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in the North East of England*

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## **'Holding Things Together' (And What Falls Apart ... )**

### **Encountering and Dramatizing Austerity with Women in the North East of England**

Ruth Raynor

A group of women in the North East of England; all mothers, all out of paid work or in low waged temporary employment; women getting on and getting by amidst austerity. But what does austerity become for these women? How does it surface and register in their everyday lives through a series of fragmented encounters? Together, we developed a fictional play to explore what austerity becomes in the midst of other things. Encounters ranged from the un-dramatic to the almost intense and eventful, from an empty flowerbed at the end of the street to service closure and a loss of support. In our play we tried to make a story of austerity through these and other disparate encounters, but the plot kept falling apart. Our attempts to dramatize austerity using theatre-as-method revealed its multiplicity and incoherence. As austerity differently met and co-constituted the lives of women in a supposedly shared demographic, it disrupted opportunity for collective experience, so that even austerity was not related to or lived as a common object. Although moments of stubborn conviviality continued in and between the lives of women, austerity became present as an intensification of existing processes of precarisation that engendered forms of fracturing and dissonance. This disrupted women's energy and opportunity to flourish through existing forms of attachment to one another, to family life and to other forms of unpaid care. The thesis, like our play, tells a story of how for these women fragments of austerity act in the midst of other things, and of how encounters with austerity move between the dramatic and the ordinary, the personal and the generic, the situation and the event. And in that context, the thesis and the play explore what, for these women, holds together and what falls apart.



**Holding Things Together (And What Falls Apart ... )**  
**Encountering and Dramatizing Austerity with Women in**  
**the North East of England**

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**Submission for Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Geography**

**Durham University**

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### **Declarations**

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## Introduction: Women and Austerity

'...That was the whole plan when I was pregnant with David, that they would share a room. Na I mean it's the size of this table anyway David's room. I'm exaggerating, no, but so emm, we're going to try and appeal against that. They say that they should be sharing but they can't share because like with John having like a form of autism he needs his own space all the time. So like so, and like I says with, with, Barnardo's being like hit by all the cuts and all that, that's errr, with like no support groups and also with like John with like the taxis [*provided to take John to a school that is able to support his additional needs*] I think it used to be every 18 months it used to come up for review I think it's every six months they're doing it now so I think...'

'Ah it's just everything's all over the place at the minute. I mean em, me mam is come really like emmm dependent on us as well at the minute because em, well, like, ahh I can talk to you, me mam and me dad are both like recovering alcoholics and all that and so sometimes me mam falls off the wagon and back on and it's like me sisters not really that supportive as well, so, it's like me. I have to take up a lot of the slack and it's just keeping me mam occupied all the time, and it's just like draining a lot of the time, and I took her to the bingo last week, didn't win nowt [*laughs*]. But emm, I says she's like all over the place at the minute and um [*pause*] you still get letters to go down to the Jobcentre [*laughing*] and I'm like come on like, and it's like 'think about getting back to work,' and I think I'd love to get back to work if anything it used to

like take your mind off it, it's like something different but em...if anything at the minute it's just all over the place...' (Sarah, 2013<sup>1</sup>)

This thesis attempts to understand what it means for things to be 'all over the place' for women amidst austerity. It does so by working through a theatre-making process with a small group of women in in the North East of England. Between 2011-2013 I engaged with a third sector family support organisation in a supposedly disadvantaged part of Gateshead, England. Specifically I attended a women's group that met for two hours every Thursday morning. This became a comforting routine. Space to breathe, to chat, to make things, to give and receive support, to exercise and to develop a play. My son, Arthur, came along too and enjoyed his time in the crèche. The broader organisation has core offers, namely after-school and holiday childcare. Other provision includes IT training, English language support, healthy eating classes, exercise sessions, a weekly toddler group, holiday clubs, and a refugee group. When I went for a scoping meeting with the director of the organisation I discovered that the women's group was likely to close. It was funded on a project-by-project basis, and subsequently generally more-or-less precarious. I found some money from the University to cover the crèche for eight weeks and it was able to continue. Gabbie, a drama worker recently made redundant from a local FE College, and I went along to the group. The plan was to develop a fictional play. We would facilitate eight two-hour drama workshops engaging with women's everyday experiences of living and working (mostly unpaid) in the North East of England at the onset of 'austerity.' Drawing on those workshops I would write a draft of the script and use actors to perform it back to the group for feedback. I would take comments on board to re-

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated transcriptions are taken from one to one conversations with participants recorded in 2013.

write, and eventually we would produce the play professionally for local audiences. In short this is what happened. Except that during the final week of drama workshops the women's group received a visit from *The Big Lottery* and successfully obtained funding for another two years. Arthur and I continued to attend the group for that period of time. I got to know participants well. Some of our conversations and activities informed the script and many more will be drawn on in this thesis. I began to gain a deeper understanding of the stresses and strains of life for women in an austere UK. I also began to recognise women's everyday strategies for coping, carrying on, having fun, how exhausting and ordinary that could feel. During this time actors performed two 'play-backs' of the script-in-development to the group for comments, and eventually it was completed and staged. At the end of the two years we had one to one conversations to talk in depth about the project. I developed close friendships and the group became a great source of support. It is with this in mind that I attempt to do justice to that process and especially to those women.

A small group of women and the drama we made together are at the heart of the thesis. This in-depth approach enables me to engage with the complexity and multiplicity of how the cuts and reforms of austerity are encountered in specific contexts. Through the combination of approaches - group participation, conversations and theatre - we were able to explore and attempt to evoke not just how women's supposedly autonomous lives were effected by austerity, but also how austerity effected interactions *between* women, institutions and other infrastructures, in the midst of other relations. Rather than thinking austerity in a vacuum or thinking lives touched by austerity generically, working closely with a small group enabled me to consider the multiple and networked nature of austerity as it was encountered in

everyday life. As Sarah's words suggest, micro situational differences matter to how austerity is encountered. For example, being a parent or carer, being a woman, being out of paid work and located in a region with limited supply of paid work matters, but it also matters how old participants' children are, whether or not they have a live-in partner, a spare room, health problems, private or local authority housing, proximity to particular services, broader family issues, and so on. What are women's existing strategies for managing stress? What are their different capacities for coping with change? Working with such a small group in a supposedly shared demographic enabled me to consider nuanced relations with austerity in the midst of other relations, including austerity's discursive, affective and emotional dynamics. Using theatre-making methods, for example role-play and re-enactment, allowed us to explore how the spatiality of the everyday is made and remade in relation to austerity; in a park, in a community organization, in the home, through an atmosphere or mood, and so on. We could engage with how austerity was felt and/or registered (or not) in and through a series of encounters across multiple spaces, and how those multiple encounters meet or cluster in particular spaces, including body-subjects. We could also think about how relations with austerity might escalate over time, might be carried along by participants, might be displaced and might surface on a given occasion. I give attention then to how austerity effects (interrupts, intensifies, disassembles and/or fractures) existing relations that meet and fold into women's everyday lives. And I ask, when do the effects of austerity fail to register *as* austerity in or beyond their scene or moment of encounter and why? By paying close attention to austerity's entanglement with other processes and formations I seek to better understand what austerity becomes for those women, including its multiplicity, its incoherence, its moments of consolidation, its rhythmic and affective life.

Since everyday relations with austerity are mediated through a complex range of encounters, for example with a third sector support organisation, a privatised appointment service in the NHS, a brown envelope on the kitchen table, this raises the challenge of researching the effects of austerity particularly when those effects include the loss or disassembly of certain spaces of encounter. I consider how, using theatre, this project works, fails, or might work as a strategy of consolidation to produce shared encounters with austerity. If austerity is always entangled in other formations and processes, how to practice critique in relation to it? How to research and/ or represent austerity in a thesis and through the form of a play when it is encountered as a series of fragmented and fragmenting forces, when it constitutes and sometimes hides the unravelling of existing sites, scenes, ideologies and promises, producing for example an empty community room, a pre-emptive strategy that wasn't enacted, or a form of continuation amidst privatisation?

### **1.1.2. The Encounter and Precarious (Unpaid) Labour**

My choice of the term encounter is important here. What do the cuts and reforms of austerity become as a series of effects in women's everyday lives? I use encounter to refer to how those women come into relation with austerity or further how women become in relation with austerity, both as they express this and as I observe it. And in reverse I think about what austerity becomes in relation with participants. The term 'Encounter' is commonly used as both a verb and a noun. As a verb it describes 1. unexpectedly facing or experiencing something hostile or difficult, and 2. meeting someone unexpected. The encounter also names 1. a confrontation or an unpleasant



struggle 2. an unexpected or casual meeting with something or someone and 3. a chance meeting or brush rendezvous. The routes of the term are in middle English from meeting as an adversity or meeting adversities and based on Latin in + contra – against<sup>2</sup>. This suggests that women's relations with austerity were necessarily antagonistic and/or surprising. As I go on to explore, while the forces of austerity certainly work against these women (generally) participants' did not *always* encounter austerity in a negative way (more on this later) and amidst histories of turbulence for economically marginalised subjects cuts and reforms were not always surprising. The notion of opposition can become ambivalent or lost in the term encounter, which is then predominantly about understanding forms of 'meeting,' or forms of relationality between difference. This frees me up to think about the multiplicity of women's encounters with austerity in the everyday without assuming that they would *always* take an oppositional or unexpected form, or necessarily have an *immanently* negative affect.

For me, understanding the encounter is predominantly about understanding relations between the verb and noun; that is ways in which experiences get inside or co-constitute the experiencing subject. In this way encounters and activity leave their traces behind (albeit with different degrees of intensity) and fold into other encounters. Any noun can be verbed though some resist more than others. My interest in relations between doing and being (that is becoming) began with a preoccupation with work and is developed in this thesis through engagement with post-structural feminism. In simple terms whenever I asked a participant (or anybody else for that matter) 'what do you do' they would reply '*I am a...*' stay at home mum,

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<sup>2</sup> Definition taken from the Oxford English Dictionary Online (2016) available: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/encounter> [26th February 2016]

dinner lady, or whatever. I am (or should say at the moment I become) a PhD student, like women in the group I also become much more besides what I do, but nevertheless what I do 'gets inside', it becomes part of me. This refers to a relation between forms of doing and the co-constitution of the subject, which I explore in more detail throughout the thesis. Women participating in this project are largely out of paid work, and have a number of unpaid care responsibilities including managing budgets, sourcing and providing food, clothing and other items, maintaining the home as a safe environment, giving emotional support, providing transport to and from school, nursery or other institutions, managing and ensuring access to a range of appointments, and so on. For these women the borders between (unpaid) 'work' and 'life' are more than a little porous. Therefore although I understand women's occupation through feminist accounts of unpaid labour I cannot always delineate unpaid labour from other forms of activity. Unpaid labour, as I use it here, is distributed alongside other activity in everyday spaces which are made and remade in a context of austerity, for example the community organisation, the home, the park, the walk to school, the supermarket. How then is what women do and how they do it impacted by austerity? I think about how austerity mediates women's relations with unpaid work, but also extend this out to think about the effects of austerity on relations between unpaid work and other activity. Thinking about the multiple forces of austerity that come together, shift and leave their traces behind in and through other social forms and processes for these particular women enables me to both explore and stay comfortable with the typological 'messiness' of paid and unpaid work. This enables me to think more broadly about how 'what women do' and spaces they encounter might 'get inside,' and leave their traces behind, whilst also accounting for excesses of those relations.

The North East of England is a region with a strong industrial history that has been disadvantaged economically as a consequence of de-industrialisation - see Gore et al. (2007), Crisp et al. (2009), Hudson (2013) on the mapping of employment gaps onto what were industrial strongholds.) This makes it a useful site for thinking about contemporary forms of precarious labour - on 'precarity' see Neilson and Rossiter (2008), Puar et al. (2012), Rideout and Schneider (2012) and on how precarity as a broader phenomenon becomes bound up with austerity see Puar et al. (2012). So, relations with labour are more regularly surprising, unexpected, fraught, fleeting and so on (though perhaps such regularity means that over time, the element of surprise and unexpectedness diminishes). And relations between paid work and other daily activities become increasingly blurred (for example see Elcioglu (2010) on temporary workers and everyday practices of waiting, suspension, being on hold.) Therefore I ask, if de-industrialisation unravelled an already frail promise of plentiful supply of what was (briefly amidst Fordism, predominantly for working men) long-term sustainable (often messy and dangerous) work in the North East of England, how does austerity affect women located in the same region? There is a significant loss of public sector employment, which grew in the local economy after de-industrialisation (the highest percentage of loss nationally (SPERI, 2015)). There is also an erosion of space for regular, shared encounters with unpaid labour (and other activity) as unpaid labour practices are de-stabilised by withdrawal of funding for services and welfare. What falls apart (and at moments may be held together) in this context are networks for peer support, as I explore in Part 2 Chapter 2, and a sense of continuity in relation to unpaid labour, that might allow for a coherent future-present imaginary, as I explore in Part 2 Chapter 3. I argue that generally for these women such un-doing

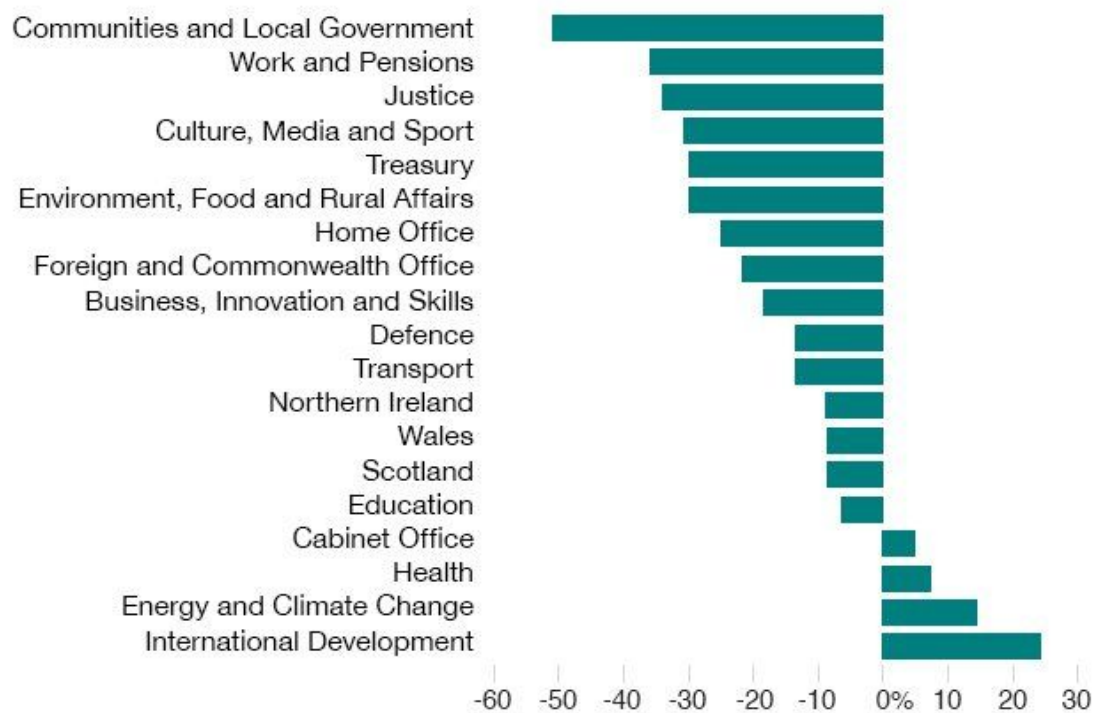
is intensified as an effect of cuts to funding for social care, arts and culture, local authority budgets, and the increased conditionality of workfare. Compulsion to enter an inconsistent and turbulent paid labour market risks disrupting women's relations with unpaid labour, though sometimes they find creative ways around this. And this raises the question; if the women and I become (in part) what we do then what happens when the infrastructures that support what we do are disrupted, disassembled or shifted? What happens consequentially if labour becomes increasingly temporary and changeable? When we hold together multiple shifting occupations - what falls apart, and what energy is required to keep things together? By working with women who are largely out of paid work I ask what forms of unpaid labour are made more precarious as a consequence of austerity? And what does that do to fracture not just bonds between people, but individuated subjects too?

### **1.1. 3. A New Austerity?**

I aim to engage with what austerity becomes as participants encounter it amongst other social formations and processes. But what do I actually mean by austerity, and what does this thesis do to supplement existing geographies of austerity? The new austerity as a series of specific fiscal policies is a political-economic response to the financial crisis of 2008 that has been implemented with various degrees of intensity in a range of contexts in Western economies (on these differentiated global geographies see Kitson, Martin, Tyler, 2011). It enacts the premise that a state's fiscal deficit can and should be reduced through a series of spending cuts, for the good of the public finances. This has translated into a range of budget cuts in the UK since 2010 as shown across government departments in the chart shown on the following page.

Real change in budget between 2010-11 and 2015-16. This chart shows a period of fiscal 'austerity' from implementation until the current date.

### Real change in budget 2010-11 to 2015-16



Source: IFS/Treasury



Image source *BBC* (2016) [online] available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-34790102> [January 24th 2016.]

Due to the expansive and complex nature of cuts and reforms in a UK context it is difficult to provide a coherent account of them. I focus here on those likely to have the

most direct impact on women participating in this process. Some of the most significant departmental budget cuts between 2010-2011 and 2015-2016 are as follows (data taken from Wheeler, 2016): The home office have cut 24.9% since 2010 including yearly 4% cuts to police budgets and 17000 front line police jobs lost according to the Police Federation. Business, Innovation and Skills has been cut by 18.4% since 2010, Justice has seen cuts of 34.1% including cuts to legal aid. Culture, Media and Sport have seen cuts of 30%, with much of this falling to the Arts Council. Education has been cut by 6.4%. The Department of Communities and Local Government have been cut by 51%, the largest percentage reduction of all government departments. However, the localisation of this process makes it very difficult to give a standard account of the cuts, which hit the poorest local authorities the hardest (Bushe, Kenway and Aldridge 2016). The localisation of council tax and the reduction of council tax benefits has created a situation in Gateshead whereby even those on very low incomes, including claimants of 'Income Support' (IS) and 'Job Seekers Allowance' (JSA) pay a percentage of council tax. Those of working age on the very lowest of incomes (including claimants of JSA and IS) would have previously paid no council tax but now pay at least 8.5% of their standard rate. So for a standard payment of £120 per month a claimant would pay £10.20 per month. Cuts and reforms to local authority budgets also impact on the services that they can provide. Local leisure, arts, and other facilities that were part or wholly local authority funded have been lost, scaled down or shifted to a voluntary run model. In Gateshead this encompasses but is not limited to libraries, leisure centres, and third sector organisations including our local family support service. Since 2010 the Council has cut its budget by 90.6 million, there are now 1700 fewer people working for the organisation (Robinson and Collins, 2016). Finally, cuts to the Department for Work and Pensions since 2010 have

been 35.8%. This has translated into cash freezes to child benefits, changes to how working age benefits rise each year and a 1% limit on most benefits rises. It has also overseen 'the removal of the spare room subsidy,' commonly referred to as the bedroom tax. This means that working aged people claiming housing benefit, with one spare bedroom have 14 % of eligible rent withdrawn and those with two or more spare bedrooms will lose 25% of eligible rent. Same sex children up to the age of 16 have to share a room, and other children up to the age of 10 have to share a room. A single person with two spare bedrooms paying £120 a week in rent would have to pay £30 of that rent themselves (Department for Work and Pensions 2013). If they are claiming JSA and not in paid employment that money would be taken from a weekly income of £73.10 for over 25s, £57.90 for under 25s. In 2008 parents with the youngest child aged 12 were moved from IS to JSA, in 2009 those with the youngest child age 10, in 2010 this changed to those with a youngest child aged 7 and in 2012 this changed to parents with a youngest child age 5. The amount of money parents receive on JSA is the same as IS, but parents or carers on JSA have to prove that they are actively seeking work or face sanctions. What we see here then is a reform that imposes more conditionality on the receipt of welfare for parents. Similarly, the abolishment of Disability Living Allowance and introduction of Personal Independent Payments and other reforms have overseen increased conditionality of state support for disabled adults, children and carers (Unison, 2013). The Department for Work and Pensions has overseen large-scale structural reform as well as making budgetary reductions.

It is clear from this overview that those most reliant on support are hit the hardest, as I go on to explore. After the 2015 election, the Conservative Government attempted to

push budgetary withdrawal further with significant effect on benefits claimants. Recent proposals and changes have included caps to the number of children for whom it is possible to claim benefits, the withdrawal of housing benefits for under 25s, further reductions to the benefits cap and more conditionality for those claiming JSA (HM Treasury, 2015).

Despite the significance of these changes, the premise of austerity has been contested by Blyth (2012) amongst others who argue that it has failed to stabilise public finances, not least because spending cuts do not necessarily correlate with a decreased deficit. He argues: 'Since 2008 where across the globe states that have cut the most have exhibited the worst economic performance... Per contra, periphery Europe has fallen off a cliff while core Europe has stagnated. The United Kingdom has crawled along despite its cuts and its debts have increased rather than decreased as a result' (Blyth, 2013: 739). While austerity measures have had some impact on reducing the deficit, they have delivered little growth and public debt has risen from 56.6 Percent of GDP in 2009 to 90 percent of GDP in 2013, 1.39 trillion (Office of National Statistics, 2009, 2013).

My focus here is in a UK context where austerity enacts a range of changes to state spending and governance that not always only involve direct cuts spending, and/or that call into question the temporal framework for deficit reduction. For example, I have mentioned increases in the conditionality of particular benefits and some research suggests that such processes cost more than they save (for example, DWP 'fit to work' assessments (National Audit Office, 2016)). It is arguable then that despite their appropriation to justify austerity 'the rules of economic logic evaporate when it comes to policy' (Blyth, 2013: 740).



Instead government policy amidst austerity also oversees a rapidly increased marketization of state services, and escalates existing processes of privatisation, for example by privatisation of state infrastructures/services like the Royal Mail and by outsourcing to private companies including in security, in the NHS and in education (Plimmer, 2014). Changes have led to increased competition *and* insecurity in the jobs market through the relaxation of employment law (for these changes see Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012) and welfare (workfare) being made increasingly conditional and insecure, for example by the enforcement of stricter sanctions and by shifting terms for the provision of social security (Department for Work and Pensions, 2016). Consequently, I think about austerity as more complex and less linear than only a process of state withdrawal for the purposes of deficit reduction. Throughout the thesis I use the term 'cuts *and* reforms' to refer to the implementation of policies under the rubric 'austerity' in the UK that extend beyond simple budgetary withdrawal or end. This is intended to reflect the diversity of changes, and proposals that were implemented or put forward during the period of my research between 2011-2013.

If relations between intentionality and austerity have been called into question what about the effects of austerity beyond a relation with the fiscal deficit? Austerity is not just a series of actions but also becomes their effects. A range of work in geography, sociology and social policy has suggested that rather than being 'all in it together' as Prime Minister David Cameron claimed in a speech to Conservative Party conference (2009) the burden for resolving the financial crisis has been distributed unequally (see Adkins 2015; Coleman, 2016). It has been well argued that cuts and reforms target already marginalised groups (Hall, Massey and Rustin, 2013) and exacerbate existing

divides of class, race, gender, ethnicity sexuality and disability at a local, regional and global level (Brah, Szemen, Gedalof, 2015). In a UK context, de-industrialised regions particularly in the North of England have suffered more than wealthier (often) Southern regions because of limited employment opportunities and existing necessity for a state re-distribution of wealth (Dorling and Ballas, 2008). Such distribution is significantly scaled back amidst austerity (Newcastle City Council, 2013). Further, whilst scaling back funds to local authority budgets the coalition government put those local authorities in charge of making difficult choices about how to allocate limited resources. This form of 'austerity localism' is not 'entirely innocent' but is invoked to restructure the public sector (Featherstone et al. 2012) leading to increasing dependency on the voluntary and private sector (see report by Vacchelli, Kathrecha and Gyte, 2015). Existing health inequalities could widen as a consequence of austerity (Bambra and Garthwaite, 2015; Schrecker and Bambra, 2015). And numerous reports demonstrate that women have been disproportionately affected by cuts and reforms (see Women's Budget Group 2012; Fawcett Society, 2013; Karamessini and Rubrey, 2014).

Pearson and Elson (2015) show that the biggest fall in disposable income as a result of austerity policies in the UK have been borne by already 'disadvantaged' groups, including lone mothers and single women without children who are out of or in precarious paid work. What is undermined, damaged and destroyed amidst austerity are the infrastructures that support social reproduction: social care, pensions, housing benefit, lone parent benefit and so on. MacLeavy (2011) argues that various cuts and reforms, including in the UK movement towards the universal credit and increasing erosion of state assistance for unpaid work, challenges the autonomy and financial

security of women in particular. The impacts of cuts and reforms directly effecting women who are engaged in unpaid labour seep beyond those direct sites or scenes of encounter with austerity. Many women's organizations may be unable to survive the constant questioning and re-writing of the welfare state that takes place amidst austerity (Vacchelli, 2015: 83). Simultaneously however, women are increasingly called upon to take up the slack by providing formal or informal unpaid labour in local communities or as well as in family life (Jupp, 2014).

The case of women here acts to exemplify how austerity intensifies and extends existing social and economic inequalities (Adkins, 2015). However, austerity has not only been conceived as a series of state implemented fiscal cuts and reforms, as the perpetuation of existing forms of social asymmetry, or relatedly as an unequal distribution of material effects. Austerity also has a cultural life, an emotional, affective and atmospheric life; for example see Clayton, Donovan and Merchant (2015) on the emotions of austerity in a context of care and commitment in public service delivery in the North East of England; Coleman, (2016) on austerity as a mood of (hopeful) pessimism; and Hitchen (2016) on living and feeling the austere.

Hatherley (2015) describes a genre of "austerity nostalgia," that infuses government discourse, television programming, fashion, branding and so on. This evokes a post-war period and in doing so exemplifies a longing for security and stability in hard times. A Labour government implemented austerity in the 1940s. This was a time when demand outstripped supply so private consumption was restricted in order to prioritise exports and investment. Unlike today austerity in the 1940s was also accompanied by the expansion of the welfare state. Although this was a successful

economic strategy, daily consumption restrictions became unpopular with the people and Labour lost government in 1951 as the conservatives promised to 'set the nation free' (Tomlinson, 2013). However contestable the notion that austerity was lived as a positive experience in the 1940s is, nostalgic evocations to 'keep calm and carry on,' 'make do and mend' or 'tighten the purse strings' are associated with what are largely attached to as positive qualities such as stoicism, collectivity, and taking things in order. This becomes what Hatherley describes as a 'legislated nostalgia' (after Coupland, 1991), that is a form of nostalgia constructed for those who did not actually experience the thing being evoked (also see Bramall, 2013). Arguably then a public sense of the heroism and success of post-war austerity helps to make the new austerity *feel* heroic, necessary and effective (Tomlinson, 2013). And a key point in this literature is that austerity resonates with cultural formations that extend beyond the immediate context of austerity policies and programs.

Relatedly, for Forkert (2014) government austerity rhetoric involves a quasi-religious discourse in which cuts become necessary to redeem the country's guilt about apparent extravagance through the years of New Labour (1997- 2010). I argue that this is so effective exactly because it holds a public sense of the excesses of neoliberal capitalism and its failed promises of social equality, upward mobility, and home ownership (see Berlant, 2013b), together with the notion that austerity 'disciplines' or takes control of such excess. If certain promises are fraying, austerity makes sense of that fraying, and paradoxically enables continued attachments to those promises by galvanising a sense that discipline now will allow for a brighter future later on.

If the effects of austerity are distributed unevenly and especially harm the most

insecure then perhaps moral judgements, vilification and demonization are used as a means to sustain this process and become entangled with contemporary cultures of austerity. Politically and culturally we have seen an increase in hostility of mood towards already marginalised groups in the UK including immigrants, refugees and benefits claimants (for example see Jensen 2014). Stigma and discrimination become attached to broad moral judgements about how other people should behave and what kinds of social contribution are deemed to be valued (Valentine and Harris, 2014; Jensen and Tyler, 2015). Government rhetoric feeds into this for example by pitching the 'worker' against 'the shirker,' and by asking 'where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits (Osborne, 2012)?' This sort of language is used both to legitimate the cuts and reforms to welfare and to evoke the kind of disciplining and taking control described above. Further a plethora of television programming and tabloid media intensify the assimilation of othering with a necessity for welfare withdrawal. They make exceptional cases grotesque in order to stereotype benefits claimants and produce and/or feed a public appetite for what has been described as poverty porn (Jenson, 2014). This is despite research countering notions of generations of unemployed and suggesting that most people want to be in paid work (Shildrick et.al, 2012a). This refuses to recognise any value in unpaid labour, such as mothering or other forms of care. I argue that such othering helps to sustain the affective promise of austerity, despite the inconsistencies of its economic rationale (Blyth, 2012) because a sense of 'excess in need of control', becomes embodied by particular figures. Those figures are subject to change depending on context. For example, a figure of excess may be a banker, a rich landlord, a benefits claimant, or a politician. However, some figures become more

commonly, consistently and publicly imbued with a form of excess that is threatening and out of control than others, including the kind of women engaged in this research, mothers on benefits (Jenson and Tyler, 2012). Government and media discourse generally attaches excessiveness to those who are already disadvantaged, and already less likely to have a voice in mainstream outlets. It is also those others, who are most likely to feel the hardest and most direct effects of austerity. Those figures can be disciplined on behalf of others. Amidst the fraying of certain promises, after financial crisis, and as precarious work spreads, coherent forms of attachment fall apart. What is re-asserted in this context is grouping and vilification of marginalised others. This in turn produces an illusion of the persistence of distinct typologies, for example 'the worker' or 'the shirker,' even as the lines between employment and unemployment are eroded. Morality becomes attached to those types, which are either deemed to be 'deserving' or 'undeserving' of limited state resources (after Valentine and Harris, 2014; Jensen and Tyler, 2015). This demonstrates how a blurring of the cultural and political discourses of austerity hold together both a sense that a) we are 'all in it together' and therefore all collectively responsible for taking control of excess and b) that responsibility can and should be taken by somebody or something elsewhere (most commonly those undeserving excessive figures). Further, as I go on to explore, forms of stigmatisation and discrimination play out in nuanced ways and complex - micro-othering as well as persistent expressions of care circulate amongst participants. The othering simultaneously offers and undoes the promise of escaping the status of underserving subject even for those figures most commonly vilified.

Austerity has been framed as a 'dangerous ideologically driven idea' (Blyth, 2012), as a series of unequally distributed effects, as a cultural tool that works in part to sustain

those political-economic strategies even as they fail within their own terms, and as related to public moods including pessimism and nostalgia. This produces an account of austerity in excess of a function of state withdrawal for the purposes of deficit reduction. As the work that I have reviewed above indicates, in various ways under the rubric austerity change takes place, even where that change is the intensification of processes already in motion (for example welfare conditionality or withdrawal of service privatisation). In part, this change oversees the unravelling of certain relations with the state and expectations from the state (see Batthacharyya, 2015). However, alongside such unravelling the evocation of nostalgia, othering and disciplining may produce a sense of coherence, of holding together or entrenchment of the very same relations that those processes disassemble. Perhaps then consolidation and disassembly are tensed together in austerity. This tension between consolidation and disassembly sets out the central concern of the thesis: amidst the cuts and reforms of austerity what for these particular women can be held together and what falls apart? What rhythms of holding together and falling apart coexist and what if anything might this tell us about the specific nature of austerity as it is lived in the everyday? Bearing this in mind I turn to the work of Lauren Berlant as I try to make sense of the complexity of austerity as a series of relations between the economic, the felt, the cultural, and the social<sup>3</sup>. I question whether austerity might be thought of as a genre, or whether the concept of genre might be helpful for those interested in thinking about how austerity reaches across various domains to become something in excess of a fiscal policy.

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<sup>3</sup> I draw on Berlant's work and particularly 'Cruel Optimism' (2011) throughout this thesis. She offers a set of provocations for thinking across social, political and cultural life by developing, feeling, exploring and expressing what she calls a 'history of the present'.

#### 1.1.4. Austerity as Genre

I use genre as a concept for engaging with, understanding, and making sense of patterns and typologies in 'the history of the present', across social, cultural and political domains. But I also think of genre as ontological force. Genres are lived and felt as something common. They are ways of being in, negotiating, sensing, belonging, organising and being organised in the historical present. Berlant (2011) writes of the necessity of thinking style and content together - so that genre becomes a relation between style or form of organising and becoming (organised). A genre then is dynamic, lively, excessive *and* co-constitutive of individuated body-subjects. As Berlant writes: 'A genre is a loose affectively-invested zone of expectations about the narrative shape a situation will take. A situation becomes-genre, finds its genres of event' (Berlant and McCabe 2011: no pagination). Berlant refers here to the 'sense-making' mechanism of genre either as a mode of critique and/or as a lived experience. And the literature that I have engaged enacts various processes of sense making in relation to austerity. It looks for patterns and commonalities to examine how austerity acts on and through particular spaces and subjects. The bringing together of this work has shown how, despite porous boundaries, austerity reaches across the social, economic and cultural in particular ways. It also suggests that perhaps austerity co-mediate the relationality of those typologies in the contemporary. For example if policies to withdraw welfare provision become folded into government discourses that co-produce moral rationalities then they also become folded into broader cultural moralities that render certain populations 'undeserving'. This in turn becomes entangled with particularly sensed relations between excess and control, disassembly and consolidation. Organizing or attempting to understand



austerity according to those typologies - that it is only an economic phenomenon, or only a cultural phenomenon - omits such relationalities. Bearing this in mind, Berlant (Berlant and McCabe 2011: no pagination) suggests the need to invent new genres for theorizing the 'historical present.' She seeks to 'induce a transformation in the way we recognize and process events'. By drawing together forms of relation between the economic, the affective, the cultural through engagement with a small group of women I attempt to differently recognise processes and events of austerity. Elsewhere, Berlant stresses a genre

'... is an affective event that is organized aesthetically, that is by way of a sensually invested conventional form... a genre accounts for and makes available collective experience'.

(Berlant, 2013a: no pagination)

My account of austerity so far has been both expansive and generic. Austerity becomes about, and forms of relation between, discourses, histories, effects, materialities, policies, affects and more. But since this engagement is so far reaching, austerity as I have used it here also seems to settle and dissolve, hang together and then fall apart. It becomes entangled with the already sensually invested conventional forms that fold into it. For example, at what point does austerity become distinct from preceding discourses that stigmatize 'undeserving' groups of people? At what point does it become distinct from policies of conditionality and processes of privatization already set in motion by the New Labour government? And at what point does it become distinct from a nostalgic trend and/or marketing device (Hatherley, 2015)? How to hold on to the precise qualities of this austerity now, which cannot be conflated with neoliberalism, which is not the same as ordinary recession and which

is different but related to the austerity of the 1940s, whilst also recognizing that this austerity exceeds a particular process of state withdrawal and/ or of deficit reduction?

In a piece on austerity and mothering Jensen and Tyler (2012: no pagination) ask: 'how austerity - as a cultural object, as a set of economic practices, as a subject-making discourse, as a web of socio-historical fantasies - is reconfiguring our sense of public, mutual and collective sensibilities?' This too raises the issue of austerity's multiplicity and asks how sense making takes place in relation to austerity in a lived and public context. What Jensen and Tyler really seem to ask is - in what ways does austerity become genre and in doing so organize us collectively, differently than before? However Jensen and Tyler narrow their exploration down to consider how the moral discourses of parenting are central to public narratives of austerity. I wish to expand an interest in the sensing and sense-making of austerity beyond the discursive. In doing so I explore how austerity is 'sensed' and 'made-sense' of as it is encountered in the everyday lives of a small group of women amidst other social processes and formations.

I suggest that certain characteristics - for example moods, material effects, discourses, and promises - may become attached to the new austerity and in doing so hold it together as genre. Austerity becomes genre as it variously surfaces in the public imagination, for example through particular promises of discipline, growth, or responsibility, but these imaginaries may owe themselves in part to hauntings, or hoardings, from the past and/or to instincts or intuitions. These imaginaries become part of how narratives are formed around the expected shape a situation (the situation

of financial crisis from 2007) will take. However, as I go on to explore, attachments to promises or other formations of austerity might also fall apart, might dissolve into other genres and might open towards new possibilities. They might not be felt or registered collectively by women in the group but instead be constituted as a genre by me, or others seeking to critically engage with austerity. And so the edges of the genre are blurred and indistinct.

Berlant (2011) shows how a genre is open to being undone through critique, intuition, and analysis. And a genre is always on the move, not least since the 'public imagination' is subject to change over time and space. Berlant's engagement with the 'good life' - a post-war imaginary that upward mobility, home ownership, and intimate family life might be attainable for all - becomes exemplar of the undoing and movement of genres. The good life promise organises public desires and activity in such a way that for Berlant wears out the subject. As the fantasmic promise of the good life frays in the West, as working conditions worsen (generally), as home ownership becomes harder to access, as spaces for intimate life are eroded, the genre frays or changes its shape. The good life promise does not catch all, there are global communities it hasn't reached, and even in Western societies there are those who choose to disavow it, but no doubt they register it in some way, and in some ways they are organised by it, even against their will.

The genre then is not only a fantasy. That is, it is not only a 'social construction' but it emerges in and through other relations - particular materialities, drives, affects and so on. For example, for Berlant (2011) the good life promise becomes sustaining, since the loss of optimism could lead to a loss of hope about anything. And so a 'genre' as a

'mode of cultural creation and interpretation becomes indistinguishable from genre as a shaping force in lived experience,' (Jackson, 2015: no pagination). Those sensually invested 'forms of convention' suggest that genre also co-constitutes and is co-constituted by the materiality of the event or situation. For example, on the 'slow death' Berlant (2011) indicates that particular conditions - including precarious work, low pay, long hours, the lack of availability of good quality food, aggressive farming practices - lead to a rise in poor health and subsequently to the slow death of a body. This becomes part of a diagnosis of cruel optimism where the promise of and even perhaps the affective rewards in cheaply available 'food for all' becomes bound to the wearing out of the subject. Further, thinking sexual identity through genre as Berlant does (2008a) shows the promise of the genre as it is registered in ordinary life. For example, Berlant suggests that the works of 'women's culture' enact a fantasy that my life is not just mine, but an experience understood by other women, even when it is not shared by many or any' (Berlant, 2008a: 21). Sexual identity can become part of what genre is or what genre does. 'So the consumption of women's culture would be a way of experiencing one's own story as part of something social, even if ones singular relation to that belonging is extremely episodic, ambivalent, rejected or mediated by particular encounters with relevantly marked texts' (Berlant, 2008a: 21). And in this way men, women, and those who don't identify as a particular gender might also engage with women's culture and in doing so also become organised by that genre (although this becomes felt as more or less possible depending on a range of circumstances). In this way, genres shift and morph - but still hold together a sense of something that is commonly registered and/ or understood.

Genres then are sites of 'mutual collective recognition' and they organize us in ways

that are already intelligible to others (Jackson, 2015). But how might genres become intelligible? As Berlant has inferred 'collective recognition' may proceed and exceed the cognitive. A genre might be felt, like a diffuse mood of pessimism that becomes characteristic of austerity in the UK (see Coleman, 2016), or like a relation of cruel optimism that becomes characteristic of attachments to the fraying good life promise (Berlant, 2011). Genres become about forms of relation between subjects, sites and situations that may be discursive, that may be material, that may be affective, that are always on the move but also held in common. Genre offers a different way of thinking about what organises publics across the economic, the cultural, the emotional and so on. And exploring genre opens opportunity for different approaches to form. For Berlant, writing genre can be an instinctive process, an experimental process, and an activity that attempts to evoke relevant feelings. As she says: 'We are trained to make arguments but the arts of mediation that would incite absorption, attunement and excitement are not seen as craft skills for the critics. This seems a mistake' (Berlant, 2013a: no pagination). Taking from this, in the form of the play and in the thesis too I experiment with relations between style and content and as I do so attempt to evoke the relations between form and objects of attachment that co-constitute genre.

Genre, then, offers a vocabulary for thinking about the history of the present. This means that the forms of convention drawn on to organise a genre exist outside of linear temporality, the genre stretches through time/space to encompass hoarded traces from the past and future imaginaries. For example to return to sexual identity Berlant describes it like this:

'To call an identity like sexual identity a genre is to think about something as it

is repeated, detailed, and stretched while retaining its intelligibility, its capacity to remain readable or audible across the field of all its variations. For femininity to be a genre like an aesthetic one means that it is a structure of conventional expectations that people rely on to provide certain kinds of affective intensities and assurances’.

(Berlant, 2008a: 4)

To visualize the complex temporalities of genre I think of starling flocks as they move together in murmurations. Different birds somehow look and feel and move and so become as one. But that one is never still, it always changes, it overlaps, it divides and expands, it is apparently random but guided by forces - by the air, by a collective sense, by whim, and so on. A murmuration is its generally recognizable whole. There are disruptions - break offs or consolidations might shrink or grow the group, some birds might get lost, a loud noise might scatter the flock.

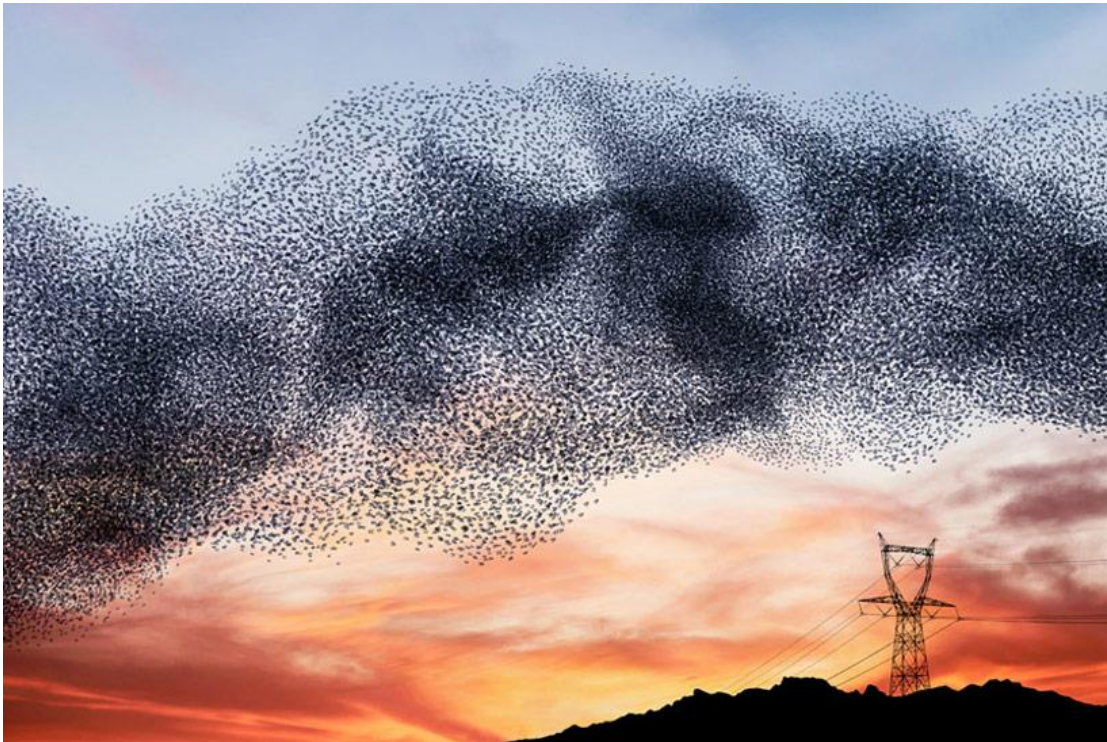


Image Source: Alain Delorme [online] available: <http://www.designboom.com/art/alain-delorme-captures-the-balletic-murmurations-of-wild-birds-11-07-2013/> [15<sup>th</sup> March 2016]

But the murmuration, like a genre maintains a sense of itself. And like a genre, the murmuration shows us two forms of relation between difference and the generic. Different birds move together to hold the shape, and that shape is never twice repeated. Genre then offers an opportunity for me to think about those two forms of relation. In this case, that is to think about relations between different women and what is shared between them, and to account for the impossibility of bare repetition, so that no two moments in the lives of those women are the same, but yet commonalities - sensually invested forms of convention persist, hold their shape, even as they change. Genres have a rhythmic life, and as such they may escalate or dissipate in particular ways, as they may variously (de)compose the body-subject.

Looking for and listening to genre helps me to think about form and style in this thesis as part of the process of making and/or finding sense of austerity. It also helps me position my work with women in relation to nascent accounts of feminism and austerity. Like Jupp (2014: 1307), I have previously struggled to 'both valourise women's experiences and practices of community work, often in poor, working class neighbourhoods, without tying down women as a category and overlooking other axes of difference'. And I have been concerned about the risks of essentialising women and womens' experiences. For example, I do not wish to assimilate women only with particular forms of unpaid labour, including care and reproductive labour. This risks amongst other things reproducing the assertion that certain forms of work are women's work. However, it is also clear through my engagement with these particular participants that unpaid labour is a primary concern. Therefore using the concept of genre I can engage with the ways in which certain forms of relation

between women and reproductive work may commonly hold together, without writing out difference, without ascribing a value less or more to that kind of labour, whilst allowing for the morphology of that form of relation, and whilst thinking how women also precede and exceed that kind of activity.

Genre offers a way in to thinking about forms of relation between the generic and difference, the public and the personal, the narrative and the situation. Berlant (2008a; 2011) uses the phrase 'intimate public' to get at this relation between what is shared and difference. Intimate public evokes what is shared between strangers and genre constitutes those shared encounters. And what "intimate public" holds in phrase is the ways in which genres address us, hail us, and then (and this is the important turn) the way in which we enter that scene of address, the ways in which we live there, so that the given little by little becomes what is made. The personal is the generic, but the generic is also personal' (Jackson, 2015: no pagination). And it is precisely this form of relation between the personal and the public, between the singular and the generic, between promises and their becoming, that I seek to engage in this thesis. I turn to form to think about the mediation of those relations. If austerity becomes genre, how does it surface through difference - in the lives of particular women, in specific situations? If genre is a form of organising that always operates amongst other forms of organising, what are austerity's modes of relation with other genres? Which genres do women choose and in which genres are they forced to live?

By working with a small group of women I am able to think about austerity through the problem of genre to attempt to understand how it is registered, whether and how for them it holds together, settles, dissolves. I turn to the singular, to difference, to



these specific women, to find what is sensed and shared and held across and between them/ us. Theatre-as-method becomes useful here. This process of coproduction offers tools for us to work-through encounters in women's everyday lives together in a shared space. It enables us to work together to think and do across multiple registers, including what is felt, what is fleshy, what matters in a particular setting. Fictional characters and situations are informed by participants' own experiences and this allows for particular kinds of distance and intimacy as the personal becomes the generic, becomes personal once more. As we improvise a scene, for example at the Jobcentre, in the park, in a school, we might register or recognize a feeling that makes some sense of the austerity genre, even if that feeling has not yet been thought in relation to austerity. We can engage with characters' complicated histories and presents and in doing so seek to understand how austerity acts on different lives differently and why. We can explore relationships between characters and institutions, and we can experiment with other potentialities, for example, enacting future imaginaries that test how far things could go or what could be done differently. We could pause the action of a scene and ask characters how they feel. This process enables opportunity for a deep encounter with the lives of a small group of women. And the act of play making could build bonds between us, which may be carried into conversations about the play and its intended function, and about everyday life amidst austerity. And we can share this work with audiences, who themselves in that moment encounter feeling and sensing bodies, as well as our own (however limited) expressions of what austerity might be or what austerity might do in the midst of other things.

This project took place at the onset of austerity, which has since tightened its grip. As

such perhaps this work captures a situation as it rumbles into the becoming of an event (see Berlant 2012). In the midst of that situation austerity both becomes and undoes. Austerity becomes a mechanism in the organisation of the lives of women, for example as a service provision is withdrawn, as financial support for unpaid labour is made more conditional, as demands are made for women to enter paid labour. But those forms of organisation are not consistently (I suggest) registered, not always felt (at the time of writing) *by these women* as common, and further their effect is an effect of fracturing. They produce subtly different forms for organising lives and fray spaces for shared experience. What austerity commonly does then is constitute change. It disrupts some existing forms of commonality, for example as it changes women's relations with motherhood by demanding other forms of labour from them. It undoes certain attachments to and promises of the welfare state, and as it does so it shifts already existing forms of organisation from which women might have developed a coherent future-present imaginary.

This returns me to the encounter and what the encounter becomes in this context is a way of exploring relations between difference and the generic, between a woman and austerity, between what is held together and what falls apart. Perhaps what I and others attempt to do is create encounters with a genre – austerity – and in doing so open imaginaries for something different. However what becomes difficult about this is the unbecoming that austerity facilitates. Just as I attempt to create encounters with a certain promise of the genre of austerity, austerity falls apart. This is exactly because what it produces is the intensified precarisation of a particular group of women. And so if women's encounters with austerity are different they don't necessarily register it, sense it, imagine it in a collective way (yet). But by bringing those

encounters together, here in this thesis, and in a fictional play that we develop together, I and we attempt at least to understand forms of the unbecoming of austerity as genre, even from its very beginnings. And this process of getting to know particular presents for particular women even at that stage, 'is also a process of asking what to do about it. How can we fantasize a new reality? How can we overcome our attachments to lives that don't work? And how can we build a pathway to something new and better? These modes of engagement in turn demand an encounter with forms of political practice and the quest for practical forms of getting un-stuck, getting beyond the present' (Berlant and McCabe, 2011: no pagination).

#### **1.1.5. Starlings**

This returns me to our specific project and the women it engaged. Participants already hold several things in common: they are all women, they are all mothers (with the exception of one periphery participant who was pregnant), they all live in Gateshead in the North East of England, and many have done so for all of their life. Most are out of paid work, some are lone parents and the majority supplement minimal or absent wages with state 'benefits'. You might say that these women are of a 'shared demographic', or already able to position themselves and become positioned as part of a bigger story. However as I go on to explore in the thesis, nuanced situational differences become significant amidst austerity. So although it feels a little reductive here I offer some bare information about participants - including for example, marital and employment status. Women have opted to use pseudonyms and for the purposes of privacy I also give the support service a pseudonym. Women's words, which are included in this thesis, are taken from one to one conversations that we had in 2013

and transcribed directly from audio recording, unless they are stated as taken from 'field-notes' (in which case they may be an approximation) and dated, or stated from written feedback and dated.

**Sarah** (30s) was born in Gateshead. She is married to a man with two girls, one in pre-school and the other in primary school. Her eldest daughter suffers from autism. Sarah's husband was made redundant in the middle of the financial crisis and he has struggled to find local work since then. Sarah's mum and dad both suffer from debilitating mental health issues including alcoholism and agoraphobia and Sarah's sister depends heavily on her for emotional and practical support. Sarah took part in an interview at the end of the process.

**Liz** (late 30s) Liz was born in Gateshead, she has got seven children from pre-school through to secondary school. She works ten hours per week as a midday supervisory assistant in the local primary school. At the time of research Liz was not married but she was in a relationship with the children's father who lived elsewhere. Her partner who is in and out of low waged temporary work has since moved in and they have become engaged.

**Tamsin:** (20s) Liz's sister Tamsin is also out of paid work. She had one baby at the beginning of the process and has recently given birth to her third. Tamsin's partner and the father of her children lives elsewhere (Middlesbrough) because of work commitments but will be moving in with her soon.

**Tania:** (20s) born in Northern Ireland, out of paid work. Tania has got pre-school twins and towards the end of the process gave birth to a third baby. Tania lives with her husband who is in paid work. Tania took part in an interview at the end of the process.

**Jane** (early 40s) was born in Gateshead. She is a lone parent with one son in primary school. Jane was actively seeking paid work during the project period and has since taken on a part time post. Jane took part in an interview at the end of the process.

**Hannah** (30s) was born in Gateshead and is married to a man. She has got two children in primary school and the eldest child suffers from autism. Hannah works as a cleaner in the local hospital at weekends and her husband works as a labourer during the week. Hannah took part in an interview at the end of the process.

**Robyn** (50s): was born in Newcastle. She is out of paid work and cares for her pre-school granddaughter several days and nights a week. Robyn is in a relationship but does not live with her male partner. She took part in an interview at the end of the process.

**Claire:** (40s) Born in Gateshead, not in paid work. Claire has five children from pre-school to secondary school. At the time of research she was not living with the children's father and towards the end of the process Claire moved in with a new partner. Claire took part in an interview at the end of the process.

**Brenda:** (40s) Born in the North East. Brenda became an employee at the support service in 2000 after being made redundant from a large sewing machine factory. She is married to a male and has two adult children all living at home, all out of paid work.

**Emma:** (Late teens to early 20s) Born in Gateshead, out of paid work. Emma had one child at the start of the process and gave birth to a second after the project end. Her partner and the father of her children recently moved in with her. His employment status is unknown.

**Roz:** (40s) born in the South East of England and out of paid work. She had pre-school twins at the beginning of this process and her husband is in paid work. Roz took part in an interview at the end of the process.

**Bella:** (late 30s) born in Gateshead, out of paid work. Bella is a lone parent with two children. She took part in an interview at the end of the process.

**Gabbie:** (40s) was born in Wallsend in the North East of England. Gabbie is a drama worker who took the lead on our drama workshops. She was recently windowed and has two children in secondary school. Just before the project start Gabbie was made redundant from a local F.E. college. She has moved in and out of employment since. Gabbie took part in an interview at the end of the process.

**Ruth:** (was 20's- now 30's) PhD student. Born in the midlands, raised in the North-East of England. Married to the father of two children who were in pre-school at the project start, now both in primary school.

There were a number of other women who came in and out of the group and were involved in other activities, but they did not have significant input into the project and so have not been included here. There are two periphery participants, who were involved in some of the drama workshops and have been quoted at some point in the thesis,

**Laura:** (30s) Born in Gateshead. Out of paid work with one pre-school daughter. Lone parent. She attended the group intermittently at the beginning of the process but had to withdraw because of health difficulties.

**Jade:** (17) Born in Gateshead, no children but announced pregnancy at the beginning of the process. Vicky withdrew from the group in the early stages to return to college.

### **1.1.6. Chapter Summaries**

#### **Dynamic Context: On Women, The Region, And A Room**

There are various ways in which being (becoming) female and located in the North East of England matters to how austerity is lived. In this chapter I explore how austerity deepens existing asymmetries. As I do so I consider relations between the generic and difference to think context dynamically. By drawing on Irigaray (1980,

1985) I suggest how the forms of convention 'patriarchy' and the 'capitalist economy' co-constitute particular genres and produce unequal distributions of insecurity and heirarchisation by ascribing difference with value. I show value as a relation in excess of the body-subject and/or region that is always changing and ungraspable. Then I explore how the onus for improving value is placed onto supposedly autonomous women in the contemporary. For example in this empirical site there is an insufficient supply of suitable paid work. As an effect of austerity, space and support for unpaid care is closed down (particularly for lone parents) whilst demands for entry into a (lacking) paid labour market are intensified. The region and women located there are variously articulated as too fat, undernourished, deprived and failing, and encouraged to 'improve' this 'lacking value'. Ending with a 'room' this chapter establishes why the thesis will engage with austerity at the nexus of specific sites, scenes and subjects.

### **Theatre-as-method: On the Multiplicity of Body/Voice**

'The room' is an attempt to engage deeply with specific sites and subjects, attending to forms of convention and genres that co-constitute those sites and subjects, without limiting, fixing, or reducing them. Theatre enabled us to explore encounters with austerity in the room, using multiple forms of expression and methods for attunement. We play with everyday situations including encounters with austerity in a space that made those encounters volatile. We experiment and communicate as sensing, fleshy, geographically situated body-subjects, and through fictional characters we facilitate particular forms of distance and intimacy with the 'research outcome:' a fictional script. We explore affective and/ or atmospheric flows alongside



things like costume, accent, tone, physicality and setting. I explore how those multiple forms of expression and attunement produce research material in a range of ways, become carried into performance and shift once more as they are shared with an audience. Therefore I show how, using theatre we could explore encounters with austerity and attempt to facilitate an encounter with austerity for broader local audiences.

### ***Cracks An Early Draft***

Here a draft of the script in development becomes research material in its own right. Women in a fictional group attempt to make a play but things keep getting in the way. They are caught in a storm of welfare reforms, and the service that they attend is under threat. In this dusty room there are holes in the roof and a bucket catching drips. This text attempts to evoke a sense of the multiple complex relations that women have with and amidst austerity. It aims to get at particular tensions between disassembly and consolidation that become characteristic of the austerity genre. I include this draft and not the final script (which is available in performance on film) to show the workings of a process. Making a story starts in this way, clumsily. There are moments of heavy-handed exposition, action moves too quickly and the plot variously falls apart. In some ways this version of the play fails dramatically, but it is in those failings that a sense of the unbecoming of austerity might, perhaps be found.

### **Dramatising Austerity: On Dissonance**

The second part of the thesis, beginning with this chapter draws on and departs from

the script and the playmaking process. By focusing on empirical subjects, sites and scenes beyond the play it is possible to explore how austerity sprawls diffusely through multiple spaces in ways that the script could not quite reach. This chapter acts as a bridge between the play and substantive empirical sections by drawing on segments of script, interview material and fieldnotes. It works creatively to evoke the genre austerity. Does austerity become like smog; something cold and wet settled over the place? Like an abusive partner, making demands she cannot meet? Or a particular pattern of relations between event and effect: a plot that falls apart? If austerity becomes a series of forces that co-constitute subjects, sites and scenes in the midst of other things, this experiment offers other ways of attuning to how those forces act in, on and through those spaces. It notices and evokes the slippery, insidious, and incoherent nature of austerity as I found it lived, not only as a single atmosphere in which to dwell, not only as a particular relation of control, not only as plot without resolution. Dissonance becomes a quality that cuts across those different devices. And this chapter introduces dissonance as a particular form of precarisation that is not unique to austerity but that nevertheless becomes key to understanding how multiple forces including cuts and reforms act on particular sites and subjects.

### **Precarity: Fracturing and Dissonance**

Here I push further at dissonant processes of disassembly and consolidation that become part of the austerity genre. I consider forms of fracturing introduced in 2.1 on dramatizing austerity through the concepts of precarity and precarisation. This offers a framework for understanding how women's relations with unpaid labour, which are mediated by the welfare state and various public services, are disrupted by

austerity. Precarisation takes place through various rhythms of fraying, interruption and intensification that impact particularly on women's capacity for unpaid care. This chapter shows how seemingly slight or insignificant changes escalate to wear subjects down. Women encounter austerity differently, austerity removes spaces for shared experience (for example support groups) and women are pushed into supposedly autonomous methods for coping through the cuts and reforms of austerity, for example the appeal. Precarisation then is multi-faceted, it fractures spaces of conviviality, (but conviviality persists) and produces dissonant conditions for the constitution of the subject.

### **Interlude- Theatre-as-method (De)composing Habit**

In this interlude, I think more about change in a context of theatre-as-method, with focus on habit. This develops from the previous chapter to trouble notions that habits are either restrictive or liberating. Instead I draw attention to what different habits do. I argue that habit is integral to an analysis of change since habit is the mechanism whereby things endure but also a site and source of change. Continuing an interest in how form mediates relations between the generic and difference, I consider habit as flows of composition/decomposition where lines between what composition and decomposition are become blurred. I propose that the entangling and resettling of the strange and the familiar facilitated by drama-making games and exercises constituted the (de)composition of thinking/bodily habits. This provides one way of framing and understanding change described by participants in relation to the theatre-making process.

## **Austerity Futures**

Finally, I continue an interest in particular qualities of dissonance and precarisation that are specific to austerity. I consider the role of the state in participant imaginaries of the 'good life promise' as I explore how austerity impacts upon their future-present imaginaries. In doing so I develop from Berlant (2008a) who asks what affective charges become magnetised by particular futures? In 'Cruel Optimism' (2011) Berlant suggests how momentum towards a future can decompose the realisation of its own promise, or otherwise cause harm in the present. But momentum itself, investment in the promise, may somehow simultaneously be sustaining. Building from this, I work through different kinds of optimism that participants expressed including displaced optimism, disavowed optimism and attempts at being without optimism. This complicates how women relate to withdrawal and reform of the state in austerity, by showing how the state is already present in fragmented and contradictory ways. Therefore I explore how orientations towards the future become dissonant. Women in the group do not share future trajectories and further women have dissonant pulls towards the future that fracture them in a number of ways.

## **Holding Things Together And What Falls Apart...**

I conclude the thesis by drawing together accounts of how things might feel like they are 'all over the place at the minute' for these women amidst austerity. In particular I focus on forms of fracturing and dissonance that constitute austerity as a genre. I reflect on how women try to hold things together even as they fall apart, and how austerity as genre holds together, even as it falls apart. This is followed by an epilogue

that shows the play-making process as another form of holding together whereby various ambivalences and tensions were worked through towards a common object - the play. I finish with a recording of a live performance of the play - an expression of the 'tragi-comic' processes that constitutes us, women 'getting on and getting by.'

## 1. 2. Dynamic Context: Women, the Region, and a Room

'Continue, don't run out of breath. Your body is not the same today as yesterday. Your body remembers.'

(Irigaray, 1980: 76)

### 1.2.1. The Bucket Catches Drips

*It's raining outside. Heavy rain. Cosy in the warm although water pushes through cracks in the ceiling. Buckets catch the drips. Themselves a kind of warmth: efforts to keep things going. The room functions, just about. But it's a threatened embrace. It's a punished building, teetering but still dignified. It's a full building, inscribed with photographs, crafts, piles of equipment, a tea urn, lists, knocks and bumps and firm reminders to wash our hands, be kind, keep joining in... It's a room filled with potential.*

This provides location and, at times, action for our play. This is how I envision the environment we created together. In our script, description of the 'set' is leaner, allowing more space for interpretation. And this imagined room is not far removed from the actual building with/ in which we developed our 'fiction', less the cracks. Less, I should say, water physically entering the space. It's a folding then of the memory and the anticipation. Our room, the actual room, a dusty blue hall in a family support service is also perhaps a threatened embrace. It holds and/or is comprised of the same effort, the same remains of activity, the same sadness that this may or probably will become something else.

*You sit inside and wonder at it. You're a full body too, an inscribed body, knocks and bumps and so on. Keeping going. You take a breath and the damp air fills your lungs. Floating dust dances (mostly skin) filling what seemed to be empty.*

We didn't create this setting only as a reproduction of the room we worked in/ with. Instead, the set would be narratively dynamic and dramatically interactive, it would perform and be performed with (especially when the rain comes in). But what does the room work to do? Perhaps it speaks of 'precarious' place: a tested region struggling after de-industrialisation? More specifically it represents current threats to the income, and so the operations of our empirical site: a family support service in the North East of England. As a bucket catches drips, attempts at holding together persist.

The room enables me to think more about form and setting (location) as dynamically enmeshed. The room also gives space for multiple constitutions of a location including touch, smell, sensation, memory and anticipation. And it becomes indicative of a process that is always partial and creative and guided by our own complex and shifting experiences and assumptions. As the room has its walls, its limits, its barriers, so too it breathes through cracks and in this way, I hope becomes less fixity and more suggestion.

In this chapter I experiment by thinking about context dynamically. Remembering Berlant's (2008a) words about the different tools we might use to explore and evoke genre, this is, in part a creative, intuitive and partial process. However it is important (at least to me) for a number of reasons. This chapter engages with Irigaray (1985) to

think about patriarchy and the capitalist economy as 'sensually invested forms of convention' (after Berlant 2008a) that co-produce particular genres. Those genres and those forms of convention shift over time, and produce settling asymmetries within and beyond their own terms. Therefore I work through relations between the region, and women located there and abstracted 'ungraspable' value. In doing so I consider ways in which 'women on benefits' and women from or based in the North East of England are variously ascribed as lacking in U.K. culture. Images, articles and other forms of expression enforce a common narrative (intensified amidst austerity) that poverty is shameful and that getting out of poverty is an autonomous project. By exploring the region and women generically, I show this as a double violence, since we see how poverty becomes determined at least in part by an unequal distribution of opportunities and resources. Finally then, I return the room. And in doing so make the case for a project that listens closely and respectfully to a specific group of women whilst holding on to and exploring the genres that co-constitute their lives. I make the case for a project that gives participants tools to represent their own experiences and situations through fictional characters in the form of the play.

In 'Women on the Market' Irigaray (1985) both appropriates and critiques Marx on the capitalist economy. She challenges his assimilation between woman (mother) and nature to be laboured and exchanged by man. This demonstrates patriarchy as a force that constitutes women as commodities. 'Marx's analysis of commodities as the elementary form of capitalist wealth can thus be understood as an interpretation of the status of woman in so-called patriarchal societies...' (Irigaray, 1985: 173). A commodity is a relation between woman (for Irigaray) and object/ nature (for Marx) and ungraspable 'value'. This value is ungraspable because it is abstracted from her



intrinsic, imminent value by a relation with gold or phallus (or something else altogether).

‘It (the commodity) can only come about when two objects-two women are in a relation of equality with a third term that is neither the one nor the other. It is thus not as “women” that they are exchanged, but as women reduced to some common feature-their current price in gold, or phalluses -and of which they would represent a plus or minus quantity’.

(Irigaray, 1985: 175)

Therefore, I consider how her relation with generic ungraspable ‘value’ co-constitutes contemporary genres of womanhood. I also expand this beyond women to think about how the region is made into and through abstracted value. In this way form co-constitutes location dynamically. Various rhythms of consolation and disassembly become associated with that dynamic process, and material and affective traces remain even as forms of mediation shift and move on. This chapter only offers some accounts of relations between form and genre but as the room shows us, other forms of relation persist.

I have struggled for some time to frame how and why the region and sexual difference (different genres formed and constituted in different ways- but intersecting in the lives of these women and in this project) matter without fixing or reducing the region and women, that is without rendering all women and all regions equivalent and comparable. What I have found useful, through my engagement with Berlant, Irigaray and post-structuralist feminism more broadly, is an approach that accounts

for the becoming and relationality of women and place, in this case a region. I consider the region and women as differently co-constituted by forces (relations between difference and the generic) that are both material and immaterial (See Colls, 2012; Grosz, 1994, 2005; Braidotti, 1994, 2013; Irigaray, 2004). And if 'you are always moving. You never stay still. You never stay. You never 'are'' (Irigaray, 1980: 76) this enables me to consider how a politics of locating might avoid the traps through which such momentum becomes 'paralysed', 'frozen' (Irigaray, 1980:76)? And so, thinking locating/location in process will enable me to consider how (always changing but somehow held together) forms of convention including patriarchy and the capitalist economy become enmeshed with other forces of becoming including other commonalities as they escalate, settle, shift, potentially producing new genres, new forms of mediation, and so on. This chapter, then, develops a broader sense of how becoming women in a de-industrialising region are mediated through the ascription of (changing) capitalist and patriarchal values. What traces or hauntings do those forms of convention leave, how might they fold into the present situation and subsequently into future imaginaries?

'Both bodies and places need to be freed from the logic that say they are either universal or unique'.

(Nast and Pile, 1998: 1).

In this chapter therefore I engage with images and texts that differently constitute this/ our region, including bodies located there, as commodity. They do so under Irigaray's terms by rendering them somehow equivalent to an abstracted measure of value and comparable through that same measure. These forms of expression

differently trace the effects of other constitutions of the region and bodies through equivalent value; for example the value of coal that lies under the ground. In this way the chapter reproduces and critiques the imposition of 'values' that are simultaneously ungraspable (abstracted from) and co-constitutive of difference; that is individuated bodies and region(s). What I intend to create is a sense of the rhythms of assembly and disassembly that Harvey (2001) evokes in his suggestion that the 'building up and breaking down of landscapes' becomes an inevitable consequence of capitalist forms of convention. Echoing Berlant's (2011) interest in 'hoarding', I think how the traces of those rhythms might remain in and through the lives of these women.

'To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant for me to have a vulva and a clitoris and uterus and breasts'

(Rich 1984: 215-16)

I use Irigaray's metaphor of phallic penetration in 'women on the market' to consider the constitution of bodies (and in this case regions) through value, so that she becomes reduced to equivalent and comparable value. Penetration is violent when it calls her into being as commodity, that is, as comparable through terms that remain foreign to her. However this does not write out the possibility for other forms of penetration and, as Irigaray puts it, the capacity for self-touch (that is other forms of becoming) that proceed and exceed her as commodity. I think how penetration leaves traces behind, so that ungraspable, abstract constitutions of her as commodity materialize in particular ways. Where Irigaray describes the violence of patriarchy using the metaphor of phallic penetration, I think how women and/ in the North East

of England become commodity whilst holding on to their capacity for 'self-touch'. And as I will go on to explore this also shows how and why being (becoming) female and located in the North East of England, becomes significant in a context of austerity.

### 1.2.2. Penetrating a Region

"For as long as anyone alive will remember, this [the North East of England] has been a 'problem region': a special case, a sick man,"

"Despite dollops of public money and years of heroic effort... [these] former industrial heartlands are quietly decaying."

" When you go back to the North-East, the landscape's kind of crumbling. There is this sort of sadness. It feels like a people who've been weakened, who've just been cut loose."

(Becket, 2014)

Our region, the North East of England, is embodied above as a sick man: decaying and cut loose. This article ascribes the success or failure of region(s) through limited terms and reduces the North East to a commodity - comparable, a place valued in relation with another place, Detroit, according to certain economic terms. In doing so the article seeks to find or make a genre of failed regions. It evokes affects and materialities of decay, failed heroism, and sadness that fold into the lacking of the region. The article gives little focus to forms of convention that may have facilitated such failure (Hudson, 2001), instead the region is narrated as sick, lost, lacking. However, the author could have expressed the region through different kinds of

value, or without value at all, and in doing so he could have made and found different genres of the region. For example, he might have written on sea air, friendliness, pubs that have escaped gentrification, hills, historic ruins, seeing the bridges unfold across the Tyne as you arrive home on the train, atmospheres of positive and negative solidarity<sup>4</sup>. He might have written on a distinct genre of locally produced theatre which itself captures those atmospheres of solidarity; informally, affectionately, and sometimes disparagingly termed; 'Geordie-rama<sup>5</sup>.' These are just some of my own encounters with the place that I have lived for most of my life. This was not the author's experience or his interest. Instead the author, writing from London after a brief visit to the region creates the North-East as a bounded and decaying object, a rotten commodity failing in comparison to others; a failure predominantly through the terms of its capacity to generate money value. And this constitution of the region matters. It taps into some of the effects of de-industrialisation, and subsequent economic instability that I will explore in more detail in this chapter. But at the same time, those words further decompose 'the region' by performing it as sick, by giving it a value that is less.

Perhaps this, in part, is why the article caused a certain level of local outrage. It was circulated through Twitter and Facebook and criticized by residents, business members and other supporters of the North East for containing assumptions and inaccuracies. A petition was set up urging the author to return (from London) to the region and write 'a more balanced and educated piece' (Robb, 2014). And it really mattered *who* felt that they had the right to speak on this matter; that is who could

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<sup>4</sup> These are just some of my own and other participants' engagement with North East of England.

<sup>5</sup> Plays like 'Billy Elliot the Musical' and 'The Pitmen Painters' written by Lee Hall.

constitute the region in this way, and from what experience they were speaking. This was especially important amidst an absence of other articles - other constitutions of the region as national mainstream media was thought to have become increasingly 'London-centric' since budget cuts had led to a dwindling of resident Northern correspondents (Robb, 2014). Although thousands of comments emphatically celebrated the excessive joys of the North East, some responses used the same terms of analysis, i.e. they contested the accuracy of 'numbers,' used to claim the region as a sick man, rather than questioning their hegemony. They insisted that the region had value through the same abstracted terms that were used to argue that it did not. Together responses to the article escalated to become an expression of the region, an exchange demonstrating a process - a mode of affirming each other and place grown from that place which grows into that place - a positive form of public intimacy. In this act perhaps a bucket catches drips, or self-touch persists.

'She touches herself in of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity.... Two lips in continuous contact. Thus within herself she is already two but not divisible into one(s) - that caress each other'.

(Irigaray, 1985: 24)

Thinking this region through (but not equivalent to) her body, will offer a way in to how particular binding, valuing, making commodity of the region and bodies located there come to matter. Here, Irigaray describes two lips touching in one woman's body, continuous motion. Such 'self-touch' is bound with movement, becomes sensation, and precedes 'activity' or 'passivity.' To me, this speaks to forces

constitutive of the body and the region that precede and exceed the 'less or more' of abstracted value. It also speaks to an experience of womanhood that might resonate between women and in some ways be shared, just as a relation with the region was shared in responses to the article above. It speaks of a sense of belonging with, knowing, sensing the multiplicity of a body. Irigaray describes the 'violent break in' of the penis pushing apart her touch. His ascription of some abstracted value on to her, reduces her and in doing so fails to understand or account for that multiplicity. Motion is important here too - the form and force of penetration matters. Violence is a process that actively calls passivity into being: patriarchy forcibly separating the folding touch of (more than) two, rendering self-touch into obscurity and simultaneously constituting her as partial. The penis represents the ungraspability of generic value that renders her (difference) passive and general. And drawing on Irigaray, I will argue that it is precisely the ungraspability of equivalence drawn between commodities that produce susceptibility to rhythms of fraying and consolidation as it disrupts (but does not erase) what Irigaray terms the capacity for self-touch (or melting with the same sensation). In the same way, the article above becomes a kind of penetration, as it constitutes the region through its own terms of value and makes the region comparable to Detroit and Detroit equivalent to sick. And this ignores the multiplicity of both regions and reduces them to certain kinds of success or failure. However, the article also captures and draws focus on wounds inflicted by other constitutions of value less or more, as I go on to explore.

'And if a woman takes pleasure precisely from this incompleteness of form which allows her organ to touch itself over and over again, indefinitely, by itself, that pleasure is denied by a civilisation that privileges phallogomorphism'.

(Irigaray, 1985: 26)

As I use Irigaray here, the woman like the region is plural, 'as woman has sex organs more or less everywhere' (Irigaray, 1985: 28). The penis for Irigaray refers to multiple forces of patriarchy that penetrate, limit and reduce certain bodies. It (the penis) becomes both an appropriation *and* a critique of Marx. That is appropriation of Marx on the capitalist modes of production that constitute objects as commodity through a relation with ungraspable value, rendering relations with the intrinsic use value of those objects passive, frail or fragile, *and* a critique of the logic that constitutes female bodies as commodity. Patriarchy limits, reduces and makes binaries out of man-woman, nature-culture, and so on. This produces lacking, and writes out the multiplicity and 'self-touch' that for Irigaray precedes and exceeds her as commodity.

Therefore, as I use it here, Irigaray's penis becomes forces that constitute women and in this chapter the region through the terms of equivalent value - her value to him as determined by some abstracted measure. This penis penetrates a complex of multiple already sensing, incomparable, matter, and while doing so inhabits, inhibits and otherwise changes that body, stretching, inducing hormones, sweat, fear, and so on, in such a way that is (for Irigaray) self-supporting, self-gratifying, self-perpetuating. This means that the abstraction of equivalent value produces material effects and affects that get inside or co-constitute difference. As lips touched themselves *before* the penis touched them, then still a particular relation with this penis calls them into existence as value, as it does so it changes those lips (but not in a totalising way - the possibility for self-touch persists, other forms of relation and other possibilities persist too). To think this simply through labour in Marx:



'...Labour is the father of material wealth and nature is the mother... Tailoring and weaving, although they are qualitatively different productive activities, are both a productive expenditure of human brain, muscles, nerves, hands etc. and in this sense both human labour...'

(Marx, 1990: 134-135)

Here nature is attributed to woman and labour is attributed to man - the penis pushes apart the touching folds of the body as he reduces her to the status of a resource. However labouring brains, muscles, nerves, hands, in this context are both forgotten and demonstrated as labour *and* nature, and so the morphology of nature (body) and culture (work) becomes present. Nerves etc. produce labour and in doing so work the cloth and needle, but simultaneously the body is produced by labour i.e. the body is worked by the cloth and needle (or keyboard, coal, and so on). In a capitalist economy, then, the morphology of labour/ nature become mediated through generic and ungraspable value. This raises the challenge of how to map, trace, that is locate the effects of those mediations, without fixing and reducing, and therefore also co-constituting value in the same terms: less or more. For Irigaray, the labouring of 'her' liberates her from forces that reduce her to commodity. Irigaray's labour is a self-gratifying touch, touch feeding itself, through the rubbing and entanglement of multiple processes, differences and relations, and this entanglement is an opening of possibility, closed by the penetrating penis, that is the production of her only as commodity and therefore the reduction of many to one in/ as relation with another.

‘The value of commodities is the very opposite of the coarse materiality of their substance, not an atom of matter enters into its composition. Turn and examine a single commodity, by itself, as we will. Yet in so far as it remains an object of value, it seems impossible to grasp it’<sup>6</sup>.

(Irigaray, 1985: 186)

Because the value that constitutes the commodity is an abstraction, as she becomes commodity (but never only commodity) she is rendered passive, through value’s own terms. Such forces variously call the region and women in the region into passivity (as commodity) and in doing so shape and mould the body - whilst still the possibility for self-touch and/or mutual melting persists, so that other genres and other forms of intimacy (public or otherwise) remain. Think again of the article - how it identifies a region that is under-nourished, and how it simultaneously under-nourishes the region, as it fails to attend to other processes of becoming. But also how ‘the region’ responded to constitute its own affirmative genre. The equivalence drawn between the North East and Detroit remains abstracted from the multiplicity of both places. This equivalence is ungraspable, it is subject to shift, but nevertheless it matters.

‘...(T)his value is not found, is not recaptured, in her. It is only her measurement against a third term that remains external to her, and that makes it possible to compare her with another woman, that permits her to have a

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<sup>6</sup> Irigaray (1985: 176) quoting from Marx's *Capital*, Section 1, chapter 1. pp 55 (The page numbers given refer to the Modern Library edition, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels, rev. Ernest Untermann [New York, 1906]).

relation to another commodity in terms of an equivalence that remains foreign to both’.

(Irigaray, 1985: 178)

For me, what is important here is *the equivalence that remains foreign to both*; in this case, through the production of her as value she becomes entangled with ungraspable and *changing* value. This value remains foreign to her but is ascribed upon her, it gets inside. In this way value is both entangled with and abstracted from the body and the region. As value shifts and flows, this locating project hints at particular ways in which such penetrative forces constitute other forms of becoming, as the body remembers, as traces are left behind.

### 1.2.3. A Region Birthing Coal

‘They were miners in the pits and they were all on strike and they all got laid off and that’s like [when] the Jarrow March appeared’

(Robyn)

The body or region becomes commodity through its relation with some generically measured value that renders it comparable and equivalent to another body or region. This abstraction simultaneously folds into difference and in doing so materializes in particular ways and co-produces genre. And it is through the extraction, production and commodification of resources - coal and steel, amongst other things, that the North East of England came to hold this status of dying/decaying man. In 1936, Robyn’s Granddad embarked on the ‘Jarrow Crusade’ - a protest march against

unemployment and extreme poverty in the North-East of England. Industries including mining, ship-building and steel production had boomed during the First World War, but suffered in the great depression. The men walked almost 300 miles from Jarrow to the House of Parliament in London. This journey embodied physical, political and emotional distance between the North-East of England and its capital. The prime minister refused to see the marchers when they arrived and at the time the event achieved little publicity. Later Robyn's granddad refused to allow his son to become a miner.

'Me granddad always said to me dad right you're never going down the pits, like I'll never ever, working conditions standards and pay like the way you were treat, and I think me dad was there for a week until somebody, I think one of the ponies kicked him and err... that was when they still had the pit ponies and you know and the ponies kicked him and that was it me granddad was like na you're not going back simple as that, I'll never ever let you go down the pits...' (Instead her dad) 'did all sorts, ah god, he like worked in the glass mill, glass factory I think it was em Pembletons Glass and then em he worked at a paper mill and then he ended up with the council just doing various... he was like a jack of all trades with the council you ka like a joiner a leccie, sparkie, just all kinds of stuff so he was a good all rounder at doing everything.'

Robyn's dad's trajectory from industry to the public sector resonates with one broader journey in the history of the region. Coal that lay in the ground preceded coal as use and coal holding more or less and equivalent 'value.' But use and exchange of the

commodity has taken place in the North East of England for thousands of years<sup>7</sup>. With seams close to the surface and in close proximity to water, coal was extracted and transported more efficiently in the North East than in some other parts of the UK, and so it was excavated in abundance. Speedy exchange increased profit and digging intensified. Through this process coal co-constituted bodies that worked it, bodies that were warmed and bodies (largely elsewhere) that profited from it. And as bodies dug for coal, together they shaped the body of a region. As use diversified and demand increased, populations exploded, more extracting: salt, fishing, steel works, shipbuilding, textiles, and other industries developed alongside this too as the North East became one of the birth places of industrial capitalism (Hudson, 2001). Bodies laboured, and birthed children who laboured, agricultural land was replaced with houses, factories, roads, social clubs, libraries, bands, sewing clubs, and in this shape, communities were built, grew and evolved. Until...

‘The nature of capitalism ensures that all industries at some point become "old", as, in a sense, do the regions in which they are – or were - embedded’.

(Hudson 2005:585)

And then, fragility bound with the ungraspability of value became present as at various points threads unravelled. The region births less coal (the rest lies still underground), sews less, forges less, fishes less. Still houses sit and communities remain. Sewing factories, component manufacturing, call centres come and go, some linger, some (most) move elsewhere, or close and still coal lies in the ground. And, like her dad, Robyn and a number of other participants in this project moved from

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<sup>7</sup> Use of outcrop coal has been dated to 3000 BC, and use and evidence of trade in coal dated to 200 AD (Smith, 1997).

factory to factory, this time textiles and small component factories, as one by one they closed. The public sector grows and shrinks in this region, as '*dollops of public money*' are invested and then withdrawn (Hudson, 2013; Kitsen, Martin, Tyler, 2011; The Public Sector Research Centre 2011) and so the region becomes caught in a relation of dependency with its affluent Capital, a Capital made affluent, in part, off the backs and blood of the region. In this way the vagina has been shaped and moulded by the penetrating penis - that is certain relations with generic value have had material effects on what might be thought as the region. This changes, but doesn't erase capacity for self-touch - that is the coexistence of other forms of relation, the possibility that other genres might and do settle.

And of course this is a general story that evokes a certain dynamic or form of relation between capitalism and the North East of England. This story seeks to capture turbulence and the settling of asymmetries integral to the less or more of value. It fails to get at complex micro economies buzzing through the North-East, it perpetuates a dominance of masculine industrial histories, whilst hinting at colonisation for coal, it forgets wealth that settled there through trade in slaves (Charlton, 2008) and that as certain industries flourish cheaply elsewhere, labouring lives are lost elsewhere. However, what this attempts to do is evoke how bodies are pulled in and along by industrialisation and then deindustrialisation and capture the rhythms of loss that become embedded in that process - until the thriving region becomes a sick man, within certain terms.

What, at the time of writing, remains for these women is within certain (relative) terms; paid work less graspable here than some other places in the UK. A body less

able to sell labour power for money commodity and this propensity emerges in excess of that body. And so a body/a region holding less value, and/or less capacity to produce value, becomes narrated as sick and dying. And people in the North East of England, are sicker and dying faster than those in other regions (Ellis and Fry, 2008). So although perhaps 'this currency of alternatives and oppositions, choices and negotiations [only has value for us when] we remain in their order and re-enact their systems of commerce' (Irigaray, 1980: 70), this story shows how the effects and affects of the ascription of value close down opportunities to resist 'remaining in its order'. Despite this, other possibilities persist and can be enacted in a range of subtle and subversive ways as participants demonstrate later on in this thesis.

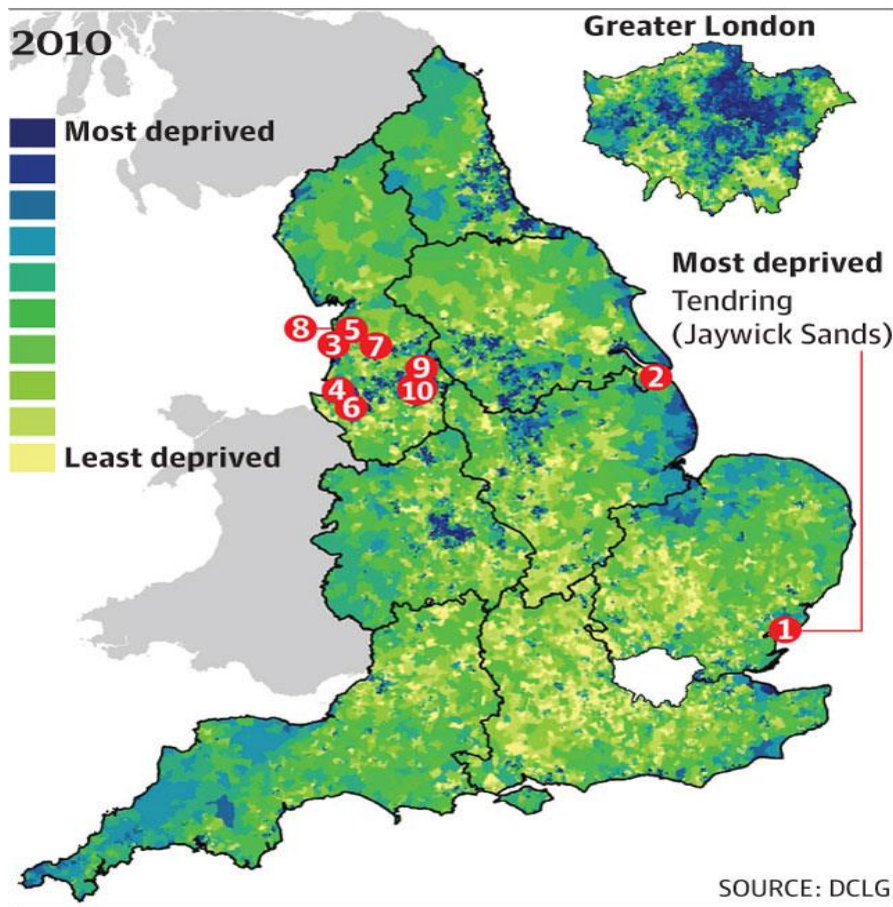
If abstracted value shape geographies in particular ways, this value swells and diminishes across time/space, but traces remain. One imposition folds into another. Less or more availability of paid work, bound with histories of (de)industrialisation become framed and fixed and mapped onto what were industrial strongholds<sup>8</sup>. Now, we arrive at a place where, in other constitutions of the region, 'economically inactive' inhabitants, including participants in this project, are measured and bounded on charts and maps. In this process, they (the bodies and the region) are made generic and compared according to the abstracted measure of 'deprivation'. For example, the

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<sup>8</sup> See Crisp et al (2009) Beatty, Fothergill and Gore (2012), Gore et al (2007) on the mapping of employment gap onto what were industrial strongholds.

map on the following page shows England's areas through a measure of deprivation 'less or more.'

## England's deprived areas



Map showing the UK measured and divided according to 'multiple indices of deprivation.'

Image source: The Guardian [online] available:  
<http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/mar/31/deprivation-map-indices-multiple> last viewed [October 27<sup>th</sup> 2015]

Like many other de-industrialised areas in the UK the North East becomes a splodge of dark blue, surrounded by a cluster of blue in the top right corner of a strange sort



of map, a stretch from the spread of yellow further down. On this map, blue refers to the *most deprived* and yellow *the least*. And the council ward where our project is placed sits within a cluster of blue. We fall in the 'highest ten percent' in the country on the *multiple indices of deprivation*. Each region is produced as a relation with its fellow, it becomes a colour, a commodity, both an abstraction materialising in a range of ways, and a particular indication of materialising abstractions. And although pains are made to confirm that this map does not measure deprivation embodied by individuals but instead only 'areas', bodies located in each region become enveloped by this idea of relative deprivation, limited and abstracted under the same terms - sick bodies in a sick region. Through the frames of *income deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation and disability, education skills and training deprivation, barriers to housing and services, living environment deprivation, and crime*, the asymmetrical distribution of opportunities are captured and traced, though little account is given for the absence or presence of love, touch or intimacy, loneliness, creativity, or parental energy, and so on. The map makes regions comparable through the terms of less or more 'deprivation', so that deprivation becomes embodied by the region.

We are working in a town in a region that was once an industrial heartland, now it's not. Then under particular political conditions the public sector was expanded here and now it is scaled back again. And so the building up and breaking down of landscapes becomes a consequence of the fragility of ungraspable value. And so, as this (and other de-industrialised regions) become far less the production and extraction of commodities such as textiles, coal, or steel, values shift, but the body remembers. More than traces remain in buildings, museums, art and theatre, roads,

atmospheres, accents, nostalgia, jokes shared, tears shed, health inequalities, levels of deprivation. The unsurprising sense prevails that as industries become torn from these bodies, from this room that they (in part) created, they are present in their absence. Thinking the constitution of the region in this way gets at the violence of this kind of penetration. In this case, capitalist value produces passive bodies and places vulnerable to turbulence through its own terms, but those bodies and places always also precede and exceed this passivity. And so, if 'the lived body, the experience of corporeality, is a social body: but must not be reduced merely to a sociological phenomenon' (Grosz, 1989: 111), the North-East region might be thought in the same way, as it becomes bound with body-subjects located there. This land was dug into, brought into particular modes of existence as and through entanglement with generic, ungraspable 'value' and therefore made fragile through its passive attachment to those fluid and ungraspable terms. 'Violent penetration' comes to represent the forces that produce bodies and the region as holding abstracted value - in doing so rendering them generic and comparable, writing out difference but also writing out other possibilities - other forms of mediation between the singular and the generic, other ways of making and finding genre. But still she holds the potential for self-touch, that is for other forms of becoming.

#### **1.2.4. Valuing Women - Less or more?**

'I am woman, I am affected directly and in my everyday life by what has been made of the subject of woman; I have paid in my very body for all the metaphors and images that our culture has deemed fit to produce of woman'.

(Braidotti, 1994: 187)

In the following section I fold the region back in on the body. In doing so I think Harvey's (2001) description of the 'building' up and breaking down of landscape, through the 'metaphors and images that our culture has deemed fit to produce of women.' After Irigaray, I engage with the shifting forms of abstracted value that have brought her into being as commodity. In the rest of the thesis, and in the play I attempt to keep hold of how she proceeds and exceeds her status as commodity and worker. Here however, I continue to explore ways in which sexed and regional bodies are packaged, made generic and comparable. I think about the material effects of such constitutions of ungraspable value as values shift but traces remain.

'In this new matrix of History, in which man begets man as his own likeness, wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men'.

(Irigaray, 1985:175)

For Irigaray, women have been constituted as commodity through the ascription of values abstracted from her and determined by him. This she argues has been the social, cultural and economic order for centuries in western contexts. And in this way perhaps capitalism evolves from and alongside patriarchy. Until we reach a point where 'in this new matrix of History, in which capital begets capital as his own likeness, wives, daughters, men, sons, brothers and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among capital?' (Irigaray, 1985: 175). For Irigaray, women are constituted by the forces of patriarchy as empty vessels to be filled, owned and exchanged by men. Even as she works she becomes commodity. And differently, those men who labored for coal and lost their

lives and health and livelihoods, were also made passive by the ungraspability of abstracted value that made a commodity out of coal. But of course women like those men are also always more than their entanglement with abstracted and fluid formations of value. Like the coal, and bodies working the coal, she proceeds and exceeds his constitution of her as commodity.

Patriarchies like capitalisms as 'sensually invested forms of convention' have changed over time but as so those forms shift traces remain. For example, in the Second World War as various industries in the North East beyond began to boom, as male workforces were diverted to other places, her labour became useful (to support the war effort) and she was able to engage with paid work in a limited way (generally). This move was not without its tensions and the state became a 'broker' that attempted to mediate between entrenched social views about the roles of women and the pragmatic demands of the war. After the war many pre-war attitudes toward women both in terms of domestic and paid labour continued (Summerfield, 2013). Further in a context of a diminished population women were 'encouraged' by a patriarchal state to focus on reproductive labour and a cultural offensive was launched to return women to domesticity (Summerfield, 2013:1). Amidst all of this, however, she also finds spaces to resist, to subvert, to move outside of such forms of relation, making her own genres through the women's movement and beyond. Slowly the workplace becomes more open to women, though still there are limits including restrictions to pay and leadership opportunities. And amidst current conditions 'activity in the paid labour market is generally deemed a necessary requirement of full citizenship status' in the UK for women and men (Dwyer and Ellison, 2009: 65). And despite this the unpaid labour still has to happen and largely still fall to women. And traces remain -

women are still, at times, constituted as sexual objects in the workplace and beyond, women are still, at times, confined to the home, they are still victims of male violence. However what makes a woman deemed 'productive' has shifted significantly over time. For some women this closes down space to commit to unpaid labour or takes her decision to do so out of her hands. Despite this the UK is not a country with full employment. As I have already identified, supply of paid labor in the North East is relatively limited generally. Further, generally, lone parents (most often women) find it difficult to find paid work that fits around childcare, and other unpaid responsibilities (Shildrick et al. 2012a, 2012b; Tunstall et. al 2012). This means that while she is now valued predominantly according to her relation or not with paid work (as demonstrated by shifts towards a model of active welfare) this work is not always easy or even possible to attain.

Such shifts have intensified under the current government in austerity. In the early 2000s New Labour redefined the notion of social security, so that lone parents and disabled people were no longer exempt from conditional welfare provision and the compulsory move into paid employment that this implied (Macleavy, 2011). Initially, this move interacted with a 'distribution of opportunities,' which was posited as replacing a 'distribution of wealth' (Giddens, 1998). Training, job searches and other forms of participation were increasingly demanded for the welfare 'reward'. In the meantime additional funding was ploughed into subsidised childcare, employment and training opportunities. However, a Conservative- Liberal Democrat coalition (and now a Conservative government) oversees the scaling back of opportunity and the escalation of conditionality, which becomes increasingly punitive under austerity (Macleavy, 2011). And so at the time of writing UK workfare intensifies pressure on

lone parents and other women using benefits, who are in various ways, constituted as lacking and in need of transformation in comparison to bodies in paid work. There is a double penetration here since welfare to workfare policy is developed through assumptions that employment conditions are distributed in the same way across the country as they are in London (Dwyer and Ellison, 2009) and that they are the same for men as they are for women (Shildrick et al. 2012b). This progressively becomes a) a very specific closing down of opportunity for lone parents (predominantly women) not to enter paid work but to focus on unpaid care responsibilities (prioritising paid economies to the detriment of unpaid economies) and b) generic denial of the limitations of jobs markets and housing provision across the UK that are distributed unevenly as a direct result of de-industrialisation. Whilst constituting women generically with or without value according to their relation with paid work, this simultaneously denies the asymmetries that have settled over time. This denies the absence of suitable available work as it pushes women into paid work, and it refuses to make space for non-capitalist economies. In this way, value gained through participation in the paid labour market becomes ungraspable and generic and yet simultaneously constructed through particular policy interventions as individuated and within grasp.

Further, the constitution of her body on 'benefits' as lacking value and in need of transformation is perpetuated by research, for example a genre of quantitative health research (for a review see Moller et. al, 2011) that describes links between unemployment and increased mortality, worse mental health status, higher morbidity and long-term illness. Like our map of deprivation this captures something significant. On the one hand, this work demonstrates the effects of settling

asymmetries and acts as a challenge to social relations productive of such asymmetry. However this also reproduces binaries between 'paid work' and 'unpaid work', it binds the body and fails to challenge the logic that being in paid work is 'good' for the body and being out of paid work is 'bad' for the body, or further by implication that a body in paid work is good, and a body out of paid work is bad.

This research is (mis)appropriated by the Department for Work and Pensions in the UK to justify pressuring the unemployed to move into paid work. For example, 'overall, the beneficial effects of (paid) work outweigh the risks of work, and are greater than the harmful effects of long-term unemployment or prolonged sickness absence. Work is generally good for health and well-being' (Waddell and Burton, 2006). However other findings suggest that work with little autonomy precarious, temporary working contracts and low pay may also have negative health implications which are just as, if not more, severe than being out of paid work (See the Marmot Review, 2010; Scott-Marshall, 2009). And so although work on spatial distributions of ill-health and unemployment may suggest settling asymmetries and a 'North South Divide' (as in Moller et al. 2011) sometimes the limited framing and political appropriation of this research risks producing another constitution of the body out of paid work as lacking and in need of improvement. This fails to sufficiently question what poverty, fractured communities and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes associated with unemployment do to incidences of poor health for those out of paid work. This fails to imagine possibilities that exceed and precede capitalist forms of convention. The effects of the entanglement of body/place/value are denied. Increasingly, an individuated woman is ascribed with ultimate responsibility for her capacity to enter the paid labour market, and ultimately for her own health and well-

being. In this way the individuated ascription of (lacking) value, through 'worklessness' is re-enforced while certain social relations that constitute the settling of asymmetries in health, in access to paid work and so on, continue.

Associated with the co-constitution of benefits bodies and unhealthy bodies, is a growing assimilation of North East bodies, benefits bodies and fat bodies. Given that the North East is often bounded as a region with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the UK, it is perhaps not a surprise that the benefits body and other post-industrial bodies including the 'Geordie'<sup>9</sup> body become entangled on images like the 'map of deprivation.' How fat becomes part of this is interesting especially given the context of an under-nourished body/ region described in the first article. As one article put it:

'North East tops 'Fat-Map' with highest levels of obesity-related hospital admissions'

(*ITV News Online*, 2014)



Image source: <http://www.itv.com/news/tyne-tees/2014-10-28/north-east-tops-fatmap-with-county-durham-topping-the-list-of-obesity-related-hospital-admissions/> October 28<sup>th</sup> 2014 available: [November 4<sup>th</sup> 2015]

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<sup>9</sup> Colloquialism describing somebody in or from the North-East of England.



Like work on health and unemployment, like the deprivation index, and like a diagnosis of the region as sick and undernourished, this kind of research gets at something. It traces certain effects of capitalist forms of convention that decompose bodies in particular ways. As Berlant (2011) suggests, the widespread availability of cheap food, long and/or precarious working hours, tiredness, family histories of poverty and starvation, may impact on the health of certain bodies in certain ways - generally. However, missing from the headline and accompanying article is also the possibility that this photograph has captured a moment of tenderness as two hands touch and perhaps melt together. Instead, this faceless, generic North-East woman's body with flesh on show becomes up for grabs. Like the 'draining of state resource' through the receipt of benefits, hospital admissions represent another form through which 'Geordie bodies' might be felt as a threat to public resource. Amidst and even before austerity a sense of excess that needs taking into control becomes attached to people who are out of paid work, fat, poor and otherwise undeserving. Take the way that fat Geordie bodies were evoked in this article about a Television advert in the UK in 2012.

### **'Fat Geordie Ads Are Funny.'**

A series of TV commercials for WH Smith drew 129 complaints for supposedly ridiculing fat people and Geordies...

In one, a well-dressed, snobbish South-East couple visit their obese and unsophisticated relatives in Newcastle upon Tyne.

The overweight husband and wife are shown sitting on their sofa, repeatedly heaving themselves forward. When a visitor asks if this is a new dance, he is told his hosts are simply trying to stand up.

The Independent Television Commission ruled yesterday that the 'pantomime nature' of the commercials was unlikely to cause harm or distress and dismissed the complaints...

(Daily Mail Online, 2015)

Through disgust and mockery this constitutes North East fat bodies as lacking. In the UK fat, it seems, *currently* holds less equivalent value than thin. Fatness and thinness become another form through which value, less or more, can be measured, another form through which bodies and the region can be compared and another form through which 'the North East' is decomposed or measured relative to other regions. The valuing of fat itself then becomes another form of penetration, another way of binding and valuing the body so that it too becomes worth less or more. And the undeserving body/region on benefits 'leeching resources' that is also a fat 'greedy/lazy' body becomes vulnerable to disgust, shame and/or ridicule. Yet again these bodies are constituted as objects of failure, in need of transformation.

#### **1.2.5. Dynamic Context: A Partial, Creative Story**

Throughout this chapter I have engaged with value as Irigaray uses it, as a relation between the generic and singular that renders her equivalent to an abstracted measure. In this case generic value bears no relation to the multiplicity of her and is subject to change in such a way that is beyond her grasp. Still it limits and reduces her and this has material effects and affects. Patriarchy and Capitalism are morphing forms of convention and both draw relations between the singular and value in different ways. I have shown then how the region and bodies located there are

constituted through those ungraspable terms and the effects of this, as the region becomes a lowly rank on the indices of deprivation, a sick man, as it is both too fat and undernourished. What this chapter in all of its contradictions and generalisations attempts to do is think about the dynamism of context. That is, to consider how relations between forms of convention and genre change over time, but still traces remain and still those genres hold a certain kind of shape. Those forms of convention as forces constitute body/place not in totality but in such a way that materialises, lingers and leaks into other modes of becoming. These forms and foldings are much more complex and messy than I have described them here. But I wanted to try to think about the escalation of particular asymmetries and turbulence that emerge in relation with constitutions of the commodity. Body-subjects in place are made passive to the building up and breaking down of terms that constitute value. Although 'we are not voids, lacks which wait for sustenance, fulfilment, or plenitude from an other' (Irigaray, 1985: 73), the constitution of us through the terms of abstracted value always produces us as lacking as our value can always be more.

This chapter has suggested how fragility becomes an effect of patriarchy and capitalism as certain landscapes are 'built up and then broken down again'. A region grows according to a certain kind of industry then withdrawal leaves a hole in the employment market. Despite this in the contemporary women out of paid work are framed as 'lacking' and in need of transformation (generally). Welfare-workfare and a culture of the 'undeserving poor' demands that they take individuated responsibility for getting a job. This denies asymmetries that have settled to disadvantage the region and women. In this way, as austerity tightens its grip, as she continues to be violated, she is blamed for that violation - she wore the wrong clothes, she walked home alone,

she asked for it. If the region is too sick or too fat the inference is made that autonomous women and the region can become healthy, thin, better, more and only through the same terms that rendered it sick. *You will achieve generic value, you will make it happen, you will get a paid job, you will achieve the good life, a successful work-life balance, and so on.* This denies relations with the generic that facilitate or limit means to achieve this, for example, the folding of industrial histories and a highly localized jobs market, the withdrawal of public services, unpaid care demands. This becomes a paradox of individuated transformation. Value is generic, ungraspable and taken out of hand, value is always a relation in excess of the body. However, I have explored current ways in which the onus for gaining value is ascribed onto an individuated body or region. This constitutes a kind of dissonance - a pull in different directions. Demands for perpetual transformation emerging from commodification, that is a journey always towards 'more' value in the future, inevitably produces less, that is lacking in the present. Material effects seep beyond specific constitutions of the body and the region as commodity through traces left behind (the body remembers). Despite this, and as Irigaray reminds us, the body always proceeds and exceeds those forms of relation, other forms of becoming persist, and other possibilities remain. This sets up context as dynamic. It also attempts to establish something that I explore further in the thesis, that is how women in this project become neither completely autonomous (with total agency) or fully passive and solely subject to the forces of, in this case, capitalism and patriarchy.

## **The Room**

Like the room the rest of this thesis and the play will also be partial, creative, incomplete, but grown from and folding into an empirical specificity. This means that some of the relations that precede and exceed her and the region as value are explored and surfaced. Simultaneously, how certain values meet and co-constitute those specific sites and body-subjects (and in doing so meet difference) are also surfaced and explored. In this way the thesis, including the play, will (albeit implicitly) capture how constitutions that I have outlined here - of a region on benefits, sick, undernourished and simultaneously too fat - seep and leak into 'the room' that is our specific empirical situation in a number of ways, but also how the room slips away from those constitutions. And how through it other stories can be told - other capacities remain, surface and may even become nourished.

So I finish this chapter by returning to the empirical specificity that I introduced at the start: a dusty blue hall in a family support center. It is a grey day as I make my first approach to the centre. Arthur, my son, is crying in the back seat. I drive along the main street in Bensham, Gateshead and to my right a row of empty houses reach up the hill. Half of them have been flattened, but there's no sign of demolition work happening today. Opposite there is a church and a playground. Most of the equipment is missing or broken. Teenagers sit on a wall. On my left there is a garage, then an Italian Café. I come to the fish and chip shop. I indicate then turn on to the street I've been looking for where I find more terraced houses with what looks like a church squeezed into the middle. A cluster of women with buggies stand outside, some are having a smoke. It's raining and coats are pulled over heads. I get Arthur out of the car and say hello. 'You press that buzzer for the crèche and then the other one for the women's group' somebody tells me. 'Right' I say then make a joke with

one of the children. She smiles at Arthur who I introduce to the group. We chat for a short while about who I am, about the weather, the kids and so on. 'We'll be in in a minute' somebody tells me as I head towards the door, 'just finishing this'. I settle Arthur into the crèche. He seems relaxed and runs to find some 'dressy ups'. Then I find the main space. The walls are painted blue. This is where I will spend Thursday mornings for the next two years. It's a full building, inscribed with photographs, crafts, piles of equipment, a tea urn, lists, knocks and bumps and firm reminders to wash our hands, be kind, keep joining in... It's a room filled with potential... It is a threatened embrace that holds, and/or is comprised of a certain kind of effort; remains of activity, sadness that this may, or probably will become something else.

I see a notice on the wall. This is the mission statement of the family support service. Perhaps some assumptions are built into the statement, or particular needs have been identified. For example there is a presence of 'disadvantage, disempowerment, isolation, lacking confidence. This forms a necessary part of the service's funding strategy. Funding is rewarded as a consequence of the service's location in a ward, and more broadly in a region, high on the 'indices of multiple deprivations'. Here, then, the general folds into the specificity. During the two years I spend there the terms and conditionality of that funding have changed, money is slowly withdrawn. Funding becomes more explicitly bound to the facilitation and evidencing of some kind of improvement within certain terms. For example, rather than 'social well-being,' groups may be established to facilitate a return to work or training, debt relief and even at the time of participation exercise and fitness classes were set up for weighing, measuring, tracking improvement. But still other forms of relation remained. And in the two years I spent at the group we didn't only develop a play,

weigh ourselves and learn how to make the most of computers, we also chatted, we made a banner sized proggy mat, we painted Christmas cards and had a go at various other crafts. We tried belly dancing, self-defence and Zumba, we drank hundreds of cups of tea, ate a few breakfasts, we shared stories and advice, laughed quite a lot and sometimes got annoyed, but for me never really bored. And those activities become part of the fabric of the building, through that participation we made the space together, and at the heart of this thesis is a question of how those women's lives came together in that space but also beyond that space, and how those women and that space carried on together and/or apart amidst those changes and others in austerity.

## 1.3. The Multiplicity of Body/Voice: On Theatre-As-Method

### 1.3.1. Introductions

On that first day we didn't actually do any drama. In the room (the blue room) some tables were laid out with orange juice, tea, coffee and croissants. Breakfast was a start of term incentive to attract people back after the holiday. But the numbers were low that day - only six women in total (excluding Gabbie and I). Strangely (given that this was a women's group) a man was sat at a table in the corner with some scales and medical equipment. Ignoring him, we all chatted for a bit. Most in the group were already mothers. I enjoyed being part of an existing story and feeling the kind of 'public intimacy' that having Arthur gave me.

'Don't worry about the crèche, they're great, they're like family.'

'I've had four through and they love it.'

I was happy to expose my insecurities to these women. It felt safe to do so. We already shared something, or at least had a range of resources to help negotiate our meeting; sleep, teething, which products work best and why, breast-feeding or bottle, our experiences of giving birth. These conversations recurred and developed throughout the process and our intimacy grew as they became more personal. I could enter the life of this group in a very particular way because I had children but also



perhaps because I was willing to be open about the struggles as well as the joys in that.

There was a buzz of excitement about the bootcamp from the previous term. Women were full of the trauma, the endurance, the sense of achievement, spurring each other on, collective struggle - a shared experience. It became clear that the perky one sitting on my left wasn't part of the group. She had also come in to talk about a project (this was uncomfortable) and introduced us to an exercise program that would be happening at the service, separate to the women's group. Funding had been provided to run the course because Gateshead had been identified as an area with an 'obesity problem'. Participants were invited to get a medical check from the man in the corner. This involved weighing us and taking our blood pressure. We would take part in the exercise and compare results when we were weighed later on down the line. A chat about health and body image followed; some people claimed that they'd like to be thinner, others that they didn't have a problem with their body. One woman stated that fatness didn't necessarily imply unhealthiness, but that she would do the exercise anyway to have fun, feel fitter and to support the group and the initiative. I liked this mini subversion. The subtext as I read it was a gentle and jolly, 'don't patronize me, don't think that I need working on, because I am happy with myself exactly as I am'. I could understand that and wanted to work with such sentiments in the play.

It was my turn to introduce the project. The set up felt all wrong - messy. Medical tests and weighing had confused things. Never mind, I attempted to improvise and the response was interesting. I was asked a lot of questions that I hadn't expected or thought how to answer. 'A PhD. What's that a teaching qualification or something?'

‘What’s it actually for?’ And ‘what do you want to get out of it?’ Me ‘well I hope we can work out what you want to get out of it?’ ‘Drama?’ A mixed response ‘I’m not acting in front of anybody.’ ‘That’s ok you don’t have to.’ ‘I’ve done a bit of acting at the Little Theatre.’ ‘If there’s anything we can do to support you with your course then that’s fine.’ Kindness. And Gabbie, the drama facilitator was great as she drew in the quieter members of the group. I left the two-hour session not only feeling that this might be ok, but also a little less alone as a mum.

This gets at how my first encounter with the group was negotiated in a range of ways through our different experiences of motherhood and the connections that sharing those experiences formed between us. In this chapter I am going to focus on the methods that we used in this project to mediate encounters with the everyday lives of these women. This project is ultimately about them, and other themes or genres including femininity, motherhood, precarity, poverty, and my main focus – austerity – differently surface as a consequence of our in-depth engagement. The emphasis here is on the theatre-making process at the core of the project. I use the term ‘theatre-as-method’ to refer to theatre-making in a context of social research - that is theatre made with the explicit intention of generating research material. In our own project ‘research material’ would include the output of the play, but also other material generated through the development of the play and as a consequence of the play-making process<sup>10</sup>. This included one to one conversations with the women which happened after the drama workshops. These conversations were a continuation of group dialogues developed around and after the drama making process. The intimacy of the conversations reflected bonds that had been built through our shared

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<sup>10</sup> I took notes at the end of every session and participants were clear from the outset that these would be used in the thesis and other published material.

experiences of motherhood, of being at the women's group and of drama-making which I go on to explore in more detail in an interlude on habit.

Before outlining what we did in more detail, I explore what using theatre-as-method can offer in human geography amidst broader work with performance and performativity, with focus on the multiplicity of body and voice. As I argue, geographers using theatre to develop research material, as a dissemination technique, or to provide an 'immersive encounter,' have not explicitly considered relations between body and voice, and in places this work (however implicitly) reproduces binary framings of the concepts. I engage with post-structural feminism and in particular feminist new materialism, to consider the relationality of body and voice and the implications of this for attuning to and expressing genre. Then, drawing on examples from our project, I suggest that participative theatre techniques can expand forms for doing/thinking body/voice in collaboration with participants.

When actors came together to perform our script in development it mattered what they looked like, how they sounded, even what they smelt of. Performers enlivened the words in the script. And as the actor speaks air is expelled from the lungs. The vocal folds vibrate. But even in silence the actor has a voice - through gesture, poise, a body breathing, sexed, coloured and textured. How in this way does voice become part of the body and vice versa? When somebody listening or noticing lifts or deadens the mood? As air fills the lungs, muscles contract, endorphins release? Therefore, I understand 'body/voice' as folding together, as a series of relations between shared forces and difference. This raises the question: how might using theatre-as-method

expand forms for geographical experimentation with body/voice<sup>11</sup>? This kind of approach contributes to and reflects on recent but still hesitant engagement with theatre as part of what Shaw, DeLyser and Crang (2015) describe as a new found openness to what counts as method in human geography, including a (re)turn to ‘creative doings’ in and as research (Hawkins, 2015). However, whilst theatre has begun to be employed in various ways in human geography, and I review some of this work below, I argue that it remains underutilised in the context of this openness to method.

Specifically I engage with theatre-as-method to think again about a distinction that settles (explicitly or otherwise) between body and voice in human geography (see Crang, 2003; 2005). Conventionally voice is understood as an expression that conveys a thought or feeling. Talk-based methods foreground participant voice and as I write I have been encouraged to find my voice. In written reflexive approaches the body risks becoming like an ‘empty vessel’ that positions voice through stabilised identities (Crang, 2003) and through immersive practices the body becomes its capacity to affect and be affected (Dewsbury, 2003; Latham, 2003; McCormack, 2003; Wylie, 2002). I argue that recent theoretical work in human geography has opened new spaces for thinking more about the relations *between* body and voice that constitute the body-subject. This work (albeit differently) develops from or resonates with, theories falling under the rubric ‘new materialism(s)’ (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, 2012). In this chapter I consider body-subjects that are not fixed, bound or stable but instead

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<sup>11</sup> I use experiment throughout after Gibson-Graham (2011:4) meaning: ‘what can we learn from what is happening on the ground.’ In experimentation there is no active transformative subject ‘learning about’ a separate inert object, but a subject-object that is a ‘becoming world.’

understood to be in process, becoming at the nexus of multiple relations with-in (for example Colls and Fannin (2013) on the placenta) and with-out (Grosz, 1994; Colls, 2012; Puar, 2012). Differently in this work body-subjects become indeterminate, relational, excessive, *and* differentiated, fleshy, situated. A whole range of material and immaterial forces meet to constitute body-subjects. This undermines a Cartesian divide between mind and body and thinks across divisions between subject and object, nature and culture (Braidotti, 2012). In doing so it creates opportunity for understanding material and immaterial relations between voice and body. This, as I go on to show, has significant implications for how we might think about body and voice in method.

If words (spoken or written) become the primary vehicle through which voice is given, taken or found, I suggest that theatre-as-method provides one way of shifting that emphasis. Voice may be expressed through a movement, a sound, a gesture, or even a kind of stillness. My claim, following others (Crang, 2005; Latham, 2003), is that despite an expansion of more than talk-based qualitative methods, including to installation (Hawkins, 2010), phonology (Gallagher and Prior, 2013), and visual methodologies (Tolia-Kelly, 2012; Rose and Tolia-Kelly 2012), there is more scope for thinking/doing voice beyond the written and/or spoken word. Whilst I argue that theatre-as-method expands how voice is expressed, I also argue that we need to think of body and voice in relation. So that voice is not an expression of a stable already constituted subject but instead becomes an occasion for the constitution of the subject. Therefore amidst feminist ontologies in new materialism my use of the term body/voice is intended to stress that voice is inseparable from the body: that is inseparable from the ways in which bodies meet and fold into their outsides (see

Haraway, 1991). When voice is written or spoken it is embodied *and* excessive. More could be done to play with this. Further, forms other than the written or spoken word can become expressions of body/voice in the generation *and* dissemination of research material. In this thesis I think more about opportunity in theatre-as-method to expand forms of expression beyond and in excess of words. I suggest that being 'between' theatre and geography in this way provides new occasions to disrupt 'the disembodied voices of academia and voiceless bodies colonised for knowledge' in human geography (Crang, 2003: 499 quoting Spry, 2001: 718).

Given their influence on work at the intersection of theatre-geography, I begin by considering some of the ways in which theories of performance and performativity have become folded into the generation of research material in human geography. I unpick how body and voice are engaged differently through those processes and this supports my suggestion that 'voice' still predominantly becomes limited to linguistic modes of expression. Then I offer a review of existing meeting points between theatre and geography. I argue that some of this work also restricts voice to linguistic modes of expression, or foregrounds sensual learning that excludes differentiated bodies. However, I develop from key exceptions that suggest new possibilities for thinking/doing body/voice in theatre-as-method.

I follow by demonstrating some of the ways in which theatre-as-method multiplies form for experimenting with relations between body and voice. Our play was both fictional and co-constituted by the embodied and embedded experiences of participants and later actors and audiences. Here the research output was not distinct from but folded into the formal techniques mediating its development. Research material was enlivened and characterized by experiments with body/voice and

simultaneously body/voice became (however lightly, however partially) constituted by the process. This output continued to breathe, dance; be open to excesses through live performance as a mode of dissemination. Therefore, I consider how body/voice becomes as and through forms of mediation between things shared - that is forces that meet and fold in to bodies - and difference - that is bodies and/or moments individuated at the nexus of those forces.

### **1.3.2. Body and Voice in Performance and Performativity**

Theories of performance and performativity have folded into and legitimated work at the intersection of theatre and geography. I begin by examining how body and voice have surfaced between those theories and broader methodological practices. For example, new techniques that stressed research as performative, without always drawing explicitly on theories of performance or performativity, were integral to challenging positivism in human geography. These include written performances aimed at emphasizing the socially and politically constituted nature of knowledge claims (see McDowell, 1992; Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi, 1995). If readers were brought closer to the author's subjective, phenomenological self then they might better understand how that would determine the kind of knowledge produced (for a review and critique of positionality and reflexivity in geography see Rose (1997)). Sometimes in this work the body becomes present as providing a 'sort of inescapable positioning of the researcher - through race, disability or gender' (Crang, 2002: 500). Therefore this anticipates a stable bodily-identity that can be rationally articulated using spoken or written words. Difference is conceived as anterior, and possibility for slippage is closed down by written accounts that 'fix' relations between bodies and

identities. Other approaches recognize knowledge as both partial, embodied and in process (after Haraway, 1991). They situate bodies in research encounters that are open to slippage/ subversion and/ or recognize processes of morphology between researcher, situation, and participant. This gives space to the indeterminacy of performance, so that body and voice might be thought co-constitutively. For example, in their accounts of the 'performativity of place' (Gregson and Rose, 2000) described a reflexive cycle enmeshing personal habits, theories of performance, academic performance, and empirical research (also see Cook 2001; Crang and Cook, 2007).

In some cases voice and body are held in a particular relation through certain performances of reflexivity so that body becomes assimilated with identity and voice becomes a linguistic mode of expression related to that identity. This has been challenged by an account of performance in non-representational theory. Criticism highlighting the limits and fixity of 'representation' were related to efforts to engage bodies' shifting power to 'affect and be affected' (see Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Thrift, 2007). Under this rubric Dewsbury (2000) and Thrift and Dewsbury (2000) positioned performance as indeterminacy, irretrievability and excess. Since bodies are dynamic, attempts at re-presentation would necessarily fail. It is not possible to reproduce an immanent encounter in an always-changing world. However, creative methodologies were sought to foreground the sensuous excesses of a cognitive self in an irretrievable empirical moment. This kind of geographical research would be open to the irreducibility of everyday life. A significant proportion of this work has become occupied with immersion of the researcher in 'research encounters' so that they might become attuned to affects between humans and non-humans. Affects that are relational, and in being so excessive of an individuated self, are described in written



publications, for example see Wylie (2005) on walking and McCormack (2003) on dance movement therapy. Participative immersion becomes synonymous with a kind of proximity to the excesses of performance, either explicitly or by implication. In this context the body becomes an instrument for attuning to excesses. Voice is the expression of those empirical moments. Written descriptions of immersive encounters provide one method for communicating their experiential nature, whilst still authors hold on to the limits of those forms of representation.

However, perhaps if researchers express their own immanent and relational encounters and therefore get to have a 'voice,' then this can omit how other participants experienced the encounter. This establishes a methodological problem; if, at times, qualitative research in human geography constructs a stable subject by rationally reflecting on fixed identities, then this can further fix those identities. It can be reductive as it neglects non-verbal, non-cognitive excesses that co-constitute the subject, as well as the indeterminacy of a becoming world. However, researchers reflecting on experiential encounters risk writing out other 'voices', that is excluding how other participants 'felt' the encounter. If words - spoken or written as a method for 'having a voice' - are privileged in either process then this risks omitting a spectrum of other possibilities for the generation of research material that might differently foreground the multiplicity of body/voice. I suggest that using theatre in geography provides one way to negotiate this tension.

### **1.3.3. Body and Voice in Theatre-Geography**

In the following section I review key work in the growing field of theatre-geography to show its potential for developing and communicating geographical research<sup>12</sup>. If words and voice are often assimilated in geographical research, a body of work on non-representational theory in cultural geography already gives attention to the limits of words for engaging the indeterminacy of performance. Some of this work has advocated experiments at the intersection of theatre and/or performance and geography. For example, Thrift and Dewsbury (2000: 422) enthused that performance practices could expand existing limits of what makes the methodological: 'A whole range of techniques for making the world come alive ...' would allow "a series of research areas which are now routinely written about; embodiment, emotions, and so on, to be given flesh'. In this call, Thrift and Dewsbury did not give much time to other drama practices already taking place in the discipline, particularly amidst a burgeoning of participatory geographies (see Pain, 2004) (developing from Participatory Action Research (PAR), see Chambers, 1994; Freire, 1972; Hall, 1981; Maguire, 1987). Such absences are understandable given that in the main PAR has not engaged with theoretical frameworks set out in Thrift and Dewsbury's text. In participatory geographies efforts to erode boundaries between the University and the community (Kendon, Pain and Kesby, 2007; Mrs. Kinpaishy, 2008) become enacted through often creative methods including participatory or community-led theatre (Kaptani and Yuval Davis, 2008; Pratt and Kirby, 2003). These approaches seek to subvert what are framed as embedded hierarchal boundaries between the community and the academy, foregrounding marginalized voices. For example, for Cieri and McCauley (2007) the creation and presentation of theatre is a site of participatory action research. In this case emphasis is placed on voice as talk. They described a

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<sup>12</sup> The work that I engage with here has self-identified as theatre-geography. See, Schechner (1973, 2003) for more on the (muddy) lines between theatre and performance.

'dialogic' process where actor/ collaborators and artist/researchers collected 'untold' stories about three charged historic events: the 1960's voting right struggle in Mississippi; the mid 1970's school desegregation controversy in Boston; and the 1969 Black Panther Party - Los Angeles Police department conflict (ibid. 141). Transcripts were shaped by researchers/ actors into a narrative collage and re-told in performance. Possibilities for differently engaging those specific bodies in this process of knowledge generation beyond a talk-based approach were not observed. However, brief mention was made of the sensory materialities of listening and hearing. Here the body mattered in performance, where the presence of breath in moments of 'retelling' about 'pain and grief, struggle and triumph' became cited as a reason for their 'resonance' (ibid. 146).

Mattingly (2001) also worked with talk-based methods to develop a script performed by teenagers in City Heights, San Diego. Interviews were used to prioritise the voices of marginalised participants (also see Kaptani and Yuval-Davis, 2008). By bringing questions of narrative authority into dialogue with the symbolic economy, Mattingly drew attention to how participant's stories were embedded in specific contexts and would be received as such since, 'putting people's voices on stage does not necessarily give people power over the institutional and symbolic contexts in which their voices are heard...' (Mattingly, 2001: 457). I think it matters that in performance those teenagers embodied/enlivened stories collected in City Heights, but how and why was given little attention in this written account. Further, while framing the co-constitution of research in performance is useful, perhaps limiting this to 'narrative authority' and 'symbolic economy' creates too fixed and disentangled a notion of how those relations play out?

Pratt and Johnston's (2013) writing on *Nanay: a testimonial play* also involved staging of talk-based material, this time from care-givers, employers and other stakeholders engaged in Canada's Live-In Care-Givers Program (see also Johnston and Pratt, 2010). However this verbatim production (see Hammond and Steward 2008) alluded to a folding of voice and body in performance with detail and nuance. The raced and sexed bodies of actors and/or performers mattered. And bodies as they touched, felt, and sensed, became viscerally present in the write up. Perhaps this was aided by a 'promenade' performance, which enabled witnesses to move around and interact with the space (see Kaye, 2000). Witnesses described intimate encounters with participants' objects, letters, diary entries, as well as texts that were enlivened by bodies in performance. Further forum techniques enabled 'spect-actors' to become particularly 'active' in the constitution of this research. Through this intimate contact between bodies in place theatre as a method of dissemination facilitated open, indeterminate modes of expression (also see Pratt, Johnston and Banta, 2015; Johnston and Pratt, 2010).

Pratt and Johnston's work is suggestive of a 'broader geographical interest in the possibility that theatrical space holds for getting people thinking and feeling the issues differently and directly' (Johnston and Bajrange, 2014: 455). In reflections on 'Street Theatre as Democratic Politics in Ahmedabad' Johnston & Bajrange suggested that it was the 'liminal and embodied quality of performance that (held) potential for substantive dialogue across difference (ibid: 456). They drew on Butler's account of the 'reoccupation and resignification of the subject,' and Ranciere's account of 'art as the distribution of the sensible' whereby audiences (could) move in and beyond

existing social positions. Some consideration was given to the potential that this approach might re-assert the fixity of 'social positioning' (ibid. 458). However the authors outlined *specific* contexts through which particular bodies were already reduced to particular identities as this was bound with the settling of material injustices. For example a participant would not be able to enter certain forms of employment because of the tone and colour of their skin. Authors also described some positive effects emerging from engagement in street theatre including mobility towards employment and training. Some discussion that theatre creates an 'emotional bridge' hinted towards the affective and emotional impact of theatre as a form of research dissemination that can constitute 'the development of empathy as a space for mediation' (after Pedwell, 2012: 461). Therefore this project considered why it matters that particular bodies met and interacted in performance, and what the material and immaterial effects of such a meeting might be.

In 'Sensing the City', Johnston and Lorimer (2013) described Vancouver-based sensory experiment, 'Do You See What I Mean?' This short piece is complimented by Johnston's later work with Bajrange to develop street theatre as a mode of (re)thinking/doing urban encounters, though this time, the project frames bodies through their sensory capabilities. In an urban choreography audience members were blindfolded, given an immersive tour of public spaces, shops and private homes (ibid. 673), and then led by a professional dancer in contact improvisation to explore a 'heightened sense of embodiment garnered through the tour' (ibid. 675). Attention to 'the felt world' was foregrounded and the project captured innovative methods for publics to differently engage with the city using their senses. Participant reflections foreground the sensory experience but in those reflections sensing bodies become

largely generic.

Gregson et. al. (2012) used physical and verbatim theatre in a schools project. As well as collecting and translating verbatim material for the stage, physical theatre was used to develop *and* disseminate student participants' engagement with the given topic: industrial recycling. As bodies represented the movement of industrial material, Gregson et. al. (2012: 352) suggest that this process 'signaled the connections between the object body and corporeal bodies, individual and collective'. While considering the diffuse and intangible impacts of this process they noted that 'however transient performances are as events, they remain, as a trace, in the bodies of those who have performed, and those who have watched...' (Gregson et al 2012: 359). Through physical theatre participants could express their engagement with a topic even in the absence of words. Like Gregson et. al., Rogers gets at how experiences, including the production, witness or performance of theatre 'gets inside' body-subjects leaving traces behind. Amidst a body of work towards the 'geographies of theatre' (2011, 2012a 2012b), Rogers (2010) draws on ethnographic research to reflect on the rehearsal of a scripted performance *Solve for X*. Here she offers a re-reading of the script that allows it to be thought as excessive as it becomes embodied in performance. This work explores tensions between representational and non-representational accounts of subjectivity and their assimilations with fixity and becoming. In these terms, although the written script *Solve for X* (re)produced what Rogers described as 'essentialist' representations of racial identities, bodily enactments of those representations enabled other possibilities to emerge. In that moment as the text became enlivened, it was open to excess, slippage and surprise (ibid: 55). Like emotions in Rogers' account of method acting, the script is not determinate, but

instead created through relational networks. The text is open to possibility, as it becomes performed it becomes a relation between something shared (the text) and difference (the individuated body-subject performing that text). This is a fitting place to finish the review since Rogers exemplifies opportunity in theatre for (re)thinking/doing spaces between representation and non-representation that resonate with my own account of the multiplicity and relationality of body and voice in performance. In this way Rogers draws attention to drama as a mode of experimenting with voice and body that I will take forward in the following section on theatre-as-method.

Theatre has been used as a method in geography for disseminating research material developed using talk-based methods (e.g. Mattingly, 2001; Pratt and Johnston, 2013). Geographers have produced ethnographic accounts of theatre-making process to develop geographies of theatre (Rogers, 2010). Some projects use drama as a method for the development *and* dissemination of research material (Gregson et. al., 2012; Johnston and Bajrange, 2014). For me, the most compelling moments across all of the projects are those that (however implicitly) emphasize theatre's capacity for experimenting with the multiplicity of body/voice. Voice surfaces in excess of words and becomes bound to the body in various ways. So where in geographical research voice is often equated with words, work between theatre and geography begins to blur that distinction. This happens through attention to breath in speech; through the embodied 'traces' of witness or participation that are left behind; through fleshy intimacy and the 'emotional bridge' of empathy, through the staging of bodies that are raced, classed and gendered - bodies that carry the social relations of power in which they are immersed, but that also exceed those relations and still become

indeterminately. Such moments direct us to the corporeality of voice and open space for embodied modes of expression with or without words. What these moments also show is how particular bodies meet, touch and interact with other bodies, objects, environments and so on. Therefore, whilst various theories of performance and performativity are drawn on in theatre-geography, to me, these moments resonate with theories falling under the rubric new-materialisms and particularly poststructural feminist ontologies. In the next section I suggest how new materialism might flesh out our engagement with the becoming of body-subjects and therefore provide a framework for thinking about the multiplicity of body/voice. Bearing this in mind I go on to consider how theatre-as-method might expand forms for participant expression of body/voice.

#### **1.3.4. Thinking/Doing Body/Voice Through Feminist New Materialisms**

Rejections of mind/body, culture/ nature, subject/object dualisms in feminist new materialisms have implications for my engagement with theatre-as-method in this process. In different ways this work draws attention to how body-subjects are individuated as they become in relation to their outsides. Bodies are always becoming something other than their previous state, and exceed the (apparent) boundaries of the skin as they intersect with a range of networks (see Blackman, 2012). Feminist new materialism gives attention to how relational bodies are sexed by a range of forces (biological, discursive, affective and so on) that meet at the nexus of that body. For example, drawing on Grosz (1994) Colls (2012) suggests that we could attend to sexual difference while working with a subject in excess of the cognitive self without



delineating, reducing or fixing those bodies if we understand that a sexually differentiated subject is composed 'of biological flows of energy, matter and stimulating chemical fluids (adrenaline, pheromones, endorphins)' (Dewsbury, 2000: 485 cited in Colls, 2012: 436). The flows that co-constitute sexual difference are biological, they might also be discourse, image, feeling, form of convention, (after Grosz, 1994). This means that how sexual difference is embodied can vary according to context and change over time. Body-subjects become both open to possibility *and* shaped by particular forces. Puar (2012) develops this notion of a body-in-flux that may also share commonalities and differences with other bodies, by framing intersectionality as an assemblage. Developing from existing work on intersectionality, Puar moves away from conceiving bodies either in fixed states of 'ability' or 'disability', instead bodies become variously debilitated as they encounter different spaces and technologies. 'Debility' therefore becomes a meeting and folding of the biological, affective, cultural forces that constitute different bodies differently over time (Puar, 2009). In this way, difference and commonalities exist both within and between bodies. This raises the challenge of facilitating methodological engagement with forces that co-constitute and exceed fleshy, situated bodies. It raises the challenge of understanding bodies as the relation between things shared (activities, identities, habits, work, atmospheres, images, texts, foods, and so on) and difference, as those things that are shared shift and as they meet other forces in what become individuated bodies.

For Braidotti (2012, no pagination), this 'embedded and embodied brand of materialism' pushes beyond linguistic constructivism, to stress the 'concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power'. New ontologies

are open to difference that works between and through bodies so that 'otherness' and 'sameness' interact in an asymmetrical set of power relations (Braidotti, 2012: no pagination). Work in and beyond geography has given attention to form to think how bodies become not just open to but co-constituted by their outsides in indeterminate processes. For example, Mol (2008) on eating as transubstantiation shows how the food that we consume is determined by social, cultural and economic factors, and in turn gets inside and co-constitutes the body. Often food that is consumed in the West is grown, processed, and transported through broader networks. When that food is eaten it becomes part of the body - linking the body to those broader networks in ways that may not be cognitively registered. Bissell (2011) shows habits as a form of relation between a body and its environment. Environments might shape habits and in doing so shape the body as, for example, particular muscles are strengthened by a daily walk to work, or as proximity to cheap, unhealthy food slowly decomposes the body (Berlant, 2011). Therefore these ontologies show how a subject might exceed and precede a solely cognitive reflexive self, they also recognize the social relations of power in which bodies become immersed. This raises challenges for situating those body-subjects in and as research.

New materialisms expand understanding of how bodies meet and are co-constituted by their outsides beyond social constructivism and affective flows. This opens space for thinking about voice not just as an expression of a stable subject, and body not just as an instrument for attuning to affect or an empty vessel imprisoning the subject through a fixed identity. Instead expressions of body/voice engage a multiplicity of forces that constitute a body-subject. I suggest that theatre-as-method offers formal techniques for the participatory development of embodied and embedded research

that can multiply engage how bodies become situated in concrete and complex relations of power, whilst remaining open to difference. Further, participants, audience and/or performers can attune to and experiment with affect in the research encounter. Experiments with research can be conducted in a *collective* way; this can expand how participants might become in relation to the practice of doing and/or disseminating research.

After giving a general overview of what we did in the drama workshops, I elaborate on these propositions through particular moments in our practice. I give attention to both the material and immaterial excesses of words in theatre-as-method as a form of research generation, and then I consider multiple forms of expression without words. Many accounts of qualitative methods, including interviews and ethnographies, pay attention to the excesses of words. But often these accounts function as context for the words where the emphasis is on their role in shaping how people create meaning and give an account of phenomena. What distinguishes theatre-as-method is opportunity to engage participants in experiments with the relation between words and their excesses and multiply the ways in which body/voice can be expressed 'differently and directly' (Johnston and Bajrange, 2014) beyond the text.

### **1.3.5. Experimenting With The Multiplicity Of Body/Voice Using Theatre-As-Method**

Before drawing out multiple forms for expressing body/voice I start with a general overview of what we did, and place that in a context of 'applied drama'. Applied drama has largely been neglected in theatre-geography to date. The term does not

refer to a particular drama method or genre, but instead to a shifting cluster of principles such as prioritizing less heard voices, encouraging active engagement/participation, and facilitating some kind of 'transportation' through the process of making or interacting with theatre; whatever shape that transportation might take (see Nicholson, 2005). The discipline of applied drama explores what Nicholson (2005: 2) describes as a 'double ontology' which refers to emphasis on (longer term) mutual 'educational and social significance' (of theatre participation) and recognition of 'how artistic practices in their broadest sense, shape and trouble modes of thought and feeling in the here-and-now of the event'. As geographical research becomes open to more practice based approaches, how the discipline could engage and explore the multiplicity and relationality of body/voice will expand. The development of theatre-as-method offers one opportunity for this. Conversations on the 'researcher- practitioner' dichotomy and its erosion/ disruption in applied drama (see Clemson and Ntelioglou (2014) for a review) may offer some useful insights then, towards different forms of embodied knowledge generation in human geography. For example, in recognition of complex and diverse intersections between research and performance Beck et al (2011) developed the 'research continuum', intended to offer orientation through different types of research used to inform research-based theatre, and a performance continuum, which 'distinguishes among different kinds of performances, audiences, and purposes of a given research-based theatre piece'. This continuum offers a resource for understanding the different ways in which theatre and research might intersect, for example when does a performance itself become a research method, as might be the case in some kinds of forum theatre?

Further, and usefully in the context of this piece, Kershaw and Nicholson (2011: 2) describe theatre's potential to 'resist unhelpful binaries which separate intuition and embodiment from intellectual processes, emotional experiences and ways of knowing'. They articulate a research relationship that is not orientated around the establishment of cultural authority but instead might be thought of as fluid, improvised and responsive. As Clemson and Ntelioglo (2014: 234) put it, 'not only do researchers (in applied theatre) want to give voice to their participants as equals in the enquiry, but they are also interested in making their data more accessible to those on whom it is based' (note specific attention to 'voice' here). This emphasizes the opportunity that using drama-as-method affords both for the dissemination of research material and to engage participants in 'co-analysis' and 'co-production' across the research/ performance continuum (see Beck et al, 2011).

The importance of prioritising participant voice (as I expand this to body/voice) and the choice of techniques used to do so, becomes folded in to a question of whether aesthetics are too often sacrificed for instrumentalism in applied theatre (as opposed to supposedly 'pure theatre') (see for example, a recent issue on aesthetics and participation (Conway 2015; Balfour 2009). As Clemson and Ntelioglou (2014: 231) put it 'we have to be careful to keep the artistry and aesthetics of drama, theatre and performance, in addition to the attention on the social at the core – even if that artistry and aesthetic is in itself re-defined'. Thompson (2011) drawing on his own work in a post-genocide Rwanda, in prisons and in tsunami effected areas, argues that a turn towards joy, beauty and celebration should drive a politics of applied theatre (also see Nicholson, 2005; Conway, 2015). Thinking about the ethics of enactment (McCormack, 2003) by considering what kind of affective experience both the research process and

the play itself facilitates became important in our project as I go on to explore in the epilogue.

In applied drama scholars are keen not to 'pin' particular genres, approaches, or techniques to drama-making practice because this would limit or stifle the aesthetic, creative process (in Nicholson, 2005). How then might our practice, which is indebted to the discipline of applied theatre, but which uses a process of theatre-making with the explicit intention of developing social research material, open new possibilities for experimenting with body/voice in human geography? I begin by working through exactly what we did in the process and then consider that question in more detail by focusing in on selected moments in the process.

And so, a return to the dusty blue hall, and the second week in the process, time to start 'doing'. There were a lot more women there this time, 13 in total. I introduced the project again with participants from the previous week helping me out. 'So we're going to contribute towards a play? That's great!' 'Wicked.' 'Something that we can actually go and see in the future?' The response seemed more positive this time, and I noted 'all really pleased about the idea', though I also had the sense that this was more important to me than it was for anybody else. The drama sessions would always begin and end with a range of games and exercises. Some are for building concentration, others are for energising the group. They also help with trust building, begin to gently move us 'out of our comfort zone' and help us to practice and prepare methods for performance. Later, in the Interlude on habit, I discuss how the ritual practice of games at the start and end of every session helped to create a distinct space for the generation of research material and gave us a range of tools that we might use when exploring women's everyday encounters. Icebreakers in the very first session

were very simple. We were silly and laughed, learned everybody's names, thought about our commonalities and differences and began to become accustomed to using our bodies and voices differently than usual. Then the following week after more games there was a talk-based exploration of themes that might be engaged in the play.

This conversation was frank and lengthy. We explored the difficulties of negotiating paid and unpaid work, effects of austerity, stigmatisation and job loss on families and lone mothers and the significance for women of unpaid work - such as financial management, engaging with the Jobcentre, sourcing school uniforms, food and so on. Following this discussion, the session ended with more games. One involved women in a circle, each saying something that they had found difficult during the week, for example 'when three buses drive past because they've got two buggies on already and you're late for a meeting and then you get done for it', and then something positive 'when my little girl wakes me up in the morning'. Then we worked around the circle each giving the person sitting to our left a compliment: 'I've noticed how you're always dead positive and that brings me up'. This was about taking a moment to give one another some time - a process of collective sharing and listening that I found both affective and informative. These games also marked out space for the research process and enabled us to leave the session following what felt to me like an affirmative encounter.

The next week after warm ups, Gabbie led an exercise that she hoped would help us to explore genres of femininity and get participants practicing creating and performing in a gentle way. She asked the group (of 11) to split into two and each

made an advert selling 'what is good about being a woman'. The group that I worked with decided to use voice-over to accompany a range of mimed actions. It was important for me not to direct the activity but I participated in the process. Things that are good about being a woman included: 'having boobs,' 'getting dinner bought for you by your boyfriend or husband,' 'being daddies little girl' and 'having Ann Summers parties'. The exercise was invested in with fun and gusto. Robyn seemed comfortable 'directing the scene' and all of the women contributed ideas. I did the voice over in an (aptly) retro 'BBC' style as commanded. Hannah sassed across the room swinging her hips and cupping her 'boobs' celebrating her curvy body. Robyn laughed whilst miming some dubious interactions with a dildo. There was something intimate in this performance as we thought about and felt through the task together. In this scene, the expression of womanhood that interested me most was the process of playing together, and feeling the fun and trust of it.

The other group worked on a 'still-image'. Women came together to embody an octopus like figure - one on the phone, one holding a baby, one scrubbing the floor, one typing at a desk, one cooking, and one shopping. We discussed this image and Bella said that it reflected what it feels like being a woman - 'like you've got to manage a million different things at once.' Women are brilliant the group concluded because they are so good at multi-tasking. But I also felt a sense of the pressure to be that octopus woman, to be all things to all people. There were assumptions embedded in this performance about the 'modern woman' juggling paid and unpaid work (and I for one am terrible at multi-tasking). This felt a little confining and reductive in a different way to the previous scene. But it also resonated with some of the broader



themes and feelings (for example of being pulled in multiple directions) as they surfaced throughout the rest of the process and I explore in later chapters.

We moved from this exercise into a discussion about what our play should be about. Bella said - 'is it going to be like the Vagina monologues?' which I liked but the rest of the group didn't. They wanted a play with a conventional narrative form, characters interacting with one another and a 'start, a middle and an end'. Then Sarah came up with a suggestion - 'we should do like a Gateshead Support Group Soap.' This went down well. Women felt that the group connected them across different situations and talked in depth about what it meant to them. Based on this agreement, there were some discussions about the narrative. Ideas became more and more extravagant. Plot lines including things like murder and incest were passed around and Gabbie and I worked hard to keep things focussed on the experiences that are most relevant to the lives of these women. 'Well that's gonna be boring isn't it?' Robyn suggested. And she did and didn't have a point. It was important for women to recognise, we suggested, that their lives are important and the things that happen here matter beyond this space. However it was also true that we needed conflict in the script for it to work dramatically for an audience. How could we evoke and capture some of the struggles that women had described into the play? How could we do so in such a way that didn't make them seem or feel like victims, which they would hate? This became a complex problem during the script writing process and something that I explore further later on, but for now it was suggested that the group could be under threat of closure and that a story might be built around how women deal with that potential loss.

The following week we began to work on fictional characters for the script, which would be based in a related but fictional support service. We started by creating a 'role on the wall.' This meant drawing around participants on large pieces of paper. Then we would discuss:

- 1 How the character feels about him/herself
- 2 How the character feels about other people
- 3 What the character thinks about his/her life and/or events
- 4 What other people think about the character
- 5 His/her likes and dislikes
- 6 His/her history
- 7 His/her dreams or regrets.

Answers would be written around the image of the body. I've used this technique a lot including with students and it works well to externalise what can be personal concerns. Like the play itself, the roll on the wall became a shared object for discussion and exploration, so that rather than a participant feeling 'investigated' or 'worked on' the dynamic shifted and together we all 'worked on' the character, story, and so on. The technique enabled women to talk about personal matters through the character. Some of the things that we discussed included money worries, feeling angry and upset at my ex-husband and worried about my mam, having hopes for the future of my children, hopes for getting a car, getting driving lessons, getting on the housing list.

The following week we worked on time-lines for the characters. This involved tracing key events in characters' lives to discover how they arrived at their current situations, whatever those situations may be. This provided some sense of how those broader rhythms of assembly and disassembly that I explored in 1.2 played out through difference in the specific lives of particular women. For example, it was suggested that one character might have left school and married early, she never worked and then divorced when her children were older. She found herself financially independent without any qualifications or work history and struggled to get a job.

In the following sessions participants became more comfortable with the idea of performance and we developed the characters further. We used improvisation to create scenes that might become part of the play or tell us more about how characters felt in particular situations. These processes helped to create research material in their own right, which I draw on in the rest of the thesis, but they also supported development of the script. Using role-play women would act the characters through particular scenarios, for example in a Jobcentre, or at a protest against the closure of the group. Freezing the action enabled other participants to ask characters what they were feeling in a given situation. 'Hot seating' involved us asking participants performing as characters, particular questions about their situations, their lives, their hopes and dreams and so on. And so we began to develop the characters and their situations in more detail. We worked on a song that women recorded in a local sound studio. This didn't make it into the final script (though you will see it later in an earlier draft) but it did capture a sense of togetherness and investment in the group. Using these techniques we were able to encounter spatialities from outside of the blue room, for example the Jobcentre. Working through everyday spaces of encounter

using performance methods in this way, enabled us to engage with those spaces differently than we would in an interview, or through participant observation as I go on to explore this in more detail later on (and on an interlude on 'habit.')

This process opened up conversations, which happened in and around the drama. For example the Jobcentre scenes evoked or captured something important in isolation, but also led to a conversation about women's experiences of the Jobcentre. By the end of the sessions I felt closeness between us. Parenting had given us a shared story but now the play making process did too. Although attendance at the group was often sporadic there were a core number who had seen the process through and had invested in it with generosity. There were particular games that we all loved and that women asked for (Shuffle Monster) there were in-jokes (the song) and, for me, a sense of intimacy and perhaps (however temporary) belonging that resulted from sharing this experience. We had all been silly, and at times a little exposed or vulnerable. Following the drama sessions as I continued to attend the group I discussed ideas with women and if something came up that I thought we might use in the script I would check if that was ok. I also organised two 'research and development' weekends with paid actors. These 'R and D' sessions were used to work through the script 'on its feet.' They also culminated in performances of the script 'in hand' to the group for feed-back and suggestions. These sessions were an important part of the writing process. It was only when actors enlivened the text that I got a proper sense of its successes and failings. This is, in part, because of all of the excesses that become part of a performance; the relationships between characters, a particular atmosphere that a scene or exchange might create, how actors physicalize actions, accent, posture and so on. And it is these excesses that interest me about the process of using drama-as-method, both in development and as a method of dissemination.

The play that we developed followed five fictional characters caught in a storm of the cuts and reforms of austerity. This captured a sense of fracturing as their group was pulled apart by service closure. It got at cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) as characters invested hope in futures that were fraying, and of dissonance as characters and their communities were affected by multiple, conflicting obligations. The characters we developed together were singular. Each was differently entangled with common forces associated with regional histories, cuts and reforms to the provision of income support and Job Seekers Allowance, the withdrawal of services, parenting and so on, but each always also exceeded those entanglements. For example, the character of Sandra was born and raised in a specific part of Gateshead as many (but not all) of the participants had been. She had children. She was on Job Seekers Allowance and used public services. She became singular - in relation with things held in common between some or all of the participants. Therefore the fictional characters we developed were born through the various experiences and expertise of participants - each also singular, complex, bound with excess, each differently becoming in relation with shared forces. And in performance the character met and became something different again through the actor's embodiment of her words and in relation with audiences. The actor playing the part of Sandra did something specific with the part and something slightly different in every performance. However there were also important commonalities between the actor, the character, and the women who developed that character. She was a woman, she was from the North East region, and therefore she spoke with the same accent as many of the participants. She was white and she had experienced economic marginalization. This casting suggested that those

commonalities mattered to the multiple expressions of body/voice that constituted this character and subsequently this research outcome.

Returning now to that work with new materialism and a suggestion that theatre-as-method can expand opportunities for engaging the multiplicity of body/voice, I think more closely about a combination of talk-based and physical methods that we used to develop our characters. In the first instance I look at work on the mechanics of speech in actor training. This becomes one way to consider relations between body and voice. I draw on an improvisation performed in our project to focus on relations between the text and its excesses. Then I consider how certain games and exercises enabled us to experiment with relations between body/voice even without words as they encouraged participants to develop non-verbal modes of expression. Across both sections, I show how theatre-as-method opens up new ways through which expressions of body/voice become constituted in and as research.

### **1.3.6. Body/Voice in Theatre-As-Method (With And Without Words)**

First to consider mechanics of speech as it is thought in some aspects of drama practice. It is only as lungs fill, air enters and oxygen becomes the body that speech may follow. And in this way, 'voice' becomes a relation between specific bodies and 'everywhere' air. However it is not just air that becomes co-constitutive of body/voice, but other material and immaterial relations. For example, voice coach Patsy Rodenburg (1990) writes at length about speech as a physical and affective process where the diaphragm, vocal chords, mouth, tongue, tension, and so on all play their part. The implications of this expand beyond speech alone, and offer a way

to consider the dynamics of body/voice. In such a way that may be developed by Puar (2009) on a body's various states of debility, Rodenburg captures how environments shape, mold, and settle particular modes of or capacities for speech. This is not just through the air that gets inside, but through relations with other bodies, histories, the ground we walk on, the clothes we wear, food, drink, and so on. Sometimes such relations become drawn into sharp relief. For example, Rodenburg (ibid. 55) described a client struggling to find her 'lower breath'. She was asked to remove her high-heeled shoes and 'as soon as her feet came into contact with the ground she was able to center her voice and her breath lowered instantly.' Rodenburg (ibid. 61) describes how bodies (including her own) become limited through tightened muscles, stooped bones, habitually, as a response to historic corrections, and/or 'the terror that can associate the commitment of speech'. She draws on her own observations to suggest that speech can become bound with other forces constitutive of race, economic status, gender and other differentiations. She does so to raise the question of who has the 'right to speak' and how have these rights (or capacities) settled as habits formed between individual bodies and other forces.

This example fleshes out my discussion of 'giving voice' in theatre as research. Although methods such as interviews and focus groups are aimed at centering the voice of research participants they may not always account for the complex barriers that can constrain or prevent speech from flowing. Rodenburg offers a series of techniques that she believes help to free or release 'speech'. This work is important for understanding relations between body/speech. However perhaps this becomes problematic if it reasserts the value of speech, or a particular kind of articulacy, above other modes of communication. Instead this work is helpful where it emphasises the

excesses that accompany spoken words and how words are bound to the bodies from which they are uttered. In this case, body/voice becomes more than the words themselves. Body/voice is the expression (intonation, stutter, movement, accent) of experiences that individuate the body, and those expressions become folded back into processes of individuation. On reflection, in our own process such complexities informed how I developed the script and how I engage with participant expressions. Take Robyn for example. I was taken by her turn of phrase, she had a strong North-East accent and this in combination with her dialect often turned towards poetry. She was full of energy and demonstrated a real sense of her own 'right to speak'. This goes against some of the assumptions embedded in Rodenburg's account about working class communities. However it is worth thinking about context here too. Robyn may feel that in the space of this group she has the right to speak and in other spaces that she does not. After Puar (2009) on a body's state of debility, this centres how capacities for speech become contingent on a range of different factors that shift and change over time. And/or Robyn's confident projection becomes a form of subversion - an act of reclaiming the right to be heard - something that we see Robyn doing more of later on. I realise now that while writing the character of Sandra in the play, I captured something of the rhythms of Robyn's speech and the actor Jessica brought an energetic quality into the performance. Something, a kind of dynamism, was shared across the character, the actor and the participant. Sarah on the other hand was quietly spoken and reserved, some of this tone and energy informed the character of Katy in the script and again Christina translated this wonderfully in performance. This gave audiences clues about characters in such a way that I hope helped to constitute them as singular, rounded, relatable.



In this context then, rather than considering how theatre-as-method encourages participants to speak (since this risks assuming and/or producing particular kinds of lacking), I think of theatre-as-method as an opportunity for collective experimentation with relations between words and body/voice. I suggest that tools used in our project and often practiced in applied drama are useful where they allow for diverse forms of expression rather than attempting to privilege particular modes of expression. Many of the drama games that we used were about letting words flow, regardless of their meaning. We passed words around the room with a ball and pulled them out of a box. We spoke on behalf of others. We worked together with a partner or a group to tell a story one word, or phrase at a time. We combined verbal expression with physical movements. We said yes to everything. We created space for failure. All of the exercises were aimed at drawing attention away from speech as a concrete individual 'commitment' that might, for some, be scary, that might be thought as 'wrong'. This was not about de-valuing hesitation, silence and/ or careful reflective speech; instead it was an opportunity to use words in a different way. The games became a path to improvisation as a process of script development and this in turn became a method for generating research material. For example, the following section of text was written from an improvisation performed by two participants. What happens to words as they are embodied in performance, as they meet and become folded into individuated bodies and their excesses? Participants were asked to perform a scene in a Jobcentre in the near future:

SARAH:       Number?

SANDRA:     What do you mean number?

SARAH: You need a number?

SANDRA: Oh, yeah, here.

SARAH: It doesn't register. You need another one.

SANDRA: But... I've just waited for nearly 45 minutes!

SARAH: This number is incorrect.

SANDRA: Can you not ring across or something?

SARAH: It's not my problem.

SANDRA: But, it wasn't my fault if she gave me the  
wrong number...

SARAH: The number is incorrect.

SANDRA: Yeah but... I mean I've already been here for two  
hours. She's getting hungry... (INFANT IN ARMS)

SARAH: That is not my problem

SANDRA: What am I supposed to do?

SARAH: Get the correct number...

SANDRA: Yeah But...

SARAH: Are you refusing to co-operate?

In the moment of performance a character's singular, intimate encounter also captures an atmosphere or mood (see Adey et. al, 2013; Anderson, 2014). Something felt by participants resonates beyond this scene and surfaces again when actors performed this in a playback of a draft of the script. Tension builds as the baby becomes agitated, Sandra joins queue after queue, she attempts to breastfeed and is reprimanded for doing so, she is late and nears breaking point. Sandra's voice is fast and tight. Accent, costume, and setting give clues about her geo-historical location; words and actions

subvert generalizations that might accompany those clues. Her body is always on the move, rocking the baby, looking around, anxious, frantically paddling just to keep still. Sarah is motionless and uncompromised. This small scene resonated with participants' other descriptions, enactments, portrayals that had escalated towards a *feeling* of their being pulled in multiple directions, bulldozed, unheard, forced to make un-actionable decisions. This got at how situation as parent, as economically inactive, as located in a region with limited employment opportunities, amidst austerity might make her feel. This performance became something other than you reading those words on the page now. It was embedded in those bodies in that place. The performance was both irreducible and resonated into subsequent performances. Just as Rodenburg routes speech in the body we see in this improvisation that expressions of body/voice might include relations between accent, posture, gesture, and costume amongst other elements, they might be affective as they become held in relation with words.

Theatre-as-method enables us to explore multiple relations between body/voice and written or spoken words. I have considered why it matters that particular bodies speak particular words. And I have suggested that we can attune to the excesses of words and play around with them using theatre-as-method. In 'R and D', for example, actors might perform the same Jobcentre improvisation again but this time as though the character of Sandra is bored, this time as though she is unaffected by her baby's tears, this time as though Sarah the Jobcentre representative really cares. This kind of experiment shows the excessive forms of expression that performance brings to words on a page.

Developing from this I turn to drama-as-method for generating research material in the absence of words. In workshops we played a number of games and exercises that excluded or diminished verbal communication. Our process was towards a written script adhering to a particular form of realism involving characters behaving in a way that would be recognised by women in our group. This meant that abstract physical techniques did not become part of the output. However through non-verbal approaches we could build trust, practice different techniques for performance, and develop themes and emotional landscapes for the play. Here I reflect on some of those exercises with two key implications for body/voice in theatre-as-method, 1: expressing the multiplicity of the subject, 2: thinking/doing collective body/voice and inter-embodiment.

Through the character of Sandra I have begun to consider multiple forms of expression, for example movement, words, tone and so on. Here I think that process in an absence of words. For example, we experimented with how particular kinds of physicality might enhance or diminish a characters 'status' and explored the implications of this. In one exercise we walked around the room, 'leading' with various parts of the body - an arm, the head, the feet, the chest, the nose. How might particular ways of walking create a feeling and/or impression of status - that in turn becomes a certain constitution of power? Leading with the head pushes the body forward, it stoops the back, and participants decided that this lowered status (see Johnstone, 2007). Like Rodenburg's (1990) analysis of speech this becomes one way in which the body wears but also constitutes a form of power relation. In this development process we could attune to the complexity of status for characters in various situations. For example, whilst improvising the Jobcentre scene Robyn's

physical stance implied high status, although the character had little power in her immediate situation. This shows one way in which a woman/ character might enact resistance in subtle and nuanced ways. This approach facilitates experimentation with a particular embodiment of power that has been termed status; that is a particular constitution of the subject that talk-based methods might miss.

I return again here to the 'still image' of 'the modern woman.' Many bodies moved into one body. One woman held a baby at her breast, another a phone to her ear, another typed at an imaginary keyboard and another scrubbed a stain on the floor. I was drawn to Bella who was positioned in the middle of the scene. I try to capture her here. I delete the words and try again as I attempt to escape fixing or reducing her, but fail. Bella was standing straight, proudly (leading from the chest) tall, fat, tanned, brown hair, a pony tail, jeans, a tracksuit top, an expression on her face: clever, strong, vulnerable, stubborn and committed, more than all of that. Singular, indeterminate Bella. Superwoman pose. I cannot reproduce that multiplicity, I miss her smell, I miss other 'biological flows' passing between us. My account of Bella in this chapter is limited to our own forms of relation in that moment.

Bella worked with the other women in that scene to produce a multi-tasking octopus woman, grin fixed, limbs pulled in many directions. And all of the women, even without words in this image had something to say - they had something to say together as a group as they alluded to a sense of being pulled in multiple directions by multiple obligations. Different bodies performed those actions and together they produced a coherent whole. Performances were nuanced. I sensed Sarah's reluctance at typing, for example, or Robyn's satisfaction at scrubbing the stain. Simultaneously I

could feel different levels of commitment to the drama as Robyn seemed fully immersed and Hanna seemed self-conscious. This is how I felt and interpreted their performance in that moment; this is what that performance became for me, the audience. This exercise provides another example of the collective modes of expression that may be facilitated by theatre-as-method. The character of Sandra became an expression of women's experiences and creativity. The character was enlivened in a different way by an actor and co-constituted by audiences engaging with that actor. The image of womanhood was also a collective expression of body/voice. Again, many bodies became simultaneously one body.

The exercises described here might not be practiced wholly in the absence of words. They are set up and reflected on using language. However, they also facilitate particular relations between bodies through the limitation of no speech. Using theatre-as-method opens towards multiple forms for expression. As well as a character or a still image, expressions of body/voice might be a wordless joke, a way of wearing status through the body, a single shape made by many bodies, a word that is caught in the throat, a script in performance, and many other things that generate research material and differently 'leave traces behind' in bodies touched by the process. Therefore this chapter on body/voice offers a framework for methodological engagement with body-subjects that are constituted by a series of material and immaterial forces. I have explored some ways in which theatre-as-method might expand forms for experimenting with body/voice in geographical research, using drama games and exercises with and without words.

I have shown some ways in which theatre-as-method expands forms of expression beyond the written or spoken word. This has been based on the contention that, as

argued in section one, the expansive forms that theatre-as-method provide for the generation of research material have not yet been fully utilized in human geography. In this thesis forms of expression range from a way of walking around the room, a still image, a stutter, a character, a script. Those expressions become written up; they become part of a performance, they become stimulus for further discussion, they facilitate intimate relationships that help us to develop ideas together.

I have not sought to provide a practical toolkit for geographers interested in using theatre-as-method. Instead I open towards what might be possible using theatre-as-method in human geography. What I have advocated here, in short, is that a piece of script can and will be used as a research material, as can the character, as can processes in the development of character, as can the performance of that script, as can reflections on the script or its development. Moving forward in this thesis I will draw on research material that we generated using theatre-as-method, as well as associated observation and interviews to consider women's lived experiences of austerity. I will also return to this exploration of theatre-as-method through an additional interlude and epilogue. The interlude will focus on relations between the drama games and exercises that we played and theories of habit as ontological force to consider the kinds of 'change' that women described in relation to the process. The epilogue will demonstrate complicated processes of coproduction involved in the development of our script, and implicitly highlight certain relations between aesthetics and instrumentalism.

## **1. 4. *Cracks An Early Draft***

I have worked through dynamic context for this project and how theatre-as-method might engage becoming body-subjects that are immersed in concrete and complex social relations of power. Now I share an early draft of the script. I do so to introduce themes and 'affective force fields' (Berlant, 2008a) that I go on to explore in more detail in the second part of the thesis. I do so to show the process at work, and later the journey that this script has taken can be encountered via a DVD of the final performance. I also do so because although the story and characters are fictional they fold into an empirical specificity. This draft becomes a research outcome through which women in collaboration with me, the writer, have expressed and reflected on their own situations. The script has something to offer this thesis because it contains material that was lost or changed in the final draft (albeit for good reason) but that serves a substantive purpose. I hope that the text evokes something of the complexity of women's encounters with austerity in the midst of the other things, or at least our attempts to evoke that complexity through the form of a play. It gets at particular affective rhythms that are in part associated with that complexity, including senses of dissonance, disruption, chaos, moments of holding together and falling apart, solidarity and humour. In my view this draft of the play is fragmented. It has got too much going on. Characters try to work out what it is they are working on but the subject keeps changing - the play they are making is kept out of grasp. On regular



occasions the plot falls apart, but perhaps that too becomes an articulation of the genre austerity as I found it lived and as I explore in the second Act of the thesis.

### Cracks

Lesley (47)

Chris (30s)

Sandra (late 40s)

Katy (20)

Julia (45)

Rosie (24)

Heslop: *(a narrator reading stage directions on the day of our 'playback' performance):*

*Gateshead, a community room. It's raining outside and a bucket catches drips.*

Sandra: Cheers for coming down an' that. *(pause)* It's been by the skin of wa  
teeth all this, *(pause)* and the lasses have been mint! There's a pot at the  
back for the end, so dig deep eh and give them a clap it's the  
'Gateshead Women and girls!' Scene 1: the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October and we do  
the downward dog.

Heslop: *Sandra exits. Lesley and a Suit are alone centre stage.*

Chris: All sorted then?

Lesley: Getting there.

Chris: I'd get the girls to help, speed things up a bit.

Lesley: There's no point in telling them until it's definitely happening.

Chris: It's definitely happening Lesley.

Lesley: I mean I've been here before...we always find something, you think it's all finished and then and then a big grant comes in and...

Chris: Lesley, it's gone too far for all that

Lesley: ...and then you've caused all this worry and upset for nothing, I've been here before. We've got to keep things stable.

Chris: Lesley...

Lesley: Things have to be done... carefully.

Chris: Lesley. For Christ sake! I haven't got the time to keep chasing you up. This all needs boxing up by the 23<sup>rd</sup>!

*Heslop: Enter Sandra, soaking wet in leathers, she removes a motorbike helmet*

Sandra: Hey Les, I can hardly walk today, you should have seen what I was doing last night.

Chris: Lesley give HR a call, anytime for advice.

Sandra: Ah sorry I didn't realise...

Lesley: Right yeah ok, well, nice to catch up.

Chris: I mean it Lesley,

Lesley: Yes, yes. Promise

*Heslop: Chris exit*

Sandra: What's his beef?

Lesley: Nothing. How are you pet?

Sandra: What was he saying about HR?

Lesley: It's just some inspector pet, boring stuff.

Sandra: Is everything alright Lesley?

Lesley: What do you mean?

Sandra: With all these suits poking round all week,

Lesley: Your hair looks nice today Sandra.

Sandra: It's not more redundancies is it Lesley?

Lesley: No.

Sandra: Well is it health and safety again? Is it the roof? Cos you wanna get that sorted out Lesley, I've got a mate what'll do that cheap for y.'

Lesley: Everything is fine Sandra.

*Heslop: Enter Katy, shaking out an Umbrella with one hand, on the phone with the other.*

Katy: Yes, I, no it's just two hours mam, no she's in the crèche! It's alright, Ok Love you.

Sandra: Honestly?

Lesley: Eh God Pet, you look terrible.

Katy: Cheers like. Alright Sandra?

Lesley: No I mean I didn't mean that, I mean, you always look lovely but I mean, well, just a bit tired like, is that Lotte keeping you awake again?

Katy: No...

Lesley: I always say there's only three things you need to do to get a good night's sleep...

Sandra: Lesley?

Lesley: ...you need some hot chocolate, a nice bath, and get some of that lavender on your sheets, and don't do anything for half an hour before bed. Honestly pet.

Katy: What no reading or tele?

Lesley: Nothing... don't even think.

Katy: You can't not think!

Sandra: Lesley, Can we have a quick chat?

Lesley: Not now pet, I'm dead busy. I'll be popping in and out this morning so you lot'll have to look after yourselves... and I want these finished by the end mind.

Sandra: Well when?

Lesley: There's that meeting *(pause)* yeah *(pause)* so I'll be back down soon then for that then anyway.

Sandra: What meeting?

Lesley: Aye the meeting, I'll tell you later.

*(She exits)*

Sandra: What meeting?

Katy: Half-ten.

Sandra: Well that's it then...

Katy: What? The holiday clubs. *(she yawns)*

Sandra: Na na... there's something fishy going on with all them suits...

Katy: Aye?

Sandra: Well I heard them talking

Katy: What?

*Heslop: Enter Julia, in bright yellow wellies, which she removes and places next to a radiator*

Julia: Morning ladies... Dear me Katy you look terrible!

Katy: Ah thanks... I thought I'd made an effort as well.

Julia: Is it that Lotte again? You should let her cry more,

Katy: Thanks for the advice Julia.

Julia: I used to be left for hours, didn't do me any harm...

*Heslop: Katy gets out some cups and begins wiping down the worktop*

Julia: You know what you should do Katy...

Katy: What's that?

Julia: Sort out your sleeping,

Katy: Oh yeah?

Julia: Get some lavender, and camomile tea. Does the job every time...

Katy: I'm sure that's the answer to all me problems Julia, cup of tea?

Julia: Earl Grey for me Katy

Katy: Very swanky.

Sandra: I hate that shit, it tastes like flowers

Julia: It's bergamot.

Sandra: Burga what? I just like Tetleys...

Julia: God; you don't put milk in it Katy, I'll do it!

Katy: Just like you like your men eh San? Strong and dark...

Sandra: Aye and straight down me neck!

*(They react)*

Sandra: Well I cannit work it all out.

Katy: What's that San, ah the 'suits.'

Julia: Suits?

Katy: Sandra heard them blokes talking and she's being all mysterious about it!

Sandra: I am not!

Katy: Well what was it then?

Julia: It's just more of that health and safety stuff.

Sandra: Well I heard them saying something.

Katy: What?!

Sandra: It was more like the tone of voice I couldn't hear the actual words!

Katy: Aye, I can see how you'd decide that something terrible was going to happen based on the tone of some-one's voice. You're always getting your knickers in a knot about something. I suppose the window cleaners a spy an all is he?

Sandra: Aye well, we'll soon find out won't we?

Julia: What do you mean?

Sandra: There's gonna be a meeting.

Julia: Oh that'll be about the holiday clubs...

Katy: I told you!

Sandra: Well why didn't she just say that? Na, I think this is something else...

*(Katy's phone rings)*

Katy: Mam... yeah mam, No, I'm taking granddad Jimmy to the shops straight after and then I'll come and check it for you... ok love you... Hey San I was down A and E again on Friday saw that nice doctor you like.

Sandra: Oh Aye

Julia: Is everything ok Katy?

Katy: Aye just me mam, she's fine now... I tell you what though, A and E on a Friday night, this fella just got his willie out in the middle of the waiting room, our Jess was traumatised.

Julia: Disguising! You should sue.

- Katy: I was there for 6 hours!
- Sandra: You should have dropped the kids round mine man...
- Katy: Ah I wasn't sure, with Gary (*Pause*) Hey, I've just saved me-self 25 quid  
though,
- Julia: How did you manage that?
- Katy: glitches.com
- Sandra: right...
- Katy: Asda were doing free delivery and knocking the fiver off by  
mistake! I got a fifty quid shop for 25! I put through five shops  
for a tenner!
- Sandra: You're too clever you...
- Julia: Well... I went in to be done again the other day.
- Katy: What's that?
- Julia: Colonic irrigation (*beat*) whose got the scissors?
- Katy: Minging.
- Julia: It is amazing, I would recommend it. You feel so... light  
afterwards like being washed out from the inside.
- Sandra: How poetic...
- Katy: No thanks. Sitting watching all of that. Floating down a tube...
- Julia: It's so relaxing! They've got candles and lovely music, they get  
you all comfortable and relaxed...
- Sandra: And then woosh they shove the tube in!
- Julia: Well, I mean it's very gentle, it's only tiny!
- Sandra: You should be used to that with your Brian!
- Julia: What's amazing is how much you know, comes out.

Katy: Rank!

Julia: And the weight just came straight off, you really should try it girls.

Katy: What you sayin' like?

Sandra: What time is it now?

Julia: Twenty past. Relax!

Sandra: Do you not think Lesley's being weird though?

Julia: Well, she has been through a lot lately Sandra,

Sandra: Aye...

Katy: What do you mean?

Julia: With her husband...

Sandra: Aye it's not just that though,

Julia: ...He was let go from work a while ago Katy, didn't you know?

Katy: Shit.

Sandra: Ah aye, the other day fucking burger king knocked him back, it's a propa piss take, Jobcentre said he's too awld.

Katy: To old? Ah well, listen Sandra, don't start hassling Lesley about suits and that, I mean she's obviously got enough on her plate at the minute.

Sandra: I'm trying to help!

Katy: Aye but it's not helping is it Sandra, I mean if there's anything we need to know she'll tell us.

Sandra: Aye well we'll see. Where is everyone anyway? Cos this won't help will it, we need to get the numbers up? You're never here Katy.

Katy: I do try Sandra...

Sandra: What about Lisa? I wanted a catch up.



- Katy: She's temping,
- Sandra: It needs sorting out this like, cos you kna what happened in Felling-  
the numbers got low and that was it. You tell that lot round yours to  
get their arses down here next week right?
- Katy: Yes Sandra.
- Sandra: They just get what they need oot of it then they bin it off, it doesn't  
friggin work like that, you've got to put in an all...
- Katy: You just don't want to be the only one doing yoga next week.
- Sandra: Ah aye that's what it is!
- Julia: You won't be Sandra, I've been working on my modified  
crescent lunge.
- Katy: That sounds painful
- Julia: Come on I'll show you Katy...
- Sandra: Will you tell them though Katy I mean it?
- Katy: Yes I've said I will! People have got other things to worry  
about Sandra.
- Sandra: Aye we've all got shit going on Katy
- Julia: Anyway, yoga, so calm thoughts, Ok Katy this one's called the  
downward dog...
- Sandra: pshh... sounds like sommit Gary was trying to get us to do  
last week.
- Julia: Ignore her Katy, honestly it's really good for relaxation it'll  
probably help you to chill out.
- Sandra: 'Chill out,' listen to her, 'chill out'...

Julia: Ok um... right, Sandra could you put the music on, put the music on...

Sandra: What music?

Julia: There's a cd in my bag...

Sandra: What that yoga CD? You didn't buy that, did you?

Julia: I found it very helpful

Sandra: Forty quid!

Julia: It's relaxing!

Katy: Come on then Sandra put it on...

Sandra: Hang on what's this (*pulling out*) 'The best of Peter Andre?'

Julia: No not that...

Sandra: Didn't know you were into Peter Andre like Julia,

Julia: Look there was a sale on at HMV alright, and actually I quite like some of his earlier stuff.

Sandra: Here it is here it is, friggin' em... simply Karma, music for tranquillity and spiritual enlightenment: £39.99. track 7 *Infinite Love God* written and performed by Shakra Geoff.

Julia: Thanks Sandra....

Sandra: Recorded in the Sound Rooms, Bensham, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear.

Katy: Shakra Geoff isn't that that weirdo who always stares at you at the bus stop...

Sandra: Aye never wears any shoes...

Julia: He's a deeply spiritual person.

Sandra: Aye my mate Claire used to go out with him. He used to work  
at the bookies

Julia: Right so Katy, anyway, we'll start with something simple, the  
downward dog. So stretch up- And bend down... and up...  
don't forget to breathe...

*(Katy Follows)*

Sandra: here man you're doing it wrong man, you've got to bend from  
your hips like this... *(She takes a deep breath and then down  
until...)* arghh... arghhh... *(on the floor in agony)*

Katy: What's wrong Sandra?

Julia: Right, um Ok, slowly roll onto your side, um... keep  
breathing, and um... now um get up...

Sandra: I can't get up man...

Katy: Oh my god here sit down Sandra, you might of just pulled a  
muscle or summit,

Julia: Yes, yes, probably just over did it slightly.

Sandra: Here turn that friggin music off...

Julia: Yeah yeah but it's not usually like this Katy it's usually quite  
relaxing,

Katy: Aye, em... she's not looking too relaxed now though...

Sandra: Arghhh...

Katy: We probably shouldn't be doing Yoga now without a  
qualified instructor, *(pause)* Are you ok Sandra?

*Heslop: She hands her a drink of water.*

Sandra: Aye, I'll live, just give us a second... and will you please turn that fucking music off me head's bloody done in...

Julia: I do look forward to your language on a Thursday morning Sandra...

Katy: Have another coffee...

Sandra: Cheers.

Julia: Just breathe through it Sandra... Shakra says it's all breathing...

*(Quiet)*

Sandra: I need a tab, coming Katy?

*Heslop: Sandra opens her box of cigarettes... it's completely empty*

Sandra: Bastard...

Katy: What's up?

Sandra: I had a friggin twenty pound note in there an all...

Julia: Is it not in your purse?

*Heslop: Sandra looks through her bag and her purse, which is also completely empty*

Sandra: Na. Empty.

Katy: Ah San.

Sandra: NA, na, it must have dropped oot somewhere

Katy: Here, have one of mine...

Sandra: Na you're alreet.

Katy: Go on...

Julia: What's this Sandra, is Gary stealing from you?

Sandra: NO

*Heslop: She begins munching furiously on a biscuit.*

Katy: Come on here

Sandra: Na I'm cutting down.

Katy: H'away.

Julia: You need to start standing up for yourself Sandra!

Sandra: Thanks for the advice Julia.

Julia: I mean there must be places people like you can go.

Katy: Alright Julia.

Julia: I mean it Sandra, I really think you need to look at your options...

Sandra: Just leave it Julia.

*(pause)*

Julia: Sorry Sandra, I'm just trying to help.

Rosie: Hi, Is this the women's group?

Katy: Aye, you alright? Who you looking for?

Rosie: Um Lesley?

Katy: Ah she's not in at the minute is there anything we can do for you.

Sandra: Is this about the centre?

Rosie: er centre?

Sandra: Aye the centre, there's been a lot of suits hanging round lately, you wouldn't know about that would you?

Rosie: Um no,

Sandra: Or all this stuff in the paper's about cuts?

Katy: She'll be down in a minute, why don't you wait? Do you want a cuppa?

Julia: We've got earl grey,

Rosie: Just normal thanks, I always think earl grey tastes a bit like flowers...

Sandra: It's bergamot.

*(awkward pause)*

Rosie: So, I'm here to chat you know about the project?

Sandra: What project?

Rosie: Lesley said that she'd mentioned it?

Sandra: Nope she's not said anything to us like.

Rosie: Oh, right, just she said you were dead keen, this is the women's group?

Sandra: Aye.

Katy: She's been a bit distracted lately that's all, she'll be in in a minute though.

Sandra: So who are you?

Rosie: Oh sorry yeah I'm Rosie? I'm from Durham University

Julia: Oh Durham.

Rosie: Yeah, it's just part of some research I'm doing.

Katy: Ah what's this research like Rosie, you haven't got loads of forms for us to fill in have you?

Rosie: Not forms, no this is a bit different, I mean, I hope it'll be driven by you know the group more than me...

Sandra: Listen I'm sure it's great but it's not really a good time pet, not with all these suits and everything...

Katy: Will you give up with them suits Sandra! What's your problem with people wearing suits?

Sandra: I haven't got a problem with people wearing suits I'd just like to know why they're here!

Katy: Well would it be different if they were wearing blooming overalls??

Julia: Sorry about this Rosie, *(beat)* what is it that you're researching at the University?

Heslop: *Enter Lesley who rushes over to a filing cabinet to look for something, but the draw gets stuck*

Sandra: Ah here she is now, so what's this meeting about then Lesley.

Katy: There's someone here to see you Lesley.

Lesley: Aye, oh hello pet are you new?

Rosie: Oh hi um Lesley? It's Rosie?

Lesley: Uh-huh

Rosie: I'm not sure if you remember we spoke on the phone? About the project...?

Lesley: Ahhh...course. The Kickboxing.

Rosie: Um no it...

Sandra: Hang on sorry to interrupt like, but Lesley... What's going on? What's this meeting about?

Lesley: What meeting?

Sandra: What meeting? What meeting? You've organised a bloody meeting! We've all been waiting for you!

Lesley: Have I? Ah yes that's right I was going to tell you about the Kickboxing wasn't I?... See pet I hadn't forgot.

Heslop: *Lesley is still trying to open the drawer.*

Sandra: Right so hang on so you're just here to talk about Kickboxing...

Rosie: Um no well it's not Kickboxing...

Sandra: Cos I thought you were going to fill us in about all the suits and that...

Katy: Sandra!

Lesley: We've already talked about that Sandra, there's nothing to worry about, no this young lassie's going to give us an introduction to Kickboxing aren't you pet?

Rosie: Er no Lesley sorry it's um I'm from the University.

Julia: She's from Durham.

Lesley: Ah this bloody drawer...

*Heslop: Sandra opens the drawer*

Sandra: Here man!

Lesley: Ah thanks Sandra how did you do that?

Rosie: So no it's not kickboxing, it was the project we discussed?

Lesley: You've got funding for the crèche though haven't you pet...

Rosie: Creche? Yeah course, got that all taken care of...

Sandra: Why do we need funding for the crèche Lesley?

Lesley: Hey it'll be exciting won't it lasses, doing something different.

Sandra: Look Lesley,

Julia: Sandra, let's hear about this project first shall we?

Sandra: Na, na, I want to know what's going on? I mean, is something gonna happen to the group. They're not gonna shut the crèche are they?

Lesley: Will you shut up Sandra. I've told you, nothing's going to happen!

*(silence)*

Sandra: Well why you avoiding us then?

Lesley: Sorry about this Rosie, Sandra's got a lot going on at home haven't you Sandra, you're a bit stressed at the minute.

Julia: Listen, we're all here to help Sandra.

Sandra: I don't need your fucking help I just want to know what the fucks



going on...

Lesley: I appreciate you're frustrated Sandra but can you please not use that language in this centre,

Sandra: Ah fuck off...

*She exits.*

Katy: I'll just check she's alright...

*She exits*

Julia: Don't worry Rosie, it'll be fine...

*she exits. Lesley and Rosie are left alone on stage.*

Rosie: Sorry Lesley. It doesn't sound like a good time...

Leslie: I don't know what's got into them today Rosie. *(Pause)* So, You're from the University? Ah that's right, course, you were going to do the drama project weren't you, hey well if you want drama you've come to the right place!

*Heslop: Black out. Exit Lesley.*

Sandra: Aye you've come to the right place if you want drama. I feel like a right twat now. Scene 2; it's the 9<sup>th</sup> of October and we're all full of ideas... or full of summit!

*Heslop: Sandra joins Julia at the table.*

Julia: I'm thinking military wives- I'm thinking publicity... I'm thinking we go huge with this!

Sandra: Have you heard this?

Julia: I'm serious, I've got contacts I'm thinking we get the press involved...

Sandra: What the Deckham newsletter? We don't even know what we're doing yet,

Julia: Rosie said bring ideas.

Sandra: Aye for the play... I think you're getting a bit ahead of yourself.

Julia: Yeah well. I've done a lot of this before Sandra.

Sandra: Listen, I've done professional acting Julia.

Julia: I've never heard about this?

Sandra: Ah aye, I'm a celeb round here I've done stuff what's been seen by thousands... on the internet like...

Julia: I don't know what you mean?

Sandra: Well you kna...

Julia: Oh god, I see... well, I've always been more keen on theatre, real theatre, you know, the kind of thing I'm sure Rosie's talking about ...

Sandra: Oh Aye you're full of drama yee Julia.

Julia: Actually Sandra, the People's Theatre is very well respected, did I mention the time when Sir Ian McKellen came in...

Sandra: Once or twice.

Julia: That was the best day of my life!

*Heslop: Enter Katy, usual wet weather business.*

Katy: Well I'm not acting.

Julia: You don't know Katy you might surprise yourself, you could be quite good.

Katy: No way. I'm terrible, I did it at school, I'm worse than that paedo off Corrie...

Sandra: Ken Barlow. That was never proved. Anyway, he's a mint actor, very understated.

Katy: Wooden more like.

- Julia: 'Orpheus, Orpheus, tab behind ear looking out of grimy window at a grey dead Gateshead, don't look back at the high-rise Orpheus keep moving on. On. On. To the interchange.
- Sandra: What the fuck was that?
- Julia: It's an idea I've had for the play, it's an adaptation of the Orpheus myth, but set in Gateshead...
- Sandra: Have you heard this?
- Julia: I knew it'd be wasted on you Sandra.
- Sandra: You want some action man... get this right, cos I was thinking of this, that fucking eyesore in the centre they've built... well the Iraqi's come in right terrorists... and they're gonna bomb it right... and then this like Bruce Willis type comes down but like he's from Gateshead, Geordie Bruce Willis... comes doon and just kicks the shit out of the lot of them...
- Julia: Well, yeah I could see why you'd think that was better than my Orpheus adaptation...
- Sandra: That's not the whole story though- he falls in love with one of the Iraqis' and his lass goes propa mental.
- Julia: Oh yes very Romeo and Juliet!
- Heslop: Enter Rosie- her hair is drenched, as are her canvas shoes, she drops her flip chart... Sandra picks it up.*
- Rosie: So sorry I'm late-
- Sandra: H'away then let's crack on...
- Katy: Better late than never.
- Julia: Let her get in and dry off... Rosie you look freezing!

Rosie: Right so ok guys so last week we started thinking about... um,

*Fumbling through her notes.*

Rosie: Sorry I've lost some of my notes can we re-cap last week?

*She pulls out some notes*

Rosie: Oh god

Sandra: What's that?

Rosie: Baby porridge... So we were talking about some ideas for the play that your going to be creating, or that' we're going to be creating, can anyone remember anything we did last week?

Sandra: Aye that daft game shuffle monster,

Julia: Zip zap boing.

Rosie: Yes yes that's right, we did quite a few ice breakers and then we started thinking about um, stories that matter to us, this is all part of what our project's about.

Katy: What subject is it in Rosie, Durham doesn't do drama does it?

Rosie: Human geography.

Sandra: Geography so what we deing zip zap boing for? I thought that was all maps and that.

Rosie: Well I mean, I think it is a useful method in... you know... social research, it's an interesting way to...

Katy: To see how the other half live...

Rosie: Well no more like loose the divide I hope,

Katy: But you want a bit of gritty realism though Rosie?

Rosie: I'm not making any presumptions about the content, I mean,

Katy: You can't write a play about people being dead happy with no problems can you?

Julia: What's up with you Katy?

Katy: Ah nothing, no offense Rosie, I'm just a bit sick we're always getting people come in doing these little projects with us, I just think it gets a bit patronizing.

Julia: Katy,

Rosie: God, I hope not, I mean I'd hate to think... I hope you will start to see this as your play. I mean, what do you want to get out of this then Katy? If you could do anything?

Katy: Honestly? Escape, that's what I come here for.

Sandra: I want to do the drama.

Julia: Yes!

Katy: Aye well, can we at least keep it cheerful, not all doom and gloom?

Rosie: Course. It's your play.

Sandra: Well aye, we all want to have a laugh. Hey we could put something on about the group eh? About how good it is and that! ... We might get the numbers up?

Katy: Is that not a bit weird?

Sandra: Na why?

Katy: Well it's a bit close to home.

*Heslop: Enter Lesley with a load of paper work to file.*

Lesley: How's it all going lasses? ...

Rosie: Hi Lesley, great thanks, great.

Heslop: *Rosie begins to clear back the chairs and the others join her.*

Lesley: Do you want to go in the other room, or you could go outside, it's nice out.

Sandra: We're fine here,

Lesley: Ok just ignore me.

Rosie: So, if we have everyone walking round the room... that's it just keep walking into spaces.

Lesley: Do you not want a cup of tea first?

Sandra: Let her get on with it man!

Lesley: I tell you what, shall I join in get the numbers up?

Sandra: I thought you said you were busy?

Lesley: Aye well it can wait half an hour can't it?

Rosie: Ok so walking around, walking around... And then, not yet at some point when you feel like it just stop walking and stand still. Stop when you feel like it, but together as a whole group, just stop moving when you get the urge.

Heslop: *The others perform that actions while Katy watches*

Katy: What's all this like?

Rosie: It's err... complicate.

Katy: It's what?

Rosie: Um, you know like birds.

Katy: Birds?

Rosie: Yeah... And when you *feel* like it come together and become, use your bodies to be an image of, of, anger...

Sandra: What you doing man?

- Julia: What do you mean?
- Sandra: Well you look like a... right radgie!
- Julia: I'm a bull, it's an ancient symbol of power and rage.
- Sandra: Bull-shit more like it. We're meant to be doing it together man.  
Here...
- Lesley: Eeeh this is a right laugh isn't it girls?
- Sandra: Right you stand there like that- Aye, and I'll do this, Lesley  
get over there, what do you think eh?
- Rosie: Ok...great. Now walking around again... what we're going to  
do next is a still image of women and work over time. So you  
just move into it without talking; sense what each other are  
doing...
- Heslop: The women perform the actions with varied levels of enthusiasm.*
- Lesley: I'm scrubbing the door-step... I remember my mam- she'd be  
at it all hours... do you remember all the wives out scrubbing  
the step? No-one bothers now do they?
- Katy: I do.
- Rosey: Great and um, this looks interesting Sandra?
- Sandra: Aye... I'm on the machines
- Julia: The 'machines.' I'm multi-tasking Rosie, the modern woman's  
prerogative.
- Sandra: What's that colonic irrigation: a tube up your bum and a  
magazine in your hand both at the same time?
- Julia: Very funny Sandra,
- Rosie: Can you tell me more Sandra, about the machines?

Sandra: Aye well there was loads of sewing factories, not there's not, that's it.

Rosie: Anything else?

Sandra: I well I tried to go back after the bairn and they said no-chance, they said whose going to pick her up from school when she's poorly? That was it.

Lesley: Ah. I loved it at Levis, There was this dead close group. We used to go for these nights out... every payday right, we'd go straight out after work, down the karaoke, I'd do me special number...Bonny Tyler- you know... once upon a time I was falling in love, now I'm only falling apart... aye... I never see them now though. All those people. Wonder what they're all doing now? Barabra Mac, Phylis Steel, Who was that one? Hacky Jacqui always smelled of dog food, and the boss-Patrick eeh the hairiest nostrils you've ever seen. We were surprised he could even breathe... Aye. You've just gotta keep going though haven't you.

Sandra: Ah Lesley,

Lesley: Then I went to B and Q soldering these bits of metal, I like that an all...

Katy: Hang on I thought we were keeping this play more up-beat... not all doom and gloom and nostrils.

*Heslop: Katy's phone rings.*

Katy: Not now mam, I'll call you back. Love you.



Rosie: Ok um... so keeping Katy's thoughts on being positive in mind, I'd just like to finish with one more game, so, in a circle... ok this pen is the talky stick.

Katy: The talky stick?

Rosie: Yes so um, we pass it round and whoever has the talky stick gets to open yourselves up, discuss whatever you like... but you can't talk unless you've got the stick. SO... anyone got anything they want to get off their chest? And then we go round and think about something really good that's happened afterwards ok?

Lesley: Nothing too personal ladies, keep it light...

Rosie: Anything? Nope...

*(Silence)*

Rosie: I'll go first then shall I? Ok, well everything feels worse when you're not sleeping doesn't it? So for me something that's been tough about this week is being kept awake all night, and people keep telling me how good their babies are and that its all about technique and having a good routine and I've honestly tried everything and well... that's it really.

Sandra: Hey I know what that feels like eh being kept up all night? But it's not with our Amy!

Julia: Shush Sandra...

Katy: Ah it is dead tough, you can't be hard on yourself. Hey it doesn't always work and its not your fault if it doesn't but that baby whispering can help?

Julia: Shush... You haven't got the stick Katy.

Katy: I'll tell you after.

Rosie: Thanks Katy.

Lesley: Is it my turn? Right, well, I can think of one thing, it sounds a bit daft but at the end of our street there's these two circles full of flowers, and everyday me and the Grandbairn walk past and smell them and we like, pick out our favorites, we don't pick them just decide which ones the best, but this year the whole things just been dug over. It's just mud. It looks dead sad now. Nee flowers.

Sandra: Is that it? Nee flowers?

Lesley: Well Aye.

Rosie: Thanks Lesley, great. Anybody else?

Julia: I'd like to talk about something.

*Heslop: Lesley passes her the talky stick*

Julia: Thanks, I want to discuss... well, it might sound a bit odd, but something that really gripes me, is promiscuous women... I mean, I just don't understand it to be honest err... women who... who sleep around, and stab others in the back. They've got no self-respect, I hate women like that- no I don't actually, I pity women like that, they must hate themselves...

Sandra: Can you pass me talky stick please Julia? *(pause)* Thanks. Aye and something that really boils my piss is stuck up ladida... all fur coat and ne knickers bitches, coming in here and

thinking they're better than everyone else... but then when it comes down to it, it turns out they're full of shit... full of shit.

Katy: Where did that come from?

Lesley: Keep it light please girls and no bad language...

Katy: You two aren't back to all this again?

Sandra: Ah Aye Ange said she saw some blokes coming out of yours the other day...

Julia: I beg your pardon. Erm Sandra I wasn't actually referring....

Sandra: She said it was dead surprising what she saw- what those blokes were doing when they were coming out- what they were carrying...

Julia: I don't know what you mean?

Sandra: Yes you do Julia... Flat screen telly

Julia: Alright Sandra! So what! Yes alright. There were men coming out of my house okay. Yes they were bailiffs. Happy? They took pretty much everything. Everything. But... But I wasn't talking about you if you must know!

Sandra: Aye well... I'm just saying,

Julia: I was talking about Brian well his new flame to be precise... I bumped into him the other day, well I saw him, he didn't see me... in Newcastle and he was with her...that hussy. He was sitting in the same seat at the Fenwicks café that we always used to sit in... he was drinking the same bloody coffee and eating the same bloody cheese scone... and she looks about twelve and actually quite perfect if you like that sort of

thing... perfectly groomed anyway, if you ignore the nose...  
and anyway well... that's who I was talking about actually  
Sandra, not you... and yes there were people coming out of  
my house and yes not everything is perfect in my life either. I  
never said it was.

*(Silence)*

Rosie: Um right... don't forget something happy at the end... so try  
to clear away some of the err you know ... you finish with a  
good thing, shake all the negativity away like this: that's it  
shake it off shake it off you... and then tell us about a nice  
thing that's happened.

Julia: And a good thing...a good thing... well a good thing... I  
found some lovely cushion covers in a charity shop yesterday,  
and the cushions they look gorgeous they look lovely in the  
sitting room, they really brightened the place up... at least I've  
still got something to sit on eh... haha...

*(pause)*

Sandra: Sorry Julia, I didn't mean to I shouldn't have mentioned the  
*(pause)* I feel like a right twat now...

Julia: Yes well...

Sandra: I might be able to sort you out with some stuff like, I've got a  
mate,

Julia: That's very kind but I don't need charity Sandra

Sandra: No it's not. Hey we've all had stuff of him haven't we?

Julia: Really?

Sandra: Aye no bother,

Katy: He sounds like a nasty piece of work your Brian.

Julia: I wish I hadn't wasted so much time on him...

Sandra: Na but you can never tell with people can y I mean hey, I used  
to write to Jimmy Saville every week.

Katy: Ah no, I used to listen to mam's Garry glitter records...

Lesley: And What about that Philip Scoffield eh?

Sandra: What about him?

Lesley: Gordon the gofer?

*Heslop: They look at her bemused. Then enter a 'suit' with note pad pen  
calculator, and begins to take measurements.*

Suit: Alright?

Sandra: Whose this Lesley?

Suit: Ah don't mind me love.

Sandra: Whose this man Lesley?

*(Lesley says nothing)*

Sandra: Scuse me em, why are you here?

Suit: Who are you?

Sandra: Never mind who I am, I've been coming here for years who  
are you?

Katy: Sandra come on.

*Lesley looks at her feet*

Suit: Don't worry about me love. I'm just from the council, Lesley'll  
fill you in.

Sandra: Lesley?

Lesley: Right then em, who fancies another game of shuffle monster?

*Heslop: Blackout.*

Sandra: Scene 3, it's here. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, And the rain is getting heavier, Lesley?

*Heslop: She exits, Lesley is alone centre stage on the telephone.*

Lesley: Alright Chris. Yes everything's sorted. All packed up... ok yeah, what time? Half eleven! Well no, that's a bit early...

*Heslop: Enter Sandra.*

Can you not make it a bit later? You'll have to make it later!

*Heslop: Lesley Hangs up the phone.*

Sandra: Lesley,

Lesley: Hiya pet, eh God you made us jump.

Sandra: Look Lesley, I just wanted to say sorry.

Lesley: Sandra what's that on your arm?

Sandra: *(pause)* Look, I just wanted to say, I've been out of order lately, and whatever's going on it's none of my business.

Lesley: I know you've got a lot on Sandra,

Sandra: How's Alan doing?

Lesley: Ah he's fine, he's keeping positive, he's following the steps,

Sandra: What steps?

Lesley: Steps in Noel's Book.

Sandra: Noel?

Lesley: Aye, Edmonds, he's great, Sandra, we've been following the steps together. You could learn a lot from Noel you know, I

mean, in the 80's he was finished wasn't he, he was in the gutter? But then he turned it around didn't he and now look at him!

Sandra: Aye I never really though about it, anyway Lesley...

Lesley: His book's been dead helpful 'positively happy, cosmic ways to change your life.' There's an app an all... you can put an order in with the cosmos.

Sandra: You what?

Lesley: Aye whatever you want you just type it in and the cosmos'll sort it out. You should try it Sandra.

*(Pause)*

Sandra: Look Lesley, I just wanted to say I mean, I know it must be dead hard... and well I just want to say we're all here for you,

Lesley: Look at this, right, it's only £1.20, you can download it now

Sandra: Lesley you know when you talked me in to coming here, when you talked us into comin' down the group and toddlers and that?

Lesley: Aye,

Sandra: Well... if you hadn't done that I doubt I'd still be friggin' here Lesley, and I don't just mean today. I mean here at all, full stop.

Lesley: Ah Sandra,

Sandra: If there's anything gannin on... you need to tell us. *(pause)* I mean it Lesley.

Lesley: Ah Sandra.

Sandra: I'm fuckin worried about you!

Heslop: *The following week.*

Rosie: Go on then, tell us.

Sandra: Right, you ready Lesley...you listening to this? Right, you na Rupert the Bear?

Rosie: Yeah.

Sandra: Well Remember Macca?

Lesley: Macca?

Sandra: Paul Macartney, you know....

Julia: We know who Paul Macartney is...

Sandra: Aye well remember that song- bairns had it on friggin loop every night! You knaa... the frog chorus?

Lesley: I know!

Julia: Oh god...

Sandra: 'We all stand together!'

Lesley: Oh I love that one, He was much better wasn't he when he went off on his own?

Rosie: Does everyone remember it?

Katy: Aye...

Sandra: You do the ayeeahh bits then

Julia: Please tell me your joking?

Sandra: Na na this is dead good for getting the feeling of the group, hey I was thinking Lesley, we could get down the sound rooms, record it. We could do a bit of advertising and that. Get the numbers up. Make the play all about us.



Lesley: em yeah, Sandra.

Sandra: Right then ready, don't laugh- you ready! Don't laugh...

*(Sandra sings)*

Bom bom bom... aye-ahh

Bom bom bom ayeahh...

'Win or lose, Sink or swim,

One thing is certain we'll never give in...

Side by side, hand in hand, we all stand together!

Hey what do you think Lesley? It's good isn't it?

Lesley: Sandra, it's lovely. I love it.

Sandra: Aye well it's good isn't it, cos we all look after each other here,  
we all open up. That's what this groups all about Rosie,  
looking after each other, isn't that right Lesley?

Lesley: Yes, yes.

Katy: Its alright like, there's something missing- It needs a mash up!

Julia: A mash up?

Katy: Aye Chumbawumba!

Rosie: What's that?

Katy: You kna Chumbawumba... that lad who chucked is drink on  
Prescott

Lesley: Ah I liked John Prescott.

Katy: I get knocked down but I get up again... you're never gonna  
keep me down.

Sandra: ahh aye aye... good, good one...

Julia: We're never going to be the next military wives with that!

Rosie: No no, they're great,

Julia: But those songs don't go together...

Sandra: That's the whole point of a mash up Julia.

Julia: Oh right...

Rosie: Ready, we'll sing the first bit of the frog song, then  
chumbawumba, then back to the frog song again ok...

Julia: Oh God,

Rosie: After three...

All: Win or lose, sink or swim one thing is certain we'll never give  
in side, by side, hand in hand we all stand together...

I get knocked down, but I get up again, you're never going to  
keep me down, I get knocked down but I get up again you're  
never going to keep us down...

Win or lose, sink or swim one thing is certain you'll never give  
in, side by side hand in hand we all stand together!

*(Lesley bursts in to tears)*

Sandra: Are you ok Lesley?

Katy: Ah Lesley it wasn't that bad, come here, *(She hugs her)*

Lesley: Yeah, yeah I'm fine it's just lovely. Really good. Ignore me!  
What are we doing next eh?

Sandra: Come on Lesley, do you want to go in the office and have a  
chat?

Lesley: No, I want to keep going, we haven't got much time eh?

Katy: Well we've still got twenty minutes.

Sandra: What we doing next then?

Rosie: We could do that Job centre improvisation?

Katy: Oh that'll cheer her up! Not.

Sandra: Aye it's good this Lesley, it's for a contrast, like shows the lass  
having a bit of a tough time and that...

Julia: We can't I mean, who's going to do French Emma's part?

Sandra: Katy.

Katy: What?

Sandra: H'away man, we can't do this just the two of us...

Katy: Aye but I always said I wasn't acting! And this is just  
miserable

Sandra: Ah fine then I give up. We can't do a play with just me and  
Julia, it'll be shit.

Katy: Come on?

Sandra: Please...

Katy: It's fine, I'll do it but if any of you laugh I'll kill yous right, I  
mean it!

Lesley: You can stop at any time ok pet?

Rosie: So what we're doing here is Lesley, we're playing out a scene  
set in a Jobcentre of the future, it's semi-improvised, so Katy,  
you'll have to remember what Emma did, do you think you  
can?

Katy: I suppose I'll have to!

Sandra: Katy, Go.

Katy: Hang on, ahem,

Sandra: Go on then.

Katy: Um...

Sandra: Number,

Katy: Yeah, right um... Number?

Sandra: What do you mean number?

Katy: Well, you need a number?

Sandra: Oh, yeah, here

Katy: It doesn't register. You need another one.

*Heslop: Lesley's mobile phone rings.*

Lesley: Sorry

*Heslop: She turns it off.*

Sandra: I've just waited for ages, I've waited for an hour and a half man, you kiddin?!

Katy: The, the number's incorrect.

Sandra: Well can you not ring across or something?

Katy: It's not my problem.

Sandra: But, she gave me the wrong number...

Katy: It's not my problem...

Sandra: But, well anyway I mean... she's getting hungry (*starts rocking her arms as though with a baby*)

Katy: Are you refusing to comply?

Sandra: Well no but...

Katy: You need to get another number.

*Heslop: The center phone rings*

Lesley: Arhhh... Just leave it, carry on,

*Heslop: They wait for the phone to ring out.*

Katy: Right, ok, are you refusing to comply?

Sandra: Well no but...

Katy: You need to get another number.

Sandra: Yeah but I've already got a number

Katy: Yes well, the number is incorrect,

Sandra: For god's sake

Katy: Are you speaking to a member of staff in an abusive  
manner?...

Sandra: No

Katy: The queue is over there...

Sandra: I haven't got time, I've got to get the kids.

Katy: That's your decision but I must warn you, if you do not  
complete the scheduled review then there will be sanctions.

Sandra: What do you mean?

Katy: You will lose your allowance

Sandra: Fine then! I'll have to then won't I?

Katy: What are you doing?

Sandra: What do you think I'm doing?

Katy: This is not an allocated breast-feeding area.

Sandra: I've been waiting here for more than three hours!

Katy: You can't do that here...

Sandra: Well I am.

Katy: Are you refusing to comply?

Sandra: What else am I meant to do eh? What else am I fucking meant  
to do?

*(Pause)*

Sandra: That's all we got to...

*Lesley Claps.*

Lesley: Hey they're dead good aren't they,

Julia: That was absolutely brilliant...

Sandra: You were great Katy, really understated...

Katy: Do you think?

Sandra: Aye man, I dunna what you've been whinging about? You're better than Julia!

Julia: Excuse me?!

Katy: That wasn't too bad really.

*Heslop: The Centre phone rings again, Lesley hangs up and leaves it off the hook.*

Sandra: Lesley man, why don't you just friggin' answer it?

Lesley: We're busy.

Sandra: Lesley!

*Heslop: Sandra puts the phone back on the hook.*

Lesley: Excuse me,

Katy: Come on Sandra.

*Heslop: It rings again- Sandra picks it up.*

Sandra: Hello.

Lesley: Sandra!

Sandra: Hello yes what, yes this is Lesley... Who's that? Who?

Lesley: Sandra get off that!

*Heslop: Lesley snatches the phone off Sandra and un-plugs it.*

Lesley: Just concentrate on sorting out your own life Sandra eh?

Sandra: This is my life.

Lesley: Just mind your own bloody business. *(she exits)*

Rosie: Shouldn't someone go after her?

Sandra: This is getting ridiculous. We're going to have to talk to Alan.

Katy: Aye maybe.

*Heslop: Julia is splashed in the face.*

Julia: What's that? Oh great there's another leak!

Sandra: For fuck's sake I keep telling her to get that roof sorted out.

Katy: Calm down Sandra.

Sandra: I am calm- Julia get another bucket will you.

Katy: There aren't any more buckets.

Julia: Use this.

*Heslop: She tips some toys from a plastic box and places them under the leak*

*Heslop: Enter Lesley with painting materials*

Sandra: listen, Lesley...

*Heslop: Lesley begins to paint the woodwork around the outside of the room*

Katy: What you doing?

Lesley: Keeping on with me jobs...

Katy: Well do you not think we need to get the roof sorted?

Sandra: Lesley, we were just saying we need a night out, make it a fundraiser eh *(pause)* What do you think?

Leslie: What's that?

Sandra: A few drinks, we could do the bingo again- or hey what about a bit of Karaoke?

Lesley: Aye I like Karaoke.

Katy: Leslie why don't you leave that for now?

Leslie: Ah no...

Rosie: Do you want a drink Leslie?

Sandra: Put the brush down Lesley and we'll have a nice cup of tea...

Leslie: Tea? Eeh we'll drown in tea us lot won't we if the floods don't get us first.

Katy: Come on pet.

Lesley: Katy can you pass me that sellotape, thanks.

*Heslop: Lesley starts to try and tape over the cracks*

Lesley: It won't bloody stick, why won't it bloody stick

*Heslop: She's getting drenched*

Sandra: Leslie, you can't sellotape a roof up man!

*Heslop: The door buzzes*

Lesley: Just leave it.

Katy: *(looking at Sandra)* It might be important mighten it?

Lesley: No, it's fine

Sandra: Lesley!

Lesley: Don't open the door...

*Heslop: Another buzz*

Sandra: Lesley you've got let him in.

Lesley: Who?

*Heslop: Another buzz, Sandra moves to answer the door*

Leslie: Leave it Sandra. Rosie, we could have some karaoke in it, in the play, I could do me song.



Rosie: Good idea.

Julia: Why don't you just talk to us Lesley?

Katy: Why can't we open the door?

Chris: *(through the door)* Leslie! Leslie...

Lesley: And I need you now tonight  
And I need you more than ever

*Heslop: the door buzzes*

Chris: Leslie! Open the door!

Lesley: And if you'll only hold me tight  
We'll be holding on forever  
They'll like that!

*Heslop: a buzz at the door*

Sandra: I'm gonna open it.

Katy: We can help Lesley!

Chris: Lesley!

Leslie: Rosie, I've been thinking about this idea...

*Heslop: Sandra goes to open the door*

Lesley: Sandra please don't

*Heslop: She does.*

Lesley: Sandra!

Sandra: I'm sorry Lesley...

*Heslop: Enter Chris*

Chris: Lesley! For Christ's sake what's all this?

Lesley: What's that flower?

Chris: You said it was all in boxes...

Katy: Shit.

Leslie: It is... well all the important stuff...

Chris: Lesley!

Lesley: What?!

Chris: Jesus,

Heslop: *He starts ringing someone but there is no answer.*

Chris: Shit! I should've... What about the staff Lesley?

Lesley: Not today.

Sandra: Today? We've got to get out today?

Lesley: No.

Julia: Oh my God.

Katy: Fuck. Lesley!

Lesley: No.

Sandra: You're fucking kidding me... today Lesley!

Chris: Shit I need re-enforcements. *(he exits)*

Lesley: It's not today! It's not.

Chris: You told me that everything was sorted.

Sandra: Fuck! Fuck Lesley.

Lesley: It's bloody stupid, I've got funding coming. It's fucking stupid. It's not closing.  
It's not bloody closing!

Sandra: Lesley...

Lesley: No, I mean it Sandra, this is our play.

Sandra: Ah, come here.

Lesley: No, we haven't worked out what happens yet. We all stand together that's right isn't it lasses? You're wrong Christ. You're wrong it doesn't happen today because we don't know what happens yet. We don't know. You need to go out and start the script again... you need to...

Sandra: Lesley, you're gonna be ok. We're going to look after you... We'll sort this out I promise.

*Heslop: Blackout- the rain has stopped. A buzzer goes off several times in the darkness but lights slowly up.*

Rosie: I didn't know you worked at the hospital Sandra,

Sandra: Aye volunteering.

Katy: Aww look, Carrot.

Julia: Carrot?

Katy: Me Rabbit, Carrot.

*Heslop: Katy shows round a picture on her phone.*

Rosie: Aye?

Katy: Ah he was so cute, ah look how cute he is. My mam didn't quite get it though that you've got to bring them in in the winter!

Sandra: Aye you do...

Katy: They thought with the fur and that y' know... well one day I went out to feed him in the morning and... he was frozen stiff.

Sandra: What you mean like properly frozen stiff?

Katy: Yeah properly frozen stiff (*pause*) you could tell he'd been trying to get out as well... he was on his legs, his little face pressed up against the cage.

Julia: He's alive in this picture though?

Katy: I can still remember sitting crying into me cornflakes and I looked out of the window and me dad's taking him to be buried, he's got hold of him and he's still in the same position!

Sandra: Poor carrot.

(*Quiet falls*)

Sandra: You alright Lesley?

Lesley: Aye.

Heslop: *The buzzer goes...*

Chris: You lot must be getting hungry now eh?

Sandra: haha what with all these biscuits?

Rosie: What biscuits, I'm starving.

Sandra: Don't tell him that man! Anyway there's still hobnobs isn't there? Shit, who ate the last ones? Julia!

Julia: What?

Sandra: Argh have a look, see if you see any one yet? Any cameras...press... ITV?

Heslop: *A note comes through the door*

Katy: What about police? They'll just shift us you kna...

Julia: I'm going to read the note.

Sandra: Ignore it man...

Heslop: *Julia gets the note.*

Julia: It says 'Lesley, open the door'.

Sandra: Imaginative! Have a look Rosie is there anyone there?

*(pause)*

Rosie: Not a soul.

Sandra: Well where the bloody hell is everyone Julia, not even the  
Deckham Newsletter?

Heslop: *Katy is still looking at her i. phone*

Katy: I know why, Some idiot's gone and held up the butcher's in  
Gateshead. Armed robbery it's all over the news...

Julia: The butchers?

Sandra: Ah great. The friggin' butchers.

Katy: Aye I know. He's been robbed at gunpoint.

Sandra: What did someone have a beef with... Beef. Hahaha...

Rosie: You're not telling porkies are you?

Julia: That's offal Rosey...

Sandra: Seriously though the twat! Why did he have to do it now eh?  
What we gonna do?

Rosie: We'll have to wait.

Katy: I can't stay that long me mam'll be in a right panic and Aunty  
Julia can't cope with all the kids forever.

Lesley: Poor Carrot.

*(Silence)*

Katy: And anyway British Bake off's on tonight.

Rosie: Ah will you stop talking about food...

Sandra: H'away Katy. British Bake off!

Rosie: Terry is supposed to be working tonight...

Sandra: I think it's nice,

Katy: Ah Aye, it's nice, this is the first time I've sat down in months.  
It's bloody lovely.

Sandra: What then? Just give up and go home?

Katy: We'll still keep in touch,

Sandra: And what about Lesley?

*Silence.*

Sandra: Anyway we won't.

Julia: Course we will, We can always meet somewhere else.

Sandra: Ah aye that's what's always said isn't it, eh? It'll start off the  
odd snatched coffee and then slowly slowly less and less and  
then nothing. Then just Gary.

*(Pause)*

Katy: Ah pet.

Julia: You've got other stuff going on though haven't you Sandra, I  
mean I know Gary's not great but you're always talking about  
you know other men and things.

Sandra: Na...

Julia: What do you mean?

Sandra: It's all rubbish Julia, fantasy. I haven't had bloody sex for two  
years.

Rosie: Hey, you're not the only one Sandra.

Sandra: Pathetic isn't it.

Julia: Course not.

Sandra: I'm not going home. I can't.

Katy: Ah San...

Rosie: Why not Sandra?

Sandra: It's not his fault you kna. He's just bitter, he's all knotted up inside. Crap with money... and he drinks too much... and he's just bloody angry all the time.

Katy: You've stuck up for him for too long San,

Sandra: I know I'll go back...

Katy: You shouldn't. you can't.

Lesley: You need a proper plan Sandra- you need to image a different way

Sandra: Aye, maybe

Julia: Move in with me!

Sandra: What? Don't be daft...

Julia: Go on move in with me,

Sandra: Really, Julia?

Julia: I mean it,

Sandra: No but really though?

Julia: Yeah course... I'd love it Sandra, honestly.

Sandra: Oh I dunno, I can't.

Katy: Why not?

Sandra: I can't.... we'll do each other's heads in.

Julia: I've got loads of space... and some lovely furniture now eh?  
Thanks to you... I'm bored Sandra, I'd love the company.

Rosie: It sounds like a great idea!

Katy: It does like.

Sandra: Really?

Lesley: Perfect.

Julia: I've bought some Tetley's already, just in case anyone popped round.

Sandra: Ah did you?

Julia: Yes.

*(Silence)*

Sandra: Hey maybe I will Julia. Maybe be I fuckin well will...

Julia: Yes fuck it...

Sandra: Hey it'll be a laugh won't it?

Julia: The only thing is you'll have to not mind, well Geoff might pop in every now and then.

Sandra: Geoff?! Shakra Geoff!?

Julia: Yes, well, he's been err... helping me with some of the more difficult yoga moves...

Sandra: Aye well, I suppose I could put up with that. Thanks Julia!

*Heslop: The buzzer goes...*

Chris: Come on girls, I'm getting cold. And, the police are on their way you know

Katy: Na they're not they're at the butchers... hahaha

Chris: Someone'll be round soon girls...

*Blackout*



## 2. 1. Dramatizing Austerity: On Dissonance

### 2.1.1. Characteristics of the Austerity Genre

In Part 1, Chapter 2 I worked with Irigaray to create a dynamic account of context. I looked at forms of convention that co-constitute genres which stretch over time. This showed how the North East region and women living there become penetrated by the ascription of ungraspable value (generally). In the present there is an insufficient supply of suitable paid work, space and support for unpaid care is closed down (particularly for lone parents), whilst demands for entry into a (lacking) paid labour market are intensified. Simultaneously, the region and women located there become too fat, undernourished, deprived, and failing (in an article, an advert, and a report) but her capacity for self-touch persists. In Part 1 Chapter 3 I considered the implications of theatre-as-method for multiple expressions of body/voice in social research. This showed potential for experiments with accent, intonation, posture, image-making, affect and emotion. We could use dramatic form and theatre-making techniques to engage with encounters that constitute what austerity is and what austerity does, what is shared and what falls apart, and how women exceed ascriptions of generic value. In Part 1 Chapter 3 a draft of the script became research material in its own right. This showed some of our attempts to evoke austerity as women encountered it in the midst of other things. Characters invested in different promises that were sensed as proximate and possible. For example, Sandra invested in the promise of making a play,

and Lesley invested in the promise of 'Cosmic Ordering'. Those promises didn't follow a linear progression, nor did they quite come to fruition. We saw women's different attempts to 'get on and get by' as the roof (infrastructures of support for unpaid care) crumbled around them and as other forces threatened to pull women apart but they continued to hold things together. Moments of humour and mutual care evoked a sense of stubborn conviviality in a context of precarisation. Therefore this draft of script got at key themes including processes of precarisation that were specific to austerity and operated amidst other forms of precarisation. It attempted to evoke ways in which increasingly unstable futures folded into an affective present.

The second part of the thesis engages in more detail with those themes. This means drawing on broader empirical and conceptual material to look at what the genre austerity becomes in the lives of these women. The second chapter - 2.2 - draws on theories of precarity, precarisation and precariousness with focus on the fraying and disruption of infrastructures for unpaid care. The third chapter - 2.3 - develops from Berlant's (2011) account of 'Cruel Optimism' to look at what promises persist for these women who are already economically marginalized through the cuts and reforms of austerity. It considers how futures fold into an affective present in the empirical scene and asks what effect austerity has on how futures become present? Both chapters differently explore what austerity becomes for women who are already 'on the breadline'. However, the chapters also show the multiplicity and incoherence of austerity as it differently meets and co-constitutes the lives of women in a supposedly shared demographic and in doing so disrupts opportunities for shared experience, even with austerity itself. Before moving on to those chapters I begin with an experiment. 'Dramatizing Austerity: On Dissonance' acts as a bridge between the play and the rest

of the thesis in a number of ways. It draws together elements of the script and the play making process with excerpts of interview and ethnography. It is both a piece of creative writing and a search for theories that might begin to make sense of the genre austerity by getting at certain effects and affects that I go on to explore in the following chapters.

Berlant (2011) erodes boundaries between literary theory and social theory, cultural texts and everyday life. Texts are not 'representations' but instead have an affective life that resonate with and become part of the everyday. In this chapter I engage with the play, with processes in its development and with women's descriptions and re-enactments of everyday encounters with austerity to evoke a sense of the austerity genre. Since the outcome of the play and the process in its development are not separate entities, just as the genre austerity and its effects and affects are not separate entities, I think and do form and content together in this chapter. Building on the conceptual frameworks laid out in Act 1, I consider austerity as a series of material and immaterial forces that effect and affect as they enmesh with other forces in and between body-subjects. Those forces work across political, cultural and economic domains, for example they are associated with cuts to state funding, the increasing contingency of state support, and certain forms of othering in political and cultural discourse. In this case, focusing on the challenge of dramatising austerity I consider what qualities the genre austerity might have by thinking it through theatrical devices; atmosphere, character, plot.

Considering the challenge of dramatizing austerity offers a way of exploring, which, if any, relations with austerity became felt as common by the women? And/ or this

highlights the problem of making sense of a lack of common encounters with austerity, or making a scene when the plot keeps falling apart. During my time in Gateshead cut backs and pushes forward resulting from the reduction and reform of state spending on welfare and services made their presence known. However, even amongst this small group of women in a supposedly shared demographic, austerity touched lives in different ways, at different times and in different places; for example, as one woman was moved from income support to job seekers allowance or in the combination of national and localised workfare that followed<sup>13</sup>; by the withdrawal of legal aid and a custody case; by the bedroom tax and a threatened eviction. Austerity at times appeared to rumble along in the background, at times to go unnoticed, at times to make things feel better, at times to be harmful and at times, in austerity's multiplicity, all or some of those relations became held together at once.

Here, then, I think more about those disparate processes, which enables me to consider how relations with austerity as genre became felt in the empirical scene as frail, broken, or altogether absent. At the time of writing, it became difficult to make participants' encounters with austerity resonate as part of an already existing story in the play or in conversation. As I think and/or feel austerity through atmosphere, character, and plot I attempt to grasp at the austerity genre even as it seems to fall apart. Cutting across those devices I find a feeling or quality of unresolved dissonance, whereby multiple and dissonant relations are held together. I argue that this 'holding together' of dissonant relations is important to how austerity was lived by these women in the midst of other relations. However, dissonance is not specific to austerity. It also applies

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<sup>13</sup> In the UK financial support offered to people who are unemployed or 'job seekers' has become increasingly contingent. Claimants must fulfil various requirements (for example participate in unpaid work placements) or risk the withdrawal of their payments (sanctions.)

to other relations in and beyond the current condition. Dissonance means lack of agreement - especially inconsistency between the beliefs one holds or between one's beliefs and actions. Political claims that 'we're all in it together' whilst services that are vital to some citizens and not others are taken apart is dissonance. The nostalgic evocation of a period that oversaw the growth and expansion of the welfare state and the NHS, whilst those infrastructures become undone, is dissonance. Dissonance also means the mingling of discordant sounds, especially a clashing or unresolved musical interval or chord. In austerity multiple relations between a woman and various demands - challenges of unpaid care, compulsions for self-appreciation, amongst others - pull against one another and in doing so produce unresolved fracturing, discord and disagreement. And in this way, dissonance is also commonality where that commonality is exactly an absence or erosion of things held in common. Therefore, thinking austerity through dramatic form in this chapter I attempt to introduce and evoke some of those forms of dissonance. And in doing so begin to suggest what in/ as austerity comes together, what is held in tension, and what falls apart.

### **2.1.2. Genres of Regional Theatre**

A Women's Group in a family support service, in a ward in Gateshead in the North East of England. Women attending the group are in and out of or on the edge of 'economic inactivity'<sup>14</sup>. Gateshead, as I have suggested in 1.2, is a place with a strong industrial history - echoes of that unravelling are still heard in a limited jobs market,

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<sup>14</sup> The category 'economic inactivity' is used in the UK by the Department of Work and Pensions and other organisations to describe people not in the paid labour market including care-givers, the unemployed, students and the retired. This term belittles unpaid care and other forms of labour that make indirect financial contributions to the UK economy.

and it has had some of the most significant cuts to local authority spending relative to the rest of the UK. Women, as I have noted, are also disproportionately hit. Those numbers tell a particular story; they become a particular kind of generality. In the play and in this thesis I and we wanted to find or make some other stories to get at how those generalities folded into the different lives of women.

This project began with my own interest in an existing genre of regional drama including plays and/or films like *The Filleting Machine* (Hadaway, T. 1981) *The Dancer/Billy Elliot* (Hall, L. 2000) and *The Pitmen Painters* (Hall, L. 2007). These dramas were all set amidst industrial landscapes and/or in processes of industrial change in the North East of England. In this way they spoke to the turbulent processes of assembly and disassembly explored in 1. 2. on 'the room'. The dramas differently evoked the 'building up and breaking down' of industrial body-subjects and also celebrated the singularity of people and place in excess of those processes. In different ways the dramas grasped at what it meant to share or move outside of a particular world of industrial work with or without proximate others. For example, in *The Filleting Machine*, the character 'Davey' is torn between gutting fish on the quayside or 'bettering himself' at University. *Billy Elliot's* dad decides whether or not to 'break' the 1984 national coal miners' strike to support his son's dream of becoming a dancer. Lee Hall's *The Pitmen Painters* (set between 1934-1947) follows Ashington miners engaged in WEA art appreciation classes. The play is based on a factual account (Feaver, 2001) and the paintings at its heart capture interrelations between paid labour and other forms of social and cultural activity; they show individuals becoming part of something 'bigger than themselves' through work and play.

In the play one man rejects an offer to become a salaried artist to remain in the world of mining despite the dangers associated with such work/way of life. Strangely plausible, this plotline potentially fed off and into common local stories (legislated nostalgia) about solidarity, masculinity and industrial heritage. The play became a trace that remains from the wiping out of that industry. It also raised interesting questions about changing relationships with paid and unpaid labour, shared experience and regional identities at different stages of industrialisation and de-industrialisation. As characters' internal dilemmas are folded into broader political/ economic landscapes the plays differently evoke how industrial change is lived and folded into the intimate. How do these characters negotiate those situations, how do they hold reciprocity together with self-preservation?

Of course these are fictions and do not necessarily get at the affective and material complexities of industrial change as I am sure they were lived. But the plays both tap into and co-constitute something shared by multiple subjects who had experienced that kind of labour and/or political struggle. Women are largely written out of the dramas but it was possible, even as a woman from the North East of England, to feel part of those stories as well as excluded from them. I recognized the accents, the landmarks, even the jokes, and I was invited to feel part of the journey towards resolution, the anger, hope, and moments of solidarity. Further, as form and content fold together, the plays adhere to a narrative convention; they have a strong plot driven by a protagonist with an over-riding objective. Conflict emerges from barriers preventing the resolution of that objective (see Lajos, 2004). This resonates with different political genres captured in the plays, meaning particular struggles associated with workers' rights and de-industrialisation. For example, in *Billy Elliot* dramatic conflict emerges from barriers

preventing the protagonist from fulfilling his drive to become a dancer. This journey becomes enmeshed with other characters' involvement in the 1984 national miners' strike. Strike action is driven by a hoped for resolution, and conflict emerges when barriers prevent momentum towards that resolution. The conflict between those on strike and opposing forces (police, government, those not able or willing to strike) become commonly registered across multiple body-subjects (fictional and otherwise).

Widespread popularity of this kind of theatre including revivals of older plays such as *Close the Coal House Door* (Plater, 1968: National Tour, 2016) compelled me to question why people keep writing and engaging North-East drama that is set and/or written in the industrial past? Is this because relations with work less commonly constitute forms of regional and/or classed identity (however disavowed relations with those identities might be)? Do those plays tap into some longing for that kind of public intimacy, however disavowed and/or fantasmic our memories of it might be? Is this a way of holding on to or stretching a diminished genre? Do the plays, however slightly, tend to wounds left behind by violent processes of de-industrialisation?

In the *Pitmen Painters* you were a miner or you weren't. In the *Filleting Machine* you worked on the Fish Quay or you didn't. In *Billy Elliot* you went on strike or you were a 'scab'. The plays differently showed how relations between those ways of belonging (or not) were complex and tensed, they showed characters' disavowed relations with the worlds in which they lived, they suggested what it felt like to be excluded or to know but not feel comfortable 'in your place.' The plays tell stories of industrial workers who were variously rendered threat not least in times of industrial conflict when Thatcher (1984) described them as 'the enemy within'. A strong sense of coherent forms of



convention that organised characters' lives cut across the plays but characters' singularity disrupt processes of limiting, demonising, othering, and show characters in excess types. This was something that we hoped to achieve in our play as we created a story about different, singular women 'on benefits' in this region as they encountered the effects of austerity. But was it possible to evoke the same kinds of intimacy with a North-East play set in the present, when experiences of paid and unpaid work are more diverse? I had begun to think that question in relation to austerity: how might certain interactions or encounters be registered (or not) as part of a broader commonly understood genre - austerity? I begin to work through that question, by thinking about what atmospheric qualities austerity might have and how through those atmospheres austerity might be worked into our script.

### 2.1.3. Atmosphere

Katy: Em... aye... right well, it sounds a bit daft but there's these two circles full of flowers round where we live. The kids like smelling them, but this year the whole things just been dug over. It looks dead sad now. Nee flowers.

Sandra: Is that it? Nee flowers?

Katy: Aye. Anyway we planted some more. And then I got a warning off the council didn't I...

Rosie: You what?

Katy: Health and safety.

Sandra: We're not gonna get much drama out of flowers are we Katy?

Katy: Well sorry my life isn't more exciting Sandra.

(Final Draft: DieHard Gateshead 2015)

In geography, affective atmospheres and ambiances have been given increasing attention as a way of considering 'the contingent outcomes of a multiplicity of relations between techniques, technologies, practices, materiality, sociality and much more' (Adey et al. 2013: 300), as 'moody force fields in the making and shaping of collective publics,' (Amin and Thrift, 2013:161), and as a 'diffuse quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through sensing bodies' (McCormack 2008: 413). How then might austerity become present as an atmosphere in the play?

At first, I thought of austerity as smog: a cold haze settled over the place. Smog, an ambience of smoke, pollution, fumes, gas; human effects that escape their cause. Sometimes austerity escapes its cause too, sometimes its sources are difficult to identify, it gets everywhere, it disorientates, it settles, it muddies connections between us, I try to grab it and it escapes. It is breathed and gets inside different bodies differently.

Its harm escalates.

As I drove through Bensham I encountered empty shops and houses, development projects put on hold, adults and young people hanging around. I felt the anticipation that 'things' would inevitably 'get worse' for the support service in which our project was embedded. I sensed the reforms of austerity producing a background presence of neglect or abandonment. Other participants evoked this too, albeit with different

degrees of intensity. For Hannah: 'Well it's just, the streets and everything aren't as clean as what they used to be, it's just rubbish everywhere isn't it? Cos it's not getting cleaned as much and different things like that'. For Claire: 'The flowers! I'm absolutely gutted about the flowers... and what they've started to do is not cut the grass... (so) you can't play on it'. For Jane: 'There's no jobs around and no activities for the kids like there was before' (from Fieldnotes, 2012). This suggested a steady stream of small or larger interruptions to paid work, unpaid parenting, and other practices involved in 'getting on and getting by', that amounted to a general sense of neglect or abandonment. But did these encounters produce a diffusely felt atmosphere like smog - a feeling of something cloying and grey settled over the place? Certainly where that something began or ended was not always clear. For example, take Jane's comment that there were 'no jobs'. Despite recent depletion of the public sector, a significant source of employment in the North East, it is difficult to coherently attribute changing relations with work, neglect and abandonment, singularly to 'austerity'. Women had experienced such changes and withdrawals in different ways before. For example, several recalled moving from factory to factory (usually sewing or small component manufacture) over years or even decades, until the last of those factories 'went abroad.' Hannah summarised this when she suggested:

'That's all the work there was, there was adverts and jobs coming up all of the time for machinists and I worked in the Levis factory. When I was 21 I was made redundant from Levis. They shut them all down - people who'd worked there from when they were 16 - and they were in their 40's 50's and 60' and they had nothing - nowhere to go and nothing else to do

(Fieldnotes 2012)

As well as having muddied boundaries and complicated causal relations, a grey wet atmosphere was often broken or disturbed; by a job offer, by a community event, by belief in the promise of fiscal responsibility, by women's refusal to see their world in such a disheartened way. For some, at the time of our research Bensham felt optimistic, sunny- 'like a village or community, nice' (Tania). And when I asked participants directly about austerity, several replied along the same lines as Bella: 'I haven't got the first idea cos I don't even know what it means... I don't read the papers, that's a good start isn't it'. Or, 'no, no I'm not affected by it no not at all' (Hannah). Although they often went on to describe cuts or their effects in detail. I think there is more going on here than recognising that how the effects of austerity were felt or encountered was different to how those effects were named and registered as austerity. What we may see instead is how women differently engaged with affects and effects of austerity that happened here, and those that appeared to happen elsewhere. That is differences, perhaps disconnect, between how generic and individuated affects and effects were registered. For example, for Claire: 'Aye a lot of libraries have had yeah hmmhmm... I'm just trying to think about all the different cuts... nothing affects me on a really, really serious level, you know, the benefit thing doesn't affect us, the bedroom tax doesn't affect us em...' Or for Hannah: 'not really directly em, cos I haven't got to worry about the bedroom tax and anything like that'. A number of participants described reforms impacting on other people, sometimes with a weak sense of justice or injustice, often tipping into complete indifference.

So, where a change to the terms of welfare - the bedroom tax - became background for some participants it was violently foregrounded for others. For example for Robyn: 'Don't talk about the fucking bedroom tax that's all I've got to say, bastards (...) this is where I live this is where me friends are, this is where I know em, and it's like I've made this me home'. If the affects of austerity were specific to different women, can we still think about austerity as a single atmosphere (like smog) that proceeded and exceeded those bodies? Different women, places, and institutions encounter a spectrum of reforms and cuts in the genre austerity. Like smog austerity especially aggravates those lungs already vulnerable to its particles. Those women already marginalised in particular ways by the shifting harms of capitalism and patriarchy described in 1. 2. are generally more likely to feel austerity first. And in a slow creep effect, as it sticks to the lungs and builds over time, smog will push certain women across thresholds of debilitation. This gets at how a range of small effects might escalate until individuals reach certain thresholds past which they may not be able to continue. But perhaps the different relations I saw with things like the bedroom tax also undermines dramatizing austerity as smog or shows that austerity also becomes something other than smog - as a particular relation between what is shared and difference. This is because in those relations austerity as 'something shared' fractures and becomes fractured. Perhaps this disrupts how austerity might be sensed as a diffuse atmosphere in which to dwell? Through smog differences are found in the body's capacities to breathe but are written out of the atmospheres that circulate. Perhaps then smog becomes too uniform to evoke the dynamic textures of austerity?

Austerity cannot be fully registered by one kind of atmosphere – smog – in such a way that it becomes a coherent setting within which action happens in a play. However it might be possible to imagine how austerity evokes a kind of background sense of something like smog, particularly as the effects of austerity continue beyond the scope of this project. Further smog as the muddying of connections between people gets at something of the disorientating and fracturing effects of austerity as I go on to explore in the following scene on precarity. Enveloping, disorientating, smog says something about an absence of commonality across women’s experiences of austerity. We explored this in the play through a lack of communication between Lesley and the other characters as the group was closing down. However, austerity as smog also suggests an atmosphere or environment that is mutually encountered. Perhaps this doesn’t fully evoke the dynamic ways in which austerity might become present and touch body-subjects; as a shock from the outside, for example in the loss of a job or home; as a background sense of abandonment, such as in unclean streets; or in a push, for example to return to work. Further, austerity as smog doesn’t capture austerity’s seductiveness; its felt rewards, the promises it appropriates. By which I mean how at times women appeared to become attached to the ideas of sacrifice, thrift, and regaining control of a ‘national budget’, just as Lesley attaches to the hope of ‘cosmic ordering’ in the play. Perhaps then the coherence of smog (even as it alludes to an erosion of coherence) fails to accept that situations escape their atmospheres, which in turn escape the limits of the labels they are given. Atmospheres can lay dormant, surface, rub alongside their contraries. Therefore, to work as a device austerity as atmosphere must be more than shades of one colour (grey) or shades of one texture (slightly wet). Austerity shifts its shape – it is open to its outside, it is dynamic.

If austerity as smog is too diffuse and regular, is it possible to dramatise atmospheres of austerity that include disruptions, optimisms, and indifference? Alongside the miscommunication between Lesley and the rest of the group, and her misplaced investment in cosmic ordering, we attempted to evoke the incoherent coherence of austerity as atmosphere by experimenting with relations between setting and action. For example, through the barely noted dilapidation of a building that provides setting for the play - cracks in the roof and a bucket catching drips; phones going unanswered, a problem unaddressed, hope in a promise of cosmic ordering unfulfilled, the declaration that now there are 'nee flowers', might all culminate towards a dissonant atmosphere of austerity. These encounters showed the effects of austerity on existing infrastructures. These moments became escalations building towards what austerities are or what austerity does in the midst of other things. Austerity is not a grey wetness that settles over the play, however austerity does surface atmospherically as forces that affect the way characters inhabit space, sometimes limiting, sometimes restricting a woman's capacity to act and this escalates as tension towards the end of the play that inspires, or perhaps forces women to respond somehow together.

Thinking about atmosphere in our play offers one way of understanding how austerity becomes and interacts with relations between women and other genres or forms of convention. It is a device for communicating to an audience how austerity might be felt as it emerges through and in the midst of other things. However atmospheres alone are not enough to evoke what austerity is or what austerity does. It is not only that no single atmosphere could evoke austerity. It is also that austerity became present in ways other than a diffuse atmosphere or surrounding. Therefore, in

the next section I focus on character. This offers a different understanding of the formal dynamics between austerity and the women it touches.

#### 2.1.4. Character

Sandra: I'm not going home. I can't.

Katy: Ah San...

Rosie: Why not Sandra?

Sandra: It's not his fault you kna. He's just bitter, he's all knotted up inside. Crap with money... and he drinks too much... and he's just bloody angry all the time.

Katy: You've stuck up for him for too long San,

Sandra: I know I'll go back...

Katy: You can't.

(Draft: Cracks 2013)

How might austerity become embodied through relations between characters in the play? I have thought about how missed communication between Lesley and other women might contribute to atmospheres of austerity. However, in order to get at a combination of dynamics- the shock from the outside, the rumble in the background, the pressure to fulfil unreachable obligations - here I also considered austerity as a discretely abusive partner. This dynamic tells us something important about austerity. His harm is spatially expansive. He is in the home, on the bus, outside school, he disrupts friendships, he buys her flowers then expects something she cannot give in return, he closes down space for her to make choices. Through the accumulative



impacts of welfare and service cuts, the increasing contingency of support, and associated othering, I argue that close control and intimidation created by the austere state mirrors emotional, psychological and material dynamics of domestic abuse. If we consider how relations with the state become 'familial' as they embed themselves in everyday domestic spaces (Pain, 2014) then we might locate the dynamics of 'coercive control' (Stark, 2007) in and through the character 'austerity'. And this may help us to raise and perhaps address the question: How does he entrap her, how does he seduce her? What does austerity do to break her ability to act?

As Stark (2007: 5) puts it in relations of coercive control:

'The primary harm abusive men inflict is political, not physical, and reflects the deprivation of rights and resources that are critical to personhood and citizenship.... Although coercive control can be devastating psychologically, its key dynamic involves an objective state of subordination and the resistance women mount to free themselves from domination.'

For participants on benefits amidst austerity this subordination might be associated with stigmatization, the psychology of workfare (see Friedli and Stearn, 2015), interruptions to unpaid care and other obligations (because of the demands of workfare), the withdrawal of peer, voluntary and professional support (as services close), and so it goes on. As noted above these effects might be fractured and dispersed; they might act on different women differently. Therefore, it is worth taking account of Stark's call to attend to coercive control as an assemblage of multiple encounters that produce social and spatial entrapment, the silencing and belittling of

things women find important, intimidation and humiliation. This gives an account of how personal forms of abuse are supported and sustained by the concrete and complex social relations of power in which body-subjects are immersed. This also gets at the extent to which acts of control that may seem slight or insignificant when taken out of context, have a different kind of significance when understood amongst broader patterns of behavior.

This means that austerity harms in relation to other forms of convention that have distributed insecurity unequally as I explored in 1.2. It also means that certain encounters with austerity, certain reforms, certain cuts, may seem slight when taken out of context but become significant when they are understood as part of a broader pattern of behaviour. This diffuse kind of violence makes protest or other forms of resistance harder to enact. For example, take Robyn's relation with the bedroom tax. A few extra pounds a week alongside council tax reform has pushed Robyn to decide at times between food and heating and still face eviction. Simultaneously she is impacted by the withdrawal of public services and by increasing pressure from the Jobcentre. Some people might expect Robyn to take a lodger, move to a smaller property, and/or get a job in order to resolve this situation: 'you bring it on yourself'. But those expectations fail to address the broader question, why should she? They also fail to account for other contexts for example that there is an insufficient supply of smaller properties, that three or four times a week Robyn's granddaughter stays over (taking the other room) so that her daughter can remain in paid work, the importance of support structures embedded in the place that she had lived for more than 30 years, that she has struggled to find suitable paid work in a de-industrialized region and lost several jobs in factories over time, that she wasn't re-employed after

maternity leave. Perhaps the bedroom tax becomes something different in the context of those other situations. We see that Robyn is pushed to realize un-actionable actions, or made to face the consequences. This shows a dynamic of entrapment. The other women don't always take her seriously when she 'makes a fuss' about supposedly small changes. However those changes escalate with other forms of harm and in doing so 'wear the subject down' (after Berlant, 2011).

Therefore, thinking about austerity through dynamics of coercive control evokes how cuts and reforms matter as part of broader networks of power. Austerity's harm is dispersed, it is personal and it embroiled with concrete and complex social relations. Through the development of time-lines for fictional characters in the play we were able to think more about histories that mattered to how austerity was lived, in ways that were directed by women in the project. For example a character had lost a job in the sewing machine factories and never found a replacement, she had been out of the labour market whilst she cared for her children, she had recently divorced and was suddenly alone without work or qualifications. This enabled us to imagine a character's world beyond moments of encounter or scenes in the play, which helped us to better understand how broader harms become folded into encounters with austerity in the present.

We created a number of scenes using improvised role-play to work through the characters we had created. These creative inventions did not always represent participants' experiences but instead they evoked a feeling or a dynamic: sometimes surfacing as coercion. For example, the Jobcentre scene was particularly striking as it

captured intimidation, humiliation, and the belittling of things that are important to the character Sandra:

Katy: The number's incorrect.

Sandra: Well can you not ring across or something?

Katy: It's not my problem.

Sandra: But, she gave me the wrong number...

Katy: It's not my problem...

Sandra: But, well, I mean... she's getting hungry

*(starts rocking her arms as though with a baby)*

Katy: Are you refusing to comply?

Sandra: Well no but...

Katy: You need to get another number.

Sandra: I can't

Katy: Are you refusing to comply?

Sandra: Well no...

Katy: You need to get another number.

Sandra: I've already got a number

Katy: The number is incorrect,

Sandra: For god's sake

Katy: Are you speaking to a member of staff in an abusive manner?...

Sandra: No

Katy: The queue is over there...

(Draft: Cracks 2013)

Sandra's objectives to meet her care responsibilities were blocked by other processes, as her reasoning and choices were closed down. Her actions did not and could not realise their desired effects, and yet she continued on. There was something in that call for Sandra to make an un-decidable decision that resonated beyond the scene. Although these words did not make it into the final script, the dynamic of a certain kind of control became significant for how the play attempted to dramatise austerity.

When we paused the improvisation to ask the character questions including 'what do you feel and what do you want?' Emma who was playing the part of Sandra, answered as follows: 'I feel frustrated, I want to get out of there, I feel like the things that are important to me don't matter' (Fieldnotes 2012). And in a discussion afterwards we talked about pushing this even further into the future, what would happen next? Bella stated, 'Next it'd be like that thingy (Auschwitz) just take them and their kids all down and shoot em'. This expresses how particular discourses that demonize women on benefits are felt to be harmful. Participants mentioned feeling stigma surfacing in a range of spaces, including on the bus, outside school, at home, in comments from acquaintances, friends and even strangers.

But stigma was rarely discussed freely, critically or coherently. More often in a dynamic that also resonated with 'coercive control' (Stark, 2007), women turned violent rhetoric on to themselves and each other. A number of participants appeared to have absorbed a sense of inadequacy and/or incompleteness in relation to being out of paid work. For example, Jane was going to be moved from income support to job seekers allowance as her son turned 5. She had made 300 applications and received 5 interviews and she asked me 'why should I get a benefit for sitting round

doing nowt when other people got to go and work?' Further Bella, a single mum who had moved from a well-paid job into unemployment after suffering with poor mental health stated 'I've turned into what I despised when I was working... ten years on the tables turned and I am that person, I am the single parent, I am the em... housing association home, em...why should I get a benefit for sitting round doing nowt when other people's got to go and work? So... do you know what I mean, the, the, government's allowed me to stay at home with my children and for that I'm very thankful'.

There are moments here where women seem to internalise the notion explored in 1.2. that 'you brought this on yourself'. Again this resonates with Stark's (2007) account of dynamics of coercive control. Within the confines of the dramatic form that we had chosen, this dynamic gave us something for audiences to invest in i.e. get this woman out of that relationship. The overriding objective for that character would be escape from that harmful relationship. However in the form of a play that dynamic becomes about a relation of control between two characters, in this case a man and a woman. Unless we could find a way to show connections between austerity and that relationship this could not stand in for what austerity is or austerity does, at least in isolation. Further, although the austere state may become present on occasions as a single body penetrating the home or family life, more often than that it fragments. For example, Local Authorities, third sector organisations, and The Department for Work and Pensions became in different ways the interface for women's encounters with 'austerity'. As I go on to explore in more detail in 2.3. this muddled who and what those women understood themselves to be in relation with, moving 'austerity' beyond an intimate relation between two characters, to a dissonant set of relations between

many. This multiplicity further closed down imaginaries for an exit from those less specific more diverse relations of control. Therefore in relations with 'an austere state' lines between the inside and outside became blurred. Solutions or escapes became temporary and often folded back into this thing austerity. This does not run counter to Stark's (2007) account of coercive control as a political act, or the multiplicity and diffuse forms of convention that support relations of coercive control which exceed and precede specific moments of encounter and even specific relationships. As with austerity, in relations of coercive control 'getting out' often becomes much more complex than exiting a particular relationship.

Therefore, Stark's (2007) work on domestic violence enables me to consider how controlling relationships become part of the austerity genre and how broader social contexts might support or sustain those controlling relationships (see also Pain, 2014). This gets at the complex spatial multiplicity of abuse as a political dynamic of control. It gets at diffuse forms of harm that act in and through already unequal distributions of security. It evokes how a series of encounters, cuts and reforms escalate to wear the subject down. It offers a form for expressing relations between intimate and broader political contexts. Expressing those complicated and nuanced dynamics in the play - that women decided should be predominantly about their group - became difficult. The story between Sandra and Gary did not do justice to the complexity of these issues, and eventually the narrative was lost from the script. However, thinking austerity through coercive control shows how dissonance and discord becomes part of what sustains control. Multiple forces of harm escalate and in doing so close down a field of possibilities for women, belittle them and paradoxically, sometimes they blame themselves for this. And so, although the relationship between Gary and

Sandra was lost from the script, some feelings and forms of relation associated with those dynamics of control remained, for example between Lesley and Chris as he pushed closure on her and the group but she was made to feel responsible for this.

So, a particular atmosphere in the play evokes elusive and ambivalent relations between things shared and difference even as they emerge in the midst of other things. Dynamics of coercive control evoke a closing down of possibility for women, whilst at the same time she is made to feel that she 'brought it on herself'. It speaks of the multiple spaces in which austerity becomes present, and relations between austerity and broader forms of convention that have already harmed women and the region. This produces dissonance when women's beliefs and/or desires and actions cannot be consolidated, like in the Jobcentre scene when Sandra wants to prioritize care for her children but is prevented from doing so: her field of possibilities is closed down. This disconnect between objectives and their realization, actions and their effects, leads me to think more about plot.

#### **2.1.5. Plot**

Sandra: Is everything alright Lesley?  
Lesley: What do you mean?  
Sandra: With all these suits poking round all week,  
Lesley: Your hair looks nice today Sandra.

(Draft 'Cracks' 2013)

Perhaps plot as a device can dramatise austerity precisely as austerity surfaces



through connections (or disconnections) between cause and effect? Typically plot refers to actions, events, and their effects in a script. Plot is not the same as story which refers to what exceeds relations between action and event including the emotional journey of characters, atmospheres, setting and how those excesses come together to make meaning, as they produce something that somehow hangs together (see Edgar, 2009; Spencer, 2013). In this way story becomes closer to genre as I use it as a tool for diagnosis in the everyday. In this section then I focus on plot but it is by thinking character, atmosphere, and plot together that a story of austerity might begin to come together (or fall apart).

Given the multiple and incoherent ways in which austerity became lived by participants, one of the biggest challenges we faced was developing a plot within a particular narrative convention that might say something coherent about the contemporary genre austerity. We struggled to create a drama driven by a protagonist's overriding objective and barriers preventing her from fulfilling that objective. Reflecting the dynamics of the group, I had written an ensemble piece. As I workshopped the script at playwriting courses and later with a dramaturg a criticism was consistently levelled at the play: 'we don't know whose story it is' and 'the events and effects are not causally connected'. The plot kept falling apart. And I kept arguing - 'but that's the point, we don't know whose story it is and the events and effects of austerity don't always connect up: The plot does keep falling apart'. To which the reply kept coming - 'yes but dramatically that does not work'. Was this Sandra's story of emancipation from a harmful relationship with Gary, was it Katy's story as she overcame fear of participation, was it Julia's story of separation and bankruptcy, was it Rosie's story as she attempted to juggle the 'work life' balance, or was it Lesley's

story as she dealt with redundancy and deception? In this version of the script we had attempted to get at the multiple challenges in women's life as they were intensified by the effects of austerity. However, arguably this left audiences lost - unable to relate enough to any 'journey' and therefore perhaps not fully invest in any of the characters' lives. The story that I wanted to create about austerity depended on a fragmented plot - but this didn't quite seem to work dramatically.

How, then, might we structure a plot with a protagonist, objectives, barriers, and in doing so tell a story about austerity? Setting the play in a women's group amidst its threatened closure was one of the ways in which I had attempted to make sense of this problem. This promised to create a coherent relation between the event and effects of threatened/actualised closure, and would enable me to hold on to the 'ensemble' as characters were united by their connection through the group and its threatened loss. However, women in this process were not united by a common cause, either in the face of closure, or against the threats of austerity more broadly. The threatened closure of the women's service did not contain enough dramatic conflict to drive the plot forward. This is because whilst the event of threatened closure was coherent and represented other closures we encountered in austerity, the effects of the event did not have enough intensity in isolation. I thought that to work as an affective plot device within this narrative convention, the centre and its closure, like the coal mines in *Billy Elliot*, had to really matter to the group. The event of closure must have become a shock from the outside - one that threw characters off course, and initiated some kind of dramatic transformation. And whilst the draft script shows our attempts at making the group really matter - at least to Sandra and to Lesley - this did not fully resonate with how the cuts and reforms of austerity were

described and encountered by women at the time of this research. This is because for these women closures had become a normal event and not only amidst austerity. They had lost their ability to shock.

Participants certainly expressed appreciation for the women's group we all attended. For Bella it was a:

'Life saver, absolute life saver, em... it just made us realise possibly how empty my family life and my kids family life was and that rather concentrate on what you haven't got than surround yourself with people that do have similar values and that are warm and that you do feel safe and secure around and in that way I say we pick our family we don't do you know what I mean, we don't we don't have blood family, we choose our family, that's, that's the way I look at things'.

Despite this, for a number of reasons Bella stopped coming to the group before it closed and subsequently many of her connections with other participants became frayed. For Tania: 'I've lived here for well, six seven years or something is that right? But like, I've made like all my friends from (the group) that's where I know everybody from nowadays I can walk up the streets and know people. And I like it cos it's like a little wee community'. Despite this, Tania later mentioned that she did not know who she should contact for help when birthing her second child because those friendships didn't (yet) feel quite strong enough to 'put anybody out'. We can already grasp then the frailty of connections between women and the weak effects of togetherness that attendance at the group produced. Despite these and many other

affirmations of the group the idea of closure was and was not a shock from the outside. Something that was valued, something that had important functions for the women, is threatened; there is a sense of loss. But impact was diminished because closures were not exceptional for the women. Instead they became with and folded into myriad other closures. The normalisation of closure in a turbulent capitalist landscape was intensified in the midst of austerity as many things were lost, threatened, or changed. For one participant, Sarah, recent losses had included the loss of her husband's job, threats to the taxi service taking her disabled son to school, the loss of an autism support group, the loss of Disability Living Allowance for her mum, the loss of legal aid, and other smaller losses and changes. Amidst all of this, the loss of a weekly women's group was not so significant.

How, then, could the plot device - the threat to this group - speak to those other shifts and losses and in doing so dramatise austerity as the disassembly of various infrastructures in our story? We experimented with this and in the final version of the play attempted to focus on the needs of Sandra and Lesley for whom in different ways many things were falling apart. Sandra is pulled in multiple directions by the responsibilities she faces. We gather from dissonant relations between her actions and their effects that she is unable to bring coherence to her home life. And so her energy becomes invested in something she feels she can take a hold of - making a play at the group she attends on a weekly basis. She invests in the promise that this will bring some semblance of coherence and control. However, Sandra does not realise that the effects of those actions will also be subverted. She does not realise that while she is distracted with the play, things at the group are also falling apart. She does not realise, but if she did her actions would still have little effect. A series of

disconnections between action and effect produces a sense of Sandra being pulled in multiple directions in the midst of austerity and other things. Lesley refuses to accept the possibility of closure and instead invests in frail promises of a better future that distract her from facing up to the event of closure in the present. Through this refusal she may seem to hurt herself but she doesn't. Harm happens regardless of her actions. Therefore, instead of closure, or triumphant refusal of closure, the plot reaches a climax when both Sandra and Lesley can no longer hold together those dissonant relations. However this left the problem of the end of the play, which was never quite resolved. I go on to explore this more detail in the epilogue to the thesis. But in short the problem amounts to this: do the characters in the play continue 'getting on and getting by' after closure and in doing so risk advocating the 'big society?' Do they resist in ways that women did not deem to be realistic? Perhaps there is no ending, just another barrage of cuts? Just more harm, until there is nothing left? Or perhaps harms escalate until women reach a tipping point and then revolt? Or others do? Or perhaps we find a different and more surprising kind of ending? Regardless of what happens at the end, what becomes clear from our struggles to develop a coherent plot is the fracturing of objectives and dissonant relations that become held together in austerity as I go on to explore in more detail in 2.2. on precarisation and 2.3. on austerity futures.

#### **2.1.6. Dissonance, Precarity, and the Impasse**

Atmosphere, character, and plot might work together to create a story of the austerity genre. However, a key tension resonates between these different approaches: that is, how to dramatise 'something' when that something keeps falling apart? How to

ensure that this story resonates with other constitutions of the genre? How to capture a sense that in the midst of austerity the women I worked with were pulled in conflicting directions, how to get at a series of disconnections between actions and their effects? Dissonance as a form of meeting between consolidation and disassembly cuts across our different attempts at dramatizing austerity, and I want to think a little more about dissonance as a characteristic of the genre austerity.

In the play the character Lesley attempts and then fails to inform Sandra that the group is going to close. We discover Lesley's investment in a different promise that somehow things will turn out for the best as she describes a tragicomic commitment to 'Cosmic Ordering'. This is taken from the popular 2007 'self-help' book written by the UK television personality Noel Edmonds - 'Positively Happy: Cosmic Ways to Change your Life'. This refrain of displaced hope escalates and repeats in different situations in the play. Lesley fails to confront the issue of closure while she gets on with both running the group and discretely closing down its operations. Her actions become disconnected from their intended effects as the audience recognise that investment in cosmic ordering will do little to improve the chances for this group. However Lesley's behaviour enables Sandra to invest in the production of a play without realising that its performance will be disrupted by closure. Characters different modes of adapting to change perpetuate processes of fracturing, but other possibilities for them are felt as closed down.

In this pattern of relations between actions and their effects I attempted to evoke a feeling of dissonance in the play. For characters the 'outside' of a situation could not be imagined or were imagined in such a way that displaced momentum towards the

realisation of that outside. For example, for women an outside to pressures associated with reforms to Job Seekers Allowance may be imagined in the promise of a job offer. But that precarious and low paid work may feel just as damaging as unemployment, the challenges associated with being out of paid work may be displaced to a challenge of care, and/ or the job may be lost once more. Promises and promises frayed are multiple, incoherent and often work in opposition with each other: less immigrants, winning a council house bid, carefully balancing the budget, just getting on and getting by. I found these promises attached to in a way that some kind of outside to austerity was not, at least at the time and place of my research.

In Bensham I found other moments of relief and displaced optimism where austerity was and was not present. For example, Bella had a significant amount of personal debt but took great pleasure in being thrifty: finding glitches online and saving on the weekly shop, as well as selling some goods on Ebay. For her it felt good to imagine that she was taking autonomous control financially. This resonates with a story that has held great purchase in the UK: that state finances are like a household budget and need bringing under control. However, as Bella put it she would just spend the money again - so the reward of spending and rewards in saving were able to coexist in tension, propping one another up. This gets at one way in which dissonance becomes lived as conflicting actions and effects pull in multiple directions simultaneously and must be held together.

Relatedly, many women had, or perceived themselves to have, a detailed understanding of the various, individuated effects of specific welfare reforms even in the absence of 'austerity' as a shared or named thing. This became tangled up with

cycles of micro-othering and micro-care that at once did and did not produce an escape or an outside to the effects of austerity. For example, Jane, a lone parent who was out of paid work and on benefits described three sub-categories of single parent on benefits:

‘I think sometimes there’s to me there’s different sets of single parents, like there’s single parents just cos they want kids but they don’t want a partner and there’s single parents that you’ve been married for years and their marriage dissolves... and then like single parents that’s you have a child at sixteen but they’ve never worked and we’re all chucked in the same barrel... they don’t take people’s circumstances into situation’.

Jane described this in relation to ‘swollen belly syndrome’, something she determined would be a consequence of shifts in the terms of income support, whereby once a child reaches the age of five a lone parent is moved on to Jobseekers allowance. This micro-othering enabled Jane to separate those other single parents from herself, supporting her own investment in the promise of an outside to her situation that would be found once she accessed paid work. This promise surfaced as Jane berated herself for claiming Jobseekers Allowance while other people have to work. This displaces a promise in the outside of austerity, to being outside of austerity’s more violent rhetoric.

The inverse also played out and rubbed alongside this. For example, Hannah stated:



‘It’s just sad when you hear about people and they’re having to move out of their houses and they haven’t got anywhere to move too that is smaller and they getting rid of all of these flats up in Gateshead as well... I just think they’re too quick to knock things down instead of just doing with what they’ve got’.

Hannah was able to position herself at once inside and outside the effects of the bedroom tax and recognised that harm to others was personal. However, despite recognising these injustices Hannah did not feel able or compelled to act in any way. She was too busy getting on and getting by. There was no momentum towards resolution. Therefore both micro-othering and micro-care became gestures towards an outside of austerity without participants actually imagining or moving towards an outside to austerity.

Similarly a number of participants’ refused to be positioned or position themselves as vulnerable or victim-like despite being impacted by a litany of reforms. For Sarah:

‘I says I’ve got an aunty that used to live like with with an abusive partner and I always used to think I’m not I’m not going to end up like that you know I’m not I can’t be that kind of person...So I think I’ve just always went the other way, so it’s like... I know that might sound awful (She laughs) I think cos I’ve always read books from an early age, and like you know like strong characters and all that and I was thinking I want to be mo... more like that than like y kna... my family (...)

Being upbeat consistently disrupted Sarah's descriptions of the damaging effects of austerity that, in the previous section, I thought were resonant with coercive control. So that again an outside to austerity became worked into its insides - it became a singular and fragmented process of getting on and getting by, of rolling with the punches, in such a way that became indistinguishable from other processes of adaption. These different processes of adapting and coping become part of a very specific symptom of the impasse - that is not unique to relations with austerity - but that for me captures an effect of austerity's incoherence: dissonance.

Dissonance describes conflict between events, actions and effects. As austerity is lived contradictory pulls are held together without easy or obvious resolution. Heating or food? Othering or care? Spend or save? Sanctions or a job that can't be found? Moan about it or have a laugh? Care for a sick parent or leave them to it to pay the bills? Give up that custody battle or represent yourself? Plant seeds and face action from the council for doing so, or leave the flowerbed bare? These decisions are not dichotomous; there is no clear solution that would resolve the conflict or tension. And they are not always commonly faced but instead distributed unevenly even across a small group of women all located in one region. No outside to these situations can be found by making the 'right' decision. The questions represent multiple forces pulling at and fragmenting a woman until all she can do is remain in suspension. Strategies are developed to continue within and despite those conditions of dissonance.

Dissonance in austerity, then, constitutes a kind of impasse. For Berlant (2011), the impasse refers to the effort it takes just to stay afloat. She uses the image of swimming doggy paddle; legs and arms paddling frantically unseen under the water as the body moves round and round a cul-de-sac, not getting anywhere at all, but returning on

itself like a dog chasing a tail. For Berlant the impasse is both a time in which something or someone cannot move forward and a 'stretch of time in which one moves around without a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic...' (Berlant, 2011: 4). And just staying afloat drains energy for anything else, until all that becomes possible is moving without particularly going anywhere. As I go on to explore, the multiple forms of response to change that austerity demands resonate strongly with the image of her, me, us, paddling, paddling just to keep still.

Dissonance, then, refers to discord without movement towards resolution. It refers to multiple relations that must be lived with and held together in order to stay afloat. In both versions of the play included in this thesis we attempted to evoke dissonance as a set of incoherent relations between actions and their effect. In both versions of the play, experiences of austerity were held in tension as multiple optimisms held reward and discomfort together. One character (Lesley, the group lead) simultaneously accepts and denies that the group is closing and in doing so avoids the discomfort of confrontation, whilst intensifying the reality that nothing can be done. Sandra invests in the group and in a play that might 'raise awareness' and 'raise some money'. The reward that comes from investing in the play rubs alongside the discomfort that this does nothing to address her problems at home and nothing to keep the group open either. So much energy is required just to keep going, just to feel ok, and yet that energy does not and cannot effect change.

Austerity is insidious. It escapes its outsides as it disrupts women's time, energy and opportunity to invest in other imaginaries. Momentum towards resolution is removed and dissonance - discord - is endured. Austerity closes down spaces for common

experience. It produces a series of disconnections between action and effect. The following two chapters think about these qualities of austerity in more detail by focusing on interviews and workshops with the women. 2.2 looks at relations between precarisation and precarity that are specific to austerity with focus on disruptions to unpaid care work. The second looks at how austerity becomes part of (or not) women's future imaginaries. How do women negotiate through changes and what could be learned from this towards an anti- austerity politics? What I go on to explore in more detail in both chapters is how austerity is lived as a multiplicity and incoherence of relations, as 'falling apart' makes 'holding things together' increasingly difficult.



## 2. 2. Precarity: Fracturing and Dissonance

### 2.2.1. Rhythms of Change

Sandra: Hang on there Rosie I thought we were meant to be writing a play?

Julia: I've got an idea.

Rosie: Well, we are, but first off I think it's important to get into the right zone.

Katie: The right zone?

Rosie: Head space I mean, you know.

Lesley: Do you not want to use the other room Rosie, it's bigger. Or outside, it's a lovely sunny day?

Rosie: This is great thanks.

Lesley: Right then I'll get on

*(She starts packing the toys back into a box, making a big fuss, and getting in the way)*

Sandra: Lesley do you have to do that?

Lesley: What?

Sandra: That. Friggin that. Move the entire universe around whilst we're doing this.

Katy: Aye we're trying to 'get in the zone' here Lesley.

Julia: I'm sorry about this Rosie I bet you're used to working in more professional conditions.

Rosie: It's fine.

Lesley: Don't mind me girls. I've just got to sort some stuff out. Like I say it's  
not too cold out if you want to do it on the grass.

(Final Draft: Diehard Gateshead 2015)

Precairisation refers to the disassembly of infrastructures and the penetration of bonds between women that intensifies an unequal distribution of insecurity, othering and heirarchisation. In this chapter we see those processes play out for women in ways that are specific to austerity. But, further, how women encounter austerity - multiply, differently and incoherently - also amounts to precairization. Not least since those encounters do not engender a shared sense of the austerity genre. Existing literature points to processes of precairisation in the UK and other neoliberal economies particularly for those at the 'bottom of the pile' but spreading, as more and more temporary or zero hours contracts eat away at stable permanent work and as workers' rights are corroded (see Adams, Freedland and Prassl (2015) on a large and growing set of casual work arrangements). These processes precede and exceed austerity. However I draw focus here on what, for women already out of paid work, becomes precarious as an effect of austerity. This means looking at the disruption and fraying of practices that were previously enabled by the welfare state, by public services and by part-publicly funded charities, alongside intensified pushes into paid work. I think this in a context of the historic turbulence laid out in 1.2 on Women, the Region and a Room. Therefore I don't position the welfare state as some kind of ideal for women; it did not and does not offer a suitable resolution to the asymmetries settled amidst patriarchy and capitalism. It does not counter associated heirarchisation and unequal distributions of security. The welfare state may be 'an exception to the neoliberalisation of precarity in industrial capitalism, where

insecurity in working and living has been the norm' (Lorey, 2015: 165), however this exception amounts to a little more than no security or 'safety net'. Better than nothing but not good enough. As shown in 1. 2. women, lone parents, and other carers have been subject to the unequal distribution of insecurity and heirarchisation over a sustained period of time. This has been a direct consequence of the shifting ascriptions of value associated with patriarchy and capitalism. Even before the conditionality of the 1990s, lone parents and others on welfare were in a situation of relative poverty and insecurity. Reflecting on this, Lorey (2015) suggests that Castel (2008) and other key theorists give a masculinist account of precarity whereby the threatened implicitly male worker is positioned as the sole precarious subject. Therefore, taking account of those histories of domination evoked in 1.2. I engage with what austerity does to women in this present. This means understanding the unraveling of the welfare state as an intensification and expansion of existing distributions of heirarchisation and insecurity, but also accounting for other forms of dominance evoked in the relationships between precarisation, precarity and precariousness that co-constitute the austerity genre.

After Lorey (2015) I engage with precarity as an unequal distribution of insecurity and heirarchisation that accompanies processes of othering, and relatedly, as the erosion of bonds between subjects that co-constitute the sensed mutuality of precariousness. Precariousness refers to the fragility, endangerment, and interconnectedness of all life (after Butler, 2006). In the contemporary, precarization governs by constituting the individuation of the subject or otherwise producing precarity (as I frame it above) paradoxically by engendering collective opportunities for self-governance often associated with widespread processes of fracturing. How, then, do processes of precarization play out in the austerity genre against imaginaries of consolidation



built through suggestions such as 'we are all in it together' and evocations of collective nostalgia?

What rhythms of precarisation, for example fraying, interruption, and intensification, might co-constitute the new austerity for these particular women? Rather than thinking austerity in a vacuum, this accounts for how the spatiality of women's everyday lives are made and remade in relation to austerity. For example, I explore how policies aimed at encouraging lone parents to enter the paid labor market initiated by New Labour in the UK are intensified by increases to the conditionality of 'workfare' amidst austerity and how this conditionality spreads into funding for other services and institutions. I explore how sudden infrastructural collapse associated with cuts, for example the closure of a support service or the withdrawal of Disability Living Allowance, interrupt certain forms of unpaid care activity. This results in a ripple effect that produces more demand for unpaid care despite the fraying of time and space for such care to be enacted. I also consider how austerity produces the slow fraying of infrastructures used to support unpaid care work and peer support. Here I consider the fraying of actual services and organisations, but also the fraying of less tangible networks for peer support, intimate bonds built through shared experience, and a felt sense of a future that is propped up on the past, that is eroded by the regularity of change and threats to future change, the intensified demands of workfare, infrastructural collapse and so on.

### **2.2.2. A Broken Flock: Precarity, Precariousness and Precarisation**

‘At root, precarity is an issue of dependency- as a legal term, precarious describes the situation wherein your tenancy on your land is in someone else’s hands’.

(Berlant, 2012: 5)

‘Precarity is a life lived in relation to a future that cannot be propped securely on the past’.

(Ridout and Schneider, 2012: 5)

Starlings in the murmuration become a useful image to return to here for thinking about relations between spatial and temporal dynamics of precarity. Spatially I think of precarity as a scattered flock; birds not moving together but making their own paths, or some birds lost. Temporally I imagine a felt sense that the flock will scatter, a generally felt fear of becoming lost, or the rumblings of disruption. All starlings are precarious. Any starling could be snuffed out at any time. But they have a capacity to improvise when faced with threat, by moving and flowing together. Some research has suggested that the murmuration is likely to have a protective facility. This is because by working together starlings can monitor and confuse predators. They can also potentially transfer information about food and resting sites (King and Sumpter, 2012). The murmuration becomes an expression of the interdependency of starlings; they flow and fly together and this helps to sustain life. Which birds lead and which birds follow becomes impossible to discern and as such this formation does not have a hierarchy. Instead the movements of birds affect those closest by, movements reverberate out and around so that ‘the change in the behavioral state of one animal affects and is affected by that of all other animals in the group, no matter how large the group is’ (Cavagna et al. 2010: 11865). Hierarchy would make the murmuration

less fluid, less dynamic, more contingent. And if connections were broken between birds the flock would become fragmented, capacity to improvise together becomes compromised and improvisation becomes a solitary act. Perhaps the starlings provide a model, or at least a metaphor then, for what Butler (2006: 170) describes as bonds that should 'support life, those that should be structured by the condition of mutual need and exposure, that should bring us to forms of political organization, that sustain living beings on terms of equality'.

What Butler refers to here is the understanding that all (and she focuses in particular on human) bodies are precarious, not least because they may be 'snuffed out at any time'. Butler warns against 'individualising existentialism'. Instead she speaks of bonds. All living bodies *share* this precarious relation. However, Butler emphasises that precariousness is distributed unequally across a range of spatialities. Bonds of care that could support life convivially are lost, forgotten or broken, as precariousness becomes unequally manifest. In this context, precariousness whereby all lives are understood to be co-dependent, existentially relational and mutually endangered becomes ambivalent (Lorey, 2015). There is a sense of possibility in the idea that 'tenancy on your land is in somebody else's hands' (Berlant, 2012: 5) if this produces the mutually felt disavowal of true ownership and hierarchy and a mutually felt recognition of interdependency that Butler describes/hopes for. However, precarity denotes the actual distribution of precariousness 'in relations of inequality and heirarchisation of being, which accompany processes of othering. This covers processes of domination, through which belonging to a group is attributed or denied to individuals' (Lorey, 2015: 5). In this chapter, after Lorey and Butler, precariousness refers to the existential fact of mutual endangerment, and precarity refers to the

unequal distribution of insecurity through hierarchy and associated with othering. Precarisation refers to governance constitutive of precarity that becomes manifest as a series of tensions between self-empowerment and subjugation.

Precariousness is a state that can never be fully governed, since any life could be snuffed out at any time. But through processes of 'precaritisation' some lives become more precarious than others. For example, Berlant (2011) on the slow death shows this in a relation between bodies and certain conditions in the contemporary. Where most of the available work is low paid, insecure, and unrewarding, where long hours are required in order to provide enough pay, where most of the food available is necessarily quick and cheap but also unhealthy, then bodies exposed to that work and that food are worn out, slowly. Through 'predictable repetitions' the body becomes bound in a slow death, an ordinary, un-dramatic death. This slow death is attributed to particular consumption practices; that is the repetition of particular relations between components constitutive of the body and conditions in excess of that body, for example work, food, the region. What may, in the moment, have been an act of getting on or sustaining life simultaneously becomes constitutive of slow death. Decomposition and composition happen together. And those bodies become relatively more precarious than bodies with good access to healthy food. Though, of course, anyone may be struck down by a congenital heart condition, or hit by a bus.

If precariousness refers to the existential endangerment of all life and is an inevitable consequence of birth, then precarity refers to this unequal distribution of precariousness. It enables us to ask: what lives are more-or-less likely to be snuffed out and why? What lives are deemed to be grievable and why? In this way we can

understand precarity in relation with processes of precaritization as a form of governance. Understanding precarisation as governance means exploring the ambivalent forms of relation between subjugation and self-empowerment that take place in processes of precarisation. As Lorey writes:

‘Practices of self-empowerment do not automatically have emancipatory effects but are instead to be understood in a governmental perspective as thoroughly ambivalent. They can signify modes of self-government that represent a conformist self-development, a conformist self-determination enabling extraordinary governability. Practices of empowerment, however, can also break through, refuse, or escape from appeals to functional self-government’.

(Lorey, 2015: 13-14)

In processes of precarisation, complex relations between individuation and collectivity, subjugation and self-empowerment play out. For example, drawing on Foucault, Lorey (2015) describes a move in the eighteenth century from the sovereign power of the king or church to systems of ‘self-determined’ democratic law that shifted forms of relation between subjugation and self-empowerment. ‘This modern, male, bourgeois form of sovereignty required modes of subjectivation positioned ambivalently between self-determination, and subjugation, between self-creation and obedience, between freedom and servility’ (Lorey, 2015: 3). The democratic vote gives rise to certain forms of agency and self-governance (though with historic exclusions; women, children, migrants and so on) and yet other forms of dominance continue. As Lorey (2015) puts it the lines between domination and self-governance are complex,

blurred and subject to change. For her, in the historical present in the West 'the servile side of self-governance is dominant, as identified by an absence of protests against governance through insecurity' (Lorey, 2015: 5).

Processes of precarisation enable and/or enforce so called 'self-governance' whilst subjects remain open to other forms of domination. To think this through Berlant's (2012) account of slow death, we might consider various compulsions for people to 'eat healthily', including through the othering and vilification of so-called obese bodies. Still those subjects work long, low paid unsociable hours; still they are brought predominantly into contact with unhealthy food. In this way those subjects are made to feel (collectively) autonomously responsible for their own health and harmful conditions go largely unchallenged. We see this in austerity. Collective processes of othering and individuation produce subjects as autonomously responsible for getting on, getting a job, making something happen, whilst structures of support for those suffering from already unequally distributed fields of possibility and insecurity are withdrawn. This denies that other conditions and other forms of relationality make certain kinds of achievement more or less possible.

Relatedly, in the contemporary we see how precarisation through fear and othering play out spatially and temporally. Precarisation in Butler's work (2006) shows how public anxiety about existential threat becomes attached to certain subjects. This is nurtured politically and culturally, dividing populations and in doing so making all subjects more or less vulnerable to different forms of dominance so that some lives become deemed less grievable than others. Certain others come to embody the existential threat of endangerment, and this makes citizens subject to domination in a

range of different ways. For example, Butler (2006) explores how fear of threat from so-called 'Islamic extremism' provides scope for the widespread loss of all kinds of civil liberties. But, more deeply, more fundamentally, this becomes a denial of *mutual* endangerment, so that *all* lives become bounded as more-or-less grievable. If we return to Irigaray in 1.2, this ascription of value onto lives penetrates her multiple touch – disrupts our capacity to improvise together, and breaks bonds between us. This leads to hierarchisation so that some lives become deemed to be worth more than others. The vilification of women on benefits, of regional and/or 'obese' women, who are variously positioned as a threat to financial recovery becomes an example of that in austerity. This too becomes a process of precarisation, if those groups of people who become felt as threat to fiscal security also become felt as threat to the continuation of a certain way of life, perhaps even as a threat to the continuation of life itself. Simultaneously, dissonantly, austerity oversees the disassembly of structures that support the continuation of a certain way of life. Relatedly there is precarisation through fear or anxiety of a future that cannot be propped on the past. Counter to this, in some cases an event - a shock from the outside - that surfaces a collectively felt sense of existential interdependency becomes an equaliser. Hope can be found in a mutual understanding that only the present is certain. For example, in times of disaster Solnit (2009) has shown an intensification of bonds of empathy: 'Rather than fracturing already weak social ties, disasters are often met with outpourings of altruism and generosity. In the 'intensified present' of disaster (Solnit) finds joy in the enactment of kindnesses and the giving of help' (in Anderson, 2016, no pagination). However, broader diagnoses of precarity and precarisation have shown the erosion of certain social-economic promises in Post-Fordist contexts which become associated with a commonly sensed loss of security (Ridout and Schneider,

2012: 5). As Berlant (2011: 192) puts it, and as we have seen in 1.2 on the body and the region:

‘Capitalist activity always induces destabilizing scenes of productive destructions – of resources and of lives being made and unmade according to the dictates and whims of the market. But, as David Harvey and many others argue, neoliberal economic practices mobilize this instability in unprecedented ways’.

Precarity in this context becomes the fracturing of the workforce, certain forms of blurred lines between work and life, the lost promise of stable paid work, housing and retirement (see Puar et. al 2012). Austerity mobilises instability further: we see the withdrawal and re-shaping of the welfare state and public services that amounts to the lost promise of a ‘safety net,’ simultaneously, dissonantly, what is asserted is the promise of fiscal security (so that we might hold on to those things that are being lost?). As Berlant (2012: 166) puts it, what we also see in the contemporary is a spreading of precarity. ‘Instabilities that were ordinary for proletarian labour-related subjectivity became crisis when they hit the bourgeoisies’. After the widespread threat to security of financial crisis, perhaps austerity evoked the promise that such spreading could be reversed, with a few sacrifices? Stability for bourgeoisies could be secured if a safety net for the proletarian was lost. However in a situation of mutual precariousness a safety net for some is a safety net for all. And here I ask what in those conditions is lost or frayed for women when promises of stable work, home ownership, retirement and so on are already out of reach?



Berlant (2012) refers to an interest in relations between the materiality of precariousness in class and political terms and its appearance as an affect. For Berlant, precarity as affect is in part a spreading and intensification of anxiety as more of us struggle to get by and get on. However, there is also hope in precariousness as an 'emotionally invested slogan (...) a rallying cry for a thriving world of interdependency and care that's not just private' (Berlant, 2012: 166). And in this way as precarity spreads, activism might take flight, as in the case of the Occupy movements (Ridout and Schneider, 2012) and/or other forms of dominance may flourish (Butler, 2006) amidst loss of faith in a 'fantasy world to which generations have become accustomed' (Berlant, 2012: 166). Perhaps in this way austerity becomes a dampening of pulls to activism and makes space for certain forms of dominance, since it appears to address a felt concern that something must change, something must be taken into hand through the evocation of a post-war period, so that we are 'all in it together' (with just a few sacrifices) and those who are sacrificed are worn out by the process and caught in an impasse. Simultaneously, dissonantly, austerity intensifies processes of disassembly especially for those already outside of the promise of a 'good life', for those already out of paid work as I go on to explore.

Precarity, precariousness and precarisation do not operate individually. Instead they form differently posited relations that change over time/space. In relations between precarity and precarization, different forms of domination are evoked and different kinds of possibility emerge. Therefore in this chapter I seek to consider specific relations between three modes of precarity that co-constitute the genre 'austerity' in the UK. In austerity particular forms of relation between subjugation and self-empowerment play out and/or are intensified as I go on to explore. I think how the different rhythms of intensification (of individuation) and disassembly (of

infrastructures that support unpaid care, space for shared experience, a sense of a secure future) happen in austerity for these women in the North East of England. What spaces for conviviality are made or found for women who have already always been more-or-less precarious? How does austerity support or diminish capacities for care and how does conviviality persist or fail in these conditions? Addressing these questions helps to develop my account of austerity as genre, as I consider how austerity differs to processes of precarisation more broadly.

### **2.2.3. From Family and Community Support to Support for Self-Appreciation?**

In 1.1 and 1.2. I touched on the role of our community organization, which was established in order to provide support for families in a supposedly disadvantaged part of the North East of England. Managers were vague about the financial situation of the organization and I don't aim to give a detailed account of accounts in this section. What I draw on instead are observations, informal and/or casual conversations with staff, management, and other participants as I attended the service and we undertook the drama workshops. I do so to show instability and inconsistency of service provision related to funding cuts and forms of conditionality that constitute austerity, but also to explore how the organization was being pulled towards facilitating certain forms of individuated 'appreciation' (of value determined by some abstract ungraspable term) for service users. New terms and levels of funding were beginning to shape ways in which the service could run. Even at the time of research it was possible to see effects of the cuts and reforms of austerity on the service, including how future impacts were being anticipated. The onset of austerity did not

produce a shock event; there was no immediate disruption. However, relative to a period of stability between the late 1990s and late 2000s there was a general sense that things were becoming more insecure. Two years later the women's group that I engaged is no longer running. The increasing scarcity of money for projects becomes part of a broader pattern, which necessitates capacity for change and adaptability in the service. It becomes difficult for some service users to develop bonds over an extended period if activities no longer feel relevant or if they become exclusionary for any reason. Staff can't rest or settle into a project as they persistently anticipate and prepare for the next one. Change is not directed by need. Women did not suddenly stop benefiting from the women's group, but rather end was dictated by a lack of funds. Increasingly, the availability and conditionality of project-by project funding increasingly directs the kind of services that can be offered. Perhaps this also disrupts a felt sense that a future can be propped up on the past for some service users and for staff if this results in certain forms of discontinuity. The organization becomes increasingly stretched and more energy must be invested in fundraising.

In informal conversations members of staff described awareness that some jobs might go. This had an effect on the atmosphere at the service. Tension surfaced when job security was discussed and then rumbled in the background for much of the rest of the time. Reductions in local authority funding had removed a stable source of support for ongoing costs and this put more pressure on everybody to fundraise. In a number of conversations staff talked about the 'direction' things were moving in, towards a particular kind of conditionality that would be attached to the provision of funding.

I saw this in the exercise classes introduced in 1.3 on drama as method. Classes were given (all be it not compulsorily) in exchange for the weighing and measuring of

women so that those at the point of delivery could evidence the success of the course. Success becomes aligned with weight loss and subsequently women are ranked and valued according to their weight and their capacity to lose weight. What does this become? In some ways it becomes a form of support for women who may not otherwise have the opportunity or confidence to participate in exercise. This might also be thought as a gesture. Papering over the cracks while other infrastructures that generally condition unhealthy life-styles, lack of opportunity or confidence continue. And still women can be valued, this time according to their weight on a chart. Still this becomes a push towards some form of 'self-improvement'. This places emphasis on women to become responsible for their own appreciation through the offer of a resource and something that women can *choose* or not to participate in. Something about this rubbed me up the wrong way. The inference was that women should want to get fit. Should. Want. A demand and an accusation. And also that this was a gift for which they should be grateful? Really? Do a bit of Zumba on a Tuesday. Continue to look after your kids. Stay on the breadline. Get a low paid job, perhaps work at a call centre, probably sit down all day. He buys her flowers and expects that to make it all ok? This fails to account for other forces that debilitate her as she is given a *choice* to be/ do better. Of course those delivering the service had good intentions, no doubt those funding the program did too. And largely we all enjoyed the exercise. But still. It rubbed me up the wrong way in a context of broader increases in 'opportunity for self-improvement' that constitutes her as lacking without embracing all that she is and all that she does.

Women responded to the offer of exercises classes in a range of ways. Some internalized the lacking and described that they 'do need to lose weight' as they worked hard to 'improve.' Others dismissed the measuring and claimed 'I am

completely happy with my body just as it is' but they also expressed a willingness to participate for fun and in order to support the group. A dynamic shifts from one of 'we gift you this opportunity to self-improve' to hang on a moment 'the service needs us for its continuation, just as we might value what the service can offer'. *Choosing* to participate in this way becomes a disruptive and simultaneously compliant process. Therefore the lines between servile and other forms of self-empowerment become muddled in this context. In this way, it was often difficult to discern whether it was women or the service who were being supportive/ supported or both, as women would do things like encourage one another to turn up because 'they need the numbers'. For women to have opportunity to offer support in this way and not only become 'cared for' or 'worked on' was important and emphasised a mutuality of need.

During my time with the group I saw many expressions of conviviality and mutual support whereby women framed it as being 'their choice' to conform in particular ways and in doing so resist feeling reduced, passive, lacking and in need of improvement. Women's choice to invest in others was reflected in a level of energy and commitment to acts of kindness. Drama-making offered a particular space for that kind of conviviality as I explore in the following 'interlude' on change and habit. This was something we tried to express in the play through relations between the character of Rosie and other women in the group. Mutual care subverted what might have become a problematic dynamic between us. During the time of research at least two other PhD. candidates came in to talk with us, there were a range of visits from the police, from other third sector organizations and so on. These were people wanting to either educate or learn from women in a range of ways that made the group feel somehow exotic. I was uncomfortable becoming part of this. However

together we 'worked on' the play including characters in the play, or the dynamic was reversed as I revealed things about myself too, and in return was given support and advice about caring for my children and other personal issues. Us all being open in this way produced a kind of intimacy in the absence of hierarchy. This helped to strengthen bonds between us. I noted after one of the early sessions:

'This is a warm and respectful group. On a number of occasions women speak up in support and praise of each another. For example Sarah said of Lisa 'She's a great mam, dead competitive, her and her sister kept outdoing each other, one would get pregnant then the other then the other - your sister has stopped at six though hasn't she? But she's a great mam.' When Jane mentioned that she had to go to hospital Lisa immediately responded, 'If you need any help with anything though, I'll come round and do stuff for you.' It's often subtler than the words though, more a generally circulating atmosphere of affection, bolstered by humour and producing a kind of intimacy. Dignity becomes associated with helping and choosing to help. In the drama nobody sat out (generally). People worked hard at making the games and activities work. They were energetic and engaged. There was a sense of business and of mutual support for one another and the group. These were the things that women chose to spend their energy on, supporting each other and in doing so supporting themselves. This was found in ways of helping to set up first thing, bringing chairs out, carrying the breakfast things through little things that escalate to produce an atmosphere of conviviality. This was disrupted at times by a look or a glance, a misjudged joke. Some showing off and disapproval at that. Not often though'.

Of course, this runs completely counter to imaginaries of women 'on benefits' as lazy, work-shy, shirkers and shows how women escape and resist such forms of othering. However, opportunity for this kind of conviviality may be closed down in the group through certain processes of precarisation. For example, one key-worker suggested that the organization would be funded more and more according to its ability to facilitate and evidence particular outcomes rather than for offering broader, more diffuse and less easily evidenced support to families. In particular the service would have to work hard at moving women from unemployment into paid work or training. This movement would have to be tracked and recorded. She felt that this would undermine a key purpose of the organization, to support families, and particularly women in their unpaid care work, to nurture social bonds and to provide space for mutual support. Further she explained that in some cases the service provided deep groundwork to help marginalized women feel confident enough to engage with ordinary everyday interactions. Those women could not be quickly or easily moved in to paid employment and may be harmed by the kind of temporary disposable work on offer. She told me about one woman who did not attend our group. When she picked her son up from the crèche he showed her a piece of artwork that he was proud of. Without response she

'scrunched it up and threw it in a wheelie bin as she walked past (...) And then you remember that that's what happened to her. No-one ever rewarded her so she stopped bothering to try. And now she's passing that on to him. And that's the sort of thing we try to work with her on, helping her to show herself appreciation and this might support him in his learning and

development’.

This shows some of the complex ways in which capacities to care become disrupted but may also be nurtured through the support service and other infrastructures. In the same way, my own capacity to care for my children was supported by advice from other women in the group. Time and space is given for reproductive labour in a contemporary context where as Berlant (2012) puts it time and space for reproduction is multiply eaten away at.

Baring this in mind, the keyworker felt strongly that women already face enough broader pressures to enter what is a lacking paid labor market. How might this woman take rejection after rejection after rejection as she applies for an over-subscribed number of poorly paid jobs? Through new terms for funding, a service that intends to support and build women up, might risk breaking them down. Once again this constitutes women out of paid work as lacking, in need of improvement and assumes that improvement could be evidenced through movement into paid labor. Doesn't this set women into competition against one another and in doing so penetrate the multiplicity of our touch or how we fly together? In this way the service would no longer become consistent or secure in its delivery but instead its continuation would become contingent on delivering a range of outcomes that are partly taken out of hand (limited by a lacking jobs market). This kind of approach would necessarily oversee a turbulent flow of participants as people were moved through and into (precarious, low waged) paid labour. Potentially this would make space for the development of intimate relationships and stronger social bonds more difficult to establish. And this particular case was speculative but such speculation



emerged from staff's sensitivity to creeping shifts in the terms for funding. This member of staff had noticed that the institution was increasingly funded according to its ability to facilitate movement towards employability by offering training and so on. This process also facilitates a creeping form of precarisation. It disrupts space for women to come together with shared goals, or without having to be productive, and replaces those opportunities with activity towards individuated measurable outcomes that serve demands for her economic productivity. Women are ascribed with a value that is less or more and efforts are made to 'improve' that value just enough to take them out of welfare.

In our support service the opportunity to provide consistency in a context of already precarious project-by project delivery became frayed. There was a diffuse sense of increasing insecurity. However, this did not always translate into an anti-austerity attitude. A number of staff bought the line that cuts were necessary and this closed down space for other kinds of imaginary just as it intensified precarisation. One group lead worried about losing her job but talked about 'being on the dole' in prerogative terms even to women who were already on the dole. Both of her children had struggled to find paid work and had to remain in the family home well into adulthood. She has described their efforts to enter the paid labour market including being in and out of temporary work. This staff member's empathy for her own children and concern for her own future in stable employment, as well as care generally expressed towards women in the group, was held in tension with comments like:

'The trouble is they give them (benefits claimants) too much, despite what you're saying that their aren't enough jobs... I think they've got the right idea

in other countries, I mean in China people are only allowed to have one baby- and that helps control the population and they don't get any benefits or anything'.

(Fieldnotes 2012)

A number of women reacted to this by arguing how 'terrible' it is in China 'because people are after boys and they are getting rid of the girls', then going on to speak about a case of late abortion that had recently been in the news. I raise this with caution, not to vilify this member of staff who expressed inappropriate attitudes to the group, not even to show how some women argued with such attitudes, but in an attempt at understanding how and why those attitudes could coexist with the reality of Brenda's situation and with other expressions of affirmation towards women in the group. There were a few things going on here, namely processes of precarisation through fear of insecurity, which became bound up with precarisation through othering. This member of staff was concerned about the future of the organization. Fear of being 'on the dole', may have compelled her to distance herself from other people on the dole, just as we saw a lone parent on benefits distancing herself from other lone parents on benefits in 2.1 on Dramatising Austerity. Brenda condemns women in close proximity, the thing she fears becoming and by implication her own children and potentially herself. Brenda becomes an obedient subject as she repeats mainstream rhetoric that 'they (benefits scroungers) get too much'. Perhaps this obedience produces a sense of security? It enables Brenda to hold on to the possibility of belonging to something bigger than herself - just as that possibility is threatened. This strategy for coping becomes a form of self-harm and an attempt at self-empowerment. It fractures relations between people. In this way othering and

precaritisation pull not only groups against one another but also constitutes individuated subjects dissonantly. She won't be like those abstract others who get too much; she can take autonomous control of this situation, by getting on and getting up and repeating othering? Again this lets austerity- that is the cuts and reforms and promises of more that have intensified insecurity in the service - off the hook. Here then staff members become pulled into competition amidst increased insecurity. If insecurity must lead to loss, better if that loss is somebody else's precaritisation. Brenda's views about unemployment became part of a broader atmosphere of insecurity that enveloped the service, but that did not translate into a sense 'that we're all in this together' or that austerity was a force that should be mutually resisted.

#### **2.2.4. Pressure from the Jobcentre?**

Changes to the service were relatively subtle at the time of this research. There was a stronger sense of insecurity. Processes of micro-othering played out in complex and contradictory ways. Forms of care and conviviality continued but demanded more energy and creativity as they were penetrated in a range of ways. However, if the women's group is important to participants but only becomes one of many infrastructures used to support unpaid care in the everyday, what other forms of fraying, intensification, and interruption happened as part of the austerity genre? In 2.1. I showed some of the small disruptions to women's daily routines; for example flowers that can no longer be admired by a mum and her children on the way to school, a public field that can no longer be played in, and a sure start centre that can no longer be volunteered at. These different kinds of loss may escalate to produce a general sense of the fraying of infrastructures or networks and the disruption of

everyday habits that become part of family life. The sense of a future that depends on the past is worn away at. Changes to the provision of welfare for people out of paid work become one of the most significant effects of austerity for women who are largely out of paid work.

Under the genre austerity we see the constitution of people on benefits as a threat to financial recovery. Austerity policy becomes framed as form of protection against that threat, whilst simultaneously the safety of the welfare state is eroded. Job loss, and unemployment is significant in a context of austerity, but for women engaged in various forms of unpaid labour relations with and attitudes towards (un)employment were ambivalent. For these reasons the 'Jobcentre' was an important space that we discussed and explored in some detail (as discussed in 1.3). After we performed the scene in a Jobcentre of the future Gabbie (drama worker) discussed her own recent experiences. She was made redundant during a restructure at the local FE College. This involved the reduction and downscaling of teaching staff many of whom saw their pay cut by a third. Gabbie saw this as a ruthless process of de-skilling and a result of the marketization of the Further Education sector. She struggled to adapt to unemployment after 17 years in the institution and redundancy closely followed the death of her husband. Many of the ways in which Gabbie had imagined a future that was 'propped up on the past' were destabilised at this time. She faced a number of shocks from the outside, which changed the course of her life. After the loss of her husband she received very little support from the college and she felt that her particular emotional circumstances had not been taken into account during the restructuring process. She was already feeling extremely low. But as she put it, she made an effort to be positive, and she invested hope in opportunities that might be

found there. As she described it, she bounded up to the desk and was greeted with the words 'you look enthusiastic, that won't last'. In that moment Gabbie lost a sense of her own singularity- she became one of many for whom enthusiasm has been lost.

Gabbie was required to apply for a number of jobs that she felt to be unsuitable. She was condescended to. She began to look further and further afield for work. It was important to her to continue in her area of expertise, but cuts to Further Education and the Arts meant that those opportunities were limited particularly in the region. A suitable job came up in a theatre elsewhere and Gabbie decided to give it a go. Money was very tight and she applied for subsistence to cover travel to the interview. She had given the letter of invitation and a return rail ticket as evidence to support this application. Jobcentre staff claimed that this was not sufficient evidence and insisted on telephoning the organisation. She had not been offered the job but had been hopeful that something else might come up there. She had lost her husband, she had two traumatized teenagers to care for, she had felt ignored at the College and then rejected by them. In this context such a seemingly small act of distrust had a huge impact on her. It made her feel infantilized and humiliated. 'You look enthusiastic, that won't last'. And it didn't. Like the loss of flowers in a public space, this slight act becomes significant when brought into context alongside other losses and processes of fraying (of her field of possibilities, of the kind of work available) and intensification (of demands for flexibility but within restricted terms). For Gabbie there was shock, job loss. There were also various moments of encounter through which her singularity was felt as lost or interrupted. Those rhythms became part of how the genre austerity was lived by Gabbie. They didn't operate in isolation but instead acted in relation to one another. Gabbie has since become the kind of once stable now precarious worker

that Berlant (2012) describes. She struggles to support her children through their grief as well as working through her own. They are doing well. She has moved from temporary post to temporary post, sometimes working in drama, sometimes not. She has been able to remain in the North East of England. A contract comes to an end in June and she doesn't know what will happen next. She has got on and got by. She has got friends around her. She bought her home before prices increased so she doesn't have much of a mortgage. All of these situations matter amidst the squeezes that close down a field of possibilities for Gabbie and simultaneously demand flexibility. Still she is worn down as she adapts, worries, relaxes for a few months and then the cycle begins again. What becomes hoped for in this context is the job she once had, and so her relation with the future folds in on the past (interesting in a context of austerity nostalgia) and amidst perpetual insecurity what escapes is space to rest in the present.

There was time and space to listen and give support to Gabbie as we discussed her experiences in the group. Women agreed with her suggestion that a sense of shame or stigma (their own choice of words) could become associated with Jobcentre encounters (but not always). For example, Bella mentioned the layout of the institution. She talked about walking in to find security or 'bouncers' on the door and how it feels to sit at tables and chairs that are bolted down to the floor. A few other women said that a sense of stigma was worse now than it was before, and this led to a discussion about some people behaving badly and that letting everybody down. Sarah suggested that although she cared for her mum and for her autistic son she didn't feel right claiming carers' allowance. She said that one Jobcentre worker had encouraged her to apply but she had refused to do so. As well as the stigma, she thought that this would de-value the care she gave. It made it about getting money

and not about doing what felt right. This shows some of the ambivalent relations that women have with 'benefits'. Bella was quick to defend staff and talked about some positive experiences. She suggested that it 'depends who you get, they know that I just talk a load of crap but they're nice to me so I'm happy with that'. She also reminded us to be careful about blaming staff for things that are taken out of hand: 'they're just there to do a job and they have to do that job'. Again there is resistance to the reducing or limiting of 'others', this time Jobcentre staff.

Sarah's sense that being paid more for caring would change her relationship with that care was interesting and resistance to valuing pay above all surfaced again later on when women discussed current drives to 'make work pay' and in doing so move people into paid work. In an interview with Jessica, an 'economic development officer' for Gateshead Council, who had engaged with some of the participants in our process I learned more about this imperative to make work pay. She talked in detail about 'removing barriers to work.' This included things like helping with CV's, application forms, interview presentation and so on. But she also spoke about the issue of childcare, particularly for lone parents: 'It restricts the hours that you can work and it also leaves you with a big problem over the summer holiday um so that has been the big, big barrier'. She mentioned the insufficient supply of paid work more broadly in the region,

'I'm still in touch with my colleagues who work on work program and they've got targets of um I think they are supposed to get 50 people jobs this month and she is working with 170 clients and there's about 6 or seven people working (...) I think you've got to also remember that there's been

redundancies made at all of the big councils and well, public sector, and what that also means is that there are people who are much better skilled, got recent experience, up to date knowledge and skills and its just that competitive market’.

And again we see an insufficient supply of paid work in relation to demand. This shows the pressure that Jessica’s colleague is under to meet difficult targets. It is possible to imagine how pressure might become passed on to ‘clients’ too. Again for lone parents the issue of an insufficient supply of paid work becomes even more problematic as more readily available jobs like retail demand weekend work and childcare is less difficult to obtain on the weekends.

‘I’m not saying they can’t get a job within the right hours but it’s quite difficult, the kind of thing they can get is working in a school teaching assistant, or teacher or in the office in the school, sometimes you do see other jobs with charities or things which are term time only but they’re its not many of them and if you think about how many lone parents there are and they’re all going for the same jobs...’

So again we see the pressures that women face, as they are encouraged to move into paid work by a government that is ‘on the side of working families’ in a context of paid work that is just not available or suitable. There is a sense of recognition that women’s capacity to care is disrupted by paid work but the importance of this capacity for unpaid care is perhaps lost amidst the demonization of people on benefits. Jessica suggests both how difficult and how important it is to ‘make work



pay' and describes this as the 'benefits trap'. She doesn't say much about a labour trap though. As she empathizes with women she goes on to condemn the level of benefits that some are able to claim particularly in relation to her own pay. This taps into one key promise across the political spectrum in the UK (at the time of this research): a promise to 'make work pay', so that people no longer get 'something for nothing'. So that unpaid care is rendered equivalent to nothing. Making work pay becomes a weapon in the war against benefit claimants who are positioned as a threat to fiscal security.

But what impact might such pushes in to paid work have on women's capacity to care? And what does the notion of 'making work pay' do to close down opportunity for women like Sarah, who prioritize unpaid care for reasons that exceed financial reward? Women explained that Jobcentre staff had recently starting specifying exactly *how* work would pay more in order to encourage women into the paid labour market. In one-to-one meetings whilst discussing a particular job opportunity a budget would lay out current income and expenditure relative to the income available should a woman secure a given job. This did not convince women. For example, Emma suggested that some of the extra expenses for those in work were forgotten. And Bella said: 'it's always just a matter of pence. So I could go to work and be 50 pence better off a day but I won't have seen my kids at all?' Jane had a job interview set up but the job finished at three. She called the Jobcentre and said

'I have to pick up the little 'un at 3.15 so how can I do that, unless I move his school but then that would cost me in bus fair to get him to school and I couldn't afford that. They said to me well 15 minutes you would have enough

time to get back if you took a taxi, and I said I've just said I can't afford a bus so how can I afford a taxi?'

(Fieldnotes 2012)

She went for the interview but didn't get the job. For Jane there is a desire to work, but also a desire to be there at the end of the school day, to continue to care, and to manage financially too. And in this case a choice to work or not was eventually taken out of hand anyway, all of that effort and anxiety and no luck, and this in a context of 300 unsuccessful applications. As we see more later on women's possibilities are closed down and they are pushed into a relation with a certain trajectories towards 'self-appreciation' (of ungraspable value) through compulsions to move into paid work. Thinking through women's relations with the Jobcentre shows how a sense that the future can be propped up on the past becomes frayed or disrupted through a series of slight encounters as women are encouraged back to paid work.

### **2.2.5. Holding Things Together**

Women's relations with unpaid labour become increasingly precarious amidst austerity as women are pulled towards paid work. Insidious pressures for individuated self-appreciation filter through various conditions for funding at the group. Simultaneously women have encountered disruptions or threats to what had been long term, stable paid work for Gabbie and potentially for staff at our

organization. Micro-othering between staff and of people on benefits who 'get too much' takes place, but acts of conviviality, empathy, and mutual understanding also persist in situations of insecurity. Therefore we have seen how turbulent relations with paid and unpaid work produce demands for flexibility and adaptability, at the same time certain possibilities (to be in particular kinds of paid work, to prioritize unpaid work, to find work that pays *and* fits with family life, to be related to as a singular other) are limited. The service's capacity to provide space to support reproductive labour is frayed. The Jobcentre is a site from which pushes in to paid work are intensified, but not always felt as such when staff are 'nice' or understanding. However, focus on specific sites fails to get at the multiple effects of austerity as a number of infrastructures and networks are disrupted and as pressure to get on and get by amidst those conditions are intensified in the lives of women.

Therefore I turn now to Sarah, who began this thesis by describing how 'things are all over the place at the minute'. I show how forms of fraying, interruption, and intensification play out multiply in her everyday life. Sarah cares informally for her mum and dad, for her autistic son and for her two other children. She wants to work but she feels compelled to care. Those two things were not felt to be conducive. It became clear from our interview and other interactions, how multiple effects of austerity from different domains met in her everyday life, closing down possibilities, demanding flexibility, leeching time and energy. These forms of fraying, interruption and intensification produced complex relations between precarity and precarisation in a context of austerity, after financial crisis.

First there was job loss. Her husband, a builder, was unable to secure contract work in

the region following the financial crisis of 2007. Due to a collapse in demand for his trade he faced a choice; either travel long distances for work and become separated from his family for most of the time, or find other kinds of work. He decided to look for work locally and to learn to drive with the hope that this would expand his options. 'I mean he's um doing the ten lessons for, I think its err... £180 pound err and he's like "I don't feel confident enough yet I think I need another ten" and I'm like... we're really having to cut back on everything yeah so...' The driving lessons are also a response to funding cuts for taxis that take their disabled son to school. Because 'I can't be taking two three buses like well on a morning... two three buses on an afternoon and all that... if (their son's) taxis get cut...' So where care for Sarah's son was distributed according to need as taxis and a particular kind of school enabled him, them, but relatedly potentially us all - in various ways - that distribution of support was threatened or lost as an effect of budget cuts. In this context practically and emotionally care became felt more and more as the sole responsibility of Sarah and her husband. In addition to the threat of withdrawal for taxi's that take their child to school, job loss has preceded new council tax rules and the implementation of the bedroom tax and in this case Sarah must appeal, becoming responsible for getting on and getting by amidst change once more. As Sarah put it 'but so emm, we're going to try and appeal against that... They say that they should be sharing but they can't share because like with John having like a form of autism he needs his own space all the time'.

Job loss, work is withdrawn, bedroom tax and council tax increases, home feels insecure too, transport to a school able to support their son's additional needs, threatened. Driving lessons, looking for work, making appeals, managing tight budgets. All of these forms of change and responses to change demand time, energy

and, as Sarah put it, confidence. Further they all become processes whereby Sarah assumes responsibility to keep things going as austerity enacts change. Amidst this kind of change energy, time and confidence are pulled into the act of keeping going as things become increasingly uncertain. At the same time other infrastructures are withdrawn, including groups that provide space for respite, informal advice, peer support and produce a sense of consistency amidst change. For Sarah, when a Barnardo's group for families with autism closed there was significant impact amidst other pressures and strains in her life. So multiple effects of austerity and financial crisis escalate to impact on Sarah as they work in relation with one another. Each effect taken in isolation may have felt tolerable, but together they lead to a sense that 'things are all over the place at the minute'. Sarah and her husband work hard to hold things together, to keep on, and keep going amidst these rhythms of change. At the same time they are rendered 'shirkers' who 'do nothing'. Austerity affects her broader family and this increases pressure on Sarah. Where it is impossible for family members to 'bear the load' and keep things going through change, Sarah must bear that load instead. For example, as a result of an ATOS assessment Sarah's mum had what was Disability Living Allowance (DLA) withdrawn.

I mean em... me mam is come really like emmm dependent on us as well at the minute because em... well, like, ahh I can talk to you... me mam and me dad are both like recovering alcoholics and all that and so sometimes me mam falls off the wagon and back on and it's like me sisters not really that supportive as well, so, it's like me, I have to take up a lot of the (pause) slack and its just keeping me mam occupied all the time, and its just like draining a lot of the time. (...)

Me mam gets very anxious with forms and everything because she agoraphobic as well, she's scared to go out on her own and that... I know people think it's like the spiders (Laughs). That's another thing she, me mam, was on emm... sickness benefit but she's been kicked off (She laughs) so em its like ahhh... Yeah she's had to go for a medical and she lost that and she's going through appeal at the minute and like she's getting herself, I think that's why she's fell off the wagon a bit at the minute because she's worried that if she does have to go on to Job Seekers Allowance she can't be going looking for work, she couldn't even go down to Gateshead high street on her own, never mind going to sign on... you know, so I means it's like all that rigmarole.'

So this is a direct effect of the withdrawal of 'sickness benefits' and associated pressure for Sarah's mum to return to work. Sarah's mum feels frightened about the future and Sarah believes that this has worsened her condition. This impact also reverberates into the life of Sarah, who has to be there for her mum more than she was before. She has to both 'pick up the pieces' and attempt to facilitate yet another appeal. Sarah talks about a sense of stress against the backdrop of these responsibilities when she gets a letter from the Jobcentre. In some ways she would love to work, just to 'get a bit of peace', but she couldn't imagine how her mum, her dad and her sister would manage.

'But em its like ahhh you see I mean if I was to get like a full time job like I do like worry about what's going to happen like with me sister because she's like bad with her nerves and with me mam and with the kids...and all that it's all

like... I mean it would be lovely for me cos I've got peace but its like *(laughs)*  
But eeh moan over I'm sorry for ranting...'

So as networks and institutions that might provide support for mum, for sister and for Sarah are withdrawn she continues to feel a sense of obligation to care, this makes her relation with that care fraught and compels her to desire a 'way out' in the form of paid work. Alongside more demands on her time at home, there is increased pressure on her to return to paid work. As she puts it:

'S: There's just so, so much that's going on! I know! That's what I mean and the, the last thing I need is going down for bloody job seekers appointments, for Fuck's sake.

R: Have you had to go for interviews?

S: No the last time I had went I was talking to a really nice, lady and she was saying with like the age of (her youngest son) but obviously like they're cracking down now when they go into full time school but when he was just in nursery for two hours a day but I think the next appointment will be September so (...)

I mean I, I, know like, the real, like the way the government's going on like in the papers and all that I mean ah like ah the work shy and that they don't want to find a job and kick them off the benefits and yeah beli... believe me there are some people that I know that are like that... But em... but they're not seeing the other side of things that like there are other people there that are trying to help other people you know its like... *(She sighs)*

Here then Sarah's capacities to care are disrupted by particular forms of withdrawal or threatened withdrawal; the time and energy it takes to appeal, making ends meet on a tiny budget, anticipating and preparing for future reforms, a residual sense of pressure to return to work but also pulls to care. She recognizes that changes in the terms for income support will become a threat to her current situation, and this becomes manifest in an outburst about going to the Jobcentre, even though people are currently being 'nice'. An opportunity to become a formal carer for her mum is closed down by the reassessment of her mum's condition. At the same time demands for informal care are intensified by withdrawal – as DLA is removed and she 'has to pick up the pieces' and as a support group collapses this disrupts space for her to share responsibility for caring for her son with others. However Sarah doesn't stop feeling responsible for her family and later on she talks about probably needing them as much as they need her.

'I mean at times I do think that like... at times I sort a go on like saying that me sister and me mam need me but then sometimes I think I need them, I need to look after them, you know because if I cant be there for them one day I'll feel dead guilty about it'.

This is consistent with Sarah's approach to the drama and to the women's group. She claims to enjoy 'being useful' and later on describes taking strength from this. However we see her capacity to be there for her broader family eaten away at by the multiple stresses and pressures that play out as austerity. Berlant (2012) speaks about the wearing out of subjects as space for intimacy and reproductive labour are eroded.



We see this in the case of Sarah but also see Sarah continuing to hold things together. How long she can continue, I'm not sure. Perhaps her husband will pass his driving test? Perhaps he will get a job? Perhaps things will get better? Perhaps it will all become too much and she will burn out? Eventually she will be moved from Income support to JSA and at this point something is likely to change. How the rest of her family fair through this is difficult to tell.

### **2.2.6. What Falls Apart ...**

In the support service there has been an intensification of insecurity related to the creeping withdrawal of funding. This leads to the fraying of a felt sense that the future of the organisation can be propped up securely on its past. Such fraying is felt and related to differently by participants and staff working at the organisation. There has been interruption as a group ends, or fear of interruption as it is understood that a job might go. At times, competition for continued employment is bound with othering so that what becomes opposed is other employees and not cuts that threaten jobs across the board. As funding becomes differently conditional opportunity for service leaders and users to direct the kind of activity that takes place is eroded, and in this way perhaps the multiple touch - or bonds between staff and participants - also become penetrated by some generic, ungraspable value associated with that conditionality (weight loss, movement into paid work, and so on). However, resistance to such penetration persists, for example as women celebrate their bodies and as they recognise their own contribution to the running of the service.

We see in encounters with the Jobcentre how women's singularity become felt as lost

or interrupted. For example, this happens when Bella walks past 'a bouncer' and notices that the seats are bolted down, or as Gabbie is told 'that enthusiasm won't last'. However, women also show moments through which their singularity is kept hold of, as 'they know I talk a load of crap and they're nice to me anyway'. Women perform the singularity of others too, as they describe the Jobcentre staff who are nice, who should not be condemned, who are just doing a job. Therefore in both the third sector organization and the Jobcentre there is a sense of ways in which resistance to forms of precaritization - through recognition of and/or attunement to the singularity of others - might be frayed or interrupted, but also how resistance persists. In this way a line between the singularity of the other and the singularity of the self becomes a bond and a celebration of mutual interdependency. There are moments when women refuse to 'other' Jobcentre staff or 'people on benefits' and times when they refuse to be rendered lacking as 'out of paid work' (as they continue to prioritise unpaid care) or as fat and in need of losing weight. If in those situations we are singular, we are all singularly mutually vulnerable, we are not othered, reduced, limited, and ranked. However, perhaps what we see is the closing down of opportunity for such resistance as pulls into paid work and other processes mean that the constitution of her as 'lacking' strengthens its grip.

I think those moments of resistance through starlings in the flock - attuning, moving, improvising together. At certain moments women feel compelled to be there for people, and in doing so they refuse to reduce other people and themselves; they move outside of a relation with value 'less or more' that penetrates the multiplicity of her touch. However, increasingly in austerity simple demands disrupt that form of flowing together. This disruption happens as infrastructures that enable women to

put out the chairs, to be busy for the group are eroded, through various compulsions towards paid work, or through other demands that steal time for care. For example, as Sarah must develop a number of appeals, she has less time to just be there for her mum, to take her to the bingo and to make sure she is ok.

Amidst threats to the continuation of her everyday family life, senses of a future that can be built on the past become frayed. For example, as Sarah's rent is threatened by bedroom tax and council tax, as her son's school becomes harder to access, the future is made insecure. However, the field of possibilities that are available in order to improvise through such insecurity are restricted. The available possibilities are individuating and in being so disrupt flow once more. Compulsion to be there is the flock *and* is the motivating force for the flock's moving and being together but a) withdrawals, conditionality, and other changes intensify the difficulty of realising that compulsion meaning that it takes more effort to keep things going and in doing so hold things together and b) forms of resistance are individuated as women try and find an exemption to the rule rather than change in the rule, so not only is the flock fractured, but people are separated from it.

What this means is that in the face of disruption or threatened insecurity what becomes possible to enable continuation is becoming exceptional. It is through appeal that the bedroom tax can be avoided, it is by getting a job that JSA can be avoided, it is through the job loss of another member of staff that employment can be retained. There is a sense then of having to make the appeal, be dynamic, get the job, take action in order to negotiate the effects of austerity. This produces a feeling of autonomous responsibility for improvising through change. This constitutes the

individuation (not the singularity) of the subject - but this also so often relies on the limiting and reduction of others, since for my case to be exceptional others must not be. If all lives are mutually dependent then that limiting and reducing of others also becomes a limiting and reducing of the self. Again we see this paradox play out in austerity. There is a compulsion and a desire to be 'all in it together' which is expressed by women's continued capacities to care and by the ways in which this felt good. There is a sense that in order to 'all be in it together' we can register and attune to the singularity of others and in doing so recognize both the singularity and the interconnectedness of life (which is mutually precarious but might be snuffed out at any time). However, there is also the closing down of a field of possibilities to be 'all be in it together' as forms of living through and negotiating instability increasingly require separation from others through exceptional acts. In this way austerity is not felt as a force that could be mutually resisted. Instead, processes for getting on and getting by fracture women whose time and energy becomes pulled into responding to a multiplicity of changes. And this disrupts ways in which austerity could be encountered as a common, coherent force that might engender collective resistance.

## **Interlude: (De)composing Habit in Theatre-as-method**

Before moving on to think more about women's future imaginaries in the contexts of precaritisation described above, I'd like to pause for a second, to interrupt the flow as it were, and take you back to our empirical site and to the theatre-making method. I want to think a bit more about change as processes of (de)composition and about the particular space that drama made for moving and flowing together. I suggested in 1.3 on theatre-as-method how research encounters, like other encounters, differently produce conditions for the co-constitution of the subject and therefore incite more or less intense processes of change amidst on-going difference. In this Interlude I think relations between the research encounter and change through our use of drama-as-method. I draw on theories of habit to engage with 'little' (Balfour, 2009) or low intensity changes that participant's described in relation to this process. Here focus is on participants' suggestion that something *felt* different amidst or as a result of drama making and on my own sense of a shift in our relationships. The change they described takes place in a context of on-going difference, as intangible, as refracted in and through other processes, and co-constitutes specific conditions for the generation of research material. I draw on theories of habit to think about change since habit is a mechanism whereby things endure but also a site and source of change. So far, I have thought about how habits that constitute daily life - smelling some flowers, attending an autism support group, the rituals and routines associated with particular work (paid or unpaid) - are disrupted amidst austerity. I have considered how practices of embracing the singularity of the other become decomposed by processes of

individuation that cut across various forms of change amidst austerity, and forms of resistance to that. I have also thought how certain habits - shaped by certain environments - persist to constitute a 'slow death' or wearing out of the subject (Berlant, 2011). Here I draw on particular theories of habit to attempt to understand the elusive and subtle change that women described in relation to our drama work. As I do so I consider relations between drama practice and change in a context of ongoing difference; that is where habit is already thought to be more-or-less volatile.

The habit that I engage here is dynamic, lively and future orientated (Grosz, 2013). Therefore, in order to understand how change is enacted in and through habit I suggest that it constitutes flows of composition/decomposition where lines between what composition and decomposition are become blurred. Here (de)composition is taken from Deleuze (1988) on Spinozan ethics. This refers to the composition or decomposition of bodies (and/or parts of bodies) as an always relational process: 'When a body 'encounters' another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion in its parts' (Deleuze, 1988: 19). Therefore if habit becomes a force through which body-subjects or parts of body-subjects encounter one another how are those parts (de)composed in the process? In turn how are habits (de)composed by particular relations between body-subjects? And more specifically here: if habit constitutes difference and in doing so constitutes multiple processes of (de)composition how did our drama techniques become enrolled in those processes of (de)composition? I consider these questions through some of the exercises that we used and through their repeated practice as over time they enmeshed and re-settled the strange and the familiar. In summary I suggest that these exercises facilitated a form of experimentation with the volatility of habit and in

doing so produced particular conditions for the co-generation of research material including interview material and the development of our fictional play.

### **Zip Zap Boing**

I begin by returning to the dusty blue room. Thirteen women; children's pictures on the wall; faded toys; a tea urn. Us all milling around. A definite sense that this meant far more to me than it did to anybody else. A deep breath, chairs shuffled out of the way, last gulps of tea, sun streaming through the window. We take off our shoes. An introduction to the project and:

Gabbie: 'Let's start by telling us your name and something interesting about yourselves.'

Laura: 'I've got bipolar'

Robyn: 'I'm a granny with three motorbikes,'

Bella: 'I've been on page three of the Sun, but not as a model.'

Liz: 'I've got seven kids,'

Claire: 'I've got five kids'

Roz: 'I've lost ten stone,'

Jane: 'I've just found a lump'

We found out later that it was benign, but in that moment Jane described her loneliness; she didn't have anybody else to talk to about what was going on and we listened and responded, just as we did to each of the expressions. I was surprised that people were so open so early on and I could feel a buzz of reciprocal investment,

active contagious participation, connections across, interest, words of praise and sympathy, reassurance bouncing back and forth. I sensed a shift in our relationship.

Next we played 'Geordie zip-zap boing'. Here you pass a word and an action around and across the circle, quick fire, usually zip, zap or boing but this time in a North-East dialect: 'Alreet' 'Alreet' 'Alreet,' 'Canny' 'Giz a tab.' It's fast and you have to pay attention. Self-conscious at first, words were mumbled monotone, or sarcastically, lots of laughing. Then focus, speed, concentration takes over, Alreet, Alreet, Alreet, (faster), 'Canny', 'Arggh. Did it wrong', 'Canny', 'Alreet', 'Alreet', 'Giz a Tab'. It moved and flowed through the circle. We've got it as silliness folded in to seriousness and back again; as a will to complete the activity seemed to overpower the embarrassment. 'Excellent'. Next, 'The Sun Shines On...' We sit on chairs in a circle. I gave some instructions then demonstrated the game by standing in the middle and exclaiming that:

'The Sun Shines on... anybody with brown hair.'

Immediate motion as those with brown hair got up and moved to another chair; a clash of bodies, me almost sitting down on top of you, a jokey shove. As I took a seat, Claire was left standing ready to take her turn. The game started safely:

Claire: 'The Sun Shines on ... People with white shoes on,'

Hannah: 'The Sun Shines on anyone who has got... blue eyes,'

Liz: 'pause...'

Gabbie: 'Don't worry about the silence, an idea will come.'



Together we expanded the boundaries for the game. One participant took a risk:

Jane: 'Everybody who believes in God,' and then another,

Bella: 'Who had sex in the last week?'

Claire: 'Who's wearing black knickers?'

I felt myself opening towards this intimacy, enjoying the strangeness of sharing secrets with people I didn't know, and the speed with which it made them feel closer. I look around and several women were sitting forward, alert, waiting for a reason to get up - eyes focussed on a spare chair, keen to avoid being left behind. Others lingered on purpose to get a chance to speak. The exercise itself became a shared experience as well as an opportunity to explore differences as well as things held in common. As in the draft script of play we moved on to one in a series of exercises that had us moving together around the space - sensing each other, *feeling* when to stop, when to speed up, when to slow down together without need for verbal communication or even eye contact. This form of interaction helped me to attune to those around me in such a way that somehow made me feel both alone and connected and this brought the murmuration of starlings to mind.

Engagement was generally tentative when we introduced a new game especially at the start of a session, but things soon warmed up and opened out. Slowly over time, week after week, the games became less strange, less likely to be imbued with anxiety or excitement, the games became more like friends. Some were more popular than others. 'Shuffle Monster' was a particular favourite, this began with call and response,

then a silly version of 'catch' with chairs, a strange walk, and a dodgy French accent. One woman (the Shuffle Monster) exclaimed 'I am the shuffle monster and what do I do?' and we all replied: 'You shuffle!' I was pleased to hear that the games travelled out of this space as they were shared with children and neighbours. We enjoyed them, because, as Bella put it: 'it's like being a kid again, you build confidence because you do something and you think that it will be embarrassing but everybody is doing the same so that becomes different'. And as she later said in an interview: 'it's like what are we bloody doing here we're grown adults, but why not, why not run around and have a laugh...do you know what I mean?' Why not do something just because it feels good?

Bella wasn't the only person to suggest that through this process something shifted. As Sarah said in an interview later on:

'When you came in on that first day, you know when the sports woman was there, and you said drama a lot of people were pulling a face, and I thought I wouldn't come, because people didn't seem interested and I was saying I hope it goes off ok... I might not come, because I don't want it being all negative... The games seemed to loosen everyone up though... We just had a laugh. If anybody is self-conscious about themselves then that first game outside, with the builders on the roof and that, then that broke the seal...'

And for Robyn:

‘It has brought out ideas in people, and brought out things that we didn't know we had... it brought out what people didn't realise they could do, a bit of achievement, personal experience, by the time you've done it is done...’

As Bella finally went on to say: ‘...often everything we do is a front, em... so it was quite nice to be stripped bare of that, that was quite nice.’

In this process I was interested in the felt sense that something was ‘different’ amidst or as a result of participation in these drama activities. Without wishing to overstate the effects of the process, the sense of feeling/ becoming ‘like a kid again’, being ‘stripped bare’, or ‘breaking the seal’ has interested me. What might that mean, or do, or even undo, in this empirical process? Is it that responsibility diminishes, that possibilities open up, that we connect through play and a common goal, that (as Bella put it) we test things out in a safe environment? Does this become a momentary unravelling of the habits that age us? Does this (temporarily) open certain frames of possibility for interaction? How to think about the implications of this for the kind of research material that we developed together?

Many performance theorists and practitioners have attempted to reflect on, galvanize and/or understand relations between applied drama and change (see Nicholson (2005) for a review). Transformation may be imagined across several registers. For example, ‘Key Change’ (2015) developed with women in UK prisons by *Open Clasp* theatre company was initially commissioned to bring male prisoners into contact with stories told by women prisoners, but the project also aimed to challenge a harmful punitive system, and to support the company's broader aim of tackling injustices

associated with patriarchy and hetero-normativity. The company's aim to 'change the world one play at a time' (McHugh, 2015) feeds in to a difference that Schechner (2001) delineates between the concepts of transportation and transformation. 'Transportation' implies a temporary change occurring as spectators, participants and/or performers are 'taken somewhere' through performance. Transformation infers some kind of permanent shift, which might emerge as the result of the escalation of several transportations but cannot be an assumed consequence of participation. Johnston and Bajrange (2014) suggest that theatre's ability to evoke emotional transportation and create a 'bridge of empathy' can impact on how audiences and/or participants engage with broader social and political frameworks. And relatedly Kershaw (1992) and Jackson (2011) emphasize theatre as a shared experience that is able to interrupt current processes of 'individualization' or 'fragmentation'. However, Balfour (2009) cites Chamberlain (2004: 93) who suggests that relations between social change and applied theatre can be fraught when this 'begins to suggest that what's 'applied' in applied theatre is not 'theatre' but a specific set of ideological values'. In this context Balfour raises the question of the scale and type of change that we might expect to occur amidst theatre participation and/or witness. He suggests that a relation between applied theatre and the intention of 'big' change may become increasingly necessary for the 'marketization' of applied theatre and as funding becomes harder to obtain. However, this demand for change becomes unproductive or even harmful where it reduces applied theatre practice to a specific instrumental function including the assertion of particular ideologies or the demand for some kind of 'improvement' of participants. Instead a theatre of 'little changes' could cut through divisions between aesthetics and instrumentalism and allow for moments of improvised change. Small or low intensity changes might not be

predetermined but could surprise, they might not be measured, and they might be intangible. Therefore taking from the spirit of a 'theatre of little changes,' I think about change in the context of our project by engaging with habit as multiple forms of (de)composition.

**I eat a banana: flows of (de)composition.**

Rhythms of fraying, interruption and intensification described in the previous chapter might be thought as a form of liberation if I hold on to certain accounts of habit, and disregarded processes of individuation that cut across such change and themselves facilitate the settling of certain habits. This is because often habit has been reduced to a repeated, embodied and unconscious act, an inescapable cognitive loop, or even a prison that renders subjects passive and oppressed; as Grosz (2013: 217) puts it 'after Sartre, Kant and Descartes habit becomes a form of mechanism that arrests consciousness, thought and freedom'. However, the ontologies I draw on here avoid fixing or moralising habit or making its disruption or surfacing stable. Utilising Grosz (2013) on Ravaisson, Bergson and Deleuze, I address concepts of habit that link it to an 'ever moving world'. Habits therefore become modes of encounter, materiality and life, rather than restrictive forms of fixity and repetition. If bodies are always becoming in relation to their outsides, then habit is not confined to the body-subject but emerges in and as encounters between body-subjects, objects, landscapes and so on (after Dewsbury and Bissell, 2015). Although habit has not to date been framed explicitly as processes of composition and decomposition this is implicit in some recent work (Bissell 2015; Berlant 2012). Therefore rather than thinking about habit as a moral form of mediation that either facilitates good-activity-freedom or bad-

passivity-imprisonment, I consider ways in which particular habits may (de)compose parts of the body-subject and ways in which habits themselves are (de)composed. Before I return to our own participatory drama practice I want to elaborate on how I think about the complex material and immaterial relations that become caught up in habit as processes of (de)composition. For Beckett (1948) habit is the ballast that chains a dog to his vomit, habit is also life. Habit is breathing. Since Beckett is exemplary at making habit volatile - by making the environments in which habits plays out seem strange - I use 'Krapp's last tape' to pull out exactly what I mean by the volatility of habit and by habits as (de)composition.

'Have just eaten, I regret to say; three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth. Fatal things for a man of my condition'.

(Beckett, 2006:4)

The curtain rises 'a Late Evening in the Future'. It's Krapp's 69<sup>th</sup> Birthday. He listens to a tape of himself speaking on his 39<sup>th</sup> birthday and dislikes the man he barely recognises. Making recordings and playing them back is one of Krapp's many habits. Eating bananas is another. This compulsive consumption is almost definitely the source of his 'bowel problems' and yet he doesn't stop. And what about the poor actor playing Krapp? What about his bowels? So, Beckett's joke is double, as he gestures towards 'life (as) habit, or rather life (as) a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals...' In this play he experiments with the materiality of performance through a folding of form and content, actor and character. Just as the character Krapp is caught in a loop of activity - listening to recordings of himself, making recordings of himself and eating bananas - so the actor playing Krapp is caught in the same loop of activity, not just in a single performance but night

after night after night. Objects - the tape recorder and the banana - become active; they sustain the habit, they become part of the habit.

Krapp (and perhaps the actor performing Krapp) becomes constipated, not from eating one banana but from repeatedly eating bananas. The composition of this habit, sustained in part by seemingly endless availability of bananas, slowly decomposes the body as it disrupts Krapp's bowel functions. This hidden infrastructure is drawn to the surface only at the point of discomfort. And if, as we are led to suspect, Krapp's increasing irritability may be bound in part to his physical condition, then irritability escalates as a relation with compacted bowels - as a relation with the repeated consumption of bananas. Therefore the habit has material and affective consequences for Krapp. Since repetition is difference, habit becomes dynamic: constituting shifts, that (de)compose the body's capacity to act or be acted on, and to affect and be affected in a range of different ways (Dewsbury and Bissell, 2015).

Flows of (de)composition including flows of activity and passivity become manifest multiply across a range of forces that constitute Krapp's habits. For example, Krapp might on occasion register that *again* he eats a banana, but not how his bowels extract sugar from the banana and become shaped by this repeated act. The comfort that the bananas on-going presence brings may be sustaining if the loss of the banana would lead to a loss of hope about anything. And so habit as process of (de)composition may be manifest multiply across material and immaterial force. In this way the subversion of a habit may not be thought as a solely wilful act. It may be incited by the shock of physical pain, for example as the relation between banana and bowel finally reaches a certain threshold and in doing so inflicts pain on the body or in other situations. Or

slippage may take the shape of a new act that may in part emerge as a result of a change in environment; for example, a new affinity for apples occurring alongside the sudden proliferation of apples. But the act of eating apples becomes bound with what came before; it must at least at first be folded into how that body has become in and as relation with bananas. Therefore the forces of habit do not have a bounded start and an end.

For Bissell (2011) habit is not always un-thought, sensed, or instinctive. Various relations with a particular habit might ebb and flow so that habit may be differently consciously engaged. For example, at times Krapp reflects on the damage he is doing to his body when he eats a banana, even on occasion 'resisting from a fourth'. Krapp shows us the volatility of habit: that habit becomes the folding of passive and active bodily affections that compose everyday encounters' (Dewsbury and Bissell, 2015) and through the multiple forces entangled in habit, different forms of passivity and activity rub together. In this context drama processes cannot be considered as surfacing fixed thinking/embodied habits or subverting stable repeated practices; instead they take place in an always-changing world. Like other forms of change they must be enrolled in existing habitual process and/or act 'a shock from the outside' that can be debilitating' as well as liberating (Bissell, 2014).

Beckett in his way constitutes what has been generally understood as a dismal account of habit as 'the ballast that chains a dog to his vomit'. However Grosz shows a different kind of emphasis in relation to what habit is or does. A habituated body can know without knowing, that is sense or otherwise become without cognition. 'Habit is the accommodation of life to its most insistent and repetitive forces and tasks, life's transformation through its engagement with a world larger than its



will or consciousness' (Grosz, 2013: 224 on Ravaison, 2008: 1838:57). In this way, for Grosz, habit does not reduce or limit consciousness but instead becomes an opening towards different forms of consciousness. Habit is activity freed by the dampening of cognition, where activity is instinct, desire, survival. Our relations with a 'larger world' constitute habits, and through those relations space is freed for more than survival. Again this evokes and perhaps moves a little beyond the flock discussed in the previous chapter in its account of relations between mutual dependency and singularity.

'The alarm summons up a chain of actions: opening our eyes, turning off the alarm, getting out of bed, putting on slippers and beginning the day. It is only because we undertake these activities in a state of half-consciousness that we have the energy and interest to undertake less routinized actions, to elaborate relatively free acts. Habits, incorporating memories of past performances in similar contexts, leave both consciousness and the energetic forces of the body able to address other issues than the habitual only because the habitual accommodates so much of what is required from us... habit is an anchor, the rock to which the possibilities of personal identity and freedom are tethered, the condition under which learning is possible, the creation of a direction, a 'second nature', an identity'.

(Grosz (2013: 226) on Bergson)

This calls to mind how frequent change and disruption in austerity demanded energy from women that became drawn into acts of simply getting on and getting by. This matters in terms of who has got the right (but also the energy) to speak or otherwise

express herself. In that context the freeing capacities of habit became dampened by disruptions to infrastructures with which habits had become entangled (I always think of the lost flowers here). In the same way if the alarm clock and the slippers are withdrawn or swapped one day what does that do to the habit? She adjusts. What if they are removed or swapped again and again and again? She adjusts and adjusts and adjusts. What energy does it require to wake up? How does this make an ordinarily banal act feel like something more significant and demand creativity that can't be used elsewhere? How does this impact on relations with or attachments to habit in general as infrastructures that they are bound with can no longer be relied upon? Despite this I also recognize the plight of Krapp and Beckett's account of the dog and his vomit. Too much of a certain kind of structure has sucked my own energy at times, differently than too much change or disruption. For example, repetitive tasks in some jobs become habitual. They may not require much cognition and leave plenty of space for creativity but I want to scream, as I am routed to that task and my field of possibilities for expending that energy are closed down. Berlant (2011) also shows slow forms of decomposition taking place through habituated forms of relation between body-subjects and work, consumption and so on. Different habits then constitute different forms of (de)composition and become in relation to particular infrastructures, forms of convention and so on. It is those forms of convention and those forms of (de)composition rather than habit itself that has become my primary interest in this thesis.

To think more about the implications of this for understanding the ambiguous change that participants described in relation to our participatory drama project I return attention to the games that we used. At first, unfamiliar drama activities may have

facilitated a shock from the outside as they disrupted participant's practiced modes of relation, but over time they became familiar, settled. Like the eating of apples after the eating of bananas drama practice became folded into other forces from outside of that practice. Therefore such practices became enrolled in a general flow of the (de)composition of habit and subsequently the (de)composition of material and immaterial forces co-constitutive of bodies.

In this section then, I want to think different potentialities of habit through our drama games, which produced a volatility of habit and became ritual as they were practiced at the start and end of every session. Thinking/doing habit in this way complicates binaries that surface in applied theatre theory between 'active' and 'passive' participation. For example, in applied theatre and particularly 'theatre in the community' emphasis is placed on 'activity and involvement rather than passivity and uncritical consumerism' (Nicholson, 2005: 97). This involves the expectation or desire that audiences and/ or participants become 'more actively' engaged with a particular topic or process as a consequence of participation. As Grosz (2013) suggested it is possible to be active in ways other than the cognitive and so this expands opportunity for thinking activity and passivity multiply across a range of material and affective relations.

Boal's (2008) drama techniques are aimed towards the production of the 'spect-actor' so that audiences or participants could become dynamically involved in the development of theatre. For Boal enhanced levels of 'activity' in the theatrical space is something to be desired and becomes a 'rehearsal for reality'. Instead thinking about habit as multiple flows of (de)composition including multiple flows of 'activity and

passivity' might shift how I understand the problem of change in our own participatory drama research process, not least since different (de)compositions of activity and passivity may co-exist multiply. Further passivity and activity may simultaneously decompose and compose parts of the body. In this way one form of activity (cognitive thought) becomes no more privileged than another ways of sensing.

For Boal (2002), drama games and exercises can open participants up to new modes of relation. 'Games for actors and non actors' are clustered around practices like: 'listening to what we hear, dynamising several senses, feeling what we touch (restructuring muscular relations), reconnecting memory emotion and imagination'. Through processes of 'de-mechanisation', the exercises attempt to shift habituated forms of relation within and between body-subjects and in doing so provide conditions for the incitement of 'social change'. I think this through the notion that habit does not necessarily produce 'mechanisation' from which subjects need 'freeing', but also in a context whereby certain habits decompose some subjects more than others. How habits are 're-tuned' might facilitate different ways of sensing and becoming in the world. Drama games and exercises provide just one amongst many ways of experimenting with that process, for example enhancing some sensory capabilities by limiting others.

Drawing on Paulo Friere (1972), Boal developed a theatrical system so that audiences could become more 'active' not just in the development of theatre. As he puts it:

'Hamlet says in his famous speech to the actors that theatre is a mirror in which may be seen the true image of nature, of reality. I wanted to penetrate

the mirror to transform the image I saw in it and to bring that transformed image back to reality: to realise the image of my desire'.

(Boal, 2005: 9/10)

However, thinking about habit as (de)composition might trouble the clear distinction that re-occurs in Boal's work between activity and passivity, composition and decomposition, and provide a different framework for understanding the change potentially effected by participation in particular drama exercises. Drawing on habit as ontological force, I might consider that the image, the mirror and the 'reality' Boal describes are not separate entities but instead become folded into one another. This means the exercises advocated by Boal amongst others and used in our project are significant where they facilitate a meeting of the strange and the familiar that may intensify the volatility of particular habits. Theatre technique cannot be disentangled from other habits already shaping and moving bodies in multiple ways. But nevertheless in the moment of participation, those forms of relation may shift as they meet those theatre techniques - regardless of how or whether those shifts are registered. According to this framework, the exercises cannot be thought as surfacing or subverting stable, always un-thought habits - creating a temporary or permanent change - but instead they become bound up in already ongoing difference as they produce different kinds of encounter between bodies-subjects.

1,2,3

To give an example of how this process played out I expand on our use of one of Boal's games: two people stand, face-to-face eyes locked and they count to three, taking it in turns number by number.

Person a) one

Person b) two

Person a) three

Person b) one

Person a) two

Person b) three... and so on.

This practices a deeply habituated act: counting in a particular language. 'One, Two, Three'. Already the usual rhythms of the activity are disrupted, as we are forced in complicity with a partner. This demands eye contact and an unspoken connection enables the words to flow as we two count together. In this activity participants are asked to slowly replace each number with an invented action and sound. For example:

a) (the cluck of a chicken and the bend of the elbows)

b) two

a) three

b) (the cluck of a chicken and the bend of the elbows)

And so we enter in to each other's imagined worlds, repeating one another's invented actions/ words until the game might become:

- a) The cluck of a chicken and the bend of the elbows
- b) A whistle and a bend of the knees
- a) A raspberry and a wiggle of the fingers
- b) The cluck of a chicken and the bend of the elbows ...

And we repeat over and over again, before re-starting the process - trying out different sounds and different images. In this exercise there is connection between us as we take on the other person's own creative actions and expressions as our own. And so if as Boal would suggest language or in this case the act of counting reproduces hierarchal forms of convention, then games and exercises might enable participants to replace those forms of convention with their own imagined vocabularies. Boal would argue that moving outside of the 'box' of '1, 2, 3' becomes a kind of liberation, as it offers the participant an opportunity to change the expression. Through repetition this practice of subversion becomes more finely tuned. That is, the bodily mechanisms that the exercises demand become practiced. However, if I think again of the habits associated with eating bananas as they become folded into the eating of apples then it is also worth considering that the activities replacing the counting have themselves come from somewhere. The act of blowing a raspberry has its own history - that in this situation becomes enmeshed with the act of counting 1.

This game produces complex flows of passivity and activity. Participants are made passive by the rules of the games. They have to count from one to three with a partner; they have to make eye contact with each other in order to achieve this aim. Then, later, they have to make a sound and movement. Some participants found this

difficult at first. To be 'silly' in this way was a scary thing to do. But simultaneously the rules of the game limited choice - either a) act or b) sit out - and opened a field of possibilities (counting can be so much more than 1,2,3). A kind of disciplining therefore is integral to this game. But such disciplining produced the conditions for activity where participants could speak, move and connect to one-another in unfamiliar ways. In this case structure provided conditions for a certain kind of experimentation.

Two does not have to follow one: an itchy head could do instead. And repeating those actions meant that something impulsive, self-conscious, spontaneous, un-thought was given a different kind of attention- was attuned to, re-performed, repeated. You and your partner decided and reproduced the action-sound in that moment of interaction. As a consequence flows of (de)composition associated with the normal act of counting 1,2,3 become volatile. The demand of spontaneity in the invention of a new sound/movement may, for some, act as a (minor) shock and then through repeated practice may improve the bodies' capacity for spontaneity, listening and attuning. The movements that the exercise demanded might stretch the body but in such a way that is directed by the team. Since too much planning rocks the rhythm of this game perhaps on occasion the present expanded here as futures contracted. As we concentrated I felt the flow of connection between us. And this demanded a feeling through of one another's limits. It required and therefore practiced trust or exposed the breach of that trust. In this game I had to believe that my partner would not laugh at me and that they would not chose a word or symbol that I could not reproduce. I had to trust. This too became a practice in collaboration. The solitary act of counting one, two, three, became a shared practice of speaking, moving, making sounds or



images together. This exercise simultaneously (de)composed the hegemony of verbal communication, and the act of counting one, two, three, as a solitary process. It practiced listening. And over time, through the repetition of this exercise the familiar act of counting became strange and the strange act of making sounds and movements became familiar.

And if habits are relations between body-subjects and other things then in this case drama games made those relations volatile in particular ways. But they did so using structure and repetition. Perhaps therefore that structure, the rules of boundaries, becomes the thing that makes experimentation and creativity feel safe or possible? 'Habits, incorporating memories of past performances in similar contexts, leave both consciousness and the energetic forces of the body able to address other issues than the habitual only because the habitual accommodates so much of what is required from us' (Grosz (2013: 226) on Bergson). The rules and repetition used in this game achieved this too. We knew what we had to do and this freed space within those limitations for experimentation. The space that becomes bounded by the repeated use of these games opens a field of possibility for interacting in unexpected ways, which as they become familiar are registered and shared collectively, this produced a kind of intimacy between us.

## **Conclusion**

'Bella: The sun shines on ... anyone who was caught out in that rain on  
Tuesday'

A few of us get up and later this becomes a topic of conversation, we all had something to say about the rain. Like this process of drama making, the floods were a meeting of the ordinary and the out of ordinary and they had enveloped us all in one way or another. And relatedly Kershaw and Nicholson (2011) and Jackson (2011) emphasize the importance of theatre as a shared experience that is able to disrupt current processes of 'individualization' or 'fragmentation'. For me, the exercises, games, and processes used in theatre-making strengthened both a sense of autonomy and singularity and a sense of my connectedness to others and the environment around me, and this for me was the consequence of that particular process in the making volatile of habit.

Through their repetition particularly at the start and the end of a session games and exercises like 1,2,3 'The Sun Shines On' and 'Geordie Zip Zap Boing' produce tension between the increased volatility of habit and repetition. A particular game that pushed bodies to move and interact in strange ways quickly became familiar and this made familiar modes of interaction strange. Boal (2002: 30) compares this process to when a person leaves their habitual environment and visits an unknown country... 'Everything seems wonderful, unexpected, fantastic' (or perhaps a little scary or daunting) 'but after a few days once again the senses learn to select and the routine starts anew'. On visiting an unknown country when there are differences even the familiar becomes drawn into sharp relief. In the same way these exercises enabled us to bring ordinary, everyday interactions into a space made strange by drama exercises. This gave an opportunity to attune to those interactions together. For example, by enacting 'getting out of bed in the morning' what usually happens alone, in a half-asleep zone is performed with others in a dusty blue hall. How does this shift

our relation with the habit? By drawing it to the surface, we could play around with the act, change it and explore it. As a method for research this opens particular ways up for us to engage with one another's every day relations and in doing so perhaps notice, feel or otherwise register them as a consequence of their intensified volatility. Finally, there is something about making that 'journey to another country' together that strengthened bonds between us. It gave us a shared set of experiences that we could talk about, laugh about, and bring into future dialogues. This made a difference to the kind of conversations that we had in the process and during interviews at the end, they were conversations between friends, or at least between people who had been through something.

## 2. 3. Austerity Futures

### 2.3.1. The Cruel Optimism of Cosmic Ordering

Lesley: Listen Sandra, there's something I need to talk to you about...

Sandra: What, (beat) we're not doing yoga again are we?

Lesley: No, no it's not the yoga,

Sandra: Downward Dog and all that shite, I couldn't walk for a week after the last session.

Lesley: No, Don't worry I've not booked any more yoga,

Sandra: Good cos all that breathing stresses me out.

Lesley: It's nothing to do with that. Look, Sandra (pause) there's something I need to tell you.

Sandra: Right. (Pause) Well come on then Lesley. Spit it out.

*(Lesley hesitates then instead of telling the truth she picks up a book on the desk)*

Lesley: Em... Well, what it is, is ... Have you read this book?

Sandra: Cosmic ways to Change Your Life?

Lesley: You should read it Sandra.

Sandra: What, so this is what you wanted to tell iz?

Lesley: Erm, yes. Yes, it is.

Sandra: Noel Edmonds? (beat)

Lesley: He's a very clever man. Its' changed my life this book. I mean Noel...  
he was in the gutter. He lost everything didn't he?

- Sandra: Did he?
- Lesley: Remember Blobby Land?
- Sandra: Where?
- Lesley: Theme park he set up in the 90s.
- Sandra: Oh aye. It went bust didn't it?
- Lesley: Exactly Sandra. He was ruined. Totally bankrupt right? Most people would be finished, but not Noel. Noel bounced back didn't he? He got into this cosmic ordering and look at him now; he's a Millionaire!
- Sandra: Fuck me I need a coffee...
- Lesley: Honestly Sandra Noel's taught me if you want something enough, eventually, it'll happen.
- Sandra: I'm sorry Lesley, I love you to bits, I mean, I love you like you're me own mother but you don't half talk some shite sometimes...
- Lesley: A lot of people follow it Sandra, it can be very useful
- Sandra: Brilliant.
- Lesley: See, what I'm saying is, what I mean is, sometimes bad things can happen and you just have to think positive... you know to... to move forward.
- Sandra: Right well I'll give it a read. I could do with some cosmic friggin order.

(Final Draft: Diehard Gateshead, 2015)

In this chapter I consider how austerity and related processes of precarisation became enmeshed (or not) with women's future imaginaries. I begin this with a return to the play. Through countless rewrites we kept hold of Lesley's 'positive attitude'

towards the future of the group and her subsequent failure to address the reality of its closure even as she began to 'tidy things away'. Lesley maintained an attachment to the promise of 'cosmic ordering' until the end of the play. Meanwhile she didn't tell the others what was going on or feel able to resist closure in any other way. Dramatic tension should emerge through audiences' recognition of Lesley's misguided optimism. This device was used to evoke how austerity futures folded into an affective present for Lesley inducing a dissonant range of feelings, including enthusiasm, positivity, anxiety and desperation. In this way, while Lesley's engagement with the self-help practice advocated by UK daytime television star Noel Edmonds (2007) might seem like a joke, it actually tapped in to something more serious. That was the role of austerity in how futures are both made in the present and remake the present. In Lesley's case creative techniques were deployed to make an uncertain future more bearable. Amidst change and potential loss, investment in the promise of cosmic ordering was aligned to the possibility of success and/or continuation. Cosmic ordering as Lesley engaged it produced a strange sense of agency; she, personally, could realise a desire simply by wanting it enough and by believing in it enough. In this case the positive attitude became both an object of desire and a mode of relating with an object of desire. It made certain futures that seemed impossible seem possible: 'If the cruelty of an attachment is experienced by someone/some group, even in a disavowed fashion, the fear is that the loss of the object/ scene of promising itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything' (Berlant, 2008b: 33). So for Lesley, what enabled the continuation of hope amidst loss was a 'positive attitude', related to the promise of cosmic ordering. Cosmic ordering both displaced and reasserted her investment in the group. A pragmatic relation with circumstance became subservient to the promise of positive

affect. The object of Lesley's optimism became both a) the continuation of the group and relatedly the promise of secure work, maintaining intimate relationships with peers, convivial work, a pension and so on and b) the fantasy of cosmic ordering. This meant that Lesley held in tension cosmic ordering as a form of attachment to the continuation of the group (when all hope seemed lost) and cosmic ordering as a replacement object of attachment; a new institution with which to belong. This constituted a dissonant orientation to two different futures. It harmed Lesley as well as keeping her going, since it frayed bonds with women who were not informed about the potential closure of the group and/or who did not buy in to the promise of cosmic ordering.

So, in the play trajectories towards particular futures were destabilised as an effect of the cuts of austerity and methods were used, in this case by Lesley, to negotiate this. Pasts and futures folded into presents in complex and contradictory ways; they were harmful, sustaining and sometimes both at the same time. In this chapter I think about what future imaginaries participants attached to and what cluster of affects and desires appeared to become magnetised to certain futures (Berlant, 2008b: 33). I build from Berlant's (2013b) suggestion that it is by exploring, without shaming, peoples' ordinary everyday attachments that we might begin to understand what those attachments stand in for, and in doing so imagine different genres towards life in all its interdependencies. For example, without 'loving the state' or 'hating the state' it is possible to understand that peoples' attachments to the state might show a willingness to be collective in ways that aren't always convenient to them. 'If we start seeing our objects of ambition and desire as stand-ins, as things that organize our attachment to life, we have a totally different understanding and a kind of generosity

toward those objects' (Berlant, 2013b:no pagination.) I use Berlant's (2008b, 2011) work on cruel optimism as a point of departure for engaging women's 'ambitions and desires' since she rests with the ambivalent and contradictory forms attachments might take. Cruel optimism gets at how people endure conditions that harm them and/or tolerate a 'fraying' or worsening of conditions by forming or maintaining attachments to certain promises. Cruel optimism is not *only* a widespread relation of continued attachment to the fraying 'good life fantasy' of late capitalism; it may also describe a form of unrequited love, for example. But cruel optimism, Berlant (2008b) argues, *is* intensified in late capitalism. Cruel optimism offers a diagnosis for the contemporary condition that seeks to understand how and why people encounter and endure the slow undoing of the social democratic promise of the post-war period. This is an approach to thinking affect and emotion in relation to distributions of dominance, othering and hierarchy, as well as an approach to thinking non-linear temporalities affectively. Optimism may be felt or registered in a range of different ways that are not necessarily 'hopeful', but could also be a form of disavowed attachment - that is an orientation to the future that is not desired but is considered to be necessary. If cruel optimism can be both sustaining and harmful since the removal of an object of attachment may lead to a loss of hope about anything, then this concept provides one way of understanding multiple forms of (de)composition that are held together simultaneously amidst austerity.

Cruel optimism is the relation between a future promise and 'wearing out' of the subject in the present. Optimism may be attached to a wide range of promises, but I am specifically interested in what Berlant (2011) frames as a 'fantasy of the good life.' A dominant genre of good life fantasy refers to the social democratic promise of the



post-war period: upward mobility, job security, political and social equality and durable intimacy, that have begun to slowly but visibly fray as institutions which made those promises seem possible are pulled apart. In the West, the 'good life' becomes a genre associated with a normal or ordinary life, something that those on the margins might aspire to attain. The cuts and reforms of austerity become bound up with the fraying of the good life promise and are simultaneously sustained (in part) by the promise of a 'state that lives within its means'. They facilitate certain processes of interruption, intensification, and disassembly that, as I have explored in the previous chapter, are not separate from but fold in to other relations and processes including organisations of unpaid labour, and historic relations of dominance. In this way cruel optimism provides a useful framework through which to explore women's strategies (or not) for adjusting to changes that are intensified or instigated by the cuts and reforms of austerity. I consider what different manifestations of the good life participants attach to, and how might those attachments shift amidst austerity as certain infrastructures are slowly dismantled?

In order to address those questions I develop a close reading of recorded one to one conversations that show how futures constitute and are constituted by participants' affective present in the context of austerity. This develops from excerpts of script whereby Lesley invests in the promise of 'cosmic ordering' as her world crumbles around her, where Sandra raises concerns about the future of the support service but is ignored and rendered paranoid, and where Katy desires to 'live in the present' and not make a fuss. Here the lines between austerity and how futures (and pasts) are constituted by and fold into presents are muddied and blurred. For example, in section 1 - 'Without optimism or displaced optimism?' - I consider moments where a

participant expressed positivity as a form of dissent by opting out of particular relations with the future. This included denying or ignoring the significance of forthcoming changes to welfare. In section 2 - 'Displaced optimism or disavowed optimism' - I consider how optimistic forms of attachment to an object and/or objects of attachment themselves are displaced. For example, rather than seeking to challenge the negative effects of austerity women turn the impetus for 'getting by and getting on' onto their supposedly autonomous selves. And in section 3 - 'Disavowed optimism or fractured optimism' - I engage with moments whereby participants described being compelled to invest in futures that they did not desire and strategies for living with or resisting that.

As I continue to understand what the austerity genre becomes in relation with different women and situations, fracturing and dissonance surfaces significantly here again. In this case I focus on dissonance as the meeting in a subject or an institution of multiple relations with future(s) that pull against one another and in doing so trouble a coherent sense of momentum towards 'the' future. Berlant's (2011: 1) relation with cruel optimism is 'when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing'. Attachment to a certain future can decompose the realisation of its own promise, or otherwise cause harm in the present. But momentum itself, investment in the promise, may somehow simultaneously be sustaining. In a dissonant relation with the future, a desire might not always become an obstacle to flourishing but instead becomes caught in tension with other desires that pull in other directions. Forms of attachment to an object of optimism are shattered or made incoherent. To offer a simple example: a participant might believe that if they work (in paid employment) more or harder, then their children will be happy, they might also believe that if they

spend more time with their children then their children will be happy. The desire is the same - for happy children - but means of achieving it are not. One possibility decomposes the other, so that making things better becomes felt as simultaneously making things worse. When attempts are made to realise both desires perhaps this becomes a form of cruel optimism; the future that is hoped for is a coherent one, the attainment of 'balance', but this can lead to a sense of mutually 'falling short'. Therefore building from the previous chapter I explore participant's relations with futures - including forms of attachment or not to fraying and increasingly 'fantasmic promises' of living ordinary, or good lives (Berlant, 2011) where, as I suggest at times, what is felt as ordinary, normal or good for these participants may not be common, shared or coherent.

### **2.3.2. Without Optimism-Displaced Optimism?**

Political and cultural discourse in the UK constitutes people out of paid work as slackers, shirkers, and not really citizens (for women's accounts of the effects of this see chapter 2.1). Amidst increasing conditionality, pressures for those people to enter the paid labour market and therefore become legitimated or normal push a particular orientation towards the future onto participants who are out of paid work and on benefits. This means that those participants should recognise themselves as lacking and understand the need for self-appreciation through entry into the paid labour market. They/ we should be enthusiastic about paid work, actively seek paid work, and feel a sense of social duty to do so. 2. 1. Dramatizing Austerity: On Dissonance showed how some participants internalised a sense of inadequacy at their failure to secure paid work and/ or expressed a desire for paid work. However, for some

women, or in some moments, different relations with unemployment also surfaced in the drama workshops and linked conversations, including the affirmation of unpaid care work and a refusal to buy into pushes towards paid work. Sometimes this was expressed as a form of positivity without investment in the future, or investment in a different kind of future: one that might work against demands for entry into the paid labour market, but instead be associated with other attachments to, for example, parenting and family life. At certain moments some participants (more or less convincingly) expressed disavowal of the uncertain future by affirming the graspability of the present. If, as Berlant (2011) proposes all optimism is cruel since all futures are an abstraction, then this affirmation of the present accounts for the cruelty of that abstraction. Such an attitude was captured in the play through the character of Katy:

Rosie:           How do you manage all of the washing?

Katy:            When a load needs doing I put it in, when it needs drying I hang it out.

(Final Draft: Diehard Gateshead 2015)

Here Katy described managing what Rosie suspected must be the excessive strains of caring for five children as a lone parent. With permission, this fragment of script was taken more or less directly from something Claire said in a session. Claire appeared to hold on to the possibility of a futureless present. She expressed in our conversation what I observed from her and some others in moments at the Women's group; futures made subservient to the demands of the present. Problems were not anticipated but responded to as they arose. This mode of becoming without (the cruelty of) optimism resonated with Berlant's (2008b: 43) analysis of how fantasy sustained the character

Cooter in the film *Exchange Value*: 'It (fantasy) is the action of living for him, his way of passing time not trying to make something of himself in a system of exploitation and exchange, which in the political economy of his world, does not produce rest or waste but slow death, the attrition of the subjects by the exchange value of capital, which are to trade a worker's body for a deferred enjoyment, that, if they're on the bottom of the class structure, they are not likely to be around to take pleasure in'. At times Claire expressed an action for living that was manifest differently than Cooter's fantasy - that is 'when something needs doing I do it, if a problem emerges, I deal with it, I do not worry about the future'. Further she performed the same absence of concern for 'making something of herself' in a system of exploitation and exchange. In this way action for the present expanded beyond everyday activities such as 'doing the laundry' and into a broader legitimization for being indifferent about paid work, not least since paid work would disrupt certain care activities. However, pulls from the state or other promises inevitably slipped into and disrupted hope of being in a pure present. As Claire explained, attempts to 'opt out' of a relation with the future might also bring harm. This might dampen her capacity to pre-empt and prepare for loss or withdrawal that could cause her harm. Like the character of Katy, Claire is a single mum of five, not in paid work. She volunteered on a regular basis at toddler groups and in the local Sure Start centre. When I asked her about changes to the state provision of benefits and services that were, at the time of this research, integral to the continuation of her ordinary everyday she replied:

'I don't know, I haven't thought about it- I think there's loads of things to worry about and I don't like worrying about things until I have to. There's just so many other things that you need to worry about, general life, you've got,

and I hate worrying about things until that is upon you and I worry about it then. I never plan for the future and that has probably been my downfall, em never. I live for here and now and I don't really think of the future because you don't know what the future is. I mean you can plan and plan and plan but having cancer in the family and stuff and me mam dying early (...) You get on with it. You do. You can moan and moan as much as you want but it doesn't change anything - you've just got to deal with what you've got - life does suck for people, it's life isn't it'.

So Claire creates a future-less present as a kind of liberation. She expresses resignation to the cuts and reforms of austerity amidst the general uncertainty of life and later talks about the pleasures that accompany living in the present, focusing on those things that you can grasp and counting your blessings. Claire refuses discourses that reduce welfare claimants to only a burden on the state by narrating the complexity of 'everything else' going on in her life. She is not only a woman out of paid work: she exceeds and precedes that status. And perhaps 'not worrying' about welfare reforms becomes a kind of resistance to the theft of singularity facilitated by generic constitutions of benefits claimants. This appears to bring some affective reward; it produces flexibility or openness to an indeterminate future and disavows unbearable or unachievable pulls to desire an ordinary life that becomes associated with pressures to enter the paid labour market. Claire claims that it is exactly a disavowal of unbearable relations with what she feels intensely as uncertain futures that facilitates happiness in the 'here and now'. This consolidation with the present resists the deferred happiness that becomes integral to relations of cruel optimism. In this way perhaps Claire's account produces happiness as a good life reality achieved by

living in a pure present. This is a mode of being in/of the present without a sense of absence, lack, or pull to something else.

However, Claire also notes that her refusal to engage the future in a particular way has left her susceptible to insecurity. Denying particular relations with the future may cause her/have caused her harm. As she puts it: 'that has probably been my downfall'. The downfall being what? Insecurity associated with an absence of paid employment she later explains. This acknowledgment feels gestural; her understanding that paid employment should be desired and that its absence should be grieved is unconvincingly expressed. It also expresses an autonomous relation with the future as it attributes an absence of paid work only to Claire and her refusal to think forward. This fails to imagine other ways in which orientations to the future might have alleviated harm, for example through collective resistance to the reduction of the age of child at which Claire is moved from income support to Job Seekers Allowance and therefore must seek work, or more broadly a post-capitalist imaginary that would affirm the emotional labour of parenting.

Claire at once denies the future as she holds on to its unpredictability. In the shadows then, lies an ungraspable, unpredictable future, which folds into the present through her resistance to planning. She resists and registers pulls towards a future in paid employment. Further she recognises this absent-relation with the future as both sustaining, affirming and potentially harmful. Developing a sense of how such relations with the future are haunted by the past, Claire talks about personal events (cancer and the death of her mother at a young age) which have intensified her sense of the future's capacity to surprise:

... I do believe that whatever happens in your life shapes you and you're constantly growing and constantly changing and to say that I wouldn't be different if my mam hadn't died well you just don't know do you... you are just how you are without thinking too much about it- yeah I suppose some things do make you stronger.

So here Claire pulls several things together; a sense of her own becoming, the understanding that she is not a stable autonomous subject, and the desire not 'to think too much about it'. If as Berlant and Edleman (2013) put it, negativity produces the energy that enables change, then perhaps unwillingness towards the negative expressed as 'worry' about austerity dampens energy for change - it constitutes a kind of passivity. However, this isn't only a passive or apolitical act. The refusal of worry itself appears to require a kind of effort or energy. Through Claire's repeated use of the term it is possible to recognise the pull of worry: 'I don't like to worry'. This emerges from some sense of the harm that worrying about (attaching to) uncertain futures brings - perhaps a sense of the inevitable cruelty of optimism. Therefore rather than only becoming a passive act, the refusal of certain relations with the future might be thought as a form of resistance to the pressures and strains of optimism. And/or perhaps a claim to 'happiness in the moment', despite living on the margins of what is deemed an acceptable life, becomes an assertion of something important: a top trump in the game of normalcy. If as Ahmed (2008) puts it in the contemporary happiness becomes framed as some kind of end goal or measure of success in the UK, then perhaps for Claire to claim happiness - regardless of circumstance - is for her to assert against many odds that her life as already a successful ordinary life. Claire achieves a



disavowal of the promise of a normally successful life by refusing to buy into fraying promises of paid work, home ownership and upward mobility. Simultaneously perhaps she grasps the promise of normalcy, by-passing those routes to 'happiness' as an ultimate end point.

However common everyday critiques associated with my diagnosis of a happy life show how even these forms of resistance can be closed down or dominated. This is through the sense that some people - particularly those not in the paid labor market - have happiness too easily where 'expressions of horror about contemporary cultures of happiness involve a class horror that happiness is too easy, too accessible, and too fast' (Ahmed, 2008: 11). Perhaps Claire's expressed attitude forms a subtle resistance to such horror. This becomes two fingers up in the face of the horrified if they aren't the ones in the possession of the happiness. If they still buy into the cruelty of the good life promise?

In what appears to support Claire's expressed reality, Berlant and Warner (1998) suggest that investment in the promise of normal life may become a desire for intimacy and/or reciprocity, un-conflicted personhood or social belonging, not just a form of succumbing to an oppressive ideology: 'To be against the processes of normalization is not be afraid of ordinariness (...) Nor is it to decide that sentimental identifications with family and children are waste or garbage, or make people into waste or garbage' (Berlant and Warner 1998: 557). Yet they also suggest people pay a price for holding on to a promise of social membership. When that promise fails to become attainable (since the impossible genre 'normality' inevitably remains so slippery, since reciprocity and intimacy are frayed by contemporary conditions) those

people so often feel responsible for that failure: for the 'the rages, instabilities, ambivalences, and failures they experience in their intimate lives (Berlant and Warner, 1998: 557). However, escaping such rage, instability and ambivalence, Claire resists attachment to the promise of social membership offered by paid work or by married life. She affirms that how things are, are out of her control; though she simultaneously gestures towards the converse, as she acknowledges such a position to be her own downfall. Claire's family (lone parent, on benefits, lots of children) is often deemed to not only be 'not normal' but also to be a moral threat in and this is solidified by political rhetoric in the UK. Despite this, perhaps Claire's self-ascribed happiness and her perceived success as a parent constitute a different promise of normality. She describes having good, intimate relationships with her children, friends and broader family. Perhaps disavowal of ungraspable terms for social belonging - expressing happiness without optimism despite circumstance - protects Claire from feeling failure and sustains what for now appears to be a healthy family life. Or perhaps her children's academic success offers a deferred promise of social membership? Either way what is not anticipated is how a good and enjoyable life might (or might not) be frayed or disrupted when Claire's youngest daughter turns five, when she is moved from income support to Job Seekers Allowance, and when she is forced to invest in the promise of paid work.

### **2.3.3. Displaced Optimism-Defiant Optimism**

Bella had worked in high paid, highly responsible jobs before taking redundancy and becoming a stay at home parent. In a refusal to engage with what she felt as a harmful relation with paid work, redundancy was a gain, not a loss: 'it was a win win'. She

resisted and displaced what might be deemed ordinary attachments to material success, home-ownership, and adopted a trajectory that reversed the promise of upward mobility.

‘I still haven’t worked out what I want to be when I grow up, I still never aspired to be anything, I never wanted to do anything, the only thing I’ve ever wanted to do was retire at 30... So ten years on and I haven’t worked since I was thirty so it’s like alternative retirement em (...) I know how to do loads of things that I don’t want to do, if I could find a job that I wanted to do that would be fabulous but me mind set now is I’ll do... once the kids are in full time school I’ll do whatever job that fits in with those hours for the least childcare possible’.

For Bella paid work remains necessary but not desirable. She suggests that there isn’t a difference between retirement and unemployment except where that difference is defined by social acceptability. As I go on to explore, for Bella the promise of social membership can be found elsewhere, namely in the fantasy of intimate family life, so that achieving a better life for her children becomes a coherent attachable promise. In this context, for Bella, being able to balance paid work with parenting is integral to the acceptability of a future in paid work. Although Bella considers paid work to be harmful, she also berates herself for being reliant on state benefits as she repeats that she is a sponger, that she is everything she hated when she was working, and that this is a luxury not a right. In this way she maintains a troubled attachment to the promise of paid work as a mode of achieving an ordinary acceptable life. The rock - paid work

- and the hard place - being a sponger - is cracked in two related ways: 1. by condemning the absent father and 2. through the imaginary of ordinary family life.

‘I think if, if you look at more middle class or well to do families, where if father is in a good job then I think it is more acceptable and more expected that mum stays at home with the children, em... and I do honestly believe that if kids were in a happy family unit that there would be less trouble later on, I do think em, you know like trying to take away no matter what the mother is invariably, the child’s carer, for the best part of their life, and certainly the most important person in the first three to four years of their life, without a shadow of a doubt so why take that nature and nurture away because society wants parents to work? I don’t get it, I don’t understand’.

A relation with the state when it substitutes the working father becomes both troubled and acceptable to Bella. The absent father denies the promise of as ordinary as possible family life, but the promise of an ordinary family life is not removed as an attachment - instead the absent father is substituted by the state. However, because of that relation with the state the resisted promise of an economically active life becomes in tension with the promise of an ordinary family life. The state is the thing that affords Bella the luxury of looking after her children and maintaining a semblance of a normal life. However the state is also the thing amongst other things that renders Bella a ‘shirker’.

'I'm a single parent so I'm sponging off the state it's as simple ... that's the way I see it, I'm sponging off the state (...) Emm I think it's a luxury to be able to stay at home with your kids, I don't think it's a right...'

Like the father of Bella's children the state is present-absent. Unlike the father of Bella's children it receives both the gratitude expressed above and indifference:

'I'm not really interested in 'the system' I'm just interested in bringing me bairns up to the best of me ability and bringing them up to be the best kids they can be (...) I'm not politically motivated I'm not, I don't care about the system, it's not, I'm not remotely political'.

Perhaps this disinterest in the system (the state) becomes a disavowal of what is unacceptable to Bella about being on benefits? Perhaps attaching primarily to the promise of bringing up her children to the best of her ability becomes a form of resistance to the ugly rhetoric that Bella clearly takes to heart. Currently Bella is getting on and getting by; she doesn't yet feel the shifting and/ or withdrawal of the state, since for now she has the 'luxury' of looking after her children. But more than this, Bella's relation with the state is a guilty and grateful one - to expect more or better support feels unimaginable. The state becomes fragmented in this account then. It becomes both an abstract system and something that affords a 'certain luxury'. It is intimate and separate. It offers the promise of living an ordinary family life and renders Bella other - a shirker. It buys her flowers then asks for something she can't give in return.

Bella does not yet engage with the unravelling of infrastructures that support her everyday, she does not account for how this might impact upon her children, nor does she imagine the possibility of acting in resistance to such unravelling. However, at the same time, not resisting the slow withdrawal of the benefits and services that enable her to carry on for now will harm Bella. This potentially threatens the ultimate object of her optimism - that is the wellbeing of her children. By not thinking about or not being aware of the potential effects of withdrawal Bella takes the future happiness of her children solely in her own hands, whilst paradoxically attributing her ability to do so to 'the state'. She does not engage with those futures she deems to be ungraspable.

It becomes apparent that while Bella attaches to the coherent promise of her children becoming happy contented adults, the processes through which she attempts to realise that promise become fragmented and in this line between consolidation and fragmentation emerges dissonance. When I asked Bella about the possibility that amidst the cuts and reforms of austerity her circumstances might change she said:

'I think about it, em... but you never know what's round the next corner so, I don't see the point in getting fixated on it, I only worry about things that I can't change anyway... [deep breath] Do you know what I mean, do, do, I don't know (...) Well do you know what it is, it's not even that, it's just I want to luxury of looking after me own children for as long as I can (...) do you know what I mean? It's not, em I do think I should work em...'

This account brings several relations with the future into tension. 'You never know what's around the next corner so don't fixate on it', becomes in conflict with 'I think

about it' and the sense (later elaborated) that unlike Claire Bella spends too much time worrying about what is outside of her own control. She wants to look after her children for as long as she can, but she thinks that she should work. This demonstrates a sense of conflict around what is best for her children: that is conflict associated with what should enable an ordinary life for them and by association for her. She displaces optimism that may have been attached to the promise of security, upward mobility and so on and reclaims optimism that is manifest in the happiness of her children - that might persist regardless of those other circumstances. However when Bella begins to speak about the values that she would like to instil to support the happiness of her children it becomes even more apparent that modes of attaching to the promise of their future become dissonant.

'What society wants is irrelevant as long as I, as long as... my kids have the values that I find important, like I'm not bothered about them going on to be academic I'd far rather they went on, as long as they read and write and they are content in themselves'.

In one relation, the state produces a provisional means to an end. It becomes the thing that enables her to invest in the promise that really matters - bringing up her kids to the best of her ability, and that means enabling them to be happy - rather than socially acceptable in other ways. Ordinary aspirations such as academic success are displaced by a desire for contentment. The state becomes abstracted from the future of her children and confined to the possibility that it affords in the present. However this 'means to an end' relation with the state can only persist as long as nothing changes. Perhaps like Lesley's attachment to the promise of cosmic ordering this attachment to

the continuation of 'things as they are' to maintain the promise of the future happiness of her children is impossible, difficult or misguided. Or perhaps not since the alternative (being in paid work) is already undesirable, since effecting changes to the withdrawal of the state already feels impossible, and therefore as Bella puts it she might as well enjoy the situation she is in while she can.

If the happiness of her children becomes the ultimate promise of a 'good life' forms of attaching to that promise constitute dissonance because Bella sees herself as a 'sponger' in conflict with the values that she would like to instil in her children:

'I think em, I want my kids to have good old fashioned decent values, honesty, em, integrity, hard working, whatever it is they choose to do, I don't want them to be bums, I don't want them to steal, I don't want them to sponge, I want them to make their own way in life but I want them to be happy doing it.'

Therefore she finds herself back between the rock - paid work that for her, is harmful and takes her away from her children preventing her from instilling the kind of values that she wants to instil - and a hard place - not working means that her children may grow up to be 'shirkers' and therefore not hold the kind of values that are important to Bella. What becomes the promise of a crack here is the ultimate end point of her children's happiness. What is crucially both missing and present in this puzzle is that their future isn't autonomously in Bella's control. Relatedly therefore what is also missing (and at the same time not quite missing) is the imaginary to reclaim unpaid labour as holding its own value, or as important in excess of ascriptions of value.



Missing because her children may grow up to think that like Bella they can 'get something for nothing', present because Bella talks a lot about the intense physical and emotional effort that parenting demands. Often this effort is sustained and made fraught by Bella's attachment to her children's future and ultimately their happiness.

'I think I spend far too much time worrying about having things perfect for the kids than just being spontaneous and just doing something and creating happy memories like that, I think I am too focused on creating the happy memories to actually do the happy memories do you know what I mean and that's that's annoying'.

Bella expresses a relation of cruel optimism that disrupts the intimacy and reciprocity that she so desires. Efforts to invest in the future for or perhaps with her children disrupt her ability to make the happy memories happen. Bella reflects on and is critical of this and at times that negativity produces the energy for change. For example, she describes moments of resistance to the cycle of 'over-planning'.

'At the minute one of the favourite things is camping out on a Friday night so we put a tele on and we've all got the sleeping bags downstairs and it does my head in cos all I want to do is like have some time on me own or have some adult, and instead like the kids are all like dead excited cos we're having movie time and we're camping out on the living room floor but that's probably like a nice memory that I'm making for them and I think that's probably like a nicer memory than... than not doing anything for weeks and weeks and weeks cos the only thing I'm focussing on is saving for a holiday

that I can't afford in that respect I think em... time goes too quickly you just arghh...'

So Bella describes her attempts to make happy memories instead of worrying about making happy memories. The future that folds into the present here is a present folded into the future - in the anticipation of happy memories. The present is swerved as it becomes memory. This is in conflict with desires for another future - one involving adult time, running away - perhaps one that creeps into and erodes the affective reward that might have come from making happy memories. In this small part of our conversation Bella's dissonant optimism again becomes apparent. She has already denied the labour that goes into parenting by describing herself as a shirker and celebrated that labour by explaining that this is difficult, that it is important, and that sometimes she would like a break. She is pulled by the imaginary of her children reflecting on a happy childhood and by the possibility of 'adult time'. At various moments, then, Bella expresses optimistic attachments to the future of her children. She does not quite let go of another desire - that she might ever possess the ultimate fantasy, 'a room of her own' that is space to be unproductive. The pull to provide the 'right' kind of future for her children therefore becomes in tension with her own desire for what might for some seem like ordinary things, but that for Bella seem exceptional, not setting an alarm for example:

'I'd love to run away, I'd love to have, I'd love to have one day or one night off, I'd love to have some time in me life where I could completely indulge meself, and whether that's just, sleeping without having an alarm on cos you haven't got to get up and do something (...) but this is the life I chose for

meself; do you know what I mean I chose kids, I chose to put them before me, but it would be so lovely to have some time off, I, I get bitter about that I get really really bitter about that'.

For Bella these desires are felt in conflict because she feels that she must parent alone. She feels that giving time to herself would threaten the future happiness of her children. Here and throughout the interview Bella reasserts that she has agency. She has chosen not to work and if she ever needed to she could always get a job. The insistence that she has chosen prevents her from indulging other wants. Disrupting this is 'bitterness' that results from not really having chosen to be a lone parent and therefore Bella holds in tension the denial of and permission for other wants. That she can't have some space - ordinary things like 'a glass of wine because I don't drink in care of the kids' - is attributed only to absence of the children's father, the absence of an ordinary family, and without a thought to the histories of patriarchal forms of convention that have settled this situation; the fragmenting of her community and absent or fraying support for lone parents. Bella therefore takes possession of the future by claiming that she has chosen her situation, whilst at the same time occasionally she allows herself to express frustration at not having chosen to be a lone parent at not having chosen to have such little space for herself, at not having chosen to find paid work harmful. Her imaginaries are channelled into what is close, imaginable, graspable; the present-absent father, the promise of happy children, and all of this is made separate from the state and from forces of patriarchy.

Despite this we see how other, more personal traces of history remain. Bella's futures and pasts close around her as they pull her in multiple directions. She wants to give her children the kind of upbringing that she feels was denied to her.

'I'm terribly competitive, I've spent my life being brought up that only the best was good enough em... and I think I've probably told you once before that I got 98 percent in an exam and the reply was well what two did you get wrong? And my biggest fear is that I'm going to push my kids too hard and expect perfection from them'.

This past haunts her present and guides a certain investment in her children's future. That haunting becomes an attempt at a disavowal of pressure or expectation but still pressure and expectation (to be a 100 percent perfect parent) creeps in. Aware of the dangers of this, she wants to spend precious time with her children and part of that desire is to instil values that Bella finds important including working, not sponging, not being a bum. Simultaneously as traces of the past remain, Bella alludes to a fantasy of normal family life with a husband at work and a mum at home. The state maintains some semblance of that fantasy while berating her for this and becoming an object of gratitude and indifference. And yet again happiness, though happiness deferred to children, becomes the end game. A form of resistance to state pressure for Bella to 'self-appreciate' by buying into the promise of paid work is displaced by pressure to self-appreciate by being the perfect parent.

#### **2.3.4. Defiant Optimism-Reluctant Optimism**

Sandra:       Howay man it'll be a laugh. Rosie said we can use it as  
                  a fundraiser.

Katy:         What for?

Sandra:       The group! In case it gans tits up.

Katy:         You're not still going on about that are you?

Julia:         What?

Katy:         Don't worry Julia, she's being paranoid!

(Final Draft Diehard Gateshead, 2015)

In the play Sandra's expressions of concern about the future of the group are made exceptional, paranoid, and so perhaps a positive attitude or even passivity is felt as normal or ideal. Simultaneously passivity sustains the 'becoming normal' of the withdrawal of public services, if to challenge that would be exceptional. Bella has managed (so far) to resist pulls to invest time in the promise of paid labour, while holding on to an ambivalent attachment to that promise by; a) berating herself for being out of paid work; b) maintaining attachment to some semblance of 'normal' family life; c) valuing (whilst not quite valuing) the labour involved in unpaid care work and holding on to the promise that her children will have good values and be content. However, some participants have already been compelled to invest time in the promise of paid labour as a consequence of the cuts and reforms of austerity - whether they like it or not. This became a consequence of intensified workfare conditionality, the bedroom tax, council tax increases and other changes. Sometimes this reluctance became alongside various forms of defiance since attachment to those

futures was not really desired but instead became necessary in order to avoid immanent and serious harm such as homelessness and/or starvation.

In 2.1. 'Dramatising Austerity' I touched upon Robyn's situation. Robyn had faced some of the most direct impacts of the cuts and reforms of austerity at the time of this research. She is a grandparent with a council house. She is not in paid work, but she does look after her granddaughter for three nights a week. She has been impacted by the bedroom tax, by increases in council tax, and by increased conditionality of Job Seekers Allowance. Robyn's relation with paid labour has always been turbulent. She was refused a return to work in a textile factory after her daughter was born, then training towards a career as an outdoor activities coach was disrupted by injuries gained in a serious road accident. Previous to the reforms of austerity Robyn described living what for her was a good life. She had a stable home, a council house, time for her friends, hobbies, and time to provide care for her daughter who as a consequence was able to work. She expressed not feeling guilty about this reality since she recognised the value of supporting her daughter, she was near retirement age, she had worked in and out of various jobs, and she had variously been 'shafted' by 'the system' along the way. This becomes a refusal to buy in to demands for self-appreciation and a form of self-celebration. Robyn maintains an attachment to the promise of a right for state support, and feels its withdrawal most strongly. However she expresses complicated and contradictory modes of resistance to the cuts and reforms of austerity. When I asked Robyn about the changes to the state that have affected her she discussed entering training for a new career.

... 'I thought I'm sick to my friggin life: I don't want to be sent on a on a on a on a co... err a thing with the Jobcentre that said go and stack some shelves at Tescos. I thought I'm better than that... and I am and I know it (laughs) and I thought I have got like to a degree I have got some like you know noodle about us and I thought I'm being realistic I was thinking something I could do physically, where as like it's not very taxing on you doing that I can sit down and draw pictures with them, I can sit and colour in, I can sit and watch them sorted. So it's not like taxing on me and it's not like physical as well so I'm not going to be, you know, on me feet all day long and I'm not going to be sitting down all day long so I've like I've gone to like the middle to the middle of the road with it (...) and I thought we'll give it a whirl and see what happens and if anything comes of it all the better'.

Here Robyn is taking control of those things that she feels to be within grasp. She avoids return to work placements by seeking other training. She plans according to her physical limitations but also aims for work which might be enjoyable. That she 'gives it a whirl and if anything comes of it all the better' suggests a loose attachment to the promise that this work might afford. That Robyn narrates herself as 'better than that' reproduces a sense of dissatisfaction at other kinds of work that are available. This is counter to a common sense that those out of paid work and on benefits should imagine themselves as lacking and be grateful for and positive about any paid possibility. It also plays into common rhetoric about British workers not willing to take on certain kinds of labour because they are too lazy or selfish. However, like Bella, Robyn enacts a refusal to be caught up in harmful systems of exploitation and exchange. Robyn's disavowal of certain forms of (cheap) labour becomes a kind of

resistance to the cruelty of optimism. It is recognition that certain promises of social belonging are harmful and an assertion of her singularity. However, this doesn't translate into an imaginary of how labour could be organised differently. Instead her claim that 'I am better than that' demonstrates an absence of collective imaginary - it fails to recognise that perhaps actually everybody is better than that. There is no value less-or-more.

It seems that for Robyn the ability to imagine collective resistance to the unravelling of what for her was a good life is already lost. Despite this she held on to an attachment to the same possibility, even if this attachment was disavowed, as it is framed by a dominant sense that the promise of reciprocity had already eroded for 'them', if not for her. When speaking about the cuts that have impacted her she said:

'...obviously them that's not affected, its straight over their heads so why should they worry about it? Why should they bother? (...) It could be you one day so why you're having at go at people on benefits and claiming and waving the big flag saying yeah you should pay! Just remember that what we, what like everybody that's fighting against it now it'll be like for you as well it'll be the situation for you so yeah...? (...) Ah yeah deffo, deffo it's like cos now it's like look after yourself and if you're all right jack I'm alright jack so sod the rest and I think that's the attitude of a lot of it now'.

So Robyn holds together defiant resistance to the cuts and changes that impact her as she refuses to buy into the rhetoric of 'workers' and 'shirkers'. She expresses this resistance as a fight not just for herself but also for others who could be impacted by



the changes. She holds on to and even celebrates a sense of convivial marginality when she claims:

‘You’ll find it’s the ones that’s the lowest of the low that’ll help you out like the roughs and scruffs like meself, you know what I mean like, but at the end of the day that’ll knit together and say well if you need a hand let us know and its always the ones that have got nothing are the first ones to offer you know what I mean...’

This affirmation of the roughs and the scruffs enables Robyn to celebrate her marginal identity while othering those who don’t buy into such a reciprocal approach - the ‘I’m alright Jacks’. However, as well as berating the ‘I’m alright Jacks’ she goes on to berate the ‘system’ which enables things like second homes, a deeply unequal distribution of wealth and more immigration to persist. The notion that ‘it could be you so you should understand how I feel’ is brought into conflict with those others deemed to threaten the continuation of her everyday: immigrants, who are lumped together with bankers, the super wealthy and second home-owners. In this negative attachment to those ‘othered’ objects the state is both held on to and lost, as persecuting the threatening figure of the immigrant provides an attachable promise of a better future.

‘My opinion is I’m sorry but you’re letting far too many people in the country and I’m not prepared to give my home in for them and I’m not being racist or whatever the other word is or nationalist but its like no that you do something about the number of people you are allowing in the country that’s like pushing for these bigger homes and stuff it’s like em... like generally that as

well, and I'm not prepared to leave me home for any of it, I would rather push and push for as long as I possibly could'.

Robyn's home is extremely important to her and amidst the bedroom and council tax increases she is afraid of losing it. What becomes impossible is an imaginary that the bedroom tax might be reversed. What can be imagined is that sorting out the 'problem' of more immigrants, people with second homes and so on could reverse Robyn's fortunes. If it is understood as inevitable that things have to get worse, then things becoming worse for others (whoever those others might be) instead of for Robyn becomes the object of her optimism. By rendering those others as threatening Robyn can frame her life as normal by association. This both contests and reaffirms the promise that is held in 'being a rough and scruff and helping people out on the bottom' since Robyn makes acceptable her decided group of 'roughs and scruffs' and casts out those whose lives don't matter. This erodes the promise of collective action and reciprocity that Robyn already laments as lost. It is possible to see here how the austerity genre becomes bound with other processes of precarisation in a complex way. After this interview Robyn became involved in a campaign in support of a local asylum seeker who faced deportation. That particular figure was close, and became more than a threatening other. When Robyn others immigrants, she repeats the kind of demonization that she herself has felt. As perhaps those people working in low waged, harmful jobs might demonise those people who are not working but use benefits instead. The 'immigrants' that she refers to here are an unknown, abstracted possibility of displaced harm. If things have to get worse, at least let them get worse for others first, me later.

Jane resigns to a pessimistic future in a different but related way. For her the thing that is felt as lost, eroded or threatened amidst the cuts and reforms of austerity is stability, and the future that she hopes for is a stable, anticipatable future. As we know, Jane does not disavow the promise of paid work - she is deeply attached to it. This will help her to achieve both stability (despite the reality of increasingly precarious work) and belonging. Where for Robyn condemning immigration provides an imaginable form of resistance to the conditions that harm her, a resistance that becomes ultimately abstracted from the withdrawal of the state and manifested in those other bodies, for Jane planning achieves the same outcome. Therefore investment in the future is resigned, not because the thing that is aimed for (stability) is already sensed as lost or threatened, but because what is hoped for is ordinary. Like Robyn, Jane's hope is that although things might get worse they will do so in such a way that can be managed autonomously. For Jane, planning - in addition to/ as a form of othering those who don't plan - becomes the means to obtain what is understood to be exceptional; stability. It offers the hope of things getting less worse for Jane than they do for others. In this way Jane expresses a very different relation with the future to Claire who attempts to be in the moment to resist the cruelty of perpetual change. Jane attempts to mitigate the effects of upheaval by pre-empting change and taking autonomous action in the form of vigilant planning. Throughout conversations, drama exercises and group discussion she makes plans, talks about making plans, she thinks forward to the impacts of her behaviour on her children and she comes up with contingencies for any further changes that may take place. But since those changes are difficult to anticipate this can become a frustrating and exhausting process for her. Amidst an everyday life that was turbulent even before austerity because of job loss, marriage separation, emigration and then return to a

'changed' community, Jane's vigilant approach to managing the future appears to produce a sustaining and anxious sense of 'taking control'. When I asked Jane about the future she said to me:

'I worry about the future all the time, me, people laugh because I said once me son leaves home I'm putting me name down for sheltered accommodation, on me 50<sup>th</sup> birthday I'm putting me name down for sheltered accommodation, I even mentioned it when I went down to age concern and they said ah like that's a good idea, but you won't get it in your fifties, and I said I know but by the time I turn 65 I'll have been on the list for 15 years I'm gonna get somewhere aren't I?'

This at once recognises the increasing instability of her world and denies it. This is because Jane expects that her vigilance will produce a safe and secure future with the promise of retirement into state or third sector provided 'sheltered housing'. She does not/ cannot engage with or imagine the possibility that such housing could be eroded by further cuts and reforms to the state: that she could be on a waiting list for nothing. Amidst other loses planning provides the promise of making a good life (that is, a not quite so bad life) possible.

'I think it helps you to plan, like I was thinking about getting life insurance out but at the moment it's unachievable, but it's I think it's best to plan ahead, like I've planned for this summer, but I've planned what I'm getting them for Christmas I've planned what I'll get him for his birthday'.

When I asked if it is easy to plan now amidst austerity, Jane accepts that planning becomes increasingly difficult but also increasingly important. How she registers changes becomes bound up in her future imaginary, for example to return to the possibility of securing retirement accommodation:

‘No because of this bedroom tax and things like that em years ago you could have got a two bedroom quite easily in sheltered accommodation but now they seem to be they look more like bedsits like you’ve got a one room you’ve got your bathroom and that’s it that’s what you’ve got. That’s like more like you start in the small nursery you grown up and then you end up in one room’.

This folds the future (past) and the present together. There is a sense here that the kind of sheltered accommodation that might be available to Jane (in thirty five years) will be effected by the bedroom tax and this demonstrates some sense of the erosion of what might be available to her. However this suspends the momentum of austerity. It holds in tension a desire to think forward and plan for the future but also an inability to image what else might be changed, what else might be lost or gained. This tendency to hold the future-present in tension brings Jane closer to old age, closer to death even in her thirties. It reveals the modesty of her aspirations: to have life insurance, to have sheltered accommodation, to pay in advance for a funeral.

‘And I always say if I win the lottery I’m going to pay me funeral costs... they went, you shouldn’t be talking like that in your thirties and I thought well it

makes sense doesn't it get your funeral paid out? Oh no I think about the future a heck of a lot. You have to.'

What kind of optimism is captured in the promise of paying for your funeral, even after winning the lottery? Like Jane's attachment to the promise of obtaining sheltered retirement accommodation this shows a limit to her future imaginary. Optimism is attached to the hope that things will not be disastrous, that things will not totally fall apart and that plans for humble and achievable futures might facilitate some kind of agency amidst all of the uncertainty.

### **2.3.5. Shattered Promises**

In part this chapter tests the ever really felt existence, for those women, of the fantasmic (fraying) 'good life promise' that Berlant (2011) discusses; the liberal-democratic state's promise of job security, upward mobility, and political and social equality. For lone parents on benefits who are subsequently multiply at the margins of UK citizenship that promise was differently in and out of grasp, frayed, displaced, already lost, already subverted, or never really invested in in a range of different ways. Those women who have become used to living through various rhythms of fragmentation and consolidation, used to being on the fringes of the 'ordinary society', have something specific and useful to say. Some women variously perform resistance to the cruel promises of 'the good life' by opting out of paid work that feels harmful, by making home of a council house and no mortgage, by living in the

moment and not worrying about the future. Despite this at times attachments to those promises of ordinary life persist even in the form of disavowal; when Bella berates herself for being a shirker, or when Claire explains that not thinking forward has always been her own downfall, for example. Perhaps we see desire or perhaps a sense of compulsion to give care and do it well, but this is brought into conflict with current insistence that she enters the paid labour market, bringing both demands at times into conflict. Space that women made to resist the harms of a 'system of exploitation and exchange' (Berlant, 2008b) by reclaiming the value of unpaid labour like Claire and Bella, or even the right to some level of unproductivity like Robyn, is increasingly closed down by the conditionality of austerity.

Berlant describes how optimistic attachments might be sustaining where the loss of a promise (however frayed and harmful that promise is) leads to a loss of hope about anything. My interest in this section has been in how attachments to futures play out for participants amidst cuts and reforms of austerity. What is lost, what remains, what is held on to amidst this kind of change? If austerity has been described as a process that shifts expectations about what the state is and what the state does (Bhattacharyya, 2015) then perhaps one point to be drawn out here is that 'the state' already does not exist for participants in a coherent form. The state is already encountered as a series of fragments that move in and out of women's lives. And it surfaces incoherently as a shape shifting abstraction. The services that people use, housing, benefits, police, schools, hospitals, the sheltered accommodation that people aspire to having, are already not sensed as part of a coherent network that might be governed from a central point. If participants do not hold a coherent attachment to the promise of the state then the loss or fraying of the state is not felt coherently either.

What the state is or does surfaces at particular moments as disruptions are felt, as change is implemented. In this way if extensive structures like the state are not encountered coherently and therefore become difficult/ impossible to imagine or attach to, then instead optimism becomes attached to what is encountered and what is felt to be attainable; for example, the promise of sheltered housing, training towards an ok, not terrible job, contented children, less immigration, the possibility of singularity and some semblance of autonomy alongside intimate family life. Somehow such possibilities are divorced from the abstracted 'whole' or state, despite simultaneously being attached to it.

What strikes me here is the amount of effort that women invest in getting on and getting by amidst change. For women in poverty, amidst the cuts and reforms of austerity, unpaid labour becomes not just the immediate demands of parenting expressed by Claire, Jane and Robyn, but also the effort it takes not to worry, the effort it takes not to drown in ugly rhetoric, the effort it takes to do the best for your children, the effort it takes to continue to plan as plans are undone. What surfaces here is the difficulty of living amidst the unravelling of structures that support your everyday without a coherent site for resistance to that unravelling. In the absence of a collective imaginary for change that might reverse the fraying of infrastructures, or move towards some kind of post-capitalist imaginary, objects of optimism become refracted, fragmented and displaced. They become internalised promises of self-appreciation; for example, I chose to be in this situation and I can always change it (I can buy in to the promise of upward mobility) or attached to other objects (the presence of an absent father, the downfall of those who don't plan, less immigrants, the disavowal of an uncertain future). Even in the life of a single, singular woman



promises work in conflict producing dissonance or demanding more or less sacrifice. For Robyn, the promise of being in it together with the 'roughs and the scruffs' is in conflict with the promise that others will feel the burden more, for Bella the promise of instilling the right kind of values in her children produces conflict (to work or not to work). Despite this, holding on to those other objects of optimism may be sustaining; they provide imaginable futures-present relations, they demonstrate an amazing capacity that women have to improvise amidst change and to creatively manage disruptions that threaten to erode their capacity for everyday coping. What comes across here is the opposite of laziness - attempts to cope with what might be recognised as the harmful and failing structures of late capitalism alongside a shrinking austere state. However, perhaps like Lesley's attachment to the promise of cosmic ordering, and Sandra's attachment to making a play these fragmented methods for imagining futures also amount to the precarisation of the subject. They allow harmful conditions to continue unchallenged. Although this might paint a worrying picture in terms of anti-austerity politics, perhaps it provides a helpful point of departure. Widespread generic changes are difficult to imagine, individuals feel themselves to be separate from and not part of the state, and so optimism becomes channelled into what is felt as proximate and attainable. Therefore it is through small attachable changes that space might open up for new collective forms of resistance that are crucially simultaneously sensed as engaging.

## **Holding Things Together and What Falls Apart...**

‘You want to represent these people honestly and truthfully but with integrity as well, and because you are holding their stories and their lives and you’ve got to treat that with real care’

(Zoe, an Actor who performed in DieHard

Gateshead 2015)

My intention at the beginning of this process was simple: to work with women in the North East of England to better understand their experiences of unemployment, precarious labour and unpaid work after de-industrialisation. I didn’t enter the project with any expectations, but I did carry a personal occupation with relations of intimacy and/or exclusion and how they become possible between proximate others, even strangers. I was angry about the multiple layers of violence enacted on women out of paid work and located in our region, especially in a context of the building up and then breaking down of industry outlined in 1.2 on ‘Dynamic Context: Women, the Region, and a Room’. I was even angrier about the extent to which unemployment largely became framed as an individual failure as this shut down space for reproductive and other forms of unpaid labour. I had not yet encountered theories of precaritisation, but I did feel that forms for engendering ‘public intimacy’ were in a

state of flux, as the sorts of work available and infrastructures for unpaid labour were changing.

Bringing all of this together with my own experiences of being in and sometimes outside of a local theatre scene and my own understanding of what theatre might offer as a method for co-produced research, I worked with a group of women in Gateshead to make a play. This enabled a double exploration of how women worked and lived in very different ways on the margins of 'economic activity.' We engaged experiences of job loss, work, family life and as it became increasingly significant: austerity. As we made 'scenes' together, the process of making became something shared between us. And in the thesis I have reflected on that process of co-production. This was about working together on something through our differences, not about working on each other. Through collaboration there were moments of tension and ambivalence but various forms of attachment to a common object - the play - engendered a kind of intimacy between us, generally. The play was an attempt to celebrate the singularity of characters in relation to things held in common including forces that sought to divide them. Moments of conviviality persisted but were threatened by various processes of precaritisation, and characters developed subversive objects of attachment as futures became increasingly unstable. The thesis has explored many of the same themes and/or forms of relation in more detail. In 2.3 on Austerity Futures I worked through what objects women attached to and why, and how austerity was felt or registered through those objects of attachment (or not.) In particular this sought to understand what for these women the 'good life' became, how women attached to fragments of the state, and how for them state withdrawal alongside certain forms of intensification began to register as significant (or not.) This section showed women's future imaginaries as dissonant and fractured. In 2.1

'Dramatizing Austerity: On Dissonance' and 2.2. 'Precarity: Fracturing And Dissonance' I worked through austerity as a series of forces that narrowed a field of possibility for women whilst simultaneously demanding particular kinds of flexibility. The often subtly fractured and fracturing ways in which austerity touched the lives of women closed down opportunity for them or us to have a shared encounter with austerity, and perhaps this prevented those disparate scenes of encounter from developing into the genre austerity for women. This 'closing down' was a consequence of the apparent slightness of specific cuts and reforms (when taken out of context), the exhaustion that multiple changes could invoke, the different ways in which changes were encountered even by women in a supposedly shared demographic, and the dominance of other attachments that persisted through austerity. And despite such difficulties, in our play and in this thesis I have tried to connect up those fractured and fracturing effects that are austerity. In doing so I attempt to shift (however slightly, alongside a range of other projects) how austerity as genre becomes understood, encountered, attached to, so that different and better promises than the intensified privatization of wealth and the distribution of resource from ordinary people to the wealthy (Berlant 2013b) might begin to be imagined.

## **Genre**

I began with an interest in labour and intimacy, belonging and exclusion and Lauren Berlant's work has become helpful for my thinking (and feeling) about those and other relations. In particular notions of 'public intimacy' and 'genre' and more specifically work on 'cruel optimism' and the fraying 'good life promise' have informed this thesis. Berlant's invocation for resting with contradictory spaces of

thought, feeling and attachment have also been influential. In the introduction I asked what genre as a concept might offer existing engagement with austerity and that question has been implicit throughout the thesis. I have engaged with how women's relationships become mediated by fragments of austerity and have tried to differently evoke qualities that might make sense of what austerity is and what austerity does as it acts on and through other relations. This has been about understanding how and whether austerity 'holds together' in the lives of women as a genre, which organizes and becomes organized by particular encounters, but also how it is attached to amidst other forms of relation and/or how it interrupts or becomes part of other forms of attachment.

A deep occupation with genre is not made explicit by Berlant and I have met the term at various points in her work as an affective force field, as a way in which a situation finds its event (Berlant, 2011), as something that organizes subjects (Berlant, 2008a), as sexual identity (Berlant, 2008a), a promise out of grasp that is somehow still sustaining (Berlant, 2011) as something that makes the personal generic and the public intimate (Berlant, 2011.) Aptly, it is by reading and feeling across and between her engagement with the concept that genre begins to take its form. There are always relations between difference (a situation or a body-subject) and something more generic, but somehow felt in common. Genre becomes a tool for engaging the function of criticism, not only of a literary text, but in the history of the present. Paying attention to genre opens towards an opportunity for noticing what genres do and how they might be different, how they might shift and what that might open up.

And as Berlant (2013: no pagination) puts it paying attention to genre is 'never about shaming people's objects, it's always about creating better and better objects. It's always about creating better worlds, making it possible for us to think in more and different kinds of ways about how we relationally can move through life.' It is by working closely with a small group of women through our different encounters with austerity amidst everyday life that I have attempted to understand women's forms of attachment; that is what organizes subjects, without shaming them. I have noticed how and when women create different or better objects that subvert, resist or avoid attachments to dominant genres or promises. For example there were expressions of disavowed attachment to a system of exploitation and exchange manifest in refusals to buy into promises of 'work now reward later,' moments of refusal to operate the ascription of generic value onto others or themselves and stubborn acts of conviviality. However, opportunity for women to attach to certain objects (largely one another, and/or certain kinds of family life) also became taken out of hand at various points, and increasingly so as a consequence of austerity.

And so if for Jackson (2015: no pagination) what Berlant 'always really talks about is genre,' for me what Berlant always really talks about is form - that is how forms of convention fold into genre, forms of attachment to particular genres, and the becoming genre of those forms of attachment. So certain forms of attachment become intensified in particular situations, for example Berlant (2008) discusses how a relation of Cruel Optimism increases amidst and becomes integral to sustaining certain forms and functioning of late capitalism. In this way, the form of relation itself becomes part of the genre that organizes contemporary life. Taking account of this, what begins to

matter is how forms of relation to particular attachments play out and therefore constitute a way of being with/ in the genre.

‘...it might be that being in a couple is not a relation of cruel optimism for you, because being in a couple actually makes you feel like you have a grounding in the world, whereas for other people, being in a couple might be, on the one hand, a relief from loneliness, and on the other hand, the over-presence of one person who has to bear the burden of satisfying all your needs. So it’s not the object that’s the problem, but how we learn to be in relation.’

(Berlant, 2013b:no pagination)

Forms of relation with a genre may not always be wanted, may not always feel good, they may also be disavowed, but still the genre organizes subjects. Understanding genre is about understanding how situations are made sense of, how encounters become part of an already existing genre, but also how forms of relations with those genres are felt, how they are chosen and/or imposed. Genre offers an approach to learning from what is attached to, what attachments hold together, for whom, when and why?

And emphasis for Berlant is on the affective qualities of genre, that is; how attachment to genre feels but also genre as a feeling of being in common, a form of public intimacy that may be organized towards life. Like habits (as I showed in an interlude on habit) genres are not ‘moral’ forms of mediation; they are not always successes or failures, instead what matters is what particular genres do. Genres can close down a

field of possibility, they can disappoint, exclude, entrap, induce a slow death, but also there is hope in an intimate public sphere and for Berlant (2008a) when genres succeed they can become a 'utopian performance.' Perhaps in this way what matters is what genres are forced upon us, and in what genres we chose to live. How do genres form and how can they be made looser or more flexible whilst still engendering and/ or being sustained by a felt sense of commonality?

'Thinking about the object as a patterning that's loosely organized, so that it would be possible to change the object without having to lose everything, is a really important part of this. So rather than saying "I hate the state," or "I love the state," saying "here's what the state can do." Rather than hate the couple form or love the couple form, say "here's what being in a couple can do, and here's the other things I need in order to flourish." Then you start to think of yourself as having a capacity to produce many kinds of patterning and attachment to the world.'

(Berlant, 2013: no pagination.)

In this thesis I have thought about women's complex and often contradictory forms of attachment to the state, to unpaid care practices, to family life, to one another and I have considered austerity as a series of fragments that act on those forms of attachment. Understanding austerity as genre has meant understanding what forms of attachment austerity appropriates, what forms of attachment austerity displaces, what forms of attachment austerity shatters and what forms of attachment austerity enforces. This attempt at understanding is not about shaming women's forms of



attachment but about thinking what and how they (de)compose. And if allowing for different and better forms of attachment is what the work of 'critics, artists and everyone' should enable, then this becomes a process of asking 'what is a good life and how can we create institutions and imaginaries to support it' (Berlant: 2013: no pagination). In this project coproduction has been an important part of that process. The thesis has been informed by participant's own creative input, by their own good life imaginaries, by their own already practiced acts of critique and by forms of commitment to the theatre making and the support service as a whole. I have learned from the stubborn persistence of conviviality, from moments of refusal (where possible) to buy into systems of exploitation and exchange, and from women's affirmation of the singularity of themselves and others alongside forms of being in common. These ways of becoming are disrupted in part by the cuts and reforms of austerity, alongside other processes of precarisation, but I take them with me beyond this thesis as I engage with anti and post-austerity imaginaries.

Currently I stumble through genre as something that is constituted by forms or patterns of attachment. I embrace genre intuitively, but still on occasion it escapes me. Genre becomes a force that organizes subjects in the everyday and a concept for diagnosing how the everyday is lived. Genres are forms of spatial organization. However, as a tool for analyzing forms of relation in the contemporary genre has not yet travelled widely (if at all) into human geography. And this thesis becomes just a starting point, a reaching into the dark, from which I begin to work through broader potential in form and genre as concepts for engaging the 'history of the present.' How do genres stretch over time/ space? How do they organize subjects? What do they show us about relations between the generic and difference? And to repeat Berlant's

own question, what genres are forced upon us and in what genres do we chose to live? If genres become ontological force, it is by paying attention to specific genres that we might expose their various processes of (de)composition.

### **Austerity as Genre**

What then, might 'genre' have to offer a diagnosis of austerity in the UK? What patterns of attachment become specific to austerity and why? Is austerity a genre, or the unbecoming of genres? Or could it become both at the same time? By thinking through the problem of austerity I have begun to understand more about how genres become, what genres can do, how they might shift, yet still hold their shape. Did austerity become an affective force-field? Or a commonly felt promise? How was this attached to or how did it shift existing forms of attachment? The play that we created evoked austerity as a force that shifted relations between women and an institution; this showed how forces of change were felt to be abstract so that characters' attached, instead, to promises that felt proximate and possible. 2.1 Dramatizing Austerity: On Dissonance showed the entrapment that takes place through a diffusion of cuts and reforms. When taken out of context changes might seem slight but as they escalate together they become increasingly violent. Dissonance is used as a concept to understand how a series of affects and effects might overwhelm or crowd women, and how at various moments they become pulled in different directions so that imagining change even for the better, becomes perhaps too exhausting. Many of these characteristics also exceed and precede the genre austerity, but what I have shown

and go on to summarise below are specific relations between austerity and those characteristics.

In this way, genre has enabled me to engage austerity beyond an economic policy, a series of effects, affects or discourses, but as something that operates across and between those domains. This is important, not least since women's forms of attachment are not limited to, or organized by those domains in distinct ways. However a worry in this process has been how to hold on to the singularity of others and myself, whilst exploring forces held in common, forces that threaten to divide or separate us and forces that organize our lives. And secondly: how to negotiate forms of relation between difference and the generic. If Berlant pays attention to the genericization of the personal (Jackson, 2015: no pagination) then I have attempted to place emphasis on the personal as it meets the generic. I try to understand how qualities that are shared might reveal themselves in the intimate lives of a small group of women. And further how those moments of reveal might fold back into the genre, change it's shape - make it feel differently possible, even just for a moment. What in this specific empirical site accompanies the genericization of the personal (which I, in this thesis also facilitate) is a shattering of commons, or the un-genericization of the personal associated with precarisation. And it is in relation to austerity that I explore the relation between the genericization of the personal and the undoing of what is shared. In other words I explore what of/ in austerity is held together and what falls apart. And this is not a departure from Berlant (2011:6) on genre, but a development of her interest in 'the improvisation of genre amid pervasive uncertainty' and how 'the waning of genre frames different kinds of potential openings within and beyond the impasse of adjustment that constant crisis creates'. And so my engagement with what austerity is

or does in the lives of these women shows austerity as an attempt to improvise a genre amidst pervasive uncertainty. Austerity simultaneously holds together as genre and falls apart as it is encountered in fractured and dissonant ways.

Austerity was improvised in response to the temporary shattering of the good life promise induced by the 'global financial crisis' of 2008. Such shattering was not only a shock event but took place alongside other slower forms of fraying. If promises were fraying, austerity provided a story to make sense of that fraying, and paradoxically enabled attachments to certain promises to continue by galvanising the sense that certain forms of loss now would allow for a brighter future later on. Austerity in the UK promised that a 'secure future' could be found amidst insecurity - with just a few sacrifices. Legislated nostalgia evoked a sense of return to the flourishing of the good life promise, and to a time of becoming secure after the turbulence of war in the 1940's. The new austerity, then, held purchase quickly by tapping into an existing aesthetic/ historic genre, this was buoyed by scenes becoming genre - such as 'dig for victory' and 'keep calm and carry on,' as well as a general feeling of excesses out of hand. This austerity managed and made heroic the descent of expectations, by both creating and registering a situation in which things had to become a little worse. Meanwhile dissonantly, austerity promised a re-birth of the good life promise. Austerity does not deliver its promise. It holds nothing or little beyond its invisible clothing together. Instead austerity becomes round after round of fraying and loss. Those frayings and losses impact already 'disadvantaged' subjects first. And so if there is a sense that sacrifice or loss is necessary after financial crisis in order to secure a 'brighter future' then that sacrifice must be faced by those who have already lost,

that is, those for whom certain good life promises were already out of reach. This becomes the making public, displacement and shattering of a relation of cruel optimism. Perhaps the promise becomes that harm in the present will be felt most intensely elsewhere by another body. For somebody in low-paid precarious work perhaps it is hoped that harm will be felt more intensely by somebody who is out of paid work, or for somebody who is out of paid work it is hoped that the harm will be felt most intensely by somebody else who is out of paid work but in a slightly different situation. But this is also about hope, that is forms of attachment to the hope that myself and others might escape the harms of austerity by galvanizing it's promises, by being somehow part of its success, by getting on and up, and that austerity can become a form of collective protection against harm. And this is not about shaming those attachments, but about recognizing what conditions facilitate them because this is exactly what austerity oversees- a continuation and expansion of the cruel and fracturing promises of late capitalism (see Berlant, 2013b). And those who are already disadvantaged are harmed most intensely. But the harm is spreading. Pensioners, or what would have been pensioners before the pension age was raised, students, anybody who uses the NHS, anybody who uses a road, or a bus, or a school, or encounters anybody educated in a school, everybody is touched by the effects of austerity, even those who think that by hoarding resources they are protected. So yes the promise of 'a brighter future' brings widespread harm in the present and that harm undermines the promises that are made by austerity. Yes attachments to the promise of taking things in hand resonate with publics. But when an outside of austerity becomes manifest in hope of escaping the harms of austerity and not in an alternative to austerity (generally, for a while) then the cruelty of optimism persists. And while we are divided by that shattered cruelty of optimism the promises of

collective life that austerity appropriates and offers; of being 'in it together' and of 'a brighter future,' and of a 'caring, socially just' state are not quite lost but seriously frayed, for all.

Therefore austerity intensifies processes of precaritisation whilst making dissonant promises. And by working closely with a small group of women I have attempted to understand how, for them, that precaritisation takes place. Existing literature constitutes precaritisation as a 'de-stabilising force' that breaks bonds between people (Butler, 2006) and/or results in othering and hierarchisation (Lorey: 2015). I have focused on two qualities of precaritisation related to austerity that both engage with and push beyond those existing frameworks. Here precaritisation is fracturing and the constitution of dissonance that works on and between body-subjects, sites and infrastructures. As I have shown in 2.1. 2.2 and 2.3. fracturing pulls at women's already existing patterns of attachment, including those sustained by state provided infrastructures and resources for unpaid care. Sometimes this fracturing becomes a crack: in a family, in a woman, in a support service, so that more effort must be made to hold things together. Sometimes fracturing becomes a break and what is fractured falls apart altogether. And understanding fracturing as harmful is not about thinking the state uncritically. Instead it is about understanding how the state - as infrastructures that women are already in relation with - unravels and the implications of this in a context of already settled asymmetries.

In this context fracturing and dissonance fold into one another. Dissonance refers to the multiple pressures, desires and obligations that pull women in different directions; it refers to the closing down of a field of possibilities alongside intensified demands for flexibility. It refers to the cacophony of noise associated with living through the demands of change, and more change, and more change. So that even slight or ordinary acts that were once quietened by habit, become part of that noise in the everyday. Perhaps this closes down space and energy for imaginaries of any more, or other kinds of change so that all that can be hoped for is a living through the day today. So, in this project for these women, austerity becomes processes of fracturing and the circulation of dissonance that becomes manifest in a cacophony of discordant noise and multiple pulls in different directions.

If austerity is fracturing then fracturing is the diffuse and varied ways in which austerity meets and impacts on the lives of women so that the effects of austerity cannot be felt as a shared imaginary. Fracturing is the withdrawal of infrastructures for peer support, shared experience, and non-capitalist forms of productivity, for example through the loss of an autism support group, the loss of a women's group, the loss of a sure-start centre. Fracturing is intensified demands for movement into paid work that constitute her as lacking, for example reduction of the age of child at which Income Support becomes JSA, the rendering of her as 'shirker,' increased conditionality, the benefits cap, the bedroom tax. Fracturing is, persistent change, or persistently threatened change that disrupts informal acts of care, saps energy and fractures future-present imaginaries so that doing anything more than getting on and getting by becomes increasingly difficult. Fracturing is how procedures for resisting reforms and coping through change produce individuation so that women have to make their own cases exceptional, for example in a process of appeal against the

bedroom tax. Fracturing is how micro-othering becomes tangled into those processes of individuation in relation with broader processes of othering, so that a body of harm or excess becomes manifest in some other body elsewhere (immigrants, other benefits claimants, second home owners) but rarely in austerity itself. This means that forms of attachment become clustered around changing what feels proximate or possible and what feels possible and proximate is not always the forces of austerity. Fracturing happens through the passing on of cuts and related decision making to local authorities and other departments so that the interfaces through which those cuts are encountered become fragmented and, so at times, anger becomes targeted at those interfaces and not the source of funding withdrawal. Fracturing becomes, the diffuse and varied ways in which austerity meets and impacts on the lives of women so that single events, cuts or reforms, may seem slight but escalate and intensify as they meet and fold together in the lives of different women differently.

And if austerity is fracturing folded into dissonance then dissonance becomes the idea that we are 'all in this together' in a context of the fracturing outlined above - whilst infrastructures that directly support some people but not others (and therefore potentially support us all) are pulled apart. Dissonance becomes, the evocation of legislated nostalgia for a time when the welfare state was built up and expanded, as the welfare state is simultaneously pulled apart. Dissonance becomes the constitution of the poorest in this country as a threat of excess, and/or a drain of resources, while resources are re-distributed from ordinary people to the hands of the wealthy. Dissonance is how austerity becomes framed as protection against threat, whilst forms of protection against threat are taken apart. Dissonance becomes demands for



her to enter a paid labour market and the production of *her* as lacking when there is an insufficient supply of suitable paid work. Dissonance becomes the closing of a field of possibilities. Dissonance becomes how the passing on of cuts to local authorities and other departments interacts with an intensification of competition between service providers and local authorities. Therefore, they are simultaneously constituted as autonomous and individually responsible for success, whilst this denies already asymmetrical conditions intensified by the withdrawal of central funding. We saw the beginnings of the effects of this on our women's service where relatedly dissonance became a compulsion to deliver services that might be felt as counter-intuitive in order to keep going. Dissonance becomes a cacophony of noise: more un-decidable choices, and more choices taken out of hand, for example heating or food, appeal (and make your own case exceptional) or get on with it, become 'a shirker' and pass negative values on to your children, or go to work and spend less time with them. Dissonance becomes an attachment to the outside of austerity without imagining an outside of austerity. This means being a single mum on benefits and othering single mums on benefits. Dissonance becomes the theft of women's singularity alongside pressure for the individuated appreciation of generic value, for example for Gabbie at the Jobcentre. Dissonance becomes a feeling of being pulled between a desire to work and a compulsion to care, for example for Sarah as her mum became increasingly reliant on her as an effect of cuts to benefits. Dissonance also becomes a desire to care and a compulsion to work, for example for Sarah as she anticipates being pulled back to work once her youngest child reaches a certain age. And dissonance becomes the feeling that space to balance paid work and unpaid care is eroded. Dissonance becomes discord related to the meeting of excessive demands associated with getting on and getting by in the everyday: the impact of withdrawal on other family members

so that you take on the burden of care, making multiple job applications and so imagining multiple possibilities unmet, anticipating the withdrawal of infrastructures of support for example taxis to a special needs school, benefits for under 25s, and coping through actual withdrawal. This is related to the effects of change, upon change, upon change in the lives of women, so that slight everyday actions once quieted by habit become part of a dissonant cacophony of noise.

Amidst dissonance and fracturing women hold on to particular attachments in various ways and certain forms of relation persist through forces that work to pull them apart. In this context holding things together for women became difficult and demanded increasing amounts of energy. Amidst noise and confusion attaching to promises that felt proximate and possible became easier than attachment to broader or more abstract objects. For example, the promise of making a successful appeal felt more possible than the promise of reversing the bedroom tax. The promise of keeping one particular service open became more possible than the promise of keeping open all services. Holding together became moments in the persistence of conviviality despite processes of individuation that applied not just to family members or friends but to strangers too. For example how women welcomed me into their group with the almost instant gift of helping. Holding together happened when women refused to lose the singularity of themselves or other people, for example when Claire showed how she was more than somebody claiming benefits, or when Bella argued that people working at the Jobcentre are just doing their job. Holding together was a compulsion to continue to care, to listen, to give empathy that broke through various forms of micro-othering when conditions made that breaking through seem possible.

Holding together was investing in a process of play-making and other activities at the center not to 'get something out of it' but driven by a desire to be part of something, give something, keep something going. This was not with the expectation of a reward other than an intrinsic reward that became part of having fun, and doing things with other people. As Berlant (2013b) suggests it is by analyzing and understanding peoples forms of attachment that we can begin to create and imagine genres and forms of relation that are less cruelly optimistic. It is only if austerity as a series of fractured and fracturing effects can be registered in common that other imaginaries might feel commonly possible.

And this returns me to our own process and our attempts to facilitate an encounter with austerity for audiences that in however slight a way might make austerity a commonly registered genre. In 2.1. *Dramatizing Austerity: On Dissonance*, I talked about the problem of making a scene when the plot kept falling apart - when austerity is fracturing and dissonance. Making the play was an opportunity to bring together our disparate encounters with austerity in the dusty blue room. However, as I explored in 2.2 the contradictory and dissonant ways in which women experienced austerity made it difficult for us to agree or settle on a story that might make sense of or resonate with what austerity is or what austerity does. The form of the play and the form of fracturing and dissonance didn't quite fit together. And as I go on to explore, whatever we did the play felt like a let down. It felt as though we were letting audiences off the hook, or letting them down, or letting women down. However, as form becomes genre the play making method demonstrated a process in the negotiation of disparate forms of attachment to a common objective - the play. We worked together to create an encounter with austerity that might resonate with

broader audiences. And even if it failed the process of working was fun, rewarding, fruitful, generative of thoughts and ideas and moments of intimacy. And in the epilogue that follows I show fragments of that process of co-production, in all its ambivalences, but also as a demonstration of how we worked together through difference.

## Epilogue: Writing the Play

A blank page. I have to start writing but I can feel a pull nagging from the distance, it's Isla or more specifically a junk model project that she wants us to do. I can hear her downstairs and she's crying. Dave's around, but he's been there a lot. I haven't. I've got our notes around me. I start. Words form - free writing, no plan just an exercise to see what happens.

Katy: I properly did not want to be getting out of bed this morning. But I did and I went to the group. Sandra was on one: totally manic. What's with her? It pulled me out of meself though. Glad I turned up, I needed the break.

Rosie: Oh Christ, how's this going to go? Will they like me? Won't they like me?

I'm not even thinking (at this point) about how my own hopes and anxieties filter into the script, the writing feels good - cathartic - I'm totally absorbed in it. I can feel the world of the story and it carries me forward...

Katy: Drama?! Fuck off.

Audience: Make us laugh.

ESRC: Produce high-quality basic, strategic and/or applied research, think about impact.

Dramaturg: An audience is as clever as the cleverest person in the auditorium. Don't spell it all out.

Director: You've blocked that character into the back of the room, people won't be able to see her, write a different action.

Sandra: I need to get Lesley to open up; she's being really weird.

The characters are drawing me in, and I like moving between their world and staging, structuring, imagining the words becoming in relation to audiences, actors, participants and so on. And then of course I hate it. When I get stuck. And then unstuck and so it goes on.

Lesley: It's all going to be fine. I just need to keep going, one day at a time Lesley, one day at a time.

Katy: I wish people would chill out.

Dramaturg: There needs to be conflict, it's no good if everyone is nice, because if everyone is nice, where's the conflict?

But everybody was nice and supportive, generally. And that's where the stakes are: if there's loads of conflict then why does it matter if the group stays or goes?

You need to work that out.

Sandra: For Fuck's sake, not again; me mam! Sometimes I wish she'd just get on with it and die.

She doesn't really, she feels guilty as soon as she thinks that. She's tired and she needs a break.

And, as I start to write in the conflict in it's a gentle kind of conflict. Ordinary. And still, I hope that this doesn't become an attack on the characters. I hope that participants feel safe and that the fiction is fictional enough? I feel a sense of responsibility, the characters have to be more than a function of conflict...

Dave: Can you watch the kids while I sort the tea?

### **The Lit and Phil library.**

Sandra: Listen to me- nobody is listening to me!

Katy: You're just being a drama queen.

That stuff about colonic irrigation - that's got to go in...

Lesley: No, No it's all fine, I've got it under control. I just need a bit more time that's all. Yes, Yes.

I hate using 'phones' (generally) in theatre, but we can't pay for another actor, unless it's really necessary, how necessary is Gary? Are there other ways to communicate the forces that fold into Lesley's internal and other forms of conflict? What if he becomes more than a voice at the end of a phone?

I'm pleased with a sense of jostling between characters especially at the start. They lose threads, speak over one another and discuss separate things together. It feels right but I haven't thought enough about the 'thrust of the plot'. And the writing is expositional too; I'm spelling out characters issues and needs, leaving no space for audiences to breathe. Not good.

Dramaturg: It's ok. At this stage you spell it all out, and then bring in the subtext. It's like whittling a stick.

Days become weeks, become months of trying to craft the script amongst other things. What started as a flow of thoughts becomes stuck and unstuck. And I begin to understand the characters intimately. Then it's the big event: the first 'playback'. What am I scared of? Failing, being criticised, it's not just that. I'm scared that women won't recognise the words, that they'll feel reduced in some way and take it as a personal slight.

There's so much to balance.

Bev: I don't think my character would say that.



I can hear what does and doesn't work more clearly as actors read the script in a rehearsal. Words take on a different life through the actors. Everyone has got an opinion, that's a lot of us. I'm starting to feel a little crowded. They also find inconsistencies, which is great, helpful. It starts to feel too much; there are parts of the script that clearly don't work. I go home and try to get it together. The house is a mess, we're midway through decorating and there's furniture everywhere. The kids are running riot. Structure drives the writing now: relations between the scenes, what order they come in, how the tension builds (or not). One little change throws everything off kilter. It's all about negotiating sacrifice.

It's the day of the reading. My nerves aren't helping the atmosphere. I'm making things tense, but it's up to the actors now and I'm grateful to them for that.

And they really bring it out of the bag, and that's exciting. I can tell that they are enjoying themselves and the audience does too. The start feels good, there's lots of laughter. Then the atmosphere thickens, darkens, stumbles. An awkward, but generous applause.

And we learn more about the play through this process of sharing than I did for weeks on my own. It feels clearer now - what works and what doesn't. And we talk about it, and women are so critically engaged it feels like a real act of care and investment.

Sarah: I think that it's good that we feel comfortable enough to talk about it cos I mean if it had been your Dave doing it, if it had been his play if he'd have come in and said right what do you feel about it, I don't think I would have felt comfortable enough to say ah well you know I don't like that part but as we know you, you know I think it's best to be a bit like honest...

Bella: I think the point can be made equally as well if not better, with less vulgar language, em... and I just think I don't know if was more as, as much as anything that the girl who was reading the part she really enunciated everything em... and it just didn't sound right, it didn't sound... er I don't know it just I just personally didn't like it.

Sarah: I mean the swearing didn't offend me (...) it just made the characters look so different, you know and then really and at the end when they did, sort of were ok with each, other it seemed better I thought you know...

Robyn: It was dead funny, it was really good... it's keeping that vibe up, it's hard...

At the end of this draft of the play the group closes and things fall apart: despite character's efforts to hold things together. And those efforts mattered, they were really important. But to me, at that time, that ending was what I saw. Infrastructures were being withdrawn...

Bella: If you're going to go and see a production, I want to get I want, I want a happy ending, I want everything to be lovely. Life's full of disappointment and life's full of,

do you know what I mean, you don't get what you want and yeah you can do realistic but it's, I just think it's nice, fantasy is nice, having hope's nice, looking for the gold at the end of the rainbow it's it's, hope is lovely, and to look at something quite negatively em... I just feel like if I'd if I'd went to see that and I'd had a night out I would come away feeling quite drained from it, (...) but I just think there's so much drudgery in people's lives that if there is this chance to, to make something have a bit magic dust in it, a bit fairy dust and make it pretty...

Hannah: Yeah but if it's all positive then it's too much the other way, you've got to have a bit of both.

Robyn: I think you just leave it as a cliff hanger and then there isn't a downer but you see, then some people just go for fucks sake man Christ almighty...

Robyn: You've got to be decisive and assertive (banging her fist down).

And with all of this in mind and more I work and I work and I work on it more. And the decorating sits undone. And we 'play back again' and more comments come.

The overall play (is) performed fab, very entertaining and funny at times.

The ending (is) lovely, maybe showing two sides would work well, like show if the centre closed/ stayed open, showing both sides of the story.

Really excellent dynamics of friendship, you really get how they come together and rub along.

I completely relate to lots of the issues, women's groups do share probs. Maybe even more of this, could be slightly less swearing?

Very touching and emotional, love it!

Think Lesley as group leader could be bit more 'put the face on' amidst her breakdown not such a soggy lettuce. Otherwise all good :)

And it's left in a drawer for a while. A thesis to write. Funding applications. Rejections. Funding success, sort of. Rachel cobbles it all together and then we've got enough to put the play on, properly (at a squeeze). Out of the drawer. More crafting, more re-working - draft 73 or something like that, I've lost count. A director and dramaturg and a set and a producer and actors, venues and everyone's on it and it's great.

Neil: You've got too many lines of attack. You need to be decisive.

More writing.

Neil: Yep this is it, sorted.

Two weeks to rehearse and it's the first day.

Neil: The actors feel like, the first half is great it pelts along. The second half doesn't work at all. I'm sorry.

A day to make it work.

Better but not quite there.

And Neil changes bits and I agree with some and disagree with others and I change bits and he agrees and disagrees. And the fees haven't come through and people have to eat. And it looks like it might fall apart. But he knows what he is doing and so do the actors.

And there's three or four days to go and still it doesn't feel right. Some of the most recent changes had to happen but they've knocked everything else off course. It's slipping out of grasp and we all feel flat. But it's too late now. What is it? And then we, one of us, realises the problem. There's an inconsistency - something that doesn't follow through the penultimate scene to the last. And the actors have got so much to learn and such little time. But we rewrite again. They're up for it, to get it right. Working script number 6 or 7, I've lost count. And they do it and they get it and we run it through and that feels better! Much better.

Dress rehearsal. Ok a bit flat. Compromised by a too small a stage. And then people start to arrive. And I'm scared. And the venue is full. And Judi steps on the stage and I can feel this buzz from the audience, people are willing her, willing it on. Enter

Sandra and a joke - Laughter. Loud laughter. And liveliness passes between the actors and the audience (including the participants) and the play is lifted ...

'Brilliant story, funny and realistic. The acting was authentic and natural. Great typical Gateshead people!'

'With humour and feeling it presented the reality behind the headlines about cuts,'

'I felt all the feels! So related to and loved every character'

And for our last performance in Gateshead the women sat together and they had a laugh. They said that they loved it and showed that they liked it (though perhaps they were being kind). And it's not a dramatic story and it's not going to change the world. It's a story about little things and how they come to matter. It's a story about trying and failing to practice critique - but it's the trying that matters. And in that way the play became our very own tragi-comedy.

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