

Geographers of small things

A study of the production of space in children's social work

by

Dharman John Jeyasingham

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Abstract

This study explores children's social workers' experiences of and practices in space. It is based on ethnographic research with social workers in two sites and examines data from observations, interviews with social workers, photographs and other images of the spaces in which social workers practised.

The study draws on the work of Henri Lefebvre, concerned with how space is produced through spatial practices, conceptions of space and moments of lived space, which occur beyond these conventions and escape complete articulation. The study uses this analytical frame in order to explore how social workers produce certain kinds of spaces as significant in their practice. It identifies a small number of affect-heavy spaces which hold great importance for children's social work: social work offices, children's and practitioners' bodies, families' homes as they are experienced by practitioners during home visits, the wider neighbourhoods which social workers associate with service users. In particular, it identifies social workers' attention to small things and micro-scales in their practice. This enables social workers to present their work as sensitive to that which is imperceptible to others but also leads to a restricted focus and limited engagement with the social and political contexts of service users' lives.

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List of abbreviations

ANT	Actor network theory
CAIT	Child Abuse Investigation Team
EAW	Enabling agile working
GIS	Geographical information systems
GP	General Practitioner
LSOA	Lower Super Output Area
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRT	Non-representational theory
ONS	Office of National Statistics
SSA	Spatial syntax analysis

INTRODUCTION

Space matters for children's safeguarding social work, in obvious and unexpected ways. Practitioners must understand the emplaced experiences of children and their families - what happens inside families' homes and in the wider places in which those homes are located. They need to be effective at working in the many different spaces of social work - formal and informal, home territory and unfamiliar ground, official, domestic and intimate. Social work also changes space - for example, skilled social workers are able to create safe and trusting environments in their interactions with clients and colleagues. In more fundamental ways, all social workers are continuously engaged in producing space through their routine practices, which organise events and actions in particular ways across space and through the stories that they tell, which evoke particular kinds of places. Despite this, social work has neglected questions about the politics of space, which this study seeks to explore.

This short chapter introduces the thesis in the following ways. It explains what led me to be interested in and want to study space and children's social work. It summarises the key themes in the existing social work literature about space before identifying aspects of the topic that remain under-researched. It then outlines the focus and methods of enquiry used in this

study, the study's broad conclusions about children's social work and space and their significance for contemporary social work. The chapter ends with an explanation of the structure of the rest of the thesis.

Motivations for the study

My interest in space and social work began in the late 1990s, when I was a children and families social worker myself. I worked in a team that was based in a large housing estate on the edge of a town that was, itself, on the fringes of [REDACTED]. My team covered the estate, which had high levels of poverty and social problems, and the socially mixed town next to it. Well-known stories existed about this place. Several years before I worked there a film, [REDACTED], had been made about life on the estate. Shortly before that, a number of children living there had made disclosures of abuse, following which unfolded one of several social work ritual abuse scandals in the early 1990s. The estate was talked about as different from the surrounding area and my colleagues and I found that other professionals working in the town often made assumptions about families there. We generally treated these with scepticism, even while we engaged in our own stories about the estate and its people, which seemed more credible to us but which were equally effective in producing it as a distinct, separate place. Some of these were class inflected and racial stories about big funerals, heroin, intergenerational cycles of neglect or feuding Traveller families. They were also about certain

qualities of the place itself that stood out to us and came to define it - the streets named after Lakeland locations, the (for us) isolated location, the open fields behind some people's homes.

Several years later, while working as a social work lecturer, I carried out a small research project with a group of social workers who were practice teachers, which aimed to explore how they promoted learning about anti-racist practice (Jeyasingham, 2007). These social workers all worked in the same predominantly white, ex-mining town and I was struck by the ways in which they talked about the place - as outsiders (none of them lived there) who gave convincing, apparently objective accounts of it and as insiders who had detailed knowledge about certain intimate aspects of life in the town. They informed me of little-known, shocking 'facts' about the place such as the record number of residents who were dependent on prescribed painkillers and the reality behind some racist attacks that had been reported in the local media. Their stories made claims to extreme social problems about a place that had initially seemed quite unexceptional to me - which, of course, nowhere is when you get to know it. I became interested in how these ways of talking were implicated in the shaping of places and, in turn, social workers' experiences of them.

Existing literature

Others have been thinking and writing about these and further questions of

space. Firstly, space and place have featured in a great deal of ethnographic social work research: while studies by Dingwall, Eekelaar and Murray (1983), de Montigny (1995), White (1997), Pithouse (1998), Scourfield (2003), D’Cruz (2003), White and Featherstone (2005) and others can be seen as having a primarily discursive focus, they also provide many insights about the importance of spaces such as offices and other workplaces, homes, neighbourhoods and geographical regions, as I have explored in detail elsewhere (Jeyasingham, 2013). More recently, a body of literature has developed that is directly concerned with space and place in children’s social work. Harry Ferguson’s extensive work on historical and contemporary approaches to child protection (2004; 2009a; 2009b; 2010a; 2010b; 2011a; 2014) has stimulated debate about space, mobility and the complexities of social work practice more generally. Gordon Jack (2010; 2011; 2013) and Sally Holland and colleagues (Holland *et al.*, 2011; Holland, 2012) have explored the significance of place for children, their families and the services that are intended to support them. Many of these discussions have sought to develop conceptual frameworks for the analysis of spatial matters in social work - such as the mobilities paradigm (Ferguson, 2009b; 2010a; 2010b; 2011a), phenomenology (Ferguson, 2011a; Phillips, 2007; McCormick, 2011) and place attachment (Possick, 2006; Jack, 2010; 2013). I explore these and other relevant discussions in chapter two.

Despite these recent explorations, space remains an under-researched element of social work practice. There has been little primary research

specifically about the topic when compared with space as a feature of other occupational practices – for example, nursing or home care. One explanation for this is that field social work, unlike clinical or domiciliary care practices, is not associated with a single location and so is difficult to pin down in space - by which I mean that it is practically more difficult to research (this also helps to explain the relatively small amount of ethnographic research with field social workers generally) and that a spatial analysis presents more complexities. As a consequence, there is a lack of clarity about how social workers practise across space, which is a good reason for exploratory research to happen.

The study

The research discussed in this thesis is concerned with social workers' experiences of space, how they understood and talked about it and how they negotiated it in their practice. My initial focus was how spaces were created in social work - how particular locations of social work practice came to function and be experienced in certain ways and how this, in turn, created certain opportunities for social and material relations. I wanted to understand what counted as places (in other words, which spaces came to be understood as defined, constant and meaningful in particular ways) and I was careful not to assume certain spatial scales here (see Massey, 1994 and Mackinnon, 2011 for discussions about the political implications of imposing scales).

From this initial focus the study has developed specific insights about a small number of spaces which were given central significance by children's social workers in the study: bodies (in particular, those of children and practitioners themselves); the offices, homes of service users and other places that social workers experienced as interior, separate spaces; the wider spaces that social workers understand their work as taking place within.

The study employed an ethnographic approach in that it was concerned with social workers' everyday practices and it attended, in particular, to what passed as unexceptional in their work. Over the course of six months, I spent time with social workers in two different social work teams in different authorities. I observed them in their offices, in meetings and discussions with other professionals, whilst visiting families at home and when they were travelling around the areas where they worked. I talked with these participants while they were working and engaged many of them in more structured interviews at other times. I did the same with other practitioners who worked with social workers such as administration workers, social work managers, an independent reviewing officer, police officers and a child protection coordinator in health visiting services. I also interviewed planners in the Estates Department of one of the research sites, exploring their understandings of social work practice and their decisions about how social workers' workspaces should be developed.

The study is broadly concerned with how space is *produced* (Lefebvre,

1991a) in children's social work - how it is brought into being through various spatial practices and ways of thinking and talking about space. It suggests that social workers themselves see space and place as important but that they tend to understand it in narrow terms. In this way, they are geographers of small things, focused on little spaces - the intimate lives of service users, the insides of kitchen cupboards, the bodies of children. It is not simply that social workers are interested in the small stuff and the fine detail; their spatial and discursive practices also create entire worlds for children and families that are small and separate. The places that social workers are concerned with are sometimes the towns, cities or boroughs in which they work; more often they are the neighbourhoods, estates, individual streets and blocks of flats where service users live. They present them, most often, as static and isolated, sometimes resonant with memories of horrific past events that have occurred in them but rarely enlivened by connections to other places.

The little concerns and micro scales of social work as they appeared in this study contrast with certain other contemporary accounts of social work as an exciting, effective business of swift and supple movements. Various developments in children's social work are relevant here: shifts to co-location with other services, open plan offices, agile working arrangements, instantaneous information transfer through databases, communication via mobile devices. It is an appealing way of presenting social work and one which many social workers might want to claim, but I want to subject it to some critical scrutiny by examining an example of such talk from Yvalia

Febrer, Director of the recently formed Frontline programme. I choose it, not because I want to single out that particular initiative for criticism but because the features emphasised in this account of social work appear in many other places and exemplify a will to present social work as speedy, exciting and effective to the extent that it has these features. Febrer describes her work when she was a practitioner in order to show how important, difficult and rewarding social work is:

On the front line, there were days when I was sitting on the floor playing Lego with a little kid one minute, and standing in front of an angry judge the next. I'd walk into a council flat where both parents were using drugs, then later visit a city banker who was beating his wife in a four-storey townhouse. That's a day in the office for a social worker, and anyone who thinks that you don't need outstanding people to do that is mistaken (Febrer, 2013).

There are a number of aspects of this account that are problematic both generally and in terms of space. The first is about the role given to postures and movements in presenting social work as a challenging profession. These are 'sitting', 'playing', 'standing' and visiting. Despite Febrer's assertion, none of these requires outstanding skills or talents – even though certain of them might be complex ('playing Lego with a little kid'), they are not things that only 'outstanding people' can do. Other features of social work practice that do require exceptional skills - critical analysis, the ability to connect and build relationships in adversity and across difference - are strangely absent from the account. Febrer does draw attention to another quality that is required of social workers - courage - but, while this is an important virtue in social work (McBeath and Webb, 2002) it points to other spatial problems with her

account. It presents social work as rather more metropolitan, varied, fast moving and conflicted than most of it is, most of the time. In fact it relies on a version of social work that is either cinematic or televisual, film and television being the only contexts in which social workers could be sitting on a floor playing Lego one minute and standing in front of a judge the next. Accounting for social work in such terms requires that it be visually recognisable and appreciable for its relatively superficial and immediate qualities. This version should be resisted; as I explore in chapter five, social workers are often judged negatively for their inability to make what they do easily appreciable to their colleagues in other professions, so greater attention to and articulation of the deep or slow aspects of practice (Holland, 2013) is important. Other people – those in social groups that are most likely to experience social work involvement – also have much to lose from this representation of social work because they are required to seem threatening in order for social workers to appear brave.

Originality and significance of this study

This brings me to what matters about this study. It offers an account of social work that focuses on everyday aspects of practice that are usually far from dramatic but, when examined in detail, prove to be significant and fascinating. It explores certain spaces that have already started to be researched by others, for example it complements Ferguson's research about home visits

(2009a, 2010b, 2011a, 2014) whilst offering a different account of some affective and material features of home visits from that in his research (see chapter five, for example). It develops a thesis that meaning in safeguarding children's social work is developed through and dependent on a small number of affect-heavy time-spaces - social work offices, home visits, spaces of direct work with children and neighbourhoods which social workers see as the places where service users live.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis has eight chapters. The first examines those theorisations of space and place that have been most influential in social work literature to date and proposes some other ways of knowing space, which can offer useful insights for social work and which have informed this study. A framework of guiding assumptions that can be made is developed, informed by Lefebvre's radical phenomenology of space as well as more recent discussions about topology in the social sciences generally (e.g. Paasi, 2009; Allen, 2011; Lash, 2012, Lury, Parisi and Terranova, 2012) and non-representational theory in cultural geography (e.g. Thrift, 1996; 2008; Lorimer, 2005; 2008; Barnett, 2008).

The second chapter employs conclusions from this conceptual discussion to examine the existing writing about space and place in social work. It identifies

important insights in this literature alongside a lack of attention to certain spaces and some narrow ways of making sense of space.

Chapter three discusses the research methods used in this study, developing the earlier discussions about how space can be known in order to consider how space can be researched in practical ways.

Following this, there are four chapters that report key findings from the study. Chapter four concentrates on social work office spaces, examining these spaces as affective terrains through which social work practice is established as meaningful. These offices worked as intermittently secluded and open spaces, where social workers were able to exercise discretion over how they worked whilst witnessing and engaging with elements of the work of other practitioners. Recent moves towards open plan offices and agile working arrangements are examined and found to have had a significant impact on social workers' experiences and interactions.

Chapter five explores social workers' practice outside of social work offices. It examines social work accounts of home visits and observations of this aspect of practice alongside data from a joint working initiative with a police child abuse investigation team, where social workers and police officers were based in the same office and frequently carried out elements of investigations together. The chapter identifies some features of social work understandings of and ways of being in space, which distinguish it from police work and which

were less likely to persist in close joint work with police officers.

Chapter six examines social workers' encounters with children, particularly the ways in which children's bodies and touch between children and social workers were described and negotiated by participants. Social workers' accounts and practices displayed some problems with how children and their bodies can be known in social work and the chapter explores some consequences of this.

Chapter seven explores social workers' ways of talking about wider spaces - the estates, neighbourhoods and sectors of authorities in which they worked. The chapter considers how social workers form judgements about external and domestic/intimate spaces in relation to one another. It examines the racial and class infused elements of many of the accounts social workers gave of wider spaces and identifies the significance of particular affective qualities in social workers' articulations of these places, such as nostalgia and the uncanny.

In the last chapter of the thesis, I explore the importance of engaging critically with social work space, linking some of the insights already offered to current debates about children's social work, such as the helpfulness or otherwise of early intervention and the significance of social exclusion as a means for understanding inequalities.

THEORISING SPACE AND PLACE

The processes of thinking about theory and thinking about a topic to study are bound together: rather than choosing a focus and then identifying a framework through which to understand it, a focus is already located in certain theorisations, implicit or otherwise. This study started out as an exploration of the 'spatiality' of children's social work but, while I might have chosen the term because it sounded sufficiently erudite for a PhD proposal, it remained open to a host of different theorisations and therefore interpretations. For example, the term is used in approaches as diverse as Anglophone engagements with Foucault's work (e.g. Barnett, 1999), Lefebvre-inspired work by theorists such as Ed Soja (1996) and phenomenological explorations such as Iris Marion Young's (1980) exploration of space and the gendering of bodies. The task of defining 'spatiality', or replacing it with another set of words, therefore required greater clarity about both focus and theoretical foundation.

In deciding how to make sense of space in this thesis, I have considered current debates in cultural geography about the conceptualisation of space, the concepts that have been used most often in social work writing about space and those which seem most useful in thinking about this study's data. This has led to a framework of ways of thinking about space as something

which is produced out of interactions between practice, materiality, representation and experience. Such concerns have arisen out of phenomenological understandings of space, particularly those developed by Henri Lefebvre (1991a) and more recent discussions about affect in non-representational theory (Thrift, 1996; 2008; McCormack, 2003; Lorimer, 2005; Barnett, 2008).

Despite the name checks above, this study avoids taking what has been referred to as the 'spirit guide' approach to critical analysis (Thrift, 2008: p. 18) - identifying a (usually dead and continental) philosopher and then mining their prolific writing for insights into the narrow focus of one's own research. Instead, the first aim of this chapter is to situate the concepts that have influenced my thinking in the contexts in which they have developed and in relation to one another. By doing this, I am able to consider their insights more critically, explore what aspects of the study they are able to elucidate and be mindful of what they leave unclear. This discussion helps to clarify a set of grounding assumptions, the elaboration of which is the second aim of this chapter. Certain of these assumptions can be understood broadly as critical approaches to space, others are concerned with more specific questions such as location and scale. They are attempts to make explicit the forms of knowledge on which the study is grounded, rather than algorithms that enable particular kinds of knowledge to be achieved. These grounding assumptions inform the discussion of existing literature on space and place in social work (chapter two), the exposition of the design of this study, my

experiences of doing the research and the approaches used in data analysis (chapter three), the analysis of findings itself (chapters four to seven) and the discussion of their relevance for social work knowledge, practice and future research (chapter eight).

Analysing discourse, analysing experience

The discursive turn in social work literature since the early 1990s has provided ways to examine how social work knowledge arises through certain structures of language (D'Cruz, 2004; Hall, Slembrouck and Sarangi, 2006) and how social work practice occurs through interactional forms - conversations with clients, meetings characterised by more and less informal styles - that lead to particular ways of knowing (Rawls *et al.*, 1997; White, 1997; Taylor and White, 2000). Alongside interest in discourse more generally, the increasing attention to narrative has enabled new ways of understanding how people create meaningful accounts of their lives, how service users frame their experiences of social workers' actions and how social workers themselves talk about their work (Parton and O'Byrne, 2000; Taylor, 2008a). However, our greater recognition of the role of language and narrative in mediating experiences has arguably made it more difficult to offer convincing explanations of experience itself in social work research. Perhaps what distinguishes Ferguson's recent work from other writing about children's social work is not, as Ferguson (2010: pp. 1103-04) himself asserts, its focus

on 'practice' rather than 'systems' (two things which are hardly exclusive of each other) but its direct attention to experience rather than to sense making, accounts of practice and observable social interaction. Ferguson uses a phenomenological approach in order to do this and I explore the consequences of this for his analysis more directly in the next chapter. In the following part of this chapter I summarise some core assumptions of phenomenology and assess its usefulness for examining space in this study. I then go on to explore some developments and critiques of phenomenology. The first of these is Henri Lefebvre's proposal for a radical phenomenology that maintains a focus on experience but examines how space is produced through action, differently in different geographical, social and historical contexts. Lefebvre's work enables attention to our experience of space, directly and outside of language or concepts, whilst critiquing phenomenology's reliance on the idea of a shared human experience of the world. I then move on to discuss non-representational theory, its critique of phenomenology's starting point for examining experience - the sensing human body - and its proposal for ways of apprehending experience that do not divide the world so absolutely into the self and everything else. Comparisons with other, related and divergent models for understanding experience and practice are made through the course of the chapter. Out of this discussion I identify the assumptions about space that will be used to develop knowledge through the rest of the thesis.

Phenomenology: consciousness as experience of the world

Descartes (1962 [1637]) famously asserted that the only certainty offered by consciousness is the existence of the thinking self. For Descartes, consciousness is separate from the world, including the body, and therefore occupies no space itself. In contrast, phenomenology supposes that consciousness cannot occur except in relation to things in the world - consciousness is always consciousness *of* something external to the self. This assertion opens up a number of ways of thinking. Consciousness is not simply an internal aspect of the mind but an *orientation to* aspects of the world (Husserl, 1969), dependent on our position in space and time and our resultant perspective. Consciousness is also an embodied experience, occurring through different senses (Rodaway, 1994), so is better understood as an interaction between the self and the rest of the world than something internal to the body. A phenomenological approach assumes that things that we might understand as happening in the conscious mind actually occur as features of the space in which the body is located. For example, in 'Man seen from the outside', Maurice Merleau-Ponty considers an interaction between himself and another person who is angry with him (2004: pp. 83-85). Our reflections afterwards lead us to see anger as a thought occurring in this person's mind or consciousness, but at the time it is indistinguishable from his facial expressions, his gestures and the room in which it happens. 'It is in the space between him and me that [his anger] unfolds' (2004: p. 83). This concern with bodies and their environments suggests that phenomenology could lend itself well to an exploration of space.

Rather than engaging in a detailed exploration of phenomenology, I want to focus on certain of its central assumptions in order to examine the ways in which geographical literature has engaged with phenomenology, consider the opportunities that it offers for productive approaches to experiences of space and provide a context for the subsequent discussion of Lefebvre's spatial dialectics. The first assumption to consider is the existence of the self as part of and in relation to the wider world. Phenomenology was first employed by Anglophone human geographers in response to the burgeoning quantitative research taking place in the discipline in the 1960s, largely focused on questions relating to urban development (Yeates, 1971, see for example Berry, 1988[1967]). This research tended to reproduce mechanistic models of human behaviour that assumed rational choices. While geographers such as Golledge (1976) used concepts from behavioural psychology to examine the complexities of human behaviour and question such assumptions, there was still an emphasis on researching scientifically observable processes. Phenomenology offered geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan ways to explore space and place as features of human experience instead. For example, Tuan (1977) examines the development of children's understanding of space, highlighting the significance of increasing bodily mobility, developing vision, changes in experiences of supervision and growth in complexity of cognition to show how children's sense of the scale and nature of the world changes as they get older. This engagement with phenomenology (often referred to as humanistic geography) enabled attention to matters such as

place attachment and identity, how a sense of the spirit of a place develops and is sustained, how some spaces come to be experienced as threatening, some as secure and homely, some as 'placeless' (Tuan, 1990[1974]; 1979; Relph, 1976). These matters each have relevance for the social issues that were being explored by quantitative geographers at the time (such as urban decline or the spatial distribution of retail development) as well as opening up quite different areas of inquiry. They also impose certain approaches to space and scale which might be limiting and which warrant some discussion.

In an early essay, Tuan explores how home spaces come to reflect not just the practical needs of an individual but also their values, aesthetics and aspirations. For Tuan, domestic '[g]eography mirrors man' (1971: p. 181): we organise our home spaces in ways that reflect a sense of ourselves and those selves evolve through interaction with our surroundings. These ideas probably have a great deal of appeal right now (cf. the proliferation of TV programmes and magazines about lifestyle concerns, centred on home spaces) but they involve at least two assumptions that have problematic consequences for conceptualising space. One is the division of the world into two inter-connected spaces: the self and the rest of the world. The second is the prioritising of narrower scales and proximal spaces in understanding the relationship between these two spheres.

To deal with the first point: phenomenology is concerned with conscious experience at the point that it occurs - the boundary between human body and

its environment. In so doing, it produces a notion of the bounded human body; sensations are located at and so define the edges of the body and the body is the default starting point for analyses of space. This makes phenomenology a less useful framework for examining either how bodies sense environments in concert with other things or how things might have their own affective existences - questions which actor network theory and non-representational theory (NRT) have provided ways of exploring (I consider these further in relation to NRT below).

In relation to the second point: because the human body is phenomenology's starting point for engaging with space, classic phenomenological studies tend to focus more on smaller scales of space and prioritise the proximal over the distant. Most of Gaston Bachelard's much cited *The Poetics of Space*, (1994 [1969]), for example, is dedicated to the exploration of home spaces. These are presented as having a natural and timeless, rather than social, significance – for example, the pleasure of being warm by the fire when it is cold and wet outside is said to be 'entirely animal' (p. 91). Bachelard explores how our bodies are moulded by our homes and this intimate concern leads him to discuss spaces in homes that are more likely to be inhabited only by solitary bodies. Attics and basements are of greater significance than the more public and social parts of a house, so too are small, secret spaces. His discussion of the compartments below false bottoms in chests and drawers that are opened for the first time in years (pp. 75-89) are still explorations of the body's experience of space but they succeed in producing a tinier version

of the human self - memories of childhood, the experience of one's body being enveloped by a space which is actually much smaller than the body itself, the prioritising of a secret and intimate, rather than social, self. Even the discussion of immense spaces such as forests (pp. 185-189) continues to produce a sense of the human body as outside of the social, engaged with timelessness and immensity through its experience of the immediate, the proximal and the sense of something vast beyond.

Because of this preoccupation with proximal spaces, even when phenomenological studies turn to larger scales of space, a preoccupation with home space and the sensing human body continues. Tuan's work deals with spaces at the scale of nations as well as houses but he still writes about these in terms of attachment, even though the relationship between self and nation is likely to be qualitatively different (based on identification with abstract ideas, possible only once a certain level of cognitive development has been achieved) from attachment to an object which can be encountered directly through the body such as another being, a toy or a room.

The approach to home as a space primarily of attachment and authenticity has been critiqued by feminist and post-colonial analyses (amongst others Oakley, 1974; Pink, 2004; Bhabha, 1990). Such discussions suggest that home and homeland are not things that we know or inhabit simply as humans, instead they serve as locations from which gendered and racial distinctions are both asserted and claimed as natural. These ideas have been critiqued in

a number of different ways; Kim Dovey (2010), for example, seeks to explore place identity as an unfinished process of becoming rather than something that is already in existence prior to being named. Doreen Massey (1994, 2005) considers the symbolic resonances of space and place but, in contrast to phenomenological discussions that are focused on belonging and authenticity, Massey uses other philosophical approaches to explore our affective connections and identifications with spaces which are far away or which are near but cannot be claimed unproblematically as home. She shows how the 'heterogeneous simultaneity' of space offers much broader identificatory and affective potential than just attachment and homeliness (2005). This kind of work shows that approaching space through the frame of the sensing human body has political consequences in terms of how space can be known and who can claim it. As I explore further in the next chapter, this critique has important consequences for how we understand social work accounts of everyday practice that focus on individual experience and interpersonal exchange.

Lefebvre: space as a dialectics

Since the 1980s, Henri Lefebvre's work has proved highly influential in Anglophone human geography and is a clear influence in the work of Dovey, Massey and many others writing about space. Lefebvre's writing is located within a phenomenological tradition but is also critical of phenomenology's

normative assumptions and consequently proposes rather different approaches to space and subjective experience. Lefebvre does not assume the archetypal human body as a default starting point for examining space, neither does he claim that bodies exist prior to their participation in social life. However, he is equally cautious about an approach that shifts from bodily experience to a focus on language as the initial point of entry into social relations. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre asks:

Must we start out from a *discourse* on the body? If so, how are we to avoid the deadly tendency of discourse to abstraction [...]? Should we perhaps rather take off from the 'social body' - a body battered and broken by a devastating practice, namely the division of labour, and by the weight of society's demands? But how can we expect to define a critical space if we start out by accepting a body inserted into this already 'social' space - and mutilated by it? On the other hand, what basis do we have - and indeed what means - for defining this body *in itself*, without ideology? (Lefebvre 1991a [1974]: p. 195, emphasis in the original)

In maintaining a focus on bodies and spaces, Lefebvre is keen to critique the preoccupation with language of epistemological frameworks such as Lacanian psychoanalysis. Instead, by assuming that space is encountered and imagined through bodies that are themselves already produced through social relations, Lefebvre opens up the possibility of radically different social spaces, experienced through differentiated social bodies but co-existing simultaneously in the same location. For Lefebvre, space is a contested matter, implicated in the production of unequal relations. Even so, we all, unavoidably, exist in space and its materiality offers potential for action

outside of that which can be expressed through language. Space is therefore a site that is available for acts of domination and resistance that cannot be completely predicted or accounted for. This approach to space is used, for example, in John Allen and Michael Pryke's (1994) discussion of the City of London, which they examine as a number of heterogeneous, simultaneously co-existing, mutually contested spaces. The City can be understood as a global financial centre and the term is often used to refer to the multinational financial corporations that use London as a base, as well as the governmental systems that facilitate financial operations there. However, it is also a set of physical spaces that are organised in particular ways in order to enable and limit certain forms of spatial interaction. The location together of large numbers of global financial institutions, the arrangement of work and entertainment spaces in close proximity, the connections between the City and other spaces in London (residential, leisure, civic) enable the City to continue to work as it does. Certain monumental buildings and spaces represent financial and political authority as a historical and secure property of the space, while power is also maintained through more and less apparent spatial practices (for instance traffic management in the City's dense street network, which is organised in part to prevent terrorist attacks on such buildings). This assemblage of spatial practices and symbolic forms means that the same physical space operates in various contrasting ways at the same time. For example, the City is not just occupied by financial traders but by a host of other workers who service this population but whose experiences of the location are quite different. Power operates in these spaces not

through systems of physical exclusion and territoriality so much as norms of spatial practice that establish the basis on which different individuals occupy spaces. As Allen writes, bankers in the City act '*in the midst* of others, yet socially distant, as much a part of elsewhere as they are of the financial spaces of the City' (2003: p. 162, emphasis in original). Space is not simply divided up unequally; instead power operates through relations of belonging, norms of interacting in and representing places and actions that subvert these norms in ways which might be tolerated, ignored or simply invisible to those who believe the space to be theirs. Space is an agent in and a context for the production of unequal power relations but it is not defined in determinate ways, nor is it subject to arrangements of complete and continuous domination.

Lefebvre proposes a way of examining the experience of space through a triad of spatial practice, representations of space and instances of lived space in which norms of practice and representation are subverted. These three dimensions of space operate in a dialectical relationship with each other, with spatial practice and representations of space producing space in normative terms, which are intermittently subverted by lived space (Shields, 1999).

'Spatial practice' and 'perceived space' are terms used by Lefebvre to refer to the everyday and unthought ways in which space is experienced. Perceived space is also used by Lefebvre to refer to aspects of the everyday built environment, for instance the forms of transport that are readily available in a city, which facilitate certain kinds of social encounters in space while

excluding others and channeling people through or away from different places. For Lefebvre, who is critical of the repetitive monotony of everyday life in industrialised societies (see 1991b), perceived space is one way in which people are alienated from each other and their own potential lives.

'Representations of space', or 'conceived space' form the second dimension of the spatial triad and refer to the ways that spaces are produced through dominant discursive accounts and visual depictions. Official representations of space such as the maps and plans used by governmental institutions to understand space are reductive (in that they are able to detail only certain characteristics of spaces) and partial (they tend to present features that sustain, rather than detract from, official accounts of the place). Because of their form, media such as maps also tend to represent space as fixed or static. Discursive accounts such as reports about levels of social deprivation in different areas also employ systems of categorisation that tend to define places in terms of their comparable, rather than unique features (the Office of National Statistics, 2008, Area Classification system - which I employ myself in chapter seven - is a good example of this). Lefebvre seeks to identify how dominant ways of representing or accounting for spaces, while often appearing to be natural and unchanging, develop in certain historical and geographical contexts. The notion of space as a commodity is one such idea: whilst often presented as self-evident, the idea that all space is property has only become a dominant one in the context of late capitalism. Such conceptions of space lend themselves to being employed for particular

political purposes, for example the physical marginalisation of various minority groups whose relationships with space are outside norms of ownership or whose location in space is contested, such as travellers and homeless people (Cresswell, 1996; Mitchell, 1995; 2003; Tyler, 2013).

The third element of Lefebvre's triad is 'lived space' (also referred to by Lefebvre as 'spaces of representation'), which exists in a dialectical relationship with the other two elements of the triad. In spite of conventional forms of the built environment, tacit norms of moving through space and official conventions of representing it, space also exists as a medium in which action is *not* already circumscribed. Although it occurs in the same physical contexts as norms of spatial practice and representation, lived space is 'life without concepts' and, as such, is not determined by these systems. Lived space exists in 'the narrowest leeway' left by conceived space, pushed to the spatial and temporal margins. For Lefebvre, it is 'works, images and memories whose content, whether sensory, sensual or sexual, is so far displaced that it barely achieves symbolic force' (1991a: p. 50). Lefebvre cites examples such as Magritte's paintings and Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture as expressions of lived space (perhaps unable to imagine how art and architecture would become commodified and co-opted into urban development schemes in the late 20th century). Those who have drawn on Lefebvre's work since the 1980s have tended to use the idea of lived space to explore more ephemeral or fleeting counter-cultural and subaltern engagements with space, such as parkour (Daskalaki, Starab and Imasa,

2008), cartoons and street protest (McCann, 1999) and the shifting use of urban spaces by women selling sex (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003).

As Dovey discusses, a Lefebvrian approach to space is likely to share many of the same focuses as a Foucauldian analysis. Both approaches require attention to the micropractices through which power is exerted, they consider the role of spatial structures as means through which normalised subjects are produced and they are equally interested in acts of transgression (Dovey 2010: p. 45). Like Lefebvre, Foucault's work has addressed space as a central aspect of the workings of power (Elden, 2001, cited in Philo, 2004) but there are significant points of differences as well. The most important is arguably Foucault's rejection of any ontology of human being (May, 2005: p. 15). While Foucault is interested in identifying the historical origins of practices or forms that are presented as matters of human existence, Lefebvre's work is concerned both with how knowledge is socially constructed and how experience occurs in relation to, but is not simply contained by such frameworks. As a consequence, it offers a framework for approaching space that is more open to considering agency and less prone to interpret acts of transgression only as features of a broader structure of domination. In particular, Lefebvre's notion of lived space, while not defined clearly or treated consistently, offers a means to identify actions which are not determined by broader social relations.

To illustrate this difference, we can consider how one focus of this study, social work office spaces, might be understood differently using Lefebvrian and Foucauldian conceptual frames. Both approaches might well be concerned with the same kinds of data - how the spaces are configured, the social and institutional processes that led to these arrangements, how space is used and presented. However, a Foucauldian approach is arguably more predisposed to understanding spatial structures as apparatuses through which power relations are established and maintained. It is therefore likely to identify participants' actions as either reflecting or transgressing the spatial practices that are acceptable/intelligible within a spatialised system. Through this frame, space is liable to be treated in more determinate ways – as Nigel Thrift has noted, Foucault's work tends to present space in terms of 'orders' and so space is often seen as a medium through which power operates, not something which is itself 'alive' (Thrift, 2007: p. 55). There is likely to be rather more attention to smaller spaces with clearly defined boundaries than to other wider spaces in which these are located or to which they are connected (see Markus, 1993 for examples of such an approach). In contrast, a Lefebvrian approach is more likely to understand such spaces as having significant effects on social relations while simultaneously being open to transformation. The physical structures of buildings and other places and the lines of visibility, access and exclusion that they produce are treated as potentially important, but space never operates simply in the geometric terms that its representation in a building plan might suggest. While the visual geographies prioritised by such conceptions of space are likely sometimes to

be important for the production of social space in offices, acoustic and haptic geographies may well be more significant during moments when someone is looking at a computer screen or talking to a colleague at the next desk. Experiences such as these occur through different spatial scales from the environment as it is visually apprehended. Defined spaces are never separate from elsewhere, they come into being through imagined links with and movements between spaces (not just adjacent ones) which place them in diverse temporal and other orderings. Lefebvre questions easy assumptions about presence/absence, proximity/distance and where the boundaries of any space can be drawn. This opening up of heterogeneous approaches to space enables power itself to be imagined in more diverse ways, not just as a question of simple domination/resistance but in forms such as seduction, manipulation, coercion and authority, each of which operates differently in space (Dovey, 1999; Allen, 2003).

Despite its insights, Lefebvre's writing is not without problems. He shows how power is spatialised inconsistently and how spaces can exist outside of dominant power relations but, in so doing, he often suggests that certain forms of experience are more natural, less socially prescribed, than others. For instance, while he celebrates sexual pleasure as a way of escaping the closed, emptied out spaces of modern life, he also claims that only with the possibility of pregnancy can sexual pleasure truly exist! Trying to separate pleasure from the risk of pregnancy results in 'the latter being compromised by the elimination of the former' (1991a: p. 167). These kinds

of statements show Lefebvre's lack of critical consideration of gender and suggest a rather pedestrian approach to desire when compared with the sex-positive politics of some of his contemporaries. They also illustrate how difficult it was for Lefebvre to maintain a sense of the body as a social construct when he was seeking to examine experience directly. More generally, Lefebvre's argument that senses other than vision offer a way of escaping conventional power relations (e.g. 1991a: p. 139) seems narrowly psychoanalytic and dated now, given the development since *The Production of Space* was published in 1974 of a consumer culture focused on the manipulation of diverse sensuous experiences.

The unpredictability of power relations across space is an important feature of Lefebvre's work. However, this approach to power also leads some writers to claim that acts of resistance in space carry more weight than they probably do. Two of the more problematic features of much of the Lefebvre-inspired writing in Anglophone geography since the publication of *The Production of Space* in English in 1991 are a search for radical subjects and a fetishisation of isolated acts of radical action in space (Kipfer *et al.*, 2008). Neither of these ways of thinking about power and space is likely to be useful for exploring statutory social work, where solutions to inequality are less likely to be about radical resistance, more likely to involve critical attention to the subtleties of social relations.

Lefebvre succeeds in developing a more critical approach to experience than classic phenomenological discussions of space, while also attending to representation and material practice. The three-fold focus has been used in this study in order to approach space in ways that avoid the reductionism of a focus either on materiality or representation. However, as I have discussed above, Lefebvre's work reproduces some normative assumptions of its own and many of its recent applications have resulted in analyses of space that reproduce simplistic notions of power and suggest solutions to oppressive relations in space that are rather too easy to be of practical application. More recent writing has continued to analyse space as both a material thing and a social construct and has further developed the theoretical terms for doing this.

Topological space

Discussions of a shift from topographical to topological space are examples of this will to theorise together the social and material aspects of space (Allen, 2011; *Theory Culture and Society* special issue on topological culture, 2012, 29, 4/5). An example of a topographical approach to space is that which prevailed in the quantitative urban geography of the 1960s (see discussion above). Here, space is understood as the surface of the globe, across which physical features are distributed in ways that can be reliably mapped. Topographical space is 'container space' (Lash, 2012: p. 261),

defined by its shape, size and coordinates. Topology, in contrast, is concerned with more basic properties of material space such as boundaries and connections between segments. In geometry, different forms or shapes can exhibit the same topology - for instance a square within a circle is topologically identical to a circle within a triangle, because each arrangement creates the same basic spatial qualities of two discrete and nested forms in a larger space. Three-dimensional space can also be understood in topological forms. Wikipedia provides a much-admired gif that illustrates how a mug and a donut are, topologically, identical. Three stills from the gif are reproduced below. They show how the donut can be expanded and compressed and thus transformed into the shape of a mug, without altering its basic properties as a continuous form surrounding a hole.

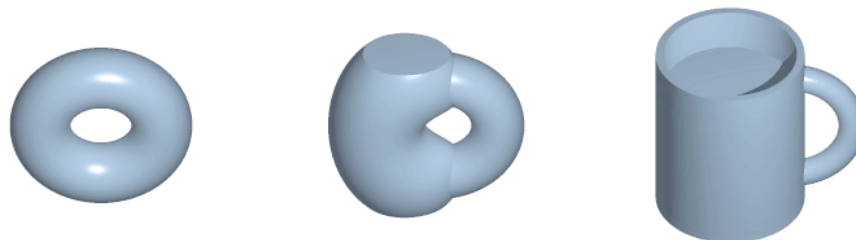


Figure 1 The topological sameness of a donut and a mug (taken from Wikipedia, 2007)

In social scientific contexts, 'topological' has been used to describe both a shift in analytical approaches to space and a fundamental feature of how space now functions in late modernity (Lury, Parisi and Terranova, 2012). In a globalised, connected world, institutions such as multi-national businesses

and NGOs are able to manipulate experiences of distance and closeness to create a sense of connectedness with far-flung events (Allen, 2011). Boundaries between spaces operate in ways which cannot simply be mapped as distinct lines but instead pervade the space of entire countries (Paasi, 2009). Borders make, rather than divide the world, functioning as sites of interaction (inclusive and exclusive) through which adjacent places come into being (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012). Other features that are treated as self-evident in topographical approaches are problematised in topological ones: roads are no longer connections that 'plug gaps' between fields or ribbons that open up development but political and social events that transform relational fields (see Harvey, 2012, in relation to a road building programme in a rural area of Peru). More generally there is an acknowledgement that material space continues to matter for separation and connection, but not in ways that can be measured simply through physical distance. Massey (2006) describes how recent history has shortened the distance between locations such as London and New York for many of those who make the journey, while it takes longer than it once did, is now more expensive and more difficult to travel the same distance in certain other directions. Space should not be understood as mattering any less than before but perhaps it is crumpled like a handkerchief in a pocket, so that some places are now experienced as much closer, others as more distant than they once were (see Serres and Latour, 1995 for a similar argument about time). The ways in which proximity, like distance, is understood are also changing. Boden and Molotch's (1994) essay 'the compulsion of proximity'

still offers a useful discussion of the richness of face-to-face interaction but it contrasts this with an impoverished realm of online communication which seems dated now. The ubiquity of the internet for many people in richer countries, opportunities for multi-sensory online communication and increasing use of online communication by individuals who are also physically co-present mean that it is no longer meaningful to contrast virtual and material spaces in such ways. Most discussions of online communication in social work have not yet engaged with this shift (although see May-Chahal *et al.*, 2014, for a discussion of how children's online and offline worlds should be understood in concert in child protection practice).

Non-representational theory

A further development in analyses of space and experience has been non-representational theory (NRT), which arose in cultural geography in the mid 1990s as a critique of the discipline's then increasingly narrow focus on the representational and the symbolic (Thrift, 1996). As such, it is one of a number of debates about ontology that can be seen as a turn to the material across the social sciences. In political science, Jane Bennett (2010) has argued for recognition of 'thing-power' - the vitality of things as active agents in the world. In anthropology, Daniel Miller (2005, 2010) has been critical of the discipline's historical focus on the symbolic meanings attributed to objects and its consequent neglect of experiences of them as material

things. Sarees, for example, are more likely to be understood in terms of their meanings as gendered and culturally symbolic artefacts and less as items which, in the wearing of them, produce certain material effects and facilitate particular uses (Banerjee and Miller, 2008). In geography, Lees (2001) has questioned the interpretation of civic architecture primarily in terms of aesthetics and historical resonances, instead arguing for an examination of the ways in which the material spaces of landmark buildings are used and experienced in everyday life. Lees and Miller each employ research techniques that are focused on the lived experiences of the material things that they are researching. Their findings contrast with the narrow conclusions that are asserted in literature focused primarily on discussion of meanings: Banerjee and Miller show how sarees can be used for and experienced as many things, Lees explores how the same aspects of a building that have been condemned as colonialist or kitsch are experienced in very different ways by individual users in everyday life.

‘Affect’ is a key focus in NRT but it is understood in ways that contrast with its use elsewhere, particularly in psychology-inflected social work literature, where the term is likely to be used in order to suggest a scientific approach to emotions and feelings. In NRT, affect is described as ‘simply a body movement looked at from the point of view of its potential, its capacity to come to be, or better, to come to do’ (Massumi, 2003: p. 215 in Adey, 2008a: p. 438). Bennett refers to it as ‘the capacity of any body’ - and Bennett does not distinguish between animate and inanimate bodies – ‘for activity and

responsiveness' (2010, p. xii). Affect is distinguished from both emotions and sensations in that it 'does not reside in an object or body, but surfaces from somewhere in between' (Adey, 2008a: p. 439). Lorimer's (2008) review of developments in NRT notes the differing ways in which it has been theorised but identifies a unifying aspect of this body of literature as the wish to locate affect in the environment rather than solely within sensate bodies. Affect is therefore a way of understanding bodies, things, motivations and movements as aspects of wider spaces, rather than features of individuated agents. Prioritising the human subject as the default site and scale for understanding feelings, sensations or gestures is questioned. This approach to affect allows NRT to explore its significance in relation to a wide range of focuses, including bodies and their movements (McCormack, 2003; Laurier and Philo, 2006a and 2006b) but also large, apparently inanimate objects such as airport buildings, tower blocks and shopping centres (Adey, 2008a; 2008b; Rose, Degen and Basdas, 2010; Degen and Rose, 2012) as I discuss in chapter three.

Attention to affect reveals the affective existences of things as much as conscious human subjects; things are not 'mere cladding' to human experience, they are of central importance in assemblages through which experience occurs (Thrift, 2008: p. 9). NRT is interested in corporeal experience but only as a part of materiality - bodies are not subjects in themselves as much as 'tool-beings' (Thrift, 2008: p. 10) which evolve in relation to certain objects and engage with other objects in action. Climbing,

for example, is as much as a practice of the mountain as of the body (Thrift, 2008: p. 11). NRT raises questions that have been explored through other frameworks too - actor network theory has asked similar questions about the role of things in practices (see Latour and Hermant, 2006) while recent writing in anthropology has sought to develop a more enplaced approach to experience than that offered by an approach that prioritises the body alone (e.g. Pink, 2011). However, NRT maintains a more constant focus on the conceptualisation of space than these other developments. As well as questioning a focus on the human body as the starting point for examining either experience or materiality, it directs attention to the role of scale in producing certain political effects. Thrift suggests that scales are imposed to reduce complexity (e.g. by the assumption that office practices should be examined at the scale of the office, rather than at larger or smaller scales). Proximity is often presented as 'the measure of all things' (2008: p. 17) when really we need to consider how objects far away are operating together with those which are close to our focus.

While NRT questions the importance that has been attached to the symbolic in discussions of space and place, it does not seek simply to attend to concrete features of space. The material and non-material are not seen as opposing registers of experience, instead NRT literature argues that a fuller engagement with the material requires a deeper understanding of its *immaterial* dimensions. Latham and McCormack's discussion of cities explores how their materiality is something which

emerges *processually* through interactions between the material and non-material: the 'complex realities of apparently stable objects [...] are always held together and animated by processes excessive of form and position' (2004: p. 705). The suggestion is that, in order to understand materiality, we need to consider the associations and processes through which materials come into being. This focus allows NRT to examine those aspects of spaces and places which cannot be apprehended through solely technical means but which, as I have argued above, notions of *genius loci* or place attachment tend to frame in ways that assume bounded human subjects and reproduce normative moral and political frameworks. Affect, in the pared down terms through which it is understood in NRT, is a way of engaging with this interaction between material and immaterial.

A number of critiques of NRT have been made. Authors such as Tolia-Kelly (2006) have highlighted how, with its move away from bodies as a central site of meaning, much NRT literature fails to account for race, gender and other social differences that are commonly understood as located in bodies. As Lorimer suggests, there may be reasons to be suspicious of the 'pure, blank spaces' offered up by NRT writers 'as open-ended, experimental arenas for the forging of a revisionist, expressive ethics of affect' (2008: p. 553). In arguing for discussion of experience that gets beyond the limits of the body, many NRT writings have imposed a model for experience where the social and historical are occluded instead. Additionally, NRT writers' own claims about the approach themselves point to some limitations. The criticisms of

ethnomethodology made by Laurier and Philo (2006a), for example - that ethnomethodology is focused on discursive acts and neglects gesture and movement - might indicate a wish to distinguish NRT from other, longer established approaches which actually could well have had much the same focus. In this study, NRT is not used in ways which ignore the significance of social structures such as race, class and gender and, while there is attention to how difference is negotiated through reference to bodies, there is no suggestion that such systems are primarily features of bodies (rather than wider social structures that lead humans to find justifications for them in bodies). Neither is it suggested that NRT is the only ontological framework through which this study's broad conclusions could have been drawn.

Identifying some grounding assumptions for the study

Following the above discussion of different ways of knowing space, experience, materiality and immateriality, I want to identify some assumptions that inform the rest of the thesis. In identifying assumptions, I am not seeking (here at least) to identify specific limitations of my approach or an unthinking approach to knowledge. Instead I am trying to identify what can be assumed - what is a critical, coherent, workable way of knowing that can be employed in a study such as this one and can produce valuable insights.

Assumption 1: Space is produced through interactions between different materials, representations, practices and experiences, in ways that cannot be completely accounted for. As with a Lefebvrian approach, this study focuses on the interplay between norms of moving through, structuring, conceiving of and representing space on the one hand and lived experiences of spaces on the other. It is concerned with the mundane spatial features of social work practice (such as the ways in which offices are arranged, the norms of having a meeting about a child with close colleagues and the relationships between work and other space-times). It also considers representations of space that are meaningful for social workers (e.g. stories about certain neighbourhoods) or that are operationalised in their work (such as the use of sat-navs or local government area data). It seeks to understand how normative aspects of social work space occur alongside and are changed by other experiences of space and practices that are unlikely to appear in conventional forms of planning or accounting for practice. A key assumption here is that social work is engaged in spatial practices and barely articulable experiences of space that are less completely closed down than many other professional practices. The practice of home visiting can certainly be seen as both mundane and radically open, so providing the possibility of moments of what Lefebvre called 'lived space'. Other frequent and fleeting aspects of practice - mostly unacknowledged features of interactions between spaces, bodies and other things that occur in apparently unremarkable instances of practice - have real impacts on service users' experiences of social work intervention and (the focus of this study) social workers' experiences of their work. These

various focuses can be seen throughout the thesis.

Assumption 2: There are likely to be benefits in interrogating, rather than reproducing, conventional measures of scale, location, time and distance. I have assumed that space matters for social work, but not necessarily in the ways that it is most often said to do so. Spatial metaphors abound in social work (e.g. secure base, placement, therapeutic space) but these representations might obscure rather than elucidate social work's spatial and material features. Social workers are likely to be understood as mobile practitioners, in that they work across different spaces, but mapping social workers' movements across the working day might not identify the most significant data about location and movement when places can change without moving and movements can occur at scales that are smaller than those being measured (see for instance the discussion of touch and children's bodies in chapter six). Certain scales become the default context for understanding certain forms of practice – e.g. home visits come to be understood through the scales of homes - in ways that could be questioned rather than reproduced.

Assumption 3: Space is produced through processes of interaction between material and immaterial things. There might be insights that can be gained from delaying separating out the material and the immaterial and instead engaging with them in the context of each other. Social work practice and theory attend to both material and immaterial features but these are often

discussed as separate matters, requiring different ways of knowing and different registers of expression. This segregation produces an idea of material and immaterial concerns as both distinct from each other and ordered, with one being seen as more significant than the other. There might be insights to be gained from exploring immaterial and material features together - for instance social workers' physical movements around neighbourhoods and the feelings of nostalgia or unease that they evoke in their stories about the same places.

Assumption 4: It might be productive to avoid leaping to the conclusion that prominent, frequently repeated features of practice are aspects of individual agents or professional identities and are stable across space. Features of social workers' practice such as sensitivity to particular signs of trouble, certain registers of feeling and ways of moving or positioning bodies in practice are commonly understood as aspects of professional identity (for instance 'social work values') or, as in some recent discussions, features of social work bodies (Phillips, 2013). It might be productive to explore these as spatial, material and immaterial forms, the boundaries of which cannot be predetermined. The study explores whether they might arise from assemblages of the material and immaterial such as social workers' bodies, the bodies of other people and animals, other objects and spaces, rhythms and affects. It considers social workers' bodily presentation, ways of feeling, moving and talking about practice as features that, while they might be stable over time, are also located in and contingent upon certain kinds of spatial,

material and immaterial configurations as mundane as office design and urban planning or as esoteric as the continuing resonance of historical abuse.

SPACE AND PLACE IN SOCIAL WORK LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of social work literature about space. Because this is a conceptual focus rather than a discrete topic, the review touches on a number of wider debates in social work literature. It seeks to develop certain arguments about social work's engagement with space and it therefore uses a narrative model of review, rather than providing a systematic review of the literature. Narrative literature reviews have been the subject of negative criticism in texts providing guidance about literature reviews, with authors such as Helen Aveyard (2010) and Chris Hart (1998) suggesting that they are an inappropriate model for academic writing in health care or the social sciences. The accusation is that narrative reviews lack a consistent approach and are not transparent about their methods. Aveyard's summary of the main differences between narrative and systematic reviews reveals that narrative reviews are being defined as the opposite of systematic reviews in this critique: narrative reviews have 'no focused research question', 'no focused searching strategy', 'no clear method of appraisal or synthesis' and are 'not easily repeatable', whereas systematic reviews have all of these qualities (Aveyard, 2010: p. 19). While concerns about bias and rigour are important, this position fails to consider contexts where a narrative approach is

appropriate for the task or where a systematic review is not possible. Other authors argue that different standards of rigour are required for different purposes and a well executed narrative review can provide a good overview of a topic and might be the best approach for challenging conventional thinking, while a recent systematic review should be used for clinicians seeking to understand the right treatment for a particular health problem (Green, Johnson and Adams, 2006).

This kind of argument is an important consideration in favour of narrative reviews but it still constructs knowledge in narrowly positivist terms: bias is seen as something that can be reduced or removed completely, given skilled application of the right framework. While I do not wish to minimise the importance of such matters, if narrative or unsystematic reviews are presented as always unacceptable (as is the case in Aveyard, 2010 and Hart 1998) or as suited to broader topics simply because they are not required to be as comprehensive as other approaches then certain research questions which have no objective boundaries and which cannot be framed in positivist terms are more likely to remain unasked. A narrative review framework is used in this thesis because space and place should not be framed as discrete topics, addressed by identifiable bodies of literature about social work. Space and place are not just always relevant, they are – given the practice and material orientations of social work – often acknowledged to be so, but usually without a critical examination of what space and place might be. They have also recently become the subjects of more detailed exploration and

theorisation but there remain both a small enough number of texts for the topics to be subject to detailed review and a range of approaches which is wide enough to benefit from the more conscious threading together that a narrative review entails. This chapter is intended to draw links between these different elements of recent social work literature while also identifying some of the gaps or limitations in current debates about space and place in social work.

Social work's spatial turn

Until the early 2000s, there had been only a small number of explorations of space in social work, primarily focused on residential homes. Examples of this – Maier (1982) and Harris and Lipman (1984) – each considered questions of control and socialisation through space. The first is a short discussion about space and power in social care services while the second explores certain architectural theorisations of space through empirical research in children's homes. Despite their differences, they conceptualise space in remarkably similar ways, primarily as a matter of the built structures in which social workers do their work. Other spatial scales or understandings of space as a product of social practices are not considered. The two studies raise some interesting and sensitive points, for example about power and practice, but the ways of knowing space that they employ have limited relevance for most aspects of field social work, which is not connected to

specific kinds of buildings in the same way as residential social care. The lack of a simple locational focus perhaps accounts for why children's social work has not, until recently, been subject to much spatially oriented research in comparison to other occupational practices that are tied to defined locations, such as hospital nursing (for reviews of such research see Andrews, 2003, 2006; Andrews and Shaw, 2008).

The lack of critical attention to space and social work seems to be ending. A number of theoretical discussions of space have been published in social work journals, detailing new ways of understanding space which have clearer applications for field social work. Fairbanks (2003a; 2003b) has highlighted the relevance for social work of a number of spatial theories from urban studies, geography and sociology (although he does not examine their practice implications). Crath (2012) has built on Fairbanks' work by exploring the role of urban spaces in racialisation, drawing on an analysis of films produced by young people who use social care services. Material spaces have also started to be explored in social work literature related to therapeutic interventions (Goelitz and Stewart-Kahn, 2008) and supervision practices (Beddoe, 2012). There is an increased interest in the environment as a physical, rather than simply conceptual, entity (Kemp, 2011) and theories from human geography and environmental psychology have been proposed as useful for research about social work education and practice (Wilkinson and Bissell, 2005; 2006). The increasing interest in spatial matters is likely to have been influenced by a longer standing turn towards space in the social

sciences from the early 1990s (itself a response to the conceptualisations of space in cultural geography from the late 1980s which I discussed in chapter one), alongside a more recent reinvigoration of thinking about the environment and global ecology (see for example Haraway, 2008). Perhaps it also marks a dissatisfaction with the disavowal of local experience and heterogeneity across space that is inherent in much of the policy promoting evidence-based practice in social work since the late 1990s. These attempts to theorise space and social work have been matched by a burgeoning literature, both theoretical and based on empirical research, which examines the spatial features of specific fields or aspects of social work practice. In what follows, I explore this literature in relation to five broad areas. This is not, of course, the only way to divide up recent literature and such an approach inevitably emphasises certain interactions between authors while downplaying others. However, the review helps to identify a number of different focuses in this nascent literature as well as identifying some questions that remain unexplored. The discussion is divided into the following sections, each of which tells a different narrative about space as a central concern for social work. As I explore through the course of the review, each narrative is grounded in its own conceptualisations of space and relies on the prioritisation of different locations and spatial scales.

Place explores literature that deals with questions such as place identity and the nature of people's connections with places and other people through place.

Boundary crossings explores discussions of the significance for social work of crossing spatial boundaries, particularly journeys into stigmatised or excluded urban areas.

Mobility continues and extends this focus on movement across boundaries, considering movements across thresholds of families' homes and into different parts of such spaces. The work of Ferguson, the most sustained and conceptually developed exploration of space and social work, is considered in some depth here.

Bodies explores the increasing interest in embodiment in social work literature and considers the extent to which such literature marks a greater engagement with material and spatial matters.

Technologies takes a slightly different path from the other sections, in order to reflect how changes in practice, more than developments in social work literature, are producing new ways of thinking about space in children's social work. It begins by listing key changes in social work spaces that have been required or enabled by technological change, before exploring the extent to which social work literature has so far examined these changes.

These focuses reveal some detailed and theoretically sophisticated exploration, alongside other matters which are so far under-researched. The final part of the review summarises the broad range of this literature.

Place

This first section explores a growing body of social work literature which has

focused on place in order to extend conceptualisations of identity and relationships. This literature questions narrowly individualistic frameworks in social work, while sometimes replicating certain other limitations of normative social work approaches to these matters. For example, Possick (2006) notes that, despite the importance in social work of understanding the person within contexts of family, community and culture, there has been little attention in social work research to the ways in which these contexts are grounded in geographical space. Possick examines threats of 'place disruption' as they are experienced by Jewish settlers in the West Bank and identifies some important points about the significance of place but her approach also illustrates the ontological limitations that can be imposed when social work turns its attention to place. Although Possick uses a methodology – grounded theory – that is intended to avoid theoretical constraints, she still develops only psychological conceptualisations in a geographical context where discussions about place are rarely limited to psychology. She writes about cognitive and behavioural coping strategies, experiences of anxiety and of place attachment or detachment but surprisingly does not describe the political and religious meanings that people say place has for them.

Other discussions offer broader understandings of place's importance for social work but are still hindered by a preoccupation with attachment theory as social work's standard framework for conceptualising emotional connection and feelings of belonging. Jack (2010, 2013) argues that social work has tended to focus on attachments to people whilst ignoring attachments to

place, but his discussion succeeds in producing a version of attachment theory that is more, rather than less simplistic than many existing discussions that ignore space. He offers a story about hefted sheep's connection to the land in his argument for recognition of the importance of place for people (Jack, 2010), one which is rather less convincing than certain earlier engagements with animal behaviour in attachment theory (see Burman, 1994 for a critical discussion of the significance of animal studies for the development of attachment theory's status as a compelling way of understanding human experience). Attachment as a way of framing the importance of place – as a formative connection in early life which deepens over time and through consistent proximity – has other retrogressive consequences which are evidenced in Jack's work. Human experience is presented as '*always* rooted in place' (Jack, 2013: p. 2; emphasis in original), a more limited and limiting assertion than the phenomenological observation that human experience is always *emplaced* (see my discussion in chapter one). In fact, the studies to which Jack refers make a variety of statements about how place is important, which do not necessarily serve as evidence of attachment as the term is commonly used in social work. Several refer to a broader range of identificatory processes in relation to place: Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996), for instance, discuss how place connection might work as a social marker, used in order to distinguish oneself from others. They also explore how moves to new places can enable new forms of identification, with one place coming to represent the old self while a new place represents the possibility of a new identity (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996: 207). They

distinguish between place-referent continuity (the identification with a specific place) and place-congruent continuity – the sense that one should live in the kind of place that is congruent with one’s sense of self and one’s values – ‘I am a city person’, for instance. Of course, such models assume degrees of mobility and choice about where one lives that are restricted for many, particularly children and young people in care (Jack’s focus here), but they do suggest a broader range of potential relationships between place and self than those which Jack identifies. Perhaps this is an indication of the dominance of a narrow version of attachment theorisation in social work understandings of identity; it could also explain social work literature’s imperviousness to conceptions of place that are not organised around the notions of home and homeland that I discussed in chapter one.

The root problem with such discussions is that place attachment, as it appears in environmental psychology literature, does not possess a common knowledge base with ‘attachment theory’ as it is usually understood in social work. Most research about place attachment is not concerned with the developmental origins of people’s attachments to places and, where there has been attention to this question, the literature identifies middle childhood as a key period (Morgan, 2010) rather than the focus on the first years of life in most of the literature that counts as attachment theory in social work.

Attempts to reconcile developmental attachment theory and place attachment literature run the risk of being reductive, to the extent that they relegate the historical, spiritual and collective meanings associated with place that other

geographical approaches to place have explored (Morgan, 2010 is an example of this). They also, inevitably, reproduce an orientation to place as origin or home, which other place writing has critiqued (see for example Massey 1993, 2005 and the discussion in chapter one).

Children and young people who come into public care systems usually move in physical space at the same time and some social work research has examined how experiences of home and belonging have been negotiated following such moves. Torronen (2006) considers young people's experiences of belonging in a children's home while Biehal (2012) has recently explored the meanings of 'home' for children in foster placements. These researchers have engaged with geographical understandings of place, particularly those in humanistic geography, but they have tended to examine questions of place at the scale of households and family type relationships, rather than neighbourhood and region, as in Jack's work.

Questions of place at the scale of region or in terms of landscape have begun to receive attention in social work with recent explorations of spirituality. According to Zapf (2005), social work literature in this area has in the past considered place to be of little interest, with discussions tending to view spirituality as 'non-local' but Zapf himself, Coates *et al.* (2006) and Galloway, Wilkinson and Bissell (2008) each claim that social work needs to reconsider the role of place in the light of learning from 'traditional knowledge' (Zapf 2005: p. 637) in social work. This literature has started to call into

question other aspects of the 'person-in-environment' principle of social work – that it understands person and place as distinct and that it prioritises individual human agency over an environment that is objectified. 'Traditional knowledge' is said to offer very different constructions, for example – 'I am I and the Environment' (Ortega y Gasset 1985 in Zapf 2005) – while environmental social work refocuses attention to the maintenance of environments as an end in itself (Besthorn and Canda 2002). These ideas offer some potential for a critique of modernist understandings of the relevance of environment but it is significant that a sense of place that is both psychological and spiritual has first come to be considered in social work through engagement with 'indigenous' or 'traditional' knowledges rather than, as in geography, theories developed in the academic mainstream and in relation to human experience more generally. As a consequence, writers in social work have been happier to examine the significance of place for debates about cultural competence, which in social work is implicitly understood to be a minority concern (e.g. Galloway, Wilkinson and Bissell, 2008), than they have been to consider the significance of place for all people. To summarise, the literature about place and social work lacks attention to experiences of belonging across wider scales of space, except through the narrow-focus lens of attachment theory or through notions of community and spirituality that are not usually considered to be of central importance for most people.

Despite the prevalence of limited ways of understanding belonging and place, the significance of neighbourhoods has been explored more productively in

some literature. Narhi (2002) has found that social work practitioners employ complex understandings of place at this scale. She examines how social workers make sense of the relationship between local living environment and social exclusion. Her research shows how they identify the importance of micro-spaces, such as individual stairwells in apartment blocks, in leading to much larger areas being understood as socially excluded and they question the significance that living in a stigmatised area might have for people who are in paid work or who have positive relationships with others. However, Narhi suggests that social workers' 'special knowledge' about this issue is also limited in that it is not analytical, is sometimes contradictory, and tends to be based on service users' views, adapted and filtered by social workers, rather than knowledge actively developed by social workers themselves. Narhi's study is important in that it shows that place matters for social work, that social workers are engaged in developing explanations for how it matters and that, at the time that Narhi published her findings, there was little in the way of formal concepts for understanding how place might be important for social work practice.

Recent years have seen an increasing amount of discussion about these issues in social work literature. Jack and Gill (2010) note requirements for social care services to consider the neighbourhood context of safeguarding while elsewhere Jack (2011) has argued that demographic data about local areas should be used in planning and delivering safeguarding services. Other forms of local data are also suggested as significant for social workers:

Holland and colleagues (2011, see also Holland, 2012) explore a number of studies that have sought to use spatial and mobile methods to research the links between wellbeing and the environment at the level of neighbourhoods. They identify the potential benefits of methodological innovations in research methods, such as the use of data from Geographical Information Systems (GIS), for exploring the spatial distribution of social problems (see Hillier, 2007 and Kemp, 2011 who have also urged that social workers should engage with such methods). In a subsequent article, Holland (2012) discusses research findings which reveal the significance of local, neighbourhood based, third sector organisations for children's safeguarding and family support services but also the comparative absence of children's social workers in parents' discussions about local support. Holland concludes that children's social work could be improved by taking on some of the qualities of services that are grounded in local neighbourhoods: in particular proximity, availability and approachability. Meanwhile, developments of social work / social care models that have a strengths base and work at the scale of neighbourhoods or local communities, such as Local Area Coordination (Broad, 2012) or Participle's Life Programme (Cottam, 2013; Featherstone, Morris and White, 2013) have been proposed as alternatives to the narrowly focused, problem oriented approaches that are dominant in children's safeguarding currently.

Boundary crossings

Safeguarding children's social workers' knowledge about and engagement

with places is developed and enacted through movements into and around the neighbourhoods where social workers practise. This is something which discussions grounded on ethnographic studies have considered. For instance, Scourfield (2003, 2006), like Narhi (2002), suggests that social workers have access to privileged forms of knowledge about place but that such knowledge is also formulated and exercised across spatial and social distances. Scourfield's study explores social workers' perceptions of the extent to which gendered identities are place specific but also social workers' views about the similarities and differences between their own gendered identities and those of the women and men who use their services. In Scourfield's ethnography of children's social workers, participants were able to talk about how local gender relations were 'more unequal' than other places, while also distancing themselves from this judgement, even while most of them had grown up and continued to live in the area. He quotes a number of social workers and probation officers who describe their connections to the local area in terms of friendships or having grown up there but stress their difference too. This theme of involvement in and separation from places in which social workers practise appears elsewhere in the literature.

Other discussions attest to the central significance of place both for early forms of social work in nineteenth century Britain and for contemporary social work practice. Webb (2007) identifies a number of ways in which place came to be important in the development of British social work in Victorian

England. Home visiting became a central feature of social work during this period, enabling 'networked mobility across locations and ... a narrowing of a sense of spatial difference' (pp. 200-1). Webb sees social work as indicative of the domestication of stranger relations – a consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation that provides opportunities for new kinds of cross-class relations, taking place in private locations and structured through power and trust. Social work also offered middle class women opportunities to escape their homes and the restrictions that being at home might involve for them. Webb concludes that the development of modern social work is characterised by the power *of* place to transform relationships alongside social workers' power *over* place – their ability to cross boundaries and transform the meanings of the places that they occupied (2007: p. 205). Social workers were able to travel into impoverished neighbourhoods in cities like London and Liverpool to engage with working class people before returning to their own homes in more affluent districts. For these women, social difference was a matter of spatial location, even if some of them also transgressed conventions about place by opening up their own homes to those whom they helped. However, movement back and forth between affluent and slum areas was not the only spatial dynamic in social work at this time. The Settlement Movement involved middle class men and women taking up residence in economically deprived areas (for example at Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel) and, while middle class men were more likely to live in such places for shorter periods before moving into professional roles elsewhere, women – who were excluded from most such opportunities – often

remained in settlements throughout their working lives (Manthorpe, 2002). Koven's (2004) investigation into 'slumming', the late nineteenth century fashion for middle class people to visit poor urban areas to observe and assist people in poverty, identifies social and erotic opportunities for middle class women in the settlement movement that were less available to women remaining in the more affluent enclaves of Victorian cities. Moving to a settlement was an effective way to avoid marriage for women who wanted to continue to work, while it also offered opportunities for romantic friendships and sexual relationships with other middle class women (p. 201) and also, perhaps, broader opportunities for friendship and sexual relations with men. Remaining living in settlements over many years led to different kinds of cross-class relationships from the ones that occurred in the home visiting work that forms Webb's (2007) focus, although we should be careful not to assume that settlements necessarily led to more equitable social relations between social workers and local people. As shown in Crocker's (1992) study of settlements in a number of US cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such initiatives were intimately involved in local politics, often imposing racial segregation or furthering the interests of local industry over local working class people. Physical proximity over longer periods of time did not involve the dissolution of social differences but social workers' residence in the neighbourhoods where they worked certainly provided opportunities for identification, interaction and exchange that were otherwise not available.

Studies of more recent children and families social work practice suggest that temporary presence is now normative, with practitioners much more likely to be present in the areas in which they work for the course of the working day before leaving for their homes elsewhere (see for examples, child care social work ethnographies by Pithouse, 1998 and D’Cruz, 2004). The decisions of so many social workers to live outside of the places in which they work are likely to be significant: moving with familiarity through a place in which one is not grounded through personal relationships leads to particular kinds of spatial practice, as shown in Megan Martin’s (2007) work. Martin describes the experience of being a social work student and travelling across the boundary between two neighbourhoods in East Detroit that are divided in terms of class and race – a movement which social workers frequently perform during the course of a working day. She describes the social differences between these neighbourhoods and the importance of social workers understanding their significance, but she also comments on the ease with which she can cross such boundaries. She ‘felt accepted in both. Being from neither’ (Martin, 2007, p. 466) and she ‘did not hesitate to cross the boundaries [...] because they were not meant for me’ (Martin, 2007, p. 472). Martin is referring here to her own biracial identity but she is also writing about the experience of developing a mobile social work identity. Her journeys reflect the routine practice of crossing neighbourhood boundaries in social work, carried out with relative ease by confident practitioners but also a movement that might well be performative of class and racial difference.

It has frequently been noted that social work operates at the intersections of public and private, personal and social spaces. However, as Reamer (2003) shows, most discussions of boundaries in social work literature seek to clarify the extent of social work's remit by asserting what constitutes a violation of boundaries, rather than exploring the nature of different forms of boundary crossing. Reamer suggests that some boundary activity, for instance around friendship between social workers and service users, may be better understood as justifiable crossing rather than transgression. Given that social work is located at boundaries between social spaces and may legitimately involve such boundaries being crossed, social work is sometimes located at interstitial points in space. Ferguson (2009a) refers to these as *liminal* spaces and, while liminality is usually a temporary experience which recedes as a new context becomes familiar, in social work 'liminality can exist on a sustained basis and last for the long duration of a case' (p.475).

Mobility

Ferguson's work deserves some detailed discussion because he is one of the few writers in social work to have explored the significance of space, movement and the body in detail and, of the literature that I discuss in this review, his work is the closest to mine in terms of its focus although there are also some epistemological differences. Some key themes emerge from Ferguson's writing – applying the recent sociology of mobilities (Urry, 2007;

Adey, 2010; Elliott and Urry, 2010) to social work; the mismatch between the abstracted and fixed nature of social work discourse and the material, liquid realities of social work activity; and the embodied, sensuous experience of practice. Ferguson argues that social work, in particular child protection work, involves experiences that are spatialised and mobile in diverse ways. For instance, the development of a national child protection agency in Britain from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century was dependent on the emerging technologies of bicycle and train, which enabled social workers regularly to visit the homes of families where children were at risk and to track down families that were themselves mobile (Ferguson, 2004). Ferguson (2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b) examines how that later transport technology, the car, has reinforced the role of the home visit as the key strategy for child protection social work whilst also causing social workers to operate in very different spatial milieus – offices, cars themselves, service users' homes – leaving them struggling to coordinate a sense of their role in these disparate environments. Ferguson (2005) also notes that the embodied experience of practice, negotiating disgusting smells and perceived contamination risks in the homes of neglected children, is hardly ever discussed in either social work literature or the professional space of the social work office. He writes about how anxiety, fear and disgust, emotions that are experienced in relation to threats to the boundary of the body and its personal space, become central to the experience of child protection practice. Consequently, social workers may be in danger of becoming inured to such responses and no longer recognising how they might inform their assessment

of a situation (Ferguson 2005, 2009a). In Ferguson's analysis, social work *articulations* are largely decontextualised and disembodied, in contrast to the located and sensuous reality of practice *experiences*.

Ferguson's earlier work on mobilities was based on analysis of records and published discussions of practice such as NSPCC case files and child death inquiry reports while his more recent writing continues to examine child death inquiry reports but, in addition, draws on data from Ferguson's own ethnographic research. This involves methods such as conversations with social workers whilst they are travelling to and from people's homes and observations during home visits themselves (Ferguson, 2011b, p. 81). These approaches provide at least two different kinds of data: social workers' accounts of their experiences of practice and Ferguson's own descriptions of atmospheres or reverberations in homes and surrounding areas. There is also some interrelation between the two because some of Ferguson's discussion of atmospheres is concerned with recollections of his own experiences as a social worker (e.g. Ferguson, 2009a, pp. 471-2; 2011a, pp. 75-6). These data enable him to develop an approach to social workers' accounts that is both empathetic (he shares some of the experiences with participants which they then discuss) and critical (he is able to identify disjunctures between social workers' accounts of events and the events themselves). However, some participants provide implausible accounts of spaces that are, even so, reproduced uncritically. A social worker says that she now only walks in a particular neighbourhood because, if she drove, she

would feel that she was at risk of being car-jacked. Another story tells of a housing estate where infected needles are slid next to lift buttons in order to harm visiting professionals (Ferguson, 2010b, p. 1106; 2011a, p. 44). Ferguson's own discussion of the neighbourhoods in which social workers routinely work refers to 'unpleasant smells, refuse, poor lighting, aggressive dogs, as well as actual threats from service users and/or other residents' (Ferguson, 2011a, pp. 43-4). He certainly notes the risk of stereotyping with these stories and seeks to distinguish such environments from people who live in them but he justifies reproducing the accounts because he believes that they allow him to explore the embodied experience of practice in such environments. However, these stories can also be understood as partial accounts, which work to establish meaning, excitement and movement in practice *after* the event. They also rely on problematic conceptions of space: a simplification of the significance of place for social exclusion, a conflation of entire places with isolated experiences of fear or repulsion that occur within them and a refusal to acknowledge that other, quite different experiences of the same places are possible.

Case file data and child death inquiry reports provide rich data about how social workers and others describe their activity in different places but they do not constitute direct evidence of practice itself. While Ferguson (2004) uses case records from the 1950s to show how social workers were once willing to articulate their disgust in ways that are taboo in social work now, these records are still accounts of practice which construct it as effective, coherent,

moral etc after the occasion, for a particular readership. Elsewhere Ferguson has drawn on the reports of the Climbié Inquiry (Laming 2003, discussed in Ferguson 2005), the two inquiries into the death of Peter Connelly (Haringey Local Children Safeguarding Board, 2008; 2009) and the Beckford Inquiry (Blom-Cooper 1985 discussed in Ferguson, 2008; 2009a; 2011a). In contrast to case files, such accounts of practice often seek to present it as flawed in distinct, appreciable ways, leading to specific conclusions about why children came to be harmed or killed. They also often display structural features that are similar to fictional accounts. The Beckford Inquiry, for example, provides a detailed description of the last home visit during which Jasmine Beckford was seen by her social worker but the report, while in some respects intended to provide clarity about events, is also constructed as a dramatic account (one chapter, for instance, is entitled 'Dramatis Personae'). The description of this home visit can be understood as meeting the report's need for an instance of dramatic irony to illustrate the superficiality of social work practice and reveal how this child could have been saved if events had occurred otherwise. I am not suggesting that either of these assertions is untrue, only that the way that the report finds evidence of them in a single home visit fulfils the narrative requirement for a sole event of missed opportunity. Place provides dramatic force for the narrative but place itself is not typically examined critically in these reports.

Ferguson's writing illustrates both the insights and the limitations of a phenomenological perspective that I discussed in chapter one. Social

workers' affective and sensory experiences are explored with a depth and level of immediacy that is lacking in most research about social work practice. However, Ferguson's concern with social workers' subjective experiences means that his writing is less engaged with the experiences of those children and adults who use child protection services (Taylor, 2008b). There is also an abiding concern with homes and small spaces within them rather than the wider spaces in which children and their families are located. Describing his own experiences of practice in the NSPCC in the 1980s, Ferguson recalls how social workers routinely inspected living rooms, cupboards, cookers and bedrooms during child protection work: 'There was a belief that it was there that the "truth" of the family's inner life and the child's welfare were to be found, and it often proved to be painfully true' (2009a, p.472). While home spaces are undoubtedly likely to be important for understanding certain kinds of child protection concerns, other matters – forms of child maltreatment that are not manifested in or that do not occur in home spaces, the wider social context of child maltreatment – might be occluded by such a focus.

Ferguson's discussion of space and social work is a sophisticated one. In particular, the notion of a 'liquid social work', increasingly represented without regard to context as a 'solid' body of knowledge and techniques, is an important critique of the focus of much current guidance and research. However, it is also limited in certain ways: through its restricted focus on home visiting as the key spatial activity of social work with children, the turn away from children's experiences of social work practice spaces, the

lack of attention to diverse scales of space as they are manifest in these places and the analysis of accounts such as Inquiry reports as if they provide unmediated evidence of practice.

While Ferguson generally explores the immediate spaces around children's and social workers' bodies, other research has considered wider scales of space. Garrett (2006) has used data from the Climbié Inquiry Report to trace the vectors of global interaction that operate in social work practice. Garrett's analysis of the report identifies the extent to which social work is concerned with establishing 'place of residence' and 'local connection'. Criteria for providing a service is not, then, simply about level of need but also about whether a family is considered to be *out of place*. The scale of local authority is important here (the report shows that a great deal of social work activity was concerned with the question of which authority was responsible) but Garrett also identifies evidence of social workers' increasing role in policing *national* boundaries. For instance, even though Ealing social workers did not question this family's legal right to be in Britain, the focus of their work was to establish moral and practical arguments for limiting support to funding the family's return to France.

Garrett's discussion raises questions about how local, national and international scales are relevant in the micro-scale of social work practice but it is limited by its lack of conceptualisation of place. While Garrett notes that place is always socially and culturally located, for the purposes of his article

he seeks to 'concentrate on the more common understanding of "place" as a physical location or site' (2006, p. 316). Consequently he is not really able to draw conclusions about how place continues to matter in the context of the global flows that he identifies. The temptation in untheorised discussions of globalisation is to focus on the collapsing of spatial distances and the increases in mobility that developments in communication and travel have entailed, alongside a critique of the politics of local place that have frequently developed in response to this. This dichotomy features in Garrett's discussion, which expresses concern about the large numbers of social workers practising in London who were not trained in the UK alongside criticism of social workers for being preoccupied with maintaining local boundaries. These are each rather easy criticisms to make but these features should not be offered as self-evidently problematic – something that both Garrett and the inquiry itself do. Lack of experience post-qualification and poor supervision are likely to have been more significant problems than social workers' place of qualification, but uncritical discussions of globalisation can often exaggerate and simplify globalisation's effects. Globalisation, as King (2004) shows, is not a singular process but multiple, unstable and place specific, but these complexities are obscured rather than elucidated in such discussions. Conceptually sophisticated empirical research about global migration and social care has occurred (see Cuban, 2013 in relation to domiciliary care services for older people) but not yet in relation to child safeguarding social work.

Bodies

Recent years have seen increasing attention to the body and experiences of embodiment in social work. Discussions that concern the material, rather than symbolic qualities of bodies also, inevitably, touch on spaces – either internal to the body or at and beyond the body's boundaries. Some discussions also explicitly link questions of embodiment and space as with Ferguson's work, discussed earlier, and Phillips (2007, 2013). For these reasons, it is important to consider what insights this literature holds for research about space in social work.

Some research concerns the embodied experiences of people who use social care services, rather than instances of social work practice themselves. For instance, McCormick (2011) discusses a phenomenological approach to research with older women who use a day centre about their experiences of food, eating and, through these topics, the 'lived body'. While McCormick does not examine social work practice itself, she is concerned with the embodied nature of interactions between herself as a (social work) researcher and the study's participants. Rees and Pithouse (2008) focus on another group of people using social work services – children in foster care. This study explores participants' embodied experiences of living in a foster placement and, like McCormick, they identify the importance of self-image, clothes, self-care routines and physical interactions with carers. While some of these issues are attended to elsewhere in social work literature, Rees and Pithouse note that this is usually within the context of risk management and

so often concerned with limiting physical touch and interaction, rather than engaging in a discussion of the ways in which care is an embodied interaction between people (2008: p. 344). This issue is also raised in the literature about touch in children's social work (Green, 2001; Lynch and Garrett, 2010)

Rajan-Rankin (2013) also uses a phenomenological approach, this time to explore social work students' embodied experiences of studying social work. In this paper, embodiment is understood primarily as emotional experiences (embodied in that emotions are, at least partly, physical sensations experienced through and in relation to the body) or as embodied difference (in that social differences such as gender and race are identified as bodily differences). These are valid ways of approaching embodiment but primarily concerned with the space inside or at the boundaries of bodies. Some wider locations – placements, difficult lectures, direct work with service users – are described by participants but Rajan-Rankin does not specifically explore their spatial or embodied features.

As well as research concerned with specific aspects of embodied experience or specific groups' experiences of lived bodies, some recent literature has attempted to develop a critical appraisal of social work's engagement with embodiment and consider which epistemologies might be most useful for social workers in their consideration of bodies. Much of this literature asserts a lack of theorisation of the body in social work practice and theory. This is seen to be the result of epistemological limitations in social work, even though

the epistemologies that are identified as causing it are multiple. Bell (2012) for instance, names both 'universalism' (p. 418) and 'relativism' (p. 419) as the problem. Cameron and McDermott (2007) blame the exclusion of the body from social work on the current dominance of four theoretical frameworks or paradigms: systems theory, ecological theory, social constructionism and critical theory. While none of these prevents a focus on the body (and, indeed, the first, third and fourth can be seen as key epistemologies for engaging with bodies) it seems credible to argue that many uses of these frameworks in social work have been strangely disembodied. Longhofer and Floersch (2012) explain the situation rather differently: they draw attention to the long history of claimed crises in knowledge systems in social work and suggest instead that knowledge crisis may be an intrinsic feature of the discipline. Social work, after all, is not defined through its epistemologies and methods but through its concerns and purposes, so eclectic frameworks are inevitable and should not necessarily be framed as a problem. Rather than a greater coherence in knowledge frameworks, Longhofer and Floersch advocate greater reflexivity in their use.

Bearing Longhofer's and Floersch's arguments in mind, it is worth examining Cameron's and McDermott's discussion in further detail. They make some compelling arguments about the limitations of predominant approaches to bodies in social work. They explain that the body is present, often central, in social work theory but also 'hard to find' (Cameron and McDermott, 2007: p. 5). For example, human growth and development theories are intrinsically

concerned with the body but, still, it is 'taken for granted, unproblematized and untheorised' itself (Cameron and McDermott, 2007: p. 5). Conceptualisations of practice do focus on bodies but here bodies are understood as 'tools' – features that social workers gain control of, use and interpret in their interventions in order to communicate and build relationships (2007: p. 8). Such a model is implicitly Cartesian: mind and body are understood as distinct and personality is equated with the mind, which uses and controls the body.

In arguing, instead, for engagement with neuroscientific and sociological discussions of the body, Cameron and McDermott propose two paradigms that are not closely aligned but also not necessarily incommensurate. The focus on neuroscience is useful in many places; Cameron and McDermott succeed, for example, in demonstrating the relevance of recent neuroscientific theorisations of emotions, exploring how a model such as cognitive behavioural therapy, which holds considerable sway in social work, is grounded in understandings of the origin of emotions that neuroscientific research has questioned. However, they fail to integrate neuroscientific and sociological approaches when they discuss practice. Their chapter on the body and child protection, for instance, is largely concerned with recent neuroscientific discussions of attachment theory rather than the ways in which bodies feature in everyday practices. Cameron and McDermott's book illustrates a potential pitfall for social work claims to new frameworks for understanding the body – the difficulty integrating biological and sociological ways of knowing when they do not just understand the body differently but

also focus on different elements, iterations and spaces of bodies.

Technologies

Several new and less new technologies require discussion in this review because they are implicated in significant recent spatial developments in children's social work practice. While many of these have not yet been written about in detail in academic discussions, ways of understanding their importance generally and in terms of space are emerging, often from discussions in informal contexts, and so they have been included in this review. They include:

- The increasing ease of use of email and email-type communications (such as messaging via agency specific information systems). These occur for a variety of purposes, from referral to external or distant services to communication within teams and within the same office spaces. This development is implicated in the continuing high levels of referrals to child protection agencies that have been identified over the last 20 years in countries such as Britain (e.g. Parton, Thorpe and Wattam, 1997) and the increasing orientation to screen work in social workers' routine practice (Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010).
- The notion of the ubiquitous internet, meaning an internet which can be accessed through multiple devices and formats in ways which make it

pervasive across different timespaces. Some discussions suggest that the internet is already ubiquitous, at least in certain places, but the ubiquitous internet is currently most often discussed as a feature of the near future. These discussions suggest the imminent possibility of computing fading into the background with the advent of everyday objects that are able to compute and communicate with each other in imperceptible and seamless ways (this is also referred to as the 'Internet of Things'). This literature also notes the difficulties which are likely to be involved in moving from the present to such a world, as well as the problems when systems fail and the shift in norms of privacy and information ownership that it will entail (Greenfield, 2010).

- High speed internet connections and wifi access. While ubiquitous computing is more often understood as a characteristic of the near future, developments in the UK infrastructure since the mid 2000s such as fibre-optic broadband have already been implicated in two radical shifts to new forms of connectivity in social work practice. The first shift is towards a situation where practitioners are continuously logged on to information systems via high bandwidth connections during their office work. Working on a desktop or laptop computer therefore now involves recording data directly on to information systems in the form that they require, rather than writing records which are then uploaded to a database, as might previously have been the case, producing changes in the ways in which such accounts are constructed (Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010). The second movement is towards working situations where practitioners are free to

work anywhere within a building, use secure connections in public spaces or even maintain a secure wifi connection across an entire geographical zone. With such a shift, spaces of physical co-presence (e.g. meetings, direct work sessions) can now also have an online element through access to databases and other online material. This leads to broader forms of information being available in such situations, a move towards information recording becoming a greater preoccupation during such work and a potential limitation on the range of locations where meetings between practitioners or between practitioners and service users can take place.

- The pervasive use of mobile phones amongst social workers and service users. Alongside greater opportunities for more remote working enabled by wifi and high bandwidth connectivity, the ubiquity of mobile phones enables practitioners to speak with each other and to supervisors in contexts (e.g. home visits, whilst driving between different places) where once they would have been working alone and making decisions independently. Mobile phone ownership by most service users has increased the forms of communication that social workers can use with service users, who are now theoretically contactable wherever they are and can now be sent messages instantaneously by text. Smart phones (which are now almost ubiquitous) provide another means to access the internet in any location where there is a phone signal. While these connections are less likely to be used for secure database access (cable and wifi connectivity are still important here) smart phones provide a

means for easy access to the internet for most social workers across all the spaces in which they work.

- Certain applications for computers and smart phones have increased the potential options for communication between social workers and also, perhaps, between practitioners and service users. Embodied online communication (for instance via *Skype*) means that social workers can talk face to face with managers without being in the same location.

Applications which enable tracking of individuals via mobile phone signals (e.g. *Find My Friends* or *Track My Work Force*) are, at least conceivably, now available for use in relation to children's social workers and could be presented as means to facilitate the safety or compliance of an increasingly remote workforce.

- Children and young people's activity online. There is increasing discussion about the internet as a space which presents risks of abuse, exploitation or communication between young people that might lead them to harm themselves (Livingstone and Palmer, 2012; May-Chahal *et al.*, 2014). In this literature, online activity is seen as an arena of children's experience that offers possibilities and risks in the same ways as offline spaces, although there is also an acknowledgement that normative but 'risky' online activity by many young people can lead to higher levels of risk for those who might not be seen as vulnerable. The internet is sometimes understood here as a separate space ('cyberspace' or 'virtual space') which social workers may need to explore and become familiar with if they are to understand risks posed to young people. In other

situations it is seen as a feature of children's everyday experiences, indistinct from the material spaces which young people inhabit.

- Social workers and service users' use of online social networks. Online dating sites were implicated in the Peter Connelly case and are likely to provide new ways in which potential abusers can join households with children. Online social media such as Youtube have been used by parents to post information (usually negative) about social workers' practices. There is also evidence of social workers and service users happening upon each other on social networks such as Facebook (Reamer, 2009).

Technological change can therefore be seen as having several different kinds of spatial impacts on children's social work practice – instigating or enabling changes in where social workers work, the spaces that they are concerned with in their practice, interactions/ relationships with supervisors, other practitioners and service users and the connections between social workers' work and home timespaces.

Children's social work literature has started to examine many of these areas of change, some more successfully than others. Information systems have been explored most fully, for instance in the detailed attention to the Integrated Children's System (ICS) in England and equivalent systems in other locations (Peckover, White and Hall, 2008; Shaw *et al.*, 2009; White *et al.*, 2009; Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010; Gillingham, 2013). The studies on which

these publications are based identify a range of problematic practices that become routinised as social workers negotiate these systems. Alongside the particularly problematic example of ICS, Parton (2008) identifies a longer-term shift in children's social work, driven by an increasing concern with risk and enabled by more sophisticated information systems, from a social/relational to an informational orientation. This entails a number of different, contradictory spatial consequences. Firstly, social work has in the past been concerned with integrating an understanding of the client's subjectivity with the objective account of deviant characteristics that led clients to be involved with social work in the first place. Its concern with the 'social' in this sense locates it on the boundary of public and private or personal spaces. A shift towards the informational represents a step back from this paradoxical space towards a more specific and objective role. Secondly, with a focus on objective and verifiable information there is a greater concern with behaviour rather than motivation, so there is also a shift from depth to surface concerns. However, although it may seem that social work has retreated to more limited concerns, these shifts have unstable and paradoxical consequences for space. With greater use of ICT social work can be practised at a distance, while systems of surveillance can become more wide-ranging, complex and built into a wider range of service users' private experiences.

Because of the perceived requirements of the assessment and decision making frameworks that have developed in England and Wales since 2000, children's social work services have tended to become organised around

different assessment and case management roles and, in many places, have come to be based together with other social care services in large contact centres. These kinds of services have not tended to be reviewed positively. Coleman and Harris (2008) see them as creating particular kinds of spatial disjunctions in relationships, because practitioners are located at a distance from service users and professionals who make referrals to social care services. As well the shift towards spatially distant interactions between practitioners and service users, two other developments in social work office spaces have occurred – a move towards large open plan offices for many field social work services and a shift towards more flexible and remote working arrangements for social workers. These depend upon and institutionalise many of the developments in technology and its use that I have summarised above. They can also both be traced to innovations in workspaces that have been championed by the same architectural and space planning practice - DEGW. The building designs of Frank Duffy, one of the four architects who formed DEGW, have been highly influential in changes to office accommodation for public sector services since the New Labour government's 'Modernisation' agenda from the late 1990s onwards. Duffy's designs emphasise flexibility, openness, visibility and shared space - features of buildings which are said to promote a shared vision amongst the workforce, flexible approaches to working, accessibility of managers and moments of serendipitous interaction between colleagues (Duffy et al., 1998; Hirst and Humphreys, 2013). Such designs are advocated for 'headquarters' buildings - those that accommodate office based practitioners engaged in complex

transactional work involving 'open-ended problem solving'. According to Duffy, this is the core business of modern local authorities. Other, lower skilled 'individual process work' should be outsourced altogether or located in marginal sites which Duffy refers to as 'hives' (Duffy, 1997 cited in Hirst and Humphreys, 2013: p. 1509).

The influence of this approach to office buildings can be seen in many different places across the UK, where local authorities have commissioned buildings that present an image of themselves as modern, transparent, responsive and efficient. These buildings are also said to offer greater flexibility in terms of how they can be used and who can be based in them, helping to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose as the nature of local authorities' services changes in the future. Such characteristics are particularly attractive for public sector agencies, which have frequently been accused of being inefficient, inflexible and oriented towards their own systems' requirements rather than the external environment. More recently, DEGW has also been instrumental in advocating information technology systems that enable 'distributed workplaces' (Wainwright, 2010) where employees are able to work in a range of locations suited to the tasks they are doing or to their personal preference and where they are judged by their productivity rather than more arbitrary factors such as attendance at an office for a particular time period. When they are in the office, they tend to be located at a variety of points where they can access electronic information and communication networks, rather than sitting at static, owned spaces such

as personal desks. They might be given mobile devices such as phones or laptops, ostensibly because these facilitate greater mobility within and outside of the office. However, such devices - particularly if they are explicitly available for both work and personal use - also lead to employees themselves being more flexible about working later in the day, in their own homes and taking on greater quantities of work when needed. Distributed workplaces consequently offer organisations higher levels of redundant capacity, making them more responsive to unanticipated challenges as well as more efficient at doing what they currently do (Wainwright, 2010). The term 'agile working' has tended to be used in social work to refer to working practices that incorporate a degree of distributedness: open plan, networked, flexible office spaces alongside expectations that practitioners operate more independently across time and space, facilitated by secure remote access to information networks.

While agile working is said to be about working more flexibly across time and space, the shift is not simply about where and when work occurs. Rather it is claimed to be about working through trust-based rather than hierarchical relationships and innovation rather than bureaucracy (Tims 2010). Agile working is said to involve practitioners working more independently and being able to respond to changing demands of services, including changes that cannot be fully anticipated. It requires flatter organisational hierarchies and works best in 'edge' organisations, in which the capacity for making decisions is pushed to those points where frontline practitioners interact with service users (Gillies, 2011: p.210). Its proponents suggest that it involves focusing

on achieving core aims, rather than artificial targets. Agile working is claimed to bring 'people, processes, connectivity and technology, time and place together to find the most appropriate and effective way of working to carry out a particular task' (The Agile Organisation 2010). All of these things might make agile working seem an attractive prospect for both social care practitioners and users of services. However, there is currently a lack of critical literature on the subject and that which does exist raises some questions about the reasons for agile working's popularity and its effects on services and practitioners. Gillies (2011) sees it as grounded in a neoliberal conceptualisation of the 'entrepreneurial self', where organisations and individuals are required to be ever more agile in order to survive in a harsh environment, eroding concerns for the greater good or for a balance between practitioners' productivity and the impact of work on other aspects of people's lives. Agile working can be seen as one element of a wider shift in public sector services towards managerialism and marketisation (Harris, 2003; Hayes and Spratt, 2009) which have had complex effects on the degree to which individual practitioners can exercise discretion in practice (Banks, 2011; Evans and Harris, 2004). There is also a lack of clarity about what agile working actually is in practice in social work, which means that diverse practices are claimed as agile and this helps to explain its increasing popularity in the public sector organisations in which most social workers in the UK are based, where a shift to 'agility' rarely involves a reduction in bureaucratic systems or practitioners having a greater role in making decisions about resource allocation, for instance. While there has so far been

limited attention to these phenomena in academic social work research (although see published findings from this research in Jeyasingham, 2014), agile working and hotdesking have been the subject of frequent discussion on online forums such as CareSpace (<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/.carespace/default.aspx>) and in recent articles in the social work press (e.g. McGregor 2012 and, in relation to this research, Turner, 2014). Most of the discussion suggests negative experiences such as a reduction in opportunities for reflective discussion amongst social work teams and practitioners working in more isolated ways.

‘Agile working’ has so far received little attention in social work literature but it is closely connected to the spatial shifts described above and has been the subject of a great deal of discussion on online discussion forums used by social work practitioners such as CareSpace. Social workers who are required to work in this way are likely to be based in large, open plan offices, often sharing work stations with a large group of other office based, mobile practitioners. Proponents of the approach claim that, with agile working arrangements, practitioners are no longer contained by inflexible requirements such as the need to be based in a particular office in order to use an information system or communicate with a supervisor. Instead, working arrangements can be changed to suit the particular needs of the current role (The Agile Organisation, 2010). The concept therefore makes rather different assumptions about new technologies from most of the critical literature so far discussed and agile working has been embraced by many local authorities as

a means to provide office accommodation for practitioners which is better networked in terms of information technology systems, but also rationalised (because of shared workstations) and therefore cheaper. While new technologies have influenced the design of the buildings in which social workers are now based, it is not yet clear how new technologies are being used in children's social work to practise in more imaginative ways. There is evidence that some health and welfare services can be delivered online (see Goss and Anthony, 2009 in relation to psychotherapy) and online locations may offer some benefits (for example anonymity) that are less easy to guarantee in material spaces but these have not so far been explored in children's safeguarding work. The use of technologies such as telecare and internet communication are much more advanced in health and welfare services for adults (including safeguarding) than they are in children's services (Milligan, Roberts and Mort, 2011; Oudshoorn, 2011).

Conclusion

This review leads to several conclusions about the state of current social work scholarship about space and place. Research has so far explored a number of pertinent areas such as the importance of place for the identities of young people using social work services and the significance of mobility and boundary crossings for social work practice. Some topics are being explored by increasing numbers of writers, for example the matter of bodies in social

work, while other topics have recently become the source of informal discussion in practice and are likely to be subject to increasing research in the near future – for instance how technological change is influencing the spatial features and contexts of social work practice. However, space and place are still under-researched topics, with those issues that have been subject to the most discussion so far being understood through a narrow range of epistemologies. Questions of attachment have dominated understandings of the importance of place; spaces have tended to be examined at small scales, most commonly at the scale of individual bodies or interpersonal interactions. In the following chapters, questions of space and place will be explored further and attempts will be made to engage with, interrogate and build on existing ways of thinking about and knowing space in social work.

RESEARCHING SPACE AND PLACE: THE METHODS OF THIS STUDY

Introduction

This chapter considers questions about how space and place can be researched and how this happened in this study. It begins by exploring debates in social and cultural geography about the validity of some long established and more recently developed methods for researching space and place, drawing on the discussion about ways of knowing space and place examined in chapter one. Alongside this, I trace the development over time of my own ideas about how this research should be done, before outlining the methods that were used in the study. I explain how these methods were used, outlining relevant details of the study as it took place in the two different research locations and providing details about ethical approval at this point. Ethical considerations are also considered throughout this chapter as an aspect of material research practice and this reflects my understanding of ethics as a feature of social and environmental relations rather than a matter, primarily, of abstract principles (Hammersley, 2009). There is an emphasis on the practice of doing this kind of research, with the intention of providing

evidence of the project's validity but also in order to explore such research as a set of fallible practices that do not always work as intended even though, in this case, they delivered rich data. I also aim to examine research as a set of practices that involve a number of spatial dilemmas and the last section of the chapter focuses on these matters. The aim here is to provide a discussion that deals with practical, political and ethical dilemmas as they arise together, rather than constructing them as distinct matters.

Connections to Lefebvre's spatial dialectics

In the first chapter, I explored the relevance for social work practice of Henri Lefebvre's radical phenomenology of space. Lefebvre outlines how space is produced through a three-way dialectics of spatial practices and their related material structures, representations of space (discursive, visual and material), and moments when experiences of space transcend conventions of both spatial practice and representation. However, it is far from clear how such a dialectics should translate into actual empirical research methods. While *The Production of Space* (1991), the text in which Lefebvre outlines this dialectics, makes many pronouncements about how space has been produced at different times and in different places, it is not concerned with detailing how space should be explored in any practical sense. Lefebvre's work does not suggest one research methodology over others, partly because of its allusive style and partly because it is not all that consistent theoretically.

Consequently, spatial dialectics has been used as a conceptual framework for

a wide variety - methodologically and politically - of research approaches (for example see the differences between Lefebvre-inspired work by Harvey, 1989 and Soja, 1996). Lefebvre's writing does provide some tantalising suggestions about how space could be researched and I discuss one such example below in the section about ethnographic observation, because it provides a useful way to elucidate some specifically spatial considerations when using such a method. However, in general this chapter does not seek to elaborate my research methodology as if it developed as a logical or inevitable consequence of the conceptual framework I have already outlined. The links between the ideas discussed in chapter one and the approaches to research practice explored below are broader and more implicit. To give an example, my early plans to employ spatial syntax analysis and mental maps (both discussed further below) were prototype methods for researching spatial practice and representations of space respectively, but I eventually rejected them because they each conceived of space in ways which were too narrow and limiting. Later on in this chapter, my discussion about the relationship between subjectivity and affect can be seen as connected to Lefebvre's idea of *lived space*, although these connections are subtle ones that are not made by NRT authors themselves.

What methods should be used to research space?

In this section, I deal with three phases in the development of my thinking about how space should be researched, each of which carried with it different articulated and unacknowledged conceptualisations of space which I aim to explore here. They can also be seen as reflecting wider debates in the social sciences, about the limitations of both positivism and various forms of social constructionism, and a more recent turn to new forms of politics and materialism (Thrift, 2008; Bennett, 2010).

Researching material and mobile features of practice

I began to plan this study at a time when there was significant interest in certain questions of space and children's social work – in particular the amounts of time that social workers were spending at their desks and in service users' homes (see for example Laming, 2003; Ferguson, 2009a; Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010). These were questions that I wanted to explore myself and I thought that some recently developed technologies for mapping space in geography (see Longley, 2011) might be useful here. I had already attempted to make use of spatial syntax analysis (Hillier and Hanson, 1989; from here on referred to as SSA), a much longer established method for examining how spaces are organised and how individuals move through them, in an earlier discussion of physical adaptations made to men's public toilets in order to limit their use for sex (Jeyasingham, 2010). I thought that quantitative methods such as SSA could produce detailed and precise data

about movement and position, just as conversation analysis and some forms of narrative analysis had enabled other ethnographic studies to produce detailed data about talk and verbal accounts in social work practice (e.g. White, 1997; Hall, Slembrouck and Sarangi, 2006; see also Taylor and White, 2000). In what follows, I explore the potential problems involved in employing a highly focused quantitative approach such as SSA in order to investigate space. Similar arguments could be made about other quantitative approaches to representing space and movement, such as the time-space maps used in time geography (Hägerstrand and Carlstein, 2004).

I initially planned to track social workers' movements (perhaps using geographical positioning systems, perhaps through the use of diaries in which participants recorded their journeys), observe their practice directly and interview them about their work and the places where it took them. I anticipated that exploring this combination of quantitative and qualitative data would provide some new insights into the nature and extent of social workers' engagements with places - perhaps it would reveal how briefly social workers stayed in certain neighbourhoods and why this might be, the rhythms of and reasons for their daily practices or how the routes that social workers chose when going to home visits produced certain connections between places and prevented others. At this point, my methods suggested a quite specific focus, which I viewed as a positive feature. They also reproduced quite different assumptions about space: as a conglomeration of discrete but connected cells (as in SSA), as an aspect of experience articulated through participants'

talk and as a range of practices to be observed and identified in research.

The different approaches to understanding and recording spatial matters also bring with them contrasting degrees of conceptual and spatial focus. Spatial syntax analysis, for example, creates a focus on very specific questions: of depth (the number of cells or spaces that need to be travelled through in order to reach somewhere) and ringyness (the range of options that exist about paths of movement between spaces) as well as producing boundaries between spaces as points of determinate significance. Kim Dovey's use of SSA illustrates some of the opportunities and limitations of such an approach to space. For example, in a study published in 2010, Dovey uses SSA to quantify depth and identify illusions of transparency in the structural organisation of recently designed Australian court buildings. The functions of these buildings require high degrees of depth, segregation of different users (judiciary, members of the public, prisoners etc) and seclusion of aspects of their use, while recent architectural trends in countries such as Australia have valued the appearance of transparency and openness in these buildings. SSA enables an effective analysis of these contradictory imperatives, for instance by revealing the extent to which high levels of control are actually exercised in ostensibly open space. These ideas are certainly relevant for some of the social work office spaces that I studied in this project, where architectural resonances of openness and ringyness sometimes jarred with the spatial practices which actually occurred. However, the use of SSA in less specifically defined spaces, to explore much broader questions about social

life, raises new questions. How can discrete, comparable cells be delineated when the focus is the streets, alleyways and indistinctly public/private, open/secluded spaces of urban areas? Using a highly focused quantitative approach such as SSA in analyses of, for instance, public locations that people choose for injecting heroin (Dovey, Fitzgerald and Choi, 2001) brings the risk of explaining multi-faceted social experiences through a narrow set of features of spatial location (although in this case the authors moderate this with sensitive discussion of the sale and use of heroin in public spaces). The point here is that quantitative approaches such as SSA require a specific spatial focus to have already been identified and run the risk of over-interpreting differences that arise in data relating to that focus. (Incidentally, this criticism is one that could also be made of my own use of SSA in Jeyasingham, 2010.)

Turning to representation

The issue of reductiveness can just as easily occur with qualitative approaches to research about the subjective experience or perception of space, as the following exploration of mental maps illustrates. In cultural geography, mental maps are internal representations of places that people develop and employ in order to negotiate spaces as familiar places. While they cannot be accessed directly, researchers can invite participants to sketch maps of a place and examine the resulting images to see the different ways that those places are organised into a coherent whole and presented. Kevin

Lynch (1960) has been widely cited in relation to this approach and his work is worth some discussion here. Lynch was interested in the varying 'imageability' or legibility of different cities - how some cities are easier, some more difficult to hold in mind for those people negotiating them. Lynch identified certain aspects of spaces that held particular significance in users' recollections of them - landmarks, edges and paths, for example. His work therefore provides a taxonomy of features through which people might make sense of and memorise urban spaces. Ideas such as this have been used in geographical studies in which participants draw mental maps of places, showing the aspects that hold the most meaning for them, such as those parts of places where they are most at home or those that they associate with danger (for examples in social work research, see Wilkinson and Bissell, 2006 and Munford and Sanders, 2008). Mental mapping was an approach that I considered early on in the research and it is also one that colleagues have often suggested that I use, so it is worth dealing with the epistemological dilemmas that it raises. A first point to consider is whether the reductiveness of maps is, in itself, a problem. Maps and plans reduce the aspects of space that are considered significant but this might be both necessary in practical terms and productive - a focus on a restricted number of variables can enable analysis, for instance when comparing different spaces. However, the subject of how social workers articulate and negotiate space is an under-researched one and so my study needed to have a broad initial focus and employ methods that avoided, as much as possible, the imposition of limits on how participants could articulate space. I am describing here a question that all

researchers who are doing inductive studies have to consider - what methods can provide valid and comparable data without precluding an unanticipated but important potential focus? However, another, perhaps more fundamental question about this method is whether sketched maps actually reflect the ways in which people understand space or whether they impose conventions that obscure or supplant other ways of knowing space. The use of mental maps as a way of accessing participants' perceptions of spaces has been criticised on the basis that places are not usually experienced through the 'view from nowhere' that is conventional in contemporary maps and that such conventions amount to a socially and historically specific way of representing space (see Holloway and Hubbard, 2000 for a summary of such critiques). After some consideration I decided that sketched maps would impose particular expectations about how space should be represented that I wanted to avoid. In particular, these were ways of presenting space as a bounded zone that the participant inhabits only temporarily and the replication of those scales and features that predominate in the maps of areas that social workers used or were familiar with, such local authority documents detailing sectors and areas, A to Z map books and satnavs. Devices such as these were likely to be significant but I decided instead to attend to how they were used by social workers in their everyday activity, rather than employ an exercise that might provoke social workers to reproduce the constructs of space on which these representations relied.

These considerations led to the following kinds of methods:

- Observation of social workers' talk and spatial practices
- Semi-structured and unstructured interviews with social workers, exploring how they speak about their work and the places in which it happens.

There is a focus here on participants' activity, observed at a greater or lesser distance, then explored further through conversations about subjective experiences that social workers are likely to present through norms of representation and social interaction. These methods are likely to lead to more obviously complementary data than those that I initially planned to use and could therefore be claimed to achieve a higher degree of validity.

However, this assertion relies on an assumption about the centrality of individual subjective experience for understandings of space. By this I mean that the approach constructs practice activity as the actions of people in environments, the meanings or motivations of which can be explored through conversation. While I planned to treat social workers' talk about space as a representation of their experience and practices rather than a reflection of reality, my approach still privileged participants' explanations over other forms of knowledge about action. In the following discussion I consider the significance of non-representational theory's critique of cultural geographical research approaches for the methods of gathering and making sense of data used in this study. I also explore how my understanding of NRT changed during the fieldwork process, because it was only whilst being in a practice

context that I started to appreciate the significance of certain material qualities of contemporary social work practice (such as the buildings in which social workers were based and the phones, computers and other material objects that feature so much in their interactions with service users and each other) and consider how these qualities could be understood.

Researching materiality after non-representational theory

In chapter one, I explored NRT's attempt to move beyond discussions of representation and meaning to a more direct engagement with affect and movement. In this chapter, I consider a number of studies which engage with NRT in order to see how such an ontological framework might inform the focuses and methods of this research study.

Peter Adey (2008a) provides an insightful example of how NRT might change focus and methods of research. While airports have been heavily referenced in terms of their role in enabling fast movements across long distances, Adey notes the lack of attention to the material spaces of airports themselves.

Where these are examined, the analysis is often of their meanings or symbolic resonances, sometimes leading to authors imposing particular kinds of meanings (for instance, Adey is critical of discussions by Marc Augé, 1995 and others, which present airports as 'non-places'). Adey examines a specific feature of the architecture of Speke Airport in the 1930s - its viewing balcony - which enabled visitors to watch planes take off and land at the airport. Rather

than examining the appearance or meanings of the structure itself, Adey is interested in the viewpoints that it enables - the pleasures involved in watching aircraft and the wider social significance of arranging space in order to create aeroplanes as something to travel to and enjoy as spectacle. In another paper, Adey (2008b) examines the architecture of contemporary airports, showing how they function as assemblages of sites and the bodies that move through them, which are together organised to produce a range of different affective experiences - excitement, caution, anxiety, passivity - as they interact in different parts of the airport.

Adey's work on airports and other NRT-informed discussions of architectural forms show a move away from the kind of analysis of building spaces offered by Lees (2001), which I discussed in chapter one. Lees is also interested in the everyday but she understands buildings as spaces that are consumed by users, often in ways that are quite different from those intended by the architect. NRT avoids automatic distinctions between human and environment and this enables questions to be asked about how and where affective experiences arise. These are likely to be useful but, as more recent writing has identified, such questions bring potential limitations too. For example, while Rose, Degen and Basdas (2010) also consider the ways in which buildings are involved in the production of affects, they are concerned about the limited ways in which emotional experience is apprehended in NRT and another relevant ontological framework - actor network theory (ANT). They argue that ANT has tended to acknowledge emotion but (because of its focus

on relations involving agents other than living beings) not attend to it, while NRT's insistence on a material, non-subjective understanding of affect prevents it from engaging with the reality of emotional experience at all. My study has always been focused on social workers' experiences, actions and utterances. NRT can certainly enable a critical approach to the situating of subjects at the centre of the research question but, even so, social workers' actions and experiences remain valid focuses for research. I have therefore aimed at an approach which is sensitive to affect and movement as features of environments, while also attending to how they are described by feeling, thinking participants, and Rose and colleagues' arguments are relevant here.

Rose and colleagues are interested in the ways in which buildings and individuals are *co-constituted*. Buildings are understood as performative events: whilst they appear to be solid objects they are actually 'held together' by the ways in which they are used and experienced by individuals inhabiting or passing through them (2010: p. 335). Experience and use are given particular salience as actively involved in the production of building spaces. Rather than being 'consumed' in anticipated or subversive ways, more recent writers are interested in how buildings are 'reproduced' through uses (Jacobs, 2006 in Rose, Degen and Basdas, 2010). Spaces themselves change through being used. Approaches such as these enable attention to the material aspects of buildings without distinguishing these from the symbolic meanings of the wider space. So, to return to my study, a building such as Forest House can be researched by attending to how practitioners use,

experience and talk about the space. Features such as openness, clean lines, light and sterility (all of which are qualities of Forest House that I discuss in chapter four) each have material aspects that come into being through social action and experience, rather than being features of the environment that already existed. This way of understanding space requires the researcher to attend to behaviour, interactions and talk, such as comments on the space or verbal suggestions to behave in certain ways. Material aspects of spaces are attended to in terms of how they interact with users, rather than through the resonances of architectural style *per se*, leading to some quite different kinds of analyses. The approach can be seen as drawing on NRT's insights about the located nature of feelings, sensations and emotions and the production of spaces such as large buildings through social action, whilst also enabling subjectivities to be explored.

The methods used in this study

The design of this study was informed by the NRT explorations of experience and space that I have discussed. The methods used can be summarised as follows:

- Observations of social workers and the environments, people, animals and things with which these social workers interacted in their work. This included observation of social workers at their desks and in other parts

of office spaces; in more and less formal meetings such as supervision sessions, strategy discussions, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) and legal planning meetings; travelling to and from home visits and during home visits themselves.

- Conversations and unstructured interviews during the course of observations with social workers and other practitioners based in the same workplaces. Many of these conversations were ones that arose between participants, where I became involved myself. At other times, social workers sought to explain directly to me what they were doing at the time or talked about another aspect of their practice. As well as these interactions, I also initiated conversations with participants, asking them to talk about something specific such as the history of their involvement with a particular family or individual.
- Semi-structured interviews with social workers and other professionals carried out in social work offices, but separate in time and space from the observations. These focused on social workers' everyday practices, particularly spatial and movement-related aspects, social workers' views about the places in which they worked at various scales – e.g. workspaces, neighbourhoods and the areas that their teams covered - and also specific issues that had come up during the observations, which I wanted to explore further.
- Mobile interviews with social workers, during which they showed me around the places where they worked by driving or walking around with me. The ostensible purpose of these interviews was for social workers

to show me the places and talk to me about them but, in practice, I was guided by what social workers seemed to want to talk about. Most interviews included accounts of social workers' and service users' experiences, tactics that social workers used in their everyday work, their views about the places that we visited and more general views about place and space, such as the significance of features of the physical environment for social exclusion or the experience of doing home visits as a social worker.

The research sites

The research was done in two different local authorities, which are referred to here as Lumberton and Alphaville. The first local authority that I approached did not agree to me carrying out research with safeguarding social workers, saying that it would present excessive demands on practitioners' time. I then approached a senior manager in the local authority in which Lumberton is located and they indicated that it would be possible to do the research there. Initially, there were discussions about me doing a piece of research for the local authority about the progression of cases subject to proceedings but, in the end, this was not required. While I was carrying out fieldwork at Lumberton, the opportunity arose to carry out an evaluation of a pilot Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub in Alphaville. The city council in Alphaville agreed for me to carry out research for my doctoral study alongside the evaluation. The research strategy was therefore to do a study of two cases, a team of

social workers in Lumberton who were based in one office and a group of three smaller social work teams in Alphaville who all covered the same area of the city (South sector). These teams were based in a local authority social care office (termed Forest House in this thesis) for two in every three weeks and took turns to be based for one week at a time in the MASH office in a nearby police station (referred to here as Birchwood Road Police Station). My status as a researcher was therefore different in each site – I was seen as a student researcher in the first site and as an evaluation researcher in the second – and these different roles inevitably affected how participants responded to me (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) as I explore in more detail later in this chapter. The approach to sampling the cases was opportunistic – an acceptable one given the study also had a broad initial focus (space and safeguarding children’s social work) and so there were no specific research questions or theories that were being tested which might have required a purposive approach to sampling (Silverman, 2013). An opportunistic approach to sampling was also appropriate given the difficulties that I have already described in gaining access to do observational research with children’s social workers.

Table: data gathered at each site

Site	Lumberton	Alphaville	Total
Participants observed	18	28	46
Participants interviewed in the office	9 (2 family support workers, 5 social workers, 1 team manager, 1 senior police officer)	15 (3 team managers, 2 social workers, 2 health representatives, 4 detective constables, 1 detective sergeant, 3 staff from estates dept)	24
Participants interviewed during mobile interviews	3 (3 social workers, including 1 also interviewed in the office)	4 (3 social workers and 1 police officer, 3 interviews carried out, 1 participant also interviewed in office)	7 (including 2 participants who were also interviewed in the office)
Total participants interviewed	11	18	29
Observation length (hours)	176	80	256
Home visits observed	4	3	7
MARACs observed	3	0	3
Supervision sessions observed	2	0	2

As the above suggests, the sites were not selected because of particular

qualities of either place itself or because they made a good comparison. However, they are, in many ways, interesting examples of different contexts for social work with children, which invite comparison. Lumberton is a medium-sized town in a shire county while Alphaville is a relatively large city by English standards and a metropolitan borough. Lumberton is a socially diverse town with some areas experiencing significant social deprivation; Alphaville as an entire authority has very high levels of social deprivation when compared with other parts of England, although some areas of the city are affluent too. Alphaville is an ethnically diverse place, Lumberton is overwhelmingly White British. Alphaville has developed over the last two centuries while Lumberton is an 'expanded town' - so subject to much of the same planned development since the mid 20th century as Britain's 'new towns'. The populations of places like Alphaville have, until recently, been decreasing, with many of those people moving to towns like Lumberton.

There were interesting comparisons to be made about how children's social care services were being delivered in the two sites. Alphaville, like many authorities at the time of the research, was reorganising to locate social workers in large open-plan offices with shared workstations and 'agile working' arrangements, while social workers in Lumberton continued to be based in small offices where practitioners had their own desks. The MASH pilot in Alphaville led police Child Abuse Investigation officers and children's safeguarding social workers to work closely together but this was not happening in Lumberton. Despite some interesting points of comparison, the

sites both provided data about practice within the contemporary political and cultural contexts of British children's social work. There were many more similarities between the two sites than differences and, in the chapters which follow this one, I frequently draw on data from both sites in order to explore the key themes of the thesis.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for the study was initially granted by Lancaster University, where I was registered for the first two years of the PhD. Following my transfer in 2010, ethical approval was granted by the University of Birmingham. Once the local authority covering Lumberton agreed in principle for me to carry out research there I made an application through a regional research governance board used by that local authority, which granted formal approval for the research in 2011. Later in 2011, the city council for Alphaville agreed for me to conduct an evaluation study of their Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub pilot project and for me to use findings from this study for my doctoral research. The ethical approval granted by Birmingham University also covered this research.

Ian Butler (2002) has outlined a code of ethics for social work research, based on analysis of prior frameworks within social work research, social research more broadly and other realms of research such as in medicine. In doing so, Butler acknowledges that his framework is, in many ways, coterminous with

research in other disciplines, for instance in the importance that it places on research participants' autonomy, the competence of the research practitioner and the importance of ensuring that the research does no harm. If one aspect makes it distinctive, it is the emphasis placed on the responsibility of social work researchers to empower social work service users (point 2 in Butler's code) and, 'where appropriate, to seek to predicate their work on the perspective and lived experiences of the research subject' (point 5 of the code, Butler, 2002: p. 245). This study has been carried out in accordance with Butler's code but it is worth noting that, although the study is of social workers' practice, it has little to say about service users' experiences themselves. It is unlikely that this research would have a direct impact in empowering social work service users although, given it draws conclusions about some problems with some ways of delivering safeguarding services which are normative, it holds the potential to improve social workers' experiences and, through this, to effect positive changes in service users' experiences of social work.

Data

I began the fieldwork in Lumberton with a continuous two week period, followed by a period of three months during which I spend one day a week there. A month after the fieldwork at Lumberton ended, I began observations at Alphaville. This was a shorter period - one day a week over 10 weeks - which was more specifically focused on social workers' and police officers' work together (although I also became interested in social workers'

experiences of their workspaces more generally, given the changes that were occurring in Alphaville at the time). Interviews were carried out during these periods of observation at each site - nine at Lumberton, 14 at Alphaville. Most interviews took place in separate rooms in social workers' offices but a small number (three at each site) took place while participants drove or walked around the areas where they worked (these are referred to as the mobile interviews).

As I have suggested, this research strategy was heavily influenced by what was possible to do at either site, rather than what would make an ideal place to research. In Lumberton I had no agreement to observe work with service users and so my observations were of office interactions and meetings involving only professionals. In Alphaville, my focus was still practitioners but I was permitted to observe work with service users, as long as they consented and there seemed not to be a negative impact. As a result, I was present during a small number of home visits (seven in total) alongside some chance interactions between social workers and service users in public locations.

In Lumberton all the social workers and family support workers agreed to me carrying out observations in the office but some were reluctant to be interviewed, while others agreed to an interview but were never available when I was around to do one. In total, I interviewed just over half the practitioners in the safeguarding team where I was based. At Alphaville, my role in carrying out an evaluation was probably a factor in me being able to

interview a larger number of participants. I interviewed around half the police officers in the Child Abuse Investigation Team and one of the two Detective Sergeants, half of the social workers in two of the three children's safeguarding teams in the area and all three team managers.

Credibility

As the above suggests, the data result from a series of compromises between what I might have considered ideal and what participants were able to do or what they were comfortable with doing. The interviews at each site enabled me to talk to slightly more than half the practitioners there while observations included all practitioners at each of the two sites, allowing me to draw conclusions about a range of aspects of safeguarding practice rather than just the practices of those who were willing to be interviewed. I carried out approximately 256 hours of observations in social work offices, meetings, home visits and the journeys between. My observations in certain of these settings were too limited to draw conclusions. For instance, I observed three Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Meetings (formal multi-agency meetings which coordinated protective supports to victims of domestic violence) - enough to gain certain insights into how more formal meetings worked but not enough to draw specific conclusions about MARAC as a framework for joint planning. In other respects, however, the observations offered a wealth of data. Most of the observations and much of the discussions in interviews concerned activity in offices, providing enough data to enable insights into practice in these

locations. The seven home visits that I observed directly provide restricted but rich data that I have been able to analyse through comparison with data from interviews and conversations about practice in homes and observation in other places. More generally, I have tried to identify examples of phenomena that occurred frequently, rather than incidents that, while interesting, were exceptional. In many places more than one event is detailed so that this can be evidenced. In other circumstances where a detailed description is required, a single event is included – for example, the ‘Carrie’ home visit in chapter 5 – but this example is still used to explore aspects of home visiting that were evident in other observed visits. Some of the insights developed here chime with the findings of other research and, where this is the case, references are made in order to demonstrate the plausibility of the conclusions.

In relation to all the data discussed in chapters 4 to 7, I have considered the degree to which the study’s findings can be seen to demonstrate credibility (the extent to which they can be seen as reflecting the truth of what I have researched). Where possible, I have used methodological triangulation to do this – in other words I have examined the extent to which evidence drawn from one method might confirm evidence from another method of enquiry. The discussion about interruptions in chapter 4 is an example of this because it draws on data from observations and semi-structured interviews. Of course, these different methods do not provide evidence of the same thing; observations focus on certain perspectives and scales of space and

movement while interviews provide evidence of how such matters can be presented in talk. This has been noted in the literature about qualitative methodologies, with the term 'triangulation' being used to refer to methods which, while not providing corroborating data on the same matter, might increase credibility or identify different features of a particular focus and therefore enrich the discussion (Seale, 1999). In other places, it has not been possible to present data about the same specific issue that has been gathered through different methods, although data from different sources is still used. For example, in chapter 6 I discuss data gathered from interviews, field conversations and observations to examine the broad topic of children's bodies but each source provides different insights. The conclusions that are drawn are therefore framed more tentatively here, with the chapter raising questions more often than it asserts firm conclusions.

Finally, I have also attempted to consider the extent to which my analyses concur with the views and experiences of research participants. Where it has been possible to contact them, I have provided participants with drafts of the findings chapters, although this has only resulted in responses from the people that I interviewed from the Estates Department in Alphaville, who agreed with the conclusions presented in chapters 4 and 8 about office activity in that site, and one participant from one of the safeguarding social work teams. The limited response from participants generally is, perhaps, due to the lack of time available to social workers to read and comment on academic research.

Recording

The data used in this thesis is from fieldnotes, interview transcripts, notes made during the small number of interviews that were not recorded and photographs, sketches or two dimensional models of research sites (I discuss the use of images in a later section of this chapter about methods of presentation of findings).

During office observations and less formal discussions that took place in the offices where I was based (for example, strategy discussions), I generally typed fieldnotes contemporaneously. These were contexts where computers were already being used by others and it seemed acceptable for me to do this as well. During home visits and more formal meetings such as MARACs, typing fieldnotes would have been disruptive or inappropriate for other reasons and so notes about these events were made later on the same day. Fieldnotes generally concerned my visual, auditory and other sensory perceptions of the environments where observations took place. They involved records of conversations, material features of environments, atmospheres and also, sometimes, my own changing experience of observation sites such as temperature and my sense of how quickly time was passing.

Participants were informed that I was making fieldnotes and that they could see notes about contexts where they were present if they wished, although no-one asked to do this. Observations were not audio-recorded because of

the concerns of some participants that they might be recorded unknowingly, for instance while I was present in the office. In addition to notes during or directly after observations, I made other notes about my reflections and initial analyses of observations, which were distinguished from descriptive fieldnotes. Wherever fieldnotes are quoted in the findings chapters, I provide details about how they were recorded.

Of the 29 interviews that I carried out, 27 were audio-recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriber who entered into an agreement to respect anonymity. Two participants did not agree to being audio-recorded and so I made notes during their interviews. Data from these interviews was more limited as a consequence and has only been used in this thesis on one occasion, where I was able to record the exact words that the participant used. The reluctance of these participants to be recorded is something which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Anonymisation

In order to protect the anonymity of individuals and agencies that participated in the research, I have used pseudonyms for all the people and places referred to in this thesis. This has involved considering how participants might be able to identify each other and minimising description of features that could enable this to happen. Participants have generally been given a pseudonym that matches their gender but, occasionally and only when gender is not itself

a focus of discussion, gender has been changed in order to promote anonymity. References to gender that do not identify specific individuals (for instance, descriptions of the numbers of men and women in a team) are accurate. Similarly, where ethnicity or race are relevant for the discussion, I have provided accurate data about these aspects participants' identity but, in discussions where these matters are not being explored, I have not provided such details and have sometimes used pseudonyms that suggest a different ethnic origin, in order to lessen the risk of participants identifying each other. Throughout, I have chosen pseudonyms in order to promote anonymity rather than asking participants to choose their own pseudonym or choosing a pseudonym that appeared to me to be a good fit with that person.

Participants were asked to anonymise information about service users that they discussed with me in interviews, while I used pseudonyms to refer to all service users in my own fieldnotes. Generally, I have limited myself to discussion of data that did not include private aspects of participants' own experience. This has not been possible in relation to service users (given the nature of most safeguarding work) but, where intimate matters are discussed, these are sufficiently general so that individuals are very unlikely to be identifiable.

The thesis features photographs of the inside of one office and of external locations in one of the fieldwork locations. The photograph of the office has been altered so that any identifying information has been obscured. I have tried to ensure that all the photographs of external locations are not easily

identifiable unless the viewer already knows the research location well and no photographs feature the immediate surroundings of the homes of service users who were discussed during the research.

The names of places have been replaced in this thesis in order to maintain the anonymity of local authorities and other participating agencies. The two research sites are referred to as Lumberton and Alphaville - names that were inspired by certain findings of the study. Lumberton was the location for the first fieldwork, which revealed the importance that social workers attached to the uncanny qualities of place. It is a medium sized town not known for severe social problems, yet social workers were keen to tell me about its troubles. For this reason, it is named after the town in David Lynch's 1986 film *Blue Velvet*, superficially quaint but horrifying and enthralling underneath. In *Alphaville*, a film directed by Jean-Luc Godard (1965), the eponymous city is controlled by a computer and emotion and individuality are outlawed. *Alphaville* features certain spare minimal interiors not so dissimilar from the office spaces that participants in the second site talked about with me, which led to the choice of pseudonym for that place. Smaller places within each site are named rather more arbitrarily – neighbourhoods and streets in Lumberton are given the names of different ferns (e.g. Sunset [fern], Western Cliff [fern]); in Alphaville they are named after trees. These choices do not, in themselves, reflect any significant truths about the places but they are sufficiently resonant to sustain the deep meaning that social workers attached to these places and this is the reason why they have been used.

Negotiating space during the fieldwork process

Carrying out ethnographic research raises a number of spatial-ethical matters, which I discuss in this section. In the first instance, negotiations about access are likely to bring with them questions about how to relate to others who might initially be strangers, how to offer or accept hospitality and the balancing of one's own concerns with the wishes and priorities of others (all of which are long-standing focuses of debate in ethics literature). These feature various spatial matters - the material spaces to which the question of access relates and the spaces produced by the movement and interactions of bodies during the course of the fieldwork itself. They also, as with so many aspects of social work, involve concerns about the dangers that proximity and contact might involve.

In the following section, I explore these matters as they relate to the time-spaces prior to the research being agreed and during the whole fieldwork process. Questions are raised about what researchers and participants are imagined to be, the material bodies of researchers and participants and how spatial questions - of location and movement - are central to all ethnographic practice, whether space is a research focus or not.

Access and imagined contact in social work ethnography

Access is likely to be a delicate matter in any ethnographic study but there are some specific considerations in relation to social work ethnographies. One

issue is the cautious attitude that social work agencies and individuals often display towards research that uses an ethnographic approach. While the benefits of practice-near research are frequently acknowledged in social work and calls have been made for social work educators and academics to become more familiar with practice concerns (see for example Social Work Task Force, 2009), research techniques such as observation are likely to be less familiar to social work practitioners than they might be to other professional groups, given the smaller number of ethnographies of social work practice than in other areas. On the other hand, social work research is currently subject to less formalised governance processes than is the case in professions such as medicine, where much more ethnographic research has taken place. This creates a context where researchers are subject to less explicit interrogation about their plans but where there remains a degree of implicit caution about the researchers' activity that can continue through the course of their research. An example from Scourfield's ethnographic study of children's social workers, carried out in the mid 1990s, illustrates how this might be played out in practice. Scourfield and Coffey (2006) discuss how, when Scourfield attempted to gain access to do research in one authority there was a suggestion that, because he was a man, he might be trying to gain access to children in order to sexually abuse them. In this case, it seems that the decision to allow ethnographic research rested with one senior manager who, after considerable delay, allowed Scourfield to interview social workers but not to carry out observations or have access to records, as had been requested. One person was able to limit access without having to

provide the justification that a more formalised system would have required, but presumably this person was also conscious of the greater likelihood of being held individually accountable than if such a system had existed. I do not mean to suggest here that more formalised governance systems for social work research would promote a culture that is more open to ethnographic research, because ambiguity about research ethics is not the only factor at work. Scourfield and Coffey (2006) draw attention to increasing concerns about children's vulnerability to abuse in decisions about research access, while others suggest that male researchers in other areas of social science research are also increasingly cautious about being seen as potential child abusers (Pole, 2007). More recently, greater media attention has been given to some women's participation in the sexual abuse of children and, while this is unlikely to lead to lower levels of suspicion about men, it might well lead to a greater levels of caution about any researchers who seek contact with children.

There was never any suggestion during my research that I was being viewed as a potential risk to children. In fact, given the shift away from talk about gender in terms of oppressive masculinity (which prevailed at the time of Scourfield's research: see Scourfield, 2003) towards a paradigm of equality and diversity, this would probably be a less acceptable assertion for social workers to have made at the time of my fieldwork than it might have been 15 years before. Instead, I found that I was granted access alongside a continuing cautious, sometimes even suspicious, approach to my research

activities. This was particularly so in Lumberton, where I had been granted access solely as a PhD student rather than as an evaluation researcher, and I discuss some idiosyncratic effects of this suspicious granting of access below. I also develop a wider discussion of access as a practical and spatial matter, less a question of initial contact with gatekeepers than a concern which pervades the fieldwork process.

Access as spatial practice

The spatial elements of access are not simply about getting into a place in order to observe, but also about how to respond to uncertainties about access as they arise during the fieldwork. For example, in Lumberton I had agreement to observe events in the office and in professionals' meetings but not to see case records or to observe social workers' interactions with service users. In practice, I had access to a great deal of sensitive information about service users and social workers' practices through listening to conversations about cases and participants also frequently chose to tell me about these cases in detail. However, participants also sometimes raised concerns or displayed disapproval about me having written information of any kind. To give some examples, I was included in frequent discussions about the impending reorganisation of social work services but when a social worker printed off a quite innocuous circular about the reorganisation for me to keep, the team manager's facial expression suggested this would be a breach of our agreement and so I declined the offer. In the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment

Conferences that I attended, I was able to observe all discussions but was not allowed to have sight of the written agenda for the meeting, even though all the information on the agenda was read out in the meeting. My access agreement for Lumberton did not preclude me seeing such documents but this did not prevent participants from feeling that access to these artefacts went beyond the remit of my research. This caution extended to digital records as well: as I mentioned above, in two of the semi-structured interviews at Lumberton, participants agreed to be interviewed but were reluctant for me to record our discussions. In one of these interviews the participant was more open than most, disclosing quite personal information about difficulties with other members of the service and crying at one point, but in the other one the participant did not discuss issues that were more personal than other interviews, nor did they seem more reserved. Another example of the limits of participants' expectations about access concerned participants' privacy in the open space of the social work office. As I explore in chapter four, a great deal of interaction in the social work office concerned food and drink and practices related to these matters took up a lot of social workers' time. The first time I was asked about my findings, I light-heartedly mentioned this issue of food and the response was a degree of awkwardness that I had not anticipated. My interest in food practices was not mentioned again until my last day in the office three months later, when one participant recalled how some people had talked about being uncomfortable that I was watching what they were eating. I raise these matters, not because I find the limits that social workers placed

on access to be remarkable (the concerns about confidentiality and privacy seem quite understandable, particularly for a group that is sometimes criticised for poor information management or low levels of professionalism) but because they illustrate a number of factors that appeared to be relevant in *how* decisions about access might be being made. The first one relates to distinctions between knowledge and material artefacts that carry information. Participants seemed to accept me having access to virtually any information that was being shared verbally, given that I was clearly allowed to be in the office. On many occasions, intimate details about both service users and colleagues were discussed in front of me and sometimes confided directly to me. I was never aware of conversations stopping when I arrived in a room, which is not to say that nothing was off-limits in front of me but that participants observed the same social rules about negotiating this as they might do around other colleagues. However, printed copies of emails, meeting agendas and minutes all constituted material artefacts to which, it seemed to be generally agreed, I should not have access, regardless of whether they contained confidential material. In those interviews where participants chose not to be recorded, the digital recording seemed to take on the properties of a material artefact too. In an age of mythical lost memory sticks and laptops left on trains, the concern to manage information-carrying materials is unsurprising but it does not fully explain concerns about being recorded talking about matters that are not confidential or having a print-out of a non-confidential email. Instead, I think that an explanation can be found in how knowledge that was *not* carried in material artefacts - i.e. knowledge that

could not be carried elsewhere and evidenced - was being viewed in these situations. Talk in these contexts, whether informal banter or highly composed verbal accounts of case histories, was consistently viewed as off-the-record. The situations where most of my observations occurred - offices and car journeys - were all viewed as backstage spaces where, even though it was known that I was conducting research, people presented their utterances and actions as ones which could not be tied directly to them in my future writing.

In these spaces, intimate facts about service users become standard business to be openly discussed and participants seemed to expect me to want to know such details. This kind of intimacy was an appropriate focus, because of its evident status as interesting and relevant. In contrast, personal features of participants' activity (such as food-related practices) were felt to be inappropriate focuses for my research *because* they were assumed to be uninteresting and irrelevant. Yet they were also connected to the personal spaces of participants' bodies and, as I discuss in chapter four, food and drink were also used as practices to maintain personal space-time in the wider spatial-temporal context of the office day. This presentation of corporeal practices as self-evidently private also produced intimate and confidential talk about service users, in contrast, as disembodied and so not-private in office spaces. Access was therefore a spatial matter, but not simply about which material spaces I was allowed to occupy and where I could carry out my observations.

Access was established through affective features of the wider scene, rather than interactions where something was clearly communicated to me. On some occasions when materials were withheld from me, there were certain non-verbal facial cues. At other times a more nebulous, general awkwardness occurred which remained unspoken and could not be located in one person's face, posture or utterance but which I was conscious of as a lack of the response I had expected. By contrast, the MARAC agenda list was commonly withheld as if this was unremarkable or normative. In this situation, it was up to me to breach the implicit expectation by reading the agenda list of the person next to me which, when I did it, was always implicitly tolerated.

Location, movement and rhythm in research practice

Recent discussions in anthropology and geography have raised the importance of considering questions of emplacement, as well as embodiment, in ethnographic research (see for example Pink, 2011). Doing so leads to questions about how participant observers establish a place inside the scene that they are researching and how they seek to minimise their impact on the space, in order to research it. In what follows, I explore these questions through a discussion of three features of the fieldwork practice - location, movement and rhythm - with the intention of moving towards a reflexive approach to the spatial in research practice.

One of my first concerns when I began the Lumberton fieldwork was where I would be located in the office in which I was carrying out most of my observations. I carried out observations at this site every day for two weeks and then continued to do observations one day a week for a further 10 weeks. During the first week I was able to use the desk of a social worker who was on leave, which was situated in a corner of the room, next to cupboards used for filing. The desk offered a good vantage point across the rest of the office and the manager's office beyond it, while also giving me a sense of being slightly separated from most interactions between participants. There were no desks that were free for the duration of the second week and so I moved between two desks, both of which were in the middle of the room and which therefore meant that things were often happening around or behind me. The model of the Lumberton office below shows the office area in which I spent the most time (this area is part of a larger, open-plan office covering the whole floor of the building, which extended in front of the area depicted). Most activity concerned interactions in the open space and in the manager's office (shown on the right side of the model). The three desks where I was located for most of the first two weeks are indicated by seated figures.



Figure 2 Model of the Lumberton safeguarding office, showing the various positions where I was seated during weeks 1 and 2 of the fieldwork

I began the fieldwork with the aim of initially observing everything as unobtrusively as possible, until a clearer focus began to arise which I could then explore more actively. While everyone present knew about the research project I did not seek to interact with people, instead limiting my interactions to those with people who approached me. The desk in the corner proved to be a good position for this, enabling me to observe with some degree of separation and to type fieldnotes on a laptop computer without being concerned about these being seen by anyone behind me. In contrast, my location in the second week offered much more limited separation from the situations which I was observing. I was often aware of things happening behind me, which I either had to listen to without seeing or turn round, making it clear that I was attending to them. I wrote fieldnotes more sporadically because I was aware that these might be visible to people sitting or walking behind me. Inevitably I participated more in conversations in the office, partly because I was closer to

more people and partly because, when I turned around to see what was happening behind me, it was more polite to speak to people than just to watch them.

These different approaches illustrate the familiar continuum of participation-observation in ethnographic research (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). Initially I sought to limit the extent to which I intruded on the practices that I was observing and I hoped to maintain a sense of the strangeness of social work practice through which I could develop insights about it. However, while I was not actually doing social work during the fieldwork, I certainly took part in many of the practices that I observed such as conversations about cases, preparing, eating and talking about food and the activities that were part of a regular office day. My experience of sitting at a desk and typing was also a form of participation, given that I was engaged in the same broad activities that social workers spent much of their working day doing. Some of the data regarding social workers' experiences of desk work developed out of my participation as much as observation - through my reflections on the experience of slowed time during prolonged desk work, the quickening of pace during the late afternoon and conventions of being distracted by, interrupting or ignoring others.

Questions about location, movement and rhythm are relevant to these matters. 'Seen from the window', a critical chapter of *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 2004) concerned with how to research urban life, offers one kind of

resolution to such questions. Lefebvre discusses observations from his window and balcony above Rue Rambuteau, opposite the Pompidou Centre in Paris. He is not interested simply in the things that he sees but in the rhythms that occur in a place over time. He notes various rhythms across different durations of time, from the movements of cars and pedestrians as they are influenced by traffic lights to the circadian rhythms of tourists and office workers. He notes two aspects of the ways in which such rhythms become apparent which I want to discuss. Firstly, Lefebvre makes the point that if we are part of the crowd that we observe, we cannot distinguish its different elements and rhythms. Instead, a small degree of distance is required, through which we can distinguish elements but where we are also close enough to feel what we are observing. As Lefebvre states: 'in order to grasp and analyse rhythms, it is necessary to get outside of them, but not completely [...] to grasp a rhythm, it is necessary to have been ***grasped*** by it' (p. 27, bold italics in the original). For Lefebvre's purposes, a balcony is the best place to observe the street because it is both distanced from the street and part of it. Secondly, rhythms become apparent through our experience of our bodies, particularly when the body's rhythms are broken and so become apparent. Lefebvre notes that this can happen with illness (Revol, 2012, uses this idea to discuss the insights into social rhythms which come from being out of breath) but also through 'technique', where the researcher becomes aware of relationships between her body's rhythms and those of the environment.

There is an interesting comparison to be made between Lefebvre's discussion

of rhythmanalysis and Michel de Certeau's (1984) essay 'Walking in the city'. Certeau contrasts the view from the top of the (since destroyed) World Trade Center in New York with experiences of walking through the city. The first of these enables the pleasure of 'reading' the city as one coherent text, the second involves becoming part of the spatial practices which make up the bustling city, which cannot be read or known in any determinate way. The view from above is seductive because it is spectacular, predictable and because it smoothes the city into a single entity but, in turning the city into an image or text, the city itself is lost. Certeau's essay is not specifically concerned with how to research urban spaces but its implication is that cities are unrepresentable, because they consist of innumerable, ephemeral spatial practices. His idea of walking in the city is therefore quite different from another account of city walking, that of the 'flâneur' who, as a masculine, class privileged and non-disabled subject, gets to participate in the pleasures of the city while also maintaining the position of detached observer (Benjamin, 1999 [1939]; Serlin, 2012). Like Certeau, Lefebvre seeks to question this objectification of the city into a thing which can be viewed. While his discussion of Mediterranean cities (the last chapter of *Rhythmanalysis*) refers to 'flânerie' - strolling), his focus is how aspects of the city impose upon and change the stroller's body, rather than the experience of touring around and consuming the city visually. However, Lefebvre does seek to suggest that urban spaces can be depicted through careful attention to those aspects of them which can only be identified over time and so perhaps his discussion is more useful than Certeau's in terms of thinking about how space can be

researched.

While my observations were not generally of public, urban spaces, there were some continuities with Certeau's and Lefebvre's focuses. I was seeking to understand and describe spaces of social interaction that often changed considerably over time in both regular and seemingly unpredictable ways. Lefebvre's ideas about being outside the space and its rhythms, but not completely, were helpful in considering things like where to situate myself and what to look for. They helped me to consider how to make sense of my differing conclusions about office activity when viewed from the different points identified in figure 1, for example.

While Certeau was interested in how famous cities are presented and lived, his comments about the seductiveness of the view from above are also relevant for my presentation of the Lumberton office in figure 2. While it makes the space seem clearer, figure 2 also presents a perspective of the office space which never existed in reality. Figure 3 presents an image of the interior of Forest House, one of the two offices in Alphaville West, which reflects a way that the space can be viewed in reality. During my observations in Forest House in particular, I tried to attend to the ways in which perceptible features of the building interacted with social practices to produce certain kinds of spaces. As figure 3 shows, the spaces in Forest House have fairly low ceilings whilst they also open up horizontal planes of vision and potential movement. Workstation surfaces are comparatively bare

in Forest House and storage is entirely in low cabinets, rather than the tall office furniture and boxes which are features of the Lumberton office. As I explore in chapter four, these features produced acoustics where noise irritation was reduced but where conversations could be heard from right across the room. While these acoustics facilitate comfortable working in large open plan spaces, they also mitigate against the kinds of loud interactions about intimate matters which commonly occurred in the more enclosed space of the Lumberton office. I observed no such conversations at Forest House, instead the combination of material spaces and social practices at Forest House created opportunities for contact with a much larger number of people, while also limiting the qualitative range of interactions that were possible with colleagues (as I discuss further in chapter four).



Figure 3 Forest House: the view from Village Green 1 towards work stations

The themes of researcher location and movement have also been explored in more recent discussions about research methodology in cultural geography

(for example Anderson, 2004; Wylie, 2005; Moles, 2008; Buscher, Urry and Witchger, 2011) and these influenced my decisions about when to move during the observations. One day towards the end of the first week of the Lumberton research, I was observing the work of Jonathan, an experienced social worker who was on duty. He was seated next to my desk in the corner of the office and so I was able to keep track of developments in his work during the course of the day. I had already identified that social workers seemed to move around the office frequently at Lumberton so, when Jonathan moved to the manager Laura's office to talk to her, I decided to move with him. Rather than providing insights about the mobile nature of social workers' practices in the office, this action helped me to appreciate what happened when I became more mobile and so more evidently engaged with what was happening: both Jonathan and Laura sought to involve me in discussions and decision making. The exercise of getting up and moving with participants therefore revealed something about how easy it was for anyone in the office to become involved in discussions about a case. Mobile research practice revealed something about the open and collegial nature of case discussions in office space.

The debates about mobile methods raise some interesting questions about the relationships between methods and the knowledge that is generated through research practice. For example, Jon Anderson's (2004) research explores environmental activists' relationships with the places that they seek to protect and he argues that walking with participants enables new ways of

exploring this issue. In this approach, walking is said to change how a place can be experienced and therefore articulated. Studies such as this have been criticised for producing findings that are actually a consequence of the methods employed, rather than a feature of the matter under research itself (see Housley and Smith, 2010 for a particularly scathing critique of this kind of innovation). My modest attempt at mobile research discussed above revealed a related issue - in becoming more mobile, researchers are also likely to become more intrusive. In the end, I chose to become more mobile intermittently during the course of office observations, with an awareness that the approach could both offer insights and impact on the practices which I wanted to observe. It is also important to consider what kinds of insights the mobile interviews, carried out whilst driving and walking around Lumberton and Alphaville, could enable. These were initially planned as ways of observing social workers' practice outside of the office and most social workers carried out home visits during the mobile interviews, although in the Lumberton research I did not have agreement to accompany social workers into houses and so waited in the car. Even though I was accompanying social workers on trips to service users' homes in most cases, there are some problems with claiming that these journeys offered insights into participants' usual working practices. Unlike other car journeys, these ones involved conversations with a specific focus - social workers' views about and experiences of the places through which we were travelling. Some researchers have tended to present mobile methods as enabling insights into the mobile nature of participants' everyday experiences. Jiron (2011), for

example, describes her research accompanying commuters on car journeys simply as 'shadowing' while Ferguson (2011b) suggests that accompanying social workers on home visits enabled him to have greater insight into social workers' practices at other times. It seems useful here to consider mobile methods in more reflexive terms. Rather than focusing only on capturing participant mobility by shadowing or accompanying, it is important to consider what the mobility of the researcher enables. Doing interviews away from the office and in spaces such as cars or on walks enabled a different quality of conversation to be possible (Laurier *et al.* 2008; Ferguson, 2009b). It allowed me to identify certain themes in the ways that social workers talked about places, which were not manifested in the formal spaces of meetings and the busy, practice-oriented spaces of social work offices. It also revealed how social workers were able to present places through certain journeys to and around them and via certain visual perspectives and scenes within those places. The data therefore pointed to the significance of spatial context, movement, sequencing and perspective for social workers' ways of constructing and narrating places.

Methods of analysis and presentation

This thesis takes an interpretive approach to ethnography. As Denzin writes, this approach 'understands that all ethnography is theory and value-laden. There can be no value-free ethnography, no objective, dispassionate, value-

neutral account of a culture and its ways' (2000: p. 403). As such, the study does not pretend to provide an objective description of the spatial aspects of children's social work in contemporary Britain; instead it has been presented in order to make apparent my own presence in and impact on the research, for example by showing my participation in conversations or the ways that I moved around and engaged with participants. A great deal of the analysis is of narratives - the ways that participants talked to me about their work and the ways that they told stories about places or other people (service users, other professionals) during practice.

This is not a study of unmediated experience - an assertion which is no longer possible to make about qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

However, neither is it a retreat towards simply foregrounding social workers' views of their work. My focus remains practice and the analysis of representations (performances, verbal accounts, stories and myths, arrangements of the visual) is used as an appropriate way of researching social work practice given social work is, arguably, primarily a practice of representing, accounting for and sense-making. However, this is also a study of the non-representational and so it aims to identify and understand affect as a feature of broader spaces rather than the experiences and actions of discrete subjects. Some of the writing is constructed both to be evocative and to enable a critical approach to sensations evoked (see for instance, the discussions of home visits in chapter five and of wider places in chapter seven). In some places I have reproduced detailed descriptions such as my

own fieldnotes (my account of a home visit in chapter five, records of office conversations in chapters six and seven) or participants' stories. Where this is done, I have always attempted to subject such accounts to critical analysis, even where they are my own (although I note both the difficulties with this and the problems involved in critical analysis of writers' own past accounts, which can often be organised to produce the illusion of present insight through a contrast with past misunderstanding). The form that such critical analysis has taken is detailed wherever such sources are examined in the text.

In addition to the discursive accounts that are presented and analysed, this thesis also uses images such as photographs and diagrams. Sometimes, as in this and the next chapter, these are images that I have created (two dimensional models, a photograph) in order to communicate spatial features or arrangements. In chapter seven, I also present photographs which I took myself but these have been constructed in order to reflect, as closely as possible, the visual perspectives which were presented to me by participants (in this case, during the mobile interviews). They are presented and analysed as data which reflect features of participants' accounts and my own response to these accounts.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how the conceptualisations of space which I

considered in chapter one might matter in practical terms when doing research about space and social work. Details of the study's methods and their use in practice have been given and the spatial considerations of such methods have been explored. The following four chapters present findings from the study while continuing to make visible my methods of doing the research and the ways that my own presence and actions might have influenced the research process.

PRIVACY AND OPENNESS IN SOCIAL WORK OFFICES

Much of this study's fieldwork took place in offices and any understanding of children's safeguarding social work and space needs to consider how these spaces are involved in producing and maintaining practice in the forms in which it exists. The chapter looks at two office spaces in particular - the children's safeguarding office in Lumberton and Forest House, the open plan office building in Alphaville in which West sector children's safeguarding social workers were based. These examples are not intended to represent the broad range of office spaces in which children's safeguarding social workers work in the UK. Instead, they are used as case studies that illustrate how social workers practise through the spaces that are available to them, how these spaces take on certain qualities because of these practices and how they, in turn, contribute to the production of social work practice. Spatial features such as privacy, isolation, openness and exposure are important here - for instance, they have implications for the degrees of discretion that are afforded social workers in their practice. Space, therefore, has implications beyond what is commonly understood to be a question of space.

While this chapter provides evidence of problems that might arise from certain

physical configurations of social work office spaces (for instance, the use of shared workstations and large, open plan offices), the conclusion is not that other spatial arrangements are necessarily more conducive to good social work practice. Intimate, private and backstage spaces are shown to have a central role in social work office activity but they are also far from unproblematic. Instead, the argument is that space is part of social relations at every turn, both organised by social relations and an agent in transforming them.

I begin the chapter with an exploration of the Lumberton office and how seclusion and openness were negotiated in and through such a space. This discussion identifies how social workers' competing requirements, for instance in relation to seclusion, autonomy, a sense of shared purpose and common ways of working, are negotiated through spaces such as offices. The second part of the chapter examines office practices at Forest House in Alphaville, a quite different office environment which offered different kinds of interactional and identificatory opportunities. These two examples highlight different ways in which office spaces are likely to be important for social workers' activity and ways of understanding their work.

Lumberton office



Figure 4 Lumberton children's safeguarding team office: the view from Jonathan's desk

My fieldnotes from the first morning of observations at Lumberton give some sense of the atmosphere in the office at that point in time. The assistant team manager greeted me and gave me an initial tour before showing me to my desk for the week:

It's in the corner of the room so good view of the office. I sit opposite Naomi who is busy typing, calls and discusses case with member of the CIN [Child in Need] team. She is doing a court report. Office seems calm, businesslike, people sat at desks, working, brief amiable interactions followed by computer work, speaking on phone. I can hear Naomi clearly but the chat amongst people on the other side of

the room is not loud. I think that the acoustics mean that sound on the other side of the room is not intrusive

[...]

Comfortable, light office (it's overcast outside, might feel different in the sun). Muffled sounds of other people's work. Think it would be conducive to getting on with work at a fairly fast pace.

[Lumberton fieldnotes, 1-2]

Much of the discussion in the first section of this chapter seeks to develop a deeper understanding of this matter, continuing the focus on atmosphere as central to an understanding of spatial practice but trying to develop more nuanced and reflexive understandings that are sensitive to spatial and temporal dynamics. For example, I noted on that first day that office acoustics were key elements in producing and sustaining different atmospheres. At this point I was inclined to see certain physical aspects of the space - low ceilings, carpeted floors, upholstered space dividers - as significant in producing particular auditory qualities. Later, photographic evidence helped me to identify the large amount of stored paper, toys, clothes and other items in cardboard boxes that were in the office (see picture 1). These all influenced the room's atmosphere through their visual appearance, symbolic associations and noise softening effects, but they hadn't struck me as remarkable when I was there (which suggests something about how the component features of atmosphere are often apprehended as unexceptional in themselves and, in so doing, might have greater atmospheric effects). Eventually, I came to see the auditory elements of atmosphere as produced through the interactions of material qualities of space and practices within and beyond the space. Social workers' voice modulation, their practices of holding

conversations at varying distances, entering and exiting practices, the rhythms of different kinds of talk and movement over time all gave meaning to and drew significance from the spatial features I have so far noted, working together to produce certain kinds of atmosphere. These atmospheres in turn produced opportunities for certain kinds of working practices and performed understandings of social workers' roles. This is what I seek to elucidate in the discussion that follows.

Privacy, openness and exposure in office work

One feature of spatial practice at Lumberton which became apparent through the research was the production of private or intimate time-spaces in what was a comparatively open working space, but where the invoking of privacy was also proscribed or limited in certain ways and where equivalent practices and rituals also worked to produce instances of exposure. Before I discuss this further, my use of 'privacy' needs some explanation. Privacy suggests both greater autonomy regarding one's actions and greater seclusion of those activities from the gaze of outsiders, but neither of these is a required or defining feature of private space. Some activities are prohibited whatever their location and some spaces may be open to the gaze of outsiders but still be understood as private. For example, in British suburban back gardens, openly observing from outside for more than a certain amount of time is often possible, it's just understood to be intrusive. Conversely, some public spaces are as secluded as any private space, while activities which occur in them can

work to render them more private or at least more intimate (see, for example, Bell and Valentine, 1995, in relation to intimacy and sex in public). So, while autonomy and seclusion are not prerequisite features of private space and are possible in public places too, the relationship between them is a key one for determining how spaces might become private and a central way in which power operates through space in ways that are presented and experienced as natural or legitimate.

To begin with, I want to explore how privacy was achieved in the office space.

The creation of comparatively private space in the office is a key spatial practice which enables social workers to sustain their own ways of working, such as approaches to making judgements and decisions in their work with families. It is also a way in which social workers achieve a degree of control over how much work they accept and how quickly they begin to do it.

Comparative privacy and autonomy in case work practice also, paradoxically, enable social workers to be conscious of a wider range of each others' working practices including more idiosyncratic and questionable actions, even though they mitigate against directly challenging these same things. (In this way they equate with the privacy of back gardens mentioned above.) Social workers are permitted to discuss and raise questions about the practices of others, but not directly to the individual concerned, at the time that the practice is occurring. They might engage in observations at the time that such practices occur but if they do, these are generally to agree with or support in other ways what is being done or, if this seems to be sought, to allow the

individual to explore their practices in reflexive-performative ways (Taylor, 2006). Such processes often eventually lead to greater conclusiveness and defensibility in relation to judgements and decisions.

So how is such a space produced and sustained? One way relates to practices of entering and leaving the office. Norms relating to these actions illustrate how the wider office space is produced as a comparatively public arena within which social workers exercise significant degrees of autonomy and privacy in relation to their own actions. Social workers usually entered and left the office at different times in the day from each other. While those who arrived at the beginning of the day did usually greet each other, different rules of interaction prevailed for other times. I quickly learned that it was conventional not to say hello or goodbye to colleagues when they entered or left the office during the working day. When I tested this convention by saying goodbye when I left, people generally paid no attention in ways which seemed quite appropriate and comfortable: because desk work usually involves people being engaged in screen work or phone calls, inattention to the wider environment does not seem rude. Screens have various influences on privacy and exposure in the social work office. They work as a powerful focus for practitioners' visual attention, limiting interactions with others while also providing some opportunities for less intense and intermittent conversations between colleagues, while they continue to look at their screens (Laurier et al., 2008 have noted similar potential in car conversations). They also work as incomplete material boundaries and barriers for the desks which they

occupy, leaving those practitioners who do not have a computer to themselves, as is the case with family support workers, more open to being called upon by others (and perhaps identifiably less important, because of their lack of computer). In contrast, they work to expose practitioners' written work in ways that would not have happened prior to the computerisation of social work offices. Written accounts themselves, alongside supplementary data about the account (e.g. when it was entered) are recorded on shared networks, while the work which is being done on screen is always visible to people to the sides of and behind social workers (see also chapter three where I discussed the ways that this affected how I recorded notes on my laptop during the field work).

Other aspects of the office influenced social workers' privacy and exposure in other ways. For instance, the office had a large whiteboard which social workers were expected to use to indicate where they were going when they left the office. It was often days out of date and, when it was used, was usually completed in vague terms (e.g. 'hvs [home visits] back at 4'). This did not seem to indicate a lack of concern from social workers about their own or each other's safety, because participants frequently talked to me about the potential vulnerability associated with visiting service users (something I discuss further in chapters five and seven). However, they chose not to use the whiteboard as a way of managing such vulnerability, instead deciding sometimes to visit in pairs, asking for colleagues to call them during a visit that entailed some risk or simply seeing their phones as offering a way to

manage dangers if they arose. These practices indicated a concern for/preoccupation with safety that has been evident in other research (Stanley and Goddard, 2002; Smith et al., 2003; Smith, 2006; Braescu, 2012), while also maintaining greater levels of autonomy in social workers' everyday movements than would have been possible if the whiteboard had been consistently used.

The office is a location for work but also for other activities related to personal interests, pleasures and needs - for example using social media, texting, eating and drinking, each of which influences the micro-geographies of desk and personal space. Food and drink were being discussed, prepared or eaten almost continually in Lumberton and there are many different conclusions that could be drawn from this. Food has been shown to have a powerful symbolic role in denoting social status, care, cultural identity and gender relations (Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 2003). Leigh (2013, pp. 107 and 251) identifies how a team of child protection practitioners that she observed in Belgium ate lunch together and used the time to cement personal relationships, while also sometimes excluding certain people in the workplace such as students. In this study, food seemed often to be used to slow pace and demarcate privacy in the office. For example, on more than one occasion participants used food as a reason not to interact with me about the research: one social worker agreed to talk with me about a case while sitting at her desk but then proceeded to eat something which prevented her from saying very much at all. Another brought food over when she came to explain a feature of the

information system to me but, when a colleague asked her why she was doing this while eating her lunch, she said to me 'There, do you see he's saying it's inappropriate?' and returned to her desk. I saw these as ways in which certain participants communicated their thoughts about my research but they also illustrated how food was used more generally as a way to establish private time-spaces.

High degrees of privacy and autonomy were afforded to social workers' actions related to their own cases in the office. On numerous occasions I observed social workers having loud, conflicted phone conversations with service users which were always ignored by colleagues, unless the social worker involved indicated that they wanted people to listen (I discuss an instance of this later on). Other situations showed that many aspects of social workers' practice were both highly visible to their colleagues and implicitly not open for comment. On one occasion a social worker phoned a service user to tell her that she would not be visiting as planned because she was going to a core group meeting for a different family instead. She was standing in the middle of the office, speaking at a high volume and told the service user where this core group was happening - a probably unintentional but clear breach of confidentiality which colleagues universally ignored, at least at the time that it happened. More generally, phones seemed to be used in all three offices in ways which suggested more privacy and seclusion than would have been possible in the past for certain aspects of social workers' practice. In contrast to the social work offices I remembered from my own practice, the

Lumberton and Birchwood Road Police Station offices were almost devoid of desk-phone bell tones. Most of the calls which social workers received in these offices came directly through their work mobile phones rather than via the office phone system, giving social workers plenty of flexibility about which calls they chose to answer and where they took them.

The level of privacy that is available to social workers in their work in open office spaces facilitates some aspects of practice which could otherwise be contentious, but it also presents dilemmas about how to negotiate differences between working practices without raising them too openly. The question of what constitutes neglectful home conditions illustrates this well. In interviews, four participants at Lumberton raised questions about markedly different judgements on this issue across the team, something which has been shown to be an issue in social work more widely (Gershater-Molko et al., 2003; Platt 2006; Horwath, 2007). When this happened in relation to families who were initially seen by one person and then allocated to another, social workers had to confront the delicate matter of inconsistency. The following example shows how Jonathan dealt with this on a day when I was following his work closely:

Just talked to Jonathan about a visit he has just done on the Louise case. He seemed perturbed. 'It's a tip, a real tip, and they have no idea. Other things are fine but the house is a terrible state. I've been thinking about whether they should be removed.' Jonathan calls Sam over. 'When you visited with Janet, what was it like?' Sam initially says it was fine, Louise not well, seeing CAMHS. Jonathan does not accept it. Sam quickly acknowledges there were concerns, said she had different opinion from Janet but Janet was the lead so she went with her judgement. Jonathan is continuing to discuss, she says that she would

prefer not to comment more and for Jonathan to discuss with Janet. Jonathan says that this is very professional (without irony!). Jonathan explained to me that Janet has done an initial assessment, didn't raise concerns about state of the house, just said there were general issues that needed core assessment but Jonathan felt that there should be concerns listed. He said he will talk to Laura [team manager]. Then also that he will wait to talk to Janet, as 'we are a team'. I ask about whether this is a 'subjective - no - personal judgement' and that people differ. Jonathan answers that 'We should converge. With the Assessment Framework, we should have the same judgement' and then - 'this is not a borderline case'.

In the end, Jonathan did not discuss the case directly with Janet and the interaction with Sam above also indicates his reluctance to criticise another social worker for herself not questioning a colleague's judgement. I wondered whether his stated intention to raise the matter with Janet might have been a consequence of me being present, while his wish to discuss the case with Sam seemed quite typical of common practices in the office when I had been a more distant observer. Social workers discussed other people's practice with third parties often enough for it not to feel like a breach of a social rule - sometimes, as in this case, as part of their case work, but also at more intimate moments, when sharing their personal opinions about colleagues with each other or with me.

Interruptibility

So far I have described spatial practices that create zones of privacy around social workers, their desks and their cases in the wider, open environment of

the office. However, some conventions worked to produce space as open and shared between all those who could see or hear each other. For example, certain social workers frequently called out questions to the office in general or shouted across to admin workers to ask for advice about how to deal with computer systems. Conversations sometimes included small groups of people who were sitting next to each other while at other times they included people located across the whole office area. Discussions about urgent duty cases or cases which had a high profile in the team often took place across some distance (I measured one interaction which occurred across six metres, which was not unusual). Such conversations were often held on the move or tailed off whilst one participant moved away, not before, and these were ways in which certain kinds of cases acquired a high profile for the team more generally, through the idea of the open discussion or fast paced action that they required. They were not necessarily the most urgent, complex cases or the ones that involved the greatest amount of work for social workers or the team manager but other elements were important - such as shocking behaviour by parents or other professionals, the presence of particularly appealing or sympathetic children or the apparent need for immediate action to protect a child. These interactions served as important focuses for the team to maintain a sense of itself as having shared aesthetics, understandings and concerns.

Some mundane practices seemed to be important for establishing the boundaries of privacy and autonomy in the office. I quickly became aware of a

common practice of interruptibility - all participants sometimes interrupted others who were doing work on computers or were in conversation with other colleagues, to talk about matters to do with cases. Almost universally, participants responded to interruptions as if they were acceptable (the only incident which I observed where this did not happen, the interrupting person's face indicated that she viewed the refusal as a breach), so it was something that I chose to explore in interviews. I reproduce exchanges from interviews with two family support workers with quite different demeanours, both of whom I had observed interrupting colleagues. I expected them to feel differently about interrupting but, in certain ways, their responses were similar and their explanations each confirmed that there was a convention of acceptable interruption in the office. In my interview with Monica, I asked about an interaction I had observed between her and Eddie, one of the social workers:

D: What you did was you just came up and started a conversation and it seemed to me you were able to talk to him quite clearly about what you needed to let him know. Is that something that's fairly typical?

K: Yes, I think we're pretty good at saying 'Eddie, I need to talk to you about the H family, about the contacts', and he'll go 'I can't now' or 'Ok, then Monica, what is it?' [...] You see I think it is rude to approach them in the middle of something but I've got to get the balance, it's got to be said in this environment to make sure it happens. So I do try and say 'I need to speak to you about X. Are you free now or shall we talk later?' Because it needs to happen. [...] I think that's in my mind all the time: 'Can this wait or not?' If it can it'll be an email, that's another way. If it can't it's being able to approach them and they are very approachable. But you can tell as well when there's a court coming up or something and you need to know that, it's not personal to me, it's 'Oh my goodness, my head is going to explode'.

The following exchange comes from the interview with Lee:

D: People talk to each other quite a bit, people don't ask if it's ok to talk they just kind of start talking so that seems to be the culture in the office. What would you say about it - is it a problem or is there anything good about it?

L: I don't know, to be honest with you I'm probably one of the worst, I think that is the environment of the office. I went and did a day or two in another office which wasn't safeguarding, it was the after adoption team. Now it was a lot quieter in that office and there would be 'Excuse me, can I just ask you a question?' but that's a different environment. We're a safeguarding team, you know what I mean, it's a lot more stressful job to be honest with you. That's the way it is unfortunately.

D: Why is it like that? What's the benefits in a safeguarding team?

L: I think because we're more fast moving, we need answers straight away. Direct questions, direct answers because we're safeguarding, there's a child out there who needs our help more quickly. It's a 47, we need to act quickly, people know families in the area so it's straight into 'Do you know this family, have you heard about this family, have you been involved with this family', and we need answers straight away.

Monica and Lee describe this situation in different ways but they both raise the question of managing risk and they both emphasise the timeliness of the work. Lee's response in particular creates a sense of pace through repetition, numerous questions and a fast rhythm of equally short phrases. It indicates how a fast pace is actually achieved *through* an account, as much as an account reflecting the requirements of a situation that is already urgent. These instances of interruption of social workers' activity at their desks were frequent and seemed to play a role in creating atmospheres of urgency and shared concerns, while constructing individual desk work (in the main recording) as less important than information sharing and discussion.

Rituals of spectacle and affirmation

I have described above how social workers' behaviour during phone calls was often pointedly ignored by colleagues, but in other situations it was permitted or even expected that social workers would listen to colleagues on the phone and comment on what was happening, as the following extract from my fieldnotes shows. Janet has been contacted by a man with whom she worked in the past who is concerned about his ex-partner's drinking and her supervision of her baby. Janet visited the woman's home earlier but was unable to get an answer and the case seems to be becoming one that requires a quicker pace of social work. She has already relayed the events so far to colleagues and there is a sense that the case is both of interest to colleagues and one which Janet can deal with in an authoritative way, because of her historical involvement and because the referrer contacted her directly. She is now talking to the woman on the phone while Naomi, Jonathan and I have stopped what we were doing and are listening to the conversation:

Janet is on phone, talking to mother about her drinking. 'I am telling you I will do something about this if you carry on drinking.' Woman appears to be saying 'You're fucking it up for me'. Janet: 'I am not f-ing it up for you, you're f-ing it up for yourself' ... 'You have a 9 month old baby, Eve, I can't allow it. You did so well before... You know what you're like when you're drinking ... I know you love your kids, Eve, but you have to learn to put their needs first.' Janet starts to say that she knew Eve was in when she visited earlier and no-one opened the door. Naomi and Jonathan start to laugh at this.

Eve hangs up and Janet relays the conversation to other people in the office. 'I've got a life to live. You're f-ing it up for me.'

Janet explains to me that she removed a 5 year old child from her earlier. He is now 7 and is placed with his dad. 'She got pregnant but did not tell me, the [7 year old's] dad told me she'd had a concealed

pregnancy. She's drinking again.' Janet says that she is going to have to remove this child. Naomi asks whether she is bottle or breast feeding, because 'if she's breast feeding the baby's going to be out of it'.

Janet's activity on this case so far and her account of it to colleagues work to produce a sense of quick pace and with it a higher profile in the office. Other social workers are told about the case, implicitly invited to listen to the phone conversation and to comment. However, the responses of social workers (listening, laughing, Naomi's comment about the breast feeding) are ones that acknowledge Janet's authority and confirm her judgment about the urgency of the situation. Naomi's reference to breast feeding is particularly interesting - it seems to be a fairly remote possibility for various reasons but mentioning it here creates an opportunity for grim humour '(Sullivan, 2000; Gilgun and Sharma, 2012), an element of many of the more public exchanges, which often worked to perform group membership and in this case supported Janet's judgement of the situation. In fact, neither the case that Jonathan discussed with Sam and me nor this situation resulted in children becoming looked after (Louise remained at home while Eve's baby moved to live with her father), but both social workers felt able to raise at least the possibility of children being 'removed'.

Other kinds of events had the same spectacular quality as Janet's phone call and account of the Eve case. Marianne, another social worker, had a case where a child was looked after because of concerns about emotional abuse. The child's mother had created a blog which included pictures of the child

during contact sessions, some of which also featured Marianne, and details of some of the local authority's statements to court during the proceedings (for a discussion of the ethics of social workers' encounters with service users online see chapter 2 of this thesis; Reamer, 2009; Singh Cooner, 2014). The blog was an occasional topic of conversation in the office throughout the period of my fieldwork and was generally known about. Even so, when Marianne showed it to me, people quickly gathered around her computer and engaged in discussions which oscillated between indignation (about exploiting the child, breaking confidentiality of court documents) and hilarity. These instances of spectacle actually occurred quite frequently. They allowed social workers who were largely operating independently to create a sense of shared work and identity and they enabled changes in atmosphere in the office. Rather than breaking monotony, they were a key component in office rhythms where fluctuating pace and shifting atmosphere seemed to be intrinsic.

Performative identities and the importance of office spaces

As well as instances where most participants who were present became engaged in the event, the office space seemed important over time and in less spectacular ways, for the achievement of certain kinds of identities for social workers (for discussion of how social work offices have been used for such purposes see for example Satyamurti, 1981; White, 1997; Pithouse, 1998; Leigh, 2013). The following discussion focuses on one such identity –

performing being a competent practitioner for a novice social worker. The suggestion is not that this is only a performance and so merely superficial but that this and other positions are evaluated by colleagues through presentations in social spaces such as offices and so require practitioners to provide reasonably adept performances in order for them to be accepted as genuine.

Vicky was a relatively new social worker who had been present in the team for just under a year. During the fieldwork period she shared responsibility for several cases that involved formal child protection elements with more experienced colleagues. Vicky was supervised by the team manager and much of the assessment of her work and development as a practitioner would have occurred in formal supervision sessions, but she also had to present herself to colleagues across the team more generally as a competent and increasingly experienced practitioner. One way that this happened was through the discussions about service users and cases that commonly occurred in the office. These were often less formal than those that occurred in supervision but they also played an important role in the wider sense making about cases. Over the three month period of my observations, it was possible to observe certain developments in Vicky's presentation during such discussions, in line with expectations about how competent social workers talk about their work in the office. These rules are generally subtle and difficult initially to understand or to effect in practice. Examples include the expectation that practitioners be able to present a coherent account of a case,

including clarity about the nature of the problem (which was often different from the presenting problem or the problems as service users or other professionals understood them to be). Emotions can be expressed in order to make an account more convincing or compelling and it is acceptable to show irritation with a service user's behaviour, but not repeatedly and not in relation to a 'problem' (for example learning disability) that is seen as outside of that person's control. Social workers can acknowledge their own vulnerability - in fact, recognising and realistically identifying risks to themselves are ways that social workers demonstrate insight into the serious nature of safeguarding work - but expressing fear suggests a less accomplished practitioner (this is something which I explore further in chapter six and seven). The office is a primary space for modeling such behaviours and providing feedback to social workers about whether their performances are adequate. For example, on one occasion Vicky had a meeting with Roger, a parent of a child who had been removed and was subject to current proceedings, in an interview room in the same building as the office. After the meeting, Vicky came into the office visibly flustered, walking quickly and speaking loudly - 'Roger's just threatened my life'. People expressed concern and enquired about what was said in the interview. At the same time that this was happening, I asked Laura about whether Roger presented any danger to social workers. She told me 'He's actually a really nice man. He's just got a lot of problems and he's finding it hard'. In these kinds of situations less experienced practitioners were able to try out different ways of responding to the challenges of practice, receiving supportive feedback from colleagues about which to continue and which to

retune.

The data from Lumberton suggest that office spaces operate in a range of ways. They provide private spaces in which social workers can practise with high degrees of discretion, whilst their practice is simultaneously visible to colleagues. Such offices are also open spaces, where social workers are able to display and model particular values and understandings of their role.

Working alongside and whilst interacting with others are important for the production of social work practice as meaningful and for the negotiation and reproduction of practice norms. Tacit knowledge about matters such as the nature of people and how to do social work in this particular place are conveyed through ways of talking and moving through space.

Forest House

As I noted earlier, Forest House and the shift towards more 'agile' or remote working practices that were a feature of being located there were frequent subjects of debate amongst social workers at Alphaville. In this section, I continue the discussion of material things, spatial practices and conceptions of space together, in relation to a much larger, open plan office that was subject to quite different forms of spatial practice. Discussing space in these ways helps to explain the contrasting views about relationships between space and practice which became apparent in the Alphaville research. I begin

by considering architectural accounts of space, which are grounded in abstracted discussions of building form but also draw heavily on ideas about the relationship between bodies and buildings, particularly the body in motion. I consider the extent to which these ways of apprehending space are likely to influence the temporary inhabitant and some potential differences between such passing experiences and those of longer term inhabitants who 'reproduce' buildings through their practices, beliefs and accounts of places over much longer periods of time (Rose *et al.*, 2010). I draw on several different forms of data in this discussion. I consider my own experiences of visiting Forest House. I examine data from an interview with three key people who had been tasked with implementing Alphaville's Building Transformation and Agile Working policies - I refer to these people as the Enabling Agile Working or EAW team. These policies entailed relocating staff from a large number of smaller, space-inefficient offices to a few large, purpose-built 'hubs' and encouraging staff to spend less time based in offices and be prepared to carry out what was once office work in a wider variety of kinds of places. I examine some of the publicity and explanatory documents that accompanied the Building Transformation and Agile Working initiatives. I also draw on data from observations at Forest House about what social workers there were doing and conversations with participants about their experiences of working there. The resulting discussion illustrates the problems inherent in trying to arrive at a determinate analysis of spaces as either one thing or another. Instead, it focuses on the dissonances between an analysis which attends to architectural form, symbolic resonances and the environment as visually or

kinaesthetically perceived (the impressions most immediately available to outsiders like myself) and one which examines how buildings come into being through practices over longer stretches of time, including how they are experienced when they are familiar or routine, by the inhabitants or 'co-producers' of those buildings.

Alphaville's internal literature, intended to inform staff about the new buildings and the move to agile working, highlights certain key principles in the design of new office spaces: security and wellbeing of staff, accessibility and inclusivity, adaptability, openness and interaction across workspaces and ecological sustainability. Such features are presented as promoting innovation and productivity generally, while enabling a shift to agile working and more efficient use of council office space. Case studies of council staff engaged in agile working are provided as examples of its benefits. One social worker outlines her average day:

I get into work for about 9 am. I log on and check my emails and messages and respond to them. At 11 am I look at the reports I need to write up and in the afternoon I try and do my visits as this coincides with the time that children get home from school. This takes me through to the end of the day. I then log-on at home and write up what I have done until 6 pm or 7 pm where I shutdown for the day.

If I am in court I am usually there for the entire day. I tend to arrive there for 9 am and I take my laptop along with me. This means I can work during long periods of waiting time

In this and other case studies in the council's literature, practitioners emphasise features such as flexibility and efficiency. They also reveal the

penetration of work into home spaces, the significance that laptops and phones now have for social work practice and the extent to which social workers even use computer terms ('shutdown') to describe their own working activity. Home and work, mobile device and mobile body are presented as merging together and tensions between work and home life apparently disappear.

The council's agile working policy and the spatial qualities of Forest House were frequently debated topics in the Alphaville research, with areas of marked disagreement between participants about their effectiveness and suitability for an activity such as children's social work. Most participants who were based in Forest House were critical of the building, while those in the estates department talked about its advantages over the spaces which it replaced. In what follows, I explore some different ways of understanding space, mobility and the practice of children's social work, which are helpful in accounting for and evaluating the different views of office space that came up in the study.

Open spaces, agile bodies

With the social worker's body as the place of work, wherever it might be, the office building no longer has distinct purposes or qualities. Instead it needs to offer flexibility - of form, utility, even identity (Braham and Emmons, 2005). Buildings such as Forest House are presented as having organic and fluid

qualities in order to achieve this. They are able to change their arrangement, even their shape, according to shifting requirements and there is a greater emphasis in promotional literature on the movements and flows which they enable than the building's own form and dimensions. Material aspects of Forest House show how such a sense of flexibility is achieved. Office areas in the building are characterised by horizontal planes of vision: storage furniture is largely featureless and low, while windows are visible in all directions and look out on to the surrounding open environment, making spaces feel larger and more open than they actually are. There is limited use of colour, with much of the furniture and most walls being white and having no obvious ornamentation. Different zones of the building - desk areas, the kitchen facilities, certain meeting spaces - are incompletely separated from each other, suggesting flexibility about where activities can take place and providing opportunities for particular kinds of movement between areas. Some facilities are intended for a variety of purposes - for example, the 'village green' zones are open to kitchen facilities and so well situated for breaks but they also lend themselves to less structured work discussions (some participants also chose them as the location for research interviews). 'Touch down' benches provide somewhere to have a break or to work for short periods in less formal surroundings.

Forest House combines an internal formal vocabulary of openness, simplicity and flexibility with requirements for security and seclusion from outside. Unlike other sector bases in the city, Forest House has virtually no 'forward-facing'

facilities, in other words it is not used for contact between social workers and service users and the only visitors are likely to be other professionals who work closely with staff who are based there. In terms of its relationship with the outside, the building is required to be anonymous. Windows are secure and cannot be seen into from ground level outside.

My most consistent experience of Forest House was of how difficult it was to get into the building's interior. The reception area employs a superficially similar aesthetic to the interior with plenty of glass and open views of the surrounding area, but there are no views or clear paths into the interior of the building from this space, while the reception desk is actually staffed by people who refer to themselves as security, not receptionists. Phone calls are routed into the building from a switchboard elsewhere rather than the building's reception and, on most of the occasions that I visited, the front desk security were unable to contact people inside to tell them that I was waiting. The actual experience of trying to get into the building felt like it clashed with the architectural vocabulary of openness and efficiency. Of course, this was not a factor that the social workers who were based at Forest House had to negotiate. Their experience of moving into and out of the building was quite different because they generally used an unstaffed back entrance and gained entry with an electronic access card. Getting into and out of the building for them was quick, did not generally involve interaction with other people and did not even require them to sign in or out.

Once I was inside the building I tended to experience an atmosphere of calm and functionality but I was only ever at Forest House for short periods of time and always with the specific purpose of meeting with participants. I did none of the extended observation that I carried out at Lumberton or Birchwood Road Police Station and my experience of the space needs to be understood in this context. I therefore outline my impressions as examples of passing experience, in order to explore how they differ from the descriptions of Forest House given by the people who worked there and to consider the potential differences between architectural aesthetics and other experiences of places.

One feature of the building that contrasts with many of the offices in which staff had previously been based was its sense of space. Some of the teams now based in Forest House had previously been accommodated in children's centres across the West sector. Photographs of these sites, shown to me by the EAW team, suggested that they often had poor circulation, inadequate desk spaces, large amounts of clutter and were over-crowded. While Forest House addresses the first three of these problems, it is still over-crowded according to some assessments. Despite this problem, the experience of being inside the building, for the short periods during which I was there, was one of openness. Wide circulation pathways and open vistas mean that the building is comfortable and easy to walk to around. I saw that participants could move around the building without provoking the sense of hectic pace that I had sometimes observed at Lumberton while the longer distances, wider pathways and gradual transitions between zones seemed to result in

smoother, more even forms of bodily movements at Forest House. This was something I got to experience at first hand, because I often found myself walking around the building with participants trying to find a meeting room that was unoccupied (meeting rooms were in high demand there). These travels involved smooth and unhurried movements across long distances, during which I also observed others moving in similar ways. It seemed important to recognise that the feel of Forest House, once I was in it, resulted less from the resonances of architectural form alone and more from my experience of moving smoothly and seeing other such movements.

An important question is whether the sense of smooth mobility that is apparent to the visitor passing through reflects the realities of working in the building over time. In fact, just a few unhurried walkers in a building which houses hundreds can convey such a feel, whilst most people are involved in quite different actions. Participants' accounts of their experiences and my observations at the scale of work stations, rather than the building as a whole, revealed a quite different picture. These geographies consisted less of smooth and supple movements and more of participants who experienced the space as intrusive, felt restrained by it or who were struggling to keep their position in one place. Participants described less interaction between team members and a more solitary experience of practice than they had had in other places.

Sound is an important element of this. Office acoustics in Forest House differ

considerably from Lumberton. Scale is one reason for this: the section of office space in which children's safeguarding teams are usually located has almost 100 work stations while the Lumberton office had only 16 desks. Configuration also matters: the space is organised to provide open vistas, allowing social workers to see and locate each other and to identify empty workstations when they need one. The lack of seclusion also functions to prevent workstations being appropriated over longer periods of time while workers are away from the office. However, this openness causes some acoustical issues. Ceilings at Forest House have some sound absorption qualities but these are compromised by the low furniture and lack of partitions, which allow sounds to travel directly and speech to be intelligible across some distance (see Bradley, 2003 for a discussion of such factors in large open plan office acoustics). At quieter times, this has the effect of limiting conversations themselves (because they seem more public when they do take place) and it therefore struck me as a quieter space than the Lumberton office. However, social workers generally found noise much more intrusive than I had expected. My discussion with Christina, a senior social worker, was typical of wider opinions amongst participants:

It's very intense here, everybody is trying to do stuff and you can't help but listen in to other people's conversations, especially if they're interesting. Open plan is lovely, in the fact that it's open and spacey and airy, but it's not conducive to working at all.

Another reason why social workers were more conscious of noise and demands for space was because Forest House was most likely to be

overcrowded during periods when social workers most often wanted to be there, such as the beginning of the working day. The volume of speech rises as people find it more difficult to hear each other and levels of ambient noise become distracting. The problem as many social workers saw it was the 'agility ratio' (the number of work stations seen to be required by staff), which at Forest House had been altered a number of times but, at the time of the research, stood at one desk for every three social workers or family support workers, while other individuals such as team managers and administration staff had their own allocated desks. Having a high agility ratio led to certain times of the day when all desks and many phones were being used at the same time, creating a difficult working environment.

In order to be successful, agile working required social workers to embrace the idea of working in a more flexible and mobile way but there was a view amongst those leading its implementation in Alphaville that certain factors were impeding this. The following conversation between Colin, Marcus and Amina, three people who were responsible for enabling the implementation of agile working, illustrates concerns about some of the spatial practices in Alphaville that were seen as an obstacle to change:

Colin: A lot of people have been around a long time, are set in their ways and it's a case of 'We've always done it this way, and that's the way we do it.' That's the feeling I get.

Marcus: I agree

Amina: It's interesting to talk about leadership. I think, surveying space and how it's been used, and talking to people, talking to social workers - they were ready and willing to embrace that. But actually middle

management, they say - 'I want to see you in the morning and at the end of the day'. So it was a disparity actually between what they felt they could do and what they were allowed to do, really.

Dharman: That's interesting. Elsewhere in the council is there the same issues about being suspicious of workers?

Marcus: The biggest issue, and we keep saying it at every presentation, is trust. It really comes back to management. Management like presenteeism and that is basically what it is. And some managers are very proactive, encouraging people to deal with cases, come back to them when they need some supervision or advice, and other managers' leadership styles are very much 'I want to see you, and I want to see you doing this at this particular time', irrespective of maybe not finishing in that time.

The EAW team recognised the need for close communication between social workers and their managers and they tended to understand this as a predictable, proactively and mutually sought element of practice (for discussion of the importance of supervision in social work see Kadushin and Harkness, 2002). Because of this, they had promoted the use of systems such as video conferencing as alternatives to social workers returning to the office simply to update their supervisor. The council had also set up an encryption system which enabled social workers to upload confidential information securely to electronic records from a home or mobile internet connection. However, in their view, these systems were not generally being employed to enable practice that was less tied to the social work office. In contrast, my conversations with social workers suggested that they were being proactive and imaginative, but with the aim of becoming more rooted in place rather than less fettered by it. Ari, a social worker, told me:

I understand the logic around the fact that actually, if you're not going to be here all day, let someone else have your desk. I'm fine with that. But

just to have nowhere to put things is quite frustrating. We're not allowed to leave things on our desk but, to be honest, we're all human and we're quite protective of our areas, so sometimes, if you go out and you know you're coming back, you might leave your stuff, like leave your laptop there. But I've had it, on a number of occasions, where I've come back and somebody's removed my laptop from the table and just sat and worked in my space. And I don't criticise people for it because it's something you have to do. It sounds like a really petty thing but you don't realise how hard it is until you don't have it.

Rachel, also a social worker, found the impact of agile working disruptive too and contrasted it with a nostalgic recollection of her previous office in Edelman House:

There's no togetherness anymore. The very fact that you can go in and you don't know who's sitting next to you is bad enough. I mean I always sit where I sit and usually the rest of my team will be there so we, as a group of people are always over that side and have made that home. But when we were in Edelman House, where we were before, we were just all together and there was much more warmth and you knew what was going on with somebody's kids or somebody's mum. We'd go in and out of the kitchen and have our lunch in there. We don't do that now. We tend to work through our lunch hours.

Colin from the EAW team had a very different view of the same office. The environment there was seen to reflect inflexible or hierarchical approaches to work:

I mean, Edelman House - when we took the leases on there, initially it was open plan space. But they created lots and lots of little cubby holes they could sit in, from admin team managers, all the way through really. It wasn't just social workers, because they needed the confidentiality, it was people at relatively low grades. That's been part of the process through the Buildings Transformation policy, I think, breaking that down.

Much of my discussion with the EAW team concerned what they saw as a

mismatch between the essentially mobile nature of social work and common attitudes and spatial practices amongst the social work teams that worked against agile working and reduced social worker's flexibility in space.

Speaking about the negative attitudes towards 'agile working' as a term,

Marcus said:

The whole point of a lot of social work staff is that they're out with the clients and by nature they're more mobile. It's irrelevant what you call it but they're working out in the field, they're not in the office.

They explained that the previous Director of Children's Services in the city had been very supportive of this view. As Colin put it: 'It was like a breath of fresh air. He didn't want social workers in the office and his whole remit was they should be out there, they should be out there with the clients'. However, this had changed more recently and there was less confidence amongst current senior management about the benefits of agile working. The EAW team saw social workers' attempts to stake claims on desks or sit with other team members as a reflection of unimaginative or hierarchical team practices and a lack of confidence (of managers, of social workers themselves) in frontline practitioners' ability to work independently and engage with the external environment. Marcus made the point that, while a team ethos was important, that did not mean that social workers had to sit next to other members of their team:

They like to be in their team and won't even go with another team of social workers in the same building. They want to stay in that team and that's historic. That's one of the conversations we've had with [the current Manager of Children's Safeguarding Services], the manager

keeping his or her team together in an area that they can manage, supervise, oversee. I think, from our point of view, now it's a bit more broad than that. They need to encourage more collaboration within a number of different teams rather than a kind of silo view.

A key concern for the EAW team was that historical ways of working were immobile, hierarchical, inefficient and inflexible. While these features had been reflected in some of the physical office environments which social workers had come from, it seemed to the EAW team that there was a danger that similarly inflexible and immobile practices were being imposed on the open space of offices like Forest House. Amina spoke of social workers behaving as if 'invisible walls' existed between what they viewed as their area and the areas which were used by other teams. While Marcus had referred to managers' anxieties about allowing social workers to work in less closely supervised ways (see above), he also noted a different tendency for managers to sit with other managers and separate themselves from the teams that they supervised:

Marcus: There was a long discussion between the managers. Half of them were in favour of sitting within the teams and half of them weren't. So again, it's what kind of practice... Is it about the leadership style of those particular individuals or is there best practice that needs to be developed in there? And we don't know. That's not for us to say, it's an operational need. What we can do is provide the space.

Amina: It did seem odd to me. I think they were down here, weren't they? [She shows me on the building plan]. There was a big area that was empty most of the time by nature, because they're in meetings and they're out and about, the management team.

Colin: Almost cut themselves off, hadn't they?

Amina: They were literally right in the bottom, in the corner.

Dharman: I can see why team managers might want to be close to admin workers who they have a lot of contact with for information.

Amina: But they weren't. I mean, business support were here [points to a section in another part of the building] and you had the leadership team right over there.

The discussion amongst the agile working team was organised around persuasive ways of talking about good practice in terms of movement, flexibility, openness, autonomy, sharing, compromise and the unexpected benefits of proximity. This was contrasted with historical and residual practices that were hierarchical, inflexible, secretive and resistant to change and that had sometimes been expressed through cluttered, compartmentalised physical spaces, sometimes through working practices that maintained divisions and immobility in apparently open spaces. Social workers' accounts of space differed in certain ways. Their talk about the office workspace also featured references to flexibility, reciprocity, and connections with others but these were linked to predictability, continuity and sometimes nostalgia. Too much openness was associated with disruption, a lack of cohesion and potential for dangerous practice. For example, Stefan, a team manager now based at Forest House, had this to say about the environment there:

I don't like it, I think it's too noisy and it's too busy. I've come from an office which was in a converted school. I had my own office, my team had their own room, I shared an office but supervision was never a problem - the other manager would leave and we would reciprocate. You do need to sit with your team as well, and that was quite easy. There's no team cohesion here, we're trying but it's difficult. And from a safety aspect, of knowing where workers are all the time... and also, if you do want to disappear it's quite easy I think.

Social workers and those responsible for rolling out agile working in Alphaville conceived of social work space in ways which were apparently only subtly different but in actuality were grounded in contrasting assumptions about practice. Alphaville's building transformation and agile working plans were grounded in positive ideas about the benefits of more economical, flexible, contemporary and responsive work environments and the need for workers to be freed from requirements to attend an office base simply so that they can be seen to be working. The people responsible for implementing these plans were aware of the problems of scarce space and noise at Forest House but they saw this as a result of social workers spending time there out of habit rather than for a purpose and being less mobile than they needed to be in order to work effectively. Both the agile working team and social workers talked about space as holding symbolic significance, but for the first of these openness, flexibility and contemporaneity were valued, while the second group made reference to continuity over time and connections with others. They talked about office space as if it signified supportive collegial relationships and they seemed to have affection for office environments which by objective standards were not good, but which they associated with memories of collaborative or supportive relationships and successful practice. The frustration for the agile working team was that, when they asked social workers across the city what kinds of spaces they needed for their office work, contact with service users and meetings with other professionals, the responses were either inconclusive or led to spaces being provided which were then underused. Social workers were not, they told me, able to articulate

what they needed in ways that the estates department could translate into actual space.

Conclusion

As each of these examples shows, social workers' experience of their work and their sense making in relation to their cases occur in and through certain kinds of material configurations, forms of spatial practice and ways of thinking about space. These are not distinct from each other but develop in relation to one another – for example, offices change materially and atmospherically according to the activities and ways of talking and thinking about space engaged in by those within them.

While field social work might commonly be understood as a lone activity or one which practitioners make sense of through individual reflection and exploration in supervision, this research suggests that norms of talking and doing located in wider office spaces might be equally important for how things get done and understood. So office space matters, not in concrete terms where particular spatial forms can be dismissed as unproductive, but through atmospheric and affect-heavy features of space such as privacy, seclusion, engagement, exposure and nostalgia for past or distant spaces.

OUTSIDE THE SOCIAL WORK OFFICE

This chapter considers social work practices in spaces outside of the social work office, exploring and drawing links between social workers' approaches to space in their home visits to families and their work with other professionals, particularly police officers. It continues the spatial dialectical approach of the previous chapter, drawing on and seeking to provide a discussion that integrates analysis of accounts of space with observations of spatial practices on home visits and with other professionals. This chapter draws in particular on some of the mobile interviews with social workers travelling around Alphaville and Lumberton and observations in the office base of the pilot Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Alphaville, a project which brought together duty social workers, the Police Child Abuse Investigation Team and a safeguarding nurse who was linked to health visiting, GP and other local health services.

In bringing together discussions of social work practices in disparate spaces (meetings, an office in a police station, cars, hallways in service users' homes, a kitchen, a child's bedroom) the chapter seeks to elucidate any consistent features of social workers' spatial practices and conceptions of space away

from the 'inside' spaces of social work offices. Although home visits and multi-disciplinary discussions are very different contexts, they both clearly involve social workers working outside of the more or less private, more or less autonomous spaces that I outlined in the previous chapter. The inclusion of mundane practices in the MASH office in this chapter is less self-evident and needs some explanation. Like the contexts that I discussed in chapter four, the MASH was an office space where social workers spent much of their time engaged in desk work. Many of the participants asserted that the pilot project had shown them that there were no significant differences between social workers and police officers, so it could be assumed that the MASH would function as an office much like the other two office spaces which I have already discussed. However, all but one of the people who made such statements were police officers; social workers, by and large, remained silent on the subject or spoke of the differences between social workers' and police officers' practices - a finding which indicates not just differences in practices but also contrasting approaches to what can or should be identified to an external researcher as either similar or different. I also observed marked differences in atmosphere and spatial practice between Alphaville's MASH office and the other two offices in which I carried out observations, some of which seemed directly related to the multidisciplinary context of the MASH. Exploring interactions in the MASH office alongside other, more obvious forms of 'outside' practice is intended to highlight some significant aspects of social work ways of interpreting and being in spaces. The chapter explores the following questions. How do social workers create certain forms

of material space in their practice? What ideas about space are assumed in these spatial practices? How do social workers construct space in their accounts of space and their practices in space? What forms of social work embodiment and emplacement do such constructions of space and material spaces enable and what forms do they require?

The chapter engages with questions that have been raised by other research, about the opportunities and challenges for social workers and other practitioners of multi-agency working (see for example Frost and Robinson, 2004; Stanley et al., 2010; Stanley and Humphreys, 2014). Such research has drawn attention to the differing values, focuses and information systems that become more apparent when different agencies and professions work more closely. Joint working can require practitioners to make explicit the assumptions on which their judgements are based , potentially leading to the development of new ways of working, based on shared values (Frost and Robinson, 2004). However, as Stanley and Humphreys (2014) note, these differences are often embedded in different ways of understanding, recording and sharing information, so might be more difficult to shift than the awareness of individual practitioners alone.

Evaluations of recent MASH projects suggest a range of improvements, in particular: better information sharing between agencies, improved understandings of the roles of different agencies, more robust decision making and the development of a shared culture in MASH projects that is

distinct from professionals home agencies (Golden et al., 2011; Home Office, 2013; Crockett et al., 2013). These improvements echo the kinds of conclusions drawn by Frost and Robinson (2004) about the potential benefits of joined up working between agencies. However, it is important to note that the research evidence about MASH projects is still small and has tended to focus on what practitioners say about their work and what information management systems show about how services deal with referrals. Less is known about the material practices involved in closer working between police officers and social workers, which are the focus of this study.

Working in dangerous spaces

I want to start with two social workers' stories, told in different interviews, each of which was presented as an account of effective practice on difficult, potentially dangerous home visits. I'm interested in how social workers present the spaces and their own actions in getting into such spaces or achieving things within them (an issue that has been explored in previously, for example in De Montigny, 1995; Ferguson 2010b; 2011a). To provide some context, both stories occurred during mobile interviews and Ari's took place as we drove along the street in which the events that she was talking about had occurred. As elsewhere, I provide my question or comment immediately before Rachel's story as a context, while Ari's story occurred as part of an extended monologue about working with Asian families in

Dogwood, a socially and ethnically mixed neighbourhood of Alphaville that we were driving through at the time.

Dharman: You've worked in safeguarding a long time. I think that's unusual. Does it mean you practise differently?

Rachel: I think one of my skills is adapting to situations, anyway. The worst case I ever had, which will literally stay with me forever, was a case where we heard a child had been hurt because the back gate had fallen on him. So it was child protection, so I arranged to go out with a police officer. I came round the corner to meet him - five police cars! I said 'Is there something I don't know?' He said 'Apparently the last time social workers came here he drew a knife on them'. I said 'Great, nice to know now.' Anyway, we knocked on the door, we heard this thudding down the stairs. Mum stood at the door. Danny, the big guy, is stood at the back. Big bloke, you could hardly see daylight. He came thundering down the stairs. And I just said 'Danny - social services and police. What was that at the weekend!? What was Gerrard doing? I've never seen such a load of – that game was appalling!' That was because he had Liverpool posters and pictures all down the hallway. That was my key into the house and it worked. You can't teach that to new social workers.

Ari: I had a really big, big case. You know, you have a case that you'll never forget. Here in Dogwood, of an Asian family around domestic abuse and we ended up removing five of the six children because allegations had been made about domestic abuse [...] The mum was the second wife and the first wife had fled domestic violence, but she had three older children who ended up being left behind with Dad. He married again - really young, beautiful, she's such a nice girl. She had three children by him. [...] I met this mum in the morning. Her mother-in-law wouldn't leave us on our own so I had to – we found a way. We made excuses – 'Oh, I think the baby needs a bottle', so she got sent off to make a bottle and stuff. The mum said 'Get me out'. She was begging us, 'Please, get me out of here, I need to go, I need to get my kids out of this situation'. So, we'd taken an interpreter, and we offered to help her. Came back in the evening because we'd basically managed to get funding for a hotel for her and then we'd pick it up the next

day. So I went round with the police. The Dad wouldn't let us go. It was one of these massive houses down here. And as we were there talking to her, one by one, one bloke after another was entering the property, not saying anything to us, just entering the property quietly, as you do, all piling into the back kitchen. So realistically, we didn't know how many people were in this house, we didn't have a clue. She'd raised so many horrendous concerns, we were like 'Now is your opportunity'. And then the mum changed her mind. She said 'I haven't said anything, I am not going'. Because clearly she was scared of this man, she changed her mind, decided she couldn't leave him. We had no choice at that point. The police made the decision as well that they were going to police protect the children. So we ended up with five kids, all to be accommodated that night.

These stories are concerned with questions of space, danger and the dilemmas of protective action - how to get into dangerous places and see what is actually happening, how to enable women in such spaces to protect children and themselves, or how to protect children directly when this does not happen. Dangers are not specifically defined - Rachel only revealed why this was such a terrible case later in our conversation while Ari only ever referred to 'horrendous concerns' - but each story relies on an idea that is prevalent in children's social work, that home spaces are always, at least potentially, spaces of danger for children and for social workers too (Smith, 2006; Ferguson 2010b; Braescu, 2012).

A sense of this kind of danger is established in the accounts in several ways. Firstly, they are introduced as stories about cases that each social worker would never forget. Such a case stays with you because of its own qualities but also because it was the first or only time that you had to encounter such an extreme situation and so you were changed by it. So

these are stories about practice but also about the social workers themselves and, in these instances, they are stories where people are changed because of their exposure to horrible or frightening situations. They also positioned me as an insider - explicitly in Ari's story ('*You know, you have a case that you never forget*'), implicitly in Rachel's, where there was an assumption that we both knew something which new social workers would not: what to do in such critical moments. This made the stories seem more resonant for me.

As well as constructing dangerous spaces in certain ways, these accounts feature particular kinds of social work practices within such spaces. Rachel is able to find a way into the house through being observant, creative and using aspects of herself. She names her professional role but then puts this to one side, noticing something personal about Danny and drawing on features of her own personal self (she has a Liverpool accent, she knew about the recent match) to find enough of a connection to get in. Tactics such as these are constructed as spatial matters - Rachel's story emphasises both how Danny's body blocked the hallway ('you could hardly see daylight') and how she found a way in by reading clues on its walls. It suggests the value of *noticing small things* but it also dramatises the *small spaces* available for getting into this house. Getting in requires 'a key' - a little, uniquely shaped thing. The gaps around Danny's body are hardly big enough for daylight to show through but, even so, she gets past him.

In Ari's story, the house is 'massive'. The houses which she pointed out to

me were three storey terraced ones, particularly tall and deep (in the spatial syntactical sense) in relation to their size - in other words parts of them remain at some distance even once one is inside - and Ari's story draws dramatic significance from this quality. When she is inside, there are spaces to which she does not have access, but which she is aware could hold unknown dangers. The massive house and, metonymically, the dangerous things that it might conceal, create a sense of contrasting smallness amongst the woman ('really young, beautiful, she's such a nice girl') and the children in the house. Smallness is inextricably associated with vulnerability in child protection. As I discuss further in chapter six, children are almost always, explicitly or implicitly, both vulnerable and small and the smaller they are, the more vulnerable they are understood as likely to be. Ari is implicitly small in this story too, but her smallness and the massive house/ family that she has to contend with do not make her less effective. 'We found a way', she said, making things that seem like weaknesses into opportunities. The massiveness of the house, Ari's and the woman's static position and other people's (in this case the mother-in-law's) ability to move around are all used to create a chance for the woman to disclose the horrendous concerns and agree to leave with the children. At the end of the story, when Ari needs to move herself and the children, she is ready and able to do so.

A third story about dangerous home spaces, told by Ruth during an interview at the office, makes explicit the tactical use of smallness and stillness in social work practice:

I went in a house once. It was very chaotic, there's an Alsatian dog running round, they've got the mother standing there, they've locked the door so I couldn't get out. And they were throwing things at each other. A hammer would go across and things like this, and they were shouting at each other. I thought 'If I shout, they're going to shout.' So I thought 'What am I going to do?' So I went 'I'm going to sit down'. So I sat down and I started speaking really quietly. I continued to say 'Mrs X, can you come and sit down?' In fact, if you speak quietly, you go into families and all they do is shout at each other and nobody can hear what they're saying so you get a child who continues to shout, but nobody is listening to that child. If you actually speak very quietly to that child or to the parents, everything will come down.

What interests me about these stories is that social workers are dramatising the effectiveness of noticing or doing small things, being small oneself, quietness, stillness and the ability to shape oneself as required by the surroundings. Sometimes social workers need to move quickly (for instance, in Ari's story) but it is timeliness rather than speed for its own sake that these stories celebrate. Social workers should find a pace that does not jar with the surrounding rhythms, whilst also being able to influence them positively (as in Ruth's story). Skilled social work is being malleable, not in the sense of being open to manipulation by others, but in terms of being able to become the size and shape needed to get into deep spaces and see what is actually happening inside (Rachel's story). These are also, implicitly, stories about gendered bodies - the gendered nature of the violence and aggression that social workers encounter, the risks that women practitioners have to deal with and the opportunities for movement and stillness that are created through gendered features of social work bodies.

I found these stories appealing because they seemed to show skills and sensibilities that were intrinsic to social work, but they were also all highly polished stories which had probably solidified into certain arrangements over the course of time and repeated tellings. One of them, for example, was told to me on two different occasions and the similarities in terms of the circumstances in which the story was told, its structure and its delivery were remarkable. They certainly cannot be taken as simple reflections of actual spatial practices of social workers but they also do not reflect the conceptions of space that might prevail in most practitioners' work. The following discussion continues the focus on social workers' articulations about space and movement but seeks to explore what they find difficult to produce polished or confident accounts of, either because they lack ways of talking about it or because talking about spatial relations involves certain risks that they want to avoid.

Accounts of spatial interaction: tacit knowledge and taboo articulation

My discussions with social workers about more mundane interactions with service users suggested that, while they might have employed sophisticated movement skills and worked in sensitive, emplaced ways, they also had quite restricted ways of talking about these aspects of their practice. For example, during the office interview with Eddie, an experienced social worker in Lumberton, I asked him to describe how he might interact with a child during a

planned visit to a family where there were child protection concerns. As the following discussion shows, the conversation suggested a lack of language for speaking about certain aspects of bodies, spaces and movement and taboos about articulating bodies in certain circumstances.

Eddie explained that he might talk to a child in their bedroom. Most child protection plans would require him to check children's rooms and doing this with the child would give him an opportunity to talk to them on their own. He then went on to talk about the kinds of questions he would ask, the importance of remaining conscious of not speaking too much or guiding the conversation, sensitivity to the child's mood and other features of verbal and non-verbal communication. I wanted to bring back the focus of our discussion to the spatial elements of his practice so I asked him about specific aspects of this:

D: And how would ... you know, this is the space stuff that I'm asking you about now. Can you think of a time when you might've done that, talking to a young person in their room? Where did you sit? What are the distances between you? Those sorts of things.

E: Well, I let the child decide that really, I think. You don't want to overcrowd them. Yeh, you know, I'd just let the child decide, that's how I do it anyway. There's maybe ways of doing things in textbooks or whatever.

D: Well, there isn't much in textbooks really.

E: [Laughs] I'd let them decide, you don't want to become too - they know you're a social worker, especially the older children, they know you're a social worker. You can't expect children to be your best - have a great relationship straight away. Just making sure they know your role and what you do and just be led by them I think.

D: So what happens then? Give me an example of this kind of situation.

E: I know one family, ah, it's difficult to think of examples really. Um, yeh,

there's a 13 year old girl so I'd speak to her and her brother who's 11 years old. So, I asked to see their rooms cos there's an issue of ... home conditions are an issue. So I can go upstairs and just ask her how she's getting on, how she's getting on with her parents. Cos there's been issues with the mother - mental health. You know, is she seeing her friends, check she's not isolated. Um, are her friends coming to her house? Because that's been a problem in the past cos of the home conditions. Um, ask how she's getting on at school, because she's been bullied at school because of the way, her presentation again, because of the home conditions. 'How are you getting on at school?' You know, and then I'll respond to where they are so if she says 'I'm fine at school' I'll leave it there but if she's having difficulties I'll talk about, you know, 'What are the difficulties?' If it's 'I'm getting bullied', well 'why are you getting bullied?' If it's 'the way I look' or 'the way I smell', then it's, right, that needs to be raised with parents. See what I mean? So that's the way you do it, softly softly, get your information. If I just came in and said 'Oh, you don't look good, you look messy, you haven't, you always smell' or something like that then she would be very defensive straight off. That's how I would do it with that girl.

D: That sounds great, how you would do it. Um, can I just tell you what I was thinking? I asked about where you would sit and that sort of thing but it sounds like it just happens unconsciously. You just make a judgement unconsciously.

E: You do and it depends what she says, because I'm visiting regularly and there're maybe times when there isn't anything but if she does start disclosing stuff about, you know, school bullying and school then that's time to move a bit closer and start looking. Eye contact is important, your body language, so you've got to respond. You know, I think it's important that you respond to the child and not the other way round.

When I asked Eddie to focus on spatial practice he initially asserted that he would be led by the child, even though in practice he would have needed to make decisions himself about many of these matters (for example whether to sit or not; if the young person had sat down first, how close to sit to her). When I pressed him for an account of what he did in space during a piece of work, his talk turned to the question of boundary transgression: 'You don't want to become too - ', as if bringing space into conversation raised this

matter in a way that talk would not. Describing position and movement at this point in the interview felt uncomfortable, in contrast to the previous discussion about talking with a young person, even though talk about bullying and neglect must also hold plenty of potential for transgression and harm. It also seems significant that Eddie's references to space mostly relate to distance and interaction between his body and the young person's, rather than other aspects of spatial practice such as how to move around in a bedroom or how to sit on a bed, and what it is about these things which makes a conversation in someone's bedroom so different from one in a social work office interview room. He also chose not to talk about his observations of the spaces of children's bedrooms and bodies. He provided detail about how he would talk to the girl about bullying related to home conditions, presentation and self-care but he did not talk about how he would observe her appearance and smell directly himself.

After this point, Eddie reverted back to a focus on talk by giving several examples of what kinds of questions he might ask. I pointed out that it seemed that he was making 'unconscious' judgements about space as a way of prompting him to make explicit how he made decisions about how to move and position himself. He agreed but the explanations about space and movement that he gave - engaging eye contact, moving closer - did not seem a realistic reflection of how Eddie would have actually behaved in such a situation. The transcript does not necessarily reflect the sensitivity with which he used words but the interview left me with the impression that he was

skilled at talking to children, communicating openness and sensitivity through his talk and reflecting on his expectations and investment. Our conversation also showed how he used posture and movement in ways that promoted openness between us and allowed the conversation to continue, even at points when it seemed to feel uncomfortable for him. However, he did not refer to such aspects of his practice in our discussion about his interactions with young people. The interview raised the question of why these features were not spoken about.

Harry Collins' recent work on tacit knowledge is useful here (Collins, 2010). Collins notes how most knowledge is tacit rather than explicit. The tacit can be knowledge that was once explicit but has since become second nature. It can be a capacity that is not yet articulated but holds the potential to be so. It can be somatic - held in the particular forms, habits and strengths of bodies rather than conscious or unconscious concepts. It can also be located in physical forms or 'strings' - material objects or environments which, when subjects engage with them, enable ways of knowing and doing things. Some of these forms of tacit knowledge can be made explicit but not all of them. Features of the conversation with Eddie suggested that some aspects of spatial practice were explicit but not comfortable or safe to talk about. Some aspects were probably now tacit because Eddie had been doing the work for several years. Other features were intrinsic to the shape and movements of his body, clothes and the kinds of spaces - living rooms, bedrooms, schools, cars and offices - in which he did his work. These

features can be noted, as I have done here, but this does not render the subtleties of the knowledge itself explicit.

Spatial practice: the tacit somatic during home visits

During the fieldwork at Alphaville, I was able to accompany social workers on a small number of home visits. The following discussion concerns a situation where I accompanied Rachel on her first visit in relation to a case that she had been allocated to hold on a short-term basis following a child protection conference, while it awaited allocation in the long-term safeguarding team. The case features four children who had just been made subjects of child protection plans because of concern about the impact of domestic violence from their father to their mother, Carrie. Carrie had not attended the conference and so needed to be informed of its decision, while it was unclear at the conference whether her partner had been released from custody yet and so Rachel also needed to establish whether he was in the house. The case raises questions about the ways in which domestic violence is often conceptualised in children's social work currently, as a problem for which the solution always involves abusive partners leaving the household. However, given my limited knowledge of the details of this particular situation, my aim is not to explore whether or not this is legitimate in this instance. I am also not presenting it as an example of good or problematic practice or a piece of work that was successful in its aims. I cannot comment on Carrie's views of the

visit and, even if I had talked to her about this after the visit, it is questionable whether she would have been able to communicate what she thought openly and in full, given my association with Rachel. Instead, I wish to explore how certain kinds of relations, affects and meanings for social work involvement occurred during the visit through people's physical movements and positions and what this tells us about the ways in which space might be tacitly understood by social workers. The data that I draw on here are my observations of people's bodies as they interacted with each other, the home and its contents alongside my own corporeal experiences of the space. The account begins at the start of the home visit. The fieldnotes were recorded at the end of the same day of the visit and include my impressions at the time of writing about what had happened, so my aim here is to examine critically both the described events and the account itself.

Arrived when dark. Cul de sac, parked in bay opposite house and rang doorbell twice. There is a sign on door saying that you are on CCTV. I asked Rachel where the camera was, she saw it behind me. I had a sense of some trepidation at this point. We could hear people in the living room on the first floor (it's a first and second floor maisonette). Someone called out asking 'Who is it?' Rachel initially said it was someone for Carrie. When asked again she said 'social services', then said to me she didn't like saying this out loud in public.

Carrie answered the door, Rachel explained who she was and asked to come in. We walked up the stairs and she started friendly chat with Carrie and called out to the children in the living room. Rachel asks whether they're ready for Christmas, comments on nice smell of chips (as they were eating kebab and chips) and how it was good to keep warm inside (it was cold outside but flat was nice and warm). Carrie was in a dressing gown. We went through to kitchen/dining room and talked there. Carrie's friend came in – not introduced so Rachel asked – 'You're not Chloe are you?' (Chloe is the oldest child). Friend said no

and stayed to listen. It seemed that Carrie wanted her there and Rachel did not ask anything further.

See sketch for this visit.

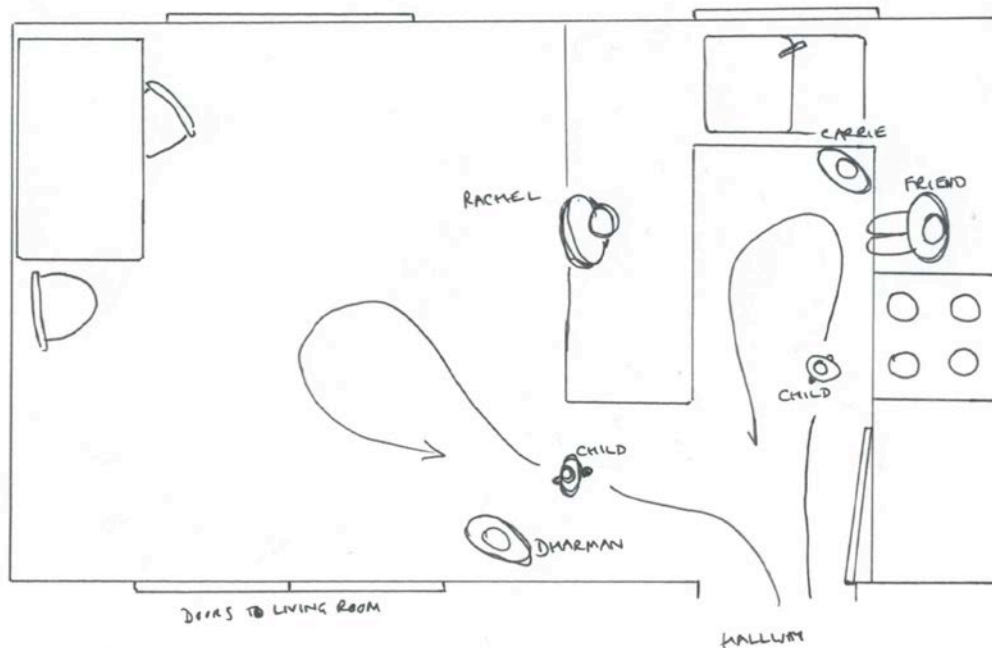


Figure 5 Fieldnotes sketch showing positions of people present at the Carrie home visit

Carrie is leaning back against worktop by sink, friend sits on worktop, eats food. Rachel refers to food again, says something nice. Rachel leaning forward on worktop: position conveyed warmth, action focused, collaborative, honest, also some degree of pace/urgency. Think this was more possible because of where and how Carrie and friend were positioned, Rachel found way of fitting in here, used worktops and kitchen as parts of scene. Rachel referred to the cooker at one point, said it was nice.

I stand behind Rachel, initially I just say who I am and then watch.

Two small children come in - lift in tempo, we greet them and they walk around us in the room. Pleasant interaction and then Carrie tells them to get out again.

Discussion with Carrie and Rachel. Rachel explaining what the conference agreed. Importance of her not allowing father back in house, not having relationship with him. Carrie saying she won't, but then asking what they would do if he did come back to the house. Rachel

explained clearly. Said that there would be concerns about children living with him, given his violence. Carrie said 'He just pushed me. He's inside about damage to a shed and violence to someone else.' She also said that he's pushed her downstairs in the past. Rachel said that concerns are about these other incidents. Carrie: 'Are you going to take my kids off me?' Rachel used hands to show - 'We're here. The kids going into care is down here' - gesture with two hands, right one far right, left one far left.

Carrie said twice during visit that she was worried now. When leaving, Rachel was in front of Carrie, started to go down the stairs - 'And don't worry about the children being taken off you, we're not there at the moment, that would be far down the line.' She said these things on leaving, opportunity to express warmth and openness when not stood face to face, but on moments of change and moments when she is turned other way (and so less confrontational).

The visit began with Rachel and me not knowing whether we would find that the children's father had returned to the house and I experienced feelings of 'some trepidation' at this point. We were outside the house and it appeared as an unknown, risk-filled space then, but very soon afterwards we were inside the home and the three women's interactions were characterised by expressions of warmth and open, comfortable postures. Carrie was leaning with her back to the kitchen worktop, her friend was sitting on it whilst eating, Rachel was leaning over another part of the worktop towards them both. The participants fell into this configuration, rather than it being imposed by the social worker; it seemed likely to be a conventional arrangement for interactions between individuals in such a space, which was available to the participants at this moment. The interaction was characterised by openness, informality and physical comfort but the topic being discussed was Carrie having to end her relationship with the children's father and the possibility of

the children coming into care. Later, when we were walking down the stairs to the front door of the maisonette, Rachel repeated what she had said about the likelihood of the children being removed - perhaps a sensible point at which to reaffirm a key message. The exchange took place in accordance with a convention of leaving someone's home - parting words at or near the front door, delivered over one person's shoulder or with one body at half profile to the other, which reaffirm a point already discussed and imply the prospect of future events. When I wrote the fieldnotes, I viewed this approach as enabling the message to be reaffirmed in a less threatening way. However, the informality of the comments and their location in the open space of the hallway, next to the room where the children were eating, strike me now as out of place, rather than a more sensitive way of talking about the topic.

Home visits constitute an aspect of children's social work that is recognised in practice and in social work literature as risk-laden, complex and demanding for social workers. Social workers on home visits are seen to be outside of their own territory, encountering the unexpected and interacting with people in the context of their own complex lives rather than in controlled environments. Homes contain the resonances of past events, which may affect the atmosphere and the actions of those within them, with or without their conscious knowledge (Ferguson, 2010b; 2011a). Social workers' movements may be constrained within these spaces, in ways that they do not consciously acknowledge but which stop them from identifying the harm that children are experiencing. Ferguson's work shows how the spatial structures

and resonances of homes are active in producing situations of disguised compliance, where service users and social workers behave as if children are being cared for and protected despite ongoing dangers. Other literature has suggested that, too often, children's safeguarding social workers are intent on outlining what clients should do differently rather than exploring people's ambivalence both about their current parenting and the changes that might be required (Forrester et al., 2008; Forrester, Westlake and Glynn, 2012), while analyses of various inquiries have identified the ways in which some parents may be skilled in presenting themselves to suggest compliance (Brandon et al., 2009; Brandon et al., 2012).

Disguised compliance can be understood as a way of explaining how deception is maintained through relationships between service users and social workers, perhaps through particularly manipulative behaviour on the part of service users, through the social worker's unconscious requirement that the service user be a good or sympathetic person or through a lack of attention to patterns as they occur over longer periods of time (Reder, Duncan and Gray, 1993). Although literature dealing with disguised compliance often does not mention home visiting, home visits still feature implicitly as the spatial context for potential problems in social work-service user relationships.

These are important matters but I am more interested in the mundane aspects of home visiting, however successfully it occurs. I am therefore not concerned with identifying potential problems that need to be avoided so much as

aspects of most home visits which create requirements for the truth to be obscured, at least to some degree. All home visits operate according to certain conventions. They are always time limited, involving social workers entering at the beginning and leaving at the end while parents (and often children too) are present before, during and afterwards. They almost always occur in the context of parents' consent and so they operate in relation to those broad conventions which structure the entry into homes of diverse groups of people such as friends, family, people selling utilities, repairing boilers etc. There are always hosts and guests, and people in each of these groups experience the interaction differently from each other. Home visiting always involves guests entering a new atmosphere, but it also involves guests bringing new atmospheres into the home. Almost all home visits bring with them a sense that visitors should be shown some gesture of care, whether this is being given a drink or just shown a place to sit or stand.

I do not know whether or not Carrie was obscuring the truth when she said that she would not allow her partner to come back to the house, although she did follow this statement with a question about what would happen if he did move back. There is certainly a question about whether she was being completely open but disguised compliance seems an inadequate concept for understanding her behaviour if this were the case, given the requirements to be open, engaged, helpful and respectful that come with being a host to a stranger who is visiting to talk about an important matter. Leaving aside the tautologies of the term itself (what is being referred to, after all, is *apparent*

compliance in the context of disguised *non-compliance*), there are some problems with the ways that this issue is often conceptualised in social work. Most of the time disguised compliance is not a feature of pathological personalities or working relationships so much as an effect of certain mundane configurations of the social and material, which carry with them tacit expectations. Home visiting is, for this reason, a problematic tool for establishing 'honest, open' (Forrest et al., 2012: p. 119) working relationships in child protection, even if it is intrinsic to this area of practice and also potentially transformative. Yet social workers in this study repeatedly celebrated their skills in home visiting, which they presented as enabling them to see the truth about children's care and family dynamics.

These examples show the importance of particular corporeal and spatial qualities in social work practice, such as smallness, stillness, getting into and finding a place in service users' homes through which to engage with people. They suggest some skilful ways of working through bodily interaction alongside a reluctance to talk about corporeal elements of practice or a lack of words for doing so. These matters become important when we consider how social workers practise more closely with other professionals, whose activities produce very different kinds of spaces. An example of this was the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) that was being piloted in Alphaville South when I did the fieldwork there. The agreement for me to carry out observations at Alphaville rested on me reviewing the pilot project and so much of my research was focused on this part of social workers' practice.

Social work and police space

At the beginning of the period of fieldwork in Alphaville, I met with the children's safeguarding service manager from the local authority and the detective inspector who managed the police Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT), two people who had worked closely together to develop the pilot MASH project. They outlined the sorts of questions about joint working between social workers and police that they thought my research could explore. One issue was the perception that social workers lacked effectiveness in their work with police officers - social workers were seen by some as being unclear about what they contributed to joint investigations and as lacking the confidence to challenge police actions when necessary. Some of the concerns about social workers which circulated in Alphaville related directly to their mobility in space: a lot of children's social workers in the city did not drive cars; a substantial proportion of the social workers in each of the safeguarding teams in West sector had not passed the police vetting process and so were not able to be based in the police station where the MASH office was located. There was a suggestion that people who could not drive or would not pass police vetting should not be offered social work posts in the future.

Following the research, it seems clear that space was significant for joint working in much broader ways than these. The differences between social workers' and police detectives' movements, the posture, shape and size of bodies, the ways in which gender was performed differently by the two

groups, their interactions with service users' bodies and homes and the extent to which their bodies were affected by and differentiated from their environment all helped to explain difficulties in joint working. That is not to say that these problems were only about space but that space was a component of joint working that was continually significant.

Gender, bodies and space

In this section, I explore police child abuse investigation work and children's safeguarding social work as practices that are embodied and emplaced in quite distinct ways, which cause certain complexities and problems for practitioners when they begin to work in closer physical proximity, as they did in the MASH pilot project. The analysis that follows focuses on gender both as a performative achievement and as a feature of the interaction of bodies with/ as parts of a material environment. This focus is not intended to imply that gender is produced through bodies to a greater extent or prior to other systems of social difference such as class, race or age. I also do not want to suggest that gender had a greater significance than other social structuring systems in distinguishing the two groups - detectives and social workers - from each other. In fact, in terms of simple quantities, the differences between police officers and social workers in the West sector of Alphaville were more obviously about race than about gender. Both teams were gender mixed, although each of the social work teams had more women than men while there were more men than women amongst the police. In relation to

race, the child abuse investigation team was uniformly white and it was located in a police station that also seemed to be populated almost entirely by white people, except for those individuals in its waiting room area. In contrast, each of the social work teams included both white and non-white people and, as such, their presence in the police station generally and the child abuse investigation team office in particular marked a significant shift for those places. The distinction to be made between gender and other social structures such as class and race was that participants often pointed to gender difference as meaningful, either through explicit reference or through gestures and other material practices which still appeared to be self-consciously gendering. I therefore want to explore how participants, particularly social workers, drew meaning from the gendered features of their practice. I explore race and class in the next chapter, using concepts from whiteness studies to make sense of how race and social class were more likely to operate through the disavowal of difference than they were to draw explicit meaning from it.

Child abuse work has a particular gendered significance in British police services in that it is an area where women officers have, historically, predominated and had greater access than men to certain areas of specialist training. Even currently, women officers seeking promotion away from uniform work may find that they are expected to work for a period in child abuse or domestic violence teams before moving into other areas of criminal investigation practice (Westmarland, 2012). Child abuse investigation is

therefore distinguished from most other areas of police work in that it is not numerically dominated by men, while women and men might work in such teams for different reasons and at different stages of their careers.

Some of the social workers at Alphaville commented on the ways in which gendered interactions in the child abuse investigation team differed from their experiences in social care teams. For example when I asked Christina, a senior social worker, about the culture of the police station she focused explicitly on women detectives' behaviour:

When they're going out on a job and they're doing their hair, and putting their make up on and you kind of think 'Hello? You're going out on a job. Does it really matter what you look like?' And some of the things they wear are so impractical. If you're in the middle of an arrest and you're wearing a skirt that's up to... Well, it isn't for me. At the end of the day, you know what, we're there to protect children and the practicalities of doing that is not wearing five inch heels.

My role at Alphaville was specifically about evaluating a pilot joint working project and consequently much of what people discussed with me was premised on a comparison of the working practices of the two professional groups. This often led to the construction of either contrasts or similarities between police and social work practice rather than more attenuated discussions. However, Christina had identified something significant about the differences between female detectives' and social workers' presentation. Although some women social workers wore make up many did not, while almost all of the women detectives wore noticeable amounts. They generally dressed more formally than the social workers, were much more

likely to wear skirts and heels and were more likely to have hairstyles that required maintenance through the working day. There were also clear differences between how female and male detectives interacted with social workers. Unlike their male colleagues the female detectives rarely came over to the social work side of the office. Some social workers talked about how it was difficult to engage with them.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that police officers' presentation and interactions emphasised gender distinctions while social workers' did not. Gender difference between social work colleagues was explicitly referred to and endowed with meaning frequently enough for this not to seem a taboo matter. Amongst the social work teams, managers were much more likely to be men than were other practitioners and this was an issue which was available for comment. Sometimes female social workers raised matters relating to gender and parenting in ways which implied that male social workers or managers might attach less significance to these considerations than they did. Men and women seemed comfortable talking about the gendered nature of child protection work and its problematic focus on women's parenting. Amongst the police, the difference between detective constable and management grades was, perhaps, not so open to gendering in binary terms (while the two sergeants were men, the inspector who managed the service was a woman). More significantly, I never heard police officers referring to each other's gender in the office and certain practices amongst the detectives seemed instead to function to perform gender equality rather

than difference. For example, the term 'mate' was sometimes used by male and female detectives in their interactions with colleagues of the other gender. Social workers did not do this.

All of this suggests that the presentation and articulation of gendered bodies held different kinds of significance amongst the two groups. As Helen Scholar (2013) has noted, there has been little attention to social workers' dress and use of clothes in academic literature, even though dress is likely to be something that social workers have to consider when thinking about how to convey professionalism, establish confidence and communicate professional values. Ethnographic research identifies how police officers' bodies are understood in police culture to be distinct from their surroundings and any unwarranted contact by members of the public with police bodies or, by extension, their uniforms, is treated as an extremely serious matter, which justifies a punitive response (Holdaway, 1983). Bodies need to be fit and strong in order to carry out those tasks which are seen as 'real' police work such as arrests, managing conflict and civil disturbance, but they also hold symbolic significance as representations of police authority and reliability. Numerous ethnographic studies point to the importance of internal solidarity and social isolation from others (e.g. Brewer, 1991; Loftus, 2009; Fassin, 2013) and these characteristics of police culture are likely to find reflection in the narrow social rules about dress and bodily presentation that existed in the CAIT, even though these were not uniformed officers. In truth, the distinctions between a) the police and everyone else and b) uniformed

officers and detectives are important considerations for understanding detectives' dress and bodily presentation. Although Christina focused only on female detectives' behaviour, male detectives were similarly engaged in some quite specific kinds of dress practices. They wore business shirts, ties and suits, a level of formality which was similar to the way women in the team presented themselves. Rather than distinguishing themselves from each other, female and male detectives' highly gendered dress practices can be seen instead as ways of contrasting their bodies with those of service users. Social workers also sometimes talked about the importance of dressing formally, for example when attending court hearings, and my observations suggested that they were generally very capable of doing this when needed. However, they also spoke about the importance at other times of dressing in a way that did not emphasise their difference from service users, even though their interpretations of what this meant in practice varied considerably. These contrasting approaches of either embodying difference or deferring its embodiment were aspects of detectives' and social workers' spatial practices which had significant effects when they worked together.

Bodies, direction and speed

As well as differences in bodily appearance and corporeal space, the study pointed to significant differences between social workers' and police officers' approaches to movement, direction and speed. When I interviewed detectives about the MASH pilot they all, without exception, spoke about

speed as a potential benefit of the initiative. When they explained their work to me they also placed considerable emphasis on its speed related aspects such as the need to operate according to the PACE clock (derived from the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984), the importance of rapidly securing a crime scene to protect evidence and the 'golden hour' - the first 24 hours after a crime has been committed, during which the most productive detective work is likely to occur. While they said that they welcomed closer proximity and working practices with social workers, some detectives found it frustrating that each of the social work teams only spent one week in three on duty at the police station. Police officers identified 'duty' as a system that was peculiar to social work - as Andy, a detective constable, explained, 'every day we're here, we're technically on duty' - but they often did not have a clear sense of what social workers did when they were not on duty, which was most of the time. Duty was, for them, obviously the most important part of social work and so it was logical that social workers should do more of it. Some talked about how it would be better if social workers worked weekends and shifts like they did, rather than office hours. Others said that they liked the MASH but would prefer it just to be one team of social workers, there all the time, rather than three teams who each spent every third week (their 'duty week') at the police station.

Social workers talked about time in different kinds of ways. They too emphasised efficiency, but not specifically speed. The differences in social work and police talk about time and speed are illustrated well by what they

said about strategy discussions, which had previously commonly taken place over the phone and had generally only involved sergeants and social work team managers. With the MASH pilot, strategy discussions relating to social work duty cases now took place in the MASH room and often involved a social worker and detective constable. Andy had this to say about the impact of the MASH:

The biggest thing for me has been the strategy discussion because that was what used to hinder things in the past and delay things. You probably see, we're all rush, rush, rush. Something comes in, we know what we got to do and we just want to go and do it. The delay has always been for the sergeant to contact the [social work] team manager to have a strategy discussion, agree something, allocate a social worker, for the social worker then to get in touch with us, or us get in touch with the social workers and agree a time. And that was always the delay. Whereas that's obviously taken that away. That's the biggest improvement I think.

Ian made some similar points in a different fashion:

D: So is it working well?

I: I like it and I think so. I will say, I do think the work of going out with someone who's immediately there, who's got exactly the same information as you is far better than - I can't stand waiting, I can't stand delay. And there's no issue then. You go out together, you've got all the information. Right, let's go then, we can chat about it in the car.

Although detectives made positive noises about this aspect of the MASH, more detailed discussion revealed that they sometimes found some features of the face to face strategy discussions frustrating. I asked Sean, a detective sergeant, about what aspects of strategy discussions could still be improved:

S: Ownership. Whose meeting it is and who's chairing it.

D: So do you think the chairing could be improved? It's chaired by team managers.

S: Yeh. And that's what I think - they need to have the confidence that they're calling a strategy discussion and it's their baby. Because then you can cut out the waffle, if you want to call it that.

Sean explained what information should form the focus of the meeting:

For me it's information in the last three, four years really in a child's life. The child may be 15 now, they may have been subject to a child protection enquiry when they were four years old but actually, what was it? You may succinctly mention it, it may be about domestic abuse or something fundamentally different to what the child is saying now. You may just do a one line on that. Not 'We need to know everything about what happened to that child.' It's about relevance and that comes with a bit of skill, comes with confidence, comes with knowledge as well.

Sean was concerned with focus, length of time and the direction of strategy discussions and the joint investigations that often ensued. He and other participants who were police officers represented investigations as forms of movement that were fast paced and consistent in their direction, following familiar procedures such as 'fast-track' questions - key lines of enquiry that need to be pursued at the start of investigations in order to establish significant facts and secure evidence (Association of Chief Police Officers, 2006: p. 41) - even when the situation itself was still uncertain. Fast, decisive action and the spatial qualities of speed and direction were all central to police accounts of their investigatory work, while social workers presented investigations in different terms. The spatial and movement qualities emphasised in their accounts included staying still, pulling back, being cautious about what might seem the obvious thing to do and looking beneath

instead. While social work child protection investigations are just as heavily proceduralised as police investigations, there was a sense in social workers' accounts that procedures alone do not enable good investigations (this point is a recurrent one in social work literature as well, for examples see Parton, 2008; Broadhurst et al., 2010; Gillingham, 2011; Munro, 2011). At times this caused difficulties for social workers and managers in their work with police officers in the MASH. Adele, a team manager, discussed the effects that being based at the police station could have on social workers' and her own practice. I asked her about the advantages and disadvantages of locating a multi-agency safeguarding project in a police station.

A: I think working in the police station it's very easy to get swept along with police mentality. It's very easy to become a police officer and not see the social care side of it and to keep that focus. I have to, I admit, consciously keep that focus because I can feel myself getting drawn into all this 'it's a criminal act'. Well, hang on a minute, you do that bit, I'll do my bit. So, it's easy, because you're in that environment and you're outnumbered. I only take two staff, I don't have my team there and we're a little voice in this madness. I'm going 'No, no, no. Wait, wait, wait. Can't do that.' So I think that can be a disadvantage and a lot of social workers can – I'm not saying mine do – but you get caught up in that blue light stuff, and it's all exciting and whatever, and then they go down that line and you have to bring them back and say 'No, you're not a police officer, you're a social worker'.

D: Can you give me an example of that, what might be the different focus?

A: I think it's about getting the investigation, getting an arrest, getting a result, instead of actually looking 'Ok, how can we do this so we get the best outcome for the child?' And when I first went up there and I did a couple of strategy discussions, you know, you record them on that risk assessment thing. I read them back and I thought 'Oh, my God, I would never do this if I was on the end of a phone.' I looked back and I thought 'Who did most of the talking in this?' I didn't, whereas when I'm on my territory doing it, I'll do all the talking. It was just interesting to look back

at it and think 'Oh, Adele that's not you. You'll have your say, normally' and I didn't. But I think it was because I was in that environment that I didn't feel that it was my - that I allowed them to take the lead, which I find quite strange.

In the same interview, Adele told me about an incident at the MASH that portrayed detectives, rather than social workers, as lacking direction and speed. At the time of the incident, neither of the sergeants was present at the office and it was not possible to make a formal referral from the social work to the police team, because the admin office that inputted police referrals (which was based in another police station) could not be contacted:

A: Last time I was on duty up there, which was a couple of weeks ago now, we had a referral come in about 3 o'clock. The child had a bruise to his face, we needed to strat it with somebody, but couldn't because it needed then to go to the Police Protection Unit admin office in South. The fax wouldn't go to South office. I needed a medical. I needed to get lots of different things done, but couldn't do it. So in the end I collared [the Detective Inspector] and said 'Look, just discuss it with me, because I need to do this now. I need to go now and we need an officer to come as well'. So we just did it there and then. But then everything I had to do was catch up afterwards. So it was quite interesting, to actually watch that happen.

D: People are having to work outside of their roles aren't they?

A: Actually, it was almost - this isn't a criticism but, well, it was almost like: 'Well, what do we do now then?' I was quite clear what I had to do, absolutely clear, but it was like 'Well what do we do?' There was no sergeant, it's not on the system, should we have this discussion or not? I was like 'Well, we've got a kid which obviously had a hand mark put on his face. He's three years old. We need to go now.'

In these accounts, both Sean and Adele make similar criticisms of the response of each other's services. For Sean, social work team managers are not assertive enough in chairing meetings, focusing the discussion of those

meetings and establishing a clear direction. Adele, on the other hand, presents her own practice as clear, ordered and timely in contrast to the lack of direction on the part of the detectives, who were unwilling to go out on a joint investigation because there was no sergeant present to take part in the strategy discussion. But behind both these stories is the implication - to be either confirmed or rebuffed - that social workers are uncertain about how to proceed and static or slow moving when they need to act quickly.

While police officers and social workers were all concerned to present their work as clear and focused, there were still some differences between the police and social work accounts of joint working that were shared with me in interviews. Andy, Ian and Sean presented the actions that are required in their examples as self-evident, already clear to themselves. While they alluded to highly specific knowledge systems they still presented knowing as an instinctual process for experienced officers, something that has been identified in many studies of police practices (see Holdaway 1983; Loftus, 2009). Adele, however, presents social work ways of knowing as concerned with that which is not immediately clear. They sometimes appear counter-intuitive, even to social workers themselves. Another feature of Adele's accounts that differs from those of the police detectives is the way that they are constructed around review and reflection. The account of her experience of doing strategy discussions is based around her recollections provoked by reading the risk assessment record. Unlike Sean's direct description of what might happen in a poorly chaired strategy discussion, Adele's account is

constructed around unearthing what actually happened by looking at the remaining evidence afterwards. She reports that she finds her own inaction 'quite strange', adding another layer of distance from actual events. In her later account of her effective practice in contrast to police indecision, Adele still chooses to frame the incident through a perspective that is one step removed from action - 'it was quite interesting, to actually watch that happen'. Even when social work practice is fast moving, social workers are apparently still watching themselves from slightly outside their own bodies or reviewing them from a later point in time.

Police and social workers' corporeal experiences of pollution threats

The final difference between social work and police practice that I want to discuss concerns their responses to dirt and pollution. In the following section I explore differences in bodily/affective presentations in relation to pollution threats, how social workers and police characterise their relationships with potentially polluting spaces in different ways and how they employ office spaces for different kinds of performances of affection and disgust.

While children's social workers and police officers in child abuse investigation teams are not necessarily working with the same children and families, they frequently engage with similar issues - social deprivation, neglected children and home spaces, fine detail about sexual activity (both consenting and abusive) - that carry associations of pollution and hold the potential to

stimulate horror and disgust. Humour is often used as a way of negotiating these experiences and establishing social distinctions in order to limit the polluting influence of stigmatised others, and police officers and social workers both did this in their responses to encounters with potentially polluting others. The other group's use of humour was also something that police officers and social workers in the MASH frequently commented on: those police officers who talked to me about the matter each asserted that social workers had the same kind of sense of humour as police officers, while the social workers who talked about police officers' humour identified it as different from their own. For instance Christina (a senior social worker) told me that 'sometimes I find their humour very disturbing - but they probably do us', while Ian (a detective constable) had this to say:

Sometimes I find humour in things which I shouldn't find humour in, because they're just daft things. And I think social services are exactly the same as us. They deal with the mucky stuff and mucky stuff is just anything, in terms of how people can treat their children and they might be smoking their cigarettes and watching their fancy TVs and such like, and then their children are there with clothing that doesn't fit and that sort of thing. In terms of priorities we do see the shitty end of society sometimes.

Ian and other police officers claimed not to see the differences between these kinds of assertions and social workers' ways of talking and, indeed, social workers also sometimes made explicitly class focused, abjection oriented statements. Even so, some differences were apparent to me and to the social workers in the study. I want to explore this issue further and ask: what was an invisible, insignificant or unmentionable difference as far as police officers

were concerned while at the same time being clear, important to identify and even disturbing for some social workers?

The following two excerpts from the Alphaville fieldnotes illustrate certain aspects of police and social work humour that recurred through the fieldwork at the MASH office. The second conversation features talk about a MASH case where a teenage girl had alleged physical abuse by her mother and had gone to stay with her father and his male partner. The first conversation did not relate to any specific case but, because it occurred on the same day, happened during the context of intermittent references to a current MASH case that featured a gay parent.

12.20 Loud, giggly discussion between Russell and Natalie [two detective constables] about sexual acts. Russell asks Natalie if she knows what 'zuffing' is. Further discussion where he clarifies it's spelled ZOOFING (zoophilia?). Natalie checks Google but finds nothing relevant. More Googling and then they find 'felching' which Natalie tells Russell (wrongly) is 'inserting animals into the rectum'. Lots of laughing between the two of them, open and public. I feel irritated and slightly uncomfortable.

[Around 4.20] Chat between Carla [social worker], Stefan [team manager] and me about smells. Stefan tells me that Carla has been into a house that 'made her eyes sting'. Carla sniffs her cardigan - 'it still smells.' I say how some smells can penetrate your clothes. Stefan relayed a story of once when he had a cold, he was visiting a house with another worker and told the other person they would have to check whether it smelled. But when the door opened there was this eye watering smell of stale urine. They had rabbits in the house. He asked the people 'Why are there rabbits in the house?' 'Because they're house

rabbits'. Stefan pulls a disgusted face, jokey as well.

Carla talks about the house she went to (the girl's dad is in a same-sex relationship). 'You open the door and it's - I don't know if it's sweat. It's an *unwashed* smell. They've done this thing which is like a walk-in wardrobe. Now I think that could be nice, but when you don't wash your clothes ... the stench!' Laughing face. This is a funny story. Carla sniffs cardigan again. Ironic stories of disgust towards others and disgust at being made smelly oneself.

Stefan told story of how when he was a student, his practice teacher said you should always accept a drink if offered, but now he just says that he's just had one. Carla said she did this as well. Stefan recalled this one house, he said he'd like a cup of tea. It was disgusting, he didn't drink it. At the end the woman was really offended. He said he apologised, said that he didn't want it. He said it was awful, there was a film on top of the tea - disgusted and laughing face.

The first of these exchanges irritated me while I viewed the second as an example of social work norms of drawing humour from practice and, as such, it seemed unremarkable even while it was of ethnographic interest. There are certainly differences in content and focus that might explain my contrasting responses and exemplify some differences in police and social work humour more broadly. Russell's and Natalie's conversation is about sexual acts and seems to rely on implicitly homophobic preoccupations with anal penetration, while Stefan and Carla's stories are each focused on forms of pollution threat - animal urine, body odour and filthy drinks - that their stories appear to connect with social deprivation rather than sexual difference (even though one of the stories is about gay men). Numerous writers have identified how, alongside increasing concern about equality in relation to other indices, class-ridden assertions have become more, rather than less, acceptable (for a critical discussion see, amongst others, special issue of *Sociology* (2005) 39, 5) which might account for why one of these conversations seemed more

offensive to me than the other. Another explanation concerns my own social location: as a middle class gay man I certainly had more reason to feel out of place while listening to the first conversation than the second. The differences, however, are more subtle and complex than these explanations alone suggest and a discursive and spatial analysis of the content of these stories and the instances of their telling can help us to explore them more fully.

I want to start with an analysis of disgust talk, drawing in particular on Imogen Tyler's (2013) recent summary of disgust literature. As Tyler explains, disgust is a social emotion; whilst it is experienced as visceral and internal to the body, disgust is actually only achievable in line with a certain range of attitudes, normative within the cultural context of the response. Disgust also requires the agreement of others - it distinguishes the disgusted from the object of her disgust through her alignment with notional or actual others who express similar responses (Tyler 2013: p. 23). Both of the above interactions show how disgust responses are affirmed by others in this way. In particular, the conversation between the social workers and myself is a good example of how participants both expressed sympathetic disgust at their colleague's story and produced their own story to illustrate their own similar disgust experiences.

Disgust, however, is a more difficult terrain for social workers to negotiate than it might be for police officers. Accumulating a wealth of disgust stories is a

good way for social workers to demonstrate their experience of 'frontline' practice, but being too disgusted also suggests a weak stomach and an aesthetics which precludes the ability to engage with stigmatised service users and question dominant attitudes to marginalised groups (Dominelli, 2002; Clifford and Burke, 2009).. On the other hand, failing to experience any degree of disgust response to situations that are appalling by normative standards could suggest that a social worker lacks the wherewithal to form basic judgements about what is 'acceptable'. The key is to tell stories about disgusting situations, without engaging in a simple abject oriented response, and these social workers do this in several ways. Carla's story is framed at its beginning and end with references to her own symbolically contaminated status as something that is funny rather than horrifying - while both her and Stefan's stories concern their presence in and openness to disgusting situations, rather than situations from which they distance themselves. They also feature mystified, rather than openly contemptuous responses, which establish the possibility 'maybe it's me?' whilst leaving the listener to discern that, of course, it is downright wrong to keep rabbits in a house or build a walk-in wardrobe and then fill it with dirty clothes.

The following extract illustrates some differences between social workers' and others' accounts of neglect in practice - in this case the contrast is with a senior family support worker, who can claim to be experienced in motivating parents who are neglectful but who does not, as social workers do, have primary responsibility for judging the severity of neglect. The extract is from

contemporaneous fieldnotes and shows a contrast between how Martin, the senior family support worker (SFSW in the notes) at Lumberton, and Eddie and Naomi, social workers, speak about a situation where there were concerns about neglect of two young children. The initial referral had concerned the children being left in dirty nappies for long periods. Eddie had carried out an investigation and the case was now held by Naomi, while Martin was carrying out regular visits to monitor conditions. Although this does not appear in the fieldnotes, it is worth noting that Martin was angry and spoke loudly during this exchange while Eddie was quiet and appeared thoughtful.

Conversation between Eddie and Martin SFSW about a visit Martin has just done to someone's flat. Martin is saying that when he opened the interior door, the smell was awful. Eddie saying that when he visited a month and a half ago it wasn't that bad. Martin is saying she was still in her pyjamas and the 'kids were in bed covered in shit'. The children's mother has said that there's a problem with mould but Martin says this is only a small part of the wall. She said that she couldn't touch it because she's allergic to penicillin. He says to Eddie [as if to the woman] 'Just put some bleach on it, you stupid cow!'

When I spoke to Eddie afterwards, he told me that the case was more complicated than Martin had suggested. I later asked Naomi about the case during her interview. She told me:

Martin phones me up and said 'Oh, there's shit everywhere!' Those were his exact words so, of course, I'm envisioning 'Oh my God, they've done it again. Those kids...', and all it was, was the smell. He'd smelt it as he went upstairs. Again, yes we've got the same issues, because she'd put them to bed the night before at seven o'clock and at 11 the next morning she still hadn't changed them. But what I wanted to go for,

if we'd got the police out the first time round with those children in that state we might have had enough to take those children and there have been concerns a long time. We've gone PLO since and she's doing really well now. But yeah, the way he forwarded the information to me, I'm like 'Oh my God I've got to get over there, I can't keep letting this happen to these kids'. And it wasn't quite as bad. It was bad enough I had to talk to her and say 'This ain't good enough, I've got to do something about this.' But it wasn't the situation that I expected it to be.

Martin's outburst had less authority than it might have done in front of a different audience, because disgust talk is seen as lacking the objectivity that social workers value in respect to such situations. Instead, they were keen to scrutinise evidence to establish the degree of severity and how it compared with past conditions. Certain social workers spoke about people in an openly disgusted way - during our mobile interview Sam pointed out various people who, she said, were 'obese' or must be 'druggies' - but none did so in relation to individual service users, while most social workers tended to view these kinds of statements critically when made by their colleagues or other professionals. Nevertheless, abjection still featured in social work talk, even though it was tempered by either sympathy or a will to quantify the specific significance of abject features. Social workers told me that they felt frustrated with the 'filth' in service users' houses or spoke of finding work with certain service users unpleasant because of how they smelled. This might then be elaborated with a display of interest in the particular type or cause of such smells - one social worker, for example, described a service user's smell to me as an 'anxious odour', another detected the smell of 'body alcohol'. Dirt and pollution were topics of discussion through which social workers demonstrated professional expertise but this also involved maintaining a

sense of these things as troubling personal boundaries and provoking abjection responses.

Julia Twigg (2002) has explored how practitioners such as medics and nurses are able to employ devices such as the clinical location of their work, their uniforms, elaborate procedures and complicated apparatuses in order to establish symbolic distinctions between themselves and the diseased bodies that they encounter. This is important for their practice, partly because it maintains professional status but also because it enables them to establish grounds on which to interact with patients as subjects who warrant respect and care, whether or not their bodies might inspire disgust. Social work and social care are more likely to be located in private, home spaces and less likely to involve the complexity of machinery, explicit claims to expertise and formality of medical practice. They are also concerned with service user groups who are much more likely to be stigmatised and marginalised and this association holds the potential to stigmatise social workers themselves (something that Twigg, 2002, notes about social care workers). Stefan's and Carla's stories suggest skills in managing this potentially contaminated status. Their stories are constructed as jokes rather than simply humorous conversation: they employ language play, parody, elements of surprise and an overarching ironic tone, all of which are more difficult to achieve than the simple expression of disgust/ hilarity in response to the grotesque and the targeting of sexual others in the exchange between the two police officers, Russell and Natalie. The conversation with Stefan and Carla therefore

involves some risk of failure, which is an intrinsic feature of humour (Berger, 1995). These are jokes that can fail to be understood by their audience and the fieldwork offered other instances where this occurred. And yet, negotiating this balance is seen to be an important one in children's social work. Disgust is often about establishing distance between the disgust and the disgusting, but there are other spatial elements too. Russell and Natalie's conversation seemed both exclusive (it would not have been easy for someone else to join in) and performed for others to observe, while the second conversation involved a different set of spatial relations. I was invited to take part and the stories that were shared were acknowledged and mirrored by those listening but they were not delivered as if for a wider audience in the office. Disgust-oriented statements that were made in too public a context seemed not to be acceptable for social workers. Instead, it seemed to be an affective register which required, and perhaps also was used to produce, an intimate setting as well as one that, as Miller (2004) suggests, is a defence against intimacy.

My differing responses to the two conversations might be better explained as disapproval of Russell and Natalie's presentation and approval of Stefan's and Carla's formal skills in appropriately affectionate abject story telling. And these certainly are stories about the abject, even if they are presented as warm or generous. They illustrate a powerful discourse in contemporary British culture of class as a problem of taste. The articulation of those who are oppressed through social class in terms of bad taste and as objects of

distaste is certainly not new but it has found increasing expression in Britain and other western countries since the 1990s (See Skeggs, 2004 for discussion of the ways that this is particularly directed at working class women; Tyler, 2013 for a discussion of the abjection of entire communities). Through this discourse, working class people come to be condemned for aesthetic reasons whilst the focus on aesthetics rather than social class itself works as a justification for the discrimination. As Stephanie Lawler (2005: p. 801) notes, class is both occluded and invoked in this logic: 'good taste [is] desirable (everyone ought to 'have' it) and attainable (everyone could 'have' it), at the same time as it is a scarce resource (not everyone does 'have' it)'. This shift in constructs of class difference has significant impacts in children's social work and has arisen alongside an increasing focus on physical home conditions, in particular the identification of dirt and smell, in practice in the UK. Social workers are encouraged to identify these in forensic terms - indeed, Carla's description ('I don't know if it's sweat. It's an *unwashed* smell') displays an objective and discerning approach to different kinds of home smells which can be understood in such a context as skilful social work - another reason why her story appeals.

These distinguishing features of social work humour were either invisible or insignificant to the police officers. Other significant differences also seemed to pass police officers by. Social workers told me that, while the MASH had improved their understanding of police working practices, they felt that police officers still failed to understand the nature of their work. Police officers, on

the other hand, cheerfully asserted that each profession now understood the other much better. Several of them wanted the project to move towards closer working arrangements such as shared team meetings and referral systems, something which would almost inevitably have compromised the statutory requirements for confidentiality in social workers' work outside of child protection enquiries. In contrast, social workers, while they valued the pilot project, now wanted greater degrees of separate space. As Stefan put it when he talked about the success of the MASH pilot:

If we were in the police station somewhere else that didn't mean our workers had to be vetted as they are and we had a bit of time and space for social workers, I think we would be there. Jerry [another team manager] used the word today – it's very *intense* over there [the MASH office in the police station]. And it isn't meant to be intense there. There's meant to be some reflective time and that doesn't always feel, you know, for social workers to come back and say 'The police hacked me off on that visit because they did this and I wanted to do this'. Where do you talk about that if you're both in the same room?

The MASH afforded other professionals closer insights into police officers' and social workers' everyday working practices too. The safeguarding lead professional for the mental health trust told me that the pilot had led her to understand and appreciate police officers' work more fully, yet seeing social workers' practice at close quarters had *increased* her doubts about their competence. Social workers seemed unable to make their expertise visible in the multi-disciplinary space of the MASH in the same ways as police officers. The skills and insights which social workers brought to the MASH seemed not to be visible to others - they were either indistinct from police work, for those

police officers who had come to see social workers as colleagues, or they were seen as absent by the safeguarding lead from the mental health trust.

Instances of joint working between police officers and social workers

So far I have identified some differences between the conceived bodies of social workers and detectives, as they are produced and performed through the stories and conversations of participants. Social work bodies are presented as malleable, able to morph into different shapes and sizes in order to get into places that are difficult to access. They are also permeable, open to engaging with stigmatised others and so also more closely aligned to polluting aspects of some of the places that they go (even though their actions might do little to question the actual idea of social work service users as polluting). Police bodies are dressed in ways that armour them against those whom they encounter and their environments. They can interact with polluted environments without being compromised, they instinctively know what to do and they move fast to achieve it. While social workers can also move quickly they are never entirely in the moment - always viewing it, as it were, from a point slightly above or to the side.

So what does this mean for actual spatial practices when social workers and police officers work together? The study involved a small number of home visits - seven - with social workers either on their own and with police officers. This number doesn't enable any firm conclusions about the impact of joint

visiting but some themes suggested themselves. The visits with social workers alone provided detailed insights into how social workers moved in people's homes and the surrounding areas. I have discussed the example of Rachel's visit to Carrie above; other examples included social workers making the most of chance meetings in public places or responding to anger and, on one occasion, aggression in sensitive and skilful ways. The three joint visits that I observed involved different kinds of movements from visits where police officers were not present. Each of the police officers stood some or all of the time while each of the social workers sat down at the beginning of the visit and remained seated. The police officers talked first and managed the progress of what were essentially interviews rather than conversations. It led me to wonder whether such close joint working had a subduing effect on social work bodies. My own interviews with participants also revealed some differences, which appeared important for understanding social workers' behaviour when they were under public scrutiny. Police officers were generally confident about being interviewed. They employed more technical language than social workers, used the word 'we' more often to refer to police generally or the child abuse investigation team as a group, answered more questions at length, were more willing to reply to sensitive questions and more often took an active role in deciding the direction of the interview. They were all happy to be recorded, in contrast to some social workers. They felt confident about having some control over how they were perceived and represented, unlike several of the social work participants (I also explore social workers' sometimes suspicious approach to the research in chapter 3).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored different aspects of social work spaces (and I include social work bodies as spaces here) as they are produced through accounts and practices. The data suggests that social work spaces are complex and evade being completely articulated. There is evidence of sensitivity about movement and space, such as social workers' attempts to identify the specific qualities and degrees of dirt in neglect cases or their reflexive cautiousness about speed and certainty of direction in investigations. The data from social workers' accounts of their work with service users and observations of the same also point to a reluctance to talk about spatial matters or a lack of words and concepts for doing this. These characteristics of social work space were likely to be important for how they interacted with other practitioners and how they communicated or failed to communicate what was unique about their expertise. The next chapter continues the focus on bodies and small spaces which this chapter has begun but moves on to focus specifically children's bodies as social workers interact with them and understand them in their talk with other practitioners.

ENCOUNTERS WITH SMALL THINGS: CHILDREN'S BODIES AND SPACE

This chapter explores a number of different contexts in which children's social care services engage with and make sense of children. Sometimes this happens with children as known subjects and present bodies – as in the instances of direct work described below. At other times, children are at a distance and limited information may be available about them. The chapter asks a number of questions about these situations that are concerned with spatial and corporeal matters. How do practitioners understand children as emplaced and corporeal beings? What conceptions of children are imposed and reproduced in discussions and actions in relation to them? What effects do social workers' and family support workers' spatial practices have, in terms of the opportunities for communication between children and practitioners and the different kinds of agency and corporeality that are afforded children in safeguarding work?

The chapter begins by examining a family support worker's accounts of her work with several different children and young people who were either subject to care proceedings or involved with the local authority because of child protection concerns. Tentative conclusions are drawn from this data and then

examined in relation to data from office observations to consider how children, their bodies and their interactions with others in space are produced in this context. This discussion helps to distinguish the kinds of bodies that children's safeguarding social workers conceive of and produce for most of the children they work with – those living with their families or looked after but where this is currently contested – from the kinds of bodies which are imagined in the values and aesthetics which social workers expound in relation to children generally. These conclusions are then applied to understand a key event in child protection – a strategy discussion about a child who has just been referred to the service. Here I use some of the ideas developed from the earlier discussion to explore the seemingly contradictory assertions about and representations of children's bodies in such an event which, for social workers and child protection police officers, appear to be sound and arrived at through rigorous discussion.

Direct work: touching children's bodies and keeping them separate

When I asked practitioners about the spaces in which they worked with children, the subject of children's bodies was either raised or seemed to be an unspoken but significant issue (see for example the discussion in the previous chapter about Eddie's account of talking to a young person). This chapter is therefore concerned with exploring children's bodies as spatial matters, understood through certain spaces and located in certain spaces (not

necessarily the same ones) and social care practice as spatialised relations between bodies.

The following extracts are from an interview with Monica, a family support worker in the Lumberton safeguarding team, about direct work that she carried out with several different children and young people who were subject either to child protection plans or to contested care proceedings at the time of Monica's involvement. Monica was seen within the team as skilled and experienced at such work, which was generally intended to enable children to express their views, wishes and feelings about past events or future plans.

The extracts are reproduced here because they exemplify a number of themes in practitioners' approaches to children and their bodies that appeared in the research more broadly. I began by asking how Monica organised space in her work but the discussion quickly became concerned more narrowly with relations and contact between bodies:

I think the hard thing is you, like here [*the office we have used for the interview*], you'd try and make a space, let's say in the library we try and do it at a table, so we've made physical space. But I've got to share with you that a lot of young people are used to being quite tactile. And as an adult we know about keeping safe, safe practice, all this which is very important. A child doesn't. So they'll come round [*she leans over, touches my sleeve*] and 'What are you doing, Monica?' and they are this close [*mimes with a hand in front of her face*]. I'm quite a tactile person myself as well so I don't sit in a particularly guarded way all the time, but I think that's part of your role, you want to get to know them and make them feel comfortable. But they do approach you and they're 'What's this?' [*she touches my watch*] 'Can I look at your watch? Can I try it on?' And then you go 'Now you sit over here' but they can still migrate towards you.

She gave an example of a child with whom she had carried out some direct work, ordered by the court as part of care proceedings. This child already knew Monica because of previous direct work. The child enjoyed the meetings but Monica found it difficult to maintain the focus of sessions and keep this child from approaching her:

So what I did there, to keep our distance, I took her to a pottery place where she had to paint pottery. Not 'had to' as in it was a chore – she really quite liked it – but she didn't then come round to me because, and I got quite a bit out of her. She'd chosen this horse and she was [*mimes child engrossed in painting the horse*]. [...] I don't know, maybe I need more training in how to do that better but I can only say I think these situations evolve, if the child keeps your distance, you've cracked it.

Monica gave another example of a child who wanted to kiss her goodbye after their work together, which she dealt with by diverting the child. I asked her to talk about whether it would be wrong to kiss or hug a child and, if so, what the reason for this was. She said:

Yeh, it's very difficult isn't it? It's extremely difficult because the child doesn't know. But the hugging or the kissing, now, I say to the parents 'If she wants to give me a hug do you have a problem with that?' And it's in front of the parents and it's happened and I've told [the team manager]. [...] Again maybe I do need further training but that's what I'd do, I say to the parent 'Look she wants to, do you?'

[...]

So, it's a fine line we tread, but I am very clear, if the parents are there I'll gain their permission. If the parents aren't there I say 'No, Monica's not allowed to do that', 'Shall we see Mummy, we can ask Mummy, but Monica's not allowed to do that when she's working', or I'll say 'I've got to drive' or 'I've got to get my seatbelt on' and I'll change the subject but that's as clear as it is, 'Monica's not allowed to'.

Creating a safe, private space in which children can be open about their views and feelings entails certain dilemmas for social care practitioners because children's relationships with space, at least in western cultures, are likely to be qualitatively different from those of adults. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) explore how children's presence in spaces is usually understood in terms of either trespass or control. Children find themselves in either 'adult space' where their presence is highly conditional or spaces that are designed for children, such as schools and playgrounds, but where their behaviour and use of different spaces at different times are prescribed in detail. As young people get older, the range of spaces that they occupy might increase (Matthews 1992) but young people's location in space is also increasingly viewed as intrusion (Matthews et al., 2000). This is a feature of space which young people are required to negotiate in different ways according to spatial, racial and class contexts (Cahill, 2000; Kato, 2009) and it is also likely to offer new opportunities for performing identity (Munford and Sanders, 2008). These aspects of children's space make it more difficult to create a context for direct work with children that feels safe and enables children to be open about their views and experiences, and this is not so much about children's cognitive, emotional or social development as it is about social stratification. Further difficulties result from the requirements for direct work that come from care proceedings or child protection plans: children have limited choice about the purpose of the work or how it is done, even though a safe space and a trusting relationship are required for the work to be successful.

The examples that Monica shared suggest that carrying out direct work in safe spaces and through trusting relationships brings with it higher chances that children will seek physical contact. Perhaps those children experience such work as caring or affectionate; perhaps they apply norms of bodily interaction that exist in other areas of their lives, where there is a caring or personal element to relations with most adults or where proscriptions against touch between children and adults do not exist. Whatever the reason for children seeking touch, Monica suggested separation is important for such work. It is likely that this is partly because physical contact can be abusive or because touch and other kinds of interactions, while not necessarily abusive themselves, could trigger recollections of previous experiences of abuse. She clearly bore the sensitivity of the topic in mind because she was tentative when speaking and there were many pauses during this part of the interview. A number of times, she suggested that she might have made errors of judgement in the complex, uncertain work involved in engaging children and talking about sensitive matters – these are ways of demonstrating awareness of complexity and performing a reflective approach to one’s own practice – but she also emphasised the importance of establishing clarity about expectations and boundaries. Elsewhere in the interview, she discussed the importance of respecting children’s bodies and ensuring they did not feel vulnerable to abuse. She also emailed me afterwards to clarify how her interview might be used in my writing. Together, these different actions evoked an approach to practice that was both reflective

and clear about boundaries – the balance which competent practitioners who are working with vulnerable young people are required to demonstrate.

The abusive potential of touch in social care work and the vulnerability of social care practitioners to allegations of abuse are important issues that social workers are likely to hold in mind in practice (Lynch and Garrett, 2010; Green and Day, 2013) but proscribing touch during direct work also seems important for other reasons. This work was concerned with children's articulated views and feelings about subjects such as their relationships with family members, the ways they had been parented and their wishes about future care and contact arrangements. Endowing children with the capacity to have views, wishes and feelings about important topics, which are coherent and stable across different contexts, seems to require children's bodies also to be conceived of as bounded and separate. It is interesting that Monica sees separation as important for the direct work *to work* – 'if the child keeps their distance you've cracked it'. However, when children's parents are present Monica asks *them* for permission. In this account of direct work, children's bodies are conceived of as inherently theirs and no-one else's while outside of these spaces their bodies are, at least partly, of their parents – if children seek contact then their bodies are acceptable to touch, with parents' permission. The difference leads to contradictions – in the autonomous, wishes and feelings focused spaces of direct work, children's interest in bodily contact actually needs to be diverted or denied. In other contexts it might be accommodated but only if parents approve it. Therefore, such childlike

qualities of children who are subject to safeguarding are only acknowledged on those occasions when they are with parents and then only as bodies that are linked to parents in some way.

At Lumberton, as in many safeguarding teams, structured direct work over more than one session was usually carried out by family support workers and was distinguished from 'child protection work' – the analysis and decision making based partly on the outcomes of direct work – which was done only by qualified social workers. Family support workers were inevitably engaged in making sensitive judgements during the sessions themselves and would present the findings of their work as conclusive in particular ways but this was not understood as a formal assessment related to risk. The following example illustrates how this might work in practice. Lee, a family support worker, talked to me about some 'good touch/ bad touch work' that he was in the process of doing with a child who had possibly been sexually abused by an older child. The work was intended to gain a sense of the child's understanding of different kinds of touch and led to him disclosing further details about what had occurred. Lee explained to me that this was not 'child protection work' even though Jonathan, the social worker for the case, would draw on its conclusions when assessing whether the child had been abused and whether there was a current risk.

Direct work by family support workers was seen by social workers as skilled and sensitive work, while family support workers were seen as practitioners

who should not be required to carry responsibility for judgements about child protection. (This was also one way in which different levels of status were established and maintained in children's social care teams.) A consequence of this was to reproduce the division noted in the discussion of Monica's work, between spaces where children speak and those where their bodies are apprehended. Children's voices were heard and their play was interpreted by family support workers while their bodies might be observed by social workers, examined by medical practitioners and checked over by parents or foster carers. Social workers then brought these different kinds of information together at a later point in time, in contexts such as supervision discussions and the compiling of formal assessment reports, forming judgements at some distance from children themselves.

This separation of attention to children's agency and children's bodies has been noted in relation to sociological and social geographical writing about childhood. As Woodyer (2008) has noted in relation to children's geographies and as Valentine (2010) has noted in relation to critical discussions of childhood more generally, children's bodies have remained an 'absent presence' in the literature. Some recent writing has started to explore the embodied nature of children's experiences and subjectivities (see Colls and Horschelmann, 2009; Kato, 2009; Herrera, Jones and Thomas de Benitez, 2009; Lupton, 2012), incorporating the turn towards an engagement with embodiment in social theory (for example, Grosz, 1994). However, children's bodies remain an under discussed matter both in social scientific discussions

of the body and those about childhood. It would not be surprising, then, if children's bodies were to raise significant anxieties and uncertainties for social workers. Discussions in social work practice have addressed this matter of how children's bodies can be known in part but have not completely resolved it. For example, although social workers recognise that maltreatment might well have an impact on children's bodies, after the Cleveland Inquiry, they must remain sceptical about how much can be read from the child's body alone. The child's wishes and feelings offer other ways to understand children's experiences and social workers frequently attest that even very young children should be seen and spoken to alone in child protection enquiries. Bodies and voices are apprehended together here: the child is both a vulnerable body that could show signs of maltreatment and an agent whose stated views matter. Even so, most children cannot be assumed to know what is best for them, particularly if they have known only inadequate parenting, and so listening to their views does not provide simple answers. The body therefore persists as a central focus for the assessment of children's well-being and vulnerability in safeguarding work. On the one hand, it cannot be read in definitive ways or treated as a straightforward object of concern separated from other, less tangible imperatives. On the other hand, its symbolic significance is huge and multiple: children's bodies can represent innocence, fragility (James et al, 1998), the future (Edelman, 2004), they can be presented as 'precious, pure, uncivilised, vulnerable' (Lupton, 2014). So the idea of children's bodies influences practitioners' judgements and is also evoked by them in order to justify assertions made in their everyday

work. However, this symbolic deployment of children's bodies is not as straightforward a matter for social workers as it might be for other people. One reason is that social workers are required to demonstrate professional expertise and so do this through a more critical, scientific and distanced perspective on childhood, which nevertheless still coheres with the value placed on children by society more broadly. Another reason is that safeguarding social workers are engaged in assessing *parenting* rather than simply children's well-being (Thomas and Holland, 2010; Hayes and Spratt, 2014) and so the child's body, more often than not, represents something other than itself, as the following example shows.

Producing children's bodies as delightful or concerning

The following extract seeks to explore how these imperatives are negotiated in child protection practice, this time focusing not on direct work but on case management matters in relation to two looked after children. It is taken from the Lumberton office fieldnotes and details a number of short exchanges between staff over the course of an hour. Records of conversation that I overheard were made contemporaneously and the notes about my own conversation with Karen (at the end of the extract) were written up directly afterwards. The talk concerns two different children: Olly, a four year child who has been in foster care for some time and is seen by social workers to be doing well and George, five years old, who has been in another foster placement since becoming looked after six months before. Olly is the subject

of what social workers call a 'full' care order while George, at the time of the conversation, is the subject of an interim care order and contested care proceedings and the case has featured some conflict between social care staff and George's family. Social workers are preparing for George to move to the same foster placement as Olly and they see this as in the interests of both children, for different kinds of reasons. The interactions are brief ones that occurred during the context of participants' desk work, phone calls and conversations about other matters. They are further examples of the more public exchanges that I discussed in chapter four in relation to cases that are seen as particularly significant (George's is such a case, given the intermittent conflict) and cases where children are seen as particularly appealing (such as Olly).

Karen is one of George's social workers and Linda is Olly's social worker. Helen is a family support worker who has been working with both children separately and has been involved in introducing them to each other. Catriona is the assistant team manager. My focuses here are the different ways that participants talk about the two children and their bodies. Times are given in square brackets.

[Around 10:50]

Catriona, Karen and Helen are talking about Olly.

Catriona: '... and Olly loves his cuddles.'

Helen: 'I had to prize him off my lap when I was there.'

[Shortly afterwards]

Catriona is leaning over the room divider [at the side of Helen's desk]. More talk about Olly's appearance.

Helen: 'He sometimes looks a bit bedraggled when he comes out of school with stuff on his top. I wouldn't say he's immaculate but he's ok. You don't want him to be so immaculate that he's worried about his clothes.'

[Around 10.54]

Karen is describing getting texts from George's mother: 'She's now saying that she doesn't want to go to [redacted] [a play centre] cos George won't turn up.'

Helen – loudly and firmly – 'So she's promised him and she's now saying that she won't do it?'

[Shortly afterwards]

Helen is now describing interaction with George during contact. He likes going on this game he was given but said he doesn't need any more toys. She suggested he tell his mum. He then said 'You have it, mum, I don't need any more.' Suggestion that this was evidence of something important.

[Around 11:30]

Linda is talking to Karen and Helen about contact between George and Olly. Karen and Helen say that it's gone well.

Linda: 'Olly's such a lovely kid. He's got no stress in his body'.

[A few minutes later]

Karen and Helen are talking lightheartedly about Olly's placement. Helen: 'It's too girly an environment.' Karen: 'Teenage girls, too many teenage hormones, not a healthy environment for a four year old boy.' Helen: 'And they are really girly girls aren't they?' Conversation continues with more of the same.

[12.00] Have just talked to Karen about the George case. She talked me through the case history. Family was first known to social care six months ago after police arrested both parents – dad for burglary, mother because a 'cannabis farm' was found in one room of their house. George was placed in foster care. There was a question about his attachment to his mother – he was initially upset, then settled very quickly. The first night, he possibly had the munchies, because he was eating a lot. He had very sunken eyes, seemed to have much brighter skin and be more healthy after a time at foster carers. Karen wishes they'd done a hair strand test at that point, she thinks all the cannabis fumes in the house may have been affecting George.

Olly and George share some similar characteristics in relation to age, gender and looked after status that, we might assume, would lead social workers to talk about them through similar constructs of childhood but there are actually clear contrasts, particularly in terms of talk about their bodies. Olly's body is the subject of delighted talk by participants while George's is scrutinised for evidence of problems. Imperfections in Olly's appearance are seen as positive ('you wouldn't want him to be [...] immaculate') while even objectively positive behaviour by George, such as a developmentally normative gesture of kindness towards his mother, is offered as a potential sign of problems in the parent-child relationship. Apparently similar characteristics are interpreted in contrasting ways: Olly's affection towards adults who are not attachment figures is a source of delight, George's ability to settle quickly in the foster placement points to a possible attachment problem. George's large appetite on the night he came into care is seen as a potential indicator of cannabis intoxication, Olly's uninhibited body makes him a 'lovely kid'. The effect of participants' talk is to produce the idea of two quite different kinds of bodies, even though we might not have that impression if we were to meet Olly and George in person.

This contrast indicates something significant – that children's social work is involved in the production of different versions of child corporeality. We might say that social workers make different kinds of bodies available for different groups of children. Two versions of childhood exist here, both of which

construct children primarily through their bodies while operating through contrasting logics and having very different effects. One makes the child's body available as a source of delight, visual and visceral pleasure and the focus of celebration. Differences from normative bodies such as physical impairment or developmental delay do nothing to limit the value of the child or the delight which can be taken in her or his body and its activities. This form of child corporeality has a central significance in children's social work but the only actual children who are articulated through it are those who are both looked after and not subject to care proceedings or other challenges to local authority care. As well as Olly, I observed instances of other children being talked about in the same delighted or affectionate terms but they were always children who were either in long-term foster placements or placed for adoption. In contrast, the corporeality of children who were seen as in need because of concerns about parenting and those who are subject to child protection plans or care proceedings is one where smallness or delicacy, openness and a trusting approach to adults, requirements for care, impairment or ill health are all available for interpretation primarily in terms of vulnerability to maltreatment or evidence of harm already caused by a parent. For the social workers observed at Lumberton, one form of embodiment takes pleasure in children's difference from adult bodies, the other form interprets it as a potential sign of something else. So only a small minority of children were endowed with the first corporeal form, but I did not have the sense that these ways of knowing were marginal or irrelevant for safeguarding. Instead, they seemed to give meaning to social workers'

practice and endow it with humanity and a connection to dominant ways of knowing childhood, even while they were also seen as inadequate as forms of knowledge for use in safeguarding and child protection work.

Strategy discussion: the insubstantial body of a child held upside down

So far I have identified some distinctive features of the kinds of children's bodies that social workers produce through their talk and the ways that they arrange practice across space. I now want to explore how these ideas might help us to understand decisions in a strategy discussion, involving safeguarding social workers and child abuse investigation police detectives, about a child who is not currently known to these services. While not determinate, judgements and decisions made during such moments are highly significant for sense making in the child protection work that follows.

The strategy discussion was observed during the Alphaville fieldwork. It relates to a referral to Children's Social Care from a GP concerning a five year old child, referred to here as Connor Jackson. Connor's mother took him to the GP because of marks around his eyes, which the GP has concluded are petechiae – small red spots resulting from capillary bleeds in the skin. Petechiae can have several different causes (injuries, organic features of the body itself) but one possible reason for them in the tissue around the eyes is a steep rise in blood pressure in the head, caused by treatment such

as strangling or being held upside down. When the GP questioned Connor, he said that his father held him upside down over the upstairs banisters as a punishment.

The referral was made to the First Response Team (the front door service for Children's Social Care in Alphaville) at 2.00pm and has recently been passed on to the social work duty team manager at the MASH, as would be the case with any such referrals relating to children who do not currently have an allocated social worker. What follows is an extract from my fieldnotes, recorded intermittently between the exchanges that made up the strategy discussion. As elsewhere, this incident is being examined as an example of conventional, rather than particularly good or poor practice. The purpose is not, therefore, to find flaws in practice but to identify norms of interpreting children's bodies and planning intervention across time and space.

According to the guidance that was current at the time of the research, strategy discussions would usually take place between a social work team manager and a detective sergeant in the Child Abuse Investigation Team, with representatives from other bodies also involved where beneficial (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010: pp. 152-4, since superseded by Department for Education, 2013). Social workers and detective constables could also take part if they had already had involvement in the case or if they would be involved in a subsequent investigation. In this case, the discussion is between Stefan, a social work team manager and

Luke, a detective sergeant. Carla and Kate are social workers and Jo is a detective constable. The sections which have been removed (marked by '[...]') are notes about discussions concerning other, unrelated matters, in between the various exchanges over time which made up the strategy discussion (strategy discussions at the MASH were often temporally disjointed in this way, because they involved breaks to gather information or await certain developments).

3.55 – Stefan let me know about a strat discussion that will be held shortly about 5 year old boy referred by GP with marks that could only have been caused by being held upside down. Child said he was held over banister by his dad. This was not playing but because he wouldn't go to bed. Mum denies this. Stefan would like to call a strat but 'police can be a bit tetchy at this time of day' (because some of them end shift at 4.00pm).

4.10 – Luke joins Stefan for strat. Asks me if this is one I will use as a case study for the evaluation. I say that I might. Brief details shared. Luke goes to check records. He says he is thinking we need medical as 'GPs are good with coughs and colds' but they need a specialist for this.

[...]

Stefan on phone to Eileen (First Response Team) about Connor J. Finds case has been open in past. Luke has some information about child but they don't have names and DOBs of parents so can't check them.

Luke says that holding a child upside down would not necessarily be abusive. Also raises questions about the GP's referral: 'If the GP is that concerned, why's he's referred it but hasn't kept the child there?' ... 'There's no injury except these petechial marks.' Nodded agreement from Stefan. Carla, who is sat at the same table: 'They do what they like, GPs'.

Luke suggests a joint visit to the school, with mother's permission,

‘speak to the child in an environment where he’s comfortable, if he still discloses, seek a paediatric medical’. The referral shows that there was petechial rash around the eyes and this was why mother was taking him to the GP. Luke says that this is further reason not be concerned: ‘You wouldn’t take your child to the doctors if you’d caused the injury.’

[Luke goes to check records again]

[...]

Luke comes back. Shares one incident on record of Connor stabbing another child in the ear. He thinks it would be an accident. Jokey horror from Stefan and Carla – ‘What, a five year old stabbing another child?’ Jo is photocopying nearby: ‘Well, it depends on the time of day doesn’t it?’ Stefan: ‘So now it’s 5 o’clock, is it ok for us to stab Luke in the ear then?’ Decision made to visit child at school the next day and then medical if need be, following that. Case has been allocated to Kate. Stefan explained that you can’t book a medical after 4pm in Alphaville – they say instead that you need to go to the children’s hospital, which itself would be further delay for the child.

After the discussion, Stefan further justified the decision to me – children that age can be cranky after about 5 or 6 pm, so not a good idea to visit to talk at that point. Then he said that he knew this from his own children and how they were at that age.

The fieldnotes give some sense of the spatial and temporal context of this strategy discussion. It has an open structure over space and time with the discussion available for other workers in the office (Carla, Jo) to comment and a number of exchanges occurring while information is gathered concurrently. There are some features of informal talk (for instance, humour and open criticism of other professionals) alongside self-conscious and precise statements about how sense is being made of the situation and what course of action is required next. Some of these statements are because of my presence (Luke asks whether I will be analysing the discussion and Stefan

provides some explanation for my benefit afterwards) but all strategy discussions include a degree of self-conscious articulation of judgements and decisions, for the benefit of the meeting's record. As Adele explained to me (see the previous chapter) prior to the MASH, strategy discussions in Alphaville used more often to be held over the phone and the shift towards holding them in the police station had a significant impact on the quality of the discussion. The shared space of the 'MASH strat' and the open-ended structure of discussions over time lead to various features: other social workers and detectives chipping in, a collaborative feel and opportunities for showing consensus without making this explicit through verbalising (such as several people nodding their response). These features of the meeting space are likely to be important for how other spaces – the child's body, professional services outside of the MASH, the family's home and child's school – are also produced.

The strategy discussion deals with some clearly documented and pertinent evidence – the petechiae themselves and Connor's having said that he was held upside down over a banister by his father as a punishment.

Nevertheless, both pieces of evidence are treated as if they cannot be assumed to be reliable; in fact, much of the talk, particularly from Luke, is concerned with the potential unreliability of such evidence. Luke alludes to the limits of GPs' expertise and the implied lack of urgency of the referral, but neither of these criticisms stands up to scrutiny. Although GPs might not be dermatological experts, competent practitioners would know whether organic

causes of petechiae could be excluded in this instance (this is an essential task in primary care because petechiae can sometimes indicate serious organic problems such as meningitis) and, in this case, Connor's GP has concluded that such causes can be excluded. The GP did not keep Connor in the surgery but this does not, in itself, suggest a lack of concern. It might have been difficult to insist that Connor remain there without involving the police, while the GP could justifiably have assumed that a child protection referral would result in a response the same day. (This has happened, but the 'response' is a decision for further investigation the next day, rather than action the same day.)

Connor's assertion that he was held upside down is not questioned as directly as the GP's assessment but neither is it viewed as having reliable status. On the one hand it seems credible, given the corroborating petechiae, and more credible than an assertion that nothing had happened. On the other hand, it cannot be said conclusively that what Connor has described to the GP was an abusive act. It is conceivable, given his age, that Connor is mistaken about *why* he was held upside down. His account could also be incomplete or could relate to an incident that was not the cause of the injury in question. However, perhaps the scepticism is a consequence of the context in which the disclosure occurred. Connor's body had already been examined, probably touched, perhaps also partially undressed by the time he was asked what had happened to him and the questions asked of him could have been leading ones. These are the likely reasons why his assertion is not seen, alone or

alongside the corporeal signs, as enough of a reason for immediate further investigation.

A decision is made that Connor should be visited by a social worker and detective at school the next day, because this will enable Connor to make a disclosure in a 'comfortable' environment, at a time of day which fits with the routine of a notional five year old child. The problem here is that there is no reason to assume that school is a comfortable place for Connor. In fact, one of the few pieces of information about him concerns a rather *uncomfortable* incident with another child. Also, Stefan's speculation about Connor's daily routine, while logical in relation to children generally, might not make so much sense for Connor, given the (limited but significant) information we have about his bedtime routine. These kinds of considerations are given little importance. Instead, quite crude judgements about age appropriateness appear acceptable, given so little is known about Connor as an individual person.

Judgements about the development of children and their bodies are arrived at through hypothetical comparisons. Almost all children are young, but not as young as other notional children, which enables their categorisation in a particular subgroup of child to be understood as a reason not to act so urgently as might be required in other situations. This applies to Connor, because being of school age places him in a broad category of children who are understood as more surveillable, because they are expected to be

regularly in school, and more able to speak about abuse because they now participate in systems outside of the family. They may also be assumed to be more resilient physically and psychologically than children who are significantly younger than them. Despite these being crude ideas that do not apply as well to those children who are more likely to experience maltreatment as they might do to children generally, the assumption of vulnerability decreasing with age is prevalent in child protection work, because practice systems need measures which enable them to assign priority to large numbers of referrals on the basis of small amounts of initial information. Children are understood as vulnerable through being young, but 'young' is a temporary and contextual status, defined in relation to moving goalposts and a discourse of vulnerable childhood can sit alongside laissez-faire responses to quite young and potentially vulnerable children.

The strategy discussion indicates the presence of contrasting value perspectives about the role of state services in children's and families' lives (Harding, 1997). The archetypal child's voice is valued, as is apparent in the plan to visit Connor at school tomorrow, even though Connor's existing assertion is given indeterminate significance. A laissez-faire approach is also evident, for instance in Luke's assertion that 'You wouldn't take your child to the doctors if you'd caused the injury', which fails to distinguish between Connor's parents, who might have different attitudes about what has happened, while engaging in supposition to argue for non-intervention. We might assume that these two value perspectives are mutually exclusive, but

the discussion has several spatial and temporal effects that allow these contradictions to co-exist. For example, the effect of the strategy discussion is to make an initial judgement about degree of risk whilst Connor's body is kept at a distance, and then to meet him in a context (school) where less can be read from his body than if he were at home, where interactions between Connor and his parents could be observed and a sense of Connor's place in the home could be gained. The discussion places great significance on allowing Connor a future possibility to be heard in a comfortable space, while a statement that he has already made is seen as less reliable. These processes serve to prioritise the imagined bodies of notional children (such as the average five year old in the early evening) and Connor as imagined in the future (being offered the opportunity to speak at school tomorrow) over the limited evidence about a real and current body and a disclosure which has already been made. In these ways, imagined children's bodies are more substantial than real ones.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified a number of different spatial complexities associated with practitioners' work in relation to children. In the strategy discussion that I have just discussed, various processes work to prevent determinate significance being attached to information about the body of a child who has only just been referred to the service. For those children who are immersed in the child protection system (such as George, subject to care

proceedings), the possible meanings of bodies are much more narrowly prescribed – their meanings can be conclusive if they connect with previously aired concerns about maltreatment. Approaching children’s bodies as contested spaces helps to explain how certain contradictions the values underpinning safeguarding practice – as both laissez-faire and child protection oriented (Harding, 1997), which were apparent in both research sites of this study – could be sustained. This contested nature of children’s bodies is also shown to pose problems for practitioners’ interactions directly with children, as shown in the examples which Monica discussed. In chapter eight, these complexities are explored further in order to consider the spatial nature of some of the problems with ways of knowing and practising in children’s social work.

SOCIAL WORK, WIDER SPACES AND THE UNCANNY

The previous findings chapters have generally focused on smaller scales of space such as buildings, rooms and bodies. Whilst I have tried to explore these as they exist in relationships with other spaces, if this thesis focused simply on more immediate spaces – ones which can be apprehended visually in their totality - it would replicate the tendency of other social work discussions of space to exclude wider scales and with them much of the social context of practice. This chapter therefore explores how social workers' talk and practice constructed places such as streets, estates, neighbourhoods, towns and other wider spaces. Doing so makes it possible to identify more fully how structures such as race and social class are reproduced through space and place in social work practice, and so these are also explored in this chapter.

Social workers are often thought to be very careful about how they talk about matters such as race and class. If this is true and if constructs of places at wider scales are key ways in which social structures such as class and race are reproduced in children's social work, we might expect social workers to be wary about talking about place at such scales. This seemed to be the case in

the first weeks of my research at Lumberton, during which social workers talked to me about places in limited and circumspect ways. Place identity, when it was discussed at all, was presented as a matter of administrative boundaries or as something which arose out of material features of spaces. For example, when I asked practitioners at Lumberton about the kind of place it was, they repeatedly spoke about the same two features - that Lumberton was an 'overspill' for a nearby large city and that it was impossible to locate people's homes on visits unless you knew the area well because the streets on housing estates were numbered so illogically. These simple and apparently superficial ways of talking about place left me wondering about other, submerged knowledge. When place came up in practice discussions it tended to be presented as having a self-evident, unarticulated significance. To give an example from the Alphaville research, during a strategy discussion a practitioner referred to a service user's home as a 'typical Leatherwood two bed terrace', a statement that seemed to present neighbourhood identity as obvious and as connected to physical space in a straightforward way. Such descriptions suggest ways of knowing space and place which are far from simple, but which are buried in the tacit or in systems of more and less explicit local knowledge which are nevertheless assumed to be shared. My early observations raised questions about this but I did not find many answers at this point. It was only when I began to carry out mobile interviews, away from the formal practice spaces of offices and meetings, that participants started to tell me more intricate and resonant stories about the places in which they worked.

This chapter begins by exploring some features of this kind of talk about spaces. It starts by exploring how interior spaces are produced through a relation with wider spaces before turning to discuss accounts of these wider spaces specifically and identifying the significance of a particular aesthetic – the uncanny (Gordon, 1997; Jervis and Collins, 2008; Ffytche, 2012) – for social work engagements with wider spaces. It then moves on to examine how class and race in particular were articulated by social workers in interviews and in practice, usually obliquely and often through reference to culturally bereft places or hotspots for sexual abuse and incest. These are not offered as standard ways in which place is talked about in social work everywhere but they are presented as examples of a form of racial talk that is more permissible than most in social work - talk about ‘white places’. The chapter poses questions about how common ways of experiencing and presenting space as troubling and uncanny are implicated in race and class productive accounts of place.

As with chapter four, this chapter presents photographs as part of the data. I have already discussed the use of photographic data in chapter three but it is worth highlighting here that the images provided in this chapter have at least two, differing purposes. They are constructed to reflect, as closely as possible, the visual perspectives offered by participants of certain places. Views of landscapes were often presented to me by participants as if they could show something that could not be conveyed through words, and yet I

sometimes could not discern what social workers wanted me to see without further verbal explanation. Their use by participants therefore suggested something of a contradiction - these were views that were meant to demonstrate something but did not, at least not conclusively. I also use them in order to make explicit how social workers delivered certain accounts of places both through language and certain organisations of the visual. Images are therefore used in two ways – as evidence of places and as evidence of ways of representing places.

Returning as axiomatic

Before discussing social workers' talk about places more generally, I want to note a movement that is presented as axiomatic in children's social work practice – returning. In this study, I observed social workers repeatedly returning to visit families to discuss what has changed and what remains the same. Returns also occurred over longer intervals: even when social workers were visiting a family for the first time, they were usually returning to an area that they had visited before. This aspect of mobile activities such as social work is important to consider: movement can involve instability, change and uncertainty (as has been emphasised in some of the literature already published about mobility and social work) but it can just as easily produce rhythm, pattern and the idea of predictability. Return in such contexts works as a means of knowing and of performing knowledge, so social workers' particular forms of mobility in practice might well be productive of stronger

senses of certainty as much as openness to the new and unknown (Ferguson, 2008). The following example illustrates this. During her mobile interview, Rachel drove me around Hemlock, the location of a large suburban housing estate and a place that she had often visited in the past:

Rachel: I'll just show you Hemlock village, cos it's a nice little village, but then I'll show you the block of flats where we have a lot of cases. *A lot* of cases. And it's - literally - it's like twilight going from one place to another. Hemlock is quite an old village and it's got some nice sort of cottages and things round the back.

[...]

At the back, over there, when I first came here, I came to work in a psychiatric unit, a therapeutic community, so it was very modern. But there was also a great big massive bin – Hemlock Hill - thousands of beds. And like many places, of course, when Hemlock Hill was actually built as a psychiatric unit, a big old bin, it was in the middle of nowhere. Hemlock was a good 10 miles outside of the city centre. [*We drive past high-rise blocks of flats*] These are vile, absolutely. I don't think I've been in a nice one, all the time I've ever had a referral from these blocks. There are a couple of very good family centres nearby, where the families get known to the workers and build up really good, positive relationships with them and do a lot of work with the families. We tend to sort of just jump in and do investigations and out again.

Social workers usually approach places that they are visiting with a past experience of visiting the same place. As with Rachel's account above and others that I discuss below, places are presented through contrasts and the process of moving through space can enact these contrasts, bring them into being. Sometimes, as with Rachel and other social workers who shared recollections of dramatic experiences, the memories are personal. Visiting is therefore not a neutral movement but a process of placing service users through wider constructs of place, recollections of the past, affective

experiences such as nostalgia and narratives organised around notions such as stability and stagnation.

Neighbourhoods

This section of the chapter concerns the ways that social workers talked about neighbourhoods that they associated most with users of social work services.

There is no consensus in the social sciences about how 'neighbourhood' should be defined but two broad approaches can be distinguished – one which equates administrative boundaries such as local authority wards with neighbourhoods and one which draws on local individual and/or community accounts of neighbourhood (Young Foundation, 2010). Both such accounts are likely to draw on physical features of places such as terrain, roads and types of housing as well as the location of services and opportunities for frequent face to face encounters although, as Holland and others (2011) point out, these are likely to vary according to factors such as age and gender. In this section I follow social workers' understandings of what constitutes a neighbourhood, and this tended most often to be influenced by physical features, particularly location in a particular housing estate or part of an estate accessed by a particular road. It has often been possible to map such accounts of neighbourhood in relation to quantitative research data about features of social deprivation in sub-ward areas. Where this is the case, I have compared such data with social workers' accounts of the same places.

The following discussion draws solely on data from Lumberton. Plenty of similar material also exists from the Alphaville site - I have drawn on such data in previous chapters (see for example Rachel's and Ari's stories at the start of chapter five) and I do so in the second half of this chapter as well - but limiting my discussion in this section to Lumberton enables a more concise discussion and one which, because the data relates just to one site, is able to draw comparisons between different social workers' stories about the same places. The following discussion explores a range of space and place related themes that arose most frequently across both sites in the mobile interviews and in those discussions during interviews elsewhere which were explicitly concerned with neighbourhoods, the local authorities themselves and other ways of representing place.

The relation between inside and outside spaces

The mobile interviews involved social workers telling me about their work and the places in which they did it, while they were moving around those places. They therefore featured numerous stories about things that social workers had done or seen and many of these stories concerned the interiors of service users' homes. For instance, during Ruth's mobile interview she talked about how she made judgements about what she saw in people's homes, discussing chaotic homes on the one hand and those that were stifling or empty on the other. Her first description relates to a family with

whom she had worked over some time, who had repeatedly been referred to Social Care by school and other agencies:

R: The house is very chaotic, grandma looks after her partner's mother [...] She's also got a disabled son who brings his girlfriend so there're always people coming in and going out. This house is where she's got the children. The children have been quite badly abused, she has her own way of dealing with things, one little girl will actually pull the clothes out and urinate on the clothes, now she's trying to stop that but her parenting style is so – well, they would raise a lot of queries because of the way that she does it. But saying that, the children love her, they absolutely adore her, but you go in and she's effing and blinding and I say 'Please don't speak like that', 'Well, I know I'm effing this and effing that'.

D: So there is a good relationship underneath that?

R: Extremely, then she's got the oldest one who's 13, I phone the school and they say she's a lovely, polite girl, doesn't swear or do anything. She accepts it's what grandma does, and they call her mum, they call grandma mum, absolutely immaculate when they go out that door. So you have to make a judgement value, the house is chaotic but the grandma will defend those children like a lion against anybody and anything or you go into a house and there is nothing there.

'Chaotic' households like these ones were often presented as essentially positive ones, where a sensitive social worker is able to see through the disorder to identify strong relationships. Other participants also described such 'chaotic' houses, using the term to refer to messy conditions or large numbers of people or animals. 'Chaotic' in these senses is not necessarily a bad thing but contrasts with empty houses - houses where there is no food and no caring adults. Social workers often framed their concerns about homes in terms of absences - a lack of toys and learning materials or simply an absence of atmosphere and personality. Later on in her mobile interview, Ruth talked about the importance of seeing inside houses in order to form a

judgement about children's care:

It gives you a lot of ideas about how the family operates and who's in control. Sometimes, it's not what they say, it's what's about and how it's organised. And the clutter that's there. I worked with a family and if you saw this woman you'd think that she came out from a really immaculate house but you went into the house - and the house is infested by flies.

In contrast to chaotic homes are houses that are cluttered and contain things that are decaying. There might be lots of things but there is an absence of life and movement. Social workers' ability to go into, see and interpret the insides of these homes leads them, it is suggested, to identify dangers that would be invisible to other professionals. Social work accounts of space are concerned with what is obscured behind the exterior but they also suggest that social workers are able to read evidence of maltreatment or dysfunction in environments that others would not notice (Burston, Puckering and Kearney, 2005; Lecroy and Krysik, 2010; Glad et. al., 2012). Space is always presented as having meaning for children's welfare in these accounts, although the meaning might be hidden or encrypted.

Accounts of events that occurred in interior spaces were often presented by participants as *taking place*: not simply occurring but happening in and through a particular kind of place, whether that be a room in a house or a neighbourhood, that was implicated in the occurrence. During the mobile interviews these emplaced events became integral parts of accounts of wider places. For instance, Sam pointed out to me the locations of instances of extreme domestic violence or the removal of children as parts of her

explanations about places. These stories were often horrible but sometimes comic - Jonathan pointed out a building where a woman had moved back and forth between relationships with two different men in neighbouring flats until, in the end, the three of them moved in together. Stories such as these chimed with aspects of the environment that were presented as speaking of deprivation, isolation or a subculture of neglect. In other stories though, violent events belied the pleasant appearance of a surrounding area and such accounts drew a different kind of meaning from wider place. For example, Sam drove me through Sunset, an affluent area of Lumberton, and told me about one of her cases:

Sunset is a really nice area, that's just down here. My service user actually lives here. He's actually really aggressive, he's got firearm charges, although you wouldn't know it because he's down here, this is quite a nice area. What he's done is moved into the area but unfortunately he's brought his past with him and there's been some domestic incidents.

Later, in relation to another area:

At the back of all this is a new set of houses, really quite affluent three storey houses. I had to go to one of these houses because the man actually punched his son and I had to do a video interview because there was a massive bruise on the child's arm.

The word 'actually' is an important feature of Sam's accounts - it signals that what happens inside houses is the truth, that it often contrasts with and is concealed by the external environment or appearance and that social workers encounter it directly. In other stories, the contrast between the inside and

outside of houses was used to show the resilience or commitment of service users. Some social workers talked about families who were housed in poor quality accommodation but who, despite external appearances, managed to care for children well. Inside/outside contrast structures were therefore employed as persuasive ways of talking about both maltreatment and care, which were all the more convincing when obscured from external view. So, stories of interior spaces are not simply about those scales of space but rely on the idea of a relation with the external environment. Sometimes the neighbourhood is evoked as an explanation for dysfunctional relations, sometimes it is employed as part of contrast structure in a persuasive account of either maltreatment or resilience.

Just as the neighbourhood worked as a contrasting foil or an explanation for internal dysfunction and abuse, the intimate spaces of service users' lives functioned in some accounts to distinguish whole neighbourhoods. Each social worker presented a landscape of Lumberton that was largely flat and unspectacular but also featured points of intense resonance. These were places of ambiguity or hidden problems, about which social workers possessed insight because of their special knowledge of certain cases. During the mobile interviews each social worker pointed out to me places where past or present service users lived. They told me about critical events of child abuse, domestic violence, suicide, stand-offs between service users and police or dramatic removals of children, all of which seemed grounded in the places where they happened and appeared to continue to

resonate there for social workers, even after families had moved away. These places were always small enough to be sensed at the scale of the human body - a block of flats which can be approached and apprehended visually, a boarded up house that can be driven past, a shopping parade that can be walked through. They were presented as symbolising something about the wider places in which they were located and, in these ways, small or interior spaces came to characterise neighbourhoods and wider scales of space in their accounts.

Outside spaces

The format of the mobile interviews enabled participants to construct accounts of places that were verbal, visual and developed across time and space. For example, participants often spoke about places while we were approaching them, creating a degree of tension over time between them knowing and me seeing places - which often had the effect of suggesting intimate and privileged knowledge. They stopped the car outside certain places and presented particular profiles and perspectives of those places and these ways of framing place are what I have tried to capture in the images which are used in this part of the chapter. Sometimes they suggested that we leave the car and walk through certain areas and the affective experiences of such movements are ones that I aim to examine, to the extent that they are significant in producing places in certain kinds of ways. This behaviour should

not be taken as offering insights into how practitioners move about and experience places when they are doing social work - for instance, during home visits. Instead, I am approaching it as evidence of ways that social workers create and sustain credible accounts of places, which may well remain implicit in practice accounts such as written records or talk in meetings but, because they are compelling when articulated in circumstances like the mobile interviews (and, likely, other contexts in which social workers talk about the places where they work) are likely to continue to be highly influential in practice too. (The question of what insights can be offered by mobile methods such as these is considered in detail in chapter three.)

The following discussion explores three themes that emerged from the data, which seem important for understandings of social workers' accounts of wider places. These are:

Social workers' rich accounts of small, precisely delineated areas

Stories about experiences in public spaces of being watched by other people that social workers were initially unaware of or that they had not initially realised were observing them

The idea that place is always significant in troubling ways

Finding rich meaning in small places

When I asked social workers to tell me what kind of place Lumberton was,

they commonly avoided making definitive statements. Occasionally the question was ignored, at other times there was a suggestion that social workers were less able to make statements about the town than people who lived there (all but one of the Lumberton social workers lived somewhere else) and several social workers suggested I should ask this question of admin workers, most of whom lived in Lumberton, instead. However, this did not seem to be simply a question of who had the right to offer an authentic account of places. For one social worker, Sam, there was little to say about Lumberton as a town:

I think it's very similar to [other places]. It's basically I think similar to all the places I've worked - Derby, Brighton, America, Newcastle - but just a smaller version. I don't think it's unique in any way because I've worked in so many other places and see exactly the same problems in Lumberton as I've seen in Derby and Brighton... It's no different.



Figure 6 Western Cliff District Centre: 'See just how concrete the jungle is'

Social workers were much more comfortable making definitive statements about place at smaller scales. When I asked Sam to show me around the town and help me to understand what kind of a place it was she, like the other participants, showed me the neighbourhoods where she said that most service users lived. These places were seen as having particular significant and identifiable features. Sam took me to Western Cliff District Centre so I could 'see just how concrete the jungle is'. We got out of the car and walked around and she pointed out what she said was evidence of drug use and a block of flats which she called 'H Block' (a reference to heroin). When we returned to the car we had the following discussion:

D: I think from what I've heard there are serious social problems in Lumberton, but driving round I don't get a sense of it. Why is it that Western Cliff is quite a disadvantaged area?

S: I think what we get is a snapshot of Western Cliff, it's not all of Western Cliff. I understand that not everyone in Western Cliff is a heroin addict, not everyone in Western Cliff is in a mother and baby unit, not everybody in Western Cliff is poor. It's just because we only concentrate on the bad, we don't concentrate on the people that are advantaged and are socially able to control their lives without any social services input. We only concentrate on those people who call us in because of their behaviours.

Western Cliff has an attractive district centre but it is also an area of significant social deprivation and there is evidence that crime is a particular problem in the neighbourhood (Communities and Local Government, 2011). Sam's comments were therefore not groundless but they were based on knowledge of social problems in the area that were not visible to me during our journey, even though she seemed to expect that they would be. I tried to explore where Sam's knowledge of these problems came from but this was difficult to identify.

The two other social workers who showed me around Lumberton had nothing to say about Western Cliff even though we passed through the area during each of the interviews. However, they were each willing to describe other small and specific areas in vivid, definitive terms. Jonathan's descriptions of parts of the Autumn estate were deeply resonant: his tour was organised in such a way that it constructed the estate as a significant destination, a 'very important but difficult [place] to find', later described as a 'very deprived' area then, when we finally turned on to the service road - 'This is the famous

Autumn estate'. While he was showing me around the estate, he drove the car into a cul de sac, pulled up and stated: 'This is Clinton's Wood. It's quite a frightening place to come to'. I said that it seemed deserted and he agreed emphatically. He told me about a case he had in Clinton's Wood where there had been some violence and it seemed from his description that aspects of the violence resonated for him in the environment. He commented on the lack of privacy in Clinton's Wood, his perception that the flats were not clearly residential in appearance, the difficulty in distinguishing fronts and backs of the homes, the fact that some of the flats had garages while none of the residents owned cars (something that he said was 'odd'). The place was incongruous for him and it evaded categorisation.



Figure 7 'This is Clinton's Wood. it's quite a frightening place to come to'



Figure 8 Hart's Tongue: Discomfort with the reversal of back and front

Ruth was the third social worker to show me around Lumberton. When she showed me around the Hart's Tongue estate, I commented on its smart appearance by saying it was nice. She replied 'Well, is it nice?' and then pointed out that houses fronted on to pathways rather than streets and so lacked privacy, while houses were commonly accessed by back gates, which are next to the parking areas in Hart's Tongue, and back gardens were obscured by high walls and sometimes contained dogs. She referred to the experience of visiting when it was dark and being vulnerable. While Jonathan did not see Western Cliff in the way that Sam did, his description of Clinton's Wood was equally evocative, as were Ruth's accounts of Hart's Tongue, and each social worker presented space as having strange or troublesome qualities. Other social workers made similar statements about other areas of the town, always specifically defined, often at the scale of a particular street.

Being watched by unknown others

The following two stories told by social workers illustrate a feature of wider

constructs of place that appeared in other conversations too, where place was characterised by the experience of becoming aware that one is being watched by others. Such accounts resonate with safeguarding social workers' own surveillance function, even if the spectral dynamics are reversed. Marianne told me a story of how, at the end of the day, she was walking to the council car park, located five minutes' walk from the office. She described this walk to me and then her feeling of becoming aware of something. She saw heads popping up in a pub window and realised that one of them was a woman who had been a client of hers, who was pointing her out to other people in the pub. She described how this event led her to feel differently about the place, that the car park is secluded and this 'leaves you vulnerable' so she no longer uses it. I interviewed Marianne at a later point and when I asked her about Lumberton she discussed the same part of the town:

D: Can I ask you about Lumberton? How would you describe it?

M: That's a difficult one. Me and Lorraine [another social worker] were talking about that last night. Because when we went to - I don't know if you've been up to where the top car park is, where the church is, near the market square? Cos I said to her, Lumberton is a funny place. You'd think of it as a quiet little market town but then you've got all this other stuff, all this stuff that we deal with. So on the surface if you were looking for somewhere to live you'd come along and go 'Oh, nice little shopping centre, nice, it seems ok'. But I think - and I suppose it'd be the same for anywhere we work, because we see the two faces of towns, don't we? If you didn't do social work you'd just come here and shop and whatever and you wouldn't see any of the other stuff. But because we do the work that we do, we see the deprivation and the drugs and all the rest of it. In the role that you do you're exposed to things that normal people aren't going to see because that's not what they go there for.

Although Marianne did not repeat the story she previously told me, she referred to its location and it seems likely that she was reminded of the event when she walked through the place the night before and again during the interview itself, when I asked her to describe how she thought of the whole town. Her account contrasted surface appearances with what was said to be really happening, she referred to the two faces of a town - only one of which most people, including most people who lived there - would see. Social workers come to see behind the facade or below the surface. The feelings inspired in her first account - coming to realise that you are being watched, seeing the place as it really is, not as it appears - recur when Marianne is in the market square but also when she is asked about the town as a whole. Feelings aroused by these highly located experiences seep into wider scales of space. 'Lumberton is a funny place'. Below is another story, this time told by Ruth during her mobile interview, while we were parked in front of a client's house:

R: I went out with a social worker once because she felt like she'd been threatened by somebody, so I said I'll come with you. We couldn't get a reply, but there was a man in the garden next door, and I said 'Do you know where your neighbour is?' And he looked at me and said 'I know who you are. I can smell you lot.' I thought 'OK'.

D: That's quite threatening. Well, quite sinister.

R: The social worker I was with said: 'Get in the car! Get in the car!' I said 'Let's get in the car', I said 'Don't rush, don't let him know that you've got' whatever. So I got in the car and I said I wanted to laugh - she says 'Get in the car! Get in the car!' And I says 'Oh, you smell then, do you?' So, you know what I mean. If you're by yourself it can be extremely threatening, and she did feel threatened by it.

These kinds of accounts were common: other social workers also told me

stories about feeling like they were being watched or feeling exposed and vulnerable when they were out on home visits. Their stories about outside spaces were often constructed around similar patterns of becoming aware of being observed, either by someone whom you did not see or someone who, at first, you assumed did not know you. They also elicited similar sensations for the listener, of the 'sinister' (as I said at the time of Ruth's story) or, perhaps more critically, the uncanny - a moment of recognition which combines with features that disrupt our sense of the familiar because they do not completely fit our expectations. Vulnerability in these examples is more specifically about becoming aware of one's conspicuousness, one's outsider status in a place which one felt was familiar. This idea of the uncanny helps me to re-interpret Jonathan's statement about Clinton's Wood being a 'frightening place to come to'. While he might have experienced feeling frightened in Clinton's Wood, Jonathan's description of the space emphasises instead its incongruity, the difficulty in 'placing' it.

Place is always significant, always problematic

I was interested in social workers' views about the physical organisation of the housing estates in which they worked. While we were parked in Staghorn, an estate that Ruth often visited, I asked about this issue. Ruth replied

I don't like it. It breeds, it breeds - everyone is on top of each other. Look at this. There seems to be a lack of privacy everywhere, you know what I mean, there's no privacy. I'm working with a family and they live on a corner and people walk past the house and People tend

to gather on the corner and notice what everyone else is doing. What I find in Lumberton is a lot of people don't work. I mean, a lot of people do but ... So their time is spent on corners talking, knowing everyone's business, so if something happens everyone wants to know.



Figure 9 Staghorn: Concern about depth and lack of privacy in cul-de-sacs



Figure 10 Silver Cloak: Concern about visibility and seclusion

Many of the features of estates that Ruth and other social workers talked to me about - diversity in housing styles, high levels of natural surveillance in shared public areas, restricting car traffic to the edges of residential areas and promoting pedestrian and cycle traffic - would have been designed to reduce

opportunities for crime and increase a sense of belonging in local spaces. However, each of these features was seen by social workers as related to social problems. This suggests that when social workers understood an area as experiencing such problems they were likely to see this as either caused by or reflected in the physical environment. Analysis of Ruth's and others' statements about the estates where they most often worked shows a number of ostensibly contradictory statements. Ruth highlighted the secluded alleyways leading to homes in Silver Cloak because of the associated risk of crime but she was also critical of the network of broad footpaths and cyclepaths that connect Silver Cloak and other estates, which are well used and have high visibility. She noted the problems of long pathways leading to front doors in Silver Cloak but, in Staghorn, the closeness of homes to the street was seen as a problem. Jonathan described the deserted feel of Clinton's Wood as troubling, while Ruth suggested that too much interaction in public spaces was a problem in Lumberton. However, these apparent inconsistencies can be explained if we acknowledge that, for these social workers, local spaces were inherently problematic whatever their characteristics.

The uncanny has been understood in a number of ways: the experience of something as both familiar and strange; a response to things which are inanimate but seem as if they are alive; the simultaneous sense of feeling out of place in the present and haunted by past occurrences. Collins and Jervis (2008) argue that the uncanny should be seen as a distinctively modern

sensibility, arising as the inevitable reverse of the priority given to rational explanation in modernity. The uncanny is felt in relation to features of social experience which previously could have been explained through reference to religion or the supernatural but, while such systems of belief might once have provided ways of making sense of the inexplicable, with the uncanny these uncertainties persist in the form of particular kinds of affective experience - feelings of unease or fear. Academic writing about the uncanny has proliferated since the 1980s and Matt Ffytche (2012) argues that we can now talk of uncanny 'theory', suggesting that the concept has had a profound impact on disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, with new approaches to interpretation that aim to accentuate uncanny aspects of their research object rather than seeking to impose a determinate analysis. In this way the uncanny becomes not just a focus of research but a tool for scholarly enquiry itself. Swati Chattopadhyay (2010), for example, suggests that the uncanny offers 'a useful device for approaching the methodological need to reconcile what we can and cannot experience' (p. 649). Evoking the uncanny (either in academic enquiry or in social workers' accounts of their experience) is claimed as a method of phenomenological exploration that sustains a sense of the indeterminate, opening up broader ways of engaging with the world.

Writing about the uncanny has tended to draw on a variety of sources - Freud's (1919) essay on the subject and the psychoanalytic discussions that it later inspired, also Derrida's (1994) engagement with Heidegger and, more generally, literary and cinematic explorations of cities as spaces of spectacle

and alienation. The idea of place is central to each of these, with the focus of Freud's paper being *das unheimliche* (which can be translated as either *uncanny* or *unhomely*), while Derrida's work is concerned with Heidegger's understanding of dwelling or being in the world. Not surprisingly then, there has been a considerable amount of interest in the uncanny in those disciplines concerned with space and place such as cultural geography, architecture and urban studies (e.g. Battista et al., 2005; Hook, 2005; Donald, 1999). The best of this work demonstrates that all space holds the inherent potential to provoke a sense of the uncanny. Space is always both a context for the current presence of material things and the present absence of things that have been there in the past.

Certain writing in social work has begun to explore social workers' accounts of disquieting experiences of interior spaces (e.g. Smith, 2003; Ferguson, 2010b), with some work employing approaches that recreate the uncanny qualities of social work practice. My sense is that the social workers in this study were also doing this about wider scales of space. The uncanny appeared in their interviews as an aesthetic that could convey important aspects of practice experience, while it was unlikely to be articulated in formal practice spaces such as the office discussions, meetings and home visits that I observed. So place matters for social work, in the sense that places are seen as significant for service users' experiences, but also because certain ways of experiencing, thinking about and talking about practice are more available in some places than in others. There are two broad conclusions that

I have drawn from these findings, alongside analysis of fieldnotes from the observation aspects of the study. I offer them because they raise questions about articulations of space and spatial aesthetics or sensibilities that could have relevance for social workers in other contexts.

The first conclusion is that, while social workers drew on protected or 'insider' knowledge about places and events that occurred in them to produce accounts of places that were often compelling, they did not seem to draw on a great deal of formal knowledge about space and place in their descriptions. For example, even though Lumberton is an expanded town, no social workers talked to me about the government policy that has promoted such towns or the factors that have led to migration to places such as Lumberton. They also made no reference to Lumberton's medieval heritage or to its more recent history as a centre for manufacturing industries. They lacked the breadth of reference that other ways of talking about similar places have provided. Lynsey Hanley (2007), for instance, gives a rich and evocative account of 'the Wood', a large social housing estate with many similarities to some of the neighbourhoods in Lumberton. Her account certainly captures the uncanny qualities of the Wood, where narrow walkways create malevolent walls of wind (pp. 1-2) and flat-roofed houses look 'like headless bodies' (p. 24). The difference is that Hanley grounds her description of the material qualities of the Wood with discussion of the history of social housing in Britain and a much broader array of accounts of lived experiences in such places. Social workers' stories constructed place as

uncanny partly by emptying it of many potential associations that could serve to ground it - recent urban planning policy, the industrial history of the area, aspects of more distant history (which are prominently displayed in public places in Lumberton) and the day to day experience of people living or working there. Instead they produced rich accounts of place identity by drawing on other, narrow registers of information - the immediate visually perceived environment alongside intimate knowledge about certain isolated, dramatic events that had occurred in these places in the past.

While social workers were generally reluctant to talk about the identity of places at a larger scale, they constructed meaningful accounts of much smaller places - those small enough to be engaged with visually or easily walked or driven around. The photographs that are included above illustrate ways in which places were presented during the mobile interviews, often focusing on small features or specific details, concerned with the areas surrounding houses rather than more public and open sites (something that Narhi, 2002, found in her research about social workers' understandings of the neighbourhoods in which they worked) and likely to take a more negative view of features that appeared neutral or positive to me. Each of the participants also organised our journeys in certain ways in order to enable certain kinds of stories about places, as spaces of urban decay (Maxine's account of Western Cliff), as 'hard to find' (Jonathan's account of the Autumn estate) or as disorganised and confusing (Ruth's accounts of Staghorn and our journey on foot along Silver Cloak's walkways). Space at these small

scales was presented as the cause of social problems. Social workers were drawing here on common sense ideas of poor urban planning leading to or compounding social exclusion, even though marginalisation is never simply the result of such features, arising as it does from structures of power that operate at societal and global scales. As well as being interested in small scales of space, social workers often showed me aspects of places that were themselves small or imperceptible. I often found them difficult to see or I failed to perceive them in the ways that the participants did. They also frequently presented places as connected to service users' problems in esoteric ways: visible, mundane features of places were seen to evoke a sense of traumatic past events or present troubles. In these ways, I think that social workers were performing a particular kind of attentiveness to place - displaying a sensibility that is alert to small visual clues which might not be apparent or which cannot be fully understood by lay people and alive to resonances that others may be unable to sense.

Producing class and race through place

The following discussion seeks to explore the consequences of a focus on small scales of space and a will to find evidence in that which is imperceptible to others for how class and race are articulated in social work practice. The focuses on intimate scales and small things apparent in these accounts have some interesting and problematic effects; class, for instance, is often

constructed through corporeal, biological and sexual terms.

Why certain places experience many more social problems than others is a crucial question for social workers, because users of social care services are often dealing not only with individual poverty but with the impact of living in a place that is continually presented and understood as socially deprived and marginal to society. Sociological and geographical literature offer diverse explanations for these phenomena, concerned with matters such as the decline of certain industries, regional and global movements of capital and people, urban blight and gentrification, the uneven distribution of resources across spaces and the stigmatisation of certain forms of housing, social life and neighbourhoods. Only one social worker (Jonathan) talked to me about any such factors, while other participants made sense of social exclusion through concepts which related to much smaller scales: those of the household, street and estate or neighbourhood. For example, social workers in both sites talked about *socialisation* as a way of explaining why social problems in the places where they worked were so entrenched. As Rachel explained to me in relation to certain neighbourhoods of Alphaville:

A lot of the time the grandparents didn't go to school and didn't bother getting jobs, the kids have gone straight and got pregnant and haven't worked. You still go to families where people have never worked a day in their life and they're in their early 30s, never had a job and that motivation, they say that motivation has gone.

As did many of the social workers in both sites, Naomi talked to me about the poor physical environment in the estates in which service users were most

often living. I asked her whether she was suggesting that this caused social problems:

The physical environment and the layout of the houses doesn't help at all but, no, I think it's about socialisation. It's hard, I think, the deprived areas of Lumberton are in a rut and I would imagine they're very hard to break away from. What some of our service users can't see is we could help, we've supported some of them to get out because they've moved out of the area. They'll moan about it but it's the same with everybody, sometimes it's easier to just keep going the way you're going, sometimes it's harder to make that change.

These explanations feature various questionable assumptions: that parents and grandparents are the only significant role models in people's lives; that families live, socialise and interact in small geographical areas and social networks over the course of generations; that moving away is a solution to this. The relationships between such factors and experiences of deprivation are likely to be more complicated. Some neighbourhoods in Alphaville and Lumberton had markedly more stable populations than others but this is not, in itself, evidence of lower levels of participation in networks that extend beyond those immediate spaces, while the reality in both places was more complicated. Certain neighbourhoods had more stable populations but this is not, in itself, evidence of lower levels of participation in networks which extend beyond those immediate spaces, while research that explores people's experiences of moving away from stigmatised neighbourhoods suggests that this can exacerbate problems of isolation (Clark, 2003).

Another notion also featured in many of the accounts of neighbourhood

decline - one that locates problems not in present social practice but in past sexual relations and current bodies. Naomi explained:

I was fairly shocked when I first came to Lumberton. I'm not being rude and I suppose this is un-PC of me, but walking round the town and seeing the people of Lumberton, it just seemed like I was going back in a bit of a time warp. It's like a little cliquy community, like a little community on its own, I don't know, a lot of interbreeding [*sic*] here, that's what I think. Without being nasty, just walking around and looking at people and some of their physical attributes, I just thought, 'Oh'. And I've learnt since that that is the case, there's a lot of interbreeding, there's a lot on our case load where they're half brothers and sisters and don't even know it. It's very close knit, everybody knows everybody and everybody has slept with everybody, you know what I mean?

When I asked Adrian about Lumberton, he had this to say:

I definitely wouldn't live here, it doesn't feel like a homely place to me but, again, is that because of my work? It's a small, very small town, isn't it? And families kind of *know* families. I use the word, I've heard the word 'interbred' here and I don't know if that's a good word to use but that's how it seems.

These ideas chimed with accounts of the uncanny which I have already discussed, such as Ruth's comment about the physical layout of some Lumberton estates: 'I don't like it. It breeds, it breeds - everyone is on top of each other.' In these accounts, incest is evidenced in bodies and expressed in, or resulting from, the oppressive and inward looking nature of what are seen as spaces of deprivation. It wasn't just Lumberton where such ideas had currency. Ari told me about Aspen, a housing estate in Alphaville:

It's one of those places that people seem to live there, have never left there, there's generation upon generation living there. Everybody knows

everyone [...] and everyone is just related to everyone. I'm saying that in the politest way possible. Everyone is related to everyone, everyone has gone out with everyone, everyone knows everyone. It's just one of those places.

As well as sex with relatives, participants made reference more specifically to high levels of intra-familial child sexual abuse - an issue about which, as social workers, they could claim a degree of privileged knowledge. I asked Sam what were the main issues that social workers came across in Lumberton. She replied:

A lot of sexual abuse, actually. A bit too much for my liking.

Dharman: Would you say that's something that's different about this area?

Sam: It's funny you should say that, we've noticed that there appears to be a prevalence of sexual abuse in this area but I don't know whether that can be confirmed. Maybe that's just what we think.

In Alphaville too, police officers, social workers and team managers all told me that there was a high level of sexual abuse in the West sector. For example, when I asked Russell, a detective constable, and Claire, a senior social worker, what the place was like they responded by saying there was a lot of sexual abuse. Claire added 'there's a lot more sex abuse here than when I was in South', invoking two kinds of privileged knowledge. First, only professionals involved in child protection are able to make such comparisons, giving these kinds of statements a comfortable authority. Second, Claire (and other social workers) used the term 'sex abuse', a phrase that is common in children's social work in Britain (personal experience and communication). Saying 'sex abuse' creates a distinct language for talking

about the matter, implying fluency and a level of expertise that requires jargon. It's also a contraction, one which suggests that these professionals have to use the term so frequently that dropping a syllable offers significant efficiencies.

Why were these ideas meaningful for social workers, even though elements of them were arguably highly unlikely? My view is that, whether or not social workers actually believe that there are greater incidences of sex between related adults and sexual abuse of children in some areas, making such statements can work to assert a sense of expertise, when executed in a skilled way. Intimate relations in families, child abuse and stigmatised areas are all social work business, about which social workers might utilise some specific ways of knowing (see for example Finkelhor, 1986; Parton, 1985), and so social workers can make statements about these topics that are more difficult for others to dispute, even if they do not agree, because they might not fully comprehend the basis on which the statements have been made. They also concern matters that are concealed from view so we should not expect them to be provable or even to seem plausible when seen from outside. As with the uncanny representations of place discussed earlier in this chapter, these accounts present social workers as being able to sense things that cannot be seen or identified conclusively. They are sometimes presented as amusing, such as Ari's suggestion that 'everyone is related', and some of the discussion about social work humour in chapter five is relevant here too, but at other times they allude instead to the sinister. Articulating

ideas in these ways allows social workers to make suggestions that are both difficult to believe and impossible entirely to refute, and apparently unbelievable yet horrifying ideas have exercised significant authority in social work (I explore this wider significance of the concealed, imperceptible and uncanny in social work in chapter eight).

As well as specifically social work sensibilities, these accounts of places of social deprivation evidence a discourse of class abjection that is particularly prevalent in Britain currently, through which certain working class communities are articulated in aesthetic and moral terms as lacking social and sexual norms which operate elsewhere (Skeggs, 2004; Tyler, 2013). I began to consider this in the discussion of social work forms of abjection in relation to interior spaces in chapter five; in this chapter I want to explore further the ways that social workers articulated disgust in their talk about wider places and communities.

In order to do this, it is important to compare social workers' stories about place with other kinds of data about the same areas. The Office of National Statistics provides detailed information about a range of social and economic matters at the level of small geographical areas. In England, these areas are known as Lower Super Output Areas or Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). They have populations of, on average, 1500 people and so are usually smaller than local authority wards and larger housing estates. As well as providing data about specific social and economic issues (e.g. income

deprivation affecting children; fear of crime) the ONS synthesises a broad range of such data in order to categorise each LSOA within a 'supergroup'. The supergroups or categories are as follows:

Countryside
Disadvantaged Urban Communities
Multicultural City Life
Professional City Life
Urban Fringe
White Collar Urban
Miscellaneous Built-up Areas

(Summarised from ONS, 2008)

These categorisations, while limited in some ways, at least provide a means to compare areas within the city that is grounded in detailed data about social factors. In Alphaville, social care services are delivered across three different geographical sectors: West, South and North. High levels of socio-economic deprivation exist across the entire administrative area and in each of the three sectors. There are some differences between sectors - for example, South and West include most of the 'Professional City Life' LSOAs in the city, while West covers most of the 'White Collar Urban' LSOAs. However, there are relatively small numbers of LSOAs in these categories across the city when compared with national averages, while those in the largest categories - Multicultural City Life, Disadvantaged Urban Communities and Miscellaneous Built-up Areas - are distributed across all three sectors. These broad data suggest many more similarities between the sectors than differences. This is understandable, given they are blunt tools for distinguishing small places from each other but also because internal administrative boundaries in local

authorities such as Alphaville are likely to be defined in order to produce areas with equivalent, rather than contrasting, sets of requirements for services, the management of which can then be devolved to more local levels.

Social work accounts of different places in the city tended to refer to many of the broad characteristics which the supergroups are intended to address - ethnic diversity, housing density and type, prevalent occupation type etc - but they also tended to focus on what was seen as unique about each place and so emphasised differences rather than similarities between parts of the city. These were particularly likely to be distinguished at the scale of sectors. Such stories produced sectors as characterised by certain social issues when, in reality, all three sectors might have such problems. Less pervasive problems with a high profile might be associated with only a small number of neighbourhoods or might not be grounded in residential areas at all, but these were still talked about as problems associated with a particular sector. For example, Alphaville has a large amount of high density, high-rise suburban social housing when compared to other English cities. This is spread across all three geographical sectors but social workers in West talked about it as an issue which characterised only their sector. Gun and gang related crime was talked about by social workers as an issue for South, even though different aspects of these crimes can be seen as either problems in small numbers of neighbourhoods in the city (and so not most of South) or as matters which impact on the social life of the city as a whole. The high level and complexity of social problems across Alphaville lead to stresses on

families in all sectors, but certain family and parenting problems are talked about as if they characterise and distinguish sectors. These kinds of differences - housing, crime, family and parenting problems - come to be understood as matters connected to place and, in a city which is both ethnically diverse and characterised by relatively low levels of ethnic segregation, they still come to be produced as *racial* matters in social workers' accounts. The following discussion seeks to explore this further.

Occasionally, social workers distinguished areas in explicitly ethnic or racial terms. Ari, who is of South Asian origin, had worked in the South sector before moving to West several years ago and she told me about how different the two areas were:

South is a little bit scary, just like, generally, it can be a bit intimidating, whereas West Alphaville, to me, it's completely different. I feel more comfortable in West Alphaville, I don't know how to describe it but it's a different ... different types of people live there. I don't know, I just feel more at home. [...] The type of people that I've worked with has completely changed. In South, I was working with a lot of black and Asian families. The majority didn't speak English so I used interpreters a lot and because I speak some of the languages, I used the languages myself. Whereas in West Alphaville, it's more white UK.

South sector includes certain neighbourhoods with large African Caribbean and South Asian communities but East and West also include neighbourhoods which are important centres for these and other minority communities. Even so, these kinds of distinctions were authoritative, partly because social workers could claim specialist knowledge of such

matters. More often, race was not identified explicitly in social workers' accounts of places but was still evident in coded terms. For example, a common account of differences between sectors amongst West social workers was that South had problems with 'guns and gangs' and was assumed to be busier for social workers but that, in fact, West was just as busy. Other examples of distinctions between places were not, or were not so evidently, grounded in ideas about racial difference. Instead, they illustrate the ways in which race seems so often to be produced in social work talk through a gap or slippage in articulation. During the interview with Stefan, a white English team manager who had worked in both East and West sectors, I asked what social problems existed in the area and, understandably given the context of the interview, Stefan's response concerned problems closely connected to parenting. It focused on West as a whole and defined the sector's problems through a contrast with East. He made reference to a domestic violence screening process – this was a city wide project which involved domestic violence leads from police, social care and health visiting services examining all notifications about domestic violence from within their own services, finding out whether other services also had relevant information about the household. The project therefore led to more referrals to social care about domestic violence.

I think that the main things we're picking up [in West] at the moment are domestic violence, and that may be to do with the screening process that we've got in place. I've not seen so many drug issues as I would have expected - what we saw when I worked in East. I tend to think that what we're getting mainly, at the moment, is parents that are unwilling to parent their children, or unable to parent their children. It's quite different

to the East, I think so. I know we did have a lot of domestic violence there. East has got some of the highest incidence of domestic violence in the country. And it's a non-descript area, it must be something in the water. I tended to find there were a lot of drug issues, I felt, in that part of the city, and mental health issues. Whereas here, it just tends to be, I don't know, we have teenage children who are not being parented. I think, since I've been here I've had, I would say, seven cases of parents who have put their children into care by basically saying 'I don't want them'. Simple as that, as you would discard a mobile phone.

Stefan's account distinguishes the two sectors in several ways - in terms of incidence of domestic violence, drug issues, mental health issues and parents putting their children into care. It is interesting because it contains some convincing elements, is very deliberately expressed, but is also devoid of explanations. For example, Stefan asserts that East is characterised by high rates of domestic violence, by drawing on privileged knowledge about incidence and by noting and immediately discounting the high identification rate for domestic violence in West, but he avoids anything other than a humorous explanation - East 'is a non-descript area, it must be something in the water'. The characterisation of West as a place where parents are more likely to put their children into care might have some credibility because of Stefan's role and the considered, rather than exaggerated, estimates of figures, but it is also presented as bewildering rather than accounted for. Experts should usually be able to offer some explanation, even if it is just to identify the parameters of possibility, so what purpose does the bewilderment serve here?

One possible explanation is that avoiding having to explain differences

between places is a way of avoiding accusations of racism, since place often stands for race in social workers' and others' talk about neighbourhoods in ethnically diverse cities. I have noted this above in relation to Alphaville South and it also potentially applies to East. This sector includes the city's most ethnically segregated South Asian communities and it is telling that Stefan does not acknowledge this in his account of the differences between East and West, given the easy associations between South Asian communities and domestic violence (e.g. Owen and Wadeson, 2007), which can appear both racist and simplistic when made explicit in social work. A lack of explanation means that the association remains available for inference, neither asserted nor ruled out, but is not made by Stefan himself. Ben Pitcher's (2014) concept of racial metonymy is useful here – certain ostensibly non-racial features come to stand for and reproduce notions of racial difference, while avoiding the accusation that one is discriminating.

Just as domestic violence might stand, metonymically, for Asian families, bewilderment itself might simultaneously work as a means of avoiding accusations of racism and yet still enact a racial metonymy. Stefan expresses it in response to parents putting their children into care as if they were getting rid of a phone, and this description connects with ways that certain white, economically deprived and spatially marginalised communities are currently articulated in Britain: as culturally, spiritually, emotionally bereft and pre-occupied with the latest material belongings. These kinds of statements can be seen as tacitly or covertly reproducing the same story about West

Alphaville as the one articulated by Ari: as a certain kind of socially excluded white place.

Other stories circulated about the differences between places, sometimes at the scale of sectors of the city, sometimes differences between different parts of the West sector. They were generally class-infused and racial stories, grounded in the specialist knowledge that social workers could claim. For example, participants referred to their own insider knowledge about what kinds of psychoactive substances were most likely to be used in different places. They usually remained vague when I pressed them for detail, suggesting not so much a lack of knowledge as its tacit nature. On those occasions when it was made explicit, knowledge about substances and place seemed to be grounded in the racialisation of certain neighbourhoods as white and socially excluded. For instance, Ari told me that Aspen was a 'high heroin area. A lot of heroin, a lot of cocaine. No crack. A lot of alcohol.' Other social workers told me about other places with higher levels of alcohol use and lower levels of heroin or cocaine use than elsewhere. These were complex, often inconsistent, distinctions but they were generally ones that found meaning in place, whilst also appearing to draw on ideas about class and racial difference which were, nevertheless, rarely articulated.

Social workers in Lumberton constructed it as a white place as well, only here, the point was made more explicitly. Both white and non-white social workers told me stories about service users' racism and this was linked explicitly to the

lack of diversity in the town (something supported by census figures, which show considerably less ethnic diversity in Lumberton than England generally). This lack of diversity distinguished the town from the social workers themselves, only about two thirds of whom were white. These kinds of differences are important to consider because stories about local place were produced not just through contrasts between places, but through ideas about the differences between place and social workers themselves. Social workers (mostly white but located in a mixed team and aware of the pervasiveness of racism) distinguished themselves from service users (who were understood to be living in a white place and more prone to racism). In Alphaville West too, the team was mainly white while also more diverse than the local area. In both places, social workers took a clear line on racism from service users to professionals. For example, on one occasion at Lumberton I talked to Lorraine, a white social worker, just as she returned from an appointment to carry out a medical examination in relation to a child who, along with siblings, was the focus of concerns about maltreatment. The following is an extract from fieldnotes, recorded shortly after the conversation:

Talked to Lorraine in the lift - she said she's had a horrible morning. She had a medical, not unexpected, but the mother refused to allow it to happen and she 'racially abused' the doctor. Lorraine will apply for a court order. She's not told the mother about this yet - 'she can sweat on it'. I clarified whether this was an order to require the assessment / medical. She said 'No, to remove them'.

It was the suspected concerns about the child's wellbeing and the refusal to agree the medical that were seen to warrant an order from court. Lorraine's

anger and hostility towards the mother, though, seemed more related to the racism. Other social workers in both Lumberton and Alphaville showed the same approach: abusing children was a serious matter but one that was usually afforded understanding and patience; racism, on the other hand, was completely unacceptable and required a zero tolerance response. Recognising racism, taking it seriously and challenging it were ways in which social workers, both white and non-white, distinguished themselves from the communities in which they worked. These kinds of practices produced Lumberton and Alphaville as particular kinds of white places, in contrast to the diverse and cosmopolitan social workers who worked in them.

As I have suggested, these approaches to place differed from talk about place in more formal practice settings. Accounts of cases in those situations were usually highly polished and constructed in order to lead to particular kinds of conclusions. They often featured reference to places but usually the meanings and affects associated with them were not articulated and their significance was presented as self-evident. Such statements appeared to be aimed at either affirming another's account or establishing the significance of an event for others and they each relied on a shared language about places (neighbourhoods, parts of homes) that was profoundly normalising, while also lacking the intricate qualities of social workers' accounts of places which occurred in the interviews and informal conversations that I had with social workers. In the practice instances, place is referenced but not elaborated, its

significance is implicit though doubtless powerful.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how social workers make sense of space, their affective experiences of space, how they make claims to expertise and insight through certain ways of representing space and the political contexts and consequences of these matters.

A central question for this study is how social workers conceptualise space, particularly the means through which they define and distinguish certain spaces from others. Most of the data discussed in this chapter, as in previous chapters, show social workers privileging intimate and other smaller scales of space. This happened, for example, through the use of inside the home/ outside the home contrast structures which, alongside notions of neighbourhood socialisation, were available to social workers to make claims to privileged knowledge about service users. Participants drew on these ways of knowing to present their understanding as intricate and as developed through direct engagement with the spaces of service users' lives. They enabled social workers to present themselves as sensitive to the imperceptible, able to decipher the encrypted and, through mobile practice, able to encounter things that others never see or understand. These techniques were effective partly because they resonated and reproduced

existing racial, class and sexual distinctions.

Moreover, the data discussed in this chapter suggest that social workers' own conceptualisations of race and social class (and the sexual-exotic as it features in such conceptualisations) are arrived at through a spatial imaginary. They come to mind and make sense through reference to spaces such as imaginary bodies and the estates or neighbourhoods where those bodies are imagined as being.

This chapter provided evidence of social workers' engagement with certain affective registers in their talk in less formal contexts about the people and circumstances that they encountered in practice, in particular, the uncanny, nostalgia and, as discussed in chapter five, disgust. Why do such sensations appeal to social workers? They certainly enabled social workers to present compelling and resonant stories, even though these less formal ways of talking were constructed quite differently from the credible, objective accounts given in formal practice contexts. However, affective responses such as these involve internal pleasures and identificatory opportunities that cannot be attributed only to the satisfaction of presenting a convincing case but connect more broadly to what is rewarding and challenging about social work and the paucity of technical, bureaucratic and narrowly psychological models for understanding that seemed to predominate in offices and meetings. I consider these matters further in the next and final chapter of this thesis.

SPACE MATTERS FOR SOCIAL WORK

This study has explored the ways in which space and place matter for social work. Some of these are likely to be unsurprising - for instance the finding that social workers' experience of their work is contingent both on material features of offices and on social/spatial practices within them. Such issues are currently being debated in social work (see for example Cooper, 2012; McGregor, 2012) and these findings have started to add to that debate (Jeyasingham, 2014; Turner, 2014). In addition, the study has pointed to the significance of space in ways that are fundamental to practice but more obscured from view: safeguarding social work occurs in a limited range of places which, nevertheless, entail considerable variation; social work practice is sometimes mobile, sometimes characterised by stillness and these different locations and qualities of movement entail radically different, sometimes incommensurate ways of seeing and feeling. While these spatial features of practice produce certain opportunities for experience, insight and engagement with service users, social work also operates through conventions of practice that are heavily routinised and precluded across space. As Ferguson (2008) has explored, social work practice is often presented as a matter of which regulations and frameworks should be applied, but affective registers such as abjection, nostalgia and the uncanny exert powerful influence over practitioners' experiences of their work. Both the complexity of people's

troubles that lead to social work involvement and the complexity of social work itself are resolutely spatial matters.

The thesis of this study can be summarised as follows.

- Children's social work is actively involved in the production of space and place. Social workers' habits of arranging their practice across time and space, their activities in those different spaces, their ways of talking about them and the representations of space that they draw on all function to create the spaces of families' lives and of social workers' practice in certain ways. These forms of space are naturalised, so their production is largely unacknowledged by social work practitioners and institutions themselves.
- Children's social work is an activity that has no one spatial context or concern: social workers can do their work in many different kinds of places, they must be effective at moving between and around spaces and they are also required to consider children's lived experiences wherever (in the home, at school, online etc) these occur. However, social work is also preoccupied with a small number of real and imagined spaces. These are - families' homes as they are apprehended during brief visits; the ritualised spaces of direct work with children and young people; children's bodies, objectified and distinguished from children's expressed views and wishes; the wider places in which social workers operate, understood through dominant

discourses of social exclusion but also featuring social workers' own claims to intricate and inside knowledge.

- Social work relies on a limited range of formal and informal social-spatial contexts in which to produce and record judgements and decisions - in particular, discussions with or in front of colleagues, formal and informal supervision and more formalised meetings such as strategy discussions. These features of social work practice and aspects of the wider social context (such as the ever-increasing significance placed on child death inquiries) produce limitations in how space is practised and conceived - at narrow spatial scales and through restricted affective registers.

In what follows I explore the broader implications of this thesis for four areas of findings, relating to office spaces, bodies, the uncanny as an affective register in practice and social workers' conceptions of the neighbourhoods and communities in which they work. These are presented because they are the ways in which space and place come to be so central for children's safeguarding social work.

Office spaces

The data from the Lumberton and Birchwood Road Police Station offices show the importance of these small and relatively secluded spaces for the production and performance of at least three different kinds of knowledge.

Social workers use these spaces to *make sense of information about families*, by forming and delivering accounts of cases to colleagues or supervisors - sometimes through discussion, other times as a monologue delivered to or in earshot of others, which can be tweaked according to feedback. Talk in these spaces is also concerned with *establishing social workers' practice itself as meaningful* - as either positively, or not further negatively, affecting children's well-being, as intellectually and emotionally rewarding for practitioners themselves (for instance as interesting or funny) and as a shared endeavour carried out by people with similar values, aesthetics and priorities. Despite this, most children's safeguarding social work is actually carried out separately from colleagues. Offices are therefore primary environments for the *transmission of tacit knowledge*, for instance about the nature of people and places, how to talk about cases in ways that are conclusive and authoritative yet also humane, how to respond or not to respond according to the rhythms of practice, how to dress, use voice tone or move one's body as a skilled practitioner does.

The three ways of generating/performing knowledge and meaning listed above are possible in a variety of spaces but they appeared to be less available for social workers based in Forest House, who were negotiating a new kind of office environment alongside a shift towards working at a distance from the office most of the time. The observations at Forest House and the interviews with practitioners and planners in Alphaville suggested some expectations that social workers would work in more flexible, distributed ways

(Wainwright, 2010; see also the discussion in chapter 2) alongside other imperatives to make themselves visible and static in office spaces. Some of the changes in office accommodation and communication technology were presented as either enabling or requiring increased autonomy for practitioners, while other technological shifts over time, such as the endemic use of mobile phones during social work visits and meetings, shared information systems and email seem to have led to reduced discretion for social work practice that entails risk or decisions about resources (virtually all safeguarding work). The normalisation of information technologies is therefore having contradictory effects in practice.

Some research has identified the developments of spatial divisions in local authorities between managerial staff based in city centre 'headquarters' sites and others relegated to marginal 'hive' locations (see, for example, Hirst and Humphreys, 2013). The data from observations in this study was less clear. Many of the material features of Forest House were similar to those of a city centre headquarters - sleek lines, high levels of visibility, open spaces available for different kinds of uses - but most of those who talked to me about Forest House described working there as an isolating experience. Forest House had a suburban, rather than city centre location and it was some distance even from local shops. When considered in the context of practitioners' movements across the working day, it was clear that Forest House was only intermittently a space for contact with other practitioners. It lacked the opportunities for creative encounters with unexpected others that

planners believed open plan working could offer. This was a hive, even if it had certain superficial features of a hub. Seen as a whole, the open plan offices and agile working arrangements at Alphaville offered limited opportunities for the sense making, meaning making and transmission of tacit knowledge that I observed at Lumberton. Despite the emphasis on agility and interaction, there was little evidence of working practices that were more collaborative, flexible or responsive to unanticipated events. Open plan offices and remote working practices in Alphaville seemed to lead to more inhibited bodies in environments that, while no less busy, were sapped of a sense of shared meaning and urgency.

All this points to a mismatch between the spatial imaginaries of agile working and the movements and ways of conceiving of space and bodies that characterised everyday social work practice. Published discussions of agile working (e.g. The Agile Organisation, 2010), Alphaville's promotional literature and my conversations with planners in the city's Estates department emphasised qualities such as mutuality, mobility, swiftness and effectiveness and a consistent focus on achieving goals. There was nothing in these discussions about corporeal discomfort and awkwardness, identifying where the client is and starting there, being present and still, humour and the unexpected changes in direction that it can effect. These are the stilted, arrhythmic, multi-vectored qualities of good social work practice.

The conclusion that flexible, open workspaces lead to flexible, open working

assumes rather too determinate a relationship between material space and social relations. As I discussed in chapter two, open spaces can institutionalise more unequal and less variable power relations, although these are likely not to be apparent in the material space itself and might well operate through subtle forms of power such as seduction and manipulation, rather than coercion or restriction (Allen, 2003). Space is not a material reflection of power relations; even if it is organised in order to symbolise equitable or open processes, power relations emerge through the material and social features of spaces, changing them in the process.

As observational research about office practices, this study has presented evidence about the importance for social work of forms of office space that, although not apparently as open as Forest House, provide social workers with a variety of degrees of openness, exposure, intimacy and seclusion, enabling different kinds of spatial practice from those that were possible at Forest House. And yet, we should not be overly enthusiastic about any one arrangement of space. Evidently, there are no spatial formulae for equitable social relations or reflexive practice, and the Lumberton and Birchwood Road data show plenty of examples of antagonism and social regulation. These were not necessarily supportive places, even though social workers were, at times, very aware of their colleagues' experiences. On other occasions, spatial practices in these offices maintained privacy and discretion in ways that mitigated against challenge and greater reflexivity in practice. They led to restricted norms of speaking about and making sense of people and places,

creating gaps between practice articulations as they occurred in the office and social workers' experiences of practice as they described them in other spaces. Identifying the right kind of workspace for social work should not, then, be reduced to consideration of how open offices or how distributed working practices should be. Consideration must also be given to the meanings, resonances and material arrangements produced through such spatial practices and these result from professional and organisational culture as much as topographical space.

Bodies and social work

Social workers consciously attend to bodies in some specific ways - as objects of child abuse and evidence of the same (Phillips, 2013), as focuses for change (for instance in behavioural interventions) and as tools which social workers use in their work (Cameron and McDermott, 2007). However, this study provided data about how social workers', parents' and children's bodies were also conceived of and negotiated in practice in other ways than these. While the study did not identify the prevalence of certain physical forms (for instance participants did not appear to dress, move or gesture in notably similar ways), social workers produced a narrow range of bodies for themselves in other ways. The stories that they told and the spatial-temporal patterns of work that they valued in child protection investigations and in direct work produced certain kinds of social work bodies. For instance, social

workers' stories dramatised their own bodies as small, still, soft and malleable, usually slow but occasionally fast when needed (see chapter five). These were ways in which social work practice was articulated as complex, sensitive and effective and they enabled social workers to make claims about their work as difficult for outsiders to appreciate. However, these same features of social work bodies presented potential problems in interdisciplinary work, where the different norms of movement and corporeality amongst police and social workers sometimes jarred and where other practitioners failed to appreciate what social workers did.

As I explored in chapters five and six, this study provides examples of how space and time are organised in particular ways in direct work with children, with some interesting effects. The examples of direct work that participants described seemed to involve a range of explicit and tacit rules about children's bodies and wider spaces. These related to expectations about touch, distance and interactions between bodies and the high degree of planning and discipline involved in constructing and maintaining the timespaces of direct work, all of which were effective in producing direct work as both esoteric and of great significance in child protection work. The practice of direct work was understood by participants to be highly skilled, something which only certain practitioners (with particular professional roles *and* personal characteristics) were able to do. Skilled direct work (work which followed the explicit and tacit rules of direct work) was seen as enabling children to open up and truths to be told, transforming the limited opportunities

for this in the social order external to direct work spaces.

These features give direct work a ritualistic quality and, of all the timespaces discussed in this study, direct work was the one that was most obviously constructed by participants as liminal in character. Liminality can be understood as the middle phase of rituals, where statuses that exist outside of the space are dissolved. It is the phase in which changes occur, one which, in Victor Turner's work (1969), is characterised by a dissolving of external structures and a surfeit of internal rules and structures. It is intense, essentially temporary and imbued with expectations of esoteric change. These esoteric and ritualistic qualities provide opportunities for change for those children subject to direct work, while also endowing practitioners with a great deal of authority. It seems strange, therefore, that direct work was generally understood to have such a narrow significance - as a way of enabling children to speak openly - rather than as an experience which could profoundly affect children.

The study provided data about some contrasting ways in which children's bodies were interpellated in practice but there also seemed to be narrow latitude available to social workers when they talked about individual children and young people. Instead, the nature of social work services' involvement with a child - as the subject of safeguarding/child protection action or as a child in a long-term, stable placement - produced narrow options for how children's bodies could be understood. They were either sources of delight or

focuses for/ evidence of potential concern. Even so, as the interactions about a child's body in the strategy discussion explored in chapter six show, narrow options for presenting children's bodies do not lead to greater certainty about them and even quite clear evidence of potential problems comes to be seen as having indeterminate significance. The data about children's bodies as they were produced in social workers' practice suggest something of a crisis or, at least, a lack of workable ways for understanding and relating to children's bodies in social care practice. There was evidence of good, sensitive communication with children in a wider context of inconsistent ways of relating to children and a prioritisation of formal means of consultation with children which, I suspect, would seem strange to many of those children and young people who are on the receiving end of it.

Alternative ways of communicating with and conceiving of children, for instance those proposed in the literature promoting social pedagogy in Britain, are likely to be of use here (Cameron and Moss, 2011; Petrie, 2011). However, much of this discussion focuses on wider cultural differences between Britain and those European countries where pedagogy prevails or the specifically risk averse nature of social care services in Britain. Something further needs to be considered, about those cultural norms of British children's social work that are not simply concerned with risk minimisation but still depend on notions of 'fragile childhoods' (White, 1997) in order to make claims about social work's specific knowledge base, role and status.

There is something strange about a professional activity in which children are understood, by default, as vulnerable and potentially threatened, and where they must be performed into speaking subjects through the esoteric processes of direct work. However, it begins to make sense if we explore an affective register which pervaded all areas of safeguarding practice outside the office in this study - the uncanny. As I discuss below, the uncanny offers ways for social workers to refute more rational modes of engaging with the facts of practice, while also reproducing some of the problematic features of a more esoteric approach.

Uncanny social work

Children's social work has a number of formal knowledge systems - psychological, bureaucratic, socio-legal - available to it, but each of these fails to reflect aspects of social workers' affective experience and clients' humanity. The uncanny offers ways of evoking these.

Child protection social work is frequently concerned with traumatic past events, the possibility of similar occurrences in the future and the sense that something of each of these must resonate (even if imperceptibly) in current, present space. A broader assumption of social work in contexts such as the UK - again, one that is evident in this study's findings - is the notion that skilled practitioners are able to find indicators of concealed or long-past

troubles in features of present space. This trope relies on two assumptions - that social workers are particularly sensitive to underlying currents and that life (experience, people, space) is layered in such ways, with real meaning covered over or disguised. Much in social work professional culture is founded on these beliefs. Conceptions of assessment, for example, frequently understood in social work as something that is best done over time, through detailed discussion and observation, carry with them the idea that what is most important is likely to be buried deep. In this paradigm, social work is a kind of archaeology, but one that must find traces not just of the past but also the future and the concurrent timespaces of family life when social workers are not present. This kind of endeavour is likely to find meaning in the uncanny, with its central notion that what is most significant might not be identifiable, even material, but is still apparent for those who are attuned to it. Perhaps the uncanny also chimes specifically with *social work* ways of knowing child maltreatment (compared, for instance, with police officers' more material preoccupations with evidence or doctors' attention to physical and behavioural symptoms).

Derek Hook identifies

two basic 'poles' of the uncanny: anxieties concerning variants of *embodied absence* on the one hand and *disembodied presence* on the other. These are anxieties about the soul, which becomes problematic by virtue of either its absence (where it should be present) or its presence (where it should be absent). (2005: p. 697, original emphasis)

Hook connects this with two central themes in horror: zombies, vampires and

the like are embodied and animate but dead and soulless; ghosts and other forms of free-floating consciousness are disembodied but present. Horror is a useful comparison to social work because, as a fictional form, it is powerfully resonant with some of the same affective qualities that feature in British social work and, while no zombies or other forms of embodied absence came to light in this study, there was plenty of evidence of disembodied presence.

Participants sensed that they were being watched in open spaces, history was said to repeat itself over generations, social workers imputed horrible past events into clients' present lives and felt these resonating in places long after clients had moved or cases were closed. These ontologies, while supported by certain flawed frameworks of practice knowledge (the return of the repressed, intergenerational cycles of abuse, socialisation based understandings of social exclusion) are more magical than explicated (Wastell, 2011); their powerful resonance stems from the fact that full explanations are concealed or continually deferred. In truth, inexplicability is a likely feature of credible ways of making sense of extreme abuse and cruelty which, by definition, are painful and troubling to think too hard about. Perhaps this is why forms of now discredited knowledge about extreme abuse have seemed compelling to social workers in the past (for example social work's engagements with satanic abuse theories or Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy). While those constructs now hold less credibility, children's social work is, perhaps more than ever before, haunted by other disembodied knowledge forms: stories about a small number of children whose deaths have been subject to high profile inquiries. They are limited in terms of their capacity to

illuminate practice but these disembodied presences haunt social workers' perceptions of the everyday situations that they encounter.

Social workers' engagement with wider spaces

Chapter seven explored the ways that participants produced rich accounts of place identity through restricted forms of information (the immediate perceived environment in the context of resonances of isolated dramatic events), deterministic knowledge formations (contrast structures, see Potter, 1996) and narrow affective registers (social workers' unease, imagined instances of children's and women's suffering). Participants also tended to focus on distinct small areas, understood at the scale of what could be perceived through the moving human body, rather than wider contexts, larger scales of space and connections with other spaces. These ways of understanding space and place led social workers who were valuing of clients and questioning of dominant attitudes to marginalised communities still to find child abuse and domestic violence unsurprising in the context of its location in the stigmatised neighbourhoods in which they most often worked.

Social workers' focus on small spatial scales, claims to insider knowledge, attentiveness to encrypted or concealed signs and sensitivity to uncanny resonances can be seen as significant for a social structural analysis of social work practice in two different ways. The first interpretation is that social

workers recognise the geographies of structuring systems such as class and race in severely precluded terms. They see factors such as social deprivation and poor urban planning as significant but they apprehend these only at the scale of the home and its immediate surroundings (this pattern appears to be replicated in other social work ethnographies such as Scourfield, 2003). In so doing, they demonstrate a lack of understanding of how socio-economic factors work at other scales and they produce ideas of these spaces as entirely separated from the wider town/city, society and other spatial-political systems. Extreme social problems are also seen to have the same effects everywhere: those people who use social care services might have little in common with their neighbours but the nature of their problems is, essentially, the same as those of social work clients in other places. Social workers' expressions of dissatisfaction with the physical organisation of streets and other public areas show awareness of their significance for vulnerability to violence but construct public spaces as a cause of social problems in determinate ways. They were displayed by participants in relation to neighbourhoods where such spaces were thoughtfully designed and functioned well, despite other social problems. The role of regional and global scales in social problems such as poverty, child maltreatment and domestic violence is effaced in such accounts.

A second interpretation, one which I favour, is that the interior, the hidden and the uncanny are key spatial frames through which social problems are understood in children's social work and that these produce a focus on

smaller scales and a will to locate the impact of wider systems in smaller spaces. There was evidence in the study that most (though not all) social workers understood that regional, societal and global relations were significant for service users' experiences, but they were interested in how these appeared in small things and at intimate scales, in ways that were concealed and that produced imperceptible but resonant effects. The claims to being able to see hidden evidence of sexual abuse or incestuous families, made by social workers in both sites, are examples of this. Compelling accounts of both place and people's troubles are possible through such a focus but, of course, it has its limits too.

The entrenchment of a risk averse, child protection oriented focus in children's social work has coincided with a turn away from working at the scale of local communities, because such work has tended to be seen as less of a priority in this paradigm. Ironically, this has happened alongside the development of certain kinds of social care and preventative services delivered precisely at neighbourhood scales, such as Sure Start in the 2000s and the current government's interest in 'troubled families' (Featherstone, White and Morris, 2014). Social work services have not had a central role in such developments, perhaps partly because they have been excluded but also, I believe, because of a lack of clear articulation of what social work could have offered to such developments. And yet, if social work had had a greater involvement in Sure Start, for instance, some of the initiative's limitations, such as the lack of success engaging with or enabling change for families with

more complex problems (Coe *et al.*, 2008), might have been avoided. Social workers certainly have knowledge and skills that are valuable in community based practice and recent critical discussions have started to make this point, as I discussed in chapter two. Parents want social workers to be available, approachable and nearby (Holland, 2012) and it seems possible to counter some of the problems relating to preoccupation with risk and information management with strengths based approaches grounded in local places (Broad, 2012; Cottam, 2013). Even so, this study suggests that a shift to social work delivered through local neighbourhoods does not simply require more time, material resources, the relocation of social work services to proximal office bases or even new models of intervention. It requires changes in how social workers feel and think about space and place. How, for instance, do local places matter for people living in them? Not in the osmosis/infection imaginaries of social exclusion and socialisation theories, nor only in terms of belonging and attachment. The conflation of place and community in much of this discussion is problematic because it associates emplacedness with homogeneity, shared experience and authenticity (surely these were also implicated in the limitations of locality based social care services such as Sure Start). While social workers in this study also imagined antagonistic relations between service users and local places, these still assumed some kind of homogeneous local community from which service users were excluded. Place matters, but not in such determinate ways. As Doreen Massey has stated,

Place [...] does - as many argue - change us, not through some visceral

belonging (some barely changing rootedness, as so many would have it) but through the *practising* of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us (2005: p. 154)

Engaging with place in such ways requires a broader affective range for social workers' sense making activity, a real engagement with sociological and geographical knowledge about the relationships between space and social problems and ways of working which involve social workers themselves negotiating the intersecting trajectories of local places.

It is important to highlight some limitations of this study's findings. First of all, the study is largely concerned with exploring participants' activities, accounts of their practice and their expressed views. It therefore does not aim to identify in detail how things should be done differently. For instance, although I discuss some of the consequences of current office spaces for social work practice, the study is not able to offer specific recommendations about how offices could be arranged productively in other ways (even though these are questions which many local authorities are confronting, given the context, at the time of writing, of continuing public sector cuts). If there is a contribution here, it is to show that changes in material space alone are unlikely to be the answer to the current problems of children's social work and different questions need to be asked instead.

The study is also one of social workers' experiences and ways of understanding space and place. It has much less to say specifically about the

experiences of people who use social work services, even though these are crucial questions for research to ask. I have avoided detailed discussion about specific social work cases or social workers' practice in relation to specific individuals in detail because of the problems with doing so without also including service users as participants. However, there are one or two places, particularly in chapters five and six, where the fine detail of interactions with or about individual service users is examined. All service users who were observed as part of the fieldwork gave their consent for this to happen, but I did not interview those people as I did participants who were practitioners. The data therefore need to be approached as providing insight into social workers' practices rather than service users' circumstances.

Towards a critical understanding of space in everyday social work practice

Just as participants in this study demonstrated a narrow affective register in their experiences of spaces, so critical discussions of space in social work have so far tended to offer a fairly limited range of cognitive-affective frames through which to understand space and place in practice. The most theoretically sophisticated discussions of space in recent social work literature have focused on notions of openness, mobility, flows, incorporeality and liminality (e.g. Phillips, 2007; Ferguson, 2008, 2011a). Such ideas are often intellectually stimulating and satisfying, but do they carry with them some inherent problems? Do they tend to overshadow settledness, stability,

slowness and stillness, which this study's findings suggested were just as significant elements of social work? I wonder if there is a wish to produce social work as something more dramatic, danger-filled, edgy and exotic than it is or should be. There are some specific choices about conceptualisation here that are worth consideration. For example, Ferguson approaches liminality as a state of inbetweenness that can become constant in social work practice in families' homes (2009a: p. 475). The liminal is frequently understood as the interstitial or inchoate in contemporary social theory and so Ferguson's use of it here should not be seen as a misreading. However, it might be useful to return to that earlier theorisation of liminality in Victor Turner's work. For Turner (1969), liminality is intrinsically temporary, ritualistic and self-conscious not (as in Ferguson's account of home visits) continuous, accidental and unconscious. Social hierarchies are temporarily dissolved or over-turned knowingly and with consent in order to bring about a transformation - liminality is therefore creative and productive. As I have discussed above, liminality might be a useful notion for understanding spaces such as direct work, given the ritualistic behaviour and esoteric knowledge that might characterise direct work. However, describing home visits as liminal seems problematic to me for several reasons. It produces a sense of potential danger where there is usually none - in fact it suggests that menace may be present but submerged in those situations where social workers are not conscious of it, precluding the possibility that it is just absent. In this way it reproduces a way of making meaningful social work practice that seemed pervasive amongst this study's participants in their talk about their work, even

while the same individuals were often caring and open in their observed interactions with families. A discourse of liminality prevents attention to the routine, homely and social elements of social work home visits that are almost always present even in contexts of discomfort, resistance and likely deception (see the discussion in chapter five) and which deserve critical attention as much as the uncanny and the liminal. It might therefore be part of a wider attempt to validate social work through exoticising or dramatising it, and this relies in part on a blurring of the difference between how social workers talk about their work and their work itself.

Conclusions

The study provides an example of how social work practice and research can be understood as material, spatial and affective practices – a feature which other social work writing has also started to explore. Certain methods are used that could be employed and further developed in future research. In particular, the focus of observations on spatial, material and affective as well discursive and interpersonal matters and the employment of mobile interviews to explore social workers' use of movement and positioning in narratives about places are likely to be relevant approaches for other social work research.

The study's conclusions about social workers' focus on a narrow range of spaces for making sense of children's experience and their dependence on

particular spaces for doing practice are likely to be relevant for future research into children's social work. The study raises questions about social workers' experiences of office spaces that it would be useful to examine in the near future as office spaces change and, as seems likely, as virtual spaces come to be used more frequently and systematically in children's safeguarding social work. The study also raises broader questions about social work ways of knowing. The narrow meanings attached to children's bodies in this research and the importance of uncanny and nostalgic affective experiences for social work sense making are likely to be relevant for other social work practice contexts as well as children's safeguarding.

In relation to social work practice, the study's findings suggest that the kinds of assumptions about social work that have underpinned moves towards open plan offices, hot desking and agile working have been incommensurate with social work practice as it is produced by statutory guidance and as it is understood by practitioners themselves. Practitioners should be actively involved in the planning and development of new workplace environments but changes in space alone should not be expected to lead to changes in organisational culture. The study also suggests that norms in children's safeguarding services of dividing up practitioner roles, of interacting with children in space and of accounting for children as bodies and subjects in space lead to confusing and contradictory outcomes. More generally, the study's findings about the importance of affects such as the uncanny and nostalgia suggest that these matters are significant for how race and class are

constructed and reproduced in much social work practice and should be explored in social work practice and education. For example, students' affective experience of practice should be considered, not just as an element of students' individual selves (as the current emphasis on reflection in British social work education seems to assume) but as a feature of the environments which students become parts of in practice. Attention is needed to how qualified social workers and social work students become geographers of the small things in their work and, in so doing, adopt and replicate spatially limited frames for understanding children and families' lives.

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