Austerity's afterlives? The case of community asset transfer in the UK

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Abstract

In the UK, community infrastructure and the care that it provides has been at the sharp end of swingeing government cuts brought about through austere economics and politics. One local manifestation, and legacy, of austerity is the rise in Community Asset Transfer (CAT), a practice whereby local authorities transfer the ownership of public assets to community groups. CAT may predominantly be understood through the lexicon of austerity localism where the state—driven by fiscal pressures—offloads publicly owned buildings onto community groups. However, narrowly applied this interpretation leaves little room for the possibility and/or recognition of other politics which may exist on the ground. In response, this paper sets out a non-foundational approach to CAT practice that involves in-depth ethnographic analysis of three CAT community centres in a Welsh local authority. Following Gibson-Graham's (2006, *A postcapitalist politics*) call to read for difference rather than dominance, and conscious of the ambivalent politics of CAT, I trace ways in which care is practiced in these new spaces through momentary acts and even explicit political engagement. CATs are experiments in care that allow us a glimpse into the life of community infrastructure after the passing of direct state support. Exploring the afterlives of these assets—and their relational and emotional geographies—reveals an affective politics and orientation not necessarily aligned with neoliberal rationales. Indeed, despite their fragile configuration, CAT practices must be acknowledged, questioned, and considered as part of the wider debate on the future(s) of post-welfare care.

KEYWORDS
austerity, care, community asset transfer, ethnography, post welfare community infrastructure

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the UK, the period of austere economic and political restructuring following the 2008–09 global financial crisis has devastated state provision of welfare (Gray & Barford, 2018). Community infrastructure has been, and continues to be, subjected to wide-ranging fiscal cuts ranging from national welfare reforms (Beatty & Fothergill, 2016) to reduced local government service spending and welfare funding (Power & Hall, 2018). The impact of austerity is further compounded through wholesale loss and closure of physical spaces of community infrastructure (Hitchen & Shaw, 2019), and is threaded intimately through the lives, relationships, and experiences of community members (Hall, 2019; Jupp, 2022). As such, austerity has taken a significant toll at the local level.

One example of the local shift in infrastructures of care is Community Asset Transfer (CAT), a practice whereby local authorities transfer publicly owned assets to community groups. In the UK, CAT practice has been on the rise since 2010, and at least 791 community assets are known to have been transferred between 2008 and 2018 (Turnbull, 2022). CAT practice is both indicative, and a legacy, of the wider dismantling of the state and welfare restructuring. Yet, I argue that CAT is also an important site of community support that offers insight into the evolution of care postwelfare.

In this paper I explore the afterlives of these assets. By attending to their complex emotional and relational geographies, I set out how new relationships of care in austerity are being established. This work is framed by Gibson-Graham's call to engage in 'reading for difference rather than dominance' (2006, pp. xxxi–xxxii), which involves recognising more progressive actions, thus shifting attention to possibilities rather than critique. Nonetheless, I acknowledge the political ambiguity inherent in community groups taking on responsibility for assets which both contributes to the diminishment of the state while mitigating the closure of these sites. By exploring the undecidability in the worlds we research (Kern & McLean, 2017), I read these spaces for difference and ambivalence, holding in tension contrasting notions of co-option and care so that more affirmative understandings might emerge from the 'messy middle ground' (May & Cloke, 2014). This follows the data rather than being distracted by external narratives, practicing weak theory and rich description (Gibson-Graham, 2014), and sits within a body of work that explores the role the voluntary charitable sector plays in the reconfiguration of care (Cloke et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2012).

To be clear, such a task does not, in any way, excuse the violence of austerity. Rather, my approach seeks to supplement structural critique of localism (Featherstone et al., 2012; Newman, 2014) by tracing 'cracks and fissures that create spaces in which various agents can prefigure alternative political and ethical worlds within the dominant' (Williams et al., 2014, p. 2803), and recognising space within the system to effect change (Milligan et al., 2008). Thus, acknowledging the contradictory politics and ethics of spaces caught up in the afterlife of austerity.

My work makes three main contributions. First, I provide new empirical evidence of emergent and existing care practices in spaces that have endured the passing of direct state support. Second, conceptually, and developed from my ethnographic data, I (re)position the legacies of austerity CAT as sites of care where different care relationships are co-constituted through momentary and conventional political actions. Third, I recognise CAT as an in-situ practice of different forms of postwelfare care, and in doing so, contribute to debates around community infrastructure in austerity.

This paper continues with a postwelfare approach and review of feminist literatures of care and community infrastructure to situate care in austerity. I then locate CAT within austerity, set out my methodology and discuss my findings. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of my exploration of CAT as a microcosm of the afterlives of austerity in the UK.

2 | POSTWELFARE CARE IN AUSTERITY

The role of care in austerity can be considered within a postwelfare framework, the dismantling of the Keynesian social contract between the state and citizen. Through this process caregiving has shifted from the state to the voluntary sector and the family (Milligan & Power, 2009). In the UK, this change in the responsibility of the state has been implemented unevenly across different local services depending on the wax and wane of government priorities since the 1980s (Kenny et al., 2017), and is accompanied by the demise of local authorities whose powers have been reduced to the commissioning and management of outsourced service providers (Latham, 2017). This sits alongside the swingeing fiscal cuts to service spending implemented under austerity (Amin Smith et al., 2016), further reducing the capacity of the local state to provide care.

The decline in direct state care provision has provoked a response from, and created new spaces for, third sector charitable and voluntary organisations, and has been the subject of changing academic conceptualisations. Scholars describe

how early academic approaches positioned the new care role of the voluntary sector as reproductive of neoliberal state agendas, while recent work is said to reject narrow characterisations to engage with messiness (Parsell et al., 2022; Power et al., 2022). The voluntary sector is neither wholly co-opted nor intrinsically progressive (Deverteuil, 2016), and exploration of its ambiguities can acknowledge spaces of care and encounter 'capable of incubating political and ethical values, practices and subjectivities that challenge neoliberal austerity' (Cloke et al., 2017, p. 703), thus offering potentialities.

The new responsibilities for the voluntary sector in a postwelfare landscape are also part of a wider change in how care is theorised. Tronto (2017) sets out a threefold alteration of care in the context of state retrenchment. Here care becomes: (1) personal responsibility with uneasy moral undertones that encourage people to ignore the needs of others; (2) a market problem, where individuals must meet their own needs through the market (see also Cox, 2013); and (3) where the proper locus of care for individuals who cannot look after themselves is the family, friends and communities. Therefore, the burden of care is (re)conceptualised as individualised, market-led and/or reliant on small social units of family and/or community, relieving the state of its responsibility. Recent scholarship on infrastructures of care in the UK explores both the impact and potential of changes to care in times of austerity in relation to at least three facets.

First, scholars have registered the loss of care through emotional geographies. These affective spaces are entangled with the closure and loss of collective assets as the welfare state is un-done through fiscal cuts. These approaches highlight how the loss of these spaces damages our mental health as 'our existence collapses into tighter and more suffocating shells' (Hitchen & Shaw, 2019, p. 4). These emotions are linked to physical closure, of libraries (Penny, 2020; Robinson & Sheldon, 2019), youth centres (Horton, 2016), centres of childcare (Jupp, 2017), and associated services; for example, cuts to youth club services and activities (UNISON, 2017). The loss of these places and activities weakens our possibilities for social interaction.

Second, is the work on relational spaces of care in austerity. On one level, this involves mapping 'shadow care infrastructures' to reveal the entanglement of care across formal/informal and established/improvised boundaries registering survival practices in the postwelfare cities (Power et al., 2022). This work highlights how the third sector, or 'shadow state', is picking up the pieces of care in postwelfare cities (Deverteuil et al., 2020; Jupp, 2022), and underlines wider experimentation in care beyond the state in times of austerity.

On another level, there is a move beyond a focus on spaces of care (for a history of care in geography, see Conradson, 2011) to address intimate interpersonal relationships between community members. Studies have focused on relations between people to witness how they navigate austerity in their everyday lives (Hall, 2019, 2020). This work approaches austerity as personal and social, asking research participants to situate their experiences alongside those of other people they know, bringing lived experiences and social inequalities to the fore (Hall, 2019). This immediate scale does not exclude economic and political concerns, where the capabilities of individuals, households and communities to sustain themselves are understood as being 'squeezed' (Fraser, 2017), but rather understands spaces of austerity as a personal condition, rather than simply an ideology or inevitability (Hall, 2019).

This work is a useful precedent for approaching relational experiences of care within CAT. Hall (2019) provides a useful guide through 'austere intimacies and intimate austerities' to reveal the scope of the relational experience of austerity and care. The themes of 'intimate monetary arrangements' show how practices of favours, labour and leisure are shaped by austerity, and 'momentary encounters' relate to the personal and wider social impacts of austerity and the reshaping of relational space between individuals (Hall, 2019). These intimacies have resonance with the interpersonal relationships that may develop under CAT.

In CAT, the collective nature of community space suggests the potential for relationships to develop through meetings beyond immediate family and friends that include wider networks of acquaintances and strangers. These relations, importantly in relation to care, may foster intimacies and longer lasting relationships (Morgan, 2009). Within the relational spaces of CAT there exists the possibility for meaningful encounters between community members, albeit where there is a need to attend to socio-spatial inequalities and power (Valentine, 2008).

Relational approaches to care have also asked, who is providing care? The care work of social reproduction, considered as 'complex networks of social processes and human relations that produce the conditions of existence' (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 2), is recognised to be often gendered, racialised and classed, and so inherently unequal (Fraser, 2017; Hall, 2020). This is of concern where policymakers look to community members to fill the gaps in care for the elderly, children, community services, and so forth (Hall, 2020), tied to a 'triple whammy' of austerity for women who disproportionally (1) depend on local services, (2) must increase their unpaid work to fill the gaps, and (3) work in local services and are hardest hit when jobs, pay and conditions are cut (Women's Budget Group, 2019).

Third, literature has also explored the new political dimensions of care. For Conradson (2011), care invites recognition of the lived experiences of others, and where they are vulnerable, marginalised or in need, care elicits a response to provide assistance and the potential to facilitate positive change. Care thus carries a transformative ethic and relational dynamic

that has the potential to transcend self-interest (Conradson, 2011). In their discussion of mutual aid, Spade (2020) highlights a dual task of care to help people survive the devastating conditions unfolding every day, *and* mobilise political resistance to tackle the underlying cause of these crises. Care is not only a form of palliative assistance but also a call to political activism.

Concurrently, there exists a growing body of work that seeks to bring nuance to the work of politics. Scholars are repositioning resistance and its associated activisms as 'everyday' (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010), 'implicit' (Horton & Kraftl, 2009) and 'quiet' (Pottinger, 2017). These varied actions propose an understated form of politics. For Askins (2014), acknowledging the 'quiet politics' of encounters between refugees, asylum seekers and local residents can engender care around local belonging and interconnect communities to wider mobilities. Sarah Hughes' (2019) call to reconsider resistance raises important questions about what we risk ignoring if we only focus on predetermined, recognisable forms. Hughes (2019) calls for engagement with 'resistance in emergence', which goes beyond the fundamental assumptions held in geography that determine in advance what comes to be determined as resistance (such as intention, linearity and opposition). 'Resistance' can be unremarkable, open to ambiguity, not foreclosed by predetermined forms, nor should we prescribe what resistance should look or feel like for anyone else (Hughes, 2019). In relation to care, Jupp (2022) argues for wider recognition of the politics of everyday care across a range of different forms of local action, activism and intervention, not all of which would normally be recognised as political.

3 | LOCATING CAT IN AUSTERITY

CAT practice, set out in the Quirk report (2007), was promoted as an opportunity for communities to have a stake in their own future through asset ownership. Part of the New Labour governments' (1997–2010) experimentation in service provision (Kenny et al., 2017), this coalesces with a notion of 'localism' as the transfer of power towards citizens (Wills, 2016). However, localism became tarnished as it developed concurrently with fiscal cuts under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010–15). Austerity localism became framed not only as a justification for spending cuts but an excuse to shrink the state (Newman, 2014; Taylor-Gooby, 2012), and as an indicator of wider structural processes designed to depoliticise the local and use it to reorganise the public sector (Featherstone et al., 2012).

Specifically in relation to local government community infrastructure, austerity has altered local welfare provision. Diminished local authority budgets mean that responsibility for services is shifted onto often the most marginalised communities already exposed to wider impacts of austerity (Strong, 2020), and struggling councils seek to sell the assets from which service were once provided. Beswick and Penny's (2018) study of the speculative development and the financialisation of public land and housing estates in London demonstrates how state assets are milked through sale and/or lease by local authorities to cover the shortfalls in central government funding.

In the case of CATs, the expectation is for community groups to provide 'community benefit' (Quirk, 2007), not a simulation of the state services once offered at these sites. Nonetheless, and as I will go on to demonstrate below, this work often goes beyond 'keeping the doors open and the lights on' to offer extensive and essential support. In relation to the physical assets themselves, CAT is used by local authorities to reduce fiscal liability for councils by shifting maintenance, staffing and any services onto community groups, not through land value capitalisation.

To date, the handful of authors to directly address CAT have foregrounded its governance opportunities. This work (1) predates austerity and/or focuses on 'technical fixes' to enhance the voluntary sector (Murtagh, 2015; Murtagh & Boland, 2019); (2) frames CAT as 're-writing' the social contract where town and parish councils—the most local form of the state that operates at neighbourhood level in some parts of the UK—take on responsibility for community assets (Wills, 2020) or (3) outlines the progressive potential of radical community management (Darby, 2016). Yet, this work tends to overlook CAT's relationship with austerity and care.

CATs are important sites to study care in austerity as they present a struggle to establish care which does not easily fit within neoliberal ideas. In response to Tronto's (2017) triptych of neoliberal care: (1) CAT practice does not directly responsibilise individuals or promote self-interest, but relies on community to share the burden of this work; (2) CAT does not swing fully towards the market, as groups must have charitable status—a check to private profit—even as market values are required to ensure financial autonomy; and (3) CATs take on the responsibility of care as a group, mitigating the spotlight on individuals.

4 | METHODOLOGY

The evidence presented here is derived from a four-year study of the uneven geographies of CAT in England, Scotland and Wales (Turnbull, 2022). This combined: (1) a national freedom of information survey of local authorities to ascertain

the scale and prevalence of CAT practice; (2) 78 interviews and recorded conversations with key participants; and (3) a 12-month ethnography conducted during 2019 of three CAT sites in a major Welsh city with a high prevalence of CAT and shift in direct state support for community infrastructure. Local accounts attest to changes to sports and youth services, and a shift in property management. These have manifested through the leasing of most leisure facilities and outsourcing of services to a national service provider; the reduction of 25 youth clubs to seven, which were tendered out to the third sector; and the rationalisation of council properties leading to the closure and sale of 'surplus' public buildings (Field Diary, 2019).

The study sites all once provided some form of youth service, yet now under CAT were locally lauded as 'thriving' and surpassing their local authority management (Field diary, 2019). CAT sites were examined through 'casing' (Vaughan, 1992), a form of analysis that requires full empirical exploration before the establishment of what each case represents. This gave room to acknowledge the importance of care practices which might have otherwise been overshadowed by grand narratives. It is important to acknowledge that CAT spaces exist precariously and struggle to secure resources, for example, by engaging in competitive fixed short-term external funding, relying on favours, unpaid labour and volunteerism (Field Diary, 2019). While this evokes capitalist logics, I seek to avoid the seduction of external fixed or totalising categorisations—which may lead to dismissal of these sites as trivial and/or apolitical—and instead follow the complexity of what I found on-the-ground.

The themes of this paper emerged from my ethnographic work witnessing the everyday routines and experiences of community life in these spaces. This included observing informal interactions (receptions, cafes, gardens), and participating and volunteering in many of the organised activities (shops, sheds, support courses, youth and social groups, societies, dance, fitness, classes of English for speakers of other languages, etc.), from which 'soft, subjective and speculative' (Burgess, 1984, p. 3) data were drawn and recorded in my reflexive field diary.

Informed consent was secured through perpetual vocal disclosures, setting myself apart as a researcher, and assisted in small part through my locally strange Scottish vowels. My data presented below reference the role of the research participants involved; that is, community member, volunteer, staff, trustee and location—Cymorth, Cyrchfan and Cymdaithasol Community Centres. Although I use quotes from individuals, by bringing them together my argument is informed by the collective research participant community. Pseudonymisation was used to protect individual participants and community groups.

5 | DISCUSSION

Hanging out at these centres offered glimpses into the afterlives of care in these communities, and its (re)emergence in a postwelfare landscape. Over the months, I witnessed several patterns in relational care in these spaces operating over different temporalities and aligned with different possibilities.

5.1 | Momentary acts of care

The presence of momentary care was observed in the social relationships between 'acquaintances' (community members, volunteers and staff) who attend organised activities. They have similarities to Morgan's (2009) 'passing acquaintances' where relationships, structured by timetables of a regular, repeated character offer brief encounters between regulars and are a potential source for close and intimate relationships.

At one community centre, an art project was set up 'in an area that just didn't have them' (Leslie, Staff, Cymorth, 2019) because 'the arts ... contribute to better mental health and well-being' (Peter, staff, Cymorth, 2019). The art project offered a free weekly space for individuals to meet. Community member regulars supported this notion of wellbeing, saying that attending 'takes you out of yourself a bit' (John, community member, Cymorth, 2019), is somewhere to 'meet new people' and 'make new friends' (Josie, Community member, Cymorth, 2019). This suggests that CATs can address loneliness, and often for people on lower incomes who under the weight of austerity policies, welfare reforms and poverty are the least able to tackle it (Stenning & Hall, 2018).

These social activities take on particular significance where they intersect with other dimensions of austerity that challenge community members' personal lives. Speaking with Jenni, a volunteer and attendee of the art project, she spoke of the activity as 'relaxing' (Jenni, volunteer, Cymorth, 2019). This contrasts with Jenni's worries about the council's diminishing care support and uncertainty for the long-term wellbeing of her child due to the 'selling off' of a local youth club:

> ... it's very hard for children with disabilities to go to the mainstream because it doesn't work ... I'm not sure how long they can stay at the [new] leisure centre, and even then, they are restricted because they only have like a small room upstairs and then half of the hall downstairs.
>
> (field diary, Cymorth, 2019)

Therefore, 'relaxing' at an art club—which might be dismissed as a leisure pursuit—also offers temporary escape and respite from the mental stress induced by austerity in other realms of people's lives, and in a context of otherwise diminishing spaces of community care. Respite also extends into the community.

> An individual, walks in off the street, talks loudly about their struggles in relation to their unemployed status. They are visibly upset and start to cry. Maggie [the receptionist] stands up, walks round the counter, and puts her arms around them ... Minutes later we are all chatting about dog walking and the person seems more composed. Maggie invites them to come back the following day for a cup of tea and community advice drop-in.
>
> (field diary, 2019)

This encounter between 'strangers' demonstrates a direct, corporal and emotionally charged encounter that appears to temporarily alleviate wider anxieties suggesting a range of intimacies. The embrace is a moment of caring through which Maggie recognises the emotional needs of the individual, offers physical comfort, and becomes confidant to a stranger who is unburdening themselves of their anxieties and worries. Genuinely offered and accepted, this encounter includes physical and embodied, emotional and personal knowledge intimacies, and that often spill over into lasting relationships and meaningful ties (Morgan, 2009).

Additionally, the potential for care transcends the fleeting moment of the social interaction itself. The enduring nature of the encounter is both implicit in the momentary recognition and acknowledgement that can help someone through their day, and importantly in this case, also through the offer to provide access to material care extends care beyond the moment. Maggie's invitation to connect the individual with formal and professional care networks accessible at this centre—including 'health service, support around food and fuel poverty, debt, access to benefits, and really practical stuff' (Peter, Staff, Cymorth, 2019)—offers long-lasting support. Thus, the encounter has its own afterlife, an echo and/or amplification of the comfort gained in having someone's arm around you in a moment of distress.

In addition to the recognition of these momentary acts of care is the question of where the burden of care falls. My vignettes begin to corroborate wider understandings of the intersectional nature of care (Jupp, 2022), albeit acknowledging that much further work is required. This is important work as any notion that care through CAT is shared collectively—thus alleviating its individualisation under neoliberalism (Tronto, 2017)—is tempered by an unequal distribution of care within these community groups.

5.2 | Political engagement?

Political engagement in CAT is built on the decision of community groups to take on responsibility for assets from the state, and some but not all of the services previously offered at these locations. Motivations across the groups reveal complex and varied rationalities. One group felt forced to act because of the 'threats of closure' (Field Diary, 2019). Another group took on an abandoned building owed by the council to expand their existing site. The third group had set themselves up independently to survive the loss of state funding and took on 'an available building' (Field Diary, 2019). These moves elicited 'sympathy for council staff who were working their notice as the groups were given the keys' (field diary, 2019), revealing difficult emotional legacies but which on their own do not define the political work of these groups.

Any argument that these spaces are engaged in explicit political work must acknowledge that most interactions and activities are orientated towards, at least outwardly, 'getting by' and 'helping out'. An idea that community members were engaged in explicit political work or activism was often rejected, otherwise framed as:

> Looking after the vulnerable people, low paid working families ... trying to help support those, because they don't seem to be able to get any help from the government, it's not about a protest or anything, it's just about supporting those families making sure they can make ends meet.
>
> (Beth, staff, Cymorth, 2019)

Irrespective of intentionality (Hughes, 2019), these everyday infrastructures of care, as feminist political economists have argued, are no less inherently political (Hall, 2019, 2020). These sentiments are also expressed in material forms of solidarity and support in 'pay-as-you-can' shops, 'knit and natter' groups, and pantry clubs which seek to go beyond the charitable (Caplan, 2017).

[We are] ... trying to remove the stigma of foodbanks because people who are in our communities, even though they are in crisis, won't use a foodbank.

(Beth, staff, Cymorth, 2019)

Although categorical talk of activism across the sites is rare, it does exist. Asking one staff member about their role in the community they talked about 'asset-based cooperation between each other to find solutions' (Peter, staff, Cymorth, 2019). Peter explained that one way to find solutions was by tackling external pressures through their affiliation with a UK-wide alliance of community organisations committed to acting together for social justice and the common good:

Working together to identify sort of shared needs ... and then we campaign, and we push for sort of political change ... [but] we are not really interested in doing things for the sake of making a noise, it's about organising really well and building power.

(Peter, staff, Cymorth, 2020)

In witnessing the everyday issues that people are being confronted with and addressing them through community organisation, this care work builds new solidarities (see also Alinsky, 1989). Peter is passionate about how the centre 'engages politically', acknowledging that it is something that 'we have struggled to do', but looks forward to staff becoming more involved in the future through 'small-scale actions together in our community and then growing from there' (field diary, 2019). CATs also indirectly contribute to politics through providing sanctuary for political progressive organisations. At one centre, spaces are hired and/or offered for regular meetings of the local branch of the Socialist Workers Party, Trans mutual aid groups, and has housed anarchist book fairs and trade union workouts. These independent groups, often orientated towards specific communities of interest, not formally part of the CAT process, are nonetheless held within these spaces in a context where the closure and loss of community infrastructure leaves fewer physical places to meet in and from which to operate. Such activities are highly significant given their potential to challenge wider inequalities and/or promote social inclusion through explicit political action.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

This paper has argued the importance of 'staying with care' to allow greater recognition of understated values and relationships being exercised in austerity. Through the case study of CATs, I have argued that community work should not simply be dismissed as reinforcing the individualisation of care, or its marketisation, but rather as generative of new spaces—ranging from momentary encounters of care and organised provision to more politicised engagement—that defy any neat categorisation as neoliberal dupes. To this end, this paper concludes with two reflections that seek to contribute to geographical scholarship on austerity.

First, by foregrounding everyday acts of care, academic attention is turned to the significance of actions offering temporary escape and respite from mental stress and economic hardship. Following feminist geographers (Hall, 2020), it shifts analytical attention on to what kind of spaces or relationships relieve the amplified burden of caring responsibilities in austere times. This paper has highlighted the ways CATs give physical and emotional space to the fleeting—and more durable—relationships of care and support evident in companionship, sociality and the sharing of anxieties; the reprieve of material provision; and the seeking of advice. CATs facilitated a space where individuals and groups could share their experiences of navigating welfare bureaucracies, and engagement with wider networks to make change. These acts co-constitute the beginning of an understanding of, and help to (re)write, the emergent afterlives of state welfare in the wake of austerity.

Second, highlighting the political significance of mundane acts of care and connection, critical scholarship must recognise the ways in which such practices in the vicissitudes of austerity's afterlives can foster a form of quiet politics (Askins, 2014) or quiet activism (Pottinger, 2017). The afterlives of these spaces—what comes after the state has withdrawn—sustain activities that provide support and friendship, but also engage in more explicitly political work where groups advocate for change. In some cases, CATs can be considered as participating in a more politicised form of organisation in austerity to help people survive the devastating conditions that unfold in the everyday (Spade, 2020). Questions remain as to how communities navigate the multiple implicit tensions of local political rationalities, and uneven impacts of policies that co-constitute public assets today. Alongside the lexicon of resistance against the closure of community infrastructure (Jupp, 2022), academics must recognise the temporal afterlives of such political energy and

how it lives on, albeit in different guises, in new community infrastructures. In all of this, austerity's afterlives are being co-constituted by values and practices of community care.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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