The affective life of austerity: Uncanny atmospheres and paranoid temporalities

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Abstract

This paper moves beyond conceptualisations of austerity as a fiscal policy towards understanding austerity as lived and felt in everyday life, with a particular focus on its affective life. Through an ethnographic focus on public libraries, this paper argues that that austerity can take the form of an affective atmosphere. Bringing together psychoanalytic and Spinozist-Deleuzian accounts of affect this paper explores austerity as an uncanny atmosphere, in which austerity is lived through a series of unknowns that re-emerge throughout the library space. Paranoia subsequently emerges as a way in which to live with uncanny austerity – to *make known* the unknowns generated by austerity. This paranoia cannot be attributed to 'paranoid individuals', but to practices that become paranoid due to the blurring of reality and fiction that uncanny austerity generates. As austerity continues year after year, the uncertainties that emerge as a result of continual budget reductions are at the same time *felt as something already known.* In other words, there is a felt sense that austerity will inevitably lead to the contraction of the library service. Lived austerity, therefore, now carries such weight and has a particular depth of experience due to the innumerable previous years of, and encounters with, austerity.

Keywords

Austerity, everyday life, affective atmospheres, uncanny, paranoia, public libraries

Introduction

The ongoing austerity agenda in the UK has gained significant academic attention, yet much of this work entrenches austerity as simply a fiscal policy. In doing so, it overlooks lived experience – a central way through which austerity is made present. Yet, what does it mean to take austerity as *lived* and *felt* as our conceptual departure, rather than simply a fiscal policy? How does it enable us to move beyond a narrative that struggles to see austerity as more than budgets and their deficits? And in what ways does this focus further our understanding of austerity, both within and beyond the geographical disciplinary field? In short, why does an attention to austerity as lived *matter*?

An attention to 'lived' emphasises the importance of exploring austerity as it is *experienced* throughout everyday life. This is an important conceptual move away from thinking about austerity as simply a fiscal policy. In so doing, it moves beyond accounts that simply re-affirm austerity as a 'thing' imagined through its 'economic-ness' (Clarke, 2010). This does not

negate the significance of the economic, but instead recognises that austerity is always *more-than-economic* as it becomes present in different domains of everyday life (Hall, 2016; Hitchen, 2016; Stenning, 2017).

Taking lived experience as our point of departure enables us to conceptualise austerity as a *multiplicity* (Hitchen, 2016, p. 103); austerity is a not a coherent phenomenon limited to a fiscal policy, but is 'always and already multiple as it is lived.' Austerity stretches across multiple everyday sites, such as the food bank (Garthwaite, 2016), the job centre (Patrick, 2017), the Citizens Advice Bureau (Kirwan, 2016), the children's centre (Jupp, 2013). It is also made present through, and shapes, a multiplicity of relations, such as the familial (Hall, 2016; Jupp, 2017), indebted relations (Deville, 2015; Kirwan, 2016; Stanley, Deville, & Montgomerie, 2016), and relations with the present and future (Coleman, 2016; Horton, 2016). Importantly, this allows us to understand the ways in which austerity is *unevenly experienced* as particular groups are disproportionately affected. This includes mothers (Raynor, 2016b), people with disabilities (Bates, Goodley, & Runswick-Cole, 2017; Goodley, Lawthom, & Runswick-Cole, 2014), young people (van Lanen, 2017) and BME women (Hall et al., 2017; Sandhu & Stephenson, 2015). Conceptualising austerity as lived, then, means to take seriously both its differential and multiple presence. As voiced by Ruth Raynor (2016a, p. 195), austerity is 'an empty flowerbed at the end of the street… a taxi no longer [taking] a disabled child to school… the implementation of the "bedroom tax" and a threatened eviction… a closed autism support group, and a choice between food and heating.'

Despite the growing work within the geographical discipline taking seriously the lived experience of austerity, still underexplored is the way in which it is *felt* throughout everyday life. Austerity is indeed an empty flowerbed, the implementation of the 'bedroom tax', a threatened eviction. Importantly, however, such encounters with austerity are lived *as they become felt.* As Raynor (2016a) suggests, these range from the intense to the undramatic. Sometimes it is not easily visible or identifiable, yet somehow we know it is there – we *feel* its presence (Gordon, 1997). In this sense austerity exceeds the representational. As such, this paper departs from much of existing austerity literature to explore the multiple ways in which austerity is *affectively experienced.*[i] A turn to affective life enables exploration of austerity's ebb and flow in intensity as it is made present in everyday life.

Exploring the affective presence of austerity matters by shaping capacities to feel and act (Bissell, 2014). However, the presence of austerity is not simply felt as a series of individualised affective experiences. It is often experienced *with* and *through* others. In other words, austerity is also *collectively felt.* Yet, despite the increasing geographical interest in the lived experience of austerity, the question of collective feeling has remained under-examined. This paper attempts to fill in a gap within existing austerity literature by exploring how austerity becomes something that is felt collectively, but importantly, how individualised experiences also become part of this process. To do so, this paper focuses on austerity's presence in public services, specifically libraries.

Yet, despite being the largest employer in the United Kingdom, the public sector has remained a surprisingly understudied economic machinery within the geographical discipline. Public services have wide-ranging but particular economic, social, political and emotional lives (Clayton, Donovan, & Merchant, 2015). The necessity to explore the life of public services has been heightened as they find themselves in transformation amidst the continuing state of austerity in the UK. Between June 2009 and June 2017, UK public sector employment reduced from 6.4 million to 5.4 million employees (Leaker, 2017). Whilst central government employment has increased during this period, local government employment has dramatically fallen from 2.8 to 2.1 million employees – a fifteenth consecutive quarterly reduction and the lowest local government employment since records began (Leaker, 2017). Austerity measures have been distributed unevenly across government departments and have affected particular groups unequally (Jones, Meegan, Kennett, & Croft, 2015; Levitas, 2012). Budget reductions have been acutely felt by local government, which have particular implications for public services that rely on local authority funding.

One such service is public libraries. Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient library services for all persons' in accordance with the Public Libraries and Museum Act 1964 (Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, 1964, p. 6). Whilst the act is all too ambiguous about what a 'comprehensive and efficient service' means in empirical terms, amidst stringent and *ongoing* cuts to public services, local authorities are nevertheless required to provide *some sort* of library service. This paper tells a story of how the library is attempting to continue in the context of, and live with, austerity as it brings about a re-emergent threat of contraction. As will become clear, this is central to how austerity is lived and felt within institutional spaces like the library (see also Norcup, 2017). Yet, it is also a particular story of the library as a *workplace.* As public libraries are made up of multiple spaces, practices and functions, this paper focuses on the library as a site of working practices and professional subjects within the context of austerity.

To do this, this paper pays attention to two affective states that I argue have been felt collectively within the lived experience of austerity: the uncanny and paranoia. Firstly, this paper brings Sigmund Freud's (2003) work on the uncanny into the realm of the affective, which have has often been thought of through psychoanalytic geographies (Hook, 2005; Pile, 2005; Royle, 2003; Straughan, 2014). Whilst there are ontological tensions between the two, this paper brings the uncanny out of the latter in order to explore how it can become a question of collective feeling. In fact, the uncanny lends itself to exploring the collective, since the uncanny is 'never one's own… its meaning or significance may have to do, most of all, with what is not oneself, with others, with the world 'itself'' (Royle, 2003, p. 2). Secondly, the affective state of paranoia is useful for thinking about the collective, not least due to its etymological roots: paranoia emerges from the Greek word *paranoos* – *para*, meaning 'beside, beyond' and *noos* meaning 'mind' (Barnhart, 1999, p. 756). In this sense paranoia is always already *beyond* the mind or beyond the individual.

The remainder of this paper, then, argues that austerity has been experienced as an uncanny atmosphere; here austerity takes the form of a series of unknowns that continually re-

emerge throughout the library space, and as such become a collective and *acutely familiar* feeling. Subsequently, paranoia emerges as a way in which to *live within* and *resolve* the uncanny atmosphere – as a way to *make known* the unknowns generated by austerity. Yet, importantly, this is not a paranoia that can be attributed to 'paranoid individuals', but to practices that *become* paranoid due to the blurring of reality and fiction that the uncanny generates. Here, then, the uncanny and paranoia also become a way of exploring the unknown that is central to how austerity is made present within the library space. However, this paper shows how it is *always more* than exploring simply an unknown – both of these collective feelings have at their core a blurring between reality and fiction. The 'unknowns' here carry such *weight* precisely because it is an unknown that is at the same time felt as *known*. In doing so, it distorts the boundaries between what is felt as known and unknown within the affective life of austerity.

Austerity's atmospheric memory

This paper focuses on a particular form of collective feeling – namely that of affective atmospheres. Whilst collective feelings are not limited to this form,[ii] affective atmospheres become a significant lens through which to explore the affective (and collective) presence of austerity. Yet, existing interest in austerity as a collective feeling has often been at a societal-scale, specifically as a public mood (Coleman, 2016; Forkert, 2017). Yet, the significance of austerity's presence at the institutional level has often been overlooked, a level in which the individual and the collective intimately intertwine. Austerity's affective life in the public sector is an important example of this. Within such spaces, austerity is often made present through shared practices and feeling (Horton, 2016). This is not to negate the significance of individualised experience; in fact, attention to affective atmospheres enables exploration into how affects become collectively felt while always recognising that they are differentially attached to as they become registered in bodies (Bissell, 2016). Within such spaces, precisely because the affective presence of austerity is not always located in individual bodies, atmospheres take seriously its ethereal nature. As voiced by McCormack (2008, p. 413), affective atmospheres are 'something distributed yet palpable, a quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through sensing bodies while also remaining diffuse, in the air, ethereal.' In other words, atmospheres enable us to understand austerity as more than simply an absence or a presence. Instead it has *shape* – a particular spatiality that allows austerity to be present with varying degrees of resolution. As argued by Böhme (1993, p. 114), atmospheres 'seem to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze.' As will be explored throughout this paper the presence of austerity within institutional spaces is both ambiguous and re-emergent, warranting greater exploration within geographical research. The material and ethereal presence of atmospheres, then, provides an important conceptual departure.

Importantly, affective atmospheres are a transpersonal intensity; they emanate from but also *exceed* the bodies from which they emerge (Anderson, 2014). Affective atmospheres generate intensive space-times by enveloping particular bodies, including sites, objects and

people (2014, p. 160). Yet, this envelopment is generated *through* the relationship between the collective and the individual:

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

This form of collective feeling is made up of transpersonal intensities, but at the same time must also be 'completed' by the individual apprehending it. It is this gap between the collective and the individual that is particularly significant to this paper, as it indicates a temporality to affective atmospheres that has been under-explored within existing literature. Whilst there has been substantial focus on their spatiality (Bissell, 2010; Morris, 2018), atmospheres are also learnt (Adey, 2014), have life spans (Stewart, 2011) and a temporal flow (Edensor, 2012). Affective atmospheres, then, have a temporal life.

In particular, this paper argues that it is the gap between emanation and completion of the atmosphere where a particular temporality emerges. This in-between space means that atmospheres are always in transformation (Anderson, 2009), but it also gives them a particular *memory*. Importantly, this memory too is transpersonal in that it emerges from, *but exceeds,* individual subjects. A memory is created from both the transformation of affective atmospheres and by their re-emergence. Firstly, transformations leave residues and are shaped by that which is enveloped. Secondly, and relatedly, as atmospheres re-emerge they bring with them a memory of previous envelopments. This is not to suggest that atmospheres ever re-emerge in the same affective state, but rather that the subjects enveloped within it – that make up and complete the atmosphere – have a particular affective memory of what it *feels* like. As voiced by Edensor (2012, p. 1114) 'affective experience of space is usually conditioned by previous experience, by habit, by familiar emotions and sensations.' Yet, whilst the individual subjects do shape this atmospheric memory, I argue that this memory is by no means limited to the subject; rather, it is a memory that emerges precisely from the relationship *between* the eminent elements and apprehending subjects. As voiced by Sumartjo (2016, p. 550) 'our own actions, thoughts, feelings and memories contribute to atmospheres that might draw others into shared experiences of collective events.' This notion of 'drawing others in' to an atmosphere is significant in that it indicates a tipping point where these memories are no longer simply confined to the subject, but become transpersonal. Indeed, Closs Stephens et al. (2017, p. 45) note that atmospheric memories are 'an attempt to think about memory not as something that is individualised in bounded persons… but as something that is transmitted through affective forces that is felt in and across bodies.' In other words, the temporality emerging is an *atmospheric memory* that is shaped by, but extends beyond, the individual. Just as atmospheres 'belong neither to an environment nor a subject' (Duff, 2016, p. 63), neither does its memory. This paper draws on the notion of an atmospheric memory to argue that austerity's ebb and flow of (transpersonal) intensity does not always occur as isolated or 'fragmented' encounters (Raynor, 2016a). Instead, the moments in which austerity intensifies

are simply one of a *series* of affective encounters (Latham & McCormack, 2009); their position within a seriality give them a felt sense of *re*-emergence. As will be explored in the paper, central to the affective life of austerity is its temporality – both through a felt sense of 'ongoingness' and re-emergence.

In summary, a turn to affective atmospheres in this paper is an attempt to explore the ways in which austerity becomes a collective feeling, whilst also recognising its significant relationship with individual experience. Whilst austerity can become felt collectively, it is also an ambiguous presence that is neither an absence or presence. Nevertheless, such atmospheres have a temporal life in that they have an atmospheric memory. As this paper will show, the 'ongoingness' of austerity greatly shapes this atmospheric memory.

Researching the affective life of austerity – a methodological challenge

The challenge of this mode of research is two-fold. Firstly, the challenge becomes about attuning austerity's fluctuations in intensity. The non-linear temporalities of austerity is important here, as its presence intensifies, dissipates and re-surfaces over time. In other words, how to attend to austerity when it becomes the 'background noise' of everyday life (Closs Stephens, 2016; Hitchen, 2016). Secondly, and relatedly, this also involves attuning to that which is beyond absence or presence, but instead something that is present with varying degrees of resolution. Austerity becomes multiple things precisely because it holds the potential to be made present anywhere as it fluctuates in intensity. This research attempts to attune to austerity as it is present in its multiple forms; austerity as multiple 'things.' Austerity is present in staff room conversations, in the circulation of rumours between staff members, in the reduction of chairs at employee meetings.

As such, this paper draws upon eighteen months of ethnographic research in a borough-wide library service in North-East England; this included participant observations, interviewing, formal meetings, and informal conversations. More specifically this included dwelling in different spaces of the libraries, attending workplace meetings, chatting to staff members and customers, accompanying van deliveries between libraries, interviewing both staff and customers in multiple libraries across the borough. Yet, austerity is not universally experienced. For example, austerity may be made present differently to a library customer compared to a library staff member; but, there will also be varied experiences *between* customers and between different members of staff. This paper, then, focusses on the library as a *workplace* – exploring how austerity (re)emerges and circulates throughout everyday working practices as it ebbs and flows in intensity. As this paper also explores austerity as a collective feeling, it also attunes to moments of where austerity is collectively experienced. This involves paying attention to austerity in different spaces of the library. Yet, this paper focusses on a key space-time of collectivity where austerity is present: the employee engagement session. It is around these meetings that intensities gather, precisely because they bring into being a series of *unknowns* that are so familiar for the library staff living with austerity. In other words, the (re)emergence of these unknowns both represent and generate an uncertain future for the library service and staff members' position within it.

The employee engagement session

The library service is situated within a local authority in the North-East of England.[iii] The local authority is ranked within the highest quartile in the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation (GOV.UK, 2015); as such, many of the libraries in the borough are placed within areas of higher deprivation than the English average.[iv] A focus on these meetings *matters*, since they significantly shape the everyday working experience of library staff in times of austerity; they, therefore, provide an important account of the affective life of austerity within the library space.

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

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

Since the introduction of the UK austerity agenda by the former Coalition government in 2010, which has seen a decimation of local government funding,[vi] the *role* of the employee engagement has changed:

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

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

> *[I]ncreasingly my job over the last number of years has become review-driven, shrinking the service, and I suppose yeah, that's probably the last four years. Before*

> *then there were cuts but they were so small it wasn't, it didn't dominate your year, it probably dominated a month or two, say 50,000, whereas the saving of a half million, that dominates a whole year long process… it's different components of that, so it might be developing the proposals, the public consultations, the political consultation, and then what we'd be into in March, April, May, June time next year will be the implementation, there's the whole HR side.* (Dennis)

Consequently, meetings have become stretched out over the course of the year, with a total of eight meetings (between September 2015 and February 2017) taking place in autumn, winter, spring, and summer. Yet, due to the annual budget cycle, in which proposals on budget reductions are implemented in April, meetings clustered between November and February.[vii]

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

1. THE UNCANNY

i.   *The uncanny*

This section argues that austerity can be experienced as an uncanny atmosphere, in particular due to the temporality of austerity. Firstly, there is a feeling amongst library staff members that further austerity measures are inevitable; austerity isn't a temporally finite state – it is cyclical and ongoing. [ix] For staff, it is not a question of *if*, but *when* the library service will contract again. Every employee engagement session holds the potential for future cuts to the library service to be declared. Thus, the *act* of announcing an upcoming employee engagement session is significant; it generates the feeling that knowledge about future spending cuts has been brought into being, which has not been imparted yet:

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

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

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

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

> *I hadn't seen Jude in a while so I asked her how the last couple of months were going. "They've been OK actually. We are waiting for the review [employee engagement meeting], so it's been quite uncertain. But we are enjoying this period of calm. But it is also hard not knowing what's coming."*
>
> *"Is it kind of like the calm before the storm?" I asked.*
>
> *"It is. But the thing is, we know it's coming… It's also quite nice having this time not knowing, because we know what's coming will be bad."* (Fieldnotes, 3.5.2016)

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

Between September 2015 and February 2017 alone eight engagement sessions took place, and staff have experienced six years of austerity prior to my research. Within each of the

repeated processes of employee engagement session the space-time of waiting is opened up. Yet, this is not simply a waiting for the unknown, it is the uncanny experience of its re-emergence that blurs reality and fiction.

ii.   The uncanny as an affective atmosphere

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

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

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

Gordon's emphasis on the uncanny *experience* is particularly significant, firstly because she understands it to be 'qualities of feeling', indicating the importance of the affective within lived experience. Secondly, for Gordon, it becomes a *social* experience; this enables us to bring the uncanny into the realm of the lived and felt that is not restricted to individualized affective experiences. The uncanny for Gordon (1997, p. 54–55) is about 'being haunted in the *world of common reality.'* This does not dismiss Freud's emphasis of the uncanny as connected to the individual psyche, but shows that the uncanny is not limited to this form. If the uncanny can be socially felt, this points towards an intensity that is transpersonal – a shared affective experience. Gordon likens the uncanny to Raymond William's (1977) 'structure of feeling' yet for Anderson (2014), *both* structures of feeling and affective atmospheres are a response to the problem of collective feeling. Gordon's account of the uncanny above, however, is able to describe the materialist nature of affective atmospheres in that it has shape, an electric empiricity; and whilst this evidence is barely there it is nevertheless palpable – we *feel* its presence (Gordon, 1997; McCormack, 2017). This again points towards the ambiguity of affective atmospheres as 'an ill-defined indefinite something' that can condition life by giving spaces, episodes or encounters a particular (uncanny) feel (Anderson, 2014, p. 140;137). By re-reading of Freud through the lens of affective atmospheres we are able to take seriously the uncanny as both individual and collective affective experiences, since atmospheres emanate from, but *exceed* the assembling of bodies (Anderson, 2009, p. 77).

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

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

2. PARANOIA

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

Within this space-time of waiting a particular *mode* of waiting emerges. Paranoia emerges as a way of living *within* and also as an attempt to *resolve* the uncanny atmosphere. Turning back to Horton (2016), it is the imagined futures of cuts that can have felt consequences within the present. Paranoia is one playing-out of these futures, precisely due to the unknown that inhabits and defines this space-time of waiting. However, paranoia as a response to an unknown manifests itself differently to that of anticipatory anxiety in Horton's work. Whilst anticipatory anxiety generates space for contingency and multiplicity within the imagined futures of austerity, paranoia's aversion to surprises forecloses the potential for multiple possible futures, through the aim of gaining 'big truths' (Love, 2011). Significantly, in naming this mode of waiting as paranoid, I am carrying out a paranoid reading of these

encounters with austerity for two reasons. Firstly, because in doing so I am closing down contingency and solidifying this affective state; secondly, because for Sedgwick (2002, p. 127), drawing on Bersani, '[p]aranoia is an inescapable interpretive doubling of presence…it takes one to know one.' Inhabiting the paranoid position is necessary here, precisely because it enables consideration of how paranoia becomes part of the lived experience of austerity. Indeed, Sedgwick (2002, p. 130) argues that paranoia should be viewed as one of many affective theoretical practices, since 'practicing paranoid strategies…represent *a* way, amongst other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge.'

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

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

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

> *Not long after we had started chatting Brendan the Janitor came with the red boxes. Almost as soon as he came in, Brendan asked them, "have you heard about the meeting on Tuesday?" Straight away I knew he was talking about the Employee Engagement Session. Both indicated that they had heard about it. "Are you going to go?" Brendan asked. Joanne seemed reluctant, "Well it's a trek from here isn't it just to go from 8.30 till 9.30. I think I'd stay here and open at 9." Brendan replied, "Come on, come and support your co-workers. I'm not going mind." He laughed at his own joke. "Well there are meant to be loads of changes afoot," Brendan said slyly indicating that he knew something that the other two didn't. Juliet and Lilianne looked at him in a not very serious/jokey way. It was as though Brendan enjoyed spreading this kind of gossip and both didn't seem to be taking it very seriously. Olivia asked, "Well are you going to tell us, because if you aren't you can psssst" (she made a noise with her lips and signalled to the door). Brendan gave a smug yet secretive look, "I*

> *can't tell you that." This made me think of what Gregg told me on the second trip in the van. He said that as soon as the meetings are scheduled "the rumour mill starts" and staff begin discussing what will likely be in the upcoming meeting. This scene seemed to epitomise this.* (Fieldnotes, 10.5.2016)

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

> *[T]here is a lot of, you know, paranoia that can start to happen and seeing things that aren't there, and again I think it all goes back to lack of communication, when there are gaps in peoples understanding or the strategy or austerity as a whole, the budget cuts, people start to fill in the gaps. I mean I know there was recently… a meeting that was coming up about austerity and about the budget cuts and it was like Chinese whispers how it went through the library service and it eventually happened where by the time it got up here* [upstairs offices in the Central library] *that the meeting had already happened and all these things had been agreed to and this was the crack now duh-duh-duh, and in reality the meeting had never happened, there'd been no emails sent, it wasn't a big sort of secret conspiracy; and it was like, how on* earth *has that got through sane rational adults and it's just spiralled and a lot of people become really, really worried and were obviously on the phone to management being like 'what's this?' And stuff like that can be quite common and you can just imagine that someone's heard something and then its gradually just got bigger and bigger through the day; but it was literally over the space of about 48 hours and I had to get like an email, blanket email, to everyone being like, 'There has been no meeting, there's been no agreement, I don't know where this has come from but I want to quash this rumour now'. And again I just think it's if you don't hear anything or there's gaps in understanding then people start to, not make up stuff, but they start to reason different things or to say different things and then put a rationality on it.* (Clora)

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

movement of burrowing backward and forward. In doing so, the unknown is *felt as known* through practices of paranoia.

In addition, Clora describes how the 'rumour' became bigger and bigger and eventually spiralled out of control; thus, a paranoid form of waiting is also *performative*, as the adoption of paranoid strategies seek and organize knowledge in a way that bring into being and further paranoia within the act of waiting. The transformation of staff members to a 'high alert' state to new knowledge also means that bodies are more susceptible to being affected by the affective charge of the emergence of new information about an upcoming employee engagement session; there is a less of an affective barrier between this new stimulus and a body's capacity to be affected. The *mobility* of the rumour also furthers the performative nature of the paranoia. Clora indicates that the rumour gained a greater vitality as it moved from the ground floor of the library to the first floor where she works. Thus, the rumour moved between the different spaces of the library by being transferred between staff members; it is in the gap between subject and subject that the rumour is able to gain a greater vitality by transforming within this 'inbetween' space. The use of the phrase 'Chinese whisper' perhaps indicates the way in which the rumour takes on new vitalities through transformation as it is transferred subject to subject.

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

Thus, attempts by staff members to make the unknown *known* is not paranoid from the outset, but *becomes paranoid*. The re-emergent nature of these unknowns generates an uncanny atmosphere precisely because it blurs distinctions between imagination and reality. Practices emerge that attempt to live *within* and *resolve* these re-emergent unknowns. As argued by Sedgwick paranoid *practices* are changing and heterogenous.[x] Precisely because this is an uncanny atmosphere, the envelopment generates an environment that can transform these mutual practices into *paranoid* practices. In other words, as these practices are in transformation they are shaped by the uncanny atmosphere to become paranoid. Not only this, but when the uncanny is a collective feeling the emergence of paranoid practices also become shared and collectively participated in.

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

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

ii.   The day of the meeting – an intensified uncanny

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

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

The looming engagement session becomes a 'double movement' of making the familiar strange and also finding familiarity in the strange (Fisher, 2016, p. 10). The latter is expressed through the combination of 'kinda' knowing what is going to happen due to the repeated return of the meetings, *combined* with the feeling of *not knowing* what will be actualised in

15

the meeting – the unknown. The former is shown through her emphasis on her feeling of a lack of transparency; thus, the familiarity of the employee engagement process also is *made strange* due to there being a gap in understanding between management and staff members. The intensified atmosphere brought about by an ever looming engagement session isn't simply a fear of the unknown, but *specifically* of the uncanny. In other words, the closer to the materialisation to the unknown, the more intensely this *familiar/re-emergent* unknown is felt.

It is on the day of the meeting that the uncanny atmosphere becomes heightened further. The non-linear temporality of the uncanny means that with every re-emergence of an employee engagement session, the relationship between the familiar and the strange has the potential to intensify, since there is greater interplay between past and future. On the day of the meeting, the atmosphere of the uncanny is felt in different spaces of the library, in particular in the staff room and in the room of the meeting itself. Before the meeting, a tension is felt in the staff room that is familiar to the days where an employee engagement session is scheduled. As the visceral experience of waiting intensifies, a usually open and expressive space becomes something entirely different – anxious and oppressive:

> *I arrived at the Central Library through the staff entrance at the back door. I wasn't sure whether to expect anyone there yet at it was still half an hour before the start of the meeting. I went into the staff room and it was completely empty. There was an eerie silence that felt rather uncomfortable – a bit like the calm before the storm… It felt a little bit like being in a morgue or a sombre museum, where there was a feeling that the silence should be preserved.* (Fieldnotes, 17.5.2016)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> *[Edna emphasised] "You know, if they do make any more volunteer libraries, people will think that this is what they were planning all along… It's just awful, 'We'll get rid of your job to be replaced by someone untrained for free.' But we will see tomorrow won't we." This made me incredibly nervous. For the past week simply thinking about the employee engagement session had filled me with dread. It felt a bit like tomorrow would be 'D-Day' (using Dennis' words) and I had already been anticipating what the meeting would be like: anger, shock, tears, sadness; people voicing their anger without any barriers anymore as everything would be laid on the line.* (Fieldnotes, 16.5.2016)

> *As I opened the doors in the reception onto the stairs I glanced at a poster on the door that stated, 'On Tuesday 1ˢᵗ November the library will open at 10am. We're sorry for any inconvenience.' I felt a pang of nerves when reading this. If the library opened at 10am this meant that the meeting would be an hour and half long, which indicated really bad news. Staff members were used to predicting the severity of the meeting based on how long it was.* (Fieldnotes, 1.11.2016)

In my encounter with Edna, the impending meeting became a site of revelation of what she felt was already known. I also participated in this reading through my sense of dread at how the meeting may be experienced by staff members. Indeed, the closing down of contingency that is so central to paranoia is evident in my reading of the meeting's length; its duration

becomes a barometer for the severity of the revelations, which I learnt through previous encounters with staff and engagement sessions. Given that I only experienced eight employee engagement sessions during my time at the library, and given that austerity had been ongoing for six years prior to my research, it is not hard to speculate the density at which staff members experience these unknowns:

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

3. A PARTIAL MATERIALISATION OF UNKNOWNS

Perhaps most significantly to the atmosphere of the uncanny within the library space, the employee engagement sessions offer only a *partial materialisation of the unknown*. Whilst the meetings are a site of revelation, both new unknowns emerge or existing unknowns continue, which staff members are again forced to live with. This section explores the atmosphere of the uncanny, not only when an unknown is materialised, but also when this is only partial:

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

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

paralysis due to the enormity of the knowledge that emerged of potential library closures and the inferred job losses accompanying this.

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

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

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

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

> We're just waiting. That's what it feels like. We're in a permanent waiting situation. (Penny)

Paradoxically, it is *also* the fact that some knowledge has materialised within the employee engagement session that enables the continuation of the uncanny atmosphere. The partial *materialisation* becomes a confirmation that the unknowns are at the same time known; the emergence of knowledge about the future of the library service becomes confirmation for staff members that they 'knew what was coming.' As such, unknowns that (re)emerge out of each employee engagement session continue the uncanny atmosphere *precisely because* the knowledge that did emerge confirmed their belief about what was to come. This works to entrench paranoid practices as a successful form of 'seeking, finding and organizing knowledge' (Sedgwick, 2002, p. 130):

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

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

Consequently, the stretched space-time of waiting means that library staff's own position within the library service remains uncertain. Despite their best efforts to live with and resolve these re-emergent unknowns within the library space through paranoid practices, for staff members, austerity becomes something that is 'biting at your heals, which is always there…' (Penny).

Conclusions

This paper has furthered how geographers might think about the concept of austerity by departing from conceptualisations that reproduce austerity as simply a fiscal policy. By taking austerity as lived and felt as the point of departure, we are able to see it as an affective presence, the ways in which this stretches across space-times, and how it envelops and shapes everyday practices. In other words, austerity has an affective life, a temporal life and a spatial life. Yet, why does the uncanny matter to how we think about austerity? What does it enable us to say about austerity as lived that we didn't know before? And why are paranoid practices a significant way in which institutional spaces deal with ongoing budget reductions?

A conceptualisation of the uncanny as atmosphere indicates that austerity is often lived *through* a blurring of reality and fiction. Austerity has a very particular temporality – it is cyclical and ongoing, and there have already been eight years of austerity within the UK. Austerity is not a temporally bounded event; it is ongoing with no clear end or resolution. This means that the uncertain futures that emerge as a result of continual budget reductions are at the same time *felt as something already known.* In this paper collective feeling has become a tool through which to explore the non-linear temporalities of austerity. Significantly, as it becomes felt through the *re-emergence* and partial materialisation of unknowns, everyday austerity has a particular *depth* of experience. Both individual and collective encounters with austerity now carry such weight precisely because of previous cycles and experiences of austerity. The employee engagement sessions in the library indicate how such encounters are simply one of many. Their seriality mean that austerity has a particular familiarity, in which previous experience becomes 'evidence' of spending cuts to come. In this sense it is not surprising that paranoid practices become a way in which to live with austerity. This generates an affective environment in which practices that gather and organize knowledge about these unknowns *become* paranoid. And why ever not, '[i]n a world where no-one need be delusional to find evidence of systematic oppression, to theorize out of anything *but* a paranoid critical stance has come to be seem naïve, pious, complaisant' (Sedgwick, 2002, p. 125–126). This is an important step beyond geographical literature that focuses simply on the uncertain futures generated by austerity (Clayton et al., 2015; Horton,

2016); there is a now a particular knowability to these austere futures due to the particular non-linear temporality that austerity takes here. Yet, it is also about the spatiality of austerity; precisely because austerity is made present within the institutional spaces like the library, this means that austerity is often experienced through collective feelings and mutual practices. This also generates a feeling of knowability that is both collectively felt and produced.

Whilst the atmosphere of the uncanny has been used as tool through which to explore the temporality of austerity, austerity has also been an empirical device through which to explore the temporality of collective feeling – affective atmospheres in particular. Whilst atmospheres have typically been thought of in spatial terms, this paper expands on existing literature (Closs Stephens et al., 2017; Edensor, 2012; Sumartojo, 2016) that shows they too have a *temporal life*. The re-emergence of an uncanny atmosphere indicates how atmospheres have a density to them in the form of an atmospheric memory. This atmospheric memory emerges from, but is no means confined to, individual bodies; just as atmospheres are transpersonal, so too is its memory, generated in the space between emerging elements and apprehending subjects. The spatiality of atmospheres is also central to this temporality; precisely because atmospheres are also always in transformation, this perhaps enables a depth as a result of this change in form. Indeed, by their very nature atmo*spheres* have a particular depth of experience as different bodies come together to produce atmospheric qualities (Anderson, 2014). Yet, it is this density, I argue, which challenges what we might typically understand the singular affective quality of atmospheres (Anderson, 2009). In other words, as atmospheres both transform and re-emerge, these envelopments can become layered so that they are never simply experienced as a singular affective quality. For example, they are differentially attuned to (Bissell, 2016), are anticipated (Sumartojo, 2016), and are felt in place (Edensor, 2012).

Finally, taking collective feeling seriously has particular implications for the spatiality of austerity. Austerity is more than an absence or presence – instead it has *shape.* Austerity here is *fuzzy*, in particular due to the blurring of reality and fiction that the continual re-emergence of unknowns generates. This paper has attempted to hold onto this fuzziness just enough to allow it to speak, but whilst also keeping its integrity as something ambiguous. Austerity's ambiguity, its continual ability to re-emerge throughout everyday life, means that attempts to escape austerity's reality are never quite achieved. In other words, individuals who are living and feeling austerity are *never quite* free from it. This is why austerity as lived matters: it *lingers* in peoples' lives in a way that can become profusely oppressing. From the outset austerity has outstayed its welcome, yet, as it reaches its eighth year, austerity's diffusive cruelty grinds individuals and collectives down without any sense of when it will end:

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

Acknowledgements

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[i] See also Coleman (2016), Deville (2015), Hitchen (2016) Raynor (2016a) and Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazár (2018) for previous work on the affective geographies of austerity.

[ii] See Raymond Williams' (1977) concept of structure of feeling.

[iii] To ensure anonymity for research participants the name of this library service has been omitted.

[iv] The IMD rank number has been omitted to maintain anonymity.

[v] Within this local authority the library service is situated within the Department of Culture and Leisure.

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

[vii] *'Generally you'd have this kind of flurry of meetings around September, October, November-time every year since about 2010.'* (Alice)

[viii] Salami slicing involves an incremental whittling away of budgets over time.

[ix] By 'cyclical' I am referring to the annual budget cycle.

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

[xi] *'[T]here's like a big exhale afterwards because I think there's just the relief that people now understand and they can now see the direction that we're going in.'* (Clora)