarious way of being into the world (Butler, 2004). This elusive *shaping* of the self that I could sense but couldn't reduce to one thing and that I've been able to become aware of more clearly after I moved to Scotland, was connected to an intimate feeling space that I embodied, which was neither totally personal, nor entirely social. This personal wasn't about a bounded, clearly delineated, and individual belonging, but stood somewhere in-between the public and the private. Although this feeling space of in-betweenness felt as a part of me, at the same time it reflected a space of intertwinement with the political and economic processes and realities of the crisis. For instance, as I started to reflect on the sense of imprisonment that followed me from Greece to Scotland and the lack of agency I felt around having the right to create my own present and future, I started recognising connections between this sense and that which permeated my everyday living in Greece. By inhabiting an "anomic space" where my rights have been diminished and in which political power as a kind of lawless law (Agamben, 2005, p. 39) restricted my ability to make the choices I wanted, a sense that reality was just a hostile outside over which I could not exert any control or influence started to emerge during my life in Greece. However, in my new life in Scotland the same restricting sense also permeated my everyday reality in the same confining way.

This thesis speaks to this space of intertwinement between the personal and the socio-political and economic realities of the crisis. Manifesting as complex political and economic operations of power that restructure the fabric of everyday living, but also produce the self (Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1998), I approach the crisis as generating complex experiences that shape what life feels like. By advancing a perspective of the economy as being intricately tied to personal lives, this thesis aims to explore the ways in which the economic crisis in its various manifestations, including austerity measures and neoliberal policies, as some of its most prevalent forms (Athanasίου, 2018), becomes a part of the self through its envelopment by the power dynamics of the crisis and the feelings and experiences that permeate it.

More than a decade has elapsed since the start of the economic crisis and the ensuing deep recession which led Greek governments to implement a broad range of austerity measures and reform programs, characterised by heavy tax rises, fiscal constraints, and the diminution of the welfare state. Yet, I see these persistent senses that speak to this space of in-betweenness, and which I carried with me in Scotland, as attesting to a “crisis time [that] has burst through the boundaries of the event itself and the fall-out continues to order everyday life” (Knight, 2021, p. 8). As Knight (2021, p. 5) argues, crisis-time transcends calendrical time and becomes a “transformative epoch where things feel different, lives take on strange and unexpected trajectories, folds and loops”.

The starting point of this research has been my own personal experiences. However, the story of living precariously under conditions of austerity and economic violence, is not only my own, as behind the material or monetary losses that the economic crisis entails, there are countless stories of people who are unable to meet their needs and whose personal lives are affected in complicated ways. For instance, recent studies correlate the rise of mental health issues in Greece with socioeconomic experiences that have become increasingly prevalent during the crisis, such as unemployment, job insecurity, and loss of income (Stylianidis & Souliotis, 2019). These indicators point towards an existence of a relationship between certain socioeconomic aspects of the crisis and their effect on mental health, without really exploring how these connections between the personal and the economic are created. Something happens to the feeling self under everyday conditions like

those that transpire in the crisis and this study aims to contribute to discussions that move beyond conceptualisations of low socioeconomic status, social determinants, and causal factors for ill mental health, in order to look closely at how the economic becomes personal.

This study contributes to theoretical discussions that examine what could broadly be described as the feeling self within the context of economic life. Writings in this diverse area are emerging from across the social sciences and although they delve into the subjective from different angles, they share a focus on how economic crises, austerity, and neoliberalism impact upon personal lives. Another shared aspect of these diverse literatures that started gaining traction in the decade following the market crash of 2007, is that they do not examine the economic from a perspective of an economically strained condition, like that of poverty, but from a standpoint of recession and socioeconomic readjustment. For Knight and Stewart (2016) this economic condition is experientially different from poverty as it expresses a dynamic and complex process of reversal, through which people are required to determine the new minimum requirements for what constitutes an acceptable life, as societies that previously enjoyed a higher standard of consumption and living are now forced to survive with much less. Research in this area includes the examination of feelings of shame and their connection to the affective governing of unemployed people (Bjerg & Staunæs, 2011; Pultz, 2018), explorations of how unemployment becomes framed and experienced in privatised and individualised terms (Beck, 2008; Pultz, 2016), tracings of the contours of the psychic life of the entrepreneurial subject (Scharff, 2016) and examinations of the psychosocial effects of neoliberalism (Layton, 2013). Feelings such as insecurity and stress have also been studied in the context of neoliberalism (Ehrenberg, 2010). An emerging body of literature from human geography also focuses on austerity in connection to everyday feelings and experiences. Within this area of everyday lived experience, there are writings that explore feelings of exhaustion and weariness (Wilkinson & Ortega-Alcázar, 2019), emotions of austerity in relation to care provision (Clayton et al., 2015), everyday family experiences of financial crisis (Hall, 2019), the psychosocial landscapes of feeling squeezed by austerity (Stenning, 2020), and collective moods and atmospheres of austerity (Hitchen, 2016; 2021).

Although, this study builds on the theoretical discussions that explore the feeling self in the context of economic life, it also differs in a number of areas. First, rather than focusing on the spatiality of the economic crisis, as is the case with studies that originate from the field of human geography, it focuses on the self and particularly the ways that it is shaped by feelings that are rooted in everyday experiences, as well as power dynamics that emanate from economic life. Although this inquiry also engages with the spatial, particularly home, and activist spaces of resistance, the focus remains on how the sensed and the lived of everyday precarious life-worlds is experienced by the self.

Second, this thesis pieces together a theoretical space that is attentive to both the power dynamics and the feelings that envelop the self in connection to the economic crisis. By putting the body at its centre, this thesis contributes to theoretical conversations that draw attention to how feelings and power interweave (D'Aoust, 2014). As this thesis delves into a space of in-betweenness between the public and the private, it examines feelings not as something which is possessed by an individual self, but feelings as something that circulates between collective and individual subjects, creating their permeable and shifting boundaries through their circulation (Ahmed, 2010). This circulation which is part of what Ahmed describes as the affective economy (Ahmed, 2004a), signals that even those feelings that we perceive as the most personal and intimate, emerge through the body's interactions with others, rather than simply belonging to ourselves. The affective here has different qualities from that of affect as a non-conscious and pre-personal intensity which precedes emotion (Massumi, 1995). Although for several scholars in the field of affective studies there is a clear distinction between affect and emotion (e.g. Connolly, 2002; Massumi, 2002; Thrift, 2008), as the first precedes cognition (Massumi, 1995), other scholars (e.g. Hemmings, 2005; Hsieh, 2008; Thien, 2005; Wetherell, 2012) have been more critical of this separation and the binaries it can create. For instance, Ahmed draws attention to how definitions that highlight this distinction while portraying the affect as non-intentionality can be unhelpful because they inevitably frame emotion as "intentionality" (Schmit & Ahmed, 2014, p. 98). Instead, Ahmed argues, emotions can denote something which exceeds the located and bound subject, as emotions move and they are social not only in the sense of being mediated, but also by showing "how the subject arrives into a world that already has affects and feelings circulating in very particular ways" (Schmit & Ahmed, 2014, p. 98). From this

perspective, emotions entail bodily processes that speak to the particular ways that we come into contact with others, as differently economised, raced and gender bodies generate varying affective responses:

To recognise somebody as a stranger is an affective judgement: a stranger is the one who seems suspicious; the one who lurks. I became interested in how some bodies are “in an instant” judged as suspicious, or as dangerous, as objects to be feared, a judgement that can have lethal consequences. There can be nothing more dangerous to a body than the social agreement that that body is dangerous (Ahmed, 2014, p. 211)

The key issue in Ahmed’s account is that the stranger’s body is already recognized as threatening before it appears, and thus we shouldn’t only concentrate on the affective encounter with it and the senses it produces, but rather on the “histories that come before subjects” in order to explore how “the immediacy of bodily reactions are mediated” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 212). To attend to this process of mediation in connection to feelings, I primarily rely on Judith Butler (e.g. Butler, 2015) and governmental theories on subjectification, as they allow me to closely examine the role of economic power in the context of the economic crisis. By drawing on governmental perspectives on subjectification that examine how people become embodied subjects as the effects of, and in relation to, power (Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1998), this thesis examines subjectification as a process that cannot be disjointed from feelings as that which provides intelligibility to the embodied self (Butler, 2015). Thus, in this thesis I use the term feelings to also approach broader processes that provide intelligibility to the self, but also speak to its process of becoming, and are interlaced with relations of power, including loss, vulnerability, and dispossession (Butler, 2015). Drawing on Cvetkovich (2012, p. 4), in this thesis I favour the term feelings, as it retains “the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences”. This approach to feelings that encompasses embodied sensations, but also embodied processes that are connected with subjectification, can also allow me to think about how feelings produce “specific modes of experience” (Dawney, 2013, p. 632). By considering the power relations through which experiences emerge in connection to the feelings that these experiences generate, I examine everyday moments of living in connection to the crisis, as being a part of this process of subjectification (Dawney, 2013).

Third, this study focuses on finding openings for resistance and movement within the economic crisis. Within the “violent conditions that burn in the background of daily life” that “forcefully constrain, traumatize, and poison, the very resources of our becoming” (Laurie and Shaw, 2018, p. 8), this thesis sets out to explore how economic violence is embedded into the flesh and bones of ourselves, while examining openings that can trouble stillness and despair and cultivate the possibility for action. This research examines the capacities for action that the crisis can create through an examination of social clinics and the psychotherapeutic practises embedded in them, with the goal of identifying ways of moving beyond the despair of precarious living of the crisis. Social clinics are a grassroots solidarity movement founded by volunteer health professionals in response to the structural adjustment programmes and austerity policies in Greece, where care provision and economic activity are carried out in ways that challenge neoliberalism and austerity (Teloni & Adam, 2018). By focusing on the activist sites of social clinics that have their origins in social movements and thus emphasize their role as providers of healthcare services, as well as vehicles for solidarity (Kotronaki & Christou, 2019), I approach the practices they incorporate as projects that can unsettle the present economic reality (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

1.2. Structure of the thesis

The rest of the thesis is divided into eight main chapters. Chapter two develops the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that ground the thesis. In this literature review chapter, I am engaging with five bodies of literature that allow me to conceptualise my approach towards the personal and the economic and also piece together a theoretical space that can enable me to hold them together. First, I outline key literatures that are specific to the Greek crisis, through which I contextualise the crisis and identify some of its most prominent features encountered in the literature. Through this literature, I start tracing how the economic crisis permeates everyday lives, as I aim to move away from perceptions of the economy as an abstract system or an autonomous entity which is disembedded from personal lives. By exploring some of my own experiences and bringing them in conversation with theory, I then move to Foucault (2008) and governmentality theory, as I examine the shaping of the self that is subjugated and simultaneously produced

through relations of power, including those of neoliberal governmentality. Following that, in my search for theoretical spaces that can enable me to examine the subject in the context of the power dynamics of the crisis, yet still be able to speak about the feeling self, I turn to Judith Butler. Starting my inquiry from her theories on subjection and the psychic life of the subject (Butler, 1997), I then move to her more recent work that has taken an affective turn over time (Butler, 2009). To further ground my inquiry into the sensed and the everyday of the crisis, I then engage with a fourth body of literature which allows me to focus on how the textures of everyday life and the political frameworks through which it is organised might help me approach the feelings that permeate living during the crisis (Cvetkovich, 2007). In the last part of the literature review, I start imagining this thesis as a tiny act of resistance that wishes to contribute to worlds and economies beyond the neoliberal and austere of the crisis (Gibson-Graham, 2006), and illustrate my rationale for setting out my focus on the activist space of social clinics and the practices that are part of them. In the last section of the literature review, I explore literature that enables me to conceptualise psychotherapeutic practise in activist sites.

In Chapter three, I develop my research design and consider its ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations, and consider how the realities that are implicated in my questions can be empirically explored. I first discuss how a feminist post-structural framework and a relational social ontology that has the body at its heart, can enable my inquiry into this space of entanglement where the personal meets the economic. In the ensuing epistemological discussion, I examine three focal points as ways of knowing in my research: theory, story, and practice. I then explore my rationale for using critical autoethnography as a methodology that can allow me to develop my research design on the basis of my ontology and epistemology. By working with conceptualisations of voice that are not easy (Lather & Smithies, 1997), I discuss the use of reflexive-dyadic interviews with volunteer psychotherapists in the social clinics (Ellis, 2004), alongside my personal stories, and the process of entangling myself into the layers of the voices of the interviewees. In the last part of this chapter, I discuss my analytical approach. By using writing as inquiry (Wyatt, 2018) and thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), I discuss the use of my body as an instrument of research and advance an understanding of theory as an embodied and dynamic process that connects thinking and doing.

Chapters four, five, six and seven compose the analytical chapters of the thesis. Each chapter examines an encounter with each of the four participants: Elpida, Maria, Anna, and Lydia. In these chapters, I entangle my stories with those of the research participants to create a troubled “we” (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 10) and assemble myself as a speaking subject who is “always leaving, always returning, always longing” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 314).

In chapter eight, I take a step back and consider the analytical chapters of my thesis in light of the questions that guided my inquiry. The first section of this chapter focuses on the shaping of the self in light of feelings and experiences in the context of the economic crisis. In the second half of this chapter, I explore what the activist site of social clinics and the therapeutic practices that are part of them can enable, particularly in relation to practices that challenge the neoliberal and austere.

In chapter nine, I provide some concluding thoughts on the theoretical contribution of this thesis and some areas for further research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction: Constructing a literature framework

This thesis sets out to explore the in-between space of entanglement between the personal and the economic. By advancing a deeper understanding of how the economic crisis is felt and experienced within relations of power, this thesis examines how the economic crisis becomes embedded into the self, while also looking for openings for resistance within the crisis. To approach this in-between space where the personal meets the economic, I bring into conversation theories that allow me to hold them together. This kind of theoretical framework calls into question the separation between the personal and the social, and the division between an outer and an inner reality, advocating instead for a psychosocial zone (Andrews et al., 2000) or a Moebius strip (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008) where the social and the personal are both composed in relation to each other. From this perspective, the creation of this in-between space that brings together the personal and the social, does not postulate these two spheres as distinct from one another. In theorizing this psychosocial space, Frosh and Baraitser (2008) use the metaphor of a Moebius strip:

Underside and topside, inside and outside flow together as one, and the choice of how to see them is purely tactical, just like the decision as to whether to look at the subject from a “social” or a “psychological” perspective. Thinking through the implications of the psychosocial as a Moebius strip, however, rather than falling back into the relatively familiar opposition of psychological and social, is where the work lies (2008, p. 349).

The metaphor of the Moebius strip as an in between-space that revokes the “in here, out there” (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008, p. 350) distinction is a useful analogy for holding together the felt, experienced and economic as one. However, in this analogy I also recognise a challenge, as the Moebius strip has also been associated with the concept of infinity, because of the infinite uninterrupted paths one can trace along its single surface (Kitchen,

2002). Frosh and Baraitser (2008) identify two main strands in psychosocial studies. The first one, which is the most prominent, is rooted in psychoanalysis as a discipline that can offer compelling explanations and ways of theorising this interplay between what are conventionally thought of as external social and “internal” psychic formations and how the “out-there” gets “in-here” (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008, p. 347). The second strand that they identify is “a place of ‘suture’ between elements whose contribution to the production of the human subject is normally theorized separately” (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008, p. 348). The origins of this psychosocial approach lie in disciplines that include sociology and applied social science, as well as critical, poststructural and feminist theory. Although this genealogy is extremely diverse, what characterises it is a commitment towards issues that encompass experience, interconnectedness, feeling, embodiment, agency and the subject, not as finalised and fixed aspects of our beingness in the world, but rather as processes that are in the making (Parker & Shotter, 2015). Here, theory does not focus on revealing an essentialist core of the self, but rather is oriented towards drawing attention to its “pervasive, insidious, and constitutive aspects that require interrogation and critique” (Given, 2008, p. 669). What also defines this psychosocial strand is a commitment to a political engagement with power, oppression, and the diverse ways in which the self is constituted in and through political and social formations (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). This thesis aligns with this diverse psychosocial strand, as the imposition of austerity politics, economic hardship, unemployment, and insecurity during the crisis has altered the social fabric of everyday living and has created complex landscapes of power dynamics that call for a critical examination. To create this in-between-space that revokes the distinction between the inner and the outer which allows me not only to hold them together, but also conceptualise my approach towards the personal and the economic, I am engaging with five bodies of literature.

First, I outline key literatures on the crisis that allow me to contextualise it and identify some of its most prominent features encountered in the literature, while retaining a focus on the personal and the ways in which crisis permeates social structures, and processes of everyday life. In my search for a definition of the crisis, I also question the act of representing it through all-encompassing depictions and problematise the act of declaring a crisis, highlighting the critical connotations entailed in this process of declaration.

I then introduce my personal experiences of living precariously and bring them in conversation with theory, in order to take a step closer towards defining the personal within the crisis and delineating my theoretical focus. This unfolding of my experience through writing, brings me to the second body of literature from which I draw on, entailing what broadly could be described as theories of the “ethical subject” (Frosh, 2010, p. 36). Starting from Foucault (2008) and governmentality theory, I examine the shaping of the self that is subjugated and at the same time made through power while exploring how subjectivities are produced in and through neoliberalism. This theoretical trajectory allows me to engage with critical considerations of power, while thinking about the subject in the context of social structures and neoliberal financial logics like the ones that transpire within the economic crisis.

In my search for theoretical spaces that allow me to be attentive to the power dynamics of the crisis, yet still be able to speak about the feeling self, I then turn to Judith Butler. Looking closely at her theory on subjection as a necessary condition for the existence of the self which works in and through the psychic life of the subject (Butler, 1997), I think about the precarious subject, while exploring how vulnerability, loss and dispossession are permeated by power.

Moving one step closer towards the feeling subject, I engage with a fourth body of literature which focuses on cultural feminist conceptualisations of affect. Theory here is concerned with the forms in which affect moves and how this movement can solidify facets of itself that can be understood in an embodied way (Kidd, 2021). Through this strand of theory, I explore how by tending to the textures of everyday life and the political contexts through which life is organized, I can better understand the feeling aspects of life during the crisis (Cvetkovich, 2007).

The final strand of theory in the literature review allows me to identify ways of escaping the hopelessness, despair, and teleology of precarious living within the crisis, by finding openings that can enable movement. Following my desire for this thesis to contribute to and engage with other worlds and economies outside the neoliberal and austere of the crisis (Gibson-Graham, 2006), I set out my focus on an activist space of resistance within the landscape of the crisis that is permeated by this potential: that of the social clinic. These

activist spaces and the psychotherapeutic practices embedded in them, allow me to think about capacities for action and movements that are produced by the crisis beyond the despair and immobility of neoliberal rationalities. In the final part of the literature review, I examine literature that enables me to conceptualise the practice of psychotherapy within activist spaces.

2.2. Contextualising the financial crisis

In this part of the literature review, I focus on the particular and the contextual (Mason, 1996) of the economic crisis by engaging with literature that has evolved to address a variety of issues that are specific to the Greek crisis. The scope of this cross-disciplinary body of work that started to emerge at the outset of the crisis in 2010 and continues to grow up to this day, varies in its scope, as it touches upon themes that range from everyday life manifestations of the crisis, to inquiries that are more theoretical in nature. Through my engagement with this literature, my focus lies on identifying some of the crisis' main characteristics and expressions that can enable me to move from an understanding of the crisis as a phenomenon situated in the world of the economy, towards the impact that it has on personal lives. Starting from the storyline of the events that demarcate the crisis and how they unfolded, I will first provide an outline of the crisis' main chapters.

The global economic downturn that started in 2007 with the bursting of the US housing bubble set in motion a series of world-wide economic shockwaves that triggered a period of severe recession and economic decline. However, the most acute effects of this crisis have been felt in Southern Europe and particularly in Greece, giving rise to the Greek debt crisis which began almost a decade ago, but continues to unfold up to the present time (Maris et al., 2021). During this period, the country came close to defaulting on its debt several times and in order to avoid a bankruptcy which seemed imminent, Greek governments have passed numerous austerity bills or rescue packages which provided high interest loans in exchange for structural reforms. In 2010, Greece received its first bailout loan from the European Central Bank, European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund in return for strict austerity measures, followed by another in 2012 and a third one in 2015. In total, Greek governments enacted 12 rounds of tax increases, spending cuts, and reforms from 2010 to 2016, which at times triggered local and nationwide protests, due to the

immense public opposition to these measures (Rotarou & Sakellariou, 2019). Some of these austerity reforms involved job-cuts, slashing social services, reducing wages and pensions, and privatizing public property. These measures led to widespread unemployment, job insecurity, loss of income, social exclusion and to thousands of people leaving the country in search for a better future (Panagiotakopoulos, 2020). These measures have also brought about large-scale social instability and the radical alteration of the country's political landscape, evident in political events such as repeated elections, massive protests and a referendum that left the country deeply divided (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou, 2016). However, the crisis has also been the springboard from which countless activist projects emerged, advancing new forms of solidarity and direct action (Malamidis, 2020).

Overall, the long-term austerity programs implemented in Greece, expressed as restrictive economic policies and the restructuring of the social sector and its policies, have locked the country into a spiral of austerity, recession, and debt. These measures have also impacted upon the public and private life through a decrease of government spending on sectors like health and education (Kentikelenis, 2015).

The crisis seems to profoundly shape various different aspects of life, some of which include health (Kentikelenis et al., 2014), mental health (Stylianidis, 2016) activism and the emergence of social movements (Rakopoulos, 2014), unemployment and austerity (Knight & Stewart, 2016), social violence and the rise of the far right (Angouri & Wodak, 2014), the natural and more than human world (Stavrakakis, 2013), and the transformation of political systems and social policies (Memos, 2010). To further contextualise the crisis and start tracing the ways it touches upon everyday lifeworlds, I will examine some of these aspects more closely through the crisis literature.

2.2.1. Unemployment and poverty

Labour markets have been transformed as a result of structural adjustment policies in Greece, as full-time contracts have been phased out in favour of hourly pay, with minimum monthly salaries falling dramatically (Hermann, 2014). Overall, austerity policies have harmed organized labour and labour rights, reduced government spending and increased financial insecurity (Knight, 2018). Between 2010 and 2021, Greece had one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe, especially in relation to youth unemployment (Eurostat,

2021). These rates would have been much higher had not over half a million Greeks, most of them highly educated, left the country since 2010 (Panagiotakopoulos, 2020). This new period of mass external migration, the so-called brain-drain, has highlighted the country's inability to retain its highly specialized youth workforce, due to low pay, poor working conditions and lack of career opportunities and job stability (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2016). Furthermore, by undergoing many consecutive years of economic contraction, the economy has shrunk and as a result half of the small businesses and companies of the country have closed down. Austerity reforms have increasingly developed a new scale of extreme poverty as the poorest socioeconomic groups struggle to survive and make ends meet (Williams & Vorley, 2015).

2.2.2. Health and mental health

Some of the most vulnerable parts of the population in Greece, like unemployed and pensioners, have become unable to receive proper healthcare as the funding of the public healthcare system has been decreased almost by half since the start of the crisis (Petmesidou et al., 2020). The reforms brought by the austerity measures impact most heavily upon the bodies of the poor who cannot afford private treatment and thus become exposed to injury and disease. The decrease in public health expenditures has left public hospitals struggling with understaffing and lack of medical supplies, even though more people have turned to the public health system as they saw their incomes shrinking (Ifanti et al., 2013). Others have been entirely left out of the healthcare system, as health provision became conditional to employment and access to primary health care has been granted only to those who were able to attain social insurance by being employed. Although this law changed in 2018, at the height of the crisis, more than 2.5 million people have been excluded from the national health system and this number didn't only include the unemployed, but also more invisible lives (Kourkouta et al., 2020). These hidden lives included the informal and precarious workers without contracts, whose occupations are associated with feeble labour conditions and low pay, but also the countless undocumented immigrants and refugees who moved to the country as another harrowing crisis unfolded within the financial crisis: the refugee crisis (Teloni & Mantanika, 2015). This steep cut on public health sector spending was one of the conditions that allowed the country to receive the rescue loans that salvaged its economy (Kentikelenis et al., 2014). These neoliberal

reforms and policies that focused on the economic rather than the human by compromising access to healthcare, indicate how the health care needs of the most vulnerable have been subordinated to the markets.

Approaching health from a perspective of mental-health and wellbeing frameworks, the “psy” disciplines (McAvoy, 2014) have tried to address the steep rise of mental health issues in the context of the crisis, through mostly a correlation of indicators that link socioeconomic factors and mental health issues. These include accounts of fiscal austerity leading to an epidemic of suicides (Kentikelenis et al., 2014) and the negative effects of income-loss on self-esteem (Giotakos et al., 2012). Some authors examine unemployment in the Greek context in connection to major depression (Economou et al., 2012), while others discuss the collateral measures of fiscal adjustment and the widespread financial insecurity they created, in connection to generalised stress and anxiety (Madianos et al. 2014). Some authors in this area explore the emotional components of the crisis rather than focusing on medicalised frameworks of mental health, like Skourteli (2013) who investigates hopelessness in the context of the crisis, or Anagnostopoulos and Soumaki (2012), who suggest that the crisis might signify a sense of loss of control over one’s life. Davou and Demertzis (2013) speak about feelings from a perspective of psychological models that aim to identify the basic emotion types induced by the crisis. Overall, most of these approaches that aim to address the more embodied and feeling aspects of the crisis, either follow a medicalised approach, or involve the unfurling of emotion into a series of dimensions and indicators.

2.2.3. Social movements

In the context of the post-2010 economic crisis, multiple social and solidarity economic networks have appeared as a response to the politics and manifestations of austerity in Greece. Some of these activist networks reject money and profit-oriented standards and aim to create communities of cooperation founded on mutual support and solidarity (Malamidis, 2020). One of the most prominent expressions of these social solidarity networks is connected with the emergence of social clinics and social pharmacies that have been created as a response to the collapse of the public healthcare system and the increasing number of people who have been excluded from it (Cabot, 2016). Alternative

currency movements, exchange networks and clothes banks, are also examples of self-organised mutual support systems that have been created spontaneously from the ground up (Douzina-Bakalaki, 2017). Solidarity has taken many forms and areas of action, including the distribution of material goods, soup kitchens, anti-middleman markets (Rakopoulos 2014; Theodossopoulos, 2016), and, since the outbreak of the refugee crisis, refugee shelters and refugee aid networks (Rozakou, 2016). These networks have also been linked to public protest and social movement mobilizations in Greece (Theodossopoulos et al., 2013).

2.3. Representations and declarations of crisis: In search of a definition

In the previous section, I presented some of the crisis literature that focuses on the particularities of the Greek crisis in order to show how it permeates social structures, and aspects of everyday life, such as social policies, health and mental health, unemployment, and social movements. In doing so, my aim is to move closer to the ways that the crisis is woven into the world of the personal and think about the ways that fiscal policies, emergency austerity measures, but also the economy itself are intricately tied with personal lives.

One of the things that also becomes apparent from this engagement with the crisis literature is a difficulty in providing a unitary and linear account and representation of what the crisis is. To contextualise the crisis, what we mean when we refer to it and how it has permeated life, I focused on the aspects that are usually identified as its most important everyday life indicators in the literature. However, these indicators don't account for the full picture of the social rearrangements that transpired during this period and the smaller stories that are part of them. One example includes the destruction of the woodlands around the urban areas as a result of the dramatic increase in heating oil prices, that turned central heating into a luxury item for many households during the crisis (Sindosi et al., 2019). There are other stories too that have taken place during the crisis, like the entry of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn into the country's parliament in 2012 and the years of racist violence that ensued. In an attempt to understand how this outburst of xenophobia and racist violence occurred, Papageorgiou (2013) writes about the crisis society as one where various losses, such as the loss of social benefits, public goods, and eventually dignity, give rise to powerlessness and the threat of annihilation that leads to aggression.

There are many different crises inside the crisis, as what started as an economic default, has acquired many forms and shapes within everyday life. These multiple expressions of crisis have opened numerous different lines of inquiry that have been approached through diverse disciplinary perspectives. These approaches encompass anthropology (Dalakoglou & Agelopoulos, 2018), political science (Kretsos, 2012), the various branches of the psychological disciplines (Dafermos, 2013; Stylianidis, 2016), and philosophy (Douzinas, 2013). This disciplinary plurality indicates how the crisis evades singular ways of representation, as its far-reaching implications permeate multiple different facets of life that involve different ways of knowing and speaking about the crisis.

Another complication in any attempt to present an all-encompassing definition and a singular representation of the crisis seems to arise from the tendency to either describe it through its real life, everyday manifestations (e.g. poverty, unemployment, mental health) or its assumed causes (e.g. neoliberalism) (Dalakoglou & Agelopoulos, 2018). For instance, while authors like Athanasiou (2018, p. 15) explore the dynamics of neoliberal governmentality and the biopolitics that produce the “economized, but also gendered, sexed, and racialized” subject of the crisis, Kentikelenis et al. (2014) read the crisis through the direct health effects of austerity and the massive reductions in public health expenditure. Picking up on the challenges of communicating the crisis, Dalakoglou and Agelopoulos (2018, p. 1) echo Roitman (2014) and choose to distinguish ethnographic narrations (“first order observations”), that offer insights into the everyday life in the crisis, from explanatory statements (“second order observations”) like Athanasiou’s. There are, however, other analytical approaches that don’t necessarily see such a clear-cut distinction. To give an example, Knight (2012, p. 1) explores peoples’ stories in a small and rather unremarkable Greek town, while examining how narratives of “famine, suicide and colonisation” intersect with issues of power and austerity.

What the disciplinary plurality that surrounds the crisis indicates, besides the difficulty of providing a singular way of representing and defining it, is that the crisis has the capacity to become a “transcendental placeholder” (Roitman, 2014, p. 13) for endless diagnostic and analytical approaches at the centre of which lies the question, “What went wrong?”, “What caused the crisis”? This question matters as implicit in it are other questions, such as who is to blame for the crisis and what should be done to remedy it.

When it comes to the connotations of communicating, but also declaring a crisis, Dalakoglou and his colleagues (2014) approach discourse from a Foucauldian perspective, as the “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1979, p. 44) and draw attention to the particular discourses on which we draw to depict the crisis, as these not only prescribe its meaning and determine how we can think about it, but also point to specific ways of thinking around its causes and resolutions.

In that sense, even the use of the word crisis embodies very particular connotations within the field of economy. As Foucault (2006) suggests, the fact that we are used to seeing the term crisis within economic or political contexts, is due to a much older cultural familiarisation with this concept as a phenomenon of human pathology and physiology, arguing that this analogy of fiscal problems to a diseased condition of the economic system, as opposed to a healthy state of prosperity, is as old as economic discourse itself. Since the outbreak of the 2007 global recession, politicians, bankers, and executives have reassumed this metaphor by using a language where economy is conceptualised as a sick person, in need of an urgent remedy. Through this medical metaphor, the economy is not only seen as a sick person, but more specifically as a sick body, a passive entity whose condition can be regulated by implementing the right decisions (Besomi, 2011).

In a similar manner that a person’s body transforms into a dehumanized object that can be manipulated and eventually cured by experts, by being looked at through a medical gaze (Foucault, 2003), the politicians and economists in the context of the crisis have appeared as wise doctors or surgeons capable of treating and removing these illnesses. The strict reforms and the rescue loans were presented by executives as the only solution to cure the sick Greek economy that was in crisis, and the measures were implemented without consideration for the detrimental ways in which so many lives would be influenced through this process by the experts who knew what was best.

As the global recession progressed and it started to become apparent just how fragile the state of the Greek economy was, this narrative of disease expanded, as it was no longer only the economy that was sick, but the people themselves. Greece became the sick man of Europe and Greeks were depicted as suffering from the “Mediterranean syndrome” (Kretsos, 2012, p. 519), an inherent cultural pathological condition that manifested with

symptoms of extensive tax-evasion, corruption, and the incapacity to implement policies. This lazy, undisciplined and deficient Greek self was directly the one to blame for the economic downturn for mainstream media analysts and economists (Ramphos, 2011). It seems that this discursive construction of the crisis and of the responsibility for its existence played a prominent role in justifying the necessity for the measures. Crises and disasters can offer favourable terrain for instilling neoliberal policies because of an acute emergency that demands swift action (Grove, 2017). Moreover, some would argue that these crises, far from being exceptional, constitute an integral part of our economic system and its expansion and establishment (Klein, 2007). From a perspective of disaster capitalism, these crises offer windows of opportunities for the advancement of neoliberal policy agendas, such as privatisation (Schuller & Maldonado, 2016), which has also been a key component of the structural readjustments that happened in Greece.

On the same grounds of crisis representations, Knight & Stewart (2016) invite us to be mindful of over-ritualised, large-scale accounts of the crisis as a disastrous event with dramatic consequences, surrounded by dramatic bailouts and incomprehensible numbers and definitions that have become so common place. They argue that by focusing on the small instead of the big of the crisis, we leave room for uncertainty, but also movement, by not getting caught up in the aporia that emerges when one comes across massive systemic failures that leave little room for imagining how things could be otherwise.

By problematising what counts as crisis and how the crisis is articulated, my aim is to invite attention to the particular ways in which we choose to represent the crisis, but also the implications of this depiction. The word crisis itself is underlined by medical connotations that imply a particular outlook in relation to responsibility and action. I have also tried to show that the crisis evades singular and all-encompassing representations, as its widespread effects have permeated all sorts of different aspects of everyday life and multiple ways of knowing and speaking about the crisis have become possible. With an awareness of both the plurality and the critical connotations of the crisis, I don't seek to pin down the crisis as one homogenous thing, but I approach it as "many interrelated things" that have deeply altered the social fabric and the texture of everyday life. Thus, I approach the crisis as an event (Roitman 2014, p. 20), a moment during which "forms-of-process that ordinarily

sustain, enable and compose our lives are, disrupted, interrupted, transformed or suspended” (Stenner, 2017, p. 14).

2.4. Putting experience to work: Carving a theoretical path.

In the previous section of the literature review, I provided an outline of the crisis and some of its most defining characteristics encountered in the crisis literature, with a focus on the personal and the ways the crisis permeates social structures, and processes of everyday life. In my search for a definition of the crisis, I also problematised both the act of depicting it through unitary and all-encompassing representations, as well as the act of declaring a crisis, as I highlighted the critical connotations entailed in this process of declaration. With an aim of remaining attentive to the plurality and non-homogeneity of the crisis, I introduced my reasoning for approaching it as many interrelated things that alter and permeate the texture of everyday living. To take a step closer towards the personal within the crisis and delineating my focus, in this part of the literature review I introduce some of my personal experiences and bring them in conversation with theory. By doing that, my aim is to move closer to the ways that the crisis is woven into the world of the personal and think about the ways that fiscal policies, emergency austerity measures, but also the economy itself are intertwined with personal lives.

Finding my way through writing, I share the ambiguities and conflicts that were part of the shaping of my research focus, while engaging with the concepts that encompass this research not as taken for granted forms that I was able to fit neatly into my research.

Rather, by focusing on the “making and unmaking” of my focus and the “arranging, organizing, fitting together” of its different parts (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p.

262), I am thinking about the process of its constitution and the things that become visible because of it (Braidotti, 2011). In this section, I start delineating the key concepts that are part of my research and I move through questions that help me outline their conceptual shape.

Starting from a writing that holds special significance for me, as it reflects part of the journey through which the central concepts that are part of this research started acquiring

their shape and form and the slow process of locating my research focus, I also examine the challenges that came with it. These challenges that were simultaneously personal and theoretical, played a central role in how this thesis and the story that it wishes to tell came into existence. Most importantly, this writing speaks to my deep connection with the topic that this thesis explores.

2.5. The nesting doll

This is a writing about being in an impasse. An impasse that manifests as a renouncement; as lowering my eyes and turning my head away from my own creative processes and their products. I want this writing to be simple, gentle and honest, not a penetrative, forceful excavation that aims to unearth deep-seated problems or revelatory insights. I cried last night, and although I haven't cried since, as I try to get close to these feelings and articulate them, I sense the same waves of pain swelling up. They are mostly made of disappointment. They are made of the piles of papers on my desk that are accumulating through the years. Articles that seem to express only fragments of the story that I wish to tell and that for most part belong to seemingly distant or unrelated families of theory. Ideas that momentarily seem to take shape and rise through the concoction of words and experiences, just to crumble and sink into a formless cold space over the next minute. Arguments and narratives that pile up and stay hidden in the secret corners of desk organisers made of cardboard. Insatiable thoughts that always demand too much time to be metabolised and become words. Thoughts that lament because they never manage to find their way into writing.

I know that personal experience is the secret thread that weaves ideas and breathes life into them, allowing us to create vibrant tapestries of stories and I fear that my repositories of experience are drying up. I no longer occupy this acute space that I used to when I first arrived in Edinburgh, as my body has slowly started to adjust to the rhythm of life here. Many times, I've thought that this is a form of self-protection. You can't keep wounds open just to study them. You can't remain perpetually enraged or feeling like an out of place, forced migrant, just for the sake of writing about it. I have also often thought that perhaps a part of this experience isn't just mine but reflects the transition from the fiery emotional and socio-political uproar of the first years of the crisis, to that of a crisis that has become an

ordinary part of life. Is it possible that this tumultuous and deeply wounded reality has now become an ordinary aspect of the everyday? I listen to my loved ones who are still at home often speaking about an intrinsic sense of numbness that seems to permeate everything and about a dazed self that leans towards withdrawing into the microcosmic realm of the private, as it has become disenchanted and injured by public life. They speak to me of the presence of a wound that remains open. A dangerous, collective wound that you can't get too close to, as you might become weakened in a time when one must possess agility and strength in order to survive. They speak to me about the collapse of the social movements that they were part of and together we wonder if this wound can ever be worked through when collective life is absent. How can we find a language or even the conceptual tools to describe this wound of the crisis without others? Arendt's (1998) says that plurality is the condition that enables action. It is by virtue of plurality that we become capable of acting and relating to others in ways that are unique and distinctive, and in so doing, of contributing to a network of actions and relationships that are vastly complex and unpredictable. For Arendt, this network of actions is what makes up the realm of human affairs; that space where individuals relate directly through language, which she sees as a fundamental form of action. This makes me wonder if a part of my silence and my difficulty to find a coherent language that would describe my research is somehow interwoven with my solitary existence in Edinburgh and the absence of a feeling of belonging to a relational or plural space.

As this writing progresses, I feel that it's becoming gradually disembodied. The feeling of a visceral connection with my own experience and the capacity to put it into words slowly fades. In the back of my head, there is a polyphony of hazy ideas that I can hear chattering from a distance. The loudest one feels sincere, but at the same time quite commonplace and for that somewhat annoying. It speaks of self-care and the ability to gently embrace the self in order to be able to occupy other relational spaces. It speaks to me about the slow eradication of joy from my life that leads to a fragmentation of the expressive means that I possess. It faintly, but insistently speaks to me about kindness and about the deep-seated comfort and sense of release that reside in self-acceptance and gentle gestures of reaching out towards myself and towards others.

2.6. Writing about writing

The title of this writing-the nesting doll-represents the endless theoretical unfolding that I experienced through my engagement with the theoretical areas where the personal meets the political and economic. As I was tapping into one line of inquiry, simultaneously numerous others opened, imbuing my focus with a shapeshifting character that made it difficult to pin down what I wanted to say, but also a sense that there was always more to read and more to know. However, this fuzziness that I experienced when working within this theoretical space, wasn't just because of the blurry edges that many of the ideas included in it have as they traverse different disciplines that approach them through different readings. It was also part of a difficulty of finding an in-between theoretical space that would capture the story that I wished to convey. This research starts from my personal experience, and my desire to share, explore and write about a very particular way in which the personal meets the economic: a space in which feelings and experience are neither solely personal, nor entirely social, but rather reflect an entanglement of the personal, with the political, social, and economic realities of the economic crisis era.

By living in the era of the crisis, one of the most painful experiences that I encountered, was that of long-term unemployment. For me, unemployment became a loss (Butler, 2004). A loss of security, a loss of an income that would enable me to access the world outside the confines of home, a loss of the opportunity to imagine myself differently in the future, a loss of the right to feel that I have the right to occupy a space in the world, as an adult that I felt has failed at adulting. Unemployment became part of the way that I experienced myself. As I took the drastic decision to migrate from Greece to Edinburgh as a way of escaping this dead-end, I became aware of how I continued to carry all these losses with me. These experiences have left a mark on me and have become a part of the way that I related to myself and others. After arriving in Edinburgh, despite the many challenges that came with leaving home behind, I started experiencing for the first time that reality wasn't just a hostile outside, or a force over which I could not exert any control or influence, but rather something that could be shaped by me. In this reality there were openings and there was space to move and to create. However, in the way that I related with these openings that

existed in this reality, there was no joy, but agony as I will try to show through the example that follows.

As I started my MSc in counselling studies during my first year in Edinburgh, I realised that qualitative research was something that I profoundly enjoyed and that I wanted to continue my studies on a PhD level. Instead of taking pleasure in finally not only having a sense of direction in my life, but also having the opportunity to make this a reality, I was overcome with dread. My performance in my studies became more than a desire to do well, or even an object of pressure and anxiety. It became part of a cluster of self-debilitating feelings that constantly whispered to me that nothing good can ever happen to me; none of the things that I desire will ever arrive and that I will soon see this dream crumbling down, as it happened with all the rest; all these dreams that I painfully saw dissipating from the insides of a home during my years of unemployment. Rather than feeling like a cherished personal creation, my master's dissertation became a daunting gatekeeper, a judge to whom I had to prove my value in order to gain access to a better life and avoid returning to all that my previous life as an unemployed person represented. That is, an emotional space in which there was no personal agency, only numbness, failure, defeat, and shattered dreams. Except I never left this space. I was still in it throughout the process of writing and even after I secured a position in the PhD programme. Unemployment has shaped me in a way that this space has become me. It wasn't just my writing or my studies that I related to from a position of pain and uncertainty. The sense of disempowerment I felt during unemployment and the lack of the ability to not only act upon my reality, but the loss of the right to dream how life could be otherwise, have turned into an ever-present sense of defeat that was permeating everything even in this new home. This sense that this intimate part of me has been so profoundly shaped by the experience of unemployment made me start wondering what this shaping was, how it happened but also how it could be described.

While I was still in Greece, instead of being an individual or endemic thing that only happened to me or few others, unemployment materialised collectively on a massive scale, and I saw most of the people around me being unemployed. This hasn't changed, as in 2021 Greece continues to have one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe (Eurostat, 2021). In the context of this socio-political reality, unemployment cannot be thought about

independently, but as being a part of a network of power configurations. Unemployment is just one of the manifestations of a broader social reordering that happened in the crisis through the imposition of austerity measures and other reforms that altered the social fabric of living that made life so precarious for many. Rather than being an abstract reality, for me, this was directly linked to the way that I experienced myself. This experience wasn't just about unemployment, but about a way of being in the world during the crisis, a way of being in a world where political and economic power in the form of financial agreements and state policies have so aggressively colonised various aspects of life, that the thought that things could ever change became unthinkable; a way of being where lives have been overturned and reconfigured to insure that debts will be honoured and repaid; a way of being in which life has become indebted (Lazzarato, 2011), and where a framework of living has been created to guarantee the production of spaces through which these state policies could function (Foucault, 2008). In that sense, the experience of unemployment for me was more about a feeling that I was inhabiting an enclosure. A space made of dead-ends and closed doors where the feeling of hope about the future was incapacitated, as life deprived of its possibilities and potentialities has become bare (Agamben, 1998). At the same time this feeling space of unemployment was made of an ever-present sense of insecurity that took many different forms, but mostly those of vulnerability and exposure to a precarious way of life (Allison, 2016; Butler & Athanasiou, 2013; Puar, 2012; Tsianos & Papadopoulos, 2006) which interlaced a lived sense of economic insecurity and the material reality of living without any form of protection.

2.7. Governmentality, power, and the subject

Part of this intimate shaping that I wanted to describe and which I embodied after leaving home, was about power, about living in the world of the crisis, understood as a "distinct assemblage of power, subjectivation and neoliberal governmentality, through which the ever-present emergency of crisis, with all its accompanying affective apparatuses of fear and insecurity, are used to legitimize the necessity of managing uncertainty and establishing a new and secure normality" (Athanasiou, 2018, p. 16). As I was trying to locate my research focus, I became aware that part of this shaping that I was trying to describe was about the self that is subjugated and at the same time made through power (Foucault, 1982).

Moreover, it was about a self that is not just shaped by a singular experience, like that of unemployment, but through a broader and more all-encompassing condition of precarity that is produced by the crisis (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). What I was trying to describe was a shaping of the self through power, within the crisis, as an assemblage of intricate social connections that couldn't be reduced to a single case, as this assemblage was made of different but overlapping realities that interfered with one another and consisted of "complex and messy" relations (Law 2004, p. 61). As I mentioned earlier, it was impossible for me to reduce this vague, yet painful sense of self that I acquired by being unemployed just to unemployment. This selfhood was more about a precarious way of being into a world where austerity politics besides revoking my access to the workplace, they were also creating a crisis-scape (Dalakoglou et.al., 2014), in which all sorts of aspects of social life were reshaped by being subjected to neoliberal financial logics. Much like a nesting doll, this becoming that I wanted to capture was about being unemployed, while being surrounded by close-ones and not so close ones who did not have enough to go by in their daily lives, while being excluded from the healthcare system, and about countless other little dolls. How could I describe this shaping?

Stepping into the area of governmentality studies, I started seeing various connections that resonated with what I was interested in, as a main topic of interest in this field concerns the way subjects are governed and produced through institutional practices (Dean, 2009; Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1998). For Foucault (2007, p. 108), governmentality concerns the conduct of conduct:

The ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculation, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument (Foucault, 2007, p. 108).

Thus, from a governmental theories' perspective, this shaping that I am looking to describe could be understood as subjectification, understood as the product of the relations between

practices of governance and social control, and sociohistorical shifts in ways of relating to the self (Rose, 1996). Foucault describes subjectification's operation in the following way:

[It] operates as a form of power that applies itself to immediate and everyday life, which categorizes individuals and attaches them to their own identity, imposes a law of truth on them that they and others must recognize in them – a form of power that makes individuals subjects – and submits them to others in this way (Foucault, 1986, p. 212).

Alongside these diverse forms of governance that produce the self, there is also biopower as a fundamental component in the expansion of neoliberal economic systems that enables “the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” (Foucault, 1978, p. 140-141). This focal point in Foucault's theory concerning the way in which individuals are governed, not simply through policies or an ideology that can be challenged and refuted, touches upon how our lives and subjectivities are formed. The framework of governmentality that encompasses this constitution of subjects as the conduct of conduct, refers to the “the acting on the actions of individuals, taken either singly or collectively, so as to shape, guide, correct and modify the ways in which they conduct themselves” (Burchell, 1996, p.19). In that sense, Foucault defines governmentality, in a rather broad way that surpasses state politics:

This word [government] must be allowed the very broad meaning it had in the sixteenth century. “Government” did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed – the government of children, of souls, of communities, of the sick [...]. To govern, in this sense, is to control the possible field of action of others (Foucault, 1986, p.221).

Thus, this concept encompasses a wide range of control techniques which simultaneously connect politics with forms of power that delineate the potential spheres of the operation of the self, along with its range of possibilities. The conduct of conduct, hence, applies not

only to the manner in which one governs himself, and allows oneself to be governed, but ultimately, in the way in which one acts and thinks. On the basis of the above ideas governmentality can be described as a process through which a form of government with particular goals and means to achieve them, produces a specific kind of subject, within the nexus of different modes of power. Another important aspect of governmentality in relation to the constitution of the subject and Foucault's understanding of ruling techniques of power in connection to self-discipline and self-control is based on the following idea:

Governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself (Foucault, 1993, pp. 203–204).

Thus, governmentality can be thought of as a process that is inwardly held and not only as system of power in which individuals, bodies, and objects are subjected to, but also actively participate in its construction through their self-construction. In that sense, at the centre of Foucault's theory of governmentality lies an understanding of power as productive of the self and as working in parallel to technologies of power. Drawing on Foucault, Rose describes technologies of power as "technologies imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired ones" (Rose, 1999, p. 52). Part of these technologies of power are also the technologies of the self and the technologies of the market. These technologies aren't entirely separate, as they take pieces from each other. Technologies of the market revolve around the purchasing and selling of products that enable individuals define who they are or want to be, whereas technologies of the self, refer to the production of the self as a specific kind of subject (Burchell, 1993). Thus, for Foucault, the way that individuals are made subjects within the matrix of technologies of power and of the self could be described in the following way:

Technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject [...] technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others

a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Martin et al., 1988, p. 18).

This account reflects Foucault's examination of power in its many forms. In investigating these different forms of power, Foucault (1979) observes that organizations also exert power on subjects through disciplinary practices and the roles that they ascribe to them, and he names this particular form of power discipline. Through the operation of these disciplinary practices, that can be seen in everyday institutional conventions, like for instance determining who was the right to speak and under what conditions, their circulation exceeds the social settings in which they are exercised, as they become internalised by subjects.

This internalization of disciplinary practices and norms is further developed by Foucault by focusing on the productive rather than constraining and repressive aspects of power. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1990) emphasizes how practices and knowledge are imbued with productive capacities that allow them to generate subjectivities and ways of being in the world. He describes this type of power that works together with disciplinary power and predominantly operates by engendering and regulating life forces as biopower (Foucault, 1990). Biopower is a form of power that targets the lives of populations and individuals through the management of "their environment" and of "the milieu in which they live" (Foucault, 2003, pp. 242–245). As a technology of power, biopower sets the "rules of the game" within the different settings where the subject operates (Foucault, 2008, pp. 259–260) and functions by "fostering the life of human beings as living, working and social subjects" (Dean, 1999, p. 99). The techniques of biopower take charge of life, by inciting, controlling, monitoring, optimizing and organizing it (Foucault, 1978) and applying themselves to everyday living and the processes in which subjects are categorised and become attached to their own identities (Foucault, 1986).

2.7.1 Neoliberal governmentality and the subject

Governmental perspectives of subjectification express a way of linking politics, the economy and subjectivity that offers me a helpful framework for thinking around the connections

between the self and the crisis, particularly in relation to how power becomes internalised and embodied and how people turn into subjects as the effects of, and in relation to, power. By examining the particular ordering of social life enabled by the crisis, I can think about the various forms of subjecthood and identity that are made possible or impossible. Can one think about and recognise oneself as a subject that is entitled to fundamental social rights like healthcare, livelihood and security during the crisis or has this become unthinkable? Within the context of the crisis, is there even any space left to think about the self differently and outside rationalities that justify a perpetually precarious way of belonging to the world?

At the same time, the debt, unemployment and economic hardship that made life precarious for me and those around me, point towards a framework of operation of socio-political powers and techniques that have the market economy at their centre. For instance, through the imposition of austerity measures that were justified on the grounds of debt, long term austerity and social policy readjustment programs were imposed in Greece that locked the country into a spiral of recession. Furthermore, these programs called for restrictive economic policies, which impacted upon the public and private life, through tax increases, reductions in salaries and pensions, a decrease of government spending on sectors like health and education, and extensive privatisation, among others austerity policies (Ifanti et al., 2013). These state practices, programs and agreements that have radically restructured living in Greece, can be seen as an expression of neoliberal politics in action. Furthermore, these strategies and imperatives not only encompass both politics and economics to conform to the criteria of the markets, but infiltrate even the most mundane and private aspects of everyday life (MacLeavy, 2019). After providing the outlines of Foucault's theory of governmentality, I will now turn to neoliberalism and neoliberal governmentality in order to think about the production of the neoliberal self in the context of the crisis.

Neoliberalism is more commonly defined as a transposable and adaptable object, rather than a monolithic, set, and static entity (Ong, 2006). As Brown (2005) argues, since the strategies and policies identified with it are sites of confrontation and power relations that change depending on the context, neoliberalism is mobile, rather than unified, although it is

encompassed by a shared logic that refers to the expansion of market rationality to nonmarket realms (Brown, 2005). Centeno and Cohen (2012) have described neoliberalism from three main perspectives: as a set of economic theories and practices that promote fiscal austerity, market-determined interests and privatization of public property, as a system of political power, and as a discourse or a system of thought that has the ability to deeply pervade and shape our cultural and social life. The first vantage point from which neoliberalism can be described for Centeno and Cohen (2012) applies to the technical policies regarding the operation of the economy that closely resemble those that have been implemented in Greece. These policies advance strict austerity and privatisation, while prioritising the requirements of the markets over those of people. The second point involves political choices and strategies that entail the sacrifice of the welfare state. Economic redistribution, government-guaranteed economic stability, publicly run utilities, government protection and the provision of secure employment, are denounced and assailed within a neoliberal framework, thus impairing the well-being of large groups of people, while granting exceptional wealth and opportunities for few. The last analytical arc of neoliberalism described by Centeno and Cohen (2012), addresses neoliberalism as a cultural project or a system of thought. This perspective entails the integration of neoliberalism into the self and the inadvertent transformation of subjects into causal agents who are responsible for its survival, in order to secure the goals of markets, private interests, and governments in the long run. From this perspective, neoliberalism as a process that extends beyond the fiscal aspect of economic activity, can be seen as providing a general matrix in which market relations expand to remould subjectivity, by aligning the trajectories of personal aspirations and desires with those of the market.

Within Foucault's (1982, p. 208) project of studying "the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects", he has examined neoliberalism not just as a manner of governing states or economies, but as a process that is intimately tied to the government of the individual and to a particular way of living life:

In neo-liberalism [...] there is also a theory of homo economicus, but he is not at all a partner of exchange. Homo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. This is true to the extent that, in practice, the stake in all neo-liberal analyses

is the replacement every time of homo economicus as partner of exchange with a homo economicus as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (Foucault, 2008, pp. 225-226).

Here, Foucault describes neoliberalism as a governmental rationality that is defined by generalizing the market's economic logic to all aspects of life and redefining culture and human existence in economic terms. Rationality here can be understood as a “systematic way of thinking about government” (Dean, 1999, p. 211) and a process of making government objects thinkable, while making them susceptible to action, measurement, and programming (Rose & Miller, 1992). Neoliberalism, seen as a form of governmentality, operates by installing a concept of the human subject as an autonomous, individualised, and self-directing unit (Larner, 2003). From this perspective, the autonomous individual sees itself as disembedded from any social and political structures and understands the self as the primary source of any achievement or failure. Furthermore, the reorganization of all human activity and social relations around the concept of enterprise is a central aspect of this economization. Therefore, neoliberal governmentality aims to amplify the enterprise form encouraging people to think of themselves as “enterprise-units” and “enterprises for themselves” (Foucault, 2008, p. 225; McNay, 2009).

This theorization concerning the formation of the neoliberal subject, focuses on the re-configuration of people as consumers and on the production of a particular kind of individualized subjectivity, which due to the internalization of neoliberal forms of governance has become self-regulated in order to comply with them in both public and private spaces (Sorrells, 2009). Neoliberalism as a particular governing rationality or governmentality that expands “a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life” (Brown, 2015, p. 30), while expanding the concept of enterprise form to all social relations, including human subjectivity (Foucault, 2008, p. 241), has been examined by a number of scholars (Dean, 1999; Hamann, 2009; Read, 2009). Some of the characteristics of this entrepreneurial culture or market logic within a framework of neoliberal governmentality include a mode of self-conduct where the subject is encouraged to become more autonomous, flexible and responsible (Burchell,

1993). Responsibility here can be seen in connection to privatisation not just as the policies or strategies that are used to privatise the public sector, but as an aspect of a particular form of neoliberal governmentality that Harvey (2005) defines as accumulation by dispossession: a way of being where everything becomes privatized, including institutions, structures, economic policies, but also the self that becomes able to operate in a context of individualized responsibility and reward (Harvey, 2005). This process of neoliberal subjectification is carried out largely by institutional mechanisms, rather than by just a mere acceptance of neoliberal statements and incentives. For instance, many social entities, such as welfare, healthcare and education services or the labour market, are entrenched in the key frameworks and practices that underpin neoliberalism, such as individual responsibility and competitiveness (Dardot & Laval, 2014). As the participation in these institutions accords to people "their roles, relationships, resources, and routines", these principles that they embody become established, and certain kinds of subjects are created (Lawrence et al., p. 53).

2.8. Judith Butler and the precarious subject

While treading through the area governmentality theory, I experienced an increasing sense of tension that wouldn't go away: I wanted to talk about something which was much more intimate and personal and I also wanted to do that from a theoretical space that would allow me the liberty to move freely and openly. In my notes from this period, I write about: *Inhabiting a place of silence and scattered/non-cohesive storylines/ a broken place; an enclosed space whose boundaries I'm trying to understand by sensing what they're made off. A wall, whose texture I am trying to caress in order to discover cracks and openings.*

This research emerged from a feeling, or feelings in the plural, which although fuzzy and difficult to articulate, were part of my experiences of living in the world of the crisis and it was imperative for me to speak about this from a place of a visceral connection with my own feelings and experiences. Not only was it necessary for me to speak about feelings in order to continue moving and writing, but this research was about feelings, as much as it was about power.

Foucault has not directly addressed emotions in his work and as Tamboukou (2003) suggests this refusal to theorize emotions can be seen within an unwillingness to accept any universal or primordial notion of human essence. For Foucault, emotions can be understood as symbolical concepts that are historically and culturally construed "in the process of the emergence of 'the man' as an object of psycho-scientific discourses and knowledges" (Tamboukou, 2003, p. 211). Therefore, from a Foucauldian perspective, emotions can be discussed as an effect of power/knowledge relations that are involved within a cultural, sociohistorical and political context.

Did this mean that by talking about something that is felt, I am eliciting a "politics of self-affirmation" that is putting forth a "notion of subjectivity as transparent and ultimately knowable" (Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006, p. 4)? That by speaking about feelings, I am claiming that subjectivity can be seen and known in a non-opaque and finite way? My goal, however, has never been to uncover a truth about the self, or a true self, nor to unearth an essentialist emotional core, but to understand more, and speak about a non-static subject that is on the move, as it stands somewhere in-between the public and the private; an intimate shaping that can be sensed, but can't be reduced to one thing.

In my search for spaces that can allow me to be attentive to the power dynamics of the crisis, yet still be able to speak about what the self feels, I turned to Judith Butler. For her, the process of becoming a subject is also a process of becoming subordinated by power, as she sees subjection as a necessary condition for the existence of the subject and as working in and through the psychic life of the subject (Butler, 1997). Furthermore, Butler and Athanasiou (2013) understand the economy as a process through which subjects are formed and reformed by pertaining to particular forms of social interactions and relationships. In that sense, the economic, they argue, can never be seen as being merely about the economic, meaning that within the economic crisis there are personal, social, material and emotional losses that are part of complex and nuanced processes of the self and its becoming. This can be illustrated by the concept of dispossession, seen as a condition which includes loss of livelihood, citizenship, shelter, food, protection, and a broader belonging to the world, which simultaneously describes the psychic conditions that determine "which 'passionate attachments' are possible and plausible for one to become a subject" (Butler &

Athanasίου, p. 1). The passionate here refers to that which isn't fully conscious, and which depends on our relationship with environments and others who sustain and drive the life of the self.

For Butler, the process of becoming a subject takes place within complex collective constructions that leave particular tracks in the subject and have the potential of manifesting themselves in emotions (Butler, 2015). These processes of becoming, speak of an I that's always entangled with power and culture and of a relational subject that cannot really be thought about as being separate from a we (Butler, 1997). On the other hand, Butler suggests that being socially constituted opens us up to pain and vulnerability, as we become ourselves through our attachments, and we are always at risk of losing these attachments to other people, or things of the social world. In her words:

It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. If I lose you [...] then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well (Butler, 2003, p. 12).

Much like Foucault, for Butler, power does not only form the subject but also provides the very conditions of its existence and the trajectory of its desire. However, to argue that persons as subjects are formed by power, does not mean that there are no real bodies, pains, pleasures, desires and emotions, but it does mean that the reality of these bodies, pains, pleasures, and desires depends on being experienced as such (Thiem, 2008). In that sense, experiencing something always necessarily entails the interpretation of this experience that makes it available as experience. By applying Butler's take on subjectivation, I can think about the precarious subject that emerges through the exercise of power and the unique social and economic realities and transformations of the crisis, while also examining stories and experiences of suffering, loss and vulnerability, as long as I think about how these stories are permeated by power.

In order to discuss what she identifies as conceptual shortcomings in Foucault's description of power and subjectivity, in the *Psychic Life of Power*, Butler asks: "what is the psychic form that power takes"? (Butler, 1997, p. 2). For her, these shortcomings revolve around Foucault's insufficient elaboration on "the specific mechanisms of how the subject is formed in submission", his lack of engagement with the "domain of the psyche" and the omission of "power in this double valence of subordinating and producing" (Butler, 1997, p. 2). She then addresses this question by developing her theory in three parts. The first part focuses on the theory of the infantile passionate attachments where she draws on the psychoanalytic idea that the child is born incapable of self-care, and, hence, has a dependent attachment to others. Butler (1997) suggests that because of this dependence, the relationship between the child and the parent is always structured by power and on the basis of this reliance, a child exists in a relationship of submission to them. Second, for Butler, the theory of the normative regulation of those attachments entails "foreclosure" as the psychic mechanism that "structures the forms which any attachment may assume" (Butler, 1997, p.24). Here, Butler connects the psychoanalytic concept of foreclosure to "the Foucauldian notion of a regulatory ideal", hence reconceiving foreclosure "as an ideal according to which certain forms of love become possible, and others, impossible" (Butler, 1997, p. 25). From this perspective, foreclosure operates as an ideal that allows some forms of attachment but not others, and so functions as an internalized social sanction upon object choice. Butler sees heterosexuality as the regulatory ideal, and a homosexual same-sex object choice as the forbidden attachment that is foreclosed. Third, by examining the formation of the melancholic subject, Butler suggests that since heterosexual identity is established by the foreclosure of homosexual attachment, it has a melancholic structure, and that this "ungrieved and ungrievable loss" produces the melancholia of heterosexual subject (Butler, 1997, p.138).

In the *Psychic Life of Power*, Butler positions her work between Freud and Foucault as she suggests that to comprehend the relation between power and subjectivity what is required is a working at the intersections of theories of power and the psyche, or put differently in-between Foucauldian and psychoanalytic thought. However, as Campbell (2001) rightly points out, although Butler situates her theory of the psychic life of power at the interchange between Foucauldian and psychoanalytic theory, Foucault and Freud address

different conceptual problems in her account of subject formation and she uses these theories for different purposes. As Campbell (2001) suggests, Butler's main problematic is Foucauldian and requires a theory of the operation of power and a political theory of the subject, and to that end, she uses Foucault's theory of power, whereas she uses certain elements of psychoanalytic theory to offer a theory of the psychic life of the subject.

Although Butler's theory of the psyche offers a political account of its composition that is closely linked to power and, in that sense, is very relevant to my interest in economic power and its impact on the subject, I also recognise that my interest also lies in feelings and experiences that are more rooted in everyday life. In her later work, Butler focuses on grief, the separation between grievable and less grievable lives and the hierarchical structures of public mourning (Butler, 2009), to not only reveal how all of us are confronted with our own vulnerability but constituted by it: "each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies [...]. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (Butler, 2004, p. 20). By emphasising the need to attend to vulnerability, Butler explores the intricate connections between violence, grief and vulnerability, to highlight that we are socially constituted and that our psychic lives are entangled with the social and political world. Here, Butler rather than offering an overarching account of psychic formation, as she did in the *Psychic Life of Power*, is more focused on working with specific ideas and concepts that are more broadly enveloped by the psychic or are in its vicinity. In *Frames of War*, Butler (2009) broadens her scope of injurability, vulnerability, interdependency and precariousness, to further interlace bodily vulnerability with its political connotations as she writes:

That responsiveness [to the world] may include a wide range of affects: pleasure, rage, suffering, hope, to name a few. Such affects, I would argue, become not just the basis, but the very stuff of ideation and of critique. [...] Hence, precariousness as a generalized condition relies on a conception of the body as fundamentally dependent on, and conditioned by, a sustained and sustainable world; responsiveness-and thus, ultimately, responsibility-is located in the affective responses to a sustaining and impinging world (Butler, 2009, p. 34).

Here, as Butler explores the different affective reactions to suffering, she starts to engage with affect theory, while also drawing on Ahmed and other authors from the broader field of cultural feminist theory. Precariousness, here, is portrayed as a sociopolitical condition that emerges from the exposure to others and their suffering, while networks of social and political affect are depicted as holding these grievable and non-grievable lives together (Zembylas, 2020). For Braunmühl (2012, p. 222), this framing of affect and emotion by Butler implies a number of things, including that we are bound to others in virtue of our emotional ties to them, but also that Butler's writings have undergone an "emotional turn" over time.

Through this engagement with grief or suffering and broadly what could be described as the more affective components of Butler's work, I see theoretical openings that can offer me an entry point into a space of exploration of feelings and experiences in connection to the crisis. In this theoretical space, affect and emotions are not regarded as "pre-social, pre-ideological and pre-discursive psychological and individual states" (Athanasίου et al., 2009, p. 5), but as being localized, context-specific, situated and embedded in psycho-social operations of power.

2.9. Cultural feminist theory and affect

In my search for spaces that can allow me to be attentive to the power dynamics of the crisis, yet still be able to speak about the felt in the context of everyday experiences of the crisis, I started delving deeper into cultural feminist conceptualisations of affect. Theory here is attentive to the ways in which affect may move and on how its movement may begin to solidify aspects of itself that can be grasped in an embodied way (Kidd, 2021). Ann Cvetkovich's work (2012) provides an illustration of this theoretical space, as she explores depression not as a medical phenomenon, but as a cultural and political one, which is produced by and reflects the textures and shapes of late capitalist society. For her, depression seen as a public feeling, is a keyword that describes the "affective dimensions of ordinary life in the present moment" (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 11), that represents what neoliberalism and globalisation "feel like". Although the concept of affect is present in her

work, she favours more the term feeling, as it is “intentionally imprecise” and retains “the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 4). By focusing on feelings that could be described as public, namely depression, Cvetkovich interest lies in everyday life and in the ways that global politics and history are expressed at the level of lived affective experience, in a way that interlaces history, politics and the personal. For her, public feelings (Cvetkovich, 2007) can be understood as a term or a category that brings together feelings and the political, which at the same time questions how a separation between the domains of the public and the private has restricted feeling life to the personal and private realm.

In an *Archive of Feelings* (2003), Cvetkovich also focuses on trauma and loss from a perspective of the everyday and the insidious, in order to trouble distinctions between private and public loss. Cvetkovich (2003) argues that what counts as national or public trauma is always what is more noticeable, what is newsworthy and dramatic, in comparison to the small dramas of the everyday that call attention to how systemic forms of violence are lived out and how their invisibility or normalization can be yet another aspect of their oppressiveness. Thus, for Cvetkovich (2007), the ambiguity of the term public feelings can enable the organic generation of different languages of affect from within their particular histories that discourages the imposition of categories established in other contexts. This can allow new vocabularies for thinking about how historical and political trauma finds its way into daily life.

Located within the same broader theoretical family, Sara Ahmed (2010, p. 30) speaks about emotions and argues: “I do not assume there is something called affect (or for that matter emotion), that stands apart or has autonomy; as if it corresponds to an object in the world [...] Instead, I would begin with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what comes near”. For Ahmed (2004b, p. 5), emotion rather than being a personal property is “a feeling of bodily change”. Ahmed (2004b, p. 6-8) also argues that “emotions are not ‘in’ either the individual or the social but produce the surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects”. On these grounds, Ahmed (2010) has developed a theory of cultural politics of emotion and affective economies that interweaves emotions, language and bodies while paying close attention to the intersections of

categories such as social class, sexuality and nation. Emotions, according to Ahmed (2010), are not possessions of subjects or objects, but rather act to assign affective value through their circulation between subjects and objects as part of an affective economy. In affective economies, emotions get stuck to specific subjects, objects, or spaces over time, just as monetary value becomes attached to assets in a capitalist economy (Ahmed, 2004a). This enables them to “align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments” (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 119).

From a closely situated theoretical perspective, Lauren Berlant (2011) writes about cruel optimism, a concept that connects present day neoliberal politics with affect, mainly through an exploration of fantasy, attachment and feeling. Speaking about fantasies of the good life that have become unachievable within the present-day economic reality, Berlant (2011) speaks about our continued attachment to fantasies like economic security as a form of what she defines as cruel optimism. At the same time, she suggests that the break out from cruel optimism, takes place within the political, which she defines as “that which magnetises a desire for intimacy, sociality, affective solidarity, and happiness” (Berlant 2011, p. 252). This break out that brings the subject into a Kleinian depressive position, from which it is possible to acknowledge “the broken circuit of reciprocity between herself and her world but who, refusing to see that cleavage as an end as such, takes it as an opportunity to repair both herself and the world” (Berlant, 2011, p. 259). Therefore, her conceptualisation of change is primarily connected to the ideas of togetherness, sociality and action, as opposed to resignation and a passive recognition that life has been organised around the futile pursuit of objects that can never be obtained. At the same time, Berlant writes about precarity as a public, collectively shared feeling, which for her provides the prevailing structure of experience of the present and spans across different social classes and locations:

[..] Descriptions of the affected populations veer wildly from workers in regimes of immaterial labor and the historical working class to, well, everyone whose bodies and lives are saturated by capitalist forces and rhythms. In what sense, then, is it accurate to call this phenomenon a new global *class*—one that has indeed been termed the *precariat*? This emergent taxonomy raises questions about to what degree precarity is an economic and political condition suffered by a population or by the subjects of

capitalism generally; or a way of life; or an affective atmosphere; or an existential truth about contingencies of living, namely, that there are no guarantees that the life one intends can or will be built (Berlant, 2011, p. 191).

Overall, this particular theoretical branch of affect theory highlights that what is felt “is neither internally produced nor simply imposed on us from external ideological structures” (Rice, 2008, p. 205). Instead, what is felt is always entangled with the dynamics, reorganizations, and re-articulations of power, history and politics (Athanasίου et al., 2008). In that sense, all the authors presented here, develop their ideas on the basis of feeling not as something that is merely individual or psychological, but rather as a reflection of a socio-political and historical reality that is rooted in the experiential. Furthermore, these theories suggest that affect shapes individual and collective bodies, so studying a feeling like depression necessitates an examination of how affects reproduce prevailing social and political power structures and systems, modes of domination, and exclusion (Zembylas, 2016).

In the context of the economic crisis, this close connection between collective feelings and operations of power can be seen in several examples. For instance, the widespread tactics of fear employed by media, European Institutions and states during the crisis, have evoked feelings of danger and of an impending ontological threat (Douzinas, 2013), on the premise of which it has become possible to pass the emergency austerity bills, which reshaped so many aspects of everyday life. On the other hand, a framework that has the idea of national identity at its core has become prevalent in public discourses that attribute the financial breakdown to the nature of Greeks as undisciplined and lazy citizens (Mylonas, 2014). In this narrative, the category of greekness has been conceptualized as a homogenous entity, thus afflicting a whole nation with a disarming sense of responsibility for the bleak circumstances that it had to endure. Walsh and Tsilimbounidi (2014, p.146) describe some of the wider discourses that have been circulating in international media in their performative paper:

Tenacious non-compliance;
Fraternizing with international bankers;
Clientelism;
Unrepentant laziness;

Handing-out early pensions;
Tax-evasions;
Sun-baked decadence (2014, p.146).

Thus, shame and guilt have been employed on one hand in order to legitimise radical impoverishment, unemployment or the eradication of social rights and on the other, to prevent acts of resistance and non-compliance (Stavrakakis, 2013). As these discourses started to surface, feelings operated as a key component to the imposition of the political project of the crisis (Psyllacou, 2021). Investigating some of these feelings within the context of the crisis, Davou and Demertzis (2013, pp. 93–105) take note of how the media has consistently used crisis explanations and depictions of “negative emotional discourse” that “includes conditions of anger, rage, wrath, anxiety, fear, threat, distrust and depression”, connecting the crisis to “trauma” and “shock” which induces a sense of “numbness” and “inaction”.

2.10. Social clinics, activism, and diverse economies

In the nesting doll writing that I presented earlier, I started narrating my experience of stillness and the sense of being at an impasse. This sense seems connected not only to inhabiting a space in which theory becomes fragmented and requires a piecing together, but also to a standstill that feels like an intrinsic part of the process of experiencing, thinking and writing about neoliberalism and the crisis. Neoliberalism and austerity have the capacity to generate hopelessness, despair and the teleology of precarious living that is reduced to being just that: a life that gets lived although it is not leading particularly anywhere (Stewart, 2012; Brown, 2015). This impasse makes it imperative for me to approach my topic from a perspective that retains hope, possibility, and the capacity to imagine a way of being that extends beyond the despair and immobility of neoliberal rationalities. Drawing on Gibson-Graham, I wonder:

What if we believed, that the goal of theory was not only to extend and deepen knowledge by confirming what we already know—that the world is full of cruelty, misery, and loss, a place of domination and systemic oppression? What if we asked

theory to do something else—to help us see openings, to help us to find happiness, to provide a space of freedom and possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 7)?

Holding these questions close to me, I started thinking about this study as a tiny act of resistance (Rodriguez-Dorans et al., 2021), an activist project that wishes to disrupt the existing economic world by contributing to social justice (Denzin & Giardina, 2011), by looking for openings from which hope might emerge and the potential for the appearance of the unexpected. Following my desire for this study to contribute to and engage with other worlds and other economies that extend beyond the neoliberal and the austere of the crisis, I identified an activist space that has been created within the landscape of the crisis which expresses this potential: that of the social clinic.

Social clinics are a grassroots solidarity movement that emerged during the crisis in order to cover essential healthcare needs within a shattered public health system that suffered enormously as a result of the structural adjustment programmes in Greece (Teloni & Adam, 2018). As the Greek national health system started to collapse, mainly due to decreased government spending, while millions of people became excluded from it due to their lack of employment and thus social insurance (Teloni & Adam, 2018), social clinics were created through volunteer initiatives to cover these needs. Although social clinics operate differently on the basis of the community in which they are located and the goals of those involved, they all operate under the same principle of voluntarism, as they are staffed by volunteers who offer healthcare services free of charge (Cabot, 2016).

Teloni and Adam (2018) differentiate the social clinics that emerged from social movements and those developed by institutional actors. In their research, they discovered that almost half of the social clinics derived by initiatives that are connected to social movements, while the rest are associated with municipalities, third sector organizations, medical associations, union of hospital doctors and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The rise of the social clinics was an attempt to address the unmet healthcare needs of people who have been excluded by the national health system, but at the same time some of these clinics have political underpinnings. Social clinics that have their origins in social movements emphasize their dual role as providers of health care services and as advocacy channels for solidarity and some of these organizations arose in the wake of the anti-austerity movement (Kotronaki &

Christou, 2019). Thus, as Vaiou and Kalandides (2015) suggest, some social clinics involve wider discussions around issues of living, advancing political demands around essential needs, combating austerity, and engaging differently with politics.

The social clinics that have branched out of the anti-austerity movement share some of its organizing principles and techniques, such as an endorsement of practices that are centred around decentralised direct democratic processes that are aimed towards an even distribution of power, shared responsibility, and open communication (Kioupkiolis & Katsambekis, 2014). For instance, the social clinics that operate within this framework, base their decision-making processes on general assemblies which lie at the center of the organization, as a collective decision-making body and as an ethically preferable means that ensures all participants can be heard and take responsibility for decision making (Evlampidou & Kogevinas, 2019).

The dominant health specialty in social clinics comprises of doctors, whose areas of expertise encompass the whole medical field (Evlampidou & Kogevinas, 2019). Some clinics include other specialists, such as nurses, social workers, dentists and midwives, while volunteers from the community can also provide administrative support to the social clinics (Cabot, 2016). At the same time, as Charis and Teloni (2017) note, the psychosocial effects of the economic crisis have created new requirements for care provision, to which many of the social clinics responded by providing psychotherapeutic services free of charge as part of their health provision strategy. Charis and Teloni (2017) observe that despite the increase in mental health issues and the growing prevalence of social concerns that amplify them within the crisis, the impact of austerity policies on the provision of mental health services in Greece has been severe. Social and mental health services have been under growing financial strains as they try to meet rising demands while working with shrinking funding (Christodoulou, 2017). Thus, the psychotherapeutic interventions that were established as part of the social clinics, operate under the shared commitment to respond to those in need of support, within the reality of an unresponsive public health system and their inability to access it through the private sector (Charis & Teloni, 2017).

2.10.1. Focus on social clinics

Social clinics are a representation of what Gibson-Graham (2006) call diverse economies: spaces in which alternative economic activities and practices are performed through connections of interdependence and egalitarian participation. For Gibson-Graham (2006, p. 36) activism within this framework involves an active process of “resubjectivation” through “the mobilization and transformation of desires, the cultivation of capacities that make identifications with other worlds and economies possible”. Within this framework of activist practices, precarity, vulnerability and agency aren’t mutually exclusive, as loss can be imbued with the ability to resist, act and live (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). From this perspective, the multiple losses experienced in the context of neoliberalism and austerity can be seen as offering a performative condition for both being affected by injuries and being prompted to act.

Activism can be seen as going against dominant rationalities and practices that ascribe to capitalist realism (Fisher, 2012) and the logic that there are no viable alternatives outside the current economic system and no space for imagining how life could be lived differently. In that sense, social clinics are a site that can offer me an exit point from the standstill of despair and immobility of neoliberal rationalities and the economic crisis. At the same time, the activist practices they employ can provide me with an opportunity to approach my subject from a place of possibility and of the capacity to envision how the crisis and the multiple experiences of precarity it entails, can also produce a different way of being.

The enactment of non-neoliberal economic politics that push back dominant logics and practices, like the ones expressed in social clinics, can be understood as a venture on a project of ethical self-transformation (Foucault’s, 1996). Drawing on Foucault, Gibson-Graham (2006), argue that by joining a group of community economy, like the social clinic, means to engage in new ethical practices of the self that create new senses of selfhood, as the connections between self, thinking and world are changed.

2.11. Psychotherapy within activist contexts

In the previous section, I argued that a focus on the activist spaces of social clinics can offer me the possibility to also think about the openings that the crisis can create in relation to

movement and resistance. In this section, I will examine why a closer focus on the psychotherapeutic interventions that are embedded within this activist space, can help me towards my research aims. As this thesis is set on delving into the in-between space of entanglement between the personal and economic while placing close attention to dynamics of power, psychotherapeutic practice is in a unique position to offer me insights towards this end. Located at the intersections where power, the self and technologies of governance, but also resistance meet, psychotherapeutic practice contributes to and simultaneously resists neoliberal forms of governance and conceptions of the self (Bondi, 2005). In this section of the literature review, I look more closely at literature that can enable me to conceptualise the practice of psychotherapy within activist spaces. Starting from tracing some of the tensions that underlie the relationship between politics and psychotherapy, particularly in relation to considerations of power and the self, I will then look more closely at critical and community approaches that are strongly linked to the framework of practice as it is exercised in the social clinics.

2.11.1. Politics and psychotherapy: exploring an uneasy relationship

Psychotherapeutic practice and politics are often perceived as occupying two detached or even clashing worlds. This conceptualisation of psychotherapy and politics often places them at two opposing disciplinary ends, marked by inherently contrasting qualities. From this perspective, psychotherapy is described as being preoccupied with the private, inner realities of individuals, while politics is concerned with the public, concrete, real world (Avisar, 2016). This perception of the connection between the therapeutic and the political seems to create a sense of unease for many practitioners, leading some to describe the act of attending to the political dimensions of therapeutic work as a taboo (Layton et al., 2006). As Parker and Shotter (2015) suggest, this inclination to frame practice as an apolitical activity, can often stem from a deep-rooted belief that therapy should be value-free or value-neutral. However, the notion of neutrality expressed in the positivist ideal of an apolitical, distant, and objective practitioner who aims to keep therapeutic reality uncontaminated by politics, has been debated (Hollander, 2013).

Political neutrality in the therapeutic realm has been contested as, among other things, it tends to dismiss the ethical and political basis of all theories (Mahrer, 2000), as well as the

political positions that practitioners occupy. Put differently, all practitioners have a political view of their work, because all psychotherapy is based on a theory-explicit or implicit- of how people should be. As Totton (2006) suggests, during the therapeutic work and assessment of clients, one is unavoidably drawing upon a felt sense of what is a desirable and appropriate state and course of action. This can include assumptions in relation to what constitutes happiness and a good life and how it should be attained, but also theoretical understandings of human experience and distress that can range from medicalised diagnoses to psychosocial approaches that see psychic and socio-political processes as mutually constitutive and always implicated in each other (Frosh, 2016). By disregarding the socio-political context of experience and placing aetiologies of distress solely within the individual, it has also been pointed out that practitioners can direct the blame inwards, thus implicitly holding the clients responsible for their suffering (Pilgrim, 1997). This approach can also be seen as an indirect endorsement to adjust to social realities that might be socially unjust. This resonates with Lasch (1980) and his suggestion that psychotherapy can often turn collective concerns into personal problems that are amenable to therapeutic intervention. This has formed the basis for an extensive critique of counselling as a means of individualising and psychologising experiences that demand political action and as narrowing down collective responses for activism (Burman, 2008). From this perspective, the contextualization of life-experiences and the effort to try and understand how losses that have their roots in the political world are also part of the story that brings a client into the counselling room, could be seen as a socially just and ethical professional act (Aldarondo, 2007).

As Totton (2006) argues, if the political is viewed as being primarily connected to issues of power, control and an understanding of experience as always being interconnected with the socio-political world, then psychotherapy cannot really be seen in separation from politics. On the contrary, therapeutic practice is also a field of political action, as a space in which power in a multitude of forms is exercised, exchanged and contested between therapists and clients (Proctor, 20002).

Cushman (1995) examines the role of psychotherapy in connection to the cultural and historical construction of the self, suggesting that psychotherapy actively participates in

perpetuating the same social causes of distress that bring people to the counselling room. He also argues that control is exercised over individuals through the construction of a self that feels empty and fragmented in order to guarantee the constant consumption of experiences and products that can keep the economy alive. Through the production of theories that fit in with the values of individualism, and consumerism, psychotherapy can unwittingly align itself with the status quo and its promise for “self-liberation through consumption” (Cushman, 1995, p. 6).

Nikolas Rose, (1990) also brings attention to the various ways in which the appeal of counselling has grown exponentially during the 20th century as a result of the intensification of individualism associated with the emergence of neoliberalism. Drawing on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, Rose (1990) has highlighted the role of disciplines within the “psy-complex” (psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy) in creating highly individualised, self-monitoring, self-governing and subjectively oriented subjects. Rose (1990, p. 3) draws attention to governmentality in connection to the rise of “technologies of subjectivity”, and the production of “intensely subjective beings”, within societies that grant a key role to the “subjective aspects of the lives of individuals as they conduct their commerce with the world, with others and with themselves”. Amongst the multiple technologies of subjectivity, Rose suggests that psychotherapy encapsulates most fully the logic of neoliberal subjectivity due to the emphasis it places upon individual liberty. Thus, psychotherapeutic discourses can be seen as highly influential means through which neoliberal governance is disseminated and achieved (Bondi, 2005). In Rose’s words:

[psychotherapeutic] technologies for the government of the soul operate not through crushing subjectivity in the interests of control and profit, but by seeking to align political, social and institutional goals with individual pleasures and desires, and with the happiness and fulfilment of the self. Their power lies in their capacity to offer means by which the regulation of selves—by others and by ourselves—can be made consonant with contemporary political principles, moral ideals, and constitutional exigencies. They are, precisely, therapies of freedom (Rose, 1990, p. 257).

According to Rose (1999), empowerment can also be understood as a technology of subjectivity that engages people into active self-management, while promoting neoliberal and individualised forms of freedom. From his perspective, the allure of empowerment is that it incites individuals to work on and modify the self, in the name of freedom.

Psychotherapy and the emphasis it places on promoting empowerment, also seen as autonomy and self-actualisation, seems to embody this technology which has been associated with the neoliberal subject formation. Thus, under the guise of client empowerment, practitioners can “subtly but actively recruit clients into a discourse of individual freedom and choice” (Bondi, 2005, p. 112).

2.11.2. Critical and community perspectives

The main focus of many of the critiques presented in the previous section is based upon an examination of psychotherapy as a “subjectifying, individualising and professionalising technology”, that is aligned with neoliberal governmentality (Bondi, 2005, p. 119). At the same time, what becomes visible through my engagement with this literature, is that therapeutic practice constitutes a space of political activity, in which power is exercised in many different ways. However, despite these connections between psychotherapy and technologies of power, like the ones seen in the recruitment of subjects into contentious forms of self-governance, it is also crucial to be able to consider strategically constructive approaches to engage with psychotherapeutic practice, rather than simply reject it as a phenomenon that is inextricably linked to neoliberalism (Bondi, 2005). As Bondi (2005) suggests, many of those who work in the psychotherapeutic professions identify themselves as being politically committed, while contending that the practices in which they participate hold politically subversive potential. This conceptualisation of psychotherapy as offering a potential for resistance that extends beyond its contribution to individualising processes that accompany neoliberal subjectivity, is particularly relevant to this thesis, as it engages with therapeutic practices that are embedded within the activist space of social clinics. How can these uneasy relationships between politics, psychotherapy and activism be thought about and described?

For Foucault (1990), discourse represents systems of meaning and knowledge that have acquired the status and currency of truth and have come to control how we identify and

organize ourselves and our social environment. In different eras, particular forms of knowledge and practice that are inextricably linked to power surface as permissible and desirable. In that sense discourse could be defined as:

[...] ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the “nature” of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1987, p. 108).

From this perspective, theory can also be grasped as being part of the discursive regimes of knowledge that not only express and describe the world, the self and practises that are interlinked with systems of meaning, but as actively producing them. As individualising theoretical understandings of human experience not only depict but generate a self that is in alignment with neoliberal logics like individualism, critical theoretical framings and practices that approach the self from an alternative standpoint, carry the potential to partly disrupt these technologies of psychotherapeutic subjectification.

Critical approaches to psychotherapy recognise the self as being embedded into the socioeconomic, cultural and historical reality, while emphasizing its embodied and always in flux character (Teo, 2015). At the same time, their approach towards the subject and its experiences is closely tied to an understanding of the self as being interwoven with a network of power relations that not only impact upon it, but form it (Parker & Shotter, 2015). For Walkerdine (2002) although these approaches are not part of a homogenous body of theory, what they share is a politically radical potential that places special significance on conceptualisations of subjectivity in relation to politics. However, Walkerdine (2002) also suggests that psychotherapy provides a space through which one can examine through theory and practice the many sites where subjectivity is lived out and how it is produced in connection to power. Similarly, Loewenthal (2015) examines psychotherapy as an extension of neoliberalism and argues for a close consideration of the profession’s engagement with politics and the exercises of power it involves, its capacity for self-critique and the connotation of utilizing terminology and language adapted from the

medical field. Parker (1999) also proposes the study and examination of forms of surveillance and self-regulation which are part the psy-disciplines but extend beyond professional and academic practice to permeate everyday life, as being an essential component of critical approaches. In that sense, critical perspectives emphasize both the analysis of power relations that are embedded within the discipline of psychotherapy and the interplay between power and subjectivity. Another group of critical scholarship is expressed by an array of psychoanalytic perspectives that focus on a critical examination of class, race, and gender (Chodorow, 1989; Flax, 1990, Samuels, 2004; Layton et al. 2006). Lastly, other scholars in the field, examine power by looking closely at the micropolitics of therapy and focusing on how power permeates therapist-client relationships (Proctor 2002; Pope & Vasquez, 2016).

Having outlined some of the critical theoretical components of psychotherapy, I will now move to a closer examination of community approaches in order to further contextualise the practice of psychotherapy within the space of social clinics. Although these community approaches have been mainly associated with psychology and psychiatry, from the outset of their emergence, there has been an interest in the ways that psychotherapy can be built into community patterns in order to increase its accessibility and availability (Gendlin, 1968).

Critical community approaches, like the ones practiced in social clinics, are praxis-oriented and focus on cultivating solidarity with those who are oppressed in order to generate transformative potential for social change (Freire, 1973). The philosophy and application of bottom-up emancipatory initiatives in order to address health inequality and other social injustices, constitute fundamental parts of community approaches that are inspired by ideals of power-sharing and social justice (Cornish et al., 2018). Underpinned by a belief in the social injustice of power inequalities, as well as the rights of all people to live lives characterised by health and dignity, the field of community approaches emerged as a critical response to the health inequalities faced by marginalised communities (Duffy, 2019).

Emerging from the social and governmental policies of neoliberalism and austerity implemented during the crisis, social clinics and the psychotherapeutic practices embedded

in them, are an example of these approaches, as they aim to enhance wellbeing within community contexts (Hanlin et al., 2008). Furthermore, the social clinics that branched out of the anti-austerity movement are also permeated by activist ideals. Inspired by the work of activists-scholars like Freire (1973) and Alinsky (1989), in community psychotherapy activism is viewed as a process which is intertwined with the development of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, according to Freire (1973), is the ability to intervene in reality in order to transform it towards ending the culture of silence in which people living in poverty are caught up. In line with these ideals, some social clinics endorse critical practices which aim to engage the community in a circle of praxis, at the center of which lie decentralised and direct democratic processes (Teloni & Adam, 2018).

Critical approaches place an emphasis on taking action to bring about socially just changes, within the premise that change may be achieved through actively intervening in damaging social structures and systems, as well as developing alternatives to them (Jason, 1991). From this perspective, closely examining the social world and developing new and diverse ways of living constitute strategies to accomplish these alternative systems (Kloos et al., 2012). Thus, knowledge generation accompanied by action, is a key component of the kind of praxis advanced by community approaches. Malherbe (2020) summarises some of the guiding principles of community approaches, particularly in relation to care. The first one speaks of the field's commitment to building political coalitions over diverse areas of struggle, as well as through actively cultivating connection, and open communication with others. An aspect of this strategy can be seen in the various citizen participation techniques and their involvement in decision-making processes within activist-led initiatives aiming to cultivate a psychological sense of community. The second principle outlined by Malherbe (2020), refers to a rejection of neoliberal conceptions of care and their expansion beyond the ones that are available within neoliberal contexts, thus highlighting the political and ethical character of care that goes alongside the effort to create communities that move beyond the neoliberal.

2.12. Reframing the research problem

In this literature review, I started setting out the focus of this thesis and the theoretical frameworks that encompass it, including the tensions and ambiguities that were part of its making. The area that this thesis explores focuses on a particular way in which the economic becomes personal: the ways in which the self is enveloped and shaped by the power dynamics of the economic crisis and the feelings and experiences that permeate it, in order to advance a deeper understanding of how the crisis becomes embedded into the self. At the same time, this research examines the capacities for action and movement that the crisis might create within the context of social clinics and the practises embedded in them, with the goal of identifying critical possibilities that move beyond the immobility of precarious living.

Following Cvetkovich's (2003) ideas around the production of different and new languages and vocabularies concerning the ways in which feelings that stem from sociopolitical and historical life find their way into the everyday, I have created the term *intimate shaping* to describe this in-between space that reflects my dual focus on feelings (Ahmed, 2004a; Berlant, 2011; Cvetkovich, 2007; Stewart, 2008) and the self, as a manifestation of power (Butler, 1997, Foucault, 1979). The choice of the word intimate is not based on an understanding of intimacy as signifying the most private part of personal lives to describe relations and feelings which are "inward to one's personhood" (McGlotten, 2013, p. 1). Drawing upon cultural theory (Berlant, 1998; Plummer, 2003), I have chosen the word intimacy as a metaphor for a feeling space of in-betweenness that is created through the dialogue with the socially specific (Jamieson, 2011). From a poststructuralist feminist viewpoint, intimacy can be understood in the context of subjectification processes, which include an ordering of relational and emotional concerns from the self in socially legible ways that allow us to make sense of ourselves and others (Dobson et al., 2018). In this sense, the intimate offers me a flexible metaphor through which I can move as I examine feelings that are rooted in experiences of the crisis, not as reflections of something which is strictly private, nor entirely social, while also enabling me to consider them in parallel to processes of the self and its becoming.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, in order to approach the in-between space of entanglement between the personal and the economic and hold them together, I have created a psychosocial Moebius strip (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008), by moving between bodies of theory that allowed me to approach the economic in the context of power relations and feelings that are rooted in experiences of the crisis. Starting from Foucault and governmentality theory, I examined the self that is subjugated and at the same time made through power while exploring how subjectivities are produced in and through neoliberalism. I then turned to Judith Butler and her theory on subjection as a necessary condition for the existence of the self which works in and through the psychic life of the subject (Butler, 1997), while thinking about the precarious subject and exploring how vulnerability, loss and dispossession are permeated by power. Focusing on cultural feminist conceptualisations of affect, I then explored how the textures of everyday life and the political contexts through which life is organized can offer me a framework for further engaging with the feeling aspects of life during the crisis (Cvetkovich, 2007). Lastly, conceptualising this study as a tiny act of resistance (Rodriguez-Dorans et al., 2021) and an activist project that aspires to unsettle the neoliberal economic world (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Denzin & Giardina, 2011), I presented my theoretically informed choice for focusing on the activist space of social clinics and the psychotherapeutic practices embedded in them. To describe this in-between space of entanglement between the personal and the economic, I have coined the term *intimate shaping* to express my dual focus on feelings (Ahmed, 2004a; Berlant, 2011; Cvetkovich, 2007; Stewart, 2008) and the self as a manifestation of power (Foucault, 1982; Butler, 1997). Following the formation of my focus through my dialogue with theory, the following questions frame my inquiry: How is the self shaped through the economic crisis and how are feelings and experiences part of this shaping? What kind of capacities for action and

movement does the activist site of the social clinic and the therapeutic practices embedded in it enable?

In the chapter that follows, I develop my research design and discuss its ontological, epistemological, and methodological underpinnings, by moving a step closer towards tracing a framework that can enable me to think about the things and realities that are implicated in my questions and how these can be explored empirically.

3.2 Paradigm and Ontology

A researcher's ontological perspective can be described as the way they perceive the social reality or the nature of things that exist in the social world (Mason, 2002, p.14). Similarly, Schwandt (2007, p. 190) defines ontology as "the worldviews and assumptions in which researchers operate in their search for new knowledge". On the basis of these definitions, a theoretical undertaking that aims to address the ontological underpinnings of inquiry, emerges as a significant aspect of research as it speaks of the nature and, thus, knowability of the key concepts that encompass any qualitative inquiry project that "interrogates the realities it invokes" (Denzin, 1997, p. 225), rather than embracing the notions and ideas that encompass it as already set and monolithic categories. Different ontologies are implicated in different paradigms, understood as basic belief systems or overarching frameworks and systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define the nature of enquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

As an attempt to organise the paradigms that guide research, different mappings have been produced to identify their key components and characteristics, commonly expressed as some form of variation between the following five main paradigm groups: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism and participatory (Guba & Lincoln 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). While these appear to align neatly on paper, paradigms can be complex and fluid in practice, leading Stinson (2009) to develop theoretical eclecticism as a piecing together of frameworks that combine philosophical underpinnings of different paradigms and Lather's (2006, p. 25) re-conceptualization of qualitative paradigms as a "disjunctive affirmation". This *disjunctive affirmation* represents a way of going about research which is defined by a multiplicity that aims to trouble neat categories and by finding ones' way into a

social science research that is less comfortable and filled with stuck places and challenging philosophical questions around truth and interpretation. On that basis, Lather presents her restructured paradigms that leave space for a cross-paradigm movement that expresses hybrid positionalities and knowledge forms that derive from them. Lather's framework offers me a useful way for approaching the things that exist in my research and what I understand as knowledge, particularly from a perspective of a movement between what she defines as critical paradigms, which include feminism, and deconstructive paradigms, which encompass post-structural approaches. In the following section, by moving between a feminist and a post-structural framework, I will examine the main concepts on which I focus in this research, the tensions that underlie them and the realities of knowledge that are implicated in them.

3.2.1. Relational social ontology: thinking with a feminist post-structural framework

From the outset of this thesis, I recognised that through this research, my aim is to explore a space of suture, a space in which the personal and the economic are entangled and the self is enveloped and shaped by the power dynamics of the crisis and the feelings and experiences that permeate it. Although the first part of the thesis covered an important part of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of my focus, it is also important to iterate them in a way that will not only allow me to hold them together, but also express them in a way that conveys their knowability and its limits. Self, power, feeling, experience, how can I hold these concepts together and what sort of realities of knowledge are implicated in them on the basis of the theoretical frameworks that I have explored in this thesis so far? Working with the ontological underpinnings of these concepts, I will show how a feminist post-structural framework offers me a well-suited approach to my questions.

In the first part of the thesis, I explored in detail different notions of power, as well as their connection to the subject and its formation, or shaping. The position that I developed so far can be summarized in the following quote by Butler:

Power acts on the subject in at least two ways: first, as what makes the subject possible, the condition of its possibility, and second, as what is taken up and reiterated in the subject's "own" acting.[...] The conditions not only make possible

the subject but enter into the subject's formation. They are made present in the acts of that formation and in the acts of the subject that follow (Butler, 1997, p. 14).

As one of the key authors of feminist post-structural theory, what Butler expresses here is not just the making of the self through power, but also the post-structuralist rejection of the concept of a fundamental or core self that remains consistent in all contexts. From this perspective, subjectivity can be viewed as dynamic, multifaceted, and contradictory, (Given, 2008), a "non-unitary" self that "inhabits a time that is the active tense of continuous becoming" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 62), a fluid subject that is "ambivalent and polyvalent, open to change, continually being made, unmade and remade" (Lather, 2006, p. 43), which rather than being authentic and essential, it is "protean and plastic, constantly on its [our] way to becoming due to the contingencies of history and our transformations, both conscious and unconscious, across conditions of repetitions that proliferate multiple difference" (Lather, 2006, p. 43).

In that sense, what can be known by looking at this subject that is always in the making, is something that is ephemeral, temporary, and partial; something that unfolds within particular contexts of space and time, rather than something transcendental and all encompassing. This partial and fragmented (Flax, 1990) knowing is in line with the space in which this thesis inquires, as the aim that I outlined so far is not to discover a truth about the self, or a true self, nor to uncover an essentialist core, but to learn more about a non-static subject that is on the move and exists somewhere in-between the public and private; a shaping that can be sensed but cannot be reduced to one thing, as I approach the crisis as a plurality, as "many interrelated things" (Roitman, 2014), that have deeply altered the social fabric and the texture of living. As Davies and Gannon (2011) also note, from a post-structuralist feminist perspective, this ongoing process of differentiation, of becoming different than we were before, is made possible within particular social, material, and historical moments and contexts. In other words, what can be known in relation to the self, is always embedded within specific socio-political sites and realities that the subject is a part of, as well as in relation to its particular location in relation to gender, race, social class and economic status (Harding, 2004). The reason for this emphasis on the contextual and the embeddedness of the subject in particular social locations and structures, is that the social

impresses itself on the individual and constitutes it precisely within these sites through the operation of power (Davies & Gannon, 2011). From this perspective what can be known always necessitates a connection with the details of the multiple social sites in which lives are lived and the dynamics of power that permeate them.

So far, I touched upon some of the main aspects of the knowability of the self, particularly in relation to the process of its making within a feminist post-structural framework. As my focus and questions point towards a self that is enveloped by the power dynamics of the crisis, but also the feelings and experiences that permeate it, in the next section I ask: what can be known in connection to feeling and experience? Using an exploration of experience and of its ontological underpinnings as my point of departure, always in connection to power, I will then move to feelings.

Drawing on Moon (2016), I will first examine two prominent approaches of post-structuralist theory towards experience, which are not only highly interconnected, but can also offer me an entry point into a third perspective and eventually into feelings. For Moon (2016), two of the most salient depictions of experience within post-structuralism are those of experience as discursively constructed and experience as a performative act. Starting from the first category, Moon elaborates on Foucault's theory of discourse (1976) and its conceptualisation not just as a linguistic element, but as a collection of principles and rules that represent peoples' ways of generating realities and action. Who may speak, what may be thought, and under what conditions truths may circulate, are all governed by discourse, and in that sense, particular discourses create the power relations that shape the subject's experience. In other words, experience has a political basis, as it is shaped by the particular power dynamics within a given community. Thus, the regimes of truth in which power/knowledge is articulated and intertwined with the subject's discursive development, are strongly tied to experience as well as its interpretation (Scott, 2008). From this perspective, the acceptance of already structured concepts that are inattentive to the sociocultural and discursive constructions of the subject and of experience, are not compatible with an understanding of experience as a discursive and historical production.

Firmly grounded in this discursive ontology of experience lies an understanding of experience as a performative act. As another thread of poststructuralist theories that

challenges the notion of ownership of experience (Moon, 2016), performativity theory sees the subject as constituted by “performative acts” which are repetitively established, generated, and sustained by social norms that “precede and exceed the subject” (Butler, 2005, p. 17). From this perspective, it is not the subject who chooses what to experience in a voluntary way, but the social rules and norms that construct experience, as experience becomes the performative effect of discourse. A focus on experience as a performative act is undergirded by the ways in which both the subject and experience are socially and discursively constructed through this process of repetition.

Taking a step back from experience to examine the ontologies which are implicated in these two closely linked approaches, I will provide my rationale for moving into a third ontological perspective, which combines features of both. The first, discursive ontology of experience postulates its formation through discourse, highlights it as being contextual, temporal and in-process within the socio-political, historical, and economic forces that produce it (Jabal & Riviere, 2007) and in that sense is highly applicable to my questions. At the same time, it speaks of a subject and its experiences, as constituted within a discursive web of medical, educational, judiciary, and religious technologies of power, leading Nayak and Kehily (2006) to point out the discursive determinism implied in this ontological position. Although Foucault (1978, p. 95) asserts that “where there is power there is resistance”, his perception of resistance is purely reactive, or simply a reaction to power rather than a proactive or positive action (Hartmann, 2003). As McNay (1991, p. 125) suggests, “[t]he emphasis that Foucault places on the effects of power upon the body results in a reduction of social agents to passive bodies and cannot explain how individuals may act in an autonomous fashion”. This is closely tied to theoretical debates that examine Foucault’s work from a critical perspective in the light of its restrictive and deterministic implications regarding agency and the possibility of resistance, that have led to different re-conceptualisations of his work in an effort to move beyond the inescapability of discourse (Hoy, 2004). However, considering that one of my key aims in this thesis is to explore how the crisis is also resisted and what sort of capacities for action and movement it enables, a thoroughly discursive ontology of experience wouldn’t assist me towards this end.

Butler's theory of performativity constitutes a re-conceptualisation of Foucault's work, as it investigates how identities are made and unmade in a reiterative and citational process through discourse, cultural practices, power relations, material contexts and historical experiences (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011). At the same time, it differs in many ways, two of the most significant ones being its approach towards the body and towards agency. Starting from agency, Butler's work has received a lot of the same criticisms as Foucault's, as for instance Benhabib (1995, p. 20-21,) argues that Butler diminishes the subject to a linguistic effect of discourse, thereby dissolving concepts of "intentionality, accountability, self-reflexivity, and autonomy" and thus advances an understanding of the self that undermines the feminist aims of empowerment and emancipation. At the same time, as Magnus (2006) suggests, Butler recognizes that discursive structures are created through the collective action of subjects and posits the possibility of intersubjectively formed action, thus perceiving the subject as participating in the discursive processes that define it to an extent. At the same time, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler recognises that bodies and bodily experience matter, as part of her theoretical concern lies in "initiating new possibilities, new ways of bodies to matter" (Butler, 1990, p. 30), while discussing the importance of the body as a medium for giving corporeal meaning to the discursive signs of gender.

For Charpentier (2019), this is indicative of a shift from a discursive ontology, to Butler's relational social ontology of the body (Butler, 2009), which I will examine more closely in the following section. As Charpentier (2019) suggests, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler's main focus lies in the power of hegemonic discourses not solely as being descriptive, but also normative, in the sense that they contribute to the creation of the very reality they describe. However, in *Frames of War*, Butler (2009) advances a relational social ontology on the grounds of a new appreciation of the relational aspects of embodiment, based on a recognition of our fundamental relationality as embodied social beings.

Butler (2009) asserts that a living body is ecstatic, in the sense that it is always beside and beyond itself, because it cannot exist without the active support of a variety of other living bodies, both non-human and human, as well as social connections, material structures, social systems, and rules. All of these elements combine to form a relational matrix that governs our existence and activity, as we cannot live as embodied living beings unless we

are sustained by this network of relationships (Charpentier, 2019). At the same time, Butler does not deny our individuality or the reality that we exist in a relatively isolated and bounded manner when she emphasizes this fundamental relationality, rather she sees it as the tentative outcome of these differentiating and energizing interactions. From this perspective, the relational body constitutes the meeting point where power structures, institutions, norms, discourses, and other bodies connect, entangle, but also sustain the body. In that sense, embodied experience is this open-ended relational field; this entanglement of vital connections and dependencies that form the body which Butler (2009, p. 65) describes as “less a discrete substance than an active and transitive set of relations” that are created and reproduced through shifting historical and performative configurations of power. Butler describes her relational ontology of the body in the following way (Butler, 2015):

We could say that the body exists then in an ecstatic relation to the supporting conditions it has or must demand, but this means that the body never exists in an ontological mode that is distinct from its historical situation. [...] [W]e cannot extract the body from its constituting relations—and those relations are always economically and historically specific (p. 148).

That is to say, this self and its experiences are made of diverse and untotalizable relations that are simultaneously embodied, material, discursive, deeply ingrained in the historically specific, made and sustained by both other embodied beings and in and through social and political structures. This relational and social ontology reflects a space of entanglement and of suture that can hold together the questions I ask in this thesis, as my focus lies on the *intimate shaping*: the self that is enveloped and shaped by the power dynamics of the crisis and the feelings and experiences that permeate it. On the basis of this ontology, what can be known is precisely an intertwinement, an interweaving web of relations that is always in connection to, always in movement, deeply contextual and permeated by power. At the same time, this ontology that highlights the relational as well as the embodied, can provide the foundation for political action (Zembylas, 2019) and thus can offer me the ground for exploring the crisis as also producing capacities for action and movement. As Sabsay (2016) argues, our corporeal vulnerability which stems from our relationality is infused with

political potential as it is what makes us open to others and thus offers the potential to affect and be affected. This indicates that agency and resistance are not inherent characteristics of a self-contained subject, but rather emerge from and are made possible because of the field of interactions in which the subject is produced. This social relational ontology of the body can offer me an entry point into feelings, but also into activism.

In *Notes on the Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler (2015) develops her theory on the basis of this relational ontology and examines embodied experience in the light of concerted actions of physical assemblies, within a framework of general bodily affectability (Wehrle, 2020). These bodies that gather to resist against the policies and systems of neoliberal politics take part in a variety of emotional processes, as “angry, frustrated or sad bodies come together to struggle against disenfranchisement, effacement and abandonment” (Lilja, 2017, p. 343). In that sense, emotions are doing things: they move bodies and generate practices, and for that they are performative (Lilja, 2017; Scharff, 2016; Zembylas, 2020). Through their circulation, for Butler (2015) they contribute to bodily enactments like those of plural bodies that get organised through activism and for feminist cultural theorist Ahmed (2004b) they bind things and selves together through their movement. From this perspective, “emotions are about movement; they move us and as a result we move in different directions, depending on how we are moved; that is, the kinds of emotions we feel” (Lilja, 2017, p. 347). On this basis, their knowability is connected to their movement and “the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds” they create (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 117). These emotions that are concurrently social, material and psychic (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 120), are in no way private as they emerge within this relational matrix of the embodied self (Butler, 2015). Furthermore, Ahmed’s understanding of the term as something that is socially mediated, as for her emotion also refers to the histories that precede it (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014), denotes a subject that is not bound and in this way her work meets Butler’s. Another point where these theories meet in terms of the ontological connotations in relation to emotion is precisely applicable to its knowability and its limits. As she discusses in her conversation with Schmitz, Ahmed aims to speak about sensations as a part of emotions in order to express her understanding of emotions as also expressing ideas values, and judgments about things: “to hate or to fear is to have a judgment about a thing as it approaches” (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014, p. 99). These senses are based on past histories

of contact, which enable the thing in question to be apprehended as dreadful or fearful. This historicity of emotion aligns with Butler's (2015) theory of the embodied subject, as part of her relation matrix of the self is also discourse. In other words, the perception of an emotion is never pure or direct, although it might appear as such, but is always mediated and always a product of interpretation and the subject's positioning within historical and social connections.

At the same time where these theories differ, also constitutes one of the main reasons that I turned to this particular branch of affect theory, expressed here by Ahmed, in terms of what it can offer to my conceptualisation of the felt. As I showed in the first part of the thesis, not only does the crisis leave a strong mark on the body, but it does so on a collective level. For instance, unemployed, pensioners and other vulnerable and precarious people become exposed to the threat of injury and illness, by not being able to receive healthcare, and generally, subsist on a day-to-day basis. Thus, it became important to find a way of speaking about emotion in a way that would be very closely connected to the visceral and corporeal, but also the plural, in the sense that something is also felt in a collective way. By touching upon the corporeal through the notions of surfacing and intensification, Ahmed offers me this pathway into the felt and into the body. In the following extract, Ahmed elaborates on this process of surfacing as an expression of an intensification of an experience that can transpire in either an individual or a collective body (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014, p. 100):

It is a presumed consciousness but through these moments of intensification the surface comes to be a physical thing that has its own weight and sensibility. At the collective level, moments of national grief intensify a feeling of what it means to be part of a national community.[...] Surfacing is about how the skin becomes a border that feels, about the role of the feeling in making the border. It is also about how the street or a neighbourhood or a nation comes to feel itself as a body through apprehending this intruder who has to be expelled.

Thus, emotions for Ahmed can do things not just to individual bodies, but bodies in the plural and they also shape things, as they create and delineate boundaries, and these boundaries, that do not only include human physical bodies, are also imbued with some

form of feeling. In that sense, as bodies move and negotiate their connection with spaces and objects that are also permeated with emotions, these spaces and objects can be thought of as being a part of what constitutes and makes the body. As Ahmed suggests, what this reading of emotions provides is a way to think about how some worlds can shelter some bodies and not others.

Anderson's (2009) notion of "atmosphere" as a "class of experience that occurs before and alongside the formation of subjectivity" and "the shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge" (Anderson, 2009, p. 78), can also add to my ontological conceptualisation of the felt, a way to think about the crisis, but also activist contexts like that of the social clinic, as spaces imbued with particular qualities and senses that not only constitute what the present feels like, but eventually a making of the bodies of those who share them.

3.3. Epistemology: Exploring theory, story, and practice

In the previous section, I outlined the ontological underpinnings of the key concepts that encompass my inquiry and questions, in order to delineate their knowability and its limits. Examining the concepts of self, power, experience and feeling and their connections, I focused on the realities of knowledge implicated in them on the basis of the theoretical frameworks that form the focus of my thesis. Through this exploration, I presented how a feminist post-structural framework and a relational social ontology that has the body at its heart, can enable my inquiry into this space of suture and entanglement where the personal meets the economic.

In this section, I begin to think about the epistemological positions that are implicated in my research, or how I can know the social phenomena and questions that underlie it (Mason, 2002). Having presented the nature and henceforth knowability of the key concepts and ideas on which I focus, this epistemological discussion is aimed at how knowledge can be generated in relation to the space in which I inquire (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Here, I try to bring out the conceptual underpinnings of the ways I can know the things that are part of my research, in order to form an onto-epistemological ground on which I can base my

methodological choices. This epistemological discussion will specifically touch upon three focal points as ways of knowing in my research: theory, story, and practice.

3.3.1. Theory: A living body of thought

From the outset of my engagement with this thesis, I found myself grappling with questions around not only how to articulate what I wanted to say, but what it actually was. Before being able to put it into words, the focus of this inquiry was something that I could sense and recognize intuitively, but which remained amorphous and elusive for a long time:

A slippery phenomenon, one that changed its shape, and was fuzzy around the edge
[...] Something which wasn't definite. That didn't have a single form. A fluid object.
Or even one which was ephemeral in any given form, flipping from one configuration
to another, dancing like a flame. (Law 2004, p.5).

My experiences have been the starting point that led me to this topic, thus locating my focus while being at this close proximity to it has been a "messy enterprise" (Turner & Norwood, 2013), on the grounds of a difficulty to maintain a sense of separation from it. Rather than trying to put these experiences aside, I decided to put them to work as I illustrated in the literature review, in order to identify entry points into my research topic, by putting them in conversation with theory. By entangling my stories with theoretical stories, I constructed a theoretical focus that holds the space that I wish to explore together while also speaking about the process of its making. As Holman Jones (2016, p. 228) suggests, " [...]Theory is a story. Theory tells a story in non-ordinary language". During this process of the making of my focus, I turned to my feelings as a means of sense-making within this "terra-incognita" of unknown theoretical and experiential landscapes (Daza & Huckaby, 2014, p. 801). These feelings were not only linked to personal experiences, like that of unemployment, but also entailed finding my way by feeling through theory as a way of figuring " Where am I now? What is this place?" (Pollock, 2006, p. 3). In that sense, I approached theory not as a fixed and lifeless cluster of ideas, but as a dynamic process that connects thinking and doing, or what Pollock defines as theory as "living bodies of thought" (Pollock, 2006, p. 8).

This understanding of theory as being embodied, but also as embodying things, provides the ground for my reasoning for continuing to use theory as a way of knowing in connection to my questions and on the basis of my ontology. Theory lives within us (Collins & Stockton, 2018), but it also provides a language for illustrating and embodying the nuances, events and experiences that are happening within a culture (Holman Jones, 2016). Rorty (1989) argues that the development of theory reflects a process of successively creating new languages, using new metaphors and vocabularies in order to describe anew what we are attempting to understand about ourselves and the world. Within this framework, Applegate (2000) proposes that the act of creating new languages to write about experience through theorising, is part of a wider process of revising and recreating our stories about our being in the social world, thus theory at its most organic level operates within the sphere of the self. From these perspectives, theory connects the self and the socio-political contexts in which it exists as an inseparable whole, always within a framework of movement and change, as the language of theory changes to reflect our understanding of the social reality within the ever-changing textures of living. This way of knowing is in alignment with my questions and my ontological conceptualisation of the self as being both embedded in socio-political contexts and as always moving and being in flux. At the same time, this approach to theory also speaks to the embodied which is at the centre of my ontology. Theory as a living and dynamic object that can be sensed, provides a means for seeing and feeling the world, which simultaneously illustrates an in-between space or the interplay between selves and cultures.

On the grounds of seeing and feeling theory, Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, (2014, p. 92) elaborate on the concept of “citationality”, as an approach that is centred around the poetics of theory and its understanding as a language and an embodied means for expressing feelings and ideas. This citational approach interweaves theoretical texts, writing and ideas with stories and is especially pertinent to projects that aspire to “enact the intervention of theory in the writing itself” (Adams et al., 2014, p. 92). Closely connected to the ideas expressed in relation to citationality is also Holman Jones (2016) suggestion that theory is a way of thinking and acting which always emanates from and exists in connection to the political. To articulate more clearly the connection between theory and the political and what theory can offer me as a way of knowing, I will revisit the idea of the impasse as

being instilled in neoliberalism's capacity to generate stillness and despair (Stewart, 2012; Brown, 2015).

Many theoretical approaches of neoliberalism as the regulative system of contemporary capitalism often employ theory in a manner that resembles a kind of clearly articulated, all-encompassing, dispassionate diagnosis of the present (Konings, 2015). Sedgwick (2003) associates this presence of a confident finality in theory, which is so prevalent when it comes to addressing neoliberal rationalities, with the practice of theorizing as a form of paranoia. This strong theory wishes to know everything in advance and impose order so that it can guard itself from surprises, without however offering any relief or exit to a place beyond, thus inducing a sense of hopelessness. What Sedgwick (2003) suggests instead is to practice a reparative form of theory that does not shut down possibility by embracing uncertainty, unpredictability, and experimentation. Building on this idea, Gibson-Graham (2006) argue that if we wish to cultivate activist theory that can move us beyond hopelessness, instead of concentrating on masterful knowing, we need to gently nourish the new and become attuned to possibilities of coexistence, surprise, and connection.

This view of theory as an activist tool that enacts things, by bringing worlds into existence depending on the ways we employ it and the theoretical constructions we create, provides me with an additional reason for using it as a way of knowing. My conceptualisation of this research as an activist project that looks into the possibilities for movement that the crisis produces, urges me to use theory as a way for looking for openings from which hope might emerge. Drawing on Butler, Holman Jones (2016) argues that the language of theory is essential for telling and reimagining not just what we can say, but also who we can be. By using theory to reflect on and critique established truth claims and orderings, including political and economic orderings (Athanasίου, 2018) that our writing instigates and sustains, I approach theory as a "reflexive participant in the poesis of knowing" (Pollock, 2006, p. 2). At the same time, theory as a "living body of thought" allows me to use theory as intertwined with the body. As Zita argues, "the body is always in theory and is always already deferred to [...] Theory-making is a labor of the body" (Zita, 1998, p. 204).

3.3.2 Storying the body during the crisis: Catching a flickering flame

In my ontology section, I explored how the knowability of feelings is connected to their history. In particular, I argued that it is the previous history of interaction and contact that allows feelings to be recognized as such, but also discourse as part of the embodied self's relational matrix and the subject's location within historical and social power configurations (Ahmed, 2004b; Butler, 2015). Thus, I suggested that knowledge is always mediated and a result of interpretation, and that feelings and experience are likewise never pure, but also an outcome of interpretation. I also discussed the knowability of the self as something ephemeral and partial that unfolds within specific spatial and temporal contexts.

This opens up a variety of issues in relation to language and representation in connection to my research. If the subject and its experiences and feelings are always mediated and constantly in a process of making, how could they ever be known? How could language ever describe them? When it comes to the feeling and experiencing subject of the crisis, how can the shaping of the self be known if what the subject feels and experiences can never be direct or pure? These queries reflect "questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted [...] about how one's vision is structured [through] language or discourse and history" (Scott, 1991, p. 777), that have been a central point of discussion within the broader field of post-structural qualitative research (Britzman, 2000). From this perspective of the subject that is formed within an open-ended relational field, part of which is discourse, knowability is interlaced with movement and change, rather than a self that can be represented and reconstructed in a uniform and interchangeable way:

The subject of the speech-act can never be the same as the one who acted yesterday: the I of the discourse can no longer be the site where a previously stored-up person is innocently restored (Barthes, 1989, p. 17).

Starting from this ever-moving discursive self, an approach that destabilizes its authority as a knowing discrete and autonomous subject could offer me a partial way of knowing it (Somerville, 2004). This kind of knowing would be unpredictable, fragmented, and temporally dispersed, without representing any consistent or permanent self (Gannon, 2006). In exploring this self through writing, Roland Barthes (1977) says:

I abandon the exhausting pursuit of an old piece of myself, I do not try to restore myself (as we say of a monument). I do not say: "I am going to describe myself" but, "I am writing a text, and I call it R.B" (p. 56).

Part of what Barthes expresses here, is that during the act of narrating the self, the self transforms and changes, thus he approaches this process of storying it by waiving strong notions of authorship that claim to capture it. However, the I, the self, that I want to explore in my research is not just the I of discourse. Although it encompasses power and discourse, as I pay close attention to the manifold operations of power within the crisis and the workings of neoliberalism and austerity, this self is also embodied and relational. It is precarious on the basis of its ever-present and constitutive vulnerability and dependency on the relations that form it and it is also feeling (Butler, 2015). Thus, to know this self within this sphere of the embodied, the experienced and the feeling, I would need to find a way of knowing it that simultaneously attends to the discursive and the embodied; a form of knowledge that is "sourced from our particular locations in particular bodies with particular feelings, flesh, and thoughts that become possible in particular sociocultural-spatial contexts" (Gannon, 2006, p. 476).

Exploring how a self that is simultaneously embodied and discursive could be known, post-structural and feminist perspectives turn to the idea of memories as being enfolded within the body, Gannon (2006) argues that the body is a living space where traces and fragments of memories can be found. When one tries to story these memories, this storying is not a truthful act that replicates the original experience as it transpired and as it was lived, but rather reconstructs it from a certain time and location, as well as a particular discursive frame. Davies (2000) focuses on the senses as a means of retrieving these body memories:

We retrieve memories sometimes as words spoken, sometimes as visual images, or smells, or as tastes vividly registered on the tongue. We can struggle to retrieve memory that exists before it is called one thing or another and in doing so arrive at something that can be recognised as truthful, though elusively so (p. 43).

This kind of knowing can be expressed through writing, a form of writing that is contradictory and complex as it unfurls from the body (Cixous, 1993) and it reconstructs the moving self while speaking of the particular locations that it occupies during this act of recounting (Derrida, 1986). Writing the self in a way that troubles its fixity and is attuned to the senses can not only highlight its dialogue and entanglement with this array of social locations through movement, as this type of storying the self is more made rather found (Bochner, 2007), but is also foregrounds its corporeality as intercorporeality (Probyn, 2003). As Probyn argues "the body cannot be thought of as a contained entity; it is in constant contact with others [...] subjectivity [is] a relational matter" (Probyn, 2003, p. 290), thus when one writes, this writing always happens in relation to. Exploring the idea of writing the relational body, Somerville (2004, p. 53) focuses on "the body-in-place" and she writes about the particular places the body inhabits. These places are where the body is at the "site of work", places that it inhabits where writing comes in to explore the connections and separations it experiences, through a process of "undoing and redoing body/place relations, disrupting many of the binaries around the body including body/place, body/mind and inside and out" Somerville (2004, p. 54).

At the same time, speech-acts also constitute embodied acts that not only shape and constitute the body, but also allow it to express the way it senses the world. As Davies (2000) argues: "Talk is made with the breath of our bodies expelled with muscles and shaped with mouth and tongue and vocal chords, and the sounds we hear are vibrations in membranes and bones" (Davies, 2000, p. 43). With reference to language, Foucault (1990) argues that the workings of social norms and power relations, cannot be limited to the linguistic realm, as they exhibit themselves via practices, social norms, and institutions, all of which have direct effects on bodily subjects, even when they are not expressed explicitly, such as in written or oral language (Wehrle, 2020). At the same time, Butler (2015) claims that it is impossible to strictly distinguish between the linguistic and the social from an epistemological standpoint, since the social meaning of the body is generated by an internalisation that is also linguistic. Thus, although the social exceeds the linguistic, the linguistic nevertheless constitutes a part of it.

On the basis of an approach towards affect as “embodied meaning-making” Wetherell contends that trying to separate affect from meaning-making, the semiotic, the linguistic and the discursive is unproductive: “it is the discursive that very frequently makes affect powerful, makes it radical and provides the means for affect to travel” (Wetherell, 2012, p. 19–20). In that sense, discourse as meaning-making is not confined to words, because our interpretation of the world is not restricted to spoken or written words, rather it’s more about how those words are conveyed, how it occurs via various sensory representations (Ahall, 2018).

3.3.3. Practices

In the literature review, I suggested that psychotherapeutic practice is in a unique position to offer me insights towards this in-between zone of entanglement between the personal and the political and their interconnection with power. Situated at the crossroads of power, the self, governmental technologies, as well as resistance, psychotherapeutic practice, contributes to, but also opposes neoliberal governance and notions of self (Bondi, 2005). At the same time, I argued that the activist spaces of social clinics in which alternative economic activities and practices are performed through connections of interdependence and egalitarian participation, can go against rationalities that reproduce the ideal of capitalist realism (Fisher, 2012), or the view that there are no viable alternatives outside the existing economic system. By focusing on the activist spaces of social clinics and exploring the practices that are embedded in them, I can approach my topic from a perspective of possibility rather than immobility and explore how the experienced and felt that shapes the self during crisis can also provide openings for resistance, movement and the capacity for action.

By asking about the kind of capacities for action and movement that the activist site of the social clinics and the practices embedded in them enable, what emerges as a critical component of my epistemological approach, is finding a way of attending to the kind of *doing* that transpires within this site that would be simultaneously attentive to power and feelings. In this section, I describe how an affective practice approach towards my question, can offer me the means for exploring the *doings*, the practices, on which I focus.

Providing an outline of the key ideas that undergird the concept of affective practice, Wiese (2019) suggests that an approach which combines affect and practice, is based on three core assumptions. The first one is that practices constitute bodily activities and thus they are always already affecting those involved in them in some way. Practices as things that the living body does, are inevitably permeated by feeling and thus have the ability to affect their participants. Second, practices are inherently social and relational, as they are affective. Thus, those who take part in them, are always involved in some form of interpretation, conscious or unconscious, in order to ascribe meaning to the practice, although this process of interpretation remains always unfinished and open to revision. Lastly, affective practices can be better understood as processes, rather than being singular events.

To elucidate this idea of process, I will draw on Walkerdine (2016) and her research on working-class communities with a history of suffering or displacement. Walkerdine (2016, p. 15) argues that affective practices are generated through history, as elements like the movement of capital, industry relocation, the transformation of workers bodies, and the practices of solidarity, community and mutual assistance are so intricately intertwined that “to understand them fully, we would need to explore them together, not isolating any one of them”. The foundations of these affective practices, in this case that Walkerdine (2016) explores practices of community solidarity, are deeply enplaced and embedded in material configurations that encompass even the particular character and architecture in which the workers are housed. The origins of these practices can also be found in shared experiences and sensations, which are linked to shared spatiotemporal rhythms of work and home: “laying out the laundry on the same day each week, the bells and whistles of work time, the joint movement of bodies [...] the sounds of the works themselves” (Walkerdine, 2016, p. 16). Thus, affective practices cannot be comprehended in isolation from the processes of interaction from which they emerged or outside the context of the unique locations and histories through which they were developed.

Likewise, Wetherell et al. (2020, p. 2), explore acts of everyday activism from a perspective of affective practice, which they describe as “a figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with meaning making [...] and other social

and material figurations”. For these authors, an emphasis on affective practice, highlights the significance of the entanglement of embodied states and meaning making, in the light of the broader way that life is organised, which contributes to the emergence of new affective-discursive patterns. Wetherell (2012) argues that these patterns of activity are inextricably linked to existing power structures and the conditions of possibility generated by social relations that are formed within them. Thus, the affective-discursive in connection to the notion of affective practice is concerned with how feelings in their many forms come to be conceivable, how they are expressed, legitimized, and repressed (Wetherell et al. 2020). In that sense, an affective practice approach “prioritises the rhythms, patterns, and unfolding orders of social life” (Wetherell et al. 2020, p. 15), where these practices can range in scale from repetitions and habits which are part of intimate interactions to larger-scale social and institutional rituals. In her exploration of quiet acts of resistance, Wetherell (2012) argues that these practices can be known through the acts and accounts of those who participate in them. In her inquiry, these acts and accounts do not offer a direct reflection of reality, but rather can show how practices can be imbued with feelings that encompass embodied dilemmas.

3.4. A Critical Autoethnography

In the following part, I will provide my rationale for using critical autoethnography as a methodology which allows me to develop my research design on the basis of the ontology and epistemology that I have discussed in the previous sections. Starting from some of the key definitions of autoethnography that provide an overview of the methodology’s key aspects, I will then move to examining critical autoethnography as an approach to my research.

For Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2011, p.1), “autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)”, by employing and combining principles of autobiography and ethnography. Furthermore, this methodology questions conventional ways of doing research and representing people (Spry, 2016) and approaches research as a political, socially-just, and socially aware activity (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). As both a process and a product, autoethnography brings together principles of autobiography and

ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011). At the same time, autoethnography is a "multivocal concept" (Reed-Danahay, 2019, p. 3), which signifies different things to different authors who use it as a methodology which situates personal experience into broader socio-political settings in different ways. For instance, Adams (2011) defines autoethnography as the investigation of the unique, interactional dynamics of cultural members, as well as the study of culture in all of its material and ephemeral forms. Denzin (1997, p. 227) defines autoethnography as the "turning of the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur". Similarly, Boylorn et al. (2013) suggest that autoethnography can enable us to make sense of who we are in the context of our cultural communities and on the basis of cultural analysis through personal narratives.

Other authors like Gannon (2017) and Wyatt et al. (2018), have experimented with forms of autoethnographic writing that aim to create selves that challenge the speaking subject's authority. As Gannon (2017) suggests, if in autoethnography emotions, bodies, and lived experiences become texts to be written, this frequently implies a humanist self-knowing and self-articulating subject, or in other words, a self that is autonomous and distinct. In that sense, personal experience can become a transcendental placeholder, or a "great original", that asserts "that there is both a 'there' and 'beings' who are there" (Britzman, 2000, p. 28). For Gannon (2017), experience can never be completely unified, knowable, or stable, and thus it is not simply waiting to be recounted by someone who was there and understands precisely what happened by looking inside the self. From this perspective that approaches the feeling and experiencing subject as inseparable from language or the discourses that it uses to make sense of itself, the auto in the autoethnographic can be written about and partially known by employing strategies that destabilise, displace and trouble the narrative I or the speaking self (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008a). This necessitates the use of writing methods that invite unpredictability, while paying close attention to both the affective and aesthetic qualities of texts, as well as a critical approach which constantly questions the language that we use and the assumptions that undergird it (Gannon, 2017).

For instance, Speedy (2012, p. 353) writes in the spaces between therapy, writing as inquiry, and autoethnography, and she pieces together fragments of writing in the shape of a "simultaneity of stories". Gale and Wyatt (2019, p. 566), also approach autoethnographic

practice as always moving, always about action, intensity, and possibility and as something that never resides and settles, but “lives in the creation of the next moment”. Gannon (2001) has also presented research data as collaborative poems while creating numerous versions of the same event, in order to avoid their meaning from settling. In her work, she has brought personal writings into “strange alliances with other people's stories”, to reject simple assertions of truth by circulating numerous accounts of the same experience “bumping against each other, undoing truth claims as quickly as they were made” (Gannon, 2018, pp. 22-23). By focusing on the discourses that are at work in experiences like that of divorce, Gannon’s aim is to discover new discourses that can enable both new ways of thinking about the topic, while creating new understandings of agency, however fractured and temporary these might be.

Gannon’s (2018) research provides an example of utilising discourse and critique, as ways of engaging with research that can facilitate different ways of thinking. As Holman Jones (2017) argues, as we undergo a time when neoliberal discourses are engrossing our understanding of the social world and the self, critical autoethnography has the capacity to provide not just a way of putting critical theory into action in creative ways, but also providing a means for generating more creative selves and creative cultures through research. Critical autoethnography is a flexible approach for analysing the experiences that are transpiring within particular cultures and the systems of power, discourse and repression that encompass them (Holman Jones, 2016). This autoethnographic approach combines autobiography and ethnography in order to offer comprehensive and deep descriptions of cultures through personal experience. However, it places a particular emphasis, not just on the analysis and study of culture, but also its critique, as it seeks to highlight the ways in which cultures are formed through institutional, social, political, and interpersonal relations and dynamics of power. In that sense, critical autoethnographers see what they do as a means of calling attention to the politics of the positions they occupy, including those of privilege and marginalization, as well as the responsibility to identify mechanisms that perpetuate social injustice (Madison, 2012).

As Holman Jones (2018) suggests, this methodology works towards fulfilling three overlapping goals. The first aim of critical autoethnography that she identifies is diagnostic. In that sense, it involves an analysis of power and of practices that are socially unjust (Hill

Collins, 2016), and entails looking closely at the structures, institutions, and discourses that favour certain individuals while marginalizing others. Second, critical autoethnography utilizes critical theory's explanatory frameworks, in their many different forms, by putting theory to work and connecting it with storytelling (Holman Jones, 2018). Critical autoethnography, centres around a type of knowing and understanding of the world as changing and incomplete, while being propelled by forces of imagination and feeling rather than as an attempt to establish stable, cohesive, and complete knowledges (Holman Jones, 2016; Pollock, 2006). Put differently, critical autoethnography works to create connections between the analytical perspectives offered by theory, and what Donna Haraway calls the unique, multifaceted, and paradoxical “view from a body” that storytelling can provide (Haraway, 1988, p. 589).

Lastly, critical autoethnography aims to advance new practices, through the creation of new knowledge about the social world (Hill Collins, 2016). Researchers strive toward achieving this objective by conceiving and producing new interpretations and pathways for social action that envision new methods of practicing research (Hill Collins, 2016). As Holman Jones argues (2017), critical autoethnographers aim for what Munoz (2009, p. 100) refers to as “utopian performatives”, as they write into the future not as a fixed and unattainable ideal, but as a stage for creating new identities and positions that offer us a reminder “that there is something missing, that the present is not enough”.

By closely connecting the personal and the political and creating links between self, experience, feeling and theory, while paying close attention to the particular dynamics of power that encompass the culture under study and the process of research itself (Boylorn & Orbe, 2013), critical autoethnography offers me a fitting approach to my research and the questions I seek to explore on the basis of the onto-epistemological ground that I have advanced so far.

As Holman Jones (2016, p. 228) argues, critical autoethnography enables us to develop “living bodies of thought” through research, as it employs storytelling to make theory come to life and demonstrate the many ways in which stories can embody a type of knowledge that has the capacity to produce movement and transformation in the world. Theory is a substantial pathway towards knowledge in my research, as I have argued that theory can

provide me with a way of knowing that is in accordance with my questions and the onto-epistemological frameworks of this thesis. Furthermore, the particular focus placed by critical autoethnography on critique is in strong alignment with my research goals and the theoretical frameworks that underlie them. As I discussed, my interest lies in the self and its “constitutive aspects that require interrogation and critique” (Given, 2008, p. 669) and I have thus connected my thesis with a particular psychosocial strand that is committed to a political engagement with power, oppression, and the diverse ways in which the self is constituted in and through socio-political formations and operations of economic power which call for a critical examination.

Furthermore, critical autoethnography pays close attention to the significance of the body in the formation of cultures and selves (Holman Jones, 2017). While recognising the importance of language, critical autoethnography opposes ethnographic approaches that solely focus on language without considering how culture is perceived through the body’s senses (Conquergood, 1991). By thinking about the self as embodied, relational and created in a web of connections that not only form, but nurture it, I have also suggested that knowledge in my research can derive from the social locations that bodies occupy, and the feelings that become possible in specific sociocultural and spatial settings (Gannon, 2006). Critical autoethnography has a history of exploring and highlighting feelings in relation to experiences of different forms of oppression, particularly in relation to vulnerability within community and cultural life (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Pelias, 2000). Narrating and exploring such feelings and experiences can create an affective force that moves us, while generating the desire to connect (Chawla, 2013; Cunningham, 2016; Ellis & Rawicki, 2013; Harris, 2016; Spry, 2016). Thus, not only does critical autoethnography aim to bring light to experiences and feelings of injustice and oppression, but it also aims to generate change through its capacity to embody and materialize (Holman Jones, 2016). This may entail the use of creative techniques which create representations that enact the self, cultures, and experiences as subjects of research differently. This type of writing that transpires as part of creative representations is better viewed as a way of “acting” or “doing” rather than something that fixes meaning (Pollock, 1996, p. 80). By choosing to focus on activism as a process that mobilizes and transforms desires which cultivate capacities that allow the identification with different worlds and economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006), my goal has

been to engage with processes that extend beyond the impasse of neoliberalism. Thus, critical autoethnography can offer me an approach that aligns with this aim and the capacity to imagine and enact different worlds and ways of being through creative forms of writing and data representation that can materialize this movement towards other worlds.

3.5. Methodology in action

Introduction

In this section, I move a step closer towards defining what constitutes data in my research, as well as my approach towards the methods through which these data can be generated. Starting from the use of my body in this research, I then move to examining the use and conceptualisation interviews and voice in my research. This section also covers my approach towards the different sites that are part of this research, as well as the ethical considerations on which I have grounded my inquiry.

3.5.1. Writing and feeling the crisis through the body

Contrary to considerations of data as being part of an objective reality, thus waiting to be collected by a neutral and objective observer, in this research I approach my own bodily senses and experiences as data. Specifically, I approach my own body not as a container with clearly defined boundaries that separate it from the things that surround it, but as always being entangled with other bodies, practices and dynamics of power (Perry & Medina, 2015), thus aiming to know through its “emotional, irrational and messy materiality” (Bondi, 2002, p. 6). Through this act, my goal is to acknowledge that different ways of approaching knowledge generation in research are underlined by different commitments, as they contribute to and reproduce particular social realities (Gibson-Graham, 2008). By knowing through my body, I foreground my social and relational ontology of the self, thus moving beyond mind-body dualisms and claims that knowledge can only be attained through subjects as independent and self-directing units (Denzin & Giardina, 2011).

I approach this bodily knowledge as “the insights and understandings generated in feeling, touching, sensing, speaking, and moving in cultural spaces and experiences” (Holman Jones, 2018, p. 8). At the same time, as bodily knowledge derives from the specific positions that become available in the sociocultural-spatial settings that the body occupies (Gannon, 2006), this form of knowledge can offer me insights into the entanglement between self and systems of power and the ways it becomes shaped by them. An essential component of knowing through my body is connected with the idea of memories as being enfolded within the body and that of the body as a living space where traces and fragments of memories can be found (Gannon, 2006). Drawing on Cixous (1993) and Davies (2000), I connect with and generate these memories through my senses and through writing. The body is Cixous's (1993) scene of writing and remembering, as memories are stored in the flesh and writing from memories unfurls from the body. This kind of writing unravels from the body and reconstructs the moving self while speaking of the specific locations it inhabits throughout this act of retelling. Adams (2011) also writes retrospectively about personal experiences that originate from or are enabled by being a part of a culture or adopting a specific cultural or personal identity. Although Adams' (2011) autoethnographic approach offers me a useful way of thinking about personal stories as offering insights into lived, everyday moments of culture, thus turning the personal into knowledge for both insiders and outsiders-in his case the culture of same-sex attraction-there are also some differences. Adams (2011) suggests that distancing oneself from the experience in hand foregrounds the ability to recognize and analyse patterns through common traits that encompass these experiences. What Adams proposes, seems to express a type of reflexivity that invokes the possibility of a more objective knowledge through a partial form of objectivity that is achieved through distancing oneself from an experience.

Although there are numerous different definitions of reflexivity, Pillow (2003) broadly describes reflexivity as a way of engaging with research which not only adds to the production of knowledge that aids in the understanding of the social world's workings, but also gives insight into how that knowledge is generated. From this perspective, a reflexive approach compels researchers to be critically aware and share how their social locations, positions, objectives, and selves, impact upon the research process. Pillow (2003) examines several different uses of reflexivity that constitute the most usual approaches in qualitative

inquiry, arguing that these may manifest as a form of catharsis, a heightened self-awareness, or even a confession which aims to exceed one's own subjectivity and represent those researched as accurately and as truthfully as possible. However, Pillow argues that these approaches towards reflexivity in their effort to produce these accurate and truthful representations fail to acknowledge the implausibility of valid or objective representation, as they invoke "a Cartesian belief in a unified, essential self that is capable of being reflected on and is knowable" (Pillow, 2003, p. 181). Instead, Pillow (2003) argues for the practice of an uncomfortable kind of reflexivity, rather than its use as a methodological instrument for improved data. This reflexivity brings into focus research in a manner that questions its own assumptions, letting readers talk back to the text, and inviting them to examine and challenge their knowledge and preconceptions. This interrogation of "the truthfulness of the tale" which provides "multiple answers" (Trinh, 1991, p. 12), through "unfamiliar" and "uncomfortable tellings" (Pillow, 2003, p. 192), is in alignment with how I approach myself as well as the idea of data in my research.

At the same time, I do not approach the concept of distancing oneself from the object of study as a straightforward subject. Arguing for the value of distance in her work, Chawla (2003) speaks about having some form of distance from past events as allowing her to examine moments of living on the margins of different cultures as turning points in her life that are inextricably linked to one another and to herself. In my research, although in the process of generating memories of the crisis through my senses and through my writing I primarily focused on past events and experiences, I often felt that this time-distance did not provide me with adequate space to maintain a sense of separation from the process of writing. Although there was a separation from these events in terms of the time that has transpired, there was limited distance when it came to feeling and I often experienced a sense of merging with the writing, in a way that brought me to a standstill. As I never stopped living precariously even after I left Greece to migrate to Scotland in search of a better life, this continued sense of vulnerability came with me. Ogden (2008, p. 294) writes that "the process of using words to 'express' feelings is not simply an act of 'getting feelings out'; rather, we are creating a new experience that had not existed prior to our use of words". In that sense, a form of distancing takes place when giving words to inarticulate bodily sensations, as through the process of writing and speaking about an experience, it is

not simply conveyed, but brought into the world with a new form. Feeling exposed and overwhelmed by a sense that the material structure that was holding my life together was so extremely fragile, I continued being immersed in a vulnerable emotional space during the writing of this thesis, and thus finding the words to perform this kind of distancing hasn't been easy.

At the same time this process helped me realise that the use of my body in connection to remembering (Cixous, 1993), had its own unique qualities regarding time. This remembering wasn't just about a process of recollection with reference to the past, but it was about a time that was more fragmented and cyclical. It was not just about effects that linger on as "recollections, memories, images, feelings - long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished" (Bochner, 1984, p. 595), but about continuing to experience the same moment; a moment that has expanded in time, thus pushing me to occupy an emotional space that was familiar to that of my life in Greece, but also different. Familiar as it was encompassed by the same feelings of hopelessness and fear about the future, but also different as the site in which this was transpiring was no longer Athens, but Edinburgh. I thus started approaching the financial crisis and all that came with it not as something that was confined within the boundaries of the particular locality with which it has been associated-Greece-but as something that I carried with me. The site was not only confined to the borders of a country in which the social fabric of living has dramatically changed due to the workings of neoliberalism and austerity, but it was also my body, as well as the new spaces it occupied in Scotland.

These body data that are connected with this cyclical and fragmented process of remembering life in connection to the crisis are simulacra that I have created (Baudrillard, 1994), reproductions without original versions that are incapable of capturing some real moment inside a field that is unreachable without the discursive frameworks that mediate it and thus give it meaning (Youdell, 2006). From this perspective, my aim is to create potent representations of experiences and feelings of life in connection to the crisis, while untangling the discursive frames that create meaning and produce the subjects that are part of them, including myself. As Youdell (2006, p. 513) notes: "My research process is unavoidably implicated in the very subjectivating processes about which it speaks. Yet these

data are recognizable. They do not contain, expose, or reflect any universal truth, but these petite narratives do resonate". These stories about stories encompass and explain other little stories, by assembling them into a fragmented whole (Young, 2008). By standing in opposition to the telling of extended, unbroken narratives of previous events or my own life story, these stories endorse anti-essentialist perspectives of the self and the social world as they emphasize plurality and movement (Young, 2008).

3.5.2. Exploring social clinics through the body

At the same time, this knowing through my body acquired a different quality when it came to the sites of social clinics as diverse-economy spaces, where vulnerability, action and agency aren't incompatible (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, Gibson-Graham, 2006). My interest in how practices as patterns of activity that are intimately intertwined with power structures and the possibilities that are produced by social relations developed within them (Wetherell, 2019), made it imperative for me to explore these practices and these spaces where the "normal ordering of things" is juxtaposed with a "different ordering of things" (Beckett et al., p. 170). This different ordering of things in relation to the power dynamics and realities generated by the neoliberal and the austere, corresponds to Foucault's (1998) heterotopias: spaces in which worlds and ideas are shuffled, and locations for individuals whose behaviour is "deviant" when it comes to established norms, which can result in the creation of new forms and ways of relating (Beckett et al., 2017, p. 171). Things are done differently in social clinics: from the provision of free of charge healthcare services to all, that speaks back to the deterioration of the public health system that ensued the crisis reforms, to the use of methods and principles that revolve around decentralised direct democratic processes aimed at an equitable allocation of power and shared accountability (Kioupkiolis & Katsambekis, 2014).

The concept of affective atmospheres, as enveloping everyday space-times through their unique spatial quality that allows them to permeate and surround persons and objects (Anderson, 2009), offers me a useful way of approaching these practices through my own body. Affective atmospheres are collective expressions of affect that shape capabilities to feel and act by modifying the available range of activities (Bissell, 2010). These atmospheres have qualities that are "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). Brennan (2004, p. 1) argues that “the ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual”. Likewise, Anderson (2009) suggests that atmospheres generate a space of intensity that flows over a perceived world into subjects and objects. For Hitchen (2021), this holds particular importance, as it speaks of the process of atmospheres becoming individualized while also being collectively sensed. Hitchen (2021) argues that atmospheres envelop subjects and objects, while at the same time being constantly picked up by, and coming into relation with, a perceiving subject. On this basis, Hitchen (2021) proposes the use of Stewart’s (2011) concept of atmospheric attunement as a way of exploring affective atmospheres. These atmospheric attunements require a high level of attentiveness “to the matterings, the complex emergent worlds, happening in everyday life” (Stewart, 2011, p. 445).

Thus, by seeing these practices in connection to affective atmospheres, I could become attuned to the world of the social clinic by being there, dwelling this space, while using my body to sense things that emerge from the practices and the bodies that perform them (Ahmed, 2004a). In part, this particular way of becoming attuned to a space and all that encompass it, was something that I did as part of my inquiry into the social clinics. In the course of my fieldwork, I had the chance to visit five social clinics, located in different areas of Athens. During my one-time visit in each of the clinics, I tried to become attuned to the space of each social clinic by exploring how it makes me feel and sensing the world in which I have been embroiled, by staying with these senses. As Hitchen (2021) notes, this kind of inquiry asks researchers to make space for these senses and staying with them long enough to enable them to speak. To stick with these senses, I have used writing in the form of fieldnotes where I focused on the things that arose as my body interacted with the spaces of the social clinics and its people: things that were displayed on walls and bulletin boards, furniture arrangement, odours, weather, gestures, clothes, expressions, voices, combined with feelings and thoughts that I allowed to stay with me and given them space to speak, as I visited and revisited these writings, while being attentive to how I became differently attuned to them as time passed.

3.5.3. Reflexive-dyadic interviews

Although this kind of bodily attunement to the practices and atmospheres that enveloped the social clinics are important parts of what I approach as data in my research, there are various reasons why I also chose to place my focus on interviews as part of the inquiry into the capacities for action and movement that the activist sites of social clinic enable. The first one is connected with the impossibility of being present during the therapeutic sessions that take place in social clinics. Although I became attuned to the space of social clinics, as I used my body to sense things that surface from the broader practices and the bodies that are part of this space through a particular kind of attentiveness (Hitchen, 2021), therapeutic sessions were outside the reach of the practices that I could attend. Confidentiality, privacy, and the protection of the information shared by the clients during counselling, as an integral part of an ethical framework of practice (BACP, 2018), made my presence in this particular space unfeasible.

An additional reason that drove me towards interviews as a fitting approach is linked to the purposes and scope of this research, as well as its epistemological underpinnings. For Wetherell et al. (2020, p. 15), an affective practice approach “prioritises the rhythms, patterns, and unfolding orders of social life”, whereas these practices can vary in magnitude from small-scale social routines to larger-scale social and institutional processes. For Wetherell (2012, p.19), the affective goes hand in hand with the discursive, as affective practices encompass figurations of “bodily possibilities and routines [that] become intertwined with the generation of meaning, as well as social and material figurations”. Thus, she emphasizes the importance of the entanglement of the body with meaning making in the context of practices as structures that organise life and produce affective-discursive patterns. For Wetherell (2012) these practices, and patterns of activity are intimately intertwined with existing power structures and the potentials and possibilities that are produced by social relations developed within them. From this perspective, the acts but also accounts of those who take part in these practices can reflect the affective-discursive and how feelings, in their many expressions, come to be conceivable, how they are articulated, reinforced, and also suppressed (Wetherell et al., 2020). This approach is highly relevant to my focus on power and feelings and allows me to approach interviews not as accounts that

offer an authentic reflection of reality, but a dynamic site for examining what might be happening when one attempts “the risky work of truth-telling” (Jackson, 2008, p. 166). Thus, I approach the voices that emerge from the interviews “as unstable and contradictory, exposing how power, subjectivity, and desire” shape the way interviewees speak of their present (Jackson, 2008, p. 166). This is a matter of how interviewees position themselves as they speak about their present and the conflicting and instable ways that undergird the process in which they situate and represent themselves through this act of narration. At the same time, I understand speech-acts as embodied acts that not only shape and constitute the body, but also allow it to express the way it senses the world (Davies, 2000).

Although I am interested in the broader practices that are part of social clinics, I examine therapeutic practice as part of these sites more closely and thus my interviewees are volunteer psychotherapists who offer their services free of charge in different social clinics of Athens. The conceptual framework of my approach towards the interviews is that of reflexive-dyadic interviewing which perceives what emerges as part of an interactive process between researcher and interviewee, as the leading autoethnography scholar Ellis (2004) argues. Reflexive dyadic interviews follow a similar process to that of conventional qualitative interviews, as they involve an interviewer who asks questions to allow interviewees to convey their experiences and feelings from their own perspective and in their own words (Kvale, 2008), while approaching the knowledge that emerges as a situated and contextual activity that is generated through this particular interaction (Mason, 2002). During the interviews I asked participants open questions that broadly focused on their experiences of working as volunteer therapists in social clinics and the kind of motivations and feelings that underlie this practice. As social clinics offer services to those who live in strained financial circumstances and thus have been among those who have been particularly exposed to the financial crisis, I was especially interested in those aspects of the volunteers’ work and their perception of the interconnection between therapeutic practice and the crisis. At the same time, I wanted to explore their various understandings of the political dimensions of their work and of the relationships that are created between the therapeutic, the political and the activist, through the particular location of therapeutic practice within activist sites.

Part of the way that Ellis (2004) conceptualises reflexive-dyadic interviews involves an attitude of receptiveness towards what the researcher experiences and feels in connection to the different aspects of the interview process, as well as the creation of a reflective space in which these experiences and feelings of both researcher and interviewee can be explored (Birch & Miller, 2000). At the same time, this interview approach is characteristic of a relationship that is encompassed by the idea of a dialogue, as the interviewer strives to become attuned to that which is interactively produced during the interview, as well the emotional dynamics that encompass it, while also disclosing and sharing a part of this process with the interviewee (Ellis, 2004). Thus, the final interview product is an artefact that combines both the reflections and emotional responses of the researcher, as well as the respondent's story.

In my effort to create this type of space, I selectively shared personal stories and experiences that brought me to this research with the interviewees, as well as my reflections and emotional responses to what was emerging during the interview. For instance, through this process of sharing I acknowledged my first-hand experiences of vulnerability and precarity due to the economic crisis, as well as my personal involvement with activism and the anti-austerity movement, from which some of the clinics have sprung. At the same time, through the acknowledgement of these experiences I did not aim to engender assumptions of sameness, nor present myself as occupying insider or outsider positions that might be overly simplistic (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). When it comes to insider-outsider positions in research, Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) argue for a "third space, a space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction". This in-between space implies movement between different positions, as well as working with the tensions that emerge through these different positionings, rather than trying to resolve them. To incorporate this idea of movement between positions, my aim was to acknowledge experiences of difference and divergence between myself and the interviewees, rather than just accentuating the idea of sameness. For instance, I recognised that although psychotherapy is part of my professional identity, my main capacity is that of a researcher and not of a practitioner, and thus welcomed their perspectives regarding practice as valuable knowledge in relation to which there was no shared experiential ground. Lastly, when it came to sharing personal experience, I remained attentive and attuned to

the different dynamics that were emerging with different interviewees, as there were moments when I felt that it was more appropriate to hold back some of my experiences in order to provide a reflective space that otherwise could be permeated by tensions that would create complicated interview dynamics. One example includes the reconciliation between my identities as a researcher and as someone who lives a precarious life. Although I partly recognised my personal experiences of the financial crisis, there are tensions that underlie these uneasy belongings that I still carry with me and I felt that by being completely open about the extent of the challenges that I faced throughout the years of my life as a precarious academic (Bone, 2020), I would occupy too much of this shared interview space. By treading this space carefully, my aim was to retain a sense of balance that invited a process of reflection and attunement for both the interviewees and myself. Throughout this process I trusted my body, as I paid close attention to my “embodied, affective response during and after the interview”, in order to further understand the “emotional dimensions of the interviewee's narrative”, as well as my own (Bondi, 2014, p. 44). As Bondi (2014) suggests, while drawing parallels between the analytical therapeutic process and interviewing, we carry a person's effect and impression on our body, and this forms a kind of embodied knowledge. Although this kind of approach doesn't assume sameness on the basis of a direct kind of correspondence between what interviewer and interviewee feel, it acknowledges that by trusting the body and the visceral experiences that emerge during the different stages of the interview process, a deeper understanding of these feelings can be generated (Bondi, 2014).

3.5.4. Voice and autoethnography and interviews

In the previous sections, I highlighted the many ways in which my personal experiences have connected me to this research. However, as I discussed, these experiences that drove me towards this research and that have always been my entry point into it, reflected a space of in-betweenness, rather than something which was just my *own*. Experiences like those of unemployment, or the witnessing of the aftermath of a public suicide in the centre of Athens, led me to trouble the notions of self, of feeling and of experience as strictly bounded, individual belongings, thus arguing for an intimate space that is neither totally personal nor entirely social, but rather speaks of an intertwinement of the personal with the

socio-political and economic realities of the crisis. Through my encounter with questions around “ownership” and “authorship” and the contradictions that emerge from “signifiers like ‘I’, ‘we’, ‘us’,” (Gale & Wyatt, 2016, p. 5), I further delineated the personal into which I am inquiring not as a medium for the “single and unified subject [to] declare its will” (Butler, 2015, p. 156), but rather an expression of a “slipping, sliding [and] relational subjectivity” (Gannon, 2018, p. 21). On this basis, I have decided to use my stories and experiences of the crisis to delve into this in-between space of the exploration of the shaping of the self. At the same time, I highlighted the limitations that exist when it comes to the exploration of a different kind of shaping that is more connected with activism and movement, seen in expressions of practices like those that are part of the social clinics, thus deciding to use interviews with volunteer therapists as part of my methods. As a consequence, I am being faced by a question that has been more implicit in the first parts of this chapter, but has become unequivocal after describing the central elements of my methodology: Whose story am I exploring in this thesis? Mine or that of the volunteer practitioners that I have interviewed? The answer to that is both.

Drawing on Holman Jones (2016, p. 10), I don’t approach autoethnography as a “me-search”, but I am interested in “assembling a we”. Other examples of this kind of approach include Adams (2011) who alongside the use of his own experience of coming out and same-sex attraction, he interviewed others on this topic, as he argues that autoethnography doesn’t necessarily mean that researchers can tell only their story. Kofoed and Stenner (2017) have also used interviews as part of their autoethnographic methodology, by developing a dialogical approach towards the interviews that is aimed at troubling the very distinction between self and other. Through this undoing of a clear-cut distinction between self and other, between their experience and that of their interviewees, Kofoed and Stenner (2017, p. 168) write into a zone of indistinction amid experiences of other and self, and the ambiguity around “to whom a given experience under consideration ‘belonged,’ and whether it ‘belonged’ to any pre-existing individual at all”.

Although I see similarities between Kofoed and Stenner’s approach and my own, I also see differences. I am not interested in writing into a zone of indistinction that conflates and merges my experiences with those of the interviewees. Although the framework of inquiry

that encompasses our experiences is that of a space where the personal and the economic meet, there are also elements in my story and the stories of interviewees that are separate. Through their accounts of their practices in the social clinics, my aim is to explore a different kind of shaping of the self that is connected with a movement that can produce other worlds and economies. Thus, rather than presenting our stories as indistinct from one another, my aim is to use this dialogical process to examine them together, not separately, but in a way that allows them to become entangled and meet one another, in order to inquire into a space that is shared, but also different. I see this approach towards assembling this particular kind of “we” as part of an attempt to strain the notion of voice (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008b). By working with conceptualisations of voice that are not easy, I align my research with efforts that wish to view voice differently (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Lather & Smithies, 1997), and I entangle myself in the layers of voices of the interviewees to challenge the ontological as well as epistemological limits of voice and self (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008).

3.5.5. Site selection and participants

Approaching the research design as a “reflexive process operating through every stage of a project” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 24), rather than a strictly linear sequence of steps or stages, elements of this research have changed as this research developed especially regarding the participants and the sites that were part of it. In this section, I will describe this process of change, while outlining how I addressed site selection regarding social clinics, as well as the inclusion criteria for interviewees.

My initial focus has been directed towards all the social clinics that offer free of charge health services. Concentrating on the common features that underlie these organisations, primarily that they were developed as free of charge health services in response to the crisis and that they were mainly staffed by volunteers, I was not initially aware of how the structural differences between them generated thoroughly different power dynamics, that also encompassed their framework of practice.

During the time that I conducted my Athens fieldwork (May-August 2017), there was no research on social clinics that identified their population in Greece, as well as the

differences between them. Ahead of starting this identification process, I decided to focus on Athens, as the primary location where most social clinics are located, on account of being the country's capital and its most populous city. Due to the lack of official records or research databases, in order to identify the social clinics as a first step, I went through public databases that were available on the internet. To verify that these social clinics were in operation, I either visited their websites, if these were available, or contacted the organisations via email, when this was provided. Through this process, I was able to identify a total number of 24 social clinics that were operating in Athens, which I separated as falling into three main categories: municipal social clinics, social clinics connected to social movement and non-profit organisation social clinics.

Municipal social clinics

The first category includes social clinics that were created as a result of state initiatives in response to a wide range of problems that occurred during the crisis. These clinics operate on a local, municipality level and are staffed by both volunteers and paid staff and can be part of municipal social services which include other types of support, like providing financial assistance to people who live beneath the poverty line. As I found out after commencing my fieldwork, the volunteer psychotherapists that were staffing these particular services were involved in this role as part of their training placements and as a component of an agreement between the private colleges that they were attending and the municipality.

Social clinics connected to social movements

The second category that I identified included social clinics which were solely staffed by unpaid volunteers and had a much more explicitly political character. These initiatives were closely connected to social movements, thus embracing many of the same direct democratic methods and anti-hierarchical ideology, like having a general assembly as their main decision-making organ. Many clinics had their own websites in which they provided detailed information regarding their work and philosophy, with many of them identifying their twofold role as channels of solidarity for those in need, as well as being endeavours that

advocated for a health model that was practiced differently. For instance, by involving people from the community in the operation of the clinics, as well as its decision-making processes, some of these social clinics aimed to depart from medicalized paradigms of practice that reproduced unequal relations of power between the volunteer health professionals and the recipients of the services.

Non-profit organisation social clinics

The third category that I identified included several different types of non-profit organizations. These organisations encompassed multi-stakeholder partnerships and NGOs and they were staffed by paid or unpaid staff, or a combination of the two. After this identification process, I realised that this group didn't really correspond to the framework of my study for two reasons. The first one was that not all of these organisations included psychotherapeutic services as part of their free healthcare provision. The second was more connected with the operation of these organisations, as despite the free healthcare they provided, many of them were oriented towards profit generating activities and thus didn't express practices and ideas that really challenged the economic reality by doing things differently. An exception was Unison (pseudonym), a non-profit civil company focused solely on psychotherapeutic services, which although didn't identify with any political movements, it described itself as a network of social solidarity, was staffed solely by unpaid volunteers and was not involved in any profit generating activities.

3.5.6. Recruiting participants

As my focus lies on practices that are connected with different worlds and economies, I decided to not invite participants from the third category of organisations that I have identified, on the basis of their profit generating framework and activities. However, I did decide to include Unison as a potential site from which I could recruit participants as its operation was centred around solidarity practices that were aimed at exceeding a financial framework.

I also decided to extend my invitation towards participants from both the other two categories of social clinics: those that operated on the level of municipalities, as well as those that were connected with social movements. What was important for me during that stage of the research was that all these sites provided their health services free of charge, and that their overall operation was within a non-profit generating model that wasn't aimed at maximizing value for its shareholders. Additional inclusion criteria for the interviewees were that they had a background in psychotherapy and thus were operating within social clinics in this capacity and that they were also volunteers. The same idea undergirding the non-monetary framework on which I was focused as part of my site inclusion criteria, applied to the recruitment of volunteers as non-paid staff. Specifically, that volunteers were involved in practices that were connected with possibilities of change that challenge the existing economic ordering of things. After this identification stage, I sent a research invitation including all the important information pertaining to this project via email (Appendix I), and asked admin staff or other key contacts of the social clinics, to circulate it to their volunteer counsellors.

3.5.6.1. Number of participants and conducting interviews

The process of selection which aims at constructing a research sample which is meaningful theoretically and empirically, as its features are relevant to the research questions, is what Mason (2002) calls strategic sampling. As Creswell suggests (2013), besides considerations relevant to participants and site, part of a purposeful sampling strategy is connected to the determination of a sample size or number of interviewees. Other authors, like Crouch and McKenzie (2006), problematise both the notions of sample and sample size, arguing that these concepts allude to a homogenous group of respondents, while in reality a shared experience or life circumstance is not a sufficient foundation for establishing limits that constitute a uniform group. Instead, they suggest that during this process of sampling, what is being sampled is not individuals of a particular kind, but variations of a specific social environment and the experiences that arise in it. Rather than being systematically chosen representations of categories or attitudes, respondents from this perspective enact different ways of embodying experience, leading Crouch and McKenzie (2006) to suggest that each interviewee is a particular case.

On this basis of each interviewee being a unique case, as well as the importance of being able to both hold each of these cases “in my mind” during all the stages of the research process (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p. 493), and engage in depth with their stories and experiences, I decided to invite ten interviewees, that I managed to recruit successfully. In total, 1 interviewee from the non-profit organisation Unison, 3 from social clinics that were connected with social movements and 6 from social clinics connected with the municipality agreed to be interviewed.

These interviews lasted for approximately 60 minutes each and were conducted in different locations which ensured that the privacy of these one-to-one conversations could be retained. As I noted, being able to explore the things that arise as my body interacted with the spaces of the social clinics (Hitchen, 2021) was particularly important, but hasn’t been possible for all the interviews. Some of the social clinics can be particularly busy environments that accommodate an array of volunteers who provide their services within settings with limited space. Thus, taking up a timeslot and a space that would normally be used for a social clinic appointment for an interview was in some cases unfeasible. Consequently, five of the interviews were conducted within spaces of the social clinics and the rest within the private practice offices of the interviewees.

An important aspect of the volunteers’ capacity in the municipal clinics that I was unaware of, became apparent after commencing my fieldwork, driving me towards reconsidering if the use of the interviews with practitioners from the municipal social clinics was befitting my research aims and questions. As I mentioned, this important component of their work was that these volunteers were trainee counsellors who were undertaking placements in the social clinics, as part of agreements between the private colleges that they were attending and the municipality. Within these settings, an employed practitioner was also standing at the top, while being responsible for supervising these training placements. Thus, these trainee practitioners did not choose these particular settings to offer their services for free, but they arrived in these settings as part of paying for their own counselling training. Consequently, the stories that they shared with me were much more focused on their experiences of starting to work with clients for the first time or their overall

experience of training, whereas the social clinic as the setting in which this was transpiring was secondary and, in some cases, unimportant.

Although referring to the Scottish context of practice, a study by Bondi et al. (2003) offers me a useful way of tracing the differences that underlie volunteer work within the counselling professions that is highly relevant to what I encountered. Arguing that counsellors who work for free and voluntary sector counselling are not the same thing, Bondi et al. (2003) define the voluntary sector as what is most commonly referred to as the NGO sector. This sector encompasses large worldwide organizations, charities and minor local organizations that operate by harnessing the work of unpaid volunteers and trainee counsellors on placements. On the other hand, the authors define as counsellors who work for free people who might be highly qualified practitioners but choose to offer their time and skills as volunteers, as they are motivated by a desire to make counselling available to all, regardless of their ability to pay.

Thus, the municipal social clinics developed by state initiatives were encompassed by the same operational approaches as those described by Bondi et al. (2003) with reference to the voluntary sector. Specifically, the structure of these social clinics in some ways reproduced logics and practices that were aligned with neoliberal economic politics, such as their top-down organisation and the harnessing of the work of unpaid volunteers. Thus, I realised that to approach this space of possibility regarding practices that are centred around different ways of being, worlds, and economies, I needed to place my focus on the social clinics that were connected to solidarity movements.

Especially after completing the process of transcription and starting to engage with the transcripts, the substantial differences between the accounts of the interviewees from the municipality and those from social movement solidarity clinics solidified my decision. On one hand, the respondents from the first group were oriented towards their training and their first-time experiences of practice. On the other, those from the second group were highly qualified practitioners who described their work in the context of bottom-up, praxis-oriented initiatives (Cornish et al., 2018), aimed at addressing health inequalities that emerged as a result of the crisis-related structural adjustment programmes in Greece. The

respondents accounts from the first group could still offer me knowledge and insights that was of relevance to my topic, as I could for instance use them to examine the relationships between neoliberalism and social policy expansion. From this perspective, I could look into how expanding social provisioning can often assist neoliberal projects (Lavinias, 2017), as a means of facilitating social control during periods of increased insecurity, and growing inequalities (Fischer, 2018). However, this was not the main focus of my study and a comparative approach towards the two different groups of the interviewees was not of interest to me, as my aim was an in-depth inquiry through the interviews into the aspects that formed the focus of my study.

Most importantly, after completing the process of transcription, I also started to become aware of something which although was evident from the first stages of my engagement with this thesis, it started to become methodologically clearer after carrying out the interviews. I started to realise how important my personal stories and experiences were in relation to what I was trying to examine and that I wanted to give them space in the thesis, a space in which they can breathe, move, and meet the stories of the volunteer practitioners that I interviewed. After deciding that I was going to approach my topic from an autoethnographic perspective that was able to speak to this space of in-betweenness betwixt the personal and the economic, I also realised that to be able to delve deeply into this space in which mine and the interviewees accounts meet, I needed to decrease the number of interviews that I used. All these essential factors informed my decision to not use these accounts in my analysis and instead place my focus on just four interviews: the three interviews with practitioners from social clinics that were connected to social movements and one with a practitioner from the non-profit organisation Unison.

3.5.7. Transcription and translation

Transcription involves a process of translating sound from recordings to text (Slembrouck, 2007). Certain aspects or characteristics of speech and interaction are reproduced in this process, which is a selective one, as it involves choices around how speech will be represented, and thus also raises questions around power (Bucholtz, 2007). In this research, I aimed for a verbatim transcription of the interviews that preserves the details of the conversation, as my aim was to stay closer to the text as it was spoken (Cameron, 2001).

As my interviews were conducted in Greek, there was an additional layer of translation as part of the transcription process, as the recordings were first transcribed in Greek, followed by translation of the whole transcripts in English. As Greek is my native language, I carefully considered cultural considerations of speech during the transcription process in order to translate accurately what was said (Riessman, 2006). However, there are expressions, cultural elements of speech, but also shared meanings between me and the interviewees that couldn't be conveyed in English. In cases when I felt that certain words had particular cultural significance which carried important nuances in connection to the interviewee's account, I included footnotes which highlighted its cultural connotations (e.g. the word *ankylosis* in Maria's analytical chapter)

3.5.8. Ethical considerations and ethics in practice

To secure best practice in research and as a means for safeguarding the integrity of the research that is being undertaken from unethical actions that can be damaging for all those involved, ethical guidelines (BACP, 2013; Bond, 2004) have been designed to provide a framework for thinking through the risks of different actions when it comes to decision making and ethical values. This research has respected these ethical guidelines in order to guarantee that these ethical requirements are being met and has received approval from the University of Edinburgh Ethics Review Board.

Besides the ethical considerations that are connected with guidelines and requirements of ethics committees, there are also the everyday ethical issues that emerge during the doing of research, which Guillemin and Gillam (2004) define as ethics in practice. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) write about ethical issues that appear during research that might have an everyday kind of quality, which distinguishes them from ethical dilemmas that take the form of scenarios involving clear-cut choices. These "ethically important moments," where the researcher's approach seems to have ethical implications that are more connected to the day-to-day issues that arise, constitutes what the authors describe as the "microethics" of research (Guillenam & Gillan, 2004, p. 262). The concepts of microethics and of ethics in practice offer me a useful way of articulating and approaching issues that emerged during this research that involved a different kind of ethical deliberation.

From the outset of this thesis, I identified the necessity for examining the complex landscapes of power dynamics, everyday living and suffering that have been created through the imposition of austerity politics, debt, economic hardship, unemployment, and insecurity during the crisis. I see this critical examination, as well as the particular theoretical and methodological frameworks that I have used to approach it as a form of “research as praxis”, meaning a “research that is explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society” (Lather, 1986, p. 258).

This process of making “visible the oppressive structures of a culture” (Denzin, 2013, p. 139) while attempting to point routes toward more socially just possibilities, has been an implicit ethical commitment as part of my aim to bring the personal and the economic together. As part of this ethical commitment, I tried to hold the personal and the economic together in ways that recognised that theorising and researching are not innocent practices, as they reproduce and help create the worlds that they describe (Denzin, 2014). The development of a critical kind of reflexivity as part of this personal accountability towards “one’s situatedness in systems of power and privilege” (Spry, 2016, p. 1086), has permeated the way that I thought about this research, as I aimed for “possibilities for thinking in terms of the utopian” (Madison, 2011, p. 131). This has been expressed in the critical theoretical constructions of self that I have advanced in this thesis, as well as the employment of critical autoethnography as a methodology which is closely connected to considerations of power and processes of troubling the notion of self.

However, during this critical reflection of my own situatedness within networks of privilege and power, I have also come to face my own vulnerability. Writing about the ethics of autoethnographic research, Lapadat (2017) notes how writing about personal experience in research can sometimes have unforeseen effects. As I mentioned, the various losses that I experienced in connection to the crisis, as well as my precarious positioning around financial insecurity, were not things that I experienced as finalized events that happened in the past. This precarious positioning gave rise to an everyday felt sense of fragility and exposure as an aspect of my beingness in the world that I carried with me throughout this research. Thus, by not only continuing to occupy this position, but trying to write to and from it has been a

process often fraught with uneasy feelings. In the context of writing about loss and trauma in autoethnographic research, Bochner (2007, p. 197) writes about dwelling a “dialectical space of agony [...] born of the inadequacies of language”. This inadequacy of language described here by Bochner, resonates with my experience, as part of the difficulty that I encountered was a struggle with words, a struggle to stay close to these stories and experiences, as well as finding the words- including the theoretical words-to describe them. Although these challenges haven’t reached some kind of final resolution, I have learnt to stay with them and realised that to find the words to narrate this fragmented theoretical and experiential space, I needed others (Arendt, 1998). These various others as an expression of plurality that enables action (Arendt, 1998), have helped me create a reflective space, part of which were my monthly meetings with my academic supervisors, my personal therapy, and the many informal conversations with close others. This reflective space in which I could continually inquire into how I relate to myself, to others and to the process of research, assisted me in finding the language and the conceptual tools to write this thesis.

Another aspect of ethics in practice in this research is connected with the notion of narrative privilege, which Bolen and Adams (2016, p. 623) define as the consideration of “who is allowed to write narratives and whose voices count” in research. Being in a position that enabled me to obtain, respond to and share the interviewees’ stories in my analytical chapters, brings about different questions in connection to narrative privilege. As the one who “wields the final control and authority” over an account’s interpretation and representation (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 324), I have aimed to be reflexive about the stories I tell, but also the way that I conceptualised them, while acknowledging how I constructed their representations (Bolen & Adams, 2016). For instance, I am not suggesting that through the analysis and sharing of these stories, I am able to capture the real meaning that lies behind the participants accounts, or an accurate reflection of their experience and feelings. What I offer are interpretations of interpretations (Butler, 1997), representations of experiences mediated by discursive frames, which I am trying to unfold (Youdell, 2006). Although creating a faithful representation of the accounts is not part of my purpose, at the same time I do acknowledge the power dynamics that are implicated in the process of authorship and representation, but also the complexity of moving between different

positions of power during this research: the ambiguity of writing from a position of precarity, but at the same time the power that is implicated in having the capacity to be the one who writes.

3.6. Analytical approach: Writing as Inquiry and Thinking with Theory

3.6.1 Writing as inquiry

So far, I spoke about a variety of things as constituting what I approach as data in my research, while delineating them through theory in a way that allows me to conceptualise them as being able to meet the questions I ask in this thesis: Body senses, memories, feelings, objects and spaces, practices, as well as stories and texts. As part of my approach towards data is a capacity to “disrupt linearity [...] and the mind/body dichotomy” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 621), several questions emerged as part of my analytical approach and how I could choose to employ it: How could I inquire into these data to explore my questions without being reductive, without dissecting them in an attempt to excavate their constituent parts, without approaching them as being able to speak for themselves?

In traditional qualitative research, the application and integration of various methods that produce different kinds of data to explore the same phenomena is referred to as triangulation (Flick, 2018). The purpose of this use of different methods, techniques, and data is to address what is considered to be flaws or inherent biases, associated with singular method approaches, and thus as a means of validating the findings (Flick, 2018). However, contrary to this approach towards validity and reliability, I have highlighted the emphasis that I place on the partial, the incomplete and that which is always in the making. Thus, I don’t approach the process of knowledge generation as aiming to “get it right”, but more as being aimed towards producing different shapes, forms, and nuances (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962).

In that sense, Richardson’s concept of crystallisation (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005, p. 963) as a process that reflects this partiality, as well the multiplicity of forms and shapes that I wish to explore through the data, expresses my approach much more accurately than triangulation:

Crystals are prisms and retract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose. Crystallisation, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of validity (a single truth), and provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understandings (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005, p. 963).

In order to explore these *angles of repose* and the kaleidoscopic colours and textures that are produced by crystals, Richardson (2000) advances writing as a method of inquiry, as an approach that locates the personal and the biographical within broader social and historical contexts:

I consider writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic [...] Writing is [...] a way of “knowing” – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it (Richardson, 2000, p. 923).

This kind of writing as a way of knowing approaches language as a constitutive force that produces things, while allowing researchers to write into the spaces that shape these accounts and stories. St. Pierre elaborates on writing as method of inquiry as both an approach to data collection, as well as a method of data analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005). Speaking about “a pesky dream about an unsatisfying interview, the sharp angle of the southern sun to which my body happily turned” (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005, p. 829), St. Pierre writes about sensual data, response data, dream data, emotional data, (St. Pierre, 1997), and memory data (St. Pierre, 1995), that didn’t appear in her interview transcripts or fieldnotes, but emerged in the process of writing into them. By arguing that these data were already there, as part of her body and “cropped up unexpectedly” in the writing (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005, p.829), St. Pierre offers me a creative way of thinking, that enables me to use writing as an approach that brings senses, the body, and memories together, which I have also foregrounded as integral parts of my data (Cixous, 1993; Davies, 2000). These “fleeting data” (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005, p. 829) that are not just “there” waiting to be collected, but are generated through writing and remembering as one, speak of the particular locations the body occupies and how these are permeated by power. Drawing on Richardson and St. Pierre, I am also using writing as part of my data analysis, by “using witing to think” (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005, p. 829), and as a process that allows

me to write into my various different forms of data without the constraints of divisive data coding practices. In that sense, drawing on Wyatt (2018, p. 43), I choose to use the term writing as inquiry rather than writing as a method of inquiry to challenge the reductiveness which underlies an approach to writing as only being a method: "Writing is thinking [...] writing is an encounter. [...] 'Method' belongs to the procedural, to the linear and the sequential, the reified and the stratified of 'research methods' [...] Writing-as-inquiry is process".

By approaching my body as an instrument of research through which the writing unfurls, I am also using writing to engage with the worlds and words of the interviewees (Longhurst et al., 2008). As I write into these worlds and words that I understand as being generated within the context of our particular encounter, I read these in terms of power, feeling, experience, practice and place, always in connection to the crisis and the kinds of movements of the self it produces and I am looking for things that produce a particular kind of "glow" (MacLure, 2010, p. 282):

Comment(s) in an interview, a fragment of a field note, an anecdote, an object, or a strange facial expression [that] seem to reach out from the inert corpus (corpse) of the data, to grasp us. These moments confound the industrious, mechanical search for meanings, patterns, codes, or themes; but at the same time, they exert a kind of fascination, and have a capacity to animate further thought (MacLure, 2013, p. 228).

I see these things that *glow* as spaces through which I can enter with my writing and as spaces in which the data imbued with their own agency, can exert their power on me, thus informing my movement towards openings through which I can entangle myself with the interviewees accounts, thus creating a particular kind of "we" (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 10), which although distinctive of my own biography, emanates from and speaks back to their stories. Drawing on St. Pierre and Jackson (2014), I examined this plurality of things that became data over and over, while reflecting on how they change through my movement between different sites, contexts, cultures and times: reading and rereading transcripts of the interviews in Athens and in Edinburgh, writing into them from different homes and spaces that produce me, my reading, my writing, differently as they are formed and form

me through different connections, but at the same time as always being underlined by a common thread that runs through them: that of the economic crisis, the insecurities and losses that underscore it and the things it produces through its violent shuffling of social and personal worlds that I don't see in separation. In this process of exploring this place of entanglement between the personal and economic, while also using writing as a way of entangling accounts, senses, and experiences through these openings in the data, I tried not to follow a predetermined path, but instead wander with data, texts, experiences, and ideas on an off-road journey, so I could trek and discover places I do not yet know (Daza & Huckaby, 2014).

3.6.2. Thinking with theory

In the previous sections of my methodology, I have advanced an understanding of theory as a way of knowing, while highlighting the central role it plays in this thesis, by approaching theory as a dynamic process that connects thinking and doing and as something which is embodied, but also as embodying things. Theory as a means of "telling and re-imagining not only what we can say, but also who we can be" (Holman Jones, 2006, p. 228), continues to play a central role in the analytical chapters, as together with writing as inquiry, I am using "thinking with theory" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), as part of my analytical approach.

Thinking with theory exists as part of the broader movement of qualitative data analysis "after coding" (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Elaborating on qualitative data analysis after coding, St. Pierre and Jackson (2014), argue that coding data in traditional qualitative research, particularly in relation to interviews, is often synonymous to an approach of interviewees words being treated as brute data that await to be coded, classified, counted or in other ways reduced. Arguing against this kind of approach, which they suggest is only possible within a divisive and realist Cartesian ontological realist perspective, St. Pierre and Jackson (2014, p. 717) argue for a post-coding analysis, that can be thought of as a "non-technique and non-method that is always in a process of becoming".

Within this framework, Jackson & Mazzei (2012, p. vii) advance thinking with theory and invite qualitative researchers "to use theory to think with their data or use data to think with theory in order to accomplish a reading of data that is both within and against interpretivism". Arguing against data interpretation and analysis through mechanistic ways

of coding and a reduction of data to themes that fail to examine the complexity of social life, they propose an approach that doesn't reduce complex and multi-layered voices and data. By thinking about data through the use of theory and using data to think about theory, what Mazzei and Jackson (2012) argue for is viewing data, like interview excerpts, in connection to and across different conceptual perspectives. As they say:

We are not referring to a use of theory and/or jargon for the purpose of obfuscation and erudition. We are advocating such as a move to create a way of thinking methodologically and philosophically that gets us out of the trap of fixing meaning (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012, p. 745).

This approach to analysis can allow me to achieve a number of things in relation to my methodology. The first one is to continue to use theory in a way that is consistent with my epistemological framework of theory as a "living body of thought" (Pollock, 2006, p. 8). As part of my epistemological discussion, I presented the concept of "citationality" (Adams et al., 2014, p. 92), as expressing the embodied nature of theorising. This citational approach, which interweaves theoretical texts, writing, stories, feelings, and ideas, sees theorizing as "an ongoing, movement-driven process that links the concrete and abstract, thinking and acting" and as "a language for thinking with and through, asking questions about, and acting on the experiences and happenings in our stories" (Holman Jones, 2006, p. 229). Furthermore, my inquiry is inevitably linked to a process of theorising, as part of its undertaking is precisely to find, but also create theoretical language that can approach and inquire into this space of entanglement between the personal and the economic. This inquiry into the intimate shaping of the self is about advancing ways of describing, including theoretical ways of knowing, that bring together things that are often thought about separately: the personal and the economic, the self that feels and that is also produced through power.

Secondly, thinking with theory as an analytical approach that troubles notions of authentic essence and genuine voice, allows me to approach the accounts in my research not as produced by subjects who know who they are and mean what they say, but as expressions of things that have already "been filtered, processed, and interpreted" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 3). These partial and incomplete data that are always being "re-told and re-

membered” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 3), allow me to engage with the subjects that are part of my research, as producing voiced data that are always “bound to power” and as “emerging from relations of power, not relations of meaning” (Foucault, 1990, p. 114). Thus, what this kind of analysis foregrounds is also a troubling of the moving self and an examination of how we position ourselves as we speak, always in connection to power.

3.6.3. Thinking with theory in this research

In order to reimagine the process of data analysis, theorising and writing and think beyond the dominant systems of coding in qualitative research through interpretations that can fragment, Jackson and Mazzei (2012, p. 1) advance “plugging-in” as a central aspect that underlies thinking with theory. Plugging-in, involves arranging and organising ideas together, to create an assemblage that can serve as the foundation for creative interpretations and as an analytical approach that complicates voice (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

The concept of plugging-in, comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988, p. 4) *A Thousand Plateaus*: “When one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work”. As they put plugging-in to work, Mazzei and Jackson and (2012, p. 747) engage with it more as a process instead of a concept, and they plug in, “voices of participants, our own voices, theoretical voices, voices of our teachers/ mentors, voices of other scholars”. As they describe this process more closely, they identify three tactics as parts of their analytical approach. The first one involves putting theoretical principles into action, by breaking the theory/practice binary through a process that aims to decentre and reflect how they constitute or produce one another. The second tactic is connected with being explicit about the questions that are enabled by a certain theoretical idea and how these questions through which they think with theory, arise “in the middle of plugging in” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.5). The third tactic entails working with the same data, in their case interview excerpts, many times to “deform [them], to make [them] groan and protest” (Foucault, 1980, pp. 22–23), with an “overabundance of meaning” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.5), which not only generates new knowledge but also demonstrates the mobility of data.

Drawing on these techniques identified by Jackson and Mazzei (2012), I also used plugging-in as part of my analysis. As I outlined in the previous section of using writing as inquiry, I

approach body senses, memories, feelings, objects, spaces, accounts and texts as part of my data. Thus, I not only plugged mine and the participants voices with theory, while also plugging my voice into theirs through a process of entanglement, but I plugged in all these fragmented and fleeting data and connected them with each other and with theory in order to think. At the same time, I make the questions that arise in the middle of writing into the data and thinking with theory explicit in the text as I write, so they can help me think, without deciding in advance what these are, as in the case of Jackson and Mazzei (2012), as I allow them to emerge through this process of plugging in. This signals towards a point of divergence from the techniques that Jackson and Mazzei (2012) propose. These authors use the same interview excerpts repeatedly to examine them through theoretical concepts of six theorists. The same interview data are analysed in different chapters, as they think separately with Foucault's Power/Knowledge, Derrida's Deconstruction, Spivak's Postcolonial Marginality, Butler's Performativity, Deleuze's Desire and Barad's Material Intra-activity.

Rather than working with the same data to think separately with different theorists, I analyse my particular encounter with each of the four participants in four different analytical chapters, to think simultaneously with different theorists in connection to four theoretical axes. These axes reflect this in-between space of entanglement between the personal and the economic that I have identified as part of a psychosocial Moebius strip (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008), that examines the self that is enveloped and shaped by the power dynamics of the crisis and the feelings and experiences that permeate it, but also the capacities for movement and action the crisis generates. These four axes are led by different theorists and include the works of other closely connected theorist that have been influenced by their work. The first axis which is led by Foucault, encompasses theories that examine how the self is subjugated and at the same time shaped through power, particularly in the context of neoliberalism and governmentality. To give an example, Mbembe's (2008) concept of necropolitics, which problematises how in contemporary politics some people may live, but others must die and is influenced by Foucault's (2008) concept of biopolitics is also a part of this axis. The second axis is led by Judith Butler and her theory on subjection as a necessary condition for the existence of the self (Butler, 1997), and other parts of her theory around embodied processes that are highly relevant to my

questions, including those of vulnerability, dispossession, and the precarious subject (Butler, 2004; 2005; 2009; 2015). The third axis is led by several different theorists who help me think about the feeling aspects of life during the crisis, and includes Ahmed (2014), Berlant (2011), Cvetkovich (2007), and Stewart (2008). These theorists offer me both a framework for examining feelings, for instance the stickiness of emotions that creates connections between and orientations towards things (Ahmed, 2004a), but they also provide me with particular concepts. For instance, cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) as an idea that problematises attachments and feelings within the context of our current economic and political realities is one of these concepts. The final axis which is more diverse is led by Gibson-Graham (2006) and particularly their idea of activist projects and practices that unsettle the neoliberal economic world. Through this axis, I engage with the particular activist and therapeutic practices that are embedded in the social clinics and I think with diverse conceptual frameworks that can enable me to think about the particular *doings* that transpire in the social clinics. For instance, to examine these practices I move between their feeling aspects of practice and the power structures through which they come to be conceivable (Wetherell et al., 2020).

The reason behind this parallel and not separate theoretical examination is directly linked to the goals, frameworks and questions that underlie this study. As I have highlighted, my aim is to explore a space of suture and in-betweenness, through which I can approach the personal and the economic as being held together. To be able to do that, I needed an analytical approach that allowed me to think with these bodies of theory together rather than separately. Secondly, as my study is situated within a critical autoethnography framework, it has aspects that are not a part of Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) approach, namely the centrality of the researcher's embodied experience. Writing about their own presence in the data analysis they note: " [it] is not an insertion into the context in an autoethnographic sense, nor is it a reflection that takes our own researcher subjectivity into account" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 135). As my own embodied experiences are a crucial aspect of my inquiry, this particular configuration of thinking with theory, enabled me to focus on my encounter with each of the four participants and the unique feelings that emerge as part of each encounter, which wouldn't have been possible within the analytical format followed by Jackson and Mazzei's (2012).

3.6.4. Presentation of analytical chapters

For the presentation of my analytical chapters, I draw on Pollock (1996) and her idea of evocative representations. This means that I see the page as a stage for creative expression that transcends binaries between the analytical and the embodied in order to “make possible multiple selves, discourses, and ways of thinking and connecting” (Pollock, 1996, pp. 80–82).

I present my analysis in four different chapters which are based on my particular encounter with each of the four participants: Elpida, Maria, Anna, and Lydia. I start these chapters with autoethnographic vignettes that reverberate the “disjointed temporalities of experiences that cannot be known for certain, cannot be placed once and for all but repeatedly pressure the subject with bodily effects” (Stewart, 2008, p. 0). These vignettes do not conform to a pattern of emplotment that reflects a chronological order of events in a narrative, but rather are aimed at producing brief forms that are more akin to memory “jolts” and “fragments” (Barthes, 2011, p. 44). This kind of “discontinuous, fragmented, sparse, elliptical” autoethnographic writing, provides me “a site for the dispersal of self rather than its reification” (Gannon, 2018, p. 25). By writing my body in this mobile way, through a “discontinuous mutation of sites (like a kaleidoscope)” (Barthes, 2011, p. 44), I write from different spaces that connect me with the crisis in different ways: Edinburgh, Athens, home and social clinics. As I write in these spaces, I see time in slices, which are fluid, transient, and fragile, rather than sequential in order to not fix experience and the self (Foucault, 1984; Gannon, 2018).

These autoethnographic vignettes with which I start the chapters, are written either in response to my particular encounter with each participant or were written independently but provided me “a starting place I hadn’t anticipated” (Gannon, 2018, p. 27). By placing these writings in the context of my encounter with the interviewees, I observed how they allowed me to attune to the particular sensations, textures, and words of the interview, thus offering me an entry point into them, or what Stewart (2010) calls a bloom space. As she notes, “a bloom space can whisper from a half-lived sensibility that nevertheless marks whether or not you’re in it” (Stewart, 2010, p. 340). Thus, these pieces were selected as

they allowed me to attune to each encounter, while enabling my writing to follow unforeseen trajectories.

Following the autoethnographic vignettes, I contextualise each encounter by placing it within the particular site in which it transpires, while introducing the different social clinics in which the interviewees work as volunteers. This allows me to both contextualise the interview encounter as a site which is permeated by unique senses, spaces, objects and bodies that constitute it, and also explore each social clinic as a site with particular structures and features that speak to the way the social impresses itself on the individual through the operation of power (Davies & Gannon, 2011).

I then move to vignettes where I examine more closely the interviewees accounts. The choice of the interview excerpts that I present in these vignettes is based on seeking voices that, “even partial and incomplete, produced multiplicities and excesses of meaning and subjectivities” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 4). This meant looking for an element of “surprise”, by searching for difference rather than sameness, but also of a particular sense of nuance and complexity around “how they [interviewees] seemed to understand how they were positioned – and how they positioned themselves – within a broad range of discursive fields as well as social and material conditions” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 4). Although there were definitely similarities between my interviewees’ accounts, by looking for difference, nuance and complexity, I was able to examine a multiplicity of forms and shapes (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005), in connection to what they were describing.

In these vignettes, I include direct quotes and indirect retellings of what the interviewees shared, while aiming to disrupt any propensity toward an omnipotent narrative (Chawla, 2003). I aim not to flatten the interviewees accounts by paying attention to the specificity and the particular nuances of the experiences they recount, while also approaching them as already “filtered, processed, and interpreted” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 3). At the same time, by approaching writing as a process of “attunement” (Stewart, 2011), I am finding openings, or “glows” (MacLure, 2010, p. 282) in the participants accounts through which I can enter and entangle my experiences with their stories. Through this process, I disrupt the linearity of their accounts, while also creating connections with my autoethnographic

vignettes, thus assembling myself as a speaking subject who is “always leaving, always returning, always longing” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 314) and a troubled “we” (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 10).

The analytical chapters are loosely organised under different section headings that emerged and “happened in the writing” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Under these section headings, I think with particular theoretical concepts and data that constitute one another and emerge in the threshold of writing, thinking, and feeling (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Gannon, 2018).

Chapter Four

Maria

Introduction

In this chapter of the analysis, I am mapping the body's dance between movement and stillness during unemployment and economic austerity. By thinking through the senses, I explore textures, sites and objects of everyday experience, while looking at their entanglement with the neoliberal power dynamics of the crisis. Through this mapping, I am also looking for openings that carry the potential for resistance, action, and the capacity to trouble stillness. The first section of this chapter starts with an autoethnographic interlude which presents some of the embodied aspects of unemployment on the basis of my own experience. These experiences are further developed throughout the chapter, as I tie them with Maria's account in order to illuminate the textures of everyday precarious lifeworlds, particularly in relation to withdrawal, isolation, unemployment, and the feeling of *becoming stuck*. The section following the interlude- setting the scene-provides the context of the social clinic where the interviewee, Maria, works as a volunteer therapist, by identifying some of the setting's main characteristics, particularly in relation to its philosophy and aims. This is followed by the main body of this chapter, which explores how the self folds and turns inwards, while also *becoming stuck*, through the flattening effects of unemployment and austerity. In the first part of the last section, I look more closely at money, as an object of everyday embodied experience. In the final section of this chapter, I turn my focus towards therapy as a practice situated within an activist site. In an effort to find openings that carry the potential to imagine other worlds, I map the tensions that emerge when diverse economic practices meet the existing economic world.

Interlude

The living room in Athens is dark except for the dim light of the electric heater. I'm wearing multiple layers of clothes, but I still feel cold and my legs and back feel sore. I've been glued to the computer chair all day and the lack of movement has made my body slow and stiff. It's been another day of aimlessly looking for a job. The scarce ads on the job search website

that I religiously go through every day either look like frauds that try to take advantage of people's desperation, or the more serious ones are completely out of reach due to not having enough work experience or the highly specialised qualifications that they ask for. There is an ocean of unemployed youth, and the abundance of hopeless people has made hirers act in predatory ways and set unrealistic demands for even simple tasks. In any case, none of them wants what I have to offer and during the last four years one rejection follows the next.

There are some rare moments when I feel a pulse of life deep inside which despite being formless and unknown, speaks of the desire to create, experience and be released from this confined prison of the everyday. This painful yearning whispers to me that there is something unmistakably wrong about this sleepwalking life and that drastic measures will need to be taken if things are to change. But these moments are rare and the lack of creativity, beauty and focus that permeate my everyday routine, make it easier to silence this voice and enter a state of hibernation that sometimes extends over several weeks or months. My partner is also in the living room, staring blankly at his computer-screen in a state of passivity that resembles mine. It feels like this lethargic feeling that surrounds us has crept into our bodies and when I touch him looking to revive myself and cast away the crawling silence, I am terrified because I only find numbness and cold.

Setting the scene: Introduction to Unison

Maria's practice room consists of a large undivided space with almost no furniture except for few chairs and many big, colourful cushions that are spread across the floor. She prepares some coffee and invites me to sit cosily on the floor next to her. I feel grateful for the warmth of her welcome and for seeing how eager she is to discuss with me. The arrangement of the room is different from most practitioners' offices I've previously seen and I ask Maria about it. She explains that her background is in psychodrama, and this is where she facilitates her group work, as the clients need ample space to move around and share their stories through role-play and other dramatization techniques. There is an extra room next door where she also sees her clients one-to-one, some of them for free, as part of her voluntary work with Unison. The focus of the work in Unison lies exclusively on taking care of the psychosocial needs of people, rather than providing general health services, as is the case with most of the social clinics. Maria describes it as a self-funded network of social

solidarity and social support, made from volunteers who provide their support to economically vulnerable people that have been hit the hardest by the crisis. These are people who are unemployed, uninsured, have very low income or might even be homeless. The majority of the volunteers in Unison are psychotherapists who provide one-to-one support for a period of twenty sessions and when this period is over, the users have the option to receive group counselling for an additional year. The rest of the volunteers are a diverse mix of people with backgrounds in the arts. These volunteers lead and facilitate the various creative groups that also take place in Unison, which include theater, dance, yoga, singing, photography, and jewelry making, and are open to everyone who receives therapeutic support through the organization.

Unison is not a part of the social clinics that have emerged directly from social movements and doesn't pronounce its political character in the same way as other places I visited during my fieldwork. As Maria tells me, the volunteers involved in the organisation wish to distance themselves from political ideologies and advance forms of resistance and solidarity that are more subtle and more focused on cultivating ways of connecting that they perceive as going against those that are produced by the crisis, the main one being love.

I am familiar with what Maria is sharing, as before our meeting I read some of the many writings co-authored by the volunteers available on the organisation's website where they explain who they are and what they do. Reading these writings, I found myself wondering if in this act of collaborative writing that focuses on collectively setting the organisation's goals towards the creation of a different, more just, and ethically inspired reality, there are traces of a social dreaming matrix (Speedy & Wyatt, 2014; Lawrence, 2003); this group practice of sharing dreams without taking their ownership, by allowing them to move freely and meet the associations and dreams of others who participate in this sharing. I don't know if any of these co-authored writings reflect the night dreamscapes of the volunteers of Unison, but as I read them, I begin thinking about individual dreams about a different way of relating to the social and political reality, that have met other peoples' dreams and have melted into each other. A short, co-authored passage on love as an illustration of the sort of world that the volunteers wish to advance through their practice stays with me and returns to my mind as I hear Maria speaking about love:

We wonder. What is indeed that element that keeps our world still standing? While we are asking ourselves honestly, our hearts have already given the answer. Love seems to be always a drop above hatred. The fuel for the journey to the magical garden of life is not money. A handful of people, who are all different and also similar like drops of love, have gathered to dare just that: Take a step forward. Start digging through the rubble. Walk side by side with our different self and with all those who are gasping in the margins of society [...] We are beyond ideologies, because we are bored of them and because they have all failed. Our aim goes beyond money, the corollary of this failure. Our only weapon is a vital one and it is crystal clear: it is to be available to support all.

Becoming stuck

The mental image of people who are singing and dancing vibrantly next to each other that forms in my mind as Maria tells me about the arts groups that operate in Unison, reminds me of a celebration of sorts and it also makes me think about the forces and experiences that have brought this group of people together. People who used to be strangers, walking on separate paths who are now intersecting and forming new ways of belonging and communicating. I'm thinking how crisis politics moves things towards unexpected trajectories and materializes in formations like those of the bodies of people who I imagine meditating and creating small pieces of jewelry while sitting side by side. I'm also thinking about the forces and desires that moved the volunteers of Unison to create this space, where zones of creativity and collectivity are opened, as group artwork is taking place alongside counselling and ask Maria why this form of practice has been chosen by the organisation. She tells me that the group artwork is aimed at helping people socialize and feel like they are part of a group again:

“Isolation is a very important part of unemployment. Losing your job can be a major blow. When you reach the age of forty or fifty and find yourself without a job you begin to ask yourself who am I? What have I achieved? I am not worthy and so on. This makes people withdraw and cut themselves off from society. So, one part of what we do takes care of the person at an individual level and another part tries to get this person back into some group where they can interact and reconnect with others who share the same problems and difficulties”.

As I read the transcript of our conversation, I become aware of how Maria locates isolation at the core of the unemployment experience, as something that can lead to existential questioning around self-worth and self-acceptance for her clients who by perceiving it in individualised terms, see it as a personal failure. Being without work can in many cases be experienced as a personal failure and unemployed people can often look for personal inadequacies to justify how they ended up in this situation and why they haven't been able to escape it, rather than seeing this as a more systemic failure (Pultz, 2018). As self-blame and guilt lead some of the people who reach out to Unison for support to remove themselves from social life, Maria describes as one of the main goals of the organisation to break down this wall of isolation by connecting them with others who also live precarious lives. Maria's account of her clients' withdrawal into the realm of the private, speaks directly to me as I know the experience she is describing intimately.

During the interview, there are moments when I find myself identifying with her clients' experiences and this evokes a slight sense of unease in me. Can I share with her that I also know first-hand what her clients go through, or by introducing parts of my identity that are more vulnerable and precarious I could risk creating tension and more complicated interview dynamics? My apprehension is partly based on an acknowledgement that reconciling worlds that are most of the time perceived as incompatible- academic research and precarity-isn't a simple task (Standing, 2011) and I wish to keep this tension of these uneasy belongings outside the interview room. However, I still feel a sense of pressure and I find myself wanting to express to Maria that it's not only people in their forties or fifties who are confronted with the difficulty of defining their identities and evaluating their lives and choices in the absence of employment. As education can no longer secure protection against unemployment in a volatile and competitive job market, the body of the academic precariat consisting of young, educated people (Standing, 2011) becomes ever larger, and I count myself amongst its ranks. Although I don't disclose my experiences to Maria, after the end of my meeting with her, I feel the urge to write about feelings and memories that were evoked during the interview in my fieldnotes:

"It is not only the real-world isolation that is the result of the lack of access to places where one has the opportunity to socialize with others, as work is also a place of socializing, interaction and communication. Even the journey to work is a journey to the outside world

and a process of interaction with it. It is the daily encounter with what we collectively construct as reality and the ungrounding that happens when you lose access to it. It is the regurgitation and repetition of the same thoughts in a daily life that is impoverished and bereft of stimulation and others. It is the experience of your whole body retracting when being asked the simple question: 'how are you, what's new with you?', as nothing's really new. It is the conscious withdrawal of the self from the social, because the internalized murmur of blame, shame and guilt, constantly whispers that you have failed, and the contact with others is a constant reminder that you have nothing to show and nothing to tell".

I am presenting this short passage of my post-interview fieldnotes, to illuminate aspects of Maria's account that are connected with unemployment experiences of withdrawal and isolation, on the basis of my own experience. Maria has pointed out the tendency of the self to turn and fold inwards when confronted with unemployment and by reflecting on my encounter with this experience, I wish to map some of the forces that move it towards this direction. One of the most challenging aspects of inhabiting the space of unemployment for me included an overwhelming sense of failure, as I couldn't shake off the feeling that I was responsible for my predicament. Something that Maria also touches upon, is the internalisation of blame by her clients and the withdrawal that follows when this feeling of guilt takes over. In this tendency to cut the self off from others, but also move one's gaze from the system that produces unemployment to the self, I see an expression of the divisive logics that underpin neoliberal governmentality (Rose, 1996). Everything is privatised in neoliberalism including the responsibility of the self and the emphasis on freedom of choice that goes with it (Brown, 2015). In my life, the evaluation of how well I performed according to ideals which included the undertaking of work as an honourable activity that is synonymous to success, recognition, and the capacity to be autonomous, would validate that I fall short in these domains. On top of that, the ample space and time provided by the lack of action during everyday life, amplified this close monitoring, thus allowing the unemployment experience and the feelings that went with it to grow and occupy an even more central role in how I came to identify myself. Although I am currently partly able to articulate my understanding of how I came to experience myself in this way, that wasn't the case during the time that these events were unfolding. Consumed by this reality, I wasn't

able nor seeking to verbalise what was happening, and the only tangible feelings that were there, were the embodied senses of shame and the paralysing feeling of *becoming stuck*. Shame would emerge during my interaction with others, which was one of the few times when this close examination of the self and its failure to fulfil its role as a financially independent adult would acquire a more conscious character and I would become more aware of its presence. Ahmed's (2014, p. 103) description of shame as "an intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about the self" reflects this feeling, as the experience of shame felt like a tight and overpowering grip on my body. The clutch of shame would push me to move away from others, wishing to hide what I perceived as a transparent and ever-present sense of failure that I feared everyone could recognise when they came close to me.

Furthermore, by being spatially confined inside a home, what also went missing was the access to the communication and interaction that happens between self, others, and the social world, as a creative exchange that makes things (Martin, 2020). This lack of access to the flow of life manifested even in the simple absence of commuting and the immobility that emerges when you always inhabit the same space-that of home-while experiencing the same objects on a daily basis. Bissell (2016) develops an understanding of commuting and everyday journeys, as an ongoing process of transformation that takes place through events and encounters that happen on the move. He suggests that during these encounters with different people, places and objects, the body's capacity to do and sense things, increases or decreases in subtle ways. Part of my experience of isolation was the sense that the polyphony created by other bodies and objects was replaced by a repetitive and flattened monotony that permeated thinking and feeling. Every day had the same texture as the next and I felt my body merging with this sameness, while being reduced to performing and experiencing the same movements, physically and emotionally, time and time again.

Until I die, nothing will change

The subject of repetition and inflexibility also comes up in Maria's account, as she tells me that many of her clients complain about suffering from pains on the body and she gives me the following interpretation on why she thinks this is happening:

“When you have no vision, when there’s no future mobility, when you have no goal, the body becomes stiff and inflexible. It is inactive. It is as if there is a physical ankylosis that mirrors a psychological ankylosis¹. And there is a psychological ankylosis that reflects a social ankylosis. Because we live in a society that gives you no way out, there is no future. What is the date that was agreed on the last memorandum that was signed? Is it the year 2061? When you see this date, you lose hope. Not too many people will read the agreement, but the number will stay in their mind. So, when you read the news and see 2061, the average person will not sit and read the details. What will stay is this: Until I die, nothing will change”².

As I read Maria’s transcript, her last sentence feels like a painful blow in the chest, and it reminds me of confined spaces that I do not wish to revisit. It brings me back to the dim light of the electric heater in my cold living room and to my aching legs that have become stiff from not moving. It brings me back to the feeble glow of the computer screen and my futile job-searching routine. This sentence that hurts speaks to an emotional impasse, which is tied to a socio-economic dead-end and the impossibility of movement that arises as the body is tethered to a net of economic agreements that hold it captive until debts are repaid. Reflecting on Maria’s account and my own experiences, I become aware of how the intimate aspects of everyday life, including the movements that the body can perform and how one relates to self and others, are regulated by economic rationalities and forces. I also notice that the experience of becoming immobile and rigid, or the presence of an *ankylosis* as Maria describes it, differs from the usual view of the economised subjectivity that embraces neoliberal rationalities that ensure its enhanced productivity by relating to the self as a product or business (McNay’s, 2009). Although the enterprising self that is bound by accountability and personal responsibility (Rose, 2009) is present in the internalised blame that accompanies unemployment, I notice that there is also a different aspect of the economised subject that Maria describes which diverges from rationalities of ambition,

¹ Ankylosis is a Greek word that has acquired a medical meaning in the English language. Merriam Webster dictionary defines it as: stiffness or fixation of a joint by disease or surgery. However, in Greek, it is used to describe a condition that can encompass body and mind. Greek Wiktionary translates it as a grip on the muscles, a difficulty bending the body, a lack of adaptability to changing new conditions. Therefore, I chose to keep the word ankylosis, which was used by Maria during the interview, as it captures and describes a condition of rigidity that might have broader social connotations but is always reflected on the body.

² Maria here is referring to the terms of the surveillance framework that specifies the financial and other reform goals that need to be achieved in exchange for the bailout packages received by Greece. These goals that are part of the memorandum of understanding on financial assistance extend to 2061.

effectiveness and productivity. Instead of logics and performances that intensify the profitability of the self, in Maria's account there is a lack of movement, and the body seems *stuck* and caught between forces that push it to remain in a state of being between life and death. As Maria narrates, when one is confronted with the reality of the austerity measures lasting until 2061, hope is lost and what is acknowledged is that the body will be held captive and made to serve the neoliberal economic policies until its death.

For Mbembe (2019), this can be seen as an expression of the advancement of necropolitics where life is subjugated to the power of death. Mbembe (2019, p. 15) argues that when the state embraces forms of power that correspond to its dark side, or what he describes as a "nocturnal body" that is based on the same desires, affects, relations and violence that drove colonialism, some people are pushed into an existence between life and death, thus resembling walking dead. As the bailout packages determine the conditions for acquiring financial assistance through reforms that aggressively restructure and colonise the lifeworld which becomes indebted, I begin to wonder if the making of passive, and atrophic bodies guarantees the compliance with the measures by those who live in the crisis. As I also wonder how this passivity of the body, seen in the absence of life and movement is established, I return to the first part of Maria's excerpt where she describes that when one misses having lifegoals or a broader vision about the future, the body becomes inflexible and stiff. In reference to that, she also later adds that what she thinks one is deprived of is the "possibility of imagining the self in the future".

What Maria describes reflects an understanding that people's lives, including her clients, are formed by things that are not yet in the present: their imaginations about the future that permeate the here-and-now. Her account depicts imagination as a force that creates not only trajectories in everyday life, but also movement. From this perspective, an existence that is bereft of the possibility of imagining the future differently, becomes stuck. This understanding of imagination as a driving force of movement resonates with me and I begin to see how in cases where unemployment is also present, imagination can become even more barren as access is lost to the affective landscape of the outside world (Berberich et al., 2013). As Maria said in the beginning of the interview, one of the main goals of Unison is to "break down the wall of isolation" through the clients' participation in the various art groups that the organisation offers. The image of people who are playfully experimenting

with different materials, or singing, dancing and meditating side by side returns to my mind and I become aware of how part of the work that is done towards breaking down the wall of isolation isn't only directed towards reconnecting people with others, but also towards reanimating the imagination. For Castoriadis (1987), when imagination challenges dystopias that emerge from repressive political systems through the creation of alternative visions, figures, forms and images, it becomes radical. He argues that what makes imagination radical is its generative function and its ability to resist, but also make things by structuring and producing lived realities.

As I write, I begin to think about indebtedness and prolonged austerity as obstructing the generative function of imagination and its capacity to produce a reality that is open and non-confining in the present by projecting visions and meanings of life and the self in the future. However, in the work that Maria describes, I see the opening of the possibility to imagine a future where the self, regardless of how vulnerable and precarious it is, can exist alongside others, while being allowed to express its playfulness and creativity. Reflecting on the radical potential that imagination carries within the context of practices like the ones that take place in Unison, I see a dance between movement and stillness. Bodies that have become stiff and inflexible are invited to move and stretch in the presence of others, inside a space that also emerged through the movement of the volunteers who created Unison.

Although delving from different perspectives, both Manning (2016) and Butler (2015) argue that engaging bodies in movement, involves engaging the politics of being with others. Butler describes "parking my body in the middle of another's action" as a form of action that is "neither yours nor mine but something that happens by virtue of the relation between us" (2015, p. 9). Manning on the other hand argues that movement is "capable of opening experience to new registers and creating new modes of existence" (2016: X). When Maria reflects on some of the reasons that drew her to become a volunteer practitioner, movement is also present:

"For me, every person is a journey, it is an experience, it is a meeting with someone whom under other circumstances I would never have seen. It is a way to feel that I am not sitting on my couch, that I contribute a little something that goes against this horrendous situation".

What strikes me in this account is that the need for movement is shared by Maria, as she expresses an understanding of volunteering as an activity that doesn't allow the body to become docile and passive by "sitting on the couch", but also as something that increases the capacity to act and resist, by enabling connection with other people. In this desire to stay in motion, I also see the traces of *becoming stuck* as a feeling that emerges from the entanglement of the self with the sociopolitical landscape of the crisis. In the articulation of Maria's need for movement and connection, I recognize my experience and see an effort to resist the same forces that hold the body down and push it towards isolation, despair, and passivity. Reflecting on this aspect of our lives that is shared and permeated by the same affective dynamics of austerity, I begin to wonder whose voice I hear in her story. When she describes her clients' experiences of dispossession as a condition of being affected by loss and injustice, but also prompted to act and move (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013), is she speaking about them or herself?

Money and experience

As Maria describes her motives for joining Unison and her shared need for movement, I think about the in-between space where the private and public are entangled. Besides the similarities that might emerge from collectively inhabiting this shared reality of austerity, I also think about the difference. As Maria shares with me, she is much more financially secure than her clients, because besides a volunteer she is also a private practitioner. Money, as one of the most salient features of austerity and the financial crisis, becomes present in Maria's story through its absence both in her clients' lives, but also in the lack of fees in the social clinic, where all services are provided free of charge. Starting from money's capacity to open or close down experience, Maria offers an interpretation that depicts it as something which exceeds commonplace accounts that define it as an inanimate object:

"The economic crisis translates into a lack of money, but is primarily the instrument that we use to go to the theater, buy a book, a drink, travel, expand our horizons and there are people who can't even afford a tomato right now. Without it, people have neither material nourishment nor psychic nourishment [...] I can't remember who said this, but bread isn't just bread. Money is life".

Maria, here, discusses aspects of social exclusion that are connected with the absence of money and the manifestation of this absence in the constrained conditions that she sees as being able to produce both material and psychic reality. In her account, money is depicted as an object that cannot only be exchanged for goods and services but can also grant access to a wide array of experiences that provide a sustenance which is interchangeably “material and psychic”. Money is typically seen as the ultimate expression of materiality and for that reason as being soulless. Weber (1958, p. 331) elaborates on this theme extensively and argues that the calculability and rationality as fundamental features of capitalist economy are directly connected with money as “the most abstract and ‘impersonal’ element that exists in human life”. However, money is interpreted very differently by Maria who identifies in it not only the pathway that leads to experience, but also experience itself. I wonder, how could money be thought about as being equivalent to life?

Writing about everyday experience, Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006, p. 165) suggest that “elements of the material world become artefacts of experience” as “experience materializes in things, flowing not only through people but also through objects” that participate in the creation of the world. Starting to think about money as an artefact or a material feature of the environment that is fundamental to living, I become aware of the presence of an embodied relationship with this object. For Black (2013, p. 43), “certain objects can be integrated into our sense of the limits and capacities of our bodies so effectively that they become a part of the direct, unreflective capacity for action usually associated with our own limbs”. From this perspective, this “seamless sensory connection” (Black, 2013, p. 43), with the body is made possible through the artefact’s capacity to assist us in sensing and acting upon the world around us. Maria’s account is moving me towards thinking about money as a part of our embodied, sensory relationship with the environment: books, drinks, travel, food, health, are all aspects of our experience of feeling and being in the world and they are all accessed through money. Money as an artefact which becomes an extension of the body can be seen as a part of the way we sense the world, as it habitually provides access to all sorts of material and non-material objects that shape our beingness in the world. Through the “bread that isn’t just bread” in Maria’s account, I am reminded again of the dim light of the electric heater in my living room in Athens that I wrote about in the interlude of this chapter. This somber light of an object that

couldn't produce sufficient heat to keep our bodies warm, but was the only option we could afford. The faint warmth of the electric heater became part of the way I experienced my body and the other bodies with which I shared the space of home. In the absence of money, this warmth's weak embrace became part of the texture of home and of the numb and subdued way that I embraced myself.

Money and therapy

During the interview, the conversation moves from the role of money in the lives of Maria's clients, to the absence of fees. As all services are offered free of charge in Unison, Maria expresses a series of dilemmas around the feasibility of offering therapy for free:

"These are questions that ask myself, but I don't have an answer. I don't know how this is for the other professions, like for a musician who works for free in Unison, but the difference for therapists is that they offer-Someone with a psychoanalytic background, would tell you that they also work with their unconscious. So, these boundaries become blurrier. I think this simple symbolic gesture of giving something back, no matter how small the sum, would help define these boundaries better-You don't help the other person grow up. You become their mother who gives everything without asking for anything in return. Only our mother gives everything and asks nothing. How can you ever feel angry with someone who offers you everything? How can you feel angry with mother? Don't you feel guilty when you do? How can this person express aggression towards me, towards the person that might represent everything that they want to attack? How can he express aggression towards someone who gives, but doesn't give him the chance to give something? The ability to put one's hand in one's pocket and offer something, can give a sense of dignity-make them feel that they are able to reciprocate what they receive. Not being able to give something back, can feel very constraining and cause aggressive feelings. Like an all-good, merciful and provider God. You can't be angry with God! And I am not God. This can raise issues around the omnipotence of the therapist. He is perfect, he needs nothing and you on the other hand are there".

As Maria shares these dilemmas, the sharpness of her voice and the uneasy movements of her body fill the room and travel from her body to mine. I sense that this is an important

topic to her that she has thought about many times before discussing it with me. I am also troubled by what she seems to be suggesting, as in a way it seems to invalidate the whole undertaking of the project: not only free of charge therapy is an impossible endeavour, but it is actually capable of causing more harm than good by reproducing dynamics of inequality that infantilise the client. Furthermore, it is a capitalocentric process, which is incompatible with any alternative economic models like the one advanced by the social clinics, as it is too deeply intertwined with the idea of a business-model transaction. From this perspective, Maria's account seems to be underpinned by various forms of neoliberal and individualistic logics (Rose, 1990) as it depicts the therapeutic relationship as part of an affair of commerce. In that sense, by identifying monetary value, in the form of fees, as an integral part of the therapeutic process and indicating that without it the therapeutic relationship falls apart, Maria iterates a neoliberal understanding which construes intimate aspects of the lives of individuals, as a relationship of commerce with the world, with others and with themselves (Rose, 1990). However, Maria is the same person who painfully recounted to me the detrimental effects of austerity in the lives of her clients. She is also someone who has actively committed herself to resisting these forces, particularly in relation to their exercise on the body and the injuries they can inflict upon it, by choosing to offer her services in Unison, despite the difficulties that she recognises in this form of practice. These aspects of her story make it difficult for me to see her as a mere agent of neoliberal governance.

Apart from that, as I shared a space with her, I was struck by the warmth and care that emanated from her presence, the commitment that she had for the people she tends to as a volunteer, but also the sense that these are dilemmas that haven't emerged from a superficial involvement with this project, but instead from a genuine effort to work around the tensions and contradictions that emerge when therapy is placed within an activist context. I wish to stay with these tensions and explore some of the dynamics that encompass them more closely through Maria's account.

Drawing on an assortment of psychodynamic ideas, Maria recognizes in the non-payment of fees a way of connecting between therapist and client which is similar to that between a child and its mother. Various authors have written about money in therapy from a psychodynamic perspective that resembles Maria's, as a symbolical transaction which represents psychic states that become part of the transference and countertransference

dynamics between client and therapist (Valentine, 1999; Trachtman, 1999). In Maria's story, money seems to draw a line, a barrier, the absence of which makes things blurry and the roles between her and her clients fuzzy. This reading resonates with Freud's idea around the exchange of money for services, who suggested that through its absence "the whole relationship is removed from the real world"³ (Freud, 1958, p. 132). In this fuzzy reality, Maria depicts giving as a one-sided act without reciprocation, which leads her to obtaining a role that is closer to that of a mother, than a therapist. This unilateral flow of giving that manifests in the absence of fees, creates uneven dynamics in the relationship, causing her to even appear as a benevolent, provider god, who is self-sufficient in stark contrast to her clients who have reached out to Unison precisely due to their many pressing needs. I wonder, are these tensions surfacing just because of money as a regulatory force that operates within a dyadic relationship between Maria and her client, or are there other forces at play? After all, this dyadic relationship doesn't exist in a vacuum, but is part of a larger network of connections which inform and delineate it, as this absence of money or fees, but also the relationship itself, exist as parts of a centre of social solidarity and support.

Writing about unpaid labour and its fundamental, yet unacknowledged, role in the economy, Irigaray (1986, p. 13) argues that "our societies presuppose that the mother should nurture the child without payment, both before and after the birth, and that she should continue to nurture both man and society". Elaborating on the issue of unpaid labour, Hochschild (2000, p. 32) provides the example of global care chains, which she defines as a:

[...] series of personal links between people across the globe that are based on the paid or unpaid work of caring. A typical global care chain might work something like this: An older daughter from a poor family in a third world country cares for her siblings (the first link in the chain) while her mother works as a nanny caring for the children of a nanny migrating to a first world country (the second link) who, in turn, cares for the child of a family in a rich country (the final link). Each kind of chain

³ Despite Freud's emphasis on the importance of fees for delineating the therapeutic relationship, a more neglected aspect of psychoanalytic history offers a very different perspective, as in the challenging times between 1920 and 1938, Freud was one of the many prominent psychoanalysts who led the way in creating outpatient centres that provided free mental health care in ten different Austrian cities (Danto, 2005).

expresses an invisible human ecology of care, one care worker depending on another and so on.

In this example, Hochschild sees how capitalism creates a supply and demand for mothering, the primary beneficiaries of which are in most cases wealthy multinational companies. As I write into the challenges narrated by Maria regarding her role in connection to money, I am reminded of the collaborative writing of the volunteers of Unison and their desire to advance ways of connecting and resistance that are informed by love. Could this love resonate with the functions of a nurturing and procreating mother who is also caught-up in a web that perpetuates the same power dynamics of inequality that make Maria's clients seek support through Unison and can this be part of the tensions that surface when Maria offers her services free of charge? In a later part of the interview, she shares some of her dilemmas in relation to the purpose volunteering can serve within a broader social network of power flows:

"Generally, I don't believe in volunteering and charity, because I believe in a society that would make all of this unnecessary or complementary to a very well-organized state. I believe in a society that would provide all these services, like mental health, health, education, safety, food-provision. In a socially just state, all of these things would be self-evident. Here, we're acting a bit like a decompression valve, giving an alibi to keep things operating as they are now".

In this part of her account, Maria iterates one of the main arguments against philanthropy and humanitarian help, as a process which leaves the inequalities that perpetuate poverty unchallenged and thus patch up the problem without really solving it (Theodossopoulos, 2016). From this perspective, efforts of solidarity movements like Unison that aim to offer immediate relief by addressing some of the most urgent aspects of austerity, are seen as redirecting attention away from their systemic generation and in this respect, can even be seen as maintaining "a secret solidarity with the very powers they ought to fight" (Agamben 1998, p. 133).

By engaging with the tensions that emerge when therapy is offered free of charge, including those of the care that is provided through volunteering within neoliberal regimes, I am left with some of the same questions as Maria. I wonder, how are we to understand ourselves

within a framework of care that is not organised around the acquisition of profit or monetary value, without getting caught-up in dynamics that perpetuate unfair power dynamics? How are we to resist the flattening effects of neoliberal dynamics and maintain the capacity for movement within a system that produces and installs stillness as a part of experiencing ourselves and our connections to others? I want to keep on moving. I hold these questions close to me, but in a light and gentle way. In a way that allows me the space to stretch my thinking and feeling body.

Chapter Five

Lydia

Introduction

In this chapter of the analysis, I focus on the labouring body. The body that is put under strain and is worn out by the project of reproducing life through the maintenance of the economic ordering of things. Thinking through a framework of collectivist and relational practice, I explore the things that are enabled within the activist site of the social clinic, in connection to experience and the self. The first section of this chapter starts with an autoethnographic interlude where I write about my own experiences of having a labouring body that I place in some of its sites of work. The following section, setting the scene, contextualises the work of Lydia, the volunteer psychotherapist whose interview I engage with in this chapter. Starting from tracing some of the tensions between activist contexts and organisations that are differently positioned towards the political, I move to examining the social clinic where Lydia works, as a site where experience and agency assume different articulations. In the next section, becoming differently political, I further inquire into the things and practices that are enacted in the social clinic, in terms of the relational self and of loss as a condition that moves the self towards the consideration of others. In the last section, I explore the labouring body within the context of the ordinary as an affective form of engagement with life itself from a standpoint of perpetual economic hardship.

Interlude

It is the year after finishing my master's degree and I have just started my first job in Edinburgh. I work as a support worker in an arts-based day centre for young people with special needs. Until now, I've been living in the relatively sheltered and multicultural reality of the University, where I've been fortunate enough to spend most of my time doing academic work that I profoundly enjoyed. Although the first year in Edinburgh has been far from easy, this new work environment feels like a huge cultural leap into the unknown. Every other day, I take the bus to some new and unknown destination, and I enter the homes of Scottish families. After I help the children prepare, we spend most of our time in the day centre, where I help them participate in the different activities of the day. I observe

everything around me and I take careful mental notes of all the details of this new life and its rituals: sitting together for a meal, mothers interacting with children, support workers talking or smiling to other workers, and accents that I am trying to decipher, most of the time unsuccessfully. I sometimes complain to my partner that it is easier for him to blend in because his appearance doesn't betray that he's not from Scotland, whereas my visible foreignness leads people to automatically assume that I come from *some far-away place* (probably Spain) and that they need to speak to me in a loud and slow voice, so I can understand what they say. I am trying to figure out how to blend in with this environment and it's not easy. The effort to dilute my difference by transforming how I speak and how I present myself to others involves a slow and laborious process of self-modification that leaves me feeling somewhat resentful. Despite my softer accent, my softer smile, my gestures, and expressions that I am trying to attune to the movements and flows of the other bodies that surround me, there are still times that my foreignness feels sharp and obtrusive. In my partner's reality, others can tell that he is eastern European, which is a far worst thing, because he feels that some of the local people have little love for those who come from that part of the world.

At the day centre, my zero-hour contract cannot guarantee the number of hours that I desperately need to cover my expenses, but my eagerness to work is quickly noticed by my line-managers and I somehow find myself supporting all the students with the most challenging behaviours and complex needs. My arms become strong from moving, lifting, and handling the bodies of people during their personal care, but a part of me is crumbling under the weight of this work.

A year has passed, and I am now working at the University's library, where I push, load and unload trollies full of books. Once again, I feel thankful for my strong hands that can provide me with what I need to survive. There are no violent physical or emotional outbursts here, but there is silence and repetition. My body is reduced to performing the same sets of movements over and over, and when things get busy and I have to work fast, I feel dizzy from the lack of oxygen in the library's stale air. When one trolley empties, I load it again, and then I silently walk between the forests of corridors, until I find the correct shelf where each book belongs. The artificiality and silence of this environment gives its place to that of the PhD workspace in the afternoons, where the no-talking rule also applies. It is my first

year as a PhD student and I feel like an imposter, a manual labourer who has accidentally managed to slip into academia.

My monthly income is less than enough to cover my expenses, so when the opportunity for extra shifts in a different area of the library appears, I naturally accept it. I manage to work the 12-hour shift during the first five days, but on the middle of the sixth day, a strange feeling takes over. My body has given up. The energy that was holding it together is just not there anymore. There is no fuel left, no energy, no hope, or dream about the future, that could lift me up and help me move, only defeat and exhaustion. I drag myself to a secret and secluded corner of the library and as I collapse on the floor I begin to cry.

Setting the scene

Lydia has a background in systemic therapy and has been working as a volunteer in the social clinic for two years. I meet her at her private practice in the Athens city centre, during what feels like one of the warmest days of that summer. Before the interview starts, we quietly take a moment to cool down and sit in silence as we feel the fan's breeze travelling across the room and over our bodies. Lydia drove under this heavy heat just for the interview. This makes me feel a little responsible for the discomfort she is experiencing in this hot and humid room, but her openness and enthusiasm are infectious, and she quickly casts away my worries. Her volunteer therapy work feels like an important part of her life, and she wants to share a piece of it with me. She tells me that her involvement in this particular space is not coincidental, but a direct outcome of her previous volunteer experiences. Before joining the social clinic, she has spent two years as a volunteer therapist for an NGO in one of the most impoverished parts of the city that, as she tells me, "entered a financial crisis long before the great financial crisis broke out": the Athens' shipyards, the country's main shipbuilding and repair zone that closed around 2008, leaving thousands of labourers unemployed as a result. As she says, this experience left her feeling that she has been used by the organisation, which made her wary of the philanthropic façade of large NGO's. She also shares that some have directly profited by the many painstaking hours that she has spent as a volunteer, as these hours were then used in grant applications as a demonstration of the NGO's societal commitment, on the basis of which the organisation has received huge financial sponsorships. This realization that her unpaid work is being monetized coincided with her first visit at the social clinic and her participation in one of its

volunteers' assemblies. This "deeply democratic process, in which so many different voices were heard", as she tells me, impressed her deeply and made her aware that rather than being involved in settings that necessitate an unconditional kind of giving, she would only offer her time as a volunteer, if certain requirements were met:

"So then, a strict condition for me to go anywhere was that it would not be charitable work, it would be something that would be beyond the philanthropic and it would also have something else inside it, some connection with social movements. Social movement maybe not in the usual political sense, but more psychological in a way that it manages to find ways to mobilize people for their rights".

As I connect with Lydia's account by reading her description of her journey from the NGO to the social clinic, I notice how she becomes increasingly attentive to the ways that the personal and the political are entangled, as she moves from the philanthropic work that was expressed by the NGO, to a social activism context where Lydia aspires to mobilise others. As I think about the different power dynamics that encompass these two contexts, the NGO and the social clinic, I see the first one operating within a highly economically distressed part of Athens, while harnessing Lydia's voluntary work for profit. On the other hand, as I read into Lydia's admission into the social clinic through the volunteer's assembly, I see it operating as a vehicle which promotes an awareness of the type of activism she wants to embody. Gould (2010, p.33) writes that social movement contexts, such as the social clinic's volunteer assembly, "not only offer a language for people's affective states, they also provide an emotional pedagogy of sorts, a guide for what and how to feel and for what to do in light of those feelings". Thinking with Gould's (2010, p.33) concept of emotional pedagogy as part of the process that volunteering in Lydia's account acquires a different orientation after she enters the social clinic, I see Lydia's movement from the disenchantment of being used for profit by the NGO, towards volunteering in the social clinic as a process aimed at perpetuating movement and action. Rather than being an act of care provision, where one offers and others benefit from it, as Lydia describes her connection with the social clinic, volunteering becomes an activist dynamic plurality that aims to mobilize and motivate all those who are involved in it. Furthermore, Lydia shares that part of the reason why she chose to stay in the social clinic was that the strong presence of the local community in this space aligned with her goals around community

mobilization. The particular social clinic where Lydia volunteers has truly been created from the ground-up, as people from the neighbourhood, many of them manual labourers, helped built it:

“This place was truly sad, you should have seen it. An old cafe, literally brown from the dirt that was covering everything. The floors were made out of a plastic material that would fall apart every time you stepped on it. Then the neighbourhood people came in and took care of everything. They painted it, made floors, and even built an attic that we could use for our pharmacy”.

As I read Lydia's her account this story becomes an image that moves me as I imagine the neighbourhood people caringly transforming this abandoned, run-down space into a fully operational, self-organised health-centre; everyday people, acting under the strain of a crisis that has exposed them to a state of deadly living; a multifaceted death that manifests through the exposure to the injuries of poverty and the dissolution of the healthcare system, but also to political violence, as state power is reduced to an enactment of governing that diminishes rights and living (Athanasίου, 2013). I wonder, as the intensity of these pressures is felt, is the collective building of the social clinic by the local community a way of moving away from these deadly forces? Does the creation of this space coincide with the creation of a fold within the crisis-world-“a fold or texture in the compositions of things” (Stewart, 2007, p. 77)-where one can experience a being otherwise?

As I imagine the neighbourhood people putting their bodies to work to create the social clinic, I think about the micropolitics of everyday life that “privilege the everyday realms as sites of transformation, and commonly involve putting experience to work [while] fracturing the ongoing processes of capture entailed in state politics” (Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006, p. xviii). Elaborating on micropolitics, Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006) describe them as operating in the context of socio-political change by generating voices, action and counter-discourses of resistance that form new and innovative coalitions. As the authors note, micropolitics form movement and collective practices not through abstract identifications, but they materialise in everyday social life. As I write into Lydia's account and her desire towards enacting an infectious movement that moves others towards action, I also write into the bodies that are present in her story, the people of the local community, who move as they work side by side and reclaim the right of their bodies to be cared for

through the rebuilding of the social clinic, and I wonder about the significance of creating the social clinic as a material object in the world. As Brown and Stenner (2001) argue, materialization entails acting both inside and outside of prevailing discourses, creating world, opening world, and affecting others, as well as a process of producing and remaking the world in ways that might be unrepresentable in existing discourses.

As I plug-in this perspective of materialization in the context of the social clinic and the idea of creating material worlds that embody ways of being that might not be part of the prevailing language we use to describe and produce the social world, I think about the collective modes of relating and creating that speak of creation through togetherness which become possible within this material site. Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006, p. 154) write about the “production of experience into a crucial moment of its own reproduction” and the everyday as a “site in which experience circulates and transforms” (Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006, p. xi). From this perspective, the social clinic as an everyday material site that has been built through collective and plural forms of being can be a site that has been produced to reproduce this particular way of sociality that ruptures not only individualist logics, but speaks of the self and its everyday conditions of life, particularly in relation to health and its repudiation, as imagined differently.

As Lydia continues sharing her thoughts around what being in relation to others signifies as part of her work in the social clinic, she touches upon another aspect of what she receives through her participation in this space:

“What work do I offer and what should I take to feel balanced, what should I ask for? And we tend to forget this as volunteers, not only to ask as my reward, but to ask as a way of being together. That this way of doing things together could be in a way my payment. Payment in this sense that my existential needs are covered and I don’t know if you can understand this. What have I received here? I will say it again! My psychological balance, a piece of it at least. That is, through social activism, I get my social existence. That this is how I would like to exist, as I do in here”.

Describing her work in the social clinic, Lydia shares some of the positive aspects of volunteering in this site, saying that this particular way of “being with the other” is gratifying in a way that fulfils deep personal and existential needs. In her account, she

depicts activism as a form of praxis which serves as an embodiment of the way that Lydia would like to live as part of the social world. Melluci (1994, p. 125) describes this as “prophecy”, a site where “the possible is already incarnate in the life of the group”. Moving away from neoliberal relations of production and commerce that isolate people from each other by turning gratification into a narcissistic pursuit which is directed towards the self, Lydia describes getting a deep sense of reward from participating in collectivist practices and ways of being that are part of what is formally known as the unproductive part of the economy (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2011).

I feel drawn to what Lydia describes and this way of being with the other as being able to provide her with a sense of balance. Writing around this idea of balance and thinking about volunteering within activist contexts as a balancing act, I think about how this felt sense in Lydia’s account is depicted as being paired with agency as an act that “gives her some possibility to constitute herself as a subject also following her own desires” (Grisard et al., 2020, p. 5). Butler (2015) argues that if we act and portray ourselves as agents, it is because we take on and convey an activity that is already happening and flowing through a network of relationships in our name. This means that the individual isn’t the exclusive or principal source of its agency, as it is animated into its own being by this network of interactions that make it capable of any action at all. This indicates that agency is not a quality inherent in a self-contained subject, but rather arises from the field of connections in which the subject is created. Thinking with this relational understanding of agency, I wonder if this feeling of balance that Lydia describes is just hers or appears as part of things that circulate and the connections that are created in the social clinic. Butler also writes (1990) that by reproducing and enacting its own representation, the subject can interpret anew some of its own properties and subjectivize itself differently to an extent. However, this manifestation of difference becomes possible only through the existence of a referential opposition to these clusters of representation. In that sense, by offering alternative clusters of representation, in the form of a sociality that manifests as collectivity, togetherness, solidarity and direct-democracy, I start thinking about the social clinic in connection to Lydia’s account, as a space that offers this possibility of not only offering new interpretations of the self, but also as enabling the enactment of a different form of agency. Through this reading, I also see this process as not being separate from the feeling subject.

As agency and a felt sense of balance are depicted together in Lydia's account, I see them as producing one another and as existing in circulation in this space, thus making possible this different form of enactment.

Becoming differently political

As Lydia begins to describe more closely the details of her work in the clinic, she tells me that she does not see clients on a one-to-one basis, but only does groupwork. During the interview, I wonder if there is a connection between the choice of working in groups and the fact that the social clinic is an activist space that favours plural and collective forms of doing things, so I ask Lydia if there are any political dimensions in the decision to offer groupwork. Her response is that the group simply allows her to accommodate a larger number of people and that this choice isn't connected to politics, or at least not politics in a conventional sense:

"This is a purely psychotherapeutic group, so it's in no way connected with how the social clinic is organized. It is wrong for someone to connect politics with following a political line or belonging to a political party. This makes me angry, it makes me angry because this isn't part of my reality! I don't belong to any political party, parliamentary or extra-parliamentary and I am not even interested in that. But I am interested in people understanding their political existence, because I think this has to do with being able to stand on their own two feet. Their responsibilities for what they can do as political beings and how they are in relation to others. It is political in the sense that through the issues that each person brings, openings are created. Through unemployment for example, there are openings that are created, how to say this? Perspectives into this person's being, his existence. That I exist inside a society and what this means. To understand a little, and this is also connected to social consciousness, to understand your own vulnerability in relation to what you lack, not only in financial terms but in social terms and in terms of health, education and in what ways you can coexist with your neighbours. That is, how you feel about yourself and the community".

Revisiting this moment through writing, I remember how surprised I was from Lydia's reaction. How I felt concerned that I might have asked the wrong thing at the wrong time.

My question around the political dimensions of her work has stirred-up something, some form of tension that I couldn't understand, but I could sense in Lydia's response. As I retrospectively write about this moment of tension, I become aware of how it might have emerged through the interview dynamics between us. Although I am an ally to Lydia's cause and to the project of social clinics, Lydia has no real way of knowing this. Despite having disclosed some of my personal experiences with social movements during the interview, as I shared that I took part in the social mobilisations of the crisis, I am still a stranger whom she meets for the first time. I wonder, when Lydia emphasizes that therapy is separate from the way that the social clinic is organised, is she defending her work from others, like me, who might think that therapy within a space that is so saturated in politics can become "too political"? Parker and Shotter (2015) suggest that the tendency to frame therapy as an apolitical activity can be seen in connection to preserving a neutral and value-free stance when it comes to practice. Did Lydia feel that I might perceive the presence of therapy within an activist space as a confirmation of its infiltration by political ideologies which derail its focus by serving specific political interests?

I also wonder if politics is more a verb rather than a noun in Lydia's account; an act, or a series of acts that represent a doing instead of a being or a thing (Butler, 1990), and if her response is part of perceiving my question as an attempt to stipulate a regulatory frame to politics that binds it to specific normative categories that she no longer subscribes to. Thinking with Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, I reflect on how identity is formed through repetition, through linguistic actions that make and unmake it by way of citational and reiterative practices that operate within systems of power and culture, historical experiences, and material circumstances. These repetitions are not performances by a subject, but a performativity which constitutes it and operates by reciting language conventions that have historically been used to bind or engage specific types of effects (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012a). Although this reciting function is more a result of historically ingrained linguistic patterns rather than the subject's intent, the categories that are formed through this process are "sites of necessary trouble" as they lack the capacity to fully signify and what is left out always comes back to disrupt its meaning (Butler, 1990, p. 372).

Writing about this particular interaction with Lydia from a performative perspective, I start reading my question around politics as an act of "hailing", a linguistic act or a calling that

invokes “a certain order of social existence”, which in this case conjures a normative definition of politics for Lydia through its association with its organised and authorial form, towards which she reacts with anger (Butler, 1993, p. 121). Butler (2004) argues that normative categories are:

[...] called into question and reiterated at the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice. One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms can be significantly deterritorialized through the citation. They can also be exposed as non- natural and nonnecessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defies normative expectation (p. 218).

Thinking about Lydia’s account through this frame, I see a normative definition of politics as still providing intelligibility to her reading of politics, mostly by Lydia using it to identify that which is not, while also suggesting that in the context of the social clinic, politics embodies something that exceeds these conventional definitions. Lydia does not seem to suggest that what she does is apolitical, but rather differently political, in the sense that it transcends political ideologies and organised politics. Instead of being defined by political affiliations or state power, this understanding of politics that she advances seems to be connected with our very existence and how we relate to others and thus represents a doing. Rather than being big, this politics is small as it seems directed towards the level of day-to-day life experience. At its centre, there are questions around finding ways of coexisting with others, within our small communities and neighbourhoods, and becoming more conscious around what it means to be a part of the social world. In this sense, part of what Lydia describes, involves putting experience to work by directing it towards subtle forms of action that are centred around being in relation to others. In her account, this political becoming is framed as having the capacity to begin from the work that is being done in the social clinic, as a site of change in which this process of reflection and of critical awareness can start.

This reconfiguration that enables the production of new ways of connecting to self and others and also new modes of experience, together with a freedom to create life differently, moves me towards Foucault’s (1996) notion of the care of the self, the practice of working on oneself, in order to better relate to others and live an ethically driven life, which also entails the critical recognition of the self as a subject of discourse. This awareness of the self

as being formed by discourse, also moves me towards thinking about Lydia's interpretation of this "differently political" in connection to critique as a form of practice. Foucault (1996), writes:

But above all, one sees that the focus of critique is essentially the cluster of relations that bind the one to the other, or the one to the two others, power, truth and the subject. And if governmentalization is really this movement concerned with subjugating individuals in the very reality of a social practice by mechanisms of power that appeal to a truth, I will say that critique is the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth (p. 386).

Although in Lydia's account I see this critical awareness as being connected with the cluster of relations that tie the self to power, seen for example in how mechanisms of power that operate through economics, unemployment, and health, shape the self, I see this awareness as also being interlaced with vulnerability. Speaking about the openings that are created through unemployment into her clients' existence and the realisation that emerges through these openings that people do not exist in isolation, but as part of social communities, Lydia depicts vulnerability as a productive condition that does things. Lydia also depicts this unknowingness as a point of departure for a renewed understanding of the other, when experiences such as that of unemployment can open the person's perspective into their own being, but also into the recognition that this being exists in relation to others.

As I encounter these openings through my writing, I feel a sense of apprehension and unease arise in me as a thought solidifies: these aren't just innocent openings or windows of awareness that offer an unhampered view into the self's relational aspects: these are wounds, pieces of the self that have been lost and bodily surfaces that have cracked through the violent impact of things.

To approach these twofold openings, these openings that hurt but also push the self towards an increased relational awareness, I return to Butler (2004) as she describes loss as a condition that moves us from the preoccupation with the self to the consideration of the others. Writing about the process of understanding the suffering of others that emerges

from the suffering self, Butler (2004, p. 30) writes: "Who have I become? or, indeed, 'What is left of me'? 'What is it in the Other that I have lost?'"

Loss during the crisis can present itself as a condition of becoming dispossessed, expressed as a loss of livelihood, employment, shelter, food, access to healthcare, but also of a broader sense of belonging to the world (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). Unemployment as part of these dispossessive losses can translate into a loss of a sense of belonging to the world, as what is also lost is a part of the self. When we lose, as Butler (2004) argues, we become unintelligible to ourselves, as we become ourselves through our attachments that dissolve and become undone during loss. Eng and Kazanjian (2003) also suggest that even during the catastrophic loss of bodies, spaces, ideals and practices, loss remains productive, as it creates a world of remains, which is also a world of new representations and alternative meanings. When we ask "what is lost?" we also ask "what remains?" (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003 p. ix), meaning that loss can be known through how its remains are produced and how they animate the creation of new bodies, subjects, spaces, representations, ideals, and knowledges. Butler (2003) also thinks about loss as a productive force:

Places are lost—destroyed, vacated, barred—but then there is some new place, and it is not the first, never can be the first. [...] What is new, newness itself, is founded upon the loss of original place, and so it is a newness that has within it a sense of belatedness, of coming after, and of being thus fundamentally determined by a past that continues to inform it.[...] We could say, that this new place is one of no belonging, where subjectivity becomes untethered from its collective fabric, where individuation becomes a historical necessity. But perhaps this is a place where belonging now takes place in and through a common sense of loss (which does not mean that all these losses are the same). Whatever is produced from this condition of loss will bear the trace of loss, but how will it bear it? In what form? (pp. 468-469)

Feelings stir up as I read this passage from Butler. These feelings are hazy, indistinct and they create a shadowy thinking-feeling space that I wish to enter. Although Butler here speaks about the productivity of loss, she also alludes to the shapelessness that follows it.

When she asks what form will that which is produced by loss take and in what form will the self carry its traces, she also recognises that what remains after loss is to an extent formless. This condition of productivity, of becoming a self after a loss, reminds me of the openings in Lydia's account and I wonder if by recognising the possibilities and the productive capacities of loss that emerge through unemployment, Lydia is not only speaking to the shapelessness which is part of this state, but is also making a different kind of suggestion. That what she names as a creation of a social consciousness, which she portrays as assuming collective action and becoming aware of the sociality of the self and of a shared sense of loss-ideals that permeate the whole endeavour of the social clinics- is also an invitation towards the self that has lost to acquire a form that will also be based on these features of sociality and togetherness. In this shadowy thinking-feeling space, I also see myself. The home-spaces that I lost after migrating to Edinburgh and the newness that was founded upon loss and precarity, the traces of which determined the form of the new place that I occupied. Writing about myself as a support worker or a library worker, I see the past that I left behind in Greece as continuing to inform my body, its movements, its becoming, and thus Edinburgh not being a new place in the sense of being a first place, but as being shaped by a past that continues to define it.

Slow deaths: Used bodies and bodies that break

As our discussion with Lydia moves from vulnerability and community to some of the particular characteristics of the clients that she works with in the social clinic, she speaks to me about how for most of them engaging in therapeutic work has been a completely new experience:

"A very unique experience for me in the social clinic was that I met men in the neighbourhood public assemblies who trusted me in the sessions. These men were, how to say this? A difficult group. Manual labourers with minimal education, sometimes just primary school. Psychotherapy for them is something utterly unfamiliar, even hostile. They came here and shared a tiny piece of themselves in the sessions. How it is for someone who relies a lot on his work and on providing to his family through his manual work, through his body. The extent of the emotional weariness they experience when staying unemployed for a long time, and how they wanted someone's permission to express this. Someone to tell them, it's okay to cry,

you are right to cry. They wanted care and acceptance for this helpless part of themselves and they had the opportunity to bring this here-this piece that they could not take anywhere else. They are the ones who provide the care and security and safety, and it's as if this is the part that is the most vulnerable. This part that was looking for a shelter so they could just cry and say: I'm not feeling well''.

As I start the process of writing into this excerpt from Lydia's interview, I feel the writing moving me towards different directions, different theoretical and analytical paths that appear as a knotty form, an intricate arrangement from which different questions appear simultaneously. I do not wish to untangle these threads and questions forcefully. I try to hold them and slowly start wandering off with them. The first thread pushes me towards a space of discomfort. A space in which I am trying to hold Lydia's description of her manual labourer clients, who have received little formal schooling, as a difficult group for which psychotherapy can appear as something malicious and strange. I wonder, is Lydia reproducing psychotherapeutic discourses part of which are classist assumptions towards poor clients? Classism as a form of prejudice within psychotherapeutic discourses operates as an implicit or explicit failure to acknowledge the poor and their experiences who become discounted, as they are framed as either uninterested or less capable of benefiting from a psychotherapeutic process (Smith, 2005). Classism as a form of distancing from lower income clients might also be expressed in ideas and stereotypes around these clients not possessing the characteristics or the language to explore feelings and experiences within a therapeutic context (Kim & Cardemil, 2012).

At the same time, in Lydia's story I don't see a movement that expresses an inclination to distance and reject in the way she situates herself towards these clients, but to connect. In the context of working with low-income clients, Smith (2005) writes about the challenges that she encountered and particularly the difficulty of creating a sense of trust, especially during the initial stages of the relationship. Smith (2005) also describes how a sense of trust started emerging after she began attending the weekly meetings in the neighbourhood community centre in which these clients also participated. By joining the meetings in the neighbourhood community centre, she writes about becoming aware that part of what hindered this process of connection were certain aspects of her identity and the way they were perceived. Specifically, being perceived as an "impersonal professional stranger"

(Smith, 2005, p. 693), who was working in the field of mental health, towards which this particular group of low-income people was apprehensive, as they had no prior experiences in connection to mental health and psychotherapy, and thus no context for what they entailed.

This makes me wonder if the men in Lydia's story rather than being a "difficult" group, because of having particular characteristics, like being working-class people and having little-formal education, also shared some of the uncertainties and questions as the clients in Smith's (2015) account. As Lydia describes her participation in the neighbourhood assemblies also in connection to this feeling of trust that was eventually created, I think about this more socially oriented way of relating and knowing each other, as having the potential to create bridges of connection with others who have no prior context of what therapy is (Kim & Cardemil, 2012).

There is another thread that I want to follow with my writing as I feel it drawing me in: the masculinity of these men and the sense of a weight that is attached to their male identities. Sensing this *weightiness*, this reliance on the body through manual work and the pressures that are exerted on it by assuming the role of the provider of the family, I feel memories arising. Times that I gently placed myself, my feelings, my words, my body into the arms of others, without fearing that I might be perceived as weak and fragile.

Butler (1990, p. 78), writes about masculinity as something which is created through "performative acts" that define it through what it is not (female, weak, gay), in order to be established as a construct that is filled with "strong" concepts and ideas. These aspects of male identity that are associated with notions of strength, autonomy and self-containment are described by Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman (2002, p. 12) as a kind of "hardness". Through these normative, hegemonic discourses, emotions as being associated with softer and gentle female identities can be rejected as a sign of vulnerability, despite for instance the need to ask for help in the presence of emotional pain (Evans & Wallace, 2008). As Lydia shares in her account, this "piece" that these men "could not take anyplace else", as it was helpless, fragile, and hurt, was brought into their sessions. As I connect my writing with Lydia's ideas of therapy as providing a "shelter" where this group of male clients have been given permission to display vulnerability and cry, I experience a sense of release. Part of this release is animated by imagination, as I think about the relieving sense of sharing what

hurts, of placing oneself, one's feelings and words in the arms of others in a space where these can be contained (Prior, 2012), rather than facing it in isolation in fear of being misconstrued as weak. Another piece of this release is connected to my previous feeling of discomfort, and I now sense discomfort and release as existing side-by-side. This strange pairing comes from the ambivalence that I encounter as I read into Lydia's readings of psychotherapeutic practice. The ambivalence of subscribing to discourses regarding socio-economic class which portray these men as a "difficult" group, while at the same time being moved by a desire to connect and managing to create a space of safety, openness, and trust.

There is one more thread that I wish to follow and that I wish to wonder off with, which feels more intricately tied to my body. This thread speaks of working as being interconnected with processes of bodies that are dying as they are being used and worn out through work. As I connect with the bodies that emerge in Lydia's account through writing- the bodies of the manual labourers that she works with in the social clinic, but also those with whom she previously worked with therapeutically in the Athens shipyards- I am faced by the idea that some spaces and people have been in a crisis long before the economic crisis started, as Lydia told me at the start of the interview. I am faced by the idea that I might be calling a crisis that which for some "is a fact of life and has been a defining fact of life for a given population that lives it as a fact in ordinary time" (Berlant, 2007, p. 760).

Berlant's (2007, p. 754) concept of slow death refers to "the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence". Furthermore, Berlant (2007, p. 759) argues that "slow death prospers not in traumatic events, as discrete time-framed phenomena like military encounters and genocides can appear to do, but in temporal environments whose qualities and whose contours in time and space are often identified with the presentness of ordinariness itself, that domain of living on". Slow death, as "the structurally motivated attrition of persons notably because of their membership in certain populations" (Berlant, 2007, p. 761), stands in parallel with the "condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life" (Berlant, 2007, p. 759). By approaching economic hardship not through the distinctly delineated timeframe of the economic crisis and the dynamic process of reversal it entails, as social groups that once had a higher quality of life

and consumption are now required to survive with far less (Knight & Stewart, 2016), I become aware that for certain bodies economic hardship is an aspect of life that has always been ordinary (Berlant, 2007; Stewart, 2008).

For Berlant, these bodies belong to those who have the duty of maintaining the economic ordering of things, while occupying a position of vulnerability. These can be low-income workers, minorities, the aged, and in a broader sense the financially crushed. Particularly in relation to the waged bodies of manual labourers who assume the role of producers rather than consumers within the current system of capital circulation, these bodies can be more tired, in physical anguish, and die sooner than those of higher-income professionals (Berlant, 2007). However, a crucial aspect of Berlant's argument is connected to the "affective forms of engagement with the environment of slow death": the "impassivity and other relations of alienation, coolness, detachment, or distraction" through which "the attrition of the subject of capital articulates survival as slow death" (Berlant, 2007, p. 779). These affective forms of engagement, entail ways of connecting with life itself and through these unacknowledged ways of relating, the body is sacrificed and used in the most profitable way that serves and reproduces the consumer economy. This destruction of bodies may take the form of deadly practices as an expression of these relations of "impassivity [...] alienation, coolness, detachment, or distraction" (Berlant, 2007, p. 779), that can manifest as decisions that undermine health, when one simply doesn't care to preserve or protect the body that serves the economy in this way.

I wonder if the feeling aspects of experience and particularly the distress that the working-class people in Lydia's account express after becoming unemployed indicate another form of affective engagement within the conditions of slow death: that of the body that has been extensively used through labour and has come to identify itself with this use but is no longer in a position to serve this purpose after becoming unemployed. In that sense, I think about the grievances that are expressed within the therapeutic setting and this "piece" that is helpless, fragile, and hurt, as Lydia says, in connection to an aspect of the experience of being used and then discarded.

At the same time, I also wonder, if my own experiences that involve manual work for which I had to intensely rely on the strength of my body, as I narrated in the first part of this chapter are connected to a more sudden kind of death. As I hold this question, I recognise that I come from a place in which the crisis mostly signifies a process of reversal (Knight & Stewart, 2016), and not something that has always been an ordinary and defining fact of life (Berlant, 2007). The multiple positionalities that I occupied and identified with through my upbringing and more broadly the economic environment in which I grew up in, are suggestive of a condition of relative economic prosperity that has been overturned and reversed due to the economic crisis. Within the context of my affective engagement and relation with life itself, regarding my body and the economic purposes it serves, I think about my bodily collapse in the library as a kind of a sudden break-down of my body. Does this *breaking down* as part of the entanglement of bodily and economic pressures that I couldn't support and carry indicate having a less resilient and softer body, or perhaps my move towards establishing a different type of affective connection with life itself? Was this *breaking down* part of a movement, part of a reorganisation concerning my labour-related subjectivity and the attachments it had for obtaining a "good life whose promise is a fantasy bribe" (Berlant, 2007, p. 765), part of an unravelling of these attachments? Was this unravelling of my body in a secret corner of the library indicative of my inability to produce and reproduce a role in the economic world that was tied with the promises of financial stability and prosperity with which I was raised?

Postlude

Lydia: So, I stayed there for three years. This was a deeply troubled area, the Athens' shipyards. These people have always been in a crisis and in a way they entered a financial crisis long before the great financial crisis broke out.

Christina: I know, my grandparents come from there.

Lydia: I'm very happy about this. So you know very well how things are there.

I do know. My grandfather was in fact a worker in the shipyard construction site. Although his son, my father, managed to become economically successful during his life, his parents

were migrants from the Greek communities of the Black Sea, who lost everything when they had to leave their homes behind during the 1920s. They made their new home in the port area where they stayed till the end of their lives, refusing to leave it for a more comfortable place, even after their children grew up and were able to provide them with a better life. As a child, I couldn't see anything wrong with their home, this tiny two-room house that was so close to the sea. I didn't know that burning wood to heat up water in the handmade boiler my grandfather has built, or cooking in a stove that was placed in a garden shed because there was not enough space for it inside the house represented poverty and hardship. I only knew how good it felt to be in my grandfather's arms as he sung to me in words of a Greek dialect I couldn't understand but made me feel safe because they were uttered with affection. I remember the joy that permeated this home, the closeness, happiness, and content it radiated that made my grandparents never wanting to leave it, even when they could. As I write into these memories I become aware of another aspect of affective forms of engagement for those for whom a crisis is an ordinary part of life: that of love.

Chapter Six

Elpida

Introduction

In this chapter, I think about activist practices in the context of the anti-austerity movement and social clinics, particularly in relation to assembling bodies that gather together. I also think about modes of resistance within the activist space of the social clinic and the economic crisis and connect them with different conceptualisations of agency, while also exploring loss from a perspective of the unravelling of a particular form of attachment: that of cruel optimism. The chapter starts with two autoethnographic interludes. In the first interlude I write about migrating from Athens to Edinburgh and in the second interlude I write about the strains that are part of this process of separation from home. In the next part, setting the scene, I use my personal experiences of the anti-austerity movement of the Parliament Square, in order to contextualise Elpida's social clinic, which has sprung from this movement and also think about the things that become possible through the public gatherings and the practices of the Square. In the next section, I follow this tracing of relations between the Parliament Square movement and the social clinic. Starting from an examination that places the social clinic in the context of projects of economic innovation, I then move to examining the role of language and the ways it is used in this setting. Following that, I move towards the tensions that emerge in activist community development settings like the social clinics, and I think about resistance and agency from the perspective of political mobilisation and of persistence. Lastly, through Berlant's (2011) concept of cruel optimism, I think about loss in connection to personal histories and neoliberal politics.

Interlude I

It is the middle of the summer, and I am travelling to a faraway corner of Athens to meet Elpida. I am feeling excited for meeting a therapist from the perhaps most well-known and active social clinic in the city. Arranging the interview hasn't been that easy and as this might be my only chance to speak with someone from this space, I am also feeling nervous. In the metro, as I feel the waves of uneasiness and enthusiasm travelling through my body, I

take a seat and begin to breathe deeply. I focus my breathing on different parts of my body, recreating its rhythm, starting from the top of the head, and gradually working my way downwards and expanding it, till I reach the tip of the toes. Always working in pairs, I allow the relaxation to engulf my eyes, ears, shoulders, wrists, hips, and knees. My senses now feel slightly altered and my surroundings seem more vibrant; the eyes that meet mine, the wind that enters the wagon through the cracked window, the cold iron bars that my hands are pressing against, all seem livelier and resonate with some elusive quality that I cannot name.

As we reach the very last stop and I get out of the metro station, I find myself in an area that doesn't look like Athens. There is a huge highway full of cars, but there are also big, open fields and the sight of a far-reaching horizon unhindered by buildings. The sun radiates with a scorching heat, and I understand that the half hour walk to the social clinic won't be so easy, so I ease down my pace and I try to think that there's no rush. I make my steps gentle and small, and I try to synchronise my breathing with this slow rhythmic movement. After all, I am relieved by the feeling of the sun touching my skin, because regardless of its midday harshness it is a comforting reminder that I am at home and that I don't need to discipline my body into becoming resilient and strong in order to endure the harsh elements of Scotland.

I turn left on a road that seems to be leading me even further into what looks like a countryside landscape, full of trees and open spaces. I arrive early for the interview, and I take a seat in the waiting area, next to a young girl and her mother. They are talking to the volunteers at the front desk who sit on the other side of the room, and their conversation feels casual and warm, almost as if I am listening to good friends. They are there to get their monthly medication, prescribed to the mother by one of the doctors of the clinic.

In moments like these, when I witness how prominent the struggle of living during the crisis still is for some, I realise the distance that has been created between me and this reality. Four years have passed since I left Greece and although I still remain financially insecure, I no longer experience the same sense of urgency when it comes to securing the necessities one needs to go through everyday life. The pain of being forced to leave home due to the lack of other options has quieted down and only occasionally, when I see or think of

something that vividly reminds me of the first difficult months in Edinburgh, I feel distant echoes of these emotions. Maybe it's easier to forget.

The idea to apply for a master's degree in Edinburgh appeared for the first time in June and the academic semester would start in September. In these three months, my partner and I had to make all the complex arrangements needed before moving to a new country, but also believe that this is real and that we really are leaving. Considering that we've only had enough savings for the first two months and that we haven't managed to find a flat or jobs prior to arriving, this decision felt like a terrifying gamble.

The plan was that we would stay with a friend of some distant friend who agreed that we could sleep in her living-room for no more than a week. Within this week we had to find our own flat, a full-time job for my partner in a country we have never visited before, and in the meantime, start studying for the master's. When I explained all that to a close friend, he jokingly (and lovingly) called us Gastarbeiter⁴. This word had a strange effect on me. Upon hearing it, a part of me realised how exposed we really were, how there were so many things that could go wrong by taking these uncertain chances. It also felt strange to occupy this identity of the precarious Gastarbeiter, the manual labourer who is forced to leave home behind in order to survive. My family has been diligent in offering me a good education while I was growing up and this care was also filled with something unspoken: promises of success, employment, and financial independence that I took for granted and which left an empty space of confusion in their place.

Interlude II

It's now early September. Two years have passed after moving to Edinburgh and my mother is driving me to the airport to get the flight back to Scotland after the summer holidays. Over these two years, I have developed a strict ritual that I follow every time that I prepare to leave home. The last evening in Athens is spent with my friends. This night before my flight always feels awkward and cold, as my body is already clenching in anticipation of the separation to come, and I await the moment that we'll embrace each other to say goodbye.

⁴ Gastarbeiter is German for "guest worker" (literal translation). It refers to foreign or migrant workers, particularly those who had moved to West Germany mainly in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s, seeking work as part of a guest worker program. Following World War II, there were severe labour shortage in continental northern Europe and high unemployment in southern European countries.

In this space that stretches me between the here and there, the travel to Edinburgh has already started and its pulling force creates cracks that I am trying to resist.

I don't want to leave, I never do.

The next day, I cover the honey, olive oil, mountain tea and oregano- things I need to recreate tastes and smells that make me feel like home-with bubble wrap and place them carefully inside my crammed suitcase. The physical sensation of anxiety usually peaks during this stage, signalling that it's nearly time to go. As I wrap my arms around my grandmother, I try to retain all the pieces that make up this moment, because she is old and I don't know if she will still be here during my next visit. During the silent drive to the airport, I try to take this last image of home with me, so I study the warm, soft sheets of light that cover the mountains.

The atmosphere at the car park outside the departures terminal feels chaotic and confusing and something feels off about the hundreds of people that are swarming through the airport. I listen and observe and after a moment I realise. We are surrounded by families who are saying goodbye to their children. All these hundreds of travellers are not tourists, but young Greek people, who just like me are leaving home after their summer visit and are now ready to disperse through Europe.⁵ I turn to my mother and mutter: "Do you understand what's happening? Everyone's leaving". She is focused on me and on her effort to look positive and optimistic, so she just smiles and nods without understanding. I play along and force a smile and as I disappear through the passport control, I wave an erratic goodbye. As the airplane takes off, I look through the window and catch one last glimpse of the city's body, a body full of broken dreams.

Setting the scene

Elpida, a therapist in her forties with a PhD in clinical psychology, has been practicing in the social clinic for five years. She exudes an air of someone who has seen a lot and who has become a part of many stories and she later shares some of these stories with me. Part of them is about how she became involved in the creation of a fully functioning self-organized health centre from scratch, with just a handful of others:

⁵ Half a million people have left Greece since the beginning of the crisis (Cavounidis, 2018).

“It all started from a group of six people who met some months before the anti-austerity movement of 2010-2011 sprung up and then actively took part in its many forms and actions together, especially those revolving around Parliament Square. The Square was the breeding-ground, the seedbed in which the idea of the social clinic hatched and what inspired us”.

As Elpida explains, the six activists that initially mobilized in Parliament Square set the foundations of the social clinic, which over the years grew to become one of the biggest self-organized health-centers in Athens, with 280 active volunteers, 115 of whom are doctors, psychotherapists, dentists, and pharmacists and the rest non-health related volunteers. She also shares that the social clinic as an activist space, drew inspiration for its organizing principles and practices from this particular social movement.

As I read the transcript of our conversation with Elpida, I feel drawn to the idea of the anti-austerity movement being able to provide a “seedbed” from which the conception of this social clinic hatched, as I wonder about the things that transpired in the space of the Parliament Square and the ways that this social movement became a fertile ground that was able to produce practices and actions. For Jackson and Mazzei (2012), the exploration of the productive effects of power as it circulates through peoples’ practices, allows the power networks that enabled these practices to become discernible. Drawing on Foucault, they argue that power is embedded in relationships rather than existing simply as the subject’s possession, which the authors also see as an effect and a vehicle of power that is constituted through discourses, desires, and practices. Individuals as vehicles and products of power are constantly in a process of interpretation as they accommodate their conditions, but also resist, disrupt and resignify them (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). For Wetherell et al. (2020), patterns of action are also inextricably linked to both existing power structures and the conditions of possibility generated by social interconnections. At the same time, for Wetherell (2012) actions are connected to feelings that come to be conceivable, expressed and asserted within these networks of connections.

Through my writing, I want to follow this tracing of relations, of practices, of feelings, within the context of the anti-austerity movement where Elpida’s social clinic has its roots, in order to explore how this productive space of possibilities opened. By following and tracing the things that circulated (Marcus, 2009) in this space of possibility through writing, a memory-

space opens. A memory space in which my body has joined other bodies that resist the accumulative losses of the crisis through protest. This protest rather than just being a site of acting out (Le Bon, 1960), transformed into a space where political interrogation materialised in collective organising on a massive scale.

I was there, right from the start of May 2010 when some of the largest demonstrations ever happening in Greece took place, with an estimated 500,000 people (Papapavlou, 2015), marching through Athens to protest the newly imposed austerity measures. In my notes from this period, I write:

I am inside a sea of people. The sea is a moving breathing body made of thousands of other bodies that feel like charged particles that pulsate in the same rhythm. Sometimes we create snake-like formations as we march together through the big streets of Athens and we fill the city with the echoes of our words. Words that travel through the air to bounce on the surface of the tall buildings of the center that have turned dark grey and black from the exhaustion pipes of cars and buses. This unlivable city is now only filled by our presence.

In the end of May, people from all sorts of different social backgrounds and ideologies flooded the Parliament Square and took it over for the next year, until August 2011. Some even brought tents and started sleeping on the site, so that the Square would never be without people. Soon after its occupation, numerous action-groups started to emerge and established themselves on the Square, having as their main objective to work and discuss collectively on a number of different issues that this newly formed movement identified as important. There were groups with a more practical orientation, like those focusing on activities such as artistic performances, multimedia, legal aid, cooking and cleaning, and other groups with a more theoretical focus, as they were almost exclusively discussion based and explored collectively different themes ranging from politics, time-banks, economy, unemployment, direct democracy to alternative eco-communities and others (Papapavlou, 2015).

Every evening these groups met to discuss and sat in circles that stretched-out and covered the whole Square, while passers-by, like myself, freely walked between them to listen to the conversations and sometimes took part in them. This part of the life of the Square would finish before 9 pm, as this was the time when the People's Assembly, the most important

and widely attended collective decision-making body of the anti-austerity movement would meet to discuss. I felt deeply impressed by this process and the way that it was organised, as prior to seeing it happen, it was difficult to imagine a discussion where hundreds or even thousands of people could participate without all these different voices and opinions collapsing upon each other and upon themselves. This was the space where everything related to the movement would be talked through, from organising and reflecting collectively on everyday affairs, to co-ordinating actions and voting on issues of concern.

The People's Assembly was primarily a space where public speaking could be exercised through a regulated process which warranted that turn-taking between speakers would be respected, as well as the speaking time-limit, and non-interruption of speakers by the audience, regardless of the popularity of their expressed views. Although voting would also take place during the Assembly's final stages, each speaker was also expected to add a contribution that was aimed towards creating a consensus amongst the group.

As I write, a memory of a particular night surfaces and the feeling of tears running on my face while listening to a young woman speaking. In this collective space of the Assembly, she spoke to us about how important what was happening was to her and shared her experiences of unemployment, the loneliness of this everyday life and how this way of being together on the Square made her feel whole again after a period of feeling lifeless. The audience that night consisted of hundreds of people, yet no one spoke. All that could be heard was her gentle voice, sharing experiences that were hers, mine, ours. These weren't tears of sadness but joy, as I felt overwhelmed by gratitude for what she was sharing and for what was happening. Although I knew that others were going through the same challenges as me-unemployment, isolation, feeling life dwindling away while being stuck at home- by seeing this woman expressing this so naturally and so publicly, a part of me became able to recognise this as a collective reality and not as something which was just mine. I was also moved by the uniqueness of what was happening and the feeling of being fortunate enough to be part of a listening space made of thousands of bodies where feelings and stories could be shared without fear.

I want to think about the things that happened in this space of assembling more attentively and I turn to Butler (2015). In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler (2015) examines the politics of public gathering, drawing on the interconnections of

performativity and precarity to explore the embodied aspects of acting together. In this work, she aims to “rethink the speech act” (Butler, 2015, p. 18), as a continuation of her undertaking (Butler, 1997, p. 11) to explore “the blind spot of speech, that which acts in excess of what is said”. For Butler (2015) the assembly signifies a space in which unevenly injured bodies make a public appearance to express, communicate and demand a life that is liveable. By focusing on arising “politics of the street” illustrated in examples such as the Arab Spring (Butler, 2015, p. 71), social movements that followed very similar tactics to the movement of the Parliament Square, she examines interdependency and vulnerability in the context of embodied vulnerability, which she sees as being interconnected to the material things the body needs to survive in the world, such as housing, infrastructure, a living wage, food and water.

Bodies turn into subjects according to Butler's notion of performativity (2015), when they can produce and be produced by cultural and institutional norms. As long as the subject continues to produce an acceptable performance, that performance constitutes the premise of possibility for a subject to be recognized, and this recognition affords the subject a type of protection against injurability. Butler identifies as precarious those who are unable to provide an acceptable performance, particularly within neoliberalism. Part of the neoliberal challenge for Butler is that neoliberalism mandates and legitimizes the unlivability of many as a sacrifice for the prospering of few. Neoliberalism also pursues those who are precarious by eroding access to basic needs like health care and a livable income, while affirming that these things constitute the expected standards of life in the modern world. As a result, the subject who is unable to perform satisfactorily, becomes potentially disposable and its disposable body is approached through a kind of political ethic that requires individualized accountability.

For Butler, assemblies of bodies such as those that take place in the aforementioned social movement spaces, make these material and social needs of the body their focal point. Taking as an example the Tahir square protests, she writes that “sometimes the simple act of sleeping there, in the square [...] was the most eloquent political statement” (Butler, 2015, p. 89–90). The act of sleeping in the square is an assertion of the assembly because it validates that which neoliberalism denies: the sociality of the body and that one's distress is a shared responsibility. When these precarious bodies sleep in the square, they say “I am

already an assembly” (Butler, 2015, p. 68). The political power of the assembly is thus based on the mobilisation of this embodied vulnerability and its persistence within space, “asserting that a group of people is still existing, taking up space and obdurately living” (Butler, 2015, p. 29).

As I think with Butler’s analysis of the assembly, I also think about the assemblies that I have been part of in the Parliament Square. I think of the bodies that have gathered in this space, bodies that became organised and produced different groups that undertook various activities and discussions in the practical and theoretical workgroups, the bodies that spoke and were listened to and the bodies that just were there, occupying this site with their presence during the day but also the night, as bodies that slept so that the Square would never be empty. I think about the remarkable efforts that went into producing these practices, but also that which speaks to the less remarkable: the simple cohabitational persistence of these assembled bodies on this square day and night as they exerted their right to appear (Butler, 2015). Thinking with and through Butler’s understanding of assembly, I reflect on the activist practices that were developed in the Parliament Square, but also the simple act of gathering and being on this site, as contesting neoliberal logics of exclusion. Butler argues that despite the outputs that these assemblies manage to accomplish, that “it matters that bodies assemble” (Butler, 2015, pp. 7–8). Thinking about the People’s assembly from this perspective, what matters besides the way that these practices were organised, is what they enabled and the ways “the body that especially [when] assembled with other bodies speaks” (Butler, 2015, p. 128). As I write, I revisit the evening when the young woman’s public sharing in the People’s Assembly moved me to tears. As I wonder about the “excess” (Butler, 1997, p. 11) of what was expressed through her speech in this assembly, I sense an opening of a space that becomes possible through this act of assembling. A defiance that arises through persistence, despite vulnerability, and through the act of being together with other bodies. As I write about this night, I see a fleeting performance that was not only hers but ours, belonging to all of those who shared this space, where interdependence materialised in this transient moment where the precarious body was present, thus enabling an experience of recognition of social suffering as a shared responsibility.

Elpida's social clinic emerged from this social movement space of the Parliament Square anti-austerity mobilizations. Writing into the idea of the "seedbed" through a tracing of relations, practices and feelings that opened a productive space of possibility through my own memories, I wonder if the six activists who mobilized in this movement, or if Elpida, also experienced fleeting moments of interdependence, of plurality and of a shared vulnerability like the one I experienced in the People's Assembly. Were there any transient moments that moved them towards reproducing the practices in which they have partaken? Or has the steady, day by day, assembling of bodies on the Square, their material persistence, moved them towards recognizing other bodies and their bodies on the ground of a shared responsibility and towards the defense of their livability (Butler, 2015)? These questions stick to my writing and although their silence lingers on, I sense that it is full of openings, full of potential and of different theoretical paths that I can follow with my writing.

Social clinics and the anti-austerity movement

As I exit this memory-space that I entered through Elpida's account around how the social clinic was initially created, I return to a part of her account where she further unfolds the idea of the activist seedbed, as she describes some of the forms of the Square movement that have intentionally been reproduced in the social clinic:

"What attracted me here was the fact that we are not doing a charity project, but we have a vision in relation to a solidarity, a different way to work, without hierarchies, without dependence on money and funding. It was not just the fact that I could help some people, but that we could create something that could inspire some of the people to do the same in their own small community, family, group of friends and maybe in some other way. It was a desire to really create, to create something different here. That is, a different way of practice, a different way of interacting with people who want help-not getting money, all these principles-creating something new that could maybe inspire something different-To show that other ways of being together also exist-We don't need to have hierarchies, we don't need someone telling us what to do, we can decide amongst ourselves, we can talk, and we can be

productive through dialogue, without being competitive and without being dependent on money”.

As I engage with Elpida’s excerpt, I am initially pulled towards money and its absence as a distinguishing feature of how the social clinic operates and also as part of what Elpida describes as drawing her to connect with this particular space. At the same time, in Elpida’s expression of an aspiration to distance oneself from this pervasive monetary and fiscal, I also recognise my own desire. Thinking about the neoliberal discourses around fiscal austerity and market interests’ that have permeated so deeply everyday life in the crisis, thus making possible an active fabrication of “the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations suited to making the fiction of markets real” (Wacquant, 2012, p. 68), I also sense my longing to pull apart and break from the pervasiveness of this omnipresent economic. In Elpida’s account I see this pulling apart as turning into a form of action that creates zones which “enlarge the scope of possibility” by aiming to dislocate the dominance of neoliberalism through a production of conceptual elements for projects of economic innovation, (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xxxiv), such as the social clinic.

As Gibson-Graham (2006) argue, the economy is not an abstract ideological concept, but a materialization that organizes the practices and processes that encircle it, while simultaneously being shaped and maintained by them. The framework under which the clinic operates is that of a non-monetary economy where the unemployed and poor are provided with the opportunity to access health services free of charge. Thus, I see Elpida’s reading of the social clinic as a space of collective struggle and solidarity, as being linked to this project of constructing new economies. Thinking with Gibson-Graham’s (2006, p. 192), concept of “community economy”, as an “ethical and political space of decision in which negotiations over interdependence take place” I think about the selves that are being recreated as communal economic subjects, as they become inextricably linked to the construction of new economies. I also wonder about what this process of the creation of a new economy entails. Elpida depicts this enactment of non-neoliberal economics as entailing the mobilisation of the desire for the creation of different ways of being and relating that have the potential for opening-up and inspiring different possibilities. As she describes part of this desire as being directed towards engaging the social clinic’s users into a circle of activist praxis, she delineates this project not as simply seeking to provide health

services to disenfranchised people, but as an effort to generate transformative potential by inviting all those involved in this space to engage in activist practices of resistance. Elpida's aspiration to "create something new that could inspire something different", that will be reproduced by those who partake in the social clinic within their own small communities, moves me towards Freire's (1973) notion of critical action. Through Freire (1973), I read Elpida's reading of the social clinic as a venture which is directed towards raising critical consciousness, as an ability to recognize oppressive conditions and systems of power, and assuming critical action to change these conditions through individual and collective social action that challenges unjust systems.

Writing about the things that constitute this process of construction of a new economy through Elpida's account, I encounter the thread of the seedbed: those forms and practices of the Parliament Square movement that have intentionally been reproduced in the social clinic. When Elpida describes the decision-making processes that transpire in the social clinic as being interconnected to non-hierarchical dialogue and non-competitive communication, as she mentions that "we can decide amongst ourselves, we can talk, and we can be productive through dialogue", she is referring to the volunteers' assembly. As she later tells me:

"The volunteers' assembly is at the heart of the social clinic. In these meetings everyone is heard, and we all take responsibility for the decisions that we take together".

As a direct continuation of the anti-austerity movement and Parliament Square, the social clinic embodies and reproduces many of its tactics, ideas, and principles, including a decentralized form of organizing and the prioritizing of the participation into a shared communicative space where speaking and thinking happens with the other by design, within the space of an assembly. The assembly as a shared communicative space where decisions are taken collectively, ensures horizontal organising, shared responsibility, self-representation, plurality of voices, and the intention to distribute power as evenly as possible among those involved (Kioupiolis & Katsambekis, 2014).

I see this form of public communication and of collective decision making that the social clinic aims to make use of, as corresponding to that of Habermasian communicative

rationality (Habermas, 1990, p. 315), the “noncoercively unifying, consensus-building force of a discourse” amongst participants who reach agreement through “argumentative speech”. Habermas (1990) argues that this communicative force constitutes a fundamental component of social life and a key mechanism for action, as our ability to understand others, society, but also ourselves, arises when we are in conversation with one another, especially in situations that require new interpretations. Using language in the volunteers’ assembly within the framework of communicative action and as an enabling means of direct-democracy, Elpida describes it as the medium that’s being used to arrive to shared understandings and as a way of coordinating plans of action through mutual agreement.

As I connect with Elpida’s account regarding the volunteers’ assembly, I think about the transparency with which language and its workings are imbued in this description. Language and the democratic access to it are depicted as becoming possible in the volunteers’ assembly space through its use in a clear and egalitarian manner. At the same time, this intelligibility and transparency of language in the form of communicative rationality (Habermas, 1987), pushes me to think about the silent, about the things language does as it circulates in this space of the assembly that move beyond the clearly articulated and enunciated. As I move, I think about language practices as systematically constructing “the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (Lessa, 2006, p. 285) and about language not as just as a tool for description or contestation of social arrangements and hierarchies, but as an active production of them (Foucault, 1997).

Thinking about the unarticulated in connection to the productive force of language, I move towards an understanding of the activist language practices that are exercised in the Volunteers Assembly, as contesting a particular model of “speakerhood”: that of the “self-made” speaker, which is endorsed by neoliberal rationalities (Rojo, 2020, p. 163). Brown (2015) defines neoliberal rationality as a form of political rationality that represents the dynamics that turn market-governing logics and processes into modes of self-constitution and social organisation. For Rojo (2020, p. 163), neoliberal rationality governs language and speakers’ conduct by disseminating knowledge that produces a particular “speakerhood” model, that of the “self-made” speaker who uses language as a process of self-capitalisation in order to enhance productivity and appear capable of acting autonomously and taking his

or her own decisions. This reflects a neoliberal entrepreneurial model and market logics that compel people, as speakers, to relate to themselves as enterprises that must ensure their own profitability (Foucault, 2000). As I write about the specific performances that accompany the notion of the “self-made speaker” (Rojo, 2020), I think about the language practices in the volunteers assembly as fostering conditions and enactments of speaking that challenge the entrepreneurial and neoliberal I. The speakers in this activist space rather than being evaluated on how well they function independently and their ability to make choices on their own, enact a plurality which is aimed at advancing a collective cause. By thinking about open and decentralized communication, consensus-building and the equality between speakers and listeners within this assembly space not from a perspective of what is achieved through these practices, but rather of what is produced, I see a becoming of the self which instead of an enactment of a self-made speaker, expresses a relational speaker who contests neoliberal rationalities.

Activist tensions and different forms of resistance

Elpida also describes language as the instrument that is used to communicate the principles of the social clinic in an effort to raise critical consciousness. However, as she shares, this process isn't always effective:

“We try to communicate to everyone exactly who we are, first of all, during the registration process. The person doing the registration is a volunteer who explains exactly our whole philosophy. We also hand out information sheets-you can also find them outside the secretary's office. Until recently we also had some TV commercials explaining who exactly we are, what we do, what our basic principles are, so we try to communicate this to the world, not that it is always understood, because there's something extraordinary about people. That is, even if you clearly explain it to them, they come here looking for who the manager is so they can make a complaint. In a way, it's like they get confused if they don't have an authority over their heads. And when you tell them that this authority doesn't exist it's like you are depriving them from a sense of security-They admire what we do it, they feel grateful, but in terms of reciprocation, we have not succeeded. The truth is that we had imagined reciprocation differently. Let's say more practically.

For example, we organized a blood donation last Saturday. We would reasonably expect more of our clinic's users to come and donate blood. But unfortunately, they did not come. Same thing happened when we organized a protest demanding an open health system. These claims are about them! They themselves suffer from this-How many times, how many calls we made. No one ever came to the demonstrations''.

As an activist space which advances a critical community approach, the social clinic is a praxis-oriented organisation which focuses on generating transformative potential for social change through community participation, as well as political mobilisation. As Elpida explains, the principles, decentralised structure and overall philosophy of this activist space are explicated to the public in various forms, without these however being always realised by the clinic's users. The primary form that this operational framework is conveyed, is through different direct communicative means which are aimed at establishing the organisation's preferred ideological and action context in the larger public discourse, while motivating others in relation to its causes. However, as Elpida shares, despite the clear articulation of this framework, this message doesn't come across the clinic's users, who seem not to understand how the organisation is structured, particularly in relation to the absence of a centralised authority. At the same time Elpida expresses her frustration regarding an additional shortcoming around the social clinic's activist goals, which is not succeeding in generating community mobilisation in the form of political mobilisation. As an activist community organisation, the social clinic is anchored in ideas around particular ways of attaining and expressing solidarity and self-determination through organised political mobilisation. As is often the case with spaces that operate under the framework of activism and community development, tensions and disappointments can emerge when community practitioners encounter realities that contradict and overturn their expectations (Perdue, 2016).

Su and Jagninski (2013) explore some of these tensions that can emerge during community development projects by examining an attempt to implement a critical community project in hard to approach youth from economically challenged neighbourhoods. This effort to apply a framework of empowerment and deliberative action in these communities included the participation of the young people in the resolution of the problems affecting them.

However, as the authors note, these expectations were overturned as they came across a different notion of what constituted a meaningful participation for these people.

Specifically, that they conceptualised community participation not as a display of their freedom of expression, but as a space in which they could start articulating and formulating these needs, which were undefined. At the same time the authors notion of emancipation through critical pedagogy and of experiential learning as one of the pathways leading to it, has run against the reality of these young peoples' needs to first develop their organising skills, such as literacy and numeracy to be able to work towards this goal.

I wonder, when Elpida speaks about reciprocation through community and political mobilisation, while expressing her disappointment in the clinics' users not assuming critical action, is she expressing her own preconceived notions around what emancipation and resistance might look like? In her account, she depicts demonstrations as important "moments of capture and revolt", while identifying protests as one of the most important means that can offer political hope for the future, an approach that Tyler (2013, p. 12) describes as "fetishising the event". Protests and demonstrations have undeniably played a huge part in the anti-austerity movement from which this social clinic emerged, as well as other recent moments of political resistance (Douzinas, 2013). However, as Dean (2013) suggests a continued attachment to a historically relevant model of anti-capitalist resistance might also affectively generate what has been described as left-wing melancholy. Wendy Brown (1999, p. 20) argues that the left-wing melancholic is "attached more to a particular political analysis or ideal – even to the failure of that ideal – than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present". This melancholy, writes Brown, "signifies a certain narcissism with regard to one's past political attachments and identity that exceeds any contemporary investment in political mobilization, alliance or transformation" (Brown, 1999, p. 20).

In Elpida's account, I see this melancholy in connection to the particular form of agency that she wishes the clinic's users to display in relation to power and resistance. Specifically, in this account I see a subscription to discourses that call for an "emancipatory model of agency", which assumes that people are "endowed with a will, a freedom, and an intentionality" whose workings are "thwarted by relations of power that are considered external to the subject" (Benhabib, 1995, p. 136). From this perspective, I see Elpida's

account as endorsing a definition of agency that embraces a predefined teleology of activist-emancipatory politics. Namely, that by communicating the clinic's principles to the users and inviting them to use health-services that are structured around equal power relations and a model of direct-democracy, the impetus for a particular form of political action and mobilization will be generated. However, as Mahmood argues, the possibility of agency is always located within structures of power and therefore insurrection and resignification cannot be predefined because the possibility of agency is "contingent and fragile, appearing in unpredictable places and behaving in unexpected ways" (Mahmood, 2006, p. 47).

Thinking with Butler (2015), I begin to contemplate on hegemonic political speech as having the potential to appear in unforeseen places, a part of which Butler suggests can even include masses that are taking to the streets. Speaking about exclusivity as a component of hegemonic political speech, or what she calls "partiality as a fact of politics" (Butler, 2015, p. 4), Butler writes about how the differential reproduction of power, even in contexts of political mobilization, when recognition is granted to some, but not afforded to others. She also identifies as a form of this hegemonic political speech that which reject the "quotidian acts that are very often at stake when we seek to understand performative politics in its struggle from and against precarity" (Butler, 2015, p.)

As I apply these theoretical ideas to think about Elpida's account, I think about partiality in connection to political causes when recognition is afforded only to some, in the context of the example she provides when speaking about the clinic's users not attending the demonstration for an open health system. When Elpida expresses that these political demands that they were putting forth in this event were an expression of the users' needs, I understand this contentious act of giving voice, as being based on particular assumptions around what the voices of users need to express. I also see this recognition as partial as it corresponds more to a voicing of the understandings and needs of the volunteer activists, whose conceptualisation of agency as well as context of everyday life and its challenges are not the same as those of the users.

Thinking about resistance from the perspective of the quotidian and of persistence (Butler, 2015), I recognise an opening that brings me to the first part of this chapter and the experience of being forced to leave home, due to a lack of choices within an economic reality that doesn't provide alternatives and prospects in the area of employment. Writing

about becoming a migrant, I shared some of the sensations and experiences my body underwent during the process of separation from home. The cracks that were created by pulling forces that stretched me between the here and there, between Athens and Edinburgh, the penetrating cold that permeated me every time I embraced the bodies of those I loved to say goodbye, the fear that engulfed me as I embraced the unknown by taking the uncertain chances that were bound up with leaving home. Reflecting on these aspects of my experience, I am thinking about resistance as persistence and about the ability to carry on living, while feeling that the body has cracked. I think about resistance in connection to resilience, not as some form of heroic display of strength, but as the simple act of being able to carry the weight of the self that has lost, day by day. I also wonder if the economically crushed users of the social clinic are also expressing resistance as persistence by not just living day by day, but also partaking in this activist space in ways that might not coincide with political mobilisation on the streets, but nevertheless express a commitment to preserving and sustaining the body. Reflecting on this act of connecting the body with health services and therapeutic services, I recognise an enactment of perseverance, which although gentler and different from the forms that Elpida imagined as opposing neoliberal reforms, it declares a commitment to life, while speaking of small acts of self-care.

Losing the self: Cruel optimistic attachments

“There were problems, but they were covered with a gloss, with a coating of consumption, of traveling, of buying things, of eating out in restaurants. All these things that smooth over the real problems. Of course, when something like the financial crisis happens, this means that you have not developed the skills to manage these problems. People who are driven to an extreme dead-end emotionally because of the crisis, are people who would probably have been driven to a dead end. In other words, I believe that the financial crisis brought the problem to the surface, but a problem that existed. Now, on the other hand, the Greeks have suffered in a very short time a huge decline in what they dreamed, what they imagined their future would be, or their present. Things like I do not have enough to pay the rent, the electricity, they cut my electricity, or I have three degrees and I will work for 600 euros while they treat me like they are doing me a favor. So, on an imaginary level, on the level of dreams, there has been a diminution and a great restriction on

freedom of movement. This is what we [volunteer psychotherapists] understand as confinement. The person is immobilized, but at the same time he sees what could have been possible-because people now have access to information and they are educated-they see that I could have this, but there is nothing I can do about it. I am tied on a wall, but what I could have is not invisible because they are not peasants living in a field in the 19th century”.

This part of Elpida’s account speaks directly to me and resonates so deeply in a way that makes it difficult for me to write. Do I have to make sense of inchoate and non-coherent parts of myself to be able to write and think about what Elpida is describing? Is there a way of holding this account that can give me enough space to enter it with my writing, or will this writing necessarily involve something that feels violent and forceful? I decide not to push away this feeling of reluctance, but stay with it and see where and how it moves me while taking writing steps that are small.

As I stay with these feelings, I am brought back to a space of confusion and loss. A space that I entered in the first part of this chapter. Gastarbeiter: The migrant who is forced to leave home to secure the material things one needs in life. I wasn’t always a Gastarbeiter. The fantasies and dreams I had about myself while growing up were different, and spoke of a life that would be smooth, uncomplicated, straightforward. Then losses came, the losses of the crisis but also the loss of my father that preceded the crisis. This loss of my father opened a hole so deep that made me incapable of relating to myself, to others, to life itself from a position that was not pain, that was not agony. When I became a Gastarbeiter, I retreated to this familiar place. This process didn’t only entail the reversal of fantasies about financial and occupational success, nor the very material losses that for instance the lack of a liveable income signified, but a regression into a space in which other losses have transpired. The first months in Edinburgh enclosed the time when I experienced this agony the most intensely. My body became differently precarious when I moved to Edinburgh as everything became accentuated by being put under the strain of pressures like the ones I narrated: having a deadline of a week to find a place to stay and a job, while simultaneously entering a new academic institution where things were done so differently from what I was used to. But these strains were also imbued with a lament. I became again a teenage girl who was broken from loss, who approached all these strenuous beginnings feeling already

defeated, who cried with a familiar cry which proclaims that which it already accepts as real: Nothing good can ever happen to you. Your life is pain, your life is loss.

When Elpida speaks about the things that were brought to surface because of the crisis and the “extreme” emotional dead end that some experience, I think about the activation of pre-existing losses that become entangled with the losses that transpire as part of the crisis, as I think about myself. The writing pushes me to think about this odd space of multiple losses more closely and as I take a step towards theory, I turn to Lauren Berlant (2011) and cruel optimism. Lauren Berlant (2011) writes about cruel optimism as a concept that interlaces neoliberal politics with affect, through an investigation of fantasy, attachment and feeling. As Berlant (2011, p. 261) argues: “the neoliberal present is a space of transition, not only between modes of production and modes of life, but between different animating, sustaining fantasies”. The argument that she develops is that although the social promises of the post-war period started to recede after the 80’s, people remained attached to unachievable fantasies of the good life, such as upward mobility, job security and socio-political equality, despite the fact that neoliberal societies can no longer provide opportunities for their fulfilment. In *Cruel optimism*, Berlant (2011, p. 180) discusses these normative fantasies and the potency of the need to feel normal, which is “created by economic conditions of non-reciprocity that are mimetically reproduced [...] to maintain the affective forms of middle-class exchange while having an entirely different context of anxiety and economy to manage”. She argues that although aspirations like economic security and upward mobility, together with other fantasies which constitute an ideal of good life have become unattainable for most within the neoliberal reality, a powerful attachment to them persists. For Berlant, this happens because although these objects of desire have an adverse effect on peoples’ wellbeing, we hold on to this attachment, as its loss would be too much to bear since “the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world” (Berlant, 2011, p. 24).

As I plug in the concept of cruel optimism in my writing, I think about this last sentence where Berlant speaks about the loss of meaning that accompanies the loss to this attachment, in connection to the creation of an affective space within the crisis that this unravelling of the good life attachments becomes possible. When Elpida speaks about

realities and feelings of confinement, immobility, and the sense of being held against the wall that emerge in connection to material realities and losses, such as not being able to afford electricity, or paying the rent, I see the loss of these attachments to the good life manifesting as a loss of meaning around living and being in the world. What Elpida describes as a gloss, or a coating of consumption-small things like being able to travel or have a meal in a restaurant-I also think about the capacity of this coating of consumption to keep the fantasies that animate the attachment to the good life alive. When this "coating" is entirely removed and these smaller aspects of living which have the capacity to provide a holding material that sustains these connections is lost, one needs to form new attachments and new fantasies around what it means to exist and work in this world.

Thinking about this space in which personal losses re-emerge and become entangled with the various losses that are part of the crisis in connection to cruel optimism, I am also brought back to that day at the airport when so many others like me were leaving their homes behind. I wonder what shape and form did these broken promises for a good life acquire for these different bodies? How were the losses of the crisis experienced by these differently precarious bodies in the context of their own personal histories and how did these merge with the loss of the animating and sustaining fantasies of the good life?

Chapter Seven

Anna

Introduction

In this chapter of the analysis, I am thinking spatially about how particular sites and materialities facilitate certain actions, atmospheres, and ways of connecting. By doing this, I map the feeling textures of life under austerity, while also looking for openings that can carry the potential to imagine other worlds, particularly in relation to the site of the social clinic and of therapeutic practice, as one of its subspaces. This chapter starts with an autoethnographic interlude that was written during the summer of my fieldwork in Athens, where I begin to reflect on my connection to the objects of home. In the following section-setting the scene-I introduce the social clinic in which Anna, the interviewee, volunteers while presenting my embodied reactions and reflections that emerged from my visit to this space. The next section-psychotherapy: this awkward thing- traces the therapeutic trajectories that can be enabled by this space and its capacities in relation to care, action and feeling. In the following section, through my conversation with Anna, and her stories of the encounter with her unemployed clients, I find an opening that allows me to think about vulnerability and softness in the context of neoliberal dynamics that become part of the micro foundation of living inside home. As the chapter develops, I move from Anna's story to my own, as I think about unemployment as a state of being confined at home. In the final section of this chapter-becoming small- by reflecting on the time I spent inside the family home as an unemployed young adult, I focus on the connections and attachments that are formed inside home, in relation to objects, the self and others, and the complex negotiations that arise from this precarious belonging.

Interlude

As I sit here trying to find a place to start from, I am surrounded by the objects and the dense energies of my childhood and youth. I feel lightheaded from the heat and the uneasy transition from the reality of Edinburgh to the reality of home. The comforting distance that I felt during the first days is starting to evaporate as my bonds with this reality are starting to re-emerge and slowly pull me in. As I become more settled, I try to remember that I need

to be careful, because I know well that these bonds still resonate with pain. On my right, I see two precious items. A transparent glass sphere filled with water, glitter and the figure of a golden angel holding a lute at its centre; a gift I gave my father for Christmas around the time I was ten years old, three years before he passed away. I notice that the water in the sphere is getting more yellow with the years, probably from the golden tint of the angel that is slowly wearing out. The second one also belonged to him. A metal airplane, also golden, that lies on a revolving wooden base with a secret music mechanism, like a music box. It is also starting to sound out of tune. Our home gets so hot in the summer and I imagine how the music mechanism must expand and become looser with every August that passes.

Our home, that odd-looking building, designed and built by my great-grandfather on the land that he bought when they left the island to move to Athens. The building has expanded in a chaotic way as new rooms and storeys were gradually added over the years to accommodate the whole family. The final result is not too bad, just not very harmonious. Its roughness is also concealed by the tree-garden: Olive, lemon, almond, orange, tangerine and cypress, growing between roses and aromatic plants. This is where I grew up, closely surrounded by the whole maternal side of my family.

I look on my left and I see the tall brass bed with the headboard that almost reaches the ceiling. A great grandmother brought it from Egypt, around one hundred and fifty years ago. My sleep that has always been uneasy becomes more troubled here, but I have learned to accept that. The bed feels heavy and soaked with the stories of the many generations of bodies that have slept in it. It holds the secrets of unions that were immersed in resentment and anger, but managed to last for whole lifetimes, simply because the idea of divorce seemed incomprehensible in their time. Other, more short-lived stories, dissolved in less than a decade, like that of my parents. Stories of tired bodies that slowly melted from work, because that was the only thing they knew to do in life have slept in it as well, and sometimes when they lay down, they conceived other bodies that eventually gave life to me.

I remember spending two whole days rubbing every single part of the bed with brass cleaner to remove the tarnish that has built-up since the last time it was cleaned, decades ago. Six years must have passed since then. I understand now that this was an effort to feel a little more like the bed belonged to me. This construction of solid metal which is so much

older than me and has been a part of the most intimate stories that tie my family together, has somehow managed to acquire a life of its own in my imagination. How is it possible not to get sucked in by the familiarity of the people and the objects that I have laid my eyes upon for countless times, while contemplating life, death, love, family and pain? There are other objects too within this space that are invisible to the eye. Boundaries and lines that have been crossed, overstepped, and negotiated over and over again. As I write, I try not to become small again and give myself permission to be part of this space without merging with its objects and the dynamics that permeate it.

Setting the scene: Atmospheric senses

I meet Anna at her private practice, located in one of the old neighbourhoods of the Athens city centre. Anna is still seeing clients when I arrive, so I wait for her in the hallway and take my time processing the space. There are many posters and brochures, but one of them draws my attention. A poster with a single phrase at its centre, written in big red letters: “No one alone in the crisis”. I have seen this poster during my visit at the social clinic in which Anna volunteers, just a couple of days before our interview. After reaching out to the clinic to recruit participants, one of the volunteers offered to show me around the place and I accepted the invitation, as I didn’t want to miss out the opportunity to experience it first-hand. The clinic comprised of three extremely modest looking rooms that looked worn out from time and use. Yet, this tiny space was buzzing with activity. Several people were waiting in the lobby, while others would come and go, arranging their appointments at the secretary’s office at the entrance of the building.

The clinic was created in 2014, during the height of the financial crisis and a time of great need for accessing medical services, as millions of people have been excluded from the national health system, due to rising unemployment rates that have left many people without health insurance (Teloni & Adam, 2018). In the case of the social clinic where Anna volunteers, medical and health professionals coming from a very wide array of specialties, responded to this public health crisis by offering their services for free. As Anna later tells me, the clinic covers the unique healthcare needs of many different vulnerable groups of people. For instance, it has become very popular with the community of Georgian women care-workers, who turn to the clinic for most of their medical needs. These women who are informal and precarious workers, some of whom are also immigrants without papers, are

just one example of the groups that seek medical assistance through the clinic. There are also many others, including immigrants from different countries, but also Greek people, who comprise the majority of the users.

As I walk around the space, I see an assortment of medical equipment, cramped inside the small rooms. These objects almost look misplaced; there is an obstetric chair right next to a desk, a dental chair, shelves that are bursting with patients' files and dossiers, and many other things, so close to each other that it's difficult to tell what they are. The atmosphere exuded by this place doesn't evoke the sterilised and cold feeling of a medical practice, but a sense of blood, sweat and tears. I become aware of how the people who created this makeshift space did it with whatever materials they had at hand, without the luxury of funds, facilities or even time, in order to protect those who have been left to die from the violence of neglect (Butler, 2009). I am thinking that these volunteers are doing society's emotional dirty work (McMurray & Ward, 2014), as they tend to the bodies of those who have been dispossessed and have nowhere else to go to receive support. Inside the clinic, the air feels charged, imbued with a sense of urgency and a pressing feeling that can be seen in the constant movement of bodies, the non-stop ringing of the secretary's phone and the space's hectic appearance, that looks as if it was put together in a hurry.

For Anderson (2016, p. 742), atmospheres are expressions of "indeterminate affective impressions that emanate from and envelope particular enclosed arrangements". In that sense, a room's atmosphere may feel charged in a particular way, or a historical present may seem animated by a certain climate. Anderson also suggests that atmospheres, understood also as "feelings of existence" can be embodied by networks, organizations or societies. Reflecting on this pressing sense of urgency that I experienced during my visit at the social clinic, I wonder about the "dynamic constellations of people, things and ideas" (Anderson, 2016, p. 744) from which this atmosphere emanates. I become aware of how the bodies that enter the clinic looking to be cared for, can carry multiple injuries that aren't only limited to poor health and illness. As Butler argues (2009), there are certain lives that cannot be comprehended as lost or injured, if they were not apprehended as living in the first place. She suggests that neoliberal practices draw divisive lines between those whose deaths are to be registered as a loss and those whose aren't. From this perspective, only the lives that are to be seen as grievable and deserving of protection belong to subjects with

rights that ought to be honoured, while the non-grievable lives belong to non-persons. For Butler, this is also the reason why the state so often strives to regulate who will be publicly grievable and who will not, as grievability can define who counts as a subject.

I begin to wonder if this atmosphere of urgency that I experienced in the social clinic emanates from these sick and vulnerable bodies that have been erased, left to die, and deemed non-grievable, as they express their pressing need to be recognized, seen and heard. The phrase that was written in big red letters on the social clinic's wall returns to my mind: "No one left alone in the crisis", and I start to think how this message that so clearly juxtaposes that of being "left to die", can act as an invitation and an opening of a space in which a sense of selfhood can be reclaimed.

Psychotherapy: This awkward thing

Anna, a psychodynamic therapist in her late forties, has been volunteering in the clinic for three years. When we start the interview and I ask her to describe the experience of working there, she begins to recount some of the more difficult aspects of her role, especially in relation to the setting's particular characteristics and the lack of clear boundaries. Anna tells me about the medical chairs and beds that take over so much of the limited space, and how her appointments with clients change from one week to the next, depending on the schedule of the rest of the volunteers with whom she shares the rooms. As she tells me, this inevitably leads to some sessions being lost:

"The times change all the time and so appointments are lost. The space is really small. One room has the obstetric chair and a medical bed and the other the dentist chair. There are no boundaries. This strict framework that adds up to this awkward thing that psychotherapy is, is absent. Inside this awkward thing, this deeper bond is created, but this isn't happening here. Something else is created that has more to do with solidarity, with the fact that you are here to help me, so I must also try. Something else is created sometimes".

In Anna's account, I see her expressing her understanding of some of the unique qualities that create a deep connection between therapist and client, and how these are missing in this setting. She describes boundaries of time and space, part of which is also the therapist's steady presence week by week, as conditions which are necessary for establishing a safe

environment and creating a therapeutic container in which emotions and experiences can be worked through (Cooper & McLeod, 2011). Something that draws my attention, is how Anna describes the space's more material components as being a part of what creates this special and "awkward" thing that psychotherapy is, on which this deeper connection between therapist and client is also based. For Massey (2005, p. 119), space can be thought of as "the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories", part of which are all living and non-living elements that make up a particular place at a particular time. Thinking about this assemblage of bodies, material things and practices that produce certain capacities for action, interaction, feeling and desire (Fox & Alldred, 2015), I wonder about the therapeutic trajectories that are created inside this space. Thinking about the messiness of the space and the practice, as days and rooms alternate from one week to the next and intimate conversations happen between medical equipment, I wonder what sort of "a framework for understanding how different processes and things combine to create the world as it is experienced" (Pink, 2012, p. 23) these materialities enable and how this is connected with solidarity. Put differently, if psychotherapy can broadly be understood as the offering of a "particular kind of a relationship and a particular space" where new meanings can be generated (Bondi, 2013, p. 4), what kind of characteristics does this process acquire within the setting of the social clinic?

As Anna says, inside the clinic, therapy becomes "different" and something else is created. Although she doesn't specifically name this different thing that is produced, she describes it as stemming from the recognition of her embodied presence as a therapist and the interconnection of this presence with solidarity. When I ask Anna to elaborate on what this different thing is, she simply describes it as therapy feeling more "tangible" compared to her private practice. There is something "awkward" and "tangible" about how ordinary and mundane (Brownlie & Spandler, 2018) therapy can be when thought about as an act of simply being there and sharing a space with someone, but I wonder about this different, elusive quality of togetherness that Anna recognizes as part of this messy space.

Writing about the Argentinian social movements of 2001, Sitrin (2006) speaks about solidarity and affective politics as being produced by corporeal relationships and by the way the bodies of activists responded to the other bodies around them. For her, this feeling of intense togetherness was the driving force that offered the capacity for building something

collectively, even without having a clear objective. Reflecting on this, I wonder if the “messiness” of the social clinic is also an affirmation that this is an activist space that has been created by the sheer effort of volunteers, thus also embodying solidarity as a special feeling of commitment and devotion to others (Stewart & Schultze, 2019). Returning to Anna’s description as therapy being more “tangible”, I start to think if her embodied presence, as well as that of her clients, is interlaced with solidarity, thus charging this therapeutic encounter with subtle capacities that emerge from a more intense corporeal togetherness, which stems from the space’s activist potential.

As Anna continues to describe her practice in the social clinic, she tells me that apart from the sessions that are lost because of the volunteers’ schedule, many of her clients choose to end therapy after visiting her a few times. As Anna says, these abrupt endings can be challenging for her:

“Some people come here for very short time. They come here to unburden themselves, to just communicate their difficulties to someone and then never return, because they don’t really get a solution to their problems. This sometimes makes me feel like a rubbish bin! They speak to someone, share their challenges, let off some steam. They don’t have the luxury to commit to this process. So what we do is to find a tiny piece of reality, psychic and everyday and work on it. But it’s different. This process of mutual commitment that happens in psychotherapy is missing”.

In this part of our discussion, Anna narrates how some of her clients’ approach therapy, not as a long-term or open-ended process of commitment, but more as a site where they can release some emotional tension and diffuse part of the overwhelming sense of pressure that they experience on a daily basis. These pressures revolve primarily around financial hardship and precarity, leading them to yearn immediate solutions to the very real problems that they face in everyday life. Anna’s account reflects some of the frustrations that she experiences in response to the pressing needs of her clients and their approach towards their relationship, as a site where they can unload some of their most damaging emotions and then leave. To describe her feelings towards this early withdrawal of her clients from the relationship, Anna uses the painful analogy of a garbage-bin. In this expression of Anna’s experience as a container of harmful emotional materials, I recognize some of the deeply felt, oppressive and paradoxical qualities of care (Bondi, 2008).

Caregiving includes the emotional labour of the carers, who can feel devalued and exploited, as in the case of Anna, who aspires to commit and attend to the emotional dimensions of a caring relationship, but this isn't reciprocated by her clients. As Bondi suggests, care connects people in delicate and fragile ways, while producing imaginative and subjective positions in which these experiences are interpreted. These caring connections can make us feel vulnerable when, for instance, we feel rejected or distant from someone who is physically close: "Care oppresses and inspires; it hurts and it nurtures; it demeans and it fulfils; it enrages and it moves; it evokes love and it evokes hate" (Bondi, 2008, p. 250).

Softness and vulnerability

As Anna describes the tensions that emerge from these uneasy endings of her work with her clients, she also offers her reading of some of the reasons that might lead them to this decision:

"There is a critical moment, a tipping point and when pressure exceeds this tipping point, you put your defences forward. It isn't time for self-discovery, but for building defenses and surviving. You can't afford to dig deeper and get in touch with you weaker parts, to enter a depressive feeling, to lose meaning. You can't do this if you have to fight every day. You have to be in survival mode, so you can find food-find a job. The time someone spends here, without securing something for tomorrow, isn't only time lost but dangerous time. When someone comes here and vents a little, and cries a little-When this happens in therapy, don't we feel drained and rundown ? This can be dangerous for someone who has to fight twenty-four hours a day. So someone might feel that I shouldn't go to this place too often, because I might become softer".

The idea that is implied in Anna's interpretation on why some of her clients in the social clinic end their work together prematurely could overall be described as that of things getting worse before getting better. In broad terms, this idea refers to psychodynamic theories of therapeutic change as occurring when experiences that are assumed to be unconsciously affecting clients, are brought to their awareness (Freud, 1966). Although this might allow some degree of insight into their cause, the affect that is associated with many

of the stages of this process can be experienced as negative (Freud, 1966). As Anna's clients in the clinic have to persevere within the battlefield of everyday life and ward off aggressive forces, manifested for instance in the perpetual hunt for a job and the many things that they lack, including the perhaps most extreme form of material destitution, which is not having food on the table, they have to keep alert and on the move. This isn't the time for stirring things inside and experiencing those parts of themselves that are weaker and more vulnerable, but on the contrary, it's the moment for building defences.

What troubles me in Anna's interpretation is that she also seems to be in alignment with this perspective, recognizing therapy as a risky process that might endanger her clients by making them more vulnerable. I wonder, how can vulnerability be bad? Loosely, the concept of vulnerability has been approached by vulnerability theorists as a "shared, constitutive and connective feature of our existence that encompasses not merely susceptibility to harm but also receptivity to positive forms of intersubjectivity" (Cole, 2016, p. 261). From this perspective, vulnerability isn't a condition that limits, but rather enables, as it speaks of a form of "shared quintessential affectability" (Gear, 2013, p. 50) and a condition of openness that allows us to be affected and affect others (Butler, 2012). By recognising vulnerability as potentially damaging, is Anna endorsing invulnerability and thus aligning with neoliberal and masculinist ideologies that disavow weakness and dependence? When we build walls and defences, aren't we also drawing lines that reproduce violence by not only keeping us separate, but also locking away those declared unsafe, and isn't this logic underpinning neoliberal forms of governance that stigmatize and discipline those who are deemed vulnerable and not fit enough to fend for themselves?

I start to reflect on the "fear of becoming soft" which Anna describes as one of the reasons that might draw her clients away from therapy. This softness that Anna speaks of doesn't allude to softness as compassion, understood also as a capacity of the feeling body to sense the lives of others in a more nuanced way or the ability to become more attuned to their suffering (Berlant, 2014). This isn't the softness of sensitive and empathic bodies, but something that feels more violent and dangerous. Berlant (2011) argues that the experience of trauma and narrative rupture in peoples' stories can be accompanied by the sensual experience of self-dissolution, and in the face of dissolution and of loss of emotional shape, the subject is firmly grasping toward stabilizing its form as a defence. Reflecting on this

shapelessness of the self as a response to loss and trauma, I start thinking about the softness in Anna's account as the tender state of an object that is about to unravel and lose the continuity of its form.

As I've earlier discussed, one of the aspects of neoliberalism embodied by Anna's clients, is that of "being left to die" and of becoming nameless. Anna is connecting this state of precarity that has been enforced upon her clients, but also their exclusion from the public health system, with a form of systemic abuse:

"It is a form of abuse, and although initially you might resist it, as the abuser becomes stronger and the resistances bend, it gives rise to a sense of apathy, and shame and a deep-seated anger, that can't be expressed, so it starts boiling underneath the surface and it takes more pathological forms that manifest in the relationships between people, between families, in the relationship with the body".

In Anna's account, there is an active assault by the systemic forces against those who have been dispossessed. By being deprived of grievability, protection and rights her clients are being erased as subjects (Butler, 2009) and are injured in multiple ways, some of which are implied in Anna's story. In this aggressive and traumatic reality in which these nameless subjects whose loss isn't registered as a loss and the struggle to survive is a daily concern, I see an unravelling and a dissolution of the self (Berlant, 2011). Within this space of social suffering, dissolution and permeability, Anna's clients orient themselves not towards "softness", but towards holding tight to whatever can provide continuity and form. By leading lives that are widely exposed to the crisis, I am thinking that Anna's clients are "more-than-ordinarily vulnerable" (Sellman, 2005, p. 4) and thus might rightfully reject fostering vulnerability and instead choose to pursue a tactical and selective kind of closure, as a protective barrier to resist oppression (Gilson, 2011). This implies that although vulnerability can be seen as a shared condition of ontological commonality (Cole, 2016), it can be experienced in radically different ways on the basis of unequal distributions of power. As Cole (2016) suggests, re-signifying vulnerability by solely focusing on its universality and its generative potential, can diminish perceptions of inequality and obscure essential distinctions among particular vulnerabilities, as well as variations between those who can be injured and those who already are, like Anna's clients. In that sense, Anna's endorsement of the need to build defences and her acknowledgement of therapy as a

potentially dangerous site, rather than expressing an alignment with neoliberal ideologies that reject weakness and dependency, could be an indication of attunement not only to her clients needs, but to the dynamics of power that permeate their lives.

Home: The door, open or closed?

In her account, Anna portrays another aspect of vulnerability that touches upon the self in relation to others, and more specifically the self in relation to family inside the parental home:

“For some women, the problems they face revolve around becoming autonomous and they also are connected with poverty and unemployment. For example, women who are trapped inside the parental home, with difficult family relationships and no income. So it’s always, the parents and the supermarket- the parents and the cigarettes, the parents and the door-open or closed? Leave and go where? So in these cases, there are issues around autonomy and adulthood and being essentially trapped inside a parental home, where there are no solutions. For instance, there was this woman, who was a little less than 40. She was long-term unemployed and lived in her parents’ house. All that separated them was an interior door, but there was a constant, everyday negotiation whether the door would remain open or closed or locked. If she would babysit her nephew should she do it for money or for free? Was she obliged to do it because her sister was buying her food? Was she allowed to make her own choices, or did she have to negotiate everything with her parents because she had no income? And where would she find income”?

As Anna describes the issues that emerged during her work with one of her clients, I notice how in her interpretation of this encounter, power dynamics of neoliberal governance and austerity politics (Foucault, 2006) are permeating home in multiple ways, while being closely interlaced with the connections that are formed inside her clients’ family. Her client, a long-term unemployed woman, is trapped in a reality of insecurity and poverty that forces her to stay in the family home in a state of prolonged economic dependency to her parents. In Anna’s account, there is a strong depiction of a notion of autonomy and self-sufficiency that is intertwined with the ideal of “an independent individual fully participating in the labour market” (McDowell, 2004, p. 156), together with an ethic of individual self-fulfilment’

through work. By being unable to become successfully employed and create her own independent biography through her individual choices and financial self-sufficiency, the portrayal of Anna's client resembles more that of a child rather than that of an adult. In this story, financial independence not only delineates who counts as an adult subject, but also regulates relationships and rights by demarking the limits of what one is entitled to inside the space of home and what movements the body can perform. In this example, I see how governmental technologies of the self and conduct are becoming part of the micro foundation of living (Foucault, 2001). In Anna's story, financial and market logics are entering the space of home, as they become part of the complex negotiations that take place between her client and her family. Should Anna's client approach the childcare of her nephew as an interaction seen within the framework of the exchange of services, as her sister is buying her food? Does she have the right to monetize this interaction or has she become "indebted" (Lazzaratto, 2011) to her sister by this act of food provision?

I would suggest that what underlies this dilemma is also the difficulty to determine what sort of object food is and whether the affective energy with which it is charged is monetary or emanates from care. Ahmed (2010, p. 31) argues that "to be affected by something is to evaluate that thing" and "that evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn toward things". Furthermore, she suggests that "to experience an object as being affective is to be directed not only toward an object, but to 'whatever' is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 33). I notice how in Anna's story, the stance of her client toward both the objects of food and the door that separates her living space from that of her parents is permeated by ambivalence and hesitation. Should the door remain open, closed, or locked? Is Anna's client entitled to claiming and occupying space inside the home although she hasn't succeeded in obtaining financial independence, or does this demark a selfhood with less rights and less space to move? Or perhaps this failure of gaining autonomy and self-sufficiency through work, signals that Anna's client still needs to be taken care of and looked after by her parents as a child?

Postlude: Becoming small

Prior to migrating to Edinburgh, these complex negotiations have also been a part of my intimate life inside the family home as an unemployed young adult. During the years I spent

sharing a home with my family as someone who was financially dependent, I became small, diminishing in size in an effort to take up as little space as possible, inside a home I felt I didn't have the right to occupy. In the course of this period, my connection to my family felt in a way similar to that of a helpless child, as I heavily relied on others for the fulfilment of my basic needs like the provision of food and shelter. Reflecting back on the dynamics and interactions of this environment, I also become aware of how home has primarily become a boundary-dissolving space of attachment to objects and people for me (Berlant, 2011). Berlant (2011) suggests that in order for the subject to stabilise its proximity to an object, it is necessary to be able to gain some traction. I would argue that by being spatially confined inside a home, there is a lack of adequate distance and space to gain this traction and differentiate oneself from the familiar objects of home. Ahmed (2004a) argues that the stickiness of affect retains connections between human but also non-human bodies that create common orientations toward things, meaning that these things obtain characteristics and tendencies over time. This indicates that some affects are already attributed to some objects and thus these objects become sticky and filled with affective value. Furthermore, she suggests (Ahmed, 2010) that the family enables a shared horizon in which objects circulate, amassing affective value.

As I think about these sticky objects, I return to the interlude of this chapter and feel the reawakening of familiar energies on my body: my great-grandmother's bed, the glass sphere with the lute-holding golden angel that I gave my father from Christmas, the garden, the textures, colours and the position of things inside home; all saturated with meaning and affectively charged in way that gravitationally pulls me towards them, as I cannot separate my history from theirs or disentangle myself from them. Unemployment and being stuck at home are experiences that are closely tied together. I am here suggesting that these boundaries between selves and things which are already blurred inside the family home, become even more fuzzy when the distance from them is diminished, as in the case of unemployment. For me, this lack of distance gave me the sense of merging with my environment and the objects and people that encompassed it, as the already charged and sticky connections between us, were amplified, and sucked me in, as the daily, uninterrupted rhythm of this confined existence, gradually turned them into an irresistible, annulling force. I wonder, why did I also feel like I was recoiling during this process of

merging with home? Why did I feel I was becoming small, and why were guilt and shame present in this experience? Has home become a space of “dithering, tottering, bargaining, testing, or otherwise being worn out by the promises that I [they] have attached to in this world” (Berlant, 2010, p. 97)? Has my confinement inside home turned it into the main stage where I experienced the wearing out and dissolution that comes from the affective attachment to a good life (Berlant, 2011)-employment, success, financial independence-that never comes? And, have these objects of desire clustered around and coalesced with the objects of home, tinting not only my orientation but attachment to them? I feel hesitant to provide a definite answer to these questions and pin them down with a categorical yes or no, although I do recognise in this reading a sense that seems to convey what transpired for me. Rather than coming from a place of certainty, this sense comes from the mark the contact with these forces of home has left on my body (Ahmed, 2004b). For Ahmed, (2004b) affect as a force that delineates boundaries, participates in creating impressions that shape the “surfaces of individual and collective bodies” (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 1). In engaging with senses like recoiling and becoming small, merging with human and non-human objects, or being worn out by the attachment to the good life that never arrives, I am thinking about the impact these forces had on the way I surfaced as a body in this space.

As I write, I become aware of how there are certain aspects of this surfacing that feel more uncomfortable than others, particularly in relation to the senses of guilt, shame and becoming small. I begin to wonder if the infantile sense of self I have had inside home and the impulse to diminish in size, which was also connected with the feeling of lacking the right to occupy space as a “failed” and jobless adult, emanated from being tightly caught up in discourses that shaped how I was to experience myself. Was I not recoiling and embodying guilt because I also attributed work success and failure to my own agential choices, thus individualising blame, rather than recognising how I am part of a system that perpetuates inequality and has denied me access to the workplace through the imposition of harsh austerity measures? Furthermore, did I not find myself still moving and living within the hostile and materially destitute world of the crisis, because of the care that my family has shown me?

Butler (2012, p. 148) argues that “precarity exposes our sociality, the fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency”, within a social world in which there are certain views

of autonomy and self-sufficiency that are leading us astray from acknowledging our connection to others. By experiencing uneasiness and shame from this interdependence with my family was I revealing an "autonomy-obsession", while aligning with ideals which prescribe that the "goal of human life is the realization of self-sufficiency and individuality" (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000, p. 8), or was I simply experiencing "that subjects are constituted within and by regimes, discourses, and micro practices of power" and that there is "no pure [...] free will that somehow escapes the operations of power" (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000, p. 10)? All of us are shaped by power in ways that can be more or less subtle and one of the most evident examples in my life is no other than the experience of the effects of economic power through the financial crisis. Perhaps in this rethinking of our ourselves as creatures who are deeply dependent upon one another, there is also a reshaping of the self that hurts, and for that is met with resistance. Growing up in a world in which we have come to identify pride with strength and strength with independence, when our frailty is revealed, there can be hurt and shame. As I write, years after the interlude of this chapter was written, I find myself again not in Edinburgh, but at home. I am surrounded by the same objects and the same familiar energies of my childhood and youth, but I no longer fear that I might get sucked in by them. I have found safety in softness, and I have given myself permission to care and be cared for.

Chapter Eight

Discussion

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I take a step back and examine the analytical chapters of this thesis in the light of the questions that have framed my inquiry. The first part of this chapter focuses on the shaping of the self through the economic crisis in the light of feelings and experience. The second part of this chapter focuses on the capacities of action and movement enabled by the activist site of social clinics and the therapeutic practices that are part of them, particularly in connection to that which challenges the neoliberal and austere.

Part I

8.2. Embodying unemployment during the crisis

8.2.1. Isolation and flatness

In the analytical chapters, I explored some of the ways in which unemployment as one of the most prominent aspects of the crisis and one of its most decisive manifestations in my life is experienced in connection to material spaces of everyday life. By focusing on the feelings, textures and power dynamics that permeate these sites, I have been able to trace part of the process through which unemployment becomes embedded into the self.

Exploring how isolation and withdrawal feed into each other and become intricately paired during the crisis, I will discuss how unemployment and the movements of the body it creates make possible its weaving in into the body.

Writing about unemployment, I spoke about the physical isolation of the body from other bodies and social spaces and its confinement at home, arguing that by becoming unemployed the self loses access to the flow of life. I described this flow of life as the simple everyday social experiences and interactions that take place outside of home, such as taking a bus to work or simply encountering other people, places, and objects. Through these small events and encounters that happen on the move, I discussed how the body can experience itself differently from the familiar ways it does at home (Bissell, 2016). As Stewart (2008, p.

8) writes, these are “things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters [...] in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like something”, and thus increase or diminish the body’s capacity to sense and do things, even in fine and imperceptible ways. By connecting the physical isolation of the body with a material reality generated by the crisis, referring to not being able to generate an income which allows the escape from this condition of confinement and isolation, I also drew attention to the workings of political and economic power as enabling this seclusion of the self and its cutting off from the social world.

Rogers-Vaughn (2014, p. 512) writes that neoliberalism accomplishes the reduction and diminution of self by “social isolation, cutting individuals off from connection with others and from social institutions”. Thus, from a perspective of biopower, isolation becomes part of technologies that set the “rules of the game” (Foucault, 2008, pp. 259–260) within the crisis, by organising life and fostering particular conditions in which the subject can operate and become attached to its identities (Dean, 2009). Part of the way that neoliberal privatisation manifests in the crisis is thus a matter-of-fact character, as an austere condition of not having enough money to exit the space of private domicile and as a result, one of the things that this thesis highlighted is that a big part of the crisis experience transpires at home.

MacLeavy (2019) argues that after the global economic crisis, neoliberalism appeared to return with a ferocity to socially divisive practices, echoing its earlier roll-back phase, as postulated by Peck and Tickell (2002), but this time more intensely. For Peck and Tickell (2002, p. 384), “roll- back neoliberalism,” corresponds to its “pattern of deregulation and dismantlement” of the social state and its institutions which was prevalent during the 1980s, to “an emergent phase of active state-building and regulatory reform—an ascendant moment of roll-out neoliberalism” that followed this phase. MacLeavy’s (2019) focus in making this argument around this aggressive form of neoliberalism is to emphasize how austerity, in particular, supports a new authoritarian and political shift, rewriting and recreating neoliberalism exactly via the isolation and denunciation of specific social groups. Austerity measures, as a prevailing feature of life during the crisis, not only attest to the presence of this aggressive form of neoliberalism, but also to their intricate connection with unemployment, as something that emanates from neoliberal reforms that generate job

losses and job scarcity (Stuckler et al., 2017). The unemployed, the precariously employed, but also the economically crushed and the sick are among these social groups that become denounced and isolated through the workings of austerity.

At the same time, I discussed this isolation of the unemployed body which transpires within this network of connections of power, as regulating the movements the body can enact in many ways. Speaking about the experience of being confined at home, I wrote about losing the sense of polyphony created by other bodies and objects which was replaced by a repetitive and flattened monotony that permeated thinking and feeling. I also described how by being reduced to performing the same movements and living everyday life in a way that had the same texture as the next, my body started merging with this sameness. In Virilio's (2001, p. 160) writing about the "residential cell" I recognise a reflection of the flattened and flattening affect that surrounds this being at home, when he speaks about "the cadaver-like inertia" of dwelling, manifesting in a "canopy bed for the infirm", "a divan for being dreamt of without dreaming".

Drawing on Highmore and Taylor (2014, p. 9) and their conceptualisation of mood as "how the social and cultural world is lived as qualities and forms, sense and feeling [...] how the world enlivens us and flattens us", Coleman (2016) focuses on pessimism about the future as a mood unique to austerity. As Coleman says (2016, p. 93), "one way of approaching pessimism is to conceive of it as a flattening mood; an affect associated with feeling down, insipid, miserable or depressed". However, this flattened way of being which emerged through my writing around the isolated self also has different qualities from the ones described by Coleman. It revolves around a specific locality, that of home, and the lethargic and monotonous rhythms of this confined everyday life that permeate the body and make it immovable, stuck, and stiff by flattening the multiplicity and diversity of experience. It also revolves around the shapeshifting forms of neoliberalism, its "hybrid nature", the "multiple and contradictory aspects of neoliberal spaces, techniques, and subjects" (Larner, 2003, p. 509) and the intimate connection between neoliberalism and violence (Springer, 2016): the paradoxical spaces the body inhabits as the acute violence of being isolated and confined at home coexists with the vapidness and staleness that permeate this experience.

8.2.2. Withdrawal, shame, and incoherence

Although the neoliberal power dynamics of the crisis produce spatial organisations (Harvey, 2001) that isolate and confine the self, by entangling my story with Maria's story, I also described a different aspect of this process of isolation in connection to withdrawal, as a desire of the self to remove itself from social life. Maria speaks about her clients experiencing unemployment as a personal failure, who by perceiving it in individualised ways are led to question their self-worth and consequently, choose to cut themselves off from others. Speaking about the experience of unemployment through the lens of a personal inadequacy, I connected my story with Maria's and spoke about the internalisation of blame and guilt that also turned my gaze from the system that produces unemployment to the self, as part of the divisive logics that underpin neoliberal governmentality (Rose, 1996). Discussing the neoliberal notions of responsibility of the self and freedom of choice that goes with it (Brown, 2005), I also wrote about the concepts of autonomy and self-sufficiency in connection to work in the chapter that focuses on Anna. Writing about neoliberal ideals of "an independent individual fully participating in the labour market" (McDowell, 2004, p. 156), and the ethic of finding individual self-fulfilment through work, I also spoke about the sense of failure I experienced by being unable to become successfully employed and obtain financial self-sufficiency.

Through this discussion, I identified some of the feelings that enable these power operations which make these subjects positions possible, while also moving the body to withdraw further into the microcosmic realm of home. Writing about shame as a tide grip on my body (Ahmed, 2014), I spoke about how it would emerge more intensely through my interaction with others, thus pushing me to hide away what I recognised as a transparent and ever-present sense of failure which I feared others could see by getting close to me. Thus, through writing about my own experience and in connection to Maria's and Anna's account, I recognised shame and its embodied presence as something that emerges in relation to others and which becomes possible through the identification with non-normative accounts of the self, like that of unemployment.

As Patterson (2018) argues, shame speaks of a desire of the self to maintain low visibility and to remain unacknowledged and cannot emerge in the absence of others. Sedgwick and Frank (1995) also advance a relational understanding of shame that they associate with certain groups- in their example queer and non-normative sexualities-and the process of them being linked to non-normative forms of life which cause them to be branded as shamed populations. In that sense, Sedgwick and Frank (1995) imply that shaming is enacted by institutional and social norms and thus reflects a process that demonstrates how the structural subordination of certain groups can be seen as an emotional map of the identities that individuals occupy.

Thus, shame can act as a register, signalling what it means to be recognized, or not recognised with normative ideals, including those of obtaining self-sufficiency and self-fulfilment through work. In her conversation with Najafi and Serlin (2008, p. 3), Berlant argues that shame in that sense indicates that “a political structure is fundamentally an affective structure that forms our subjectivities” while also speaking about shame in connection to withdrawal:

I argue that the feeling of the world withdrawing from you and therefore throwing you back on yourself could be described as shame, but that says nothing about the experience of it. The broken circuit could also involve anger, numbness, hunger, a desire to self-stimulate, a compulsion to repeat, the pleasure of a recognition, grief, and/or curiosity, and these wouldn't merely be defences against the impact of the pure feeling of shame, but actually different responses to being affectively cut off (Najafi & Serlin, 2008, p. 4).

By writing about my own experiences and entangling them with the accounts of Anna and Maria, as well as with theory, I identified unemployment as an enactment of a way of being that leads the self to identify with non-normative subject positions which aren't endorsed by neoliberal rationalities and thus move the self to an experience of having a shamed subjectivity. Writing about withdrawal in connection to shame, I also spoke about how the self folds into itself as it is cut off from the world, while also desiring to remain unseen. In my story, one of the primary feelings that accompanied the experience of shame was that of incoherence and of being unable to narrate myself to others. As shame emerged more intensely in the presence of others, so did a broken story and the inability to articulate and

express what was happening and what I was feeling. This challenge to narrate the self is also touched upon by Maria, as she says that when her clients find themselves without a job, they begin reflecting on who they are in connection to what they have achieved in life, which is difficult to communicate to others.

Probyn (2005, p. 8) argues that shame is productive as it “makes us reflect on who we are individually and collectively” and from this perspective unemployment and the shame that goes with it, can also bring about a process of questioning and confusion. As Berlant argues, “emotion doesn’t produce clarity but destabilizes you, messes you up, and makes you epistemologically incoherent—you don’t know what you think, you think a lot of different kinds of things, you feel a lot of different kinds of things” (Najafi & Serlin, 2008, p. 5). In that sense, feelings like shame can generate incoherence, which however can become intensified within neoliberal dynamics like that of the economic crisis.

Writing about the process of *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler (2005) argues that when a subject examines its own actions while trying to determine its course in life, this process is intertwined with the question of who this ‘I’ is that is obligated to account for itself and act in specific ways. She also argues that when subjects try to give an account of the self, they also give an account of social conditions under which this self emerges. I suggested that unemployment is intertwined with shame through the enactment of non-normative subject positions that aren’t affirmed by neoliberal rationalities, as one becomes unable to obtain financial and social independence and self-fulfilment by participating in the work market. However, at the same time, I also argued that the neoliberal dynamics of austerity are accountable for reproducing this social reality (MacLeavy, 2019). Thus, one is inevitably faced with the ensuing questions: How can the unemployed self produce any coherent account of itself within social conditions that produce the condition of unemployment, but also the punitive discourses that hold it responsible for this failure? Is this even possible when the self becomes so tightly enveloped in forces that push it into a state of withdrawal and regurgitation of its own feeling processes?

Although there aren’t any easy answers to these questions, as I reflect on the many forms and shapes that shame has taken in my life, I think about the ways that it has infiltrated the writing of this thesis. In the personal writing around the impasse that I presented in the literature review, I spoke about the *renouncement* of my writing, the *lowering of my eyes*,

the turning away of my head from my own creative processes and their products. Shame and incoherence have stayed with me along the journey of the writing of this thesis. From embodying feelings of a manual labourer who has managed to accidentally slip into the academic world, to that of narrating a self whose storyline was too broken to be recounted. As I move towards the end of this journey, I become aware of some of the things that being “emotionally incoherent” (Najafi & Serlin, 2008) might have enabled in this process of writing. Writing from this position of shame and incoherence, while also trying to describe and give an account of this experience, allowed me to get lost in this research (Lather, 2012). By inhabiting a space of “betwixt and between, of pushing forward toward resolution while also perpetually withdrawing from such resolution, of constantly feeling the power to find solutions while also perpetually witnessing such solutions fade into the background as new problems arise, of learning from and wrestling with a learning that un-learns itself in its learning” (Lewis, 2017, p. 300). What this made possible was experiencing knowing and writing as a form of potentiality (Wyatt, 2018), which allowed the emergence of a suspension of closure or completion that animated things that I did not know were there.

In this thesis, writing as a form of potentiality has been amplified by employing a form of critical autoethnography that allowed me to entangle myself into the layers of the voices of the interviewees and working with conceptualisations of voice that aren’t easy (Lather & Smithies, 1997). Through this methodological approach, I experienced my writing as a form of movement, as my stories constantly bumped against the volunteers’ stories, thus not allowing my writing to settle (Wyatt, 2019). This experience of my writing as always being in flux, as well as my continuous questioning around the ownership and the authorship (Gale & Wyatt, 2016) of the voices I was producing and reproducing, made me more critically aware of the systems or power in which I am enveloped as a researcher (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). Most importantly, this constant movement between different positions and between voices became a form of hope and action that directly challenged the impasse of the neoliberal and precarious lifeworlds that I am exploring in this thesis, by not allowing myself and my writing to settle.

8.3. Temporalities of the indebted self

In the chapter that focuses on Maria, I also explored some of the embodied dimensions of the process of being tied to a net of economic agreements that hold the body captive until debts are repaid. Connecting the reality of the austerity reforms of the crisis extending well into the future, I connected the sense of hopelessness that Maria discussed, expressed in the idea that “until I die, nothing will change”, with the self that becomes indebted (Lazzarato, 2011) and a different aspect of the economized subjectivity of the crisis. That is, the notion that the future permeates the here-and-now and that the present is informed by things that do not yet exist, while highlighting that the indebted self is robbed from the possibility of imagining the future differently.

At the same time, I explored a different function of neoliberal power dynamics, which rather than enhancing the productivity of the self subjugate it to the power of death (Mbembe, 2019). I thus suggested that through this necropolitical (Mbembe, 2019) operation of power, austerity measures and bailout packages, restructure and colonise the lifeworld, while enabling the making of bodies that become passive, atrophic, and also stuck, by depriving them of the possibility to imagine a different future. Thus, I described the potential to imagine a different future as something that creates movement and different trajectories in the everyday life of the present.

In a parallel manner, Lazzarato (2011) suggests that futurity and debt are inextricably linked, as he maintains that the future should be a time of potential, and unpredictability, but capitalism occupies and dominates this future through the establishment of connections of indebtedness, that render it colonized. In his words:

What matters is finance’s goal of reducing what will be to what is, that is, reducing the future and its possibilities to current power relations. From this perspective, all financial innovations have but one sole purpose: possessing the future in advance by objectifying it (Lazzarato, 2011, p. 46).

The relations of power that enable this colonisation of the future for Lazzarato (2011, p. 33), take the form of debtors and creditors, which operate not through the economic as a disembedded sphere that exists in separation from personal lives, but instead by “immediately making the economy subjective, since debt is an economic relation which, in order to exist, implies the moulding and control of subjectivity such that ‘labour’ becomes indistinguishable from work on the self”. The capacity to form and fulfil a promise is what determines this subjectivity that Lazzarato sees as produced through debt. In that sense, credit, which also encompasses the bail-out packages and their conditionalities as part of the crisis, is a “promise to pay a debt, a promise to repay in a more or less distant and unpredictable future, since it is subject to the radical uncertainty of time” (Lazzarato, 2011, p. 45). As a result, the debt economy demands the formation of subjects who accept the promise of repaying their debt, as well as the responsibilities imposed on them that speak to a specific future. This subjectivity that is generated has a distinct temporality, as it is produced in relation to a future that is not indeterminate, but has been made apparent and knowable to an extent. Thus, debt emerges as odd sensations of living in a timeless society (Lazzarato, 2011), which through responsibility and guilt that become entangled with debt “allow capitalism to bridge the gap between present and future” (Lazzarato, 2011, p. 46). This numbed and timeless present that emerges from the closing-down of the future constitutes a part of the way that I delineated the self that becomes indebted during the crisis, as well as a mode of economic being which reflects that “power is a thing of the senses” (Stewart, 2008, p. 84).

However, by exploring this condition of indebtedness through my own experiences, I have also become aware of certain qualities of time and feeling that make this indebted becoming possible through features that are different from those of a numbed and timeless present. Writing about the anxiety and lack of hope about the future that I experienced after my arrival in Scotland, I spoke about how I felt as if I was continuing to experience a moment that has expanded in time, thus pushing me to occupy an emotional space that was familiar to that of my life in Greece, but at the same time it was also different. Familiar as it was encompassed by the same feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and uncertainty, but also different as this process was unfolding within a new space. Connecting these feelings with remembering (Cixous, 1993), I described it as a process of connecting with a time that felt

fragmented and cyclical. For instance, I wrote about an ever-present anxiety, as the lack of financial resources and stable occupation followed me from Greece to Edinburgh, thus helping create an enduring sense of always inhabiting a fragile present. I also spoke about the newness of Edinburgh as a new space which my body occupied, as not really being founded upon newness, but on the basis of a past that has become present. Exploring these memories through writing, I tried to caress and feel the texture of the traces that they have left on my body, and I allowed their fragmented form to become a part of my writing. A part of what has emerged through this process of writing was the repetition of the feelings, experiences, and subject positions that I occupied in connection to the crisis, and thus of a past that wasn't really a past as it continued to inform my body and its movements: feeling the pain of separation of leaving home time and time again, having a body that is defined by fear and insecurity while continuously performing precarious professional roles and always returning to and being engulfed by an ever-present sense that things will never get better.

Adkins' (2017) and Coleman's (2016) conceptualisations of the affectivity of time as shaping the self, can help me describe this fragmented and cyclical becoming in the context of indebtedness, in ways that complement Lazzarato's understanding of the connection between future and present, and correspond to these aspects of my experience that I discussed. Speaking about indebtedness in connection to austerity, Coleman (2016, p. 98) discusses their temporality, the way that they are "felt and lived out" in connection to time, through the "blurring or recalibration of the boundaries between past, present and future". Contrary to Lazzarato's conceptualisation of debt as producing a future and possibilities that are rather clear, fixed and definite, Coleman (2016, p. 90) speaks about debt and austerity being "lived as qualities and forms, sense and feeling through a non-linear [...] temporality". Similarly, Adkins (2017, p. 456) argues that the temporal dynamics of debt, do not follow a stable and linear model of time through forecasts and projections that can be extrapolated from the present into the future, but "hinges on calculations of the possible and especially of possible futures. In this calculus futures therefore do not unfold from the present, but the present is remediated by futures which have not yet – and may never – arrive". Instead of reflecting a linear continuation of the present, the future from this perspective becomes incorporated into the present, allowing the future's potential to shape the present. Rather than living in a present where the self has become deadened, numb, and neutralised by the

closing down of the future and its possibilities (Lazzarato, 2011), Adkins (2017, p. 458) describes the temporality of debt and austerity as one of “intense activity”, where the future, the past and the present fold into each other. This “non-linear, non-chronological, affective time” (Coleman, 2016, p. 93) where the everyday becomes intensely active rather than numbed, especially through feelings of fear, anxiety and insecurity reflect the indebtedness of time in connection to my own experiences, particularly after migrating to Edinburgh. Although the hopelessness of inhabiting a lifeworld which has become colonised by economic forces that extend into the future, has often led me to identify with the subject position that Maria describes as “until I die nothing will change”, anxiety and insecurity have been more connected with a future which although hostile, it remained unknown, unpredictable, and uncertain.

At the same time, this folding of the past and future into the present, and the continuation of the crisis to inform the movements my body can perform even after leaving Greece, speak to the crisis as having the capacity to produce a temporality which is cyclical, through qualities and forms, senses and feelings that became repeated again and again. As Butler (2005, p. 34) writes, “in living my life as a recognizable being, I live in a vector of temporalities, one of which has my death as its terminus, but another of which consists in the social and historical temporality of the norms by which my recognizability is established and maintained”. Thus, in Butler’s account the self is also formed through the interlacing of personal and socio-historical temporalities, and thus personal memory is also a form of historical or collective memory. Although this kind of memory cannot be directly accessed, it leaves its traces on the body, as the social forms the body in distinct ways, meaning that “sensual and bodily forms of memory anchor us within a broader social time” (Rae & Ingala, 2020, p. 169). From this perspective, I see the cyclical temporality of the crisis, manifesting in a sense of repetition of the things that my body can do and feel, as attesting to the embodiment of the socio-historical reality of the crisis. In that sense, embodied senses and memories, as part of the self that has been produced in the context of the crisis can affirm their presence through repetition, not as a steady and solid form of sameness, but as being a part of a flexible temporality, which nevertheless has certain identifiable characteristics that speak to the shapes the self can acquire through the way that it feels about itself.

8.4. The dispossessed self: Intricate patterns of loss

In the beginning of this thesis, I started narrating how unemployment manifested as a multifaceted kind of loss in my life, as it didn't acquire one shape, but many. These losses included a loss of security, of an income that allowed me to access the world outside the boundaries of home, of the opportunity to imagine myself differently in the future, and of the right to feel that I have the right to occupy a space in the world, as an adult who I felt has failed at adulting. Throughout the thesis and through Maria's, Lydia's, Elpida's and Anna's accounts, I explored some of these different qualities and forms that loss can take and the connections between them, some of which I have already examined more closely in this discussion chapter. This exploration has allowed me to advance a deeper understanding of a particular kind of loss that takes place in connection to the economic crisis, which speaks directly to the political as being closely intertwined with the personal. That is, of loss as dispossession.

In their stories of working therapeutically in the social clinics, the volunteers whose stories I explore in this thesis have delineated part of the work that they do as revolving around the multiple losses their clients face that they see as rooted into the world of the crisis. To give some examples, Maria speaks about the economic crisis as a loss of money which translates into a deeply felt reality, as money becomes a way to access and materialise different experiences that nourish the self. Elpida speaks about the emergence of vulnerability and loss in connection to unemployment, poverty and the deterioration of the health and education system, but also as these being conditions that can enable an awareness of how the self exists in relation to others. Lydia describes the vulnerability, insecurity and confusion experienced by her working-class clients after losing their jobs and not being able to enact the role of the provider of their family. At the same time, she discusses how loss in the crisis also takes the form of a loss of fantasies about what it means to live in the world, in connection to the goals one should strive to achieve, and the disorientation that takes place as the gloss created by consumerism disappears. Lastly, Anna speaks about her clients living in conditions of poverty which sometimes can translate to not even having enough

food on the table, in connection to softness, and vulnerability as a dangerous and traumatic condition that threatens the continuity of the self.

These accounts, as well as my own experiences, speak to the “very complicated affective, psychic, and political dynamic involved in the multiple nuances of becoming dispossessed” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 6). This complexity for Butler and Athanasiou, stems from the double valence of dispossession, or the intricate ways that the self is connected to power.

On one hand dispossession signifies:

[...] submission of the subject-to-be to norms of intelligibility, a submission which [...] constitutes the ambivalent and tenuous processes of subjection. It thus resonates with the psychic foreclosures that determine which ‘passionate attachments’ are possible and plausible for “one” to become a subject. In this sense, dispossession encompasses the constituted, preemptive losses that condition one’s being dispossessed [...] by another (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 1)

In that sense, dispossession describes a process of becoming a self through loss, the process through which the subject is “installing within itself lost objects along with the social norms that regulate the subject’s disposition to the address of the other” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 1) and thus it speaks to the boundaries of our autonomy and our existence as relational and closely dependent beings. On the other hand, dispossession reflects:

[...] processes and ideologies by which persons are disowned and abjected by normative and normalizing powers that define cultural intelligibility and that regulate the distribution of vulnerability: loss of land and community; ownership of one’s living body by another person, [...] subjection to military, imperial, and economic violence; poverty, securitarian regimes, biopolitical subjectivation, liberal possessive individualism, neoliberal governmentality, and precaritization (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 2).

This double character of dispossession as an inescapable form of interdependence which forms the self through loss and as a painful and injurious condition inflicted by normative forms of violence through power operations that affect the self, its preservation, and livability, speak to a number of things that have become visible

through this thesis. First, that the manifestations and implications of dispossession like the ones that transpire in the crisis, are multifarious and have physical, material, and feeling components that are difficult to separate. For instance, I spoke about the imposed condition of unemployment in my life, which manifested as multifaceted and shapeshifting losses which were closely connected to the social world. Within the lifeworld of the crisis dispossession acquires many forms that create multiple interrelated forms of loss and in that sense, dispossession provides a language to express an array of experiences extending from “unlivability and struggles for self-determination” to neoliberal “debtocracy”, signifying “the violent appropriation of labor and the wearing out of laboring and non-laboring bodies” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. II). These neoliberal politics that I have examined in this thesis, take the form of “international financial institutions [that] prescribe to indebted countries measures of austerity (such as cutting public expenditures) as prerequisites for loans”, which in their turn can manifest as “economic precarity in the form of temporary, low-paying, and insecure jobs, in combination with cuts to welfare provision and expropriation of public education and health institutions” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. II).

Dispossession as a multifaceted experience of loss in the crisis, produces it as something that acquires a shapeshifting quality, as it denotes the simultaneous coexistence of different violent conditions that feed into each other. At the same time this process of loss as a reflection of how “human bodies become materialized” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 10), allowed me to identify the economic life and the forms of everyday living it creates and sustains, as providing feeling structures through which one can experience the world. For instance, precarity as a product of dispossession has manifested as a continuous presence in the volunteers’ stories as well as my own, in the form of a “lived feeling” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 43), in connection to vulnerable forms of life. Anna provides an example, as she connects the exclusion from the public health system enforced upon her clients, with the experience of a form of abuse that generates feelings like apathy, shame and anger.

Besides the rejection, abandonment and destitution that are interlaced with this process of certain bodies becoming disposable and more susceptible to loss and injury in

neoliberal regimes, as Butler and Athanasiou suggest, there are different “affective registers of precaritization [that] include the lived feeling of precariousness” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 43). Through this thesis, I have been able to identify how some of these affective registers, or lived feelings, can emerge precisely in connection to the first modality of dispossession as a form of interdependence through which the self is formed through loss.

As Elpida speaks about the loss of the fantasies of what constitutes the good life (Berlant, 2011) as a process that is interconnected with the crisis through the removal of the consumerist gloss that helps sustain them, but also of the meaninglessness that accompanies this unravelling, I also wrote about my own experiences of the loss of these fantasies. Writing about the neoliberal present of the crisis as a transition between “modes of life, but [also] between different animating, sustaining fantasies” (Berlant, 2011, p. 261), I spoke about the tenuous becoming of a Gastarbeiter, who is forced to leave home to survive and its collision with the dreams about professional and financial accomplishment that I grew up with this becoming signified. This precarious sense of self which was accentuated after moving to Edinburgh and being put under the strain of a more anxious and demanding reality, intensified this sense of a loss of these fantasies around security and stability, but it was also paired with a different kind of movement. That of a regression into an emotional space where other personal losses have transpired, namely that of my father. This familiar sense of anguish, lament, and grief which I haven’t experienced in decades, emerged with a force that startled me and merged with the feelings of material insecurity, unknowingness, and anxiety as to what I was to do with my life seeing the dreams I had violently collapse.

For Butler (2004), mourning is a time when one recognizes how far one's sense of self is based on one's relationships with others. Mourning contains an acknowledgment that “by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation” (Butler, 2004, p. 21). Connecting this emergence of the self to the relationship with others, she writes: “if I do not always know what it is in another person that I have lost, it may be that this sphere of dispossession is precisely the one that exposes my unknowingness, the unconscious imprint of my primary

sociality” (Butler, 1997, p. 28). Thus, mourning also holds the possibility to feel the vulnerability that comes from the self's relational being.

As Kelz (2020, p. 173) argues, mourning signifies an interruption of the self that does not emerge autonomously but becomes interrupted by the others on whom it relies on for its survival and existence, and thus is a “reminder of a primary relationality. Mourning [is] an interruption that binds the self to its past, as a prior disruptive event”. In that sense, mourning exists because of dispossession and the constitution of the self through loss and through others. At the same time, it signifies the interruptions that have transpired in the relational process of the formation of the self which have a history of their own (Butler, 2004). Thus, I understand this intense lived feeling that accompanied leaving home behind and transitioning into the life of Edinburgh in the context of dispossessive loss and its twofold valance (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). A mourning that accompanied fantasies that became unravelled (Berlant, 2011), a heightened sense of insecurity through my “precaritization” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 43), but also the surfacing of previous traumatic interruptions that have formed me, which became entangled with the losses that I was experiencing. What this implies is that the economic crisis and its losses acquire unique qualities in the context of different lives that are connected with our individual histories of loss. The losses of the crisis are not experienced in the same way by everyone, as beyond the different exposure of different bodies to injury and insecurity through the different ways of embodying precarity, there are also personal histories of loss which speak to the way that loss may be felt.

Furthermore, except for the intricate ways in which personal histories of loss shape the lived feeling of precarity as loss, through this thesis I have also recognized how loss, particularly in connection to that of the fantasies around what it means to live in the world (Berlant, 2011), is differently experienced by different groups, especially as part of different generations. Through the exploration of my own stories, I have highlighted some of the unique characteristics that the experience of the economic crisis acquires for young people.

Standing (2011) describes the precariat as a new class in the making on the basis of shifting patterns of youth labour. Speaking about flexible, casual, and fragmented work, Standing (2011) conceptualises the inability of this young emerging class to secure reliable sources of

income as a defining characteristic of their experience of the economic world, as well as of employment, and of the education this class has received as no longer being able to provide them with a steady income. Through this thesis, besides my experiences of unemployment, I have also explored my experiences of fragmented and precarious employment, which correspond to Standing's understanding of the precariat. Describing how the inability to secure a reliable source of income has been interlaced with a sense of fragility when it came to the material structures that are holding my life together, I spoke about how this experience also translated to a felt sense of fragility.

The theme is also explored by Elpida who says that when her clients face the reality of not having enough money to "pay the rent and the electricity" or "having three qualifications and working for 600 euros" and being treated as if this offer of job is a "favour", there is a diminution and a collapse of the dreams and the imaginations of what the future and life would be like. As Elpida also notes, the presence of this education as well as the increased access to information, makes the awareness of how life could be like even more tangible. At the same time, through my conversation with Lydia and her accounts of the experiences of her older working-class clients, I spoke about "slow death" in the context of bodies that have been worn out from the reproduction of the economic ordering of things and thus the presence of a crisis that has always been an ordinary part of life for some. Discussing the "affective forms of engagement with the environment of slow death" (Berlant, 2007, p. 779), I explored the idea of the body that has been extensively used through work and has come to identify itself with this use but is no longer in a position to serve this purpose during unemployment.

Although all these labour-related subjectivities share a precarious and insecure being in the world, I spoke about the process of reversal that transpires when it comes to an attachment to the fantasy of a good life as having unique characteristics for the younger generations of people in connection to the crisis, on the basis of my own experience. For those who belong to this precarious new class of young people like myself, the "fantasy bribe" (Berlant, 2007, p. 765) about the good things that will come in life not only remained a bribe, but it was painfully revealed as such. Although some of the older generations in Greece have been able to live some of these promises of the good-life like social and economic mobility and job security, which they however lost during the crisis, for the younger generations these

promises not only never materialised but shattered into pieces as for some, like myself, their only work-related experience has been that of being part of the precariat (Standing, 2011).

In my story, part of this experience has been connected with occupying subject positions made of strange pairings that I found difficult to reconcile, such as remaining precarious and at the same time pursuing an academic career. Within neoliberal economic realities, precarity is starting to proliferate in academia in many forms, including "the proliferation of termed contracts, low pay, unclear employment prospects and the existence of repressive governance strategies forcing academics out of their profession or even out of their country" (Gallas, 2018, p. 69). My own experience attests to this presence of precarity within academia and to the reality that although academic research and precarity can coexist within the present socioeconomic world, they still produce "heterogeneous, shifting, and often conflicted roles and identities", as precarious academics encounter the different power dynamics that underlie these subject positions which push them to feel "marginal" (Sutherland, 2015, p. 209). Neoliberal power dynamics are also infiltrating higher education institutions through entrepreneurial logics that associate academic identities with competitiveness, productivity, and an unequivocal kind of confidence in one's work (Valero et al, 2019). Experiencing precarity and academic life as incompatible realities, I encountered tensions such as feeling the need to keep this part of my identity concealed as I often recognised it as a sign of insufficiency, as well as a testament of non-belonging. Although these feelings are still with me, I wish to acknowledge what this subject position has also made possible. Through the writing of this thesis, I have engaged in a process of inquiry into the political meaning that has been attached to this research in connection to the world it helps produce, but also the worlds that made it, through an extensive exploration of the power dynamics of the crisis. By offering experiences that come from the margins and placing them at the centre of my inquiry (Lincoln & Cannella, 2015; Narayan, 2000), while embracing the messy, the feeling and the embodied, I have also offered insights and perspectives that come from first-hand accounts, thus contributing towards a deeper understanding of the feelings and subject positions that are connected with precarious lifeworlds.

Part II

8.5. Volunteering as an ethical political practice of commons

The notion of structural adjustment appeared as part of the vocabulary of financial policy development during the 1970s, in connection with addressing debt crises through the application of lender conditionalities, and as Schrecker (2016, p. 956) argues this process signified a “paradigm case of the strategic implementation of neoliberal policies”. Amongst the diverse measures included in the restructuring of economies aimed at improving their competitiveness, are austerity measures and cuts that affect healthcare which disproportionately affect the economically vulnerable (Clarke & Newman, 2012). An analysis for the European Parliament discovered that in most EU countries that had assumed strategies which compromised healthcare access, “poor and homeless people, older people, people with disabilities and their families, women and undocumented migrants were the groups which were disproportionately affected” (Tamamovic, 2015, p. 49). The conditionalities that were affixed to bailouts from the European Commission, European Central Bank and the IMF in Greece, have exacerbated social inequalities and insecurity, through cuts in public sector expenditures for healthcare and social security, resulting in higher user fees for health services and prescription medications (Petmesidou, 2013).

These neoliberal reforms that have transpired in Greece have caused significant changes in the social welfare landscape, creating new forms of connections between the public and the volunteer sector. Regarding the case of the social clinics which I examine in this thesis, although these organisations have developed completely separately from the statutory health sector, they essentially exist alongside it as they fill in gaps in public healthcare delivery, by meeting the needs of economically vulnerable people. This increasingly complex relationships between the government and the non-government sphere in connection to care provision and the broader changing framework of social policy reforms has resulted, as authors in the field of social welfare argue, in “an ever more hybrid and variegated mixed economy of care where private and public, market and state, paid and unpaid, formal and informal become inextricably intertwined” (Glucksman, 2006, p. 62).

However, in the case of the volunteer therapists that I interviewed, this intertwining of the social clinics with the state, aimed at addressing its shortcomings in health provision, is accounted as unintentional and undesired. For example, as Maria puts it when she refers to the health services provided by the organisation, in a “socially just state” the operation of the clinic would be unnecessary, while she also parallels what they do in the social clinic to a “decompression valve”, as it inadvertently assists authorities in maintaining and running things as they are. Although volunteering in social clinics evidently benefits individual users and communities, the interviewees express a concern over the potential harms that volunteering might elicit, making it clear that they aim to distance themselves from operational and ideological frameworks of charity and philanthropy. Like Elpida says, what attracted her to the social clinic was the fact that it is not a “charity project”, but instead a space with a “vision in relation to a solidarity”, while Lydia also defines as a condition for her volunteer work a cause that extends “beyond the philanthropic”.

As volunteers in social clinics that are connected to solidarity networks, the therapists I spoke to problematize the humanitarian dimensions of these initiatives and the unintentional assistance they might provide to the state, while however continuing to offer their expertise for free in order to actively contribute towards improving the realities of those who are in need. At the same time, the volunteers are expressing a critical discourse around care provision (Rakopoloulos, 2016), as they trace a dichotomy between empowerment and equality, expressed by a solidarity approach, and philanthropy that they see in association to both the development of relations of dependency and the perpetuation of the power dynamics of the crisis, manifested in the impoverishment of the public health system.

However, this process of negotiation of the boundaries of their volunteer work and of the determination of the power dynamics it helps sustain, also affirms that volunteering as part of the social clinics advances forms of practice that move beyond the neoliberal. An understanding of neoliberalism as a discourse which emphasises market rationalities in both public and private decision-making (Davies, 2014; Hall, 2011), has led authors like Sennett (1998, p. 148) to argue that the social and economic pressures it exerts fracture communities, as entrepreneurial individualist logics push subjects to prioritise choices that can offer individual gain.

For Dean (2014), one example is the growing tendency to view volunteering as a way of enhancing one's personal abilities in order to compete better in the job market rather than to meet a societal need. Volunteer-involving organizations' recruitment strategies have changed as a result of a shift toward a more market motivated approach, by focusing on the benefits volunteering can provide, like increasing a person's economic or human capital, rather than on the potential social and personal benefits that can arise from donating one's time to help others (Dean, 2014). In addition, Holdsworth and Brewis (2013) suggest that in the current economic paradigm, volunteering's fundamental goals revolve around improving employability and building professional connections. On this basis, Edwards (2008) argues that as a result of these developments, organizations that operate through volunteers lead them to depoliticize by focusing their attention on the manifestations of inequality rather than its fundamental structural causes and by addressing these as individual concerns.

Contrary to these conceptualisations of volunteering, the volunteers in the social clinic do not explicate what they do in terms of an economic rationale, nor frame it as a practice that can enhance their profitability as individuals. Simultaneously, rather than becoming depoliticized or being inattentive to the structural causes that lead users to social clinics, they seem acutely aware of how austerity politics permeates the users' lives, but also how their own volunteer work might contribute to the reproduction of these dynamics.

Dowling and Harvie (2014, p. 882) write that the "capital's lifeblood is unpaid work, and the Big Society as political economy is an attempt to extend the realm of unpaid work that can be appropriated". The volunteers in social clinics express concerns around this appropriation of their work by the state and the potential of social clinics essentially serving the structural adjustment programs by acting as a "decompression valve" that makes the difficult terrain of everyday life in the crisis slightly more liveable.

At the same time, as Gibson-Graham (2006, p. 88) argue "our own existence at every level can be seen as the effect of the labour of others" which they describe as our "economic being-in-common". The authors argue that if we desire to highlight the becoming of new ways of economic being, we need to explore the possibilities that surface on the ground of

this commonality of the ways in which our existence is implicated in that of others. An “ethical praxis of being-in-common” for Gibson-Graham (2006, p. 88), among other things, involves an understanding of “what is necessary to personal and social survival, how social surplus is appropriated and distributed, how a commons is produced and sustained”.

For Gibson-Graham (2006), the distinction between essential and excess work, or necessary and surplus labour, is based on a socially grounded ethical judgment and not only on the seeming reality of the body's fundamental necessities for survival. What is necessary for existence and what is surplus is formed relationally in the moment, rather than being pre-set in some culturally essentialist way. In that sense, I would argue that the volunteers' work in the social clinic, also has features of necessary or essential labour, despite the fact that they don't receive a payment for their labour. Not only are the services they provide within the cultural reality of the crisis necessary for the users' existence, but they are provided on the basis of a socially grounded ethical judgment as the main slogan of the social clinics' attests: “No one alone in the crisis”. Furthermore, this commitment entails a holistic approach toward the users' wellbeing, as support is provided not only on the basis of illness and health, but entails a commitment towards tending to the emotional needs of the users through psychotherapy, which is also depicted as a necessary form of labour by the interviewees. As Maria puts it, the users who are emotionally and economically crushed are provided with what she calls “nourishment” through psychotherapy, which is an essential component for their survival.

At the same time, voluntary work in the social clinic also has features of surplus labour. This type of labour for Gibson-Graham (2006) is the amount of time a person works in excess of the amount of time they need to reproduce themselves as workers. This social excess can be used to help those who are non-producing in the economy and help build or maintain the social order's infrastructure. When this excess labour is distributed, in the shape of a gift, a payment or a different means, then Gibson-Graham (2006) argue that community is formed or strengthened. The voluntary work in social clinics exceeds the framework of what those involved in it need to reproduce themselves as workers, both in terms of the time they put in, which is in addition to that of their everyday occupations, and of the monetary compensation they receive within this context. Furthermore, this excess work is used to

support those who currently don't belong to the producing parts of the economy, due to being unemployed. This twofold character of volunteer work in social clinics as necessary and surplus labour, feeds directly into what Gibson-Graham call "commons":

The commons—whether it be agricultural land [...] community facilities and support systems, or even the whole set of relationships comprising a community economy—provides direct input into social and physical well-being. What must be individually or communally done to exact survival is clearly related to what can be accessed directly from the commons. [...] Whether it be clean air and drinking water, a public health system, or the psychological support of a shared culture in which symbols, values, memories, and traditions can be freely drawn on to create meaning (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 96).

One determinant of the necessary and surplus work required to maintain an individual and a community is the availability of the commons. These ethical practices of commons management, form the definition and making of a community. Through the development and reproduction of a community's "common substance" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 96), a space is also created in which the question of who belongs in this community can also be raised.

In this section of the discussion I argued that the structural adjustments that occurred in Greece as neoliberal reforms, have resulted in substantial changes in the social welfare scene, resulting in new kinds of volunteer-private partnerships. Despite the fact that social clinics arose outside of the statutory health system, they exist alongside it by filling in gaps in public healthcare service. In that sense, although the volunteer work that is being undertaken in the clinics is to an extent appropriated by these neoliberal reformations, as it helps perpetuate the power dynamics of the crisis by helping maintain the current ordering of things, it also moves beyond the neoliberal in a number of ways. The volunteers in social clinics are critically aware of the boundaries of their roles and how these inadvertently approximate the operation of the state, while their goals and frameworks of interpretation of both their practice and the issues the users of the clinics face are encompassed by a clear political framework of social justice. Furthermore, rather than interpreting their volunteer

work through an entrepreneurial economic language of individual profitability, which has become one of the most prominent aspects of volunteer work within neoliberal realities, they depict it as a practice which is necessary for the survival of those who are in need and have been left alone to fend for themselves by the system. Additionally, this volunteer work as a practice which stands in-between what Gibson-Graham (2006) define as necessary and surplus labour, resists the neoliberal push towards the fracturing of communities (Sennett, 1998), by creating and making communities. Through this ethical practice of approaching wellbeing in all its bodily manifestations as a *commons*, the volunteers extend the boundaries of community belonging to incorporate all those who have been left outside the public sphere, due to their assumed non-productivity within the economic system.

8.6. Enacting non-economic transactions

Dodd (2014, p.294) argues that “money is not [...] a *thing* that is simply mapped onto social and cultural spaces but rather a process through which various kinds of human association are actively created and valued”. Money as a process can then assume different characters and forms depending on the environment of its circulation and the different relationships that encompass it. Money as an object of everyday embodied experience can act as a continuation of the body which can open or close down experience (Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006), as in the case of the crisis, and it can also act as an equivalent and a denotation of value which renders things comparable (Graeber, 2014). This capacity of money to demarcate commensurability and hence rules of exchange doesn’t reflect a straightforward action, as there are aspects of living that resist formalisation (Graeber, 2014) making their conversion into money or any specific calculation of their value a complicated affair, especially when it comes to care provision.

These are dilemmas which occupy a prominent position in the volunteers’ accounts of their practice in the social clinics, as by operating within a framework of non-economic transaction, the power dynamics that encompass the rules of exchange become a complicated issue, especially in connection to the practice of psychotherapy. Maria, in particular, problematises the absence of fees, arguing that the therapeutic relationship falls apart in their absence, thus depicting the therapeutic transaction as an affair of commerce

that is underpinned by various forms of neoliberal logic (Rose, 1990). At the same time, she raises questions around the reproduction of dynamics of inequality that position her in a caring role that resembles mothering (Hochschild, 2000) while infantilising the clients (Freud, 1958). Elpida also brings up the issue of reciprocation, expressing that the compensation that the volunteers in her social clinic imagined in return for the services they provide, would be not money, but the participation of the clinics' users in political mobilisations, in which however the volunteers didn't succeed.

By thinking with the volunteers accounts not separately, but as speaking to each other, what appears is a more complex image than that of a simple reproduction of neoliberal logics. Reading these tensions around the absence of fees through the concept of the gift, understood as a form of offer, a payment, or a promise of a payment (Mauss, 2009), what emerges is that not all gifts are the same, but are underlined by different transactional logics (Graeber, 2014), which in the case of social clinics exist as intricate and even contradictory patterns.

Graeber (2014), argues that behind the phenomena we collectively refer to as gift are fundamentally distinct logics and patterns of transaction. Among the groups of economic transactions he identifies the first one is what he describes as communism, a category that he elsewhere defines as solidarity, mutual aid, conviviality, or help (Graeber, 2010). Rather than referring to property relations, this group of transactions simply operates under the principle of "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" (Graeber, 2014, p. 68). This principle speaks of collaboration and sharing in order to make certain things freely available. Exchange, the second category of Graeber's (2014) economic transactions, is founded on fundamentally different reasoning, as it comes down to equivalency. What's at stake is a back-and-forth process that tends towards equivalency and through this process of exchange, as items move back and forth, they rearrange relations and dynamics of power, in an effort to cancel out debt. Examining the issues of transactions from a closely connected perspective, Gibson-Graham (2006) also speak about how rather than following abstract or uniform logics, these are regulated by context-specific power relations. Among the systems that they identify, when it comes to non-capitalist and alternative systems of enterprise, they argue that payment might come in many different

forms which exceed the narrow salaried system we use in our economy, such as a cooperative wage, reciprocated labour, in-kind payment, food, a repayment of the labourer's expenses, lodging, or stipends, among other things. Discussing volunteering alongside housework and family care, Gibson-Graham (2006) argue that the rewards from this group of activities might come in the form of love, emotional support, safety, friendship, or a sense of self-worth. Thus, as these authors argue, even within alternative systems of labour and transaction there is always some form of material or non-material reciprocation, even if that takes the form of an emotional compensation.

The structure of social clinic and their free of charge framework supports this emotional kind of payment as the primary means in which the volunteers can be compensated for their work. Although the social clinics in this study operate within an alternative, social-solidarity and community framework, there is no other form of payment, even in the shape of an alternative kind of configuration, such as the ones identified by Gibson-Graham (2006). In the delimitation of emotional compensation as the primary form of payment the volunteers receive, there are several issues arising. Not only is the work that is undertaken by the volunteers necessary, as I argued in the previous section, and thus labour that covers essential needs for the operation of society, which opens up questions regarding the framing of this practice as volunteering, but it is also a difficult one.

As Anna shares, the people with whom she works in the social clinic are facing significant challenges in their lives around economic pressures and survival, which can lead some of them to yearn for immediate solutions to their problems. When they do not find what they look for in therapy, they can approach the sessions as a site where they can release and diffuse some of these pressures and then end the relationship prematurely. Describing her feelings in relation to this process of premature endings and the absence of an approach towards therapy as an open-ended process of commitment, Anna speaks about the hurt that emerges during this kind of care provision, and she compares herself to a "waste bin".

Examining psychotherapy in connection to the power dynamics and feelings this form of care provision can embody, Bondi writes about a broader exploratory or psychodynamic approach as one in which therapist and client become unconsciously entangled: "This

encounter is understood as an exploratory arena within which power dynamics, in all their emotional richness and complexity, may be re-enacted and worked through” (Bondi, 2008, p. 258). As the boundaries that enable this kind of exploratory work, in terms of time, space and commitment (Cooper & McLeod, 2011), become fuzzy or absent in some of the social clinics, the development of a relationship through which the power dynamics between the volunteers and their clients, but also feelings like those of Anna could be thoroughly explored becomes challenging. Discussing the contradictory feelings that can be part of practice, Mendoza (2021, p. 115) argues that although incentives to practice psychotherapy can be framed as “acting to benefit others from the motivation of a state of mind enjoying the blissful enhancement of emotion and thought which comes from knowing that one is doing good. Paradoxically [...] the process of psychotherapy may entail, for the psychotherapist, feelings which are anything but beatific, such as inadequacy, impotence, frustration, rage, shame, and guilt”.

Besides the difficulty of exploring these kinds of feelings due to the blurry boundaries that develop within social clinics like those of Anna, the power dynamics of reciprocation that partly form the basis of their circulation, as structures of exchange aimed at creating some form of equivalency are absent (Graeber, 2014), accord them an even more complicated character. As this care is offered as part of relations that “hurt” (Bondi, 2008), feelings have the potential to become politicised, as they can become entangled with altruistic discourses that accompany the re-positioning of statutory mechanisms of care that remedy their shortcomings through volunteer work (Taylor-Gooby & Stoker, 2011). As labour that covers essential needs for the operation of society is implemented through volunteering, this can also signify “the internalisation of a political agenda” through tactics of self-regulation that are permeated by feelings and discourses like those of civil duty or self-sacrifice (Clayton et al., 2015, p. 31), thus accentuating the expectation for emotions to act as a form of compensation for volunteer work, however hurtful these may be.

A different perspective when it comes to reciprocation is offered by Lydia. As Lydia argues, the payment she receives comes in the form of an emotional compensation which she describes as a “psychological sense of balance”. However, in her account this feeling of balance rather than existing in connection to therapeutic relationships, it is depicted in

connection to the relationships that she develops in the social clinic as a community setting. These connections that she develops with both the rest of the volunteers and the neighbourhood people, who constitute most of the clinic's users and also have an active and steady presence in this particular organisation, are described by Lydia as nourishing, and also as enacting realities of more equalitarian power relationships that embody the way that she would like to live her life. In that sense, this way of being with the other, is coupled with a form of agency, as it enables the enactment and constitution of the self as a subject that "follows its own desires" (Grisard et al., 2020, p. 5). Butler also argues (2015) that the subject might reinterpret parts of its own qualities and subjectivize itself differently by reproducing and enacting its own representation. However, only the existence of a referential opposition to these clusters of self-representation allows this expression of difference. In that sense, the social clinic in Lydia's account operates as a space that offers the possibility of not only offering new interpretations of the self, but also of enabling the enactment of a different form of agency, by offering alternative clusters of representation in the form of a sociality that manifests as collectivity, togetherness and solidarity. This relational agency (Butler, 2015) that arises when volunteers like Lydia enact the self differently in ways that embody its own desire and become possible on the grounds of the relationships and connections the self develops, point towards different forms of reciprocity that exceed a framework of exchange where volunteer work and emotions are traded as commodities. From this perspective of approaching volunteer work and psychotherapy as roles which allow practitioners to enact their own desires and commitments, a different image arises in relation to reciprocity and agency. Fighting against "systemic abuse", not letting the body become passive by "sitting on the couch", "contributing a little something" that goes against the reality of the crisis, having the opportunity to encounter the other through therapy and undertaking this "unique journey and experience" that each person represents together, are all different desires and commitments that Maria, Lydia, Anna and Elpida express, the enactment of which becomes possible within the relational space of social clinics. In that sense, by exercising their own interpretations of social justice, action and resistance, or the connection with the other through therapy as an "expression of love [and] pleasure" (Bondi, 2007, p. 2), the volunteers enact different self-representations, desires and thus forms of agency that become possible through social clinics as relational spaces.

8.7. Subtle forms of resistance: Generating radical imagination

The volunteers in social clinics practise subtle forms of resistance and solidarity that they perceive as counteracting the crisis and are geared towards nurturing different ways of connecting between people. For instance, at the centre of Unison's philosophy is the concept of "love", which is delineated by the volunteers as a distancing from money rationalities, a commitment to provide support to all and the offering of psychotherapy alongside other forms of creative practice, such as group artwork. In the analysis, as well as the first part of the discussion, I described how the divisive logics that underpin neoliberal governmentality become internalised and move unemployed people towards experiencing the self as responsible for their predicament, and how self-blame, guilt, and shame push the self towards withdrawal and isolation. On the other hand, the activism that is advanced by social clinics interlaces resistance and the reconnection of the self with others.

Writing about love, Berlant says (2001, p. 439), "I think of it as a kind of tattoo, a rhythm, a shape, timing. An environment of touch or sound that you make so that there is something to which you turn and return". Elsewhere, she writes (Berlant, 2012, p. 6), "love is the embracing dream in which desire is reciprocated: rather than being isolating, love provides an image of an expanded self". In Unison, zones of creativity and collectively are created, as group artwork takes place alongside psychotherapy, and the clinic's users are allowed to exist again beside others, while expressing their creativity. In the rest of the social clinics this existence alongside the other can happen either in group therapy settings, like the ones described by Lydia, or on a dyadic level of a therapeutic relationship. Through this fostering of subtle and inconspicuous movements of connection, affective environments of love like the ones discussed by Berlant and like the ones which social clinics are geared towards, have the capacity to be produced, as the self becomes expanded through the formation of connections with others that also push against withdrawal, isolation, and guilt.

In the chapter that focuses on Maria, I also traced these practices from a standpoint of engaging the body in movement, and I described the reanimation of the imagination, which becomes colonized by the dynamics of the crisis, as being part of this process. Within the living-deadness of lifeworlds that become indebted (Cain & Montgomerie, 2019) the self of

the crisis is stripped from the possibility of envisaging the present and the future differently. As imagination becomes inert, the body is deprived of the capacity to create trajectories in everyday life beyond those invoked by neoliberal economic policies, thus inducing a closing down of the self and of experience to the new and different (Mbembe, 2019).

This revivifying of imagination as part of the more elusive forms of resistance within the context of social clinics has the potential to become radical (Castoriadis, 1987). On a first level, radical imagination is the ability to imagine the world, life, and social institutions not as they are but as they might otherwise be (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2014). From this perspective, social clinics foster radical imagination by generating new visions of sociality, collaboration, and togetherness through their operation. Through the enactment of participatory politics as part of their operational framework, rather than adopting top-down and hierarchical approaches, these organisations establish a present where alternative forms of organising speak to how conviviality and cooperation could form the basis of a different structuring of life and its social institutions. Thus, this imagination is not just about the future, but about putting those alternative futures at work in the present, through action and new kinds of solidarity (Haiven, 2014).

At the same time, radical imagination is about drawing upon the past and creating diverse stories about how the world got to be the way it is, and thus entails envisioning the present in a new light (Haiven, 2014). As an embodiment of the ability to both imagine and make common cause with other people's experiences, radical imagination underpins the ability to establish connection and solidarity across actual or imagined barriers. As Khasnabish & Haiven, (2014, p. 4) argue, "We create, with those around us, multiple, overlapping, contradictory and coexistent imaginary landscapes, horizons of common possibility and shared understanding. These shared landscapes are shaped by and also shape the imaginations and the actions of their participant individuals". In that sense, this reconnection of the self with others that transpires within social clinics, as part of groupwork or dyadic therapeutic relations, pushes against the isolation and individualised understandings of blame and guilt that accompany neoliberal politics and speaks to a differently imagined storying of how things came to be the way they are. Through the creation of shared imaginary landscapes that are created in relation to others within social

clinics, the possibility to recognise afflictions like those of unemployment not as an individual failing, but as an experiential aspect of commonality that is part of the crisis can open up. As Khasnabish & Haiven (2014, p. 4) suggest “without the radical imagination we are left only with the residual dreams of the powerful, and for the vast majority they are not experienced as dreams but as nightmares of insecurity, precarity, violence and hopelessness”. The generation of radical imagination as a more subtle form of resistance that moves beyond the neoliberal, is thus something not possessed on an individual level, but a process that transpires and becomes possible in relation to others (Haiven, 2014).

8.8. Enacting the community subject

Gibson-Graham (2006) argue that joining a community economy organization, such as social clinics, entails engaging in new ethical self-practices that produce new notions of selfhood, as the links between self, thinking, and the world alter. Furthermore, they suggest that “if to change ourselves is to change our worlds, and the relation is reciprocal, then the project of history making is never a distant one but always right here, on the borders of our sensing, thinking, feeling, moving bodies”. In projects like the social clinics that attempt to animate and carry out different economic possibilities, the self engages in a “politics of the subject” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 127), meaning a process of “producing something beyond discursively enabled shifts in identity, something that takes into account the sensational and gravitational experience of embodiment, something that recognizes the interface between self and world as the site of becoming of both”. Thus, through this process of resubjactivation which transpires when one participates in spaces where the connections to the self and the world are practiced and organised differently, the self assumes new subject positions, while engaging in new processes of embodied being.

I see the creation and participation in the various processes that underscore the operation of social clinics as offering the ground for assuming different subject positions and new ways of embodied being. I have suggested that the work of the volunteers in social clinics sets the foundations for the creation of a community by feeding into “the commons” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 96), this multifarious common reserve from which individuals and groups draw on to procure their wellbeing. At the same time, through this fabrication and partaking

in this community, I would argue that what also emerges is a community subject. As Singer (1991, p. 125) argues, community rather than being “a mark of a state of grace already given to those with being in common as consequences of a common origin or nature” emerges as a “consequence of our being together”. In that sense, Singer (1991) sees community more as a becoming that transpires by multiplying the possibilities of encounter. Through my engagement with the multiple practices that take place in the social clinics in the analytical chapters of the thesis, one of the things that I have become aware of is that the social clinics nurture and grow the opportunities of encounter and of being together.

These practices that multiply and necessitate a being together also create a space for subjects to position themselves differently to prevailing individualising dynamics of power that hold the self responsible for living in dispossessive conditions in a collective and also embodied way. Butler (2015) speaks about those who occupy the covert domains of existence, people who have been systematically denied recognition and who re-enter the domain of appearance through mass demonstrations, seeking to make a claim to space and demanding the right to appear in order to assert that their lives count and matter. Although the groups in social clinics do not correspond to this type of demonstrations and “politics of the street” (Butler, 2015, p. 71), they still push back against having a body that has been deemed non-grievable. By existing side-by-side and getting to know others whose lives also have been endangered by not counting and their history, an enlarged sense of community can emerge and a recognition of the particular losses of the crisis not as strictly belonging to an *I* but an *us*. When Butler (2009) discusses the relational aspects of embodiment, the interdependence of the body to other bodies and the multiple relations that form and sustain it, she also argues that because of the social form of the subject's persistence and development, this also means that we must assume joint responsibility for countering conditions of forced precarity. Butler (2009) also speaks about social freedom not as an individual belonging, but as something that happens in relation to, emerging from the connections that are formed between people. By multiplying the possibilities of embodied encounter, social clinics nurture the formation of relations that can offer the ground for countering induced and systemic vulnerability through subjects that recognise social suffering as a shared responsibility. Speaking about the emergence of this relational ethics while paralleling it to a new vocabulary, Frosh (2011) writes:

It is a vocabulary not of forgiveness, but of responsibility [...] It is a vocabulary of active witnessing that opposes the failed witnessing of those who watch but do not intervene. It is a vocabulary of acknowledgement [...] Facing the suffering prisms open identities closed around historical self-justification [...] but also the dependence of each of us on the others amongst whom we live. The building of walls, the shutting down of communication, the separation of communities are all modes of defence, explicitly and intentionally. They are also acts of violence that explicitly and again intentionally rule the other out of the domain of the human, to whom damage can be done (p. 240).

In the chapter that focuses on Elpida, I reflected on how this process of connection and acknowledgment transpired for me by partaking in the protests of the Parliament Square and in the space of the Assembly. By revisiting this part of my life through writing, I recognised the potency of these sites to offer spaces where bodily and material vulnerability could be enacted through the plural bodies that gathered to make a public appearance that attested to the reality of social suffering. Writing about the bodies with which I connected in the Square and the Assembly, I spoke about fleeting senses that moved me towards acknowledging my experiences of living in the injurious realities of the crisis as something that was shared by others and didn't strictly belong to me. By connecting with these bodies within speaking and listening spaces like those of the Assembly that act "in excess of what is said", as they offer sites of recognition (Butler, 1997, p. 11), I wrote about the sense of my experience of unemployment being destigmatised in connection to a feeling of belonging among others. Thus, I reflected on these sites of protest as not only contesting neoliberal power dynamics of exclusion, but also as providing spaces that can generate feelings that moved me through embodied experiences of hope as an opening towards the other and towards the world which was interlaced with a shared sense vulnerability.

I see the various groups that operate in the social clinics, from the volunteers' assemblies to the therapeutic groups and art groups of unemployed people, as being animated by and enabling the same dynamics that can emerge when vulnerable bodies assemble and encounter each other. For instance, writing about the techniques that the social clinics borrowed from the activist movement of the Square and particularly the space of the volunteers' assembly, I spoke about the productivity of these language practices and their

capacity to generate through their enactment, subjects that challenge the entrepreneurial and neoliberal “I” of the self-made speaker (Rojo, 2020). What also becomes possible in these sites where differently vulnerable bodies meet each other, are feeling practices, as feelings spring from the connections that are formed between bodies and move them (Lilja, 2017). Writing about their participation in activist consciousness-raising groups and small group discussions, Gibson-Graham (2006, p. 137) discuss the “embodied opening to the experience and needs of others” that is “unleashed by collective reflection and the tentative voicing of fears were energies that enabled empathic listening and non-judgmental speculation about other economic values and ways of being”. Similarly, I wrote about the feelings of connection that emerged from my experience of being part of a listening space made of thousands of bodies by partaking in Syntagma’s Assembly. Thus, these spaces that nurture and multiply the possibilities of encounter, besides providing sites of witnessing, of recognition of interdependence, and of discursive destabilisation (Sjoberg, 2006) of neoliberal logics that hold the self responsible for its dispossessive losses, they also allow the emergence of emotions that “align individuals with communities” (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 119). These practices as feeling practices, position the body in ways that allow the circulation and emergence of feelings from this in-between space where bodies connect. Hence, although these “fleeting ethical moments” of connection, might reflect “minor shifts in the macropolitical scheme of things” (Gibson-Graham, p. 154), they still enable an embodied movement of the self which brings about an alliance and proximity to communities of others. For instance, through my engagement with Lydia story, I interpreted this movement that emerged through her encounter with others within the activist space of the social clinic, as becoming geared towards a creation of a small politics of everyday life that is directed towards finding ways of coexisting with others as part of small communities and neighbourhoods, and becoming more critically aware (Foucault, 1983) around what it means to be a part of the social world. Volunteers like Lydia have conceptualised social clinics as performing a dual role of activist sites that offer a critical pedagogy which involves others in a cycle of activist praxis (Freire, 1973), while also providing health service delivery. Despite the tensions that the volunteers face when trying to implement this model of reproducing critical action, some of which are narrated by Elpida when she discusses the reluctance of the clinics users to participate in political mobilisations, I see this critical action

as materialising in the different, subtle, and embodied ways of being that the social clinic enables by multiplying the possibilities of encountering the other.

8.9. Solidarity and psychotherapy: advancing a framework of critical practice

In the literature review, I delineated some of the tensions that underlie psychotherapeutic practice in connection to politics and neoliberal forms of governance. Conceptualizing psychotherapy as a sphere of political activity and a space in which power is exerted, exchanged, and challenged between therapists and clients in many forms (Proctor, 2002), I traced some of the critiques which focus on its alignment with individualising technologies that are inherent in neoliberalism (Rose, 1990). I also explored some of the literature that highlights psychotherapy's capacity to advance ways of resisting these forms of governance (Bondi, 2005), while outlining understandings that highlight its potential as a socially just practice (Aldarondo, 2007). By examining psychotherapeutic practice within an activist space like the social clinics, I have been able to explore these connections between the political and the therapeutic more closely, while seeing how these practices can offer the ground for a politically subversive potential that extends beyond the neoliberal, while also being encompassed by it (Bondi, 2005).

Within the framework of psychotherapeutic critiques, one of the most prominent applies to its capacity for individualizing and psychologizing experiences that require political action and being a means of limiting collective responses that can emerge through activism (Burman et al., 1996). In this discussion chapter, I argued that although social clinics might be accommodating austerity politics through the filling in of gaps in the public healthcare system, at the same time they actively produce communities (Gibson-Graham, 2006), which also challenge dominant discourses of belonging. Even though it could be argued that psychotherapy as part of these social clinic practices that make life in the crisis more manageable can potentially subvert political processes with the potential of overturning the existing ordering of things, it is also located within a distinctly activist context that not only actively pursues activist politics but is deeply informed by it.

As Anna notes, when psychotherapy is placed within the particular spatiality of the social clinic, something different and more tangible is created that is connected with solidarity and the embodied presence of her as a therapist inside this makeshift space that was created by the volunteers with whatever materials were at hand. In this messy space that's enveloped by urgency, but also compassion (Anderson, 2009), vulnerable bodies that have been erased by being deemed non-grievable (Butler, 2004), are seen, recognised, and attended. Space, Foucault argues, plays a special role in how bodies come to be conceived and produced. Specifically, he describes the ways in which submissive bodies are socially created through the "art of distributions" (Foucault, 1979, p. 141). Discussing this Foucauldian process of physical distribution of obedient subjects, Downing (2008, p. 79) describes it as "the ways in which political anatomy operates spatially". Among other ways, this distribution becomes possible through enclosure and partitioning, with the enclosure of bodies signifying their confinement in spaces, such as prisons and partitioning, denoting "a more subtle use of space than enclosure, in which subjects are divided from each other to prevent the emergence of solidarity and community which would be detrimental to order". The spatiality of social clinics goes against this process of partitioning, as it creates and enlarges communities that operate through connections of solidarity, but also generate them. Thus, an aspect of the heterotopic space of the social clinic understood as "an intentionally produced, counter-hegemonic mode of ordering urban space" (Siegrist & Thorn, 2020, p. 1840), is about the formation of different kinds of relations that are centred around solidarity expressed as care, connection and a commitment to others, which recognises the unjust aspects of social ordering and is encompassed by a desire to change it (Blum, 2007). Min (2005) argues that the promotion of this kind of solidarity that is interlaced with the promotion of social change and justice and is committed to protect the bodily integrity of all by providing the appropriate requirements for living, is intricately tied with a recognition of our interdependence as subjects. These spatial connections of interdependence that are developed alongside solidarity (Lawson, 2007) also permeate therapeutic practice as part of the relations that are formed within social clinics. In that sense, this therapeutic process might not be just about working through or overcoming loss (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003), but acknowledging these injuries "as an affirmation of a renewed politics of solidarity and empathy, while taking into consideration material/ structural conditions of inequality" (Zembylas, 2019, p. 6). Conceived this way, as psychotherapy in

this social space becomes interlaced with solidarity, it also becomes a process where “new senses of self are instituted” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 20), by “recognizing the co-implication of material existences as well as social identities, where the acknowledged interdependence of self and other is the basis of solidarity”. Thus solidarity, interdependence and grieveability in the form of the recognition of the other can become the “background noise” (Stewart, 2008, p. 114) of psychotherapeutic practice in the social clinics, providing it with a different texture (Stewart, 2008), which also informs the connections that are being formed between therapists and the clinic’s users.

In addition to the forms of connections that are created in the social clinics in relation to solidarity, another aspect of therapeutic practice that challenges its conceptualisation as a process of individualization that underlies neoliberalism, is connected with the theory of practice under which the volunteer practitioners operate. Although the interviewees have different training backgrounds, ranging from psychoanalysis and systemic therapy to clinical psychology, and psychodrama, they delineate the issues their clients face as being deeply embedded in the socioeconomic, cultural, and historical reality of the crisis. At the same time, their approach to their clients and their experiences is inextricably linked to a view of the self as being entangled in a web of power relations that not only influence, but also shape it, particularly in connection to the politics of the crisis and the multiple realities it generates (Frosh, 2013). In that sense, psychotherapy as part of the “psy-disciplines” and a form of power/knowledge which determines and regulates what it means to be a subject (Rose, 1990), is permeated by a shared critical framing within social clinics. This critical backdrop informs the overall approach of the volunteers towards their practice and their understandings of the self as being lived out and constituted in multiple social sites, always in connection to crisis-politics and power. This increased awareness of the embeddedness of the self within an array of intersecting social relations, permeates practice as the volunteers strive to generate approaches that speak to their clients’ needs. Anna offers an example of the challenges her clients face and how these are shaped by the power dynamics of the crisis, as she describes them as “more-than-ordinarily vulnerable” (Sellman, 2005, p. 4), arguing that this turns psychotherapy into a risky process as it entails the possibility of enhancing this vulnerability (Freud, 1966). Anna describes this as a dangerous possibility, as these clients have to remain alert within the battlefield of everyday life, as they face hostile

forces represented in the never-ending search for a job or even not having food on the table. To address this, Anna advocates for a practice of psychotherapy which rather than “stirring things inside” can support these clients by assisting them in what she calls “building defences”, by pursuing a tactical and selective kind of closure of emotional protective barriers to resist oppression (Gilson, 2011), or “finding a tiny piece of everyday reality and working on it”.

In Anna’s interpretation of what comprises an effective approach towards her clients, I recognise different aspects of the critical framing therapy acquires in the social clinics. The first one being the acknowledgment of the socially positioned subject, as well as an affirmation that issues of power and the complex dynamics they generate when it comes to permeating both individual lives, as well as practice, are recognised and attended (Proctor, 2002). Second, to tend to these issues and the challenges they generate, Anna puts forth a theory of practice that goes against “acting into the relationship” in ways that might be “too ameliorative, too helpful, even, perhaps, too therapeutic” (Frosh, 2013, p. 9). This corresponds to what Frosh (2013, p. 9) describes as “coolness”, namely a way of doing therapy which rather than being informed by a desire to integrate or make things whole, or being overly concerned with therapeutic outcomes, it is more focused on the momentary truths that arise through the relationship and through the building of solidarity between therapist and client. This kind of approach can express a “type of non-knowledge, of holding back, of giving space to what happens [...] and of the contestation of mastery out of which a provocative, even subversive practice might emerge” (Frosh, 2013, p. 15).

Lastly, in what Anna describes as an effort to develop ways of working around this socially rooted vulnerability, I see an advancement of psychotherapeutic “idioms”, understood as a creation of unique ways of doing therapy that are entrenched in the precarious social world of the crisis (Matza, 2018, p. 173). Within precarious environments, psychotherapy Matza (2018, p. 13) argues, can acquire unique forms and idioms which involve the “everyday task of seeking wellbeing that aims at the good or the less harmful, in ways that are not pure, nor perfect, nor overdetermined”. In Anna’s unique approach towards vulnerability, I see the emergence of unique forms of practice that spring from the precarious social world of the crisis.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

9.1. Contribution of the thesis

This thesis has examined the *intimate shaping* of the self during the economic crisis: this in-between space of entanglement between the personal and the economic, which focuses on how the crisis becomes a part of the self through its envelopment by the power dynamics of the crisis and the feelings and experiences that permeate it. At the same time, this thesis has examined the activist sites of social clinics and the practices embedded in them, in an effort to look for openings for resistance and action within the crisis.

The *intimate shaping* has provided me with a holding space that enabled me to examine how the crisis produces particular orderings or movements of living and of the self that intertwine feelings, power, and experience. In the context of subjectification processes, this thesis has examined how these multiple orderings that feed into each other become a part of the self. By looking closely at everyday moments of living with an aim of approaching the economy not as an abstract system which is disembedded from personal lives, I have examined everyday sites of living and traced how economic powers produce “specific modes of experience” (Dawney, 2013, p. 632).

Through this tracing, I identified how the neoliberal power dynamics of the crisis produce these modes of experience by regulating the body’s movements and generating feelings which envelop it that also become part of these modes of experience. By closely examining the power relations of neoliberalism and austerity, I highlighted the isolation of the body from other bodies and its confinement at home, as one of the principle means through which economic power organises and orders life within the crisis (Dean, 2009; Foucault, 2008; Rogers-Vaughn, 2014). Connecting these power operations that impact upon the isolated body by producing this experience of confinement to an examination of the feelings that circulate during this experience, I drew attention to the ways the body *surfaces* within this space and the “role of feelings in making the border” of the body (Ahmed, 2014).

Through the “intensification of the experience” (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014, p. 100) of isolation as an expression of neoliberal privatisation, I identified feelings, as well as atmospheres of home as classes of experience that transpire “alongside the formation of subjectivity” (Anderson, 2009), as producing the way the unemployed body *surfaces* within home. Highlighting the role of neoliberal forces in shaping the movements the body can enact, I highlighted the flattened and flattening affect that emerges through the lethargic and monotonous repetition of actions like the daily search for a job, the daily encounter with the same objects and spaces, the sameness with which the body merges as the diversity of experience is lost through the loss of access to the polyphony of other bodies and spaces. Examining this mode of experience and the feelings that permeate it, I highlighted how the body is shaped through this process of surfacing as something that becomes immovable, stuck, and stiff.

Through this examination of neoliberal privatization as part of the crisis from the perspective of the confined and isolated body, I became able to bring to light how feelings can be precisely that which enables these power operations that make certain forms of subjecthood possible. Looking closely at neoliberal discourses that emphasize the self as autonomous and responsible for its own choices (Brown, 2005) through which unemployment, or even the economic crisis itself, are produced within a framework of personal inadequacy and non-normativity, I highlighted the role of shame as that which allows the self to register it as an individualised rather than systemic failing. Importantly, besides identifying how shame partakes in relations of power as a feeling which is a part of the operation of neoliberal discursive techniques, I identified how shame intensifies separation by producing certain movements of the body, such a further withdrawal into the microcosmic realm of home and an expression of a desire to remain unseen. Furthermore, I traced how incoherence feeds into shame, as the self becomes caught up in perplexing neoliberal discourses and neoliberal policies that produce conditions like those of unemployment or poverty, while intensifying the punitive discourses that hold the self responsible for this failure.

Examining the affectivity of time as the different types of temporalities that emerge in connection to the making of the indebted self (Lazzarato, 2011) as part of the crisis, I

identified how “power as a thing of the senses” (Stewart, 2008, p. 84) can become interlaced with certain embodied movements. Examining hopelessness in connection to the future that permeates the here-and-now and of the present as informed by things that do not yet exist in connection to indebtedness, I identified how a sense of a numbed and timeless present can become possible through the closing-down of the future. Writing about anxiety in connection to a non-linear affective time, I discussed financial and material insecurity as creating a present that feels intensely active and which emerges through the unpredictability of the future within precarious economic lifeworlds (Adkins, 2017). Inquiring into senses and movements my body enacted from a perspective of repetition, I examined the cyclical temporality of the crisis as emerging from the anchoring of memory in social memory and the traces the crisis leaves on the body as it is formed within the network of socio-political relations of the crisis (Butler, 2005).

Approaching feelings from a perspective which encompasses embodied processes that are connected with subjectification (Butler, 2015), I advanced a deeper understanding of how loss operates within the crisis. Situating loss within the framework of the twofold character of dispossession, I examined it as both an inescapable form of interdependence which forms the self and also as an injurious condition inflicted by institutional forms of violence through power operations that affect the self and its livability. Highlighting the parallel coexistence of different violent conditions that feed into each other in the crisis, I pointed out the shapeshifting quality of dispossessive loss as part of what creates multifariously vulnerable forms of life, as an expression of how “human bodies become materialized” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 10). Exploring my own “lived feelings” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 43) in relation to materialising as a vulnerable body, I connected the experience of a heightened sense of insecurity emerging through my precaritization, with the unraveling of the sustaining fantasies around the good life (Berlant, 2011), but also the mourning that accompanies this loss (Kelz, 2020). Approaching mourning as a “reminder of a primary relationality” (Kelz, 2020, p. 173), which signifies the interruptions that have transpired in the relational process of the formation of the self which have a history of their own (Butler, 2004), I examined the surfacing of previous traumatic interruptions that have formed the self, as becoming entangled with the losses the vulnerable self of the crisis experiences. This

tracing allowed me to conceptualize how the crisis can be registered, felt and experienced differently, as it acquires different shapes and forms on the basis of our individual histories of loss.

By examining the activist sites of social clinics and the practices embedded in them, this thesis has also identified openings for resistance and action within the crisis that challenge neoliberal forms of governance and conceptions of the self. By advancing an understanding of vulnerability as “neither fully passive nor active, but operating in the middle region, a constitutive feature of human animal both affected and acting” (Butler, 2016, pp. 25–26), this thesis has highlighted the productive capacities of the crisis in terms of that which keeps open the possibility of hope. Approaching this hope as that which retains and enables action and movement, rather than immobility, extending from the generation of different visions of sociality (Lawson, 2007), to the mobilisation of the embodied self towards ways of being that make possible the identification with different economies, this thesis has traced how “new senses of self” can be instituted (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 20) within the context of activist sites. In this thesis, this tracing of agential capacities (Athanasίου, 2016) has been based on an examination of configurations of being and action which rather than a triumphant overcoming of vulnerability by subjects who embody precarity differently and unevenly, they speak to fleeting moments of connection and of the enactment of interdependence by the self that is always enveloped by the neoliberal power relations of the crisis (Butler, 2015). Thus, this thesis has also highlighted the ambivalent and contradictory aspects of these configurations of being and action that challenge the austere and neoliberal, while being traversed by it.

This thesis illuminated volunteering as one of the practices that encapsulates this ambivalent movement more fully within these activist sites. Volunteering within social clinics becomes a practice that operates alongside the neoliberal policies of the crisis, as it fills in gaps in the public healthcare system and thus serves the structural adjustment programmes as a form of necessary labour which assists the operation of institutional mechanisms. Simultaneously, volunteering is a practice that feeds directly into the commons, this shared reserve from which communities draw on for their wellbeing (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 96). Volunteering as an ethical praxis of care redraws the boundaries of belonging to include those who have been deemed non-grievable due to their non-

productivity in the economic system of the crisis, thus pushing against individualising governmental logics (Butler, 2009). This thesis has argued that what enables this transformation of social clinics into sites of recognition is the creation of relational spaces in which the multiplication of the possibilities of embodied encounter can nurture the formation of relations that offer the ground for subjects to recognise social suffering as a shared responsibility. Through these activist spaces and their practices, including that of psychotherapy, that make the needs of the precarious body their focal point, interdependence materialises as an act of persistence and of the preservation of life which becomes possible through the relations that are developed as part of them (Butler, 2015). Within these relational spaces what also becomes possible is the emergence of a relational form of agency where new senses and interpretations of the self can be enacted, that can also embody desires and political commitments towards the creation of a more socially just reality. This thesis has highlighted how this exercise of relational agency and resistance becomes possible even within the fuzzy boundaries that therapeutic practice acquires within this activist space. Despite the complicated power dynamics that permeate therapeutic practice due to the absence of clearly delineated boundaries that can help define it and the intricacies that arise when practitioners perform these caring roles that “hurt” (Bondi, 2008), psychotherapy becomes a site of resistance within this activist space. Through the creation of shared imaginary landscapes that are created in relation to others, within social clinics and the therapeutic practices as parts of them, the expanded self (Belrant, 2012) can engage in a differently imagined storying of how things came to be the way they are, moving beyond individualised understandings of blame and guilt, and imagination can be reanimated while acquiring radical capacities (Castoriadis, 1987). Furthermore, as solidarity becomes part of the textures (Stewart, 2008) that psychotherapy acquires within this enlarged space of belonging where injuries are recognised on the basis of not only interdependence, but of the structural conditions of inequality that produce them (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003), this critical framing of loss permeates the connections that are formed within this space. As critique as a form of practice or a critical awareness (Foucault, 1996) around the connections that bind the self to itself, to others and to power, becomes possible within this spatiality, this thesis foregrounded the critical framing psychotherapy acquires in the social clinics.

9.2. Looking into the future

By piecing together a theoretical space that is attentive to both the power dynamics and the feelings that envelop the embodied self within the crisis, this thesis has created a theoretical framework that contributes to discussions that examine how feelings and power interweave. This framework's unique contribution lies in its capacity to advance theoretical ways of thinking that examine subjectification in connection to feelings, as that which provides intelligibility to the embodied self. The theoretical framework that this thesis has advanced can find applications in various theoretical contexts across the social sciences that delve into the psychosocial and the subjective from different angles, but share a focus on how austerity, and neoliberalism impact upon everyday personal lives.

By offering insights into the process of working therapeutically with clients whose lives have been acutely marked by economic forces, this thesis also contributes to discussions that examine how psychotherapy can offer the ground for a politically subversive potential. Within a changing social landscape where austerity policies, unemployment and financial insecurity are becoming increasingly prevalent, this thesis can generate insights for practitioners who work therapeutically with clients who live precarious lives.

One of the contributions of this thesis lies in highlighting the role of home as a space in which various embodied process transpire in the context of unemployment and financial insecurity. As people who live precarious lives often lack the ability to leave the family home, the transformation of home-spaces into intergenerational households becomes more prevalent. The intergenerational household as an expression of austerity invites future research into this site as a complex relational space that impacts upon the self and its becoming.

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APPENDIX

INFORMATION LEAFLET

Project Title: 'Social clinics and free of charge psychotherapeutic services in Athens: An exploratory inquiry into the role and practice of volunteer counsellors'.

My name is Christina Sachpasidi and I am a PhD student in Counselling, Psychotherapy and Applied Social Sciences at the University of Edinburgh. In my PhD, I wish to investigate the experiences of volunteer counsellors who work in Social Clinics and other free of charge psychotherapeutic services in Athens. I am interested in the ways that counsellors understand and describe their work within these settings, particularly in relation to socio-political reality and therapeutic encounter and therapeutic work with clients who face income related difficulties. I also want to see in what ways their therapeutic work in these settings is informed by their training background. Through this project, I aim to better understand the relationship between social inequalities and psychotherapy and discuss the implications that this has for therapeutic practice and training.

I would like to invite you to participate in a single one-to-one semi structured interview, where you will be asked to talk to me about your unique experiences of being a volunteer counsellor in a Social Clinic or some other type of free of charge psychotherapeutic service. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded, transcribed and the data analysed. Material from this research, will be used for my PhD thesis and in subsequent conference papers and publications in academic journals. The interview will be held at a convenient time for you, in a private environment and it will last for approximately an hour.

Information that will be discussed during the interview will be confidential. To secure confidentiality, your real name will be removed from the transcription and you will be allocated a pseudonym. All other information that could be used to identify who you are will also be altered. I will be the only person to access the raw data (audio recordings and transcripts), which will be stored safely until the completion of this research and after that it will be destroyed. Before the interview, you will be asked to give your consent regarding the details of your involvement in this project. You will also have the opportunity to receive a copy of the transcript of your interview and a summary of findings.

Please feel free to contact me for any questions you might have about my research and the interview process at Christina.Sachpasidi @sms.ed.ac.uk or at [phone number]. If you need additional information on this project, please feel free to contact my research supervisor, Jonathan Wyatt: Jonathan.Wyatt@ed.ac.uk. In the case that you would like to raise a formal complaint regarding this research, please contact the Head of the School of Health in Social Science, Charlotte Clarke: Charlotte.Clarke@ed.ac.uk, 0131 650 4327 and use the following link to the official university's complaint form:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/imports/fileManager/WEB%20Complaint%20Form.pdf>

If you are interested in participating, please let me know your availability and we will arrange a meeting. Thank you in advance, your help is much appreciated.

Best regards,