

**APPROACHING LAUGHTER WITH CARE: ETHICAL
REFRAINS FOR WORLDS OF MULTIPLICITY**

BY

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Abstract

This thesis stages an encounter between laughter and care, seeking to reimagine their ethical capacities and potentials. Through engaging with non-representational theories, it loosens existing normative moral frameworks for both laughter and care, instead affording attention to what actually happens when they emerge and come into contact with one another. Drawing on extensive ethnographic engagements, working in nursing care homes in the UK, it thus offers a means of approaching both laughter and care as practised, affective and ethical multiplicities that often act in ways that exceed discursive and representational understandings of them. Through this, it argues that we need to address both laughter and care as refrains, capable of materialising and affecting in a multitude of different ways, and therefore capable of enacting a plurality of potential ethical relations. As such, the thesis presents neither a unified understanding of laughter with care, nor a prescriptive ethical framework through which to judge them. Instead, it develops a series of more fragmented and uncertain ethical approaches through which, it argues, we might foster a sense of generosity, kindness and response-ability towards the often complex, messy and imperfect ways in which laughter and care happen, separately and together.

To Janice,

Whose capacity to approach laughter with care, and to care with laughter, not only inspired this thesis, but continues to transform the world for the better

Preface and acknowledgements

The origins of this thesis can be traced back to a conversation that I had with Janice Connolly in October 2013. Janice is an actress, comedian and social justice campaigner and I had attended a talk that she had given at the Midlands Arts Centre the week prior which discussed a project she had led involving comedy courses in care homes. She very kindly agreed to meet with me and discuss potential ideas for a PhD project around the same themes. I don't remember exactly what we discussed in that meeting, but I came away with a number of ideas and inspirations. The project proposed in the end was not just about laughter and care homes but slowly it has returned that way.

I met Janice several more times after that meeting, travelling to events with her, and running into her at yet more. Janice has a very distinctive laugh, and an even more distinctive capacity to care. Her ability to combine the two and generate real changes in people's lives, not only remains the exemplar of what an approach to laughter with care such as the one I have tried to convey in this thesis can offer, but also exposes the limits of academic work itself – for the thesis will never be able to achieve what Janice has.

Sadly, the demands of completing the thesis mean that I have lost touch with

Janice somewhat, yet the memory of her laughter has become something of a refrain as I have plotted out its ideas. As such, I would like to begin my acknowledgements by thanking Janice, not only for the time that she gave to me a number of years ago but for the continued inspiration that she provides to myself and others. I have chosen to dedicate this thesis to her for that reason.

There are a significant number of other people who must be thanked for all their help, support, care and laughter throughout this project, not least the AHRC Midlands Three Cities DTC who funded it. The list that follows is a long one, so apologies in advance.

My most sincere gratitude goes to my supervisors: Pat Noxolo and Ben Taylor. I could never have gotten through this process without your generosity, wisdom, critique, encouragement, and unwavering faith. Together you have managed to guide and direct me when I needed it, but you have also let me do it my way – something for which I am truly grateful. I think we can all let out a collective sigh of relief that there are no more forms to be filled in!

I must also offer whole-hearted thanks to the staff, residents, and family members of both care homes, who so willingly welcomed me into their lives, homes and workplaces. Similarly, I would like to thank the casts of both theatre groups for taking me on a journey that I will never forget, even if it hasn't featured so heavily in the thesis itself. The research would never have happened if it weren't for ENRICH's involvement. In particular, my gratitude

goes to Mary, Fawn, and Sandra who took a chance on a strange project about laughter.

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Beyond the department, I have been supported by a number of friends, of

which there are far too many to name here. Instead, I simply say thanks to all, but offer special thanks to: Meg (for being a constant source of energy and letting me help with “figure 6” so often); Sam (for making sure life didn’t ever get too serious, and “winning the race”); and to Ollie (for always being there to remind me that there is more to life than a PhD); and to all three of you (for all the ice-cream).

My PhD experience has been significantly enriched by a number of post-graduates from other universities, many of whom I have met through the RGS-IBG Postgraduate Forum. Again, I will offer only special thanks to my new writing partners Rich and Diana; and to Adam and Maddy, both of whom always manage to make a conference that bit better.

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My parents and brother Chris, have been a consistent source of support, as have Andrew, Katie and Hugo. I appreciate all of your encouragement, efforts to understand what it is that I do, why I keep getting stuck, and willingness to

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Finally, having started these acknowledgements with thanks to one truly amazing woman, I would like to end them by giving the biggest thanks of all to another. To Becky, the one person who is probably more pleased that this thesis is finished than I am, I really can't thank you enough for also doing everything the others have, and so much more!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When embarking on a research project, start not with the institutional tyranny of what relevance, what impact, what goal your queries might yield. Instead, begin in the middle by not knowing ... disorientate enquiry, disrupt questions and muddle the field.

(Gerlach and Jellis, 2015: 141)

1.1 | Setting scenes

At some point during 2016, the UK's Care Quality Commission (CQC) visited and reported on a nursing care home. The visit was a follow up to a previous visit and as such covered only two aspects of the service. The first related to the staff's training and procedural needs, with the inspectors approving of some positive changes made to the structures and procedures around safety. The other question covered by the inspection asked of the home: 'Is the service caring?' The report gives the following answer:

A person said, "The staff are friendly, caring and nice". Another person said, "They [staff] are more friends than staff, they'll do anything for you". A relative said, "The staff are kind and friendly". Our observations on arrival to the home were that while staff were rushing around supporting people to get up and have their breakfast, they were unable to demonstrate whether they were kind and caring. We saw people in the lounge who were left alone, some people were sleeping or just left to look

around aimlessly in the lounge with no interaction. On the afternoon, we observed staff spending time with people showing them kindness and compassion. Staff were observed stopping and spending time interacting with people, checking how they were in a way that showed they cared. *Having a laugh with people and showing how kind and friendly they were.* We saw that people were as a result comfortable and relaxed around the staff. (CQC Report [anonymised], 2016: np, emphasis my own)

This statement from an official report provides texture and tone for the kinds of scenarios that this thesis attends to: moments in which laughter and care come into contact; points where they rub up against, and affect, one another; instances of absence, presence and co-presence between the two entities; events that produce smoothness, friction, contrast, stickiness, and change; situations in which both laughter and care become meaningful separately and together; circumstances through which we come to understand their significance, and their worth. The thesis questions the kinds of logics that help to inform judgements about laughter as either a caring activity or not, offers alternative ways of approaching them, and thinks about how these different ways of approaching the question can shape our attitudes towards laughter with care. In this sense, the thesis attends to the ethics of laughter with care, focussing on the circumstances through which their ethical potentials emerge and can be apprehended. In this sense, the aim of this thesis is not to question whether the judgement of laughter with care, such as those in this report are 'right', but rather to think through the multiple ways through which we might approach this question in the first place.

This statement from an official report provides texture and tone for the kinds of scenarios that this thesis attends to in another way, however, through providing an insight into the specific places that it discusses in experimenting with these wider questions. Indeed, informing the thinking within the thesis is an engagement with nursing care homes in the UK. It is, therefore, a scene that I know to be very recognisable; a scene that I would suggest occurs in some form or another in all care homes. As such, the quote above serves to further contextualise the particular issues at stake, specifically the ways in which laughter becomes entangled within ideas of what ought and ought not to be involved in the work of care, and the implications this has on understandings of care workers' relationships with the people they care for, and therefore the *quality* of the care they provide.

This statement from an official report also provides texture and tone for the kinds of scenarios that this thesis attends to in one further, more specific, way: the home being reported on is, in fact, one that features directly in this thesis itself, under the pseudonym of Winterbourne Care Home. It is one of two care homes that I worked in as part of the ethnographic research that informs this thesis, which is therefore full of similar scenes and scenarios. That said, unbounded from the *need* to make a clear, official judgement, the scenarios I try to present are capable of offering somewhat more *generosity* to the particular circumstances that surround scenes like this and the bodies who take part in them. As such, whilst I do not wish to challenge the nature of the findings in this official report directly, my hope is that through the renewed

approach I develop in this thesis – an approach capable of recognising the complex, entangled, and often troublesome nature of the worlds in which laughter bursts – a wider sense of care, generosity and understanding might be afforded to *all* involved within these kinds of scenarios, even when what they present is somewhat imperfect.

1.2 | Beginning in the middle: laughter, care, ethics

As both its title and this opening section suggests, therefore, at its broadest level, this thesis sets out to re-imagine the ways in which we might think about the ethics of laughter and care. Although there already are significant bodies of literature that attend to the ethics of both laughter and care separately, the thesis looks to do more than just combine these theoretical approaches, instead staging an encounter that holds the two in relation to, or ‘with’ one another (Critchley, 1999; Nancy, 2000), and thus generate an ethical approach that is conceptually distinctive and situated in its nature. Although I outline the details of this approach, and how it serves to augment existing engagements with laughter, care and ethics, within and beyond geography in Chapter 2, it’s important to note that these ways of thinking, moving and being, were not generated in an abstract space, but rather emerged out of a particular set of trajectories and circumstances within the middle of the project itself. In many respects, therefore, it’s important to tell this story (to open the black box as it were) in order to allow a reader to better understand how and why this thesis and the ideas it presents, take the particular forms that they do.

Although as mentioned in the Preface, this thesis *can* be traced back to a particular conversation with Janice Connolly about the role of comedy and laughter within care homes, it's important to note that in the time between that conversation and the point at which the project was actually proposed to the funding body, its aims had migrated. The project proposed at that time was about the emotional and affective geographies of laughter in the workplace, focussing on what Linda McDowell (2009) terms 'high-touch' labour, and seeking to better understand laughter as a form of emotional/affective labour (Hochschild, 1983).

Central to this original proposal was the idea that laughter could be analytically distinguished from other socio-linguistic markers, such as humour, funniness and joking (Noxolo, forthcoming; Parvulescu, 2010; Provine, 2004) and that doing so might open up new ways of understanding its (often-paradoxical) position within social life. Indeed, this central proposition has remained somewhat consistent, and still sits at the core of this thesis, in which I address laughter specifically as a semi-instinctive, communicative, embodied response, that most often has an audible or visual element (Provine, 2001) and *sometimes* has a discernible cause, but not always (Macpherson, 2008). Crucially, attending to laughter in this manner suggests it as having a multiple, mutable, or 'nomadic' (Braidotti, 2011) relation with human subjects – simultaneously situated, distributed and relational (Mol, 2008a) – and therefore positions it not only as something that a subject *does* to another subject, but also as a 'thing' in its own right (Thrift, 2008), capable

of ‘doing’, or ‘undoing’, subjects in return (J Katz, 1999) often in somewhat unexpected ways.

In setting out to research the roles of laughter in high-touch labour, therefore, I had identified three potential case study sites in which laughter might play different roles: call-centres; comedy clubs; and inspired by my conversation with Janice, care homes. For reasons that I can’t fully recall anymore, I decided that the care home should be the first research site out of these three. This is therefore how and when ideas of ‘care’ entered into relation with laughter. Given the residual focus on work at that point, however, my initial understandings of these relationships were relatively singular in comparison to the multiplicity of laughter-care relations that feature in its final form. Indeed, I was looking to understanding these relationships through normative conceptions of caring as labour (McDowell, 2009) particularly as it takes place in the ‘formal’ spaces of care provision in nursing homes (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). Again, there is a level of continuity here, in the sense that much of this thesis does still engage with care through these ‘conventional’ understandings: seeing it as a style of engagement with another that is either imbued with a distinct emotionality of affectivity (caring *about* another), or involves a practical level of assistance (caring *for* another) and often both (Conradson, 2011); which is directed from a care-giver towards a resident – seeking to understand how laughter interplays with these.

My engagements with care homes, however, also served to complicate and

expand these conceptions of care somewhat. Indeed, it became quickly apparent that the relationships and formal practices between care workers and residents of the care home were not the only locations of care. Similarly, a multiplicity of other people also clearly cared for and about others, including family members and residents themselves, meaning the things that became matters of care were also multiple and diffuse. In other words, care was not just directed towards residents but also: staff members; family members; the care home as a building and as an institution; a number of 'external' bodies and situations; and of course, towards 'the self'. Moreover, the ways in which care is 'practised', the 'emotional' states it involves, and the ethico-political means that it seeks to achieve can be very different from one another – depending in part on the situation that is being addressed, who is addressing it, and the particular circumstances in which they are caring. It is also because of the particular complexity of care and its interactions with laughter that I eventually shifted the thesis' focus from work and workplaces, to care and care homes more specifically.

Ultimately, therefore, despite my engagement with care in this thesis largely taking place in the formal spaces of nursing care homes, I have moved towards a more expansive and less normative conception of it (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Raghuram, 2016). Broadly speaking therefore, the conception of care that frames this thesis is based on Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher's 'generic definition' of care as: "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as

possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” (1990: 40, emphasis in original; see also Tronto 1993:103). This definition thus allows an expanded sense of the agencies that are involved in care (as everything that we do) that can extend past conceptions based in culturally specific and anthropocentric frameworks (Bartos, 2018; Raghuram, 2016), instead opening space for recognition of both the multiple ways in which the maintenance, continuation and repair of worlds can take place in a given context, and of the ways in which the elements of these worlds can interweave together or indeed break apart in the act of care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).

It is thus through the gradual experimentation with the ways in which laughter interacts with this version of care that this thesis has emerged. In it, I approach both laughter and care as multiplicities and seek to hold them in tension with one another. Experimenting in such ways thus opens up new ways of understanding them, particularly around ideas of politics and ethics. Although these issues are obviously interrelated, my interest in this thesis has been more concerned with the latter, in part because of a clear connection with ideas of ‘ethics of care’ (Tronto, 1993) but also because, whilst the politics of laughter has been widely addressed (e.g. Brigstocke, 2011; Dodds and Kirby, 2012; Ridanpää, 2014b), the ways in which its ethics are understood have remained relatively unchallenged and unchanged over the last century or so.

In everyday language, ethics has two meanings: first, as a set of moral

principles that guide people's actions and behaviours; and second, as the field of academic inquiry concerned with understanding and evaluating the nature of these moral principles (Popke, 2010; Smith, 1997b). Although echoing this double position, the understanding of ethics and the ethical adopted in this thesis is somewhat different in that it moves away from the idea of 'moral principles' as the foundation of ethicality, instead suggesting that the ethical might be better understood as a way of understanding the consequences of any change to forms of relationality between two or more bodies, be they human or otherwise (see Barad, 2007). The ethical in this sense is an 'emergent' form, one that can be enacted (McCormack, 2005), experimented with (Darling, 2010), and cultivated (Thrift, 2004c), but whose exact forms can never be known in advance (McCormack, 2003). As Deleuze writes: "you do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination" (Deleuze, 1993: 627 in Popke, 2009: 83). As such, a sensibility towards the ethical is developed in this thesis which looks to productively resist normative theorisation and the universality that comes with it (in line with the understandings of laughter and care outlined above), in favour of multiple, partial understandings of their ethical forms and relations. It is, therefore, a sensibility that is less engaged with questions of responsibility, and more concerned with ideas of response-ability, and particularly how we might negotiate the unexpected, unintended and messy relational forms that are often generated through both laughter and care.

Central to this project, therefore, is a commitment to engaging with the

plurality of ethical relations, obligations, commitments, tensions, frictions and imperfections that emerge from being in-common with others (Popke, 2009, 2010; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). In this sense, it acts as a response to Bergson's call, not just to proclaim the multiple, but to actively work with/in it, embedding multiplicity at the heart of thinking and being in the world (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 16). In producing an account of these multiplicities, therefore, I deploy geographical thinking as a mode of attunement that is contextually sensitive to the situated nature of the spacetimes in which laughter and care take place (McCormack, 2013). More specifically however, the thesis is framed through a broad engagement with non-representational theories (Anderson, 2009b; Thrift, 2008) which not only offer a particular style of thinking, mode of address, and somewhat speculative ethos, that I argue is perfectly situated to engage with the understandings of laughter and care set out above, but have actively served to produce them throughout the story of the project as it is told here. As such, the next section will briefly outline non-representational theories as an approach and how this serves to shape the thinking and writing that follows in this thesis.

1.3 | Non-representational theories

Originally formulated during the 1990s by Nigel Thrift (see Thrift, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000) non-representational theory has developed into a broad and diverse approach to geographic enquiry, touching upon almost every aspect of the discipline. Non-representational theory not only draws on a diverse lineage of post-structural and phenomenological scholarship: most notably

Deleuze and Guattari (e.g. Dewsbury, 2003; McCormack, 2003; Thrift, 2004a), but also Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (Wylie, 2005, 2006), Foucault (Anderson, 2012, 2014), Bataille (Romanillos, 2011), Badiou (Dewsbury, 2007), Brian Massumi (2002), and Jean Luc Nancy (Simpson, 2009, 2015); but its ideas and modes of address have also drawn parallels with other post-structuralist philosophical projects such as: new materialism (Bennett, 2010); nomadic theory (Braidotti, 2011); posthumanism (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016); post-phenomenology (see Ash and Simpson, 2016); and other 'post-Deleuzian' feminist projects (Grosz, 1994, 2004, 2005). In this sense, Ben Anderson (2009b) suggests the plural 'non-representational theories' as a better name, which given that I draw across these various theoretical frameworks, is a practice that I have also adopted here.

Although there are subtle differences between these variegated perspectives, at the core of all non-representational theories is a fundamental critique of the primacy of *representation*, as a way of thinking and knowing the world (Cadman, 2009). Instead, non-representational theories suggest that a more embodied and performative style of geographical inquiry might be better suited to engage with and animate experiences of everyday life (Thrift, 2003; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). This is not to completely disavow the role of representations, but instead to challenge the power or 'truth' of representations (Anderson and Harrison, 2010). As Dewsbury et al. (2002: 438) argue: in non-representational theories, "representations are apprehended as performative in themselves; as doings. The point here is to

redirect attention from the posited meaning towards the material compositions and conduct of representations.” In this sense, non-representational theories seek not to simply re-present the world but rather to animate the ways in which ordinary everyday events both generate and relate to wider political, economic and social worlds (Berlant, 2011; Dewsbury, 2000; Dewsbury et al., 2002; Stewart, 2007; Vannini, 2015), paying close attention to the hybrid (Whatmore 1999), distributed (Simpson 2017) and relational (Ahmed 2004) processes within which bodies are enmeshed, and through which thought, action and feeling come into being (McCormack 2008b). As Thrift (2008: 2) suggests, in somewhat simpler terms, they seek to attend to “the geography of what happens ... a work of description of the bare bones of actual occasions”.

Although not a theory of the body per se. (McCormack, 2008b) questions about bodies and embodiment are somewhat central to non-representational styles of thought (see Anderson, 2006, 2012; Bissell, 2009; Braidotti, 1994, 2011, Colls, 2007, 2012; Dewsbury, 2000; Harrison, 2008; McCormack, 2013; Saldanha, 2010; Simpson, 2008; Thrift, 2004b; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). Guiding these engagements are a series of claims about the nature of embodiment, summarized by McCormack (2008b: 1824) as follows: (1) humans do not always consciously reflect on signs, symbols and other forms of representation when they act in the world; (2) thinking is not necessarily a case of manipulating ‘picture-like representations’ – there are other more embodied forms of thought such as habit and intuition; (3) intelligence is a

shared and relational process which involves a range of human and non-human actors; (4) emotionality and affectivity are key elements of spatial experience.

In this sense, non-representational theories share a set of trajectories with feminist theories in that they look to emphasise the notion that 'body', 'mind', and 'world' are interconnected, rather than separate entities (Callard, 1998; Grosz, 1994; Longhurst, 1995, 2001; Rose, 1993), and that bodies are relationally produced through their encounters with both other bodies and the worlds they inhabit (Ahmed, 1998; Butler, 1993; Colls, 2012; Nash, 2000). Beyond this however, non-representational theories tend towards an expanded notion of "bodies" in their relative lack of distinction between human and non-human bodies (Thrift, 2003), through devising the 'human' body as always cut through with more-than-human elements and forces (Anderson, 2014; Andrews, 2017; Grosz, 2004; Simpson, 2017) and therefore seeking to take seriously the various agencies of both these hybrids (Whatmore, 1997), and other non-human matters (Barad, 2003; Bennett, 2005).

Given this 'fundamental critique' of representation and the understanding of bodies it has generated, perhaps unsurprisingly, non-representational theories have themselves not gone without critique. Some scholars, for instance, have argued that they tend towards a treatment of representation in an almost caricatured manner (Cresswell, 2006), degrading the liveliness of

already existing attention to the cultural politics of identity and textual meaning (Lorimer, 2005; see also Philo, 2012). Others have questioned whether it really is possible to provide accounts of the world that are truly non-representational, given that no matter how the researcher goes about collecting and analysing data they will have to represent it in some manner (Andrews, 2017). Perhaps the more significant lines of critique however, have emerged around whether focus on the non-representational serves to negate the power and prevalence of representations within (subaltern) identity politics (Bondi, 2005; Nash, 2000; Nayak, 2010; Thien, 2005), and thus whether they lack engagement with social, cultural and spatial context and power which have traditionally been deployed to complicate universal claims about bodies and knowledges (Tolia-Kelly, 2006).

In response to these critiques Lorimer (2008: 556) has suggested a shift in language, to 'more-than-representational' theories, within which he suggests the 'non-representational' might prove supplementary, providing "a background hum, asking questions of style, form, technique and methods, and ushering in experimental kinds of response". Similarly, Rachel Colls (2012) argues, from a feminist perspective, that non-representational theories might be best be seen as a series of 'tactical suggestions' that can be either foregrounded or backgrounded depending on the political, ethical, ontological or epistemological context in which the research project and researcher(s) find themselves.

These critiques need to be taken seriously, and it is in part because of them that I have ended up engaging more thoroughly with care. Yet in this thesis, I do still continue to foreground *non*-representational theories. Indeed, although somewhat undeniably representations are important to understanding both laughter and care, the argument here is that there are significant opportunities afforded by attention to non-representational in adding to these understandings in a productive manner. This is on the one hand about, recognising the ways in which hums, styles, forms and techniques already mediate our engagements with representations of laughter and care, and thus become key ways through which we apprehend their place in relation to one another. Perhaps more importantly, non-representational theories also allow for a framing of elements of experience such as instinct, intuition, and indeed, emotions such as laughter or those involved in care, not just as cosmetic consequences of wider representational systems, but rather as active and forceful drivers of change to the relations between people and the spaces in which they inhabit (Dewsbury 2003). Furthermore, at a broader register, non-representational theories also offer huge potential (if not always realised) for engaging with ideas of ethics in a manner that is more attentive to the non-normative aspects of the world (Barnett, 2011) and the multiplicity of potential ethical relations that can emerge from a given encounter (McCormack, 2003), something that is absolutely vital for understanding laughter and care, both separately and together.

As such, in framing my approach to the ethics of laughter with care throughout

this thesis, I draw on a number of different concepts from non-representational theories. Most obvious are engagements with ideas of practice and affect, which cut across both non-representational theories and the thesis as a whole (Andrews, 2017); as well as a reworked understanding of subjectivities (see Simpson, 2017; Wylie, 2010). Alongside this, I also deploy more 'specialist' concepts, such as 'atmospheres', 'folds', 'excess', 'creativity', and 'intentionality' in order to unpack the material-affective workings of laughter with care in individual chapters and sections of the thesis. Cutting across these approaches however it is the concept of 'the refrain' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; McCormack, 2013; Stengers, 2008; Stewart, 2010) that perhaps does the most work in holding together the multiple and contingent ethical possibilities afforded by laughter, care and laughter with care. As McCormack (2013: 7–8) describes:

[T]he refrain names the durational mattering of which affective spacetimes are composed. Refrains have a territorializing function: that is, they draw out and draw together blocks of spacetime from the chaos of the world, generating certain expressive consistency through the repetition of practices, techniques and habits ... While qualified by a certain spatiotemporal consistency, refrains are radically open: that is to say, while they may be repetitive, refrains are always potentially generative of difference, producing lines of thinking, feeling, and perceiving that may allow one to wander beyond the familiar

The thesis as a whole, therefore, approaches laughter and care as refrains: repeatedly emerging and generating particular territories, but also remaining

‘open’ and ‘indeterminate’, always capable of producing different affects and effects. In other words, ‘the refrain’ allows for an understanding of laughter and care as discernible entities – always recognisably themselves – whilst holding onto the sense that the ways in which they materialise and affect at different moments, can be radically different. This, in turn, serves to open up a non-normative space through which we can think about their ethical potentials as always multiple: that is to say, just because laughter or care appear to emerge in a similar manner, situation or circumstance repeatedly, does not necessarily foreclose the possibilities that their outcomes can be different, uncanny, or unfamiliar. This, in turn, demands a style of ethical thinking that holds the question of laughter with care also as a refrain: one that needs to be engaged with repeatedly, attending both to the specificities of its territorialisation in the moment, and to the multiple angles and orientations through and from which these territorialisations might be experienced differently (Ahmed, 2010). In this sense, the thesis moves firmly away from universal and prescriptive claims about the ethics of laughter with care, instead arguing for more multiple, situated and speculative approaches, together which might enable a more generous engagement with the ethics of what (actually) happens (Thrift 2008) during the burst of laughter.

1.4 | Chapter outlines

The idea of the refrain thus forms an (often implicit) framing for the discussions of laughter, care and ethics in this thesis as a whole. This can be seen to occur in two ways. First, through its descriptive engagement with

numerous different moments of laughter and care, the thesis as a whole provides a sense of the multiple of ways in which both laughter and care can emerge, the kinds of spacetimes they territorialise, and the plurality of ethical encounters that are enacted through their taking place. Second, organised as a series of entangled essays, each chapter can also be seen as a refrain, approaching similar questions and moments of laughter with care from different theoretical angles, which in turn serve to express the multiplicity of ethical potentialities that emerge through differently situated engagements, de- and re-territorialising them in different ways. As such, although each chapter is capable of standing alone in some respects, they can be read and understood in a deeper manner when approached as a whole.

Chapter 2, for instance, opens the discussion by drawing together the various theoretical frameworks used in this thesis in order to set out the expanded ethical terrain through which the discussion moves. It does so through staging an encounter of sorts, between literatures on ethics within human geography and literatures around laughter: generating a dialogical account which allows both sets of literature to be advanced. More specifically it offers a critique of normative theories as a way of thinking about laughter and instead poses both engagements with non-representational theories and ideas of care in turn as a means of mediating the problematics, and multiplying the possibilities of the ethical. Finally, it returns to the idea of the refrain as set out here, posing this as a key epistemological vehicle through which we might remain open to the plurality and multiplicity of ethical forms that can emerge from interactions

between laughter and care rather than trying to force them into singular, universal conceptions.

Chapter 3 follows this by shifting concern onto the specific approaches adopted in this thesis, thinking more specifically about care homes and my place within them. Although framed as a ‘methodology’ it seeks to interweave discussions about my specific actions together with contextual details about nursing care homes spaces. It discusses key literatures around fieldwork, ethnography, analysis and ethics and relates these to my own actions during the research process, non-representational theories, and the specific sites in which the research took place. Towards the end of the chapter, I turn to the idea of writing, discussing the problematics of *representing* some of the ideas in this thesis, and the approaches that were taken to negotiate this.

Chapter 4 forms the first empirical chapter of the thesis. It experiments with different ways of thinking about laughter and reflects on the kinds of ethical judgements that these engender. Its empirical focus centres around a series of events in which encounters with laughter produced conflicting feelings in my body, and thus discusses my attempts to come to terms with this. It frames this discussion through engaging with different ways of listening, particularly as set out by Jean Luc Nancy (2007). In this sense, its primary concern is with laughter rather than care although its latter sections again point towards the need to listen to (and therefore think about) laughter with care in context-specific ways (see Tronto 1993).

Chapter 5 builds on this through engagement with the ‘doing’ subjects of laughter and care. At its most general, it looks to unpack the various ways in which laughter is practised alongside care work within nursing care homes, noting the various ways in which it is used to maintain, continue and repair forms of sociality between people. Rather than frame this discussion in terms of a singular moral subject who practices laughter with care, however, it draws on Deleuze’s (1988a, 1993) conceptions of ‘the fold’ and Nixon’s (2017) discussions of this in relation to laughter to frame the subject of laughter along three interconnected axes: the individual; the collective; and the institutional. Making such a move thus serves to displace the subject *as such* as the foundational ‘location’ of ethics and instead attend more clearly to the ethics of foldings themselves, framing this in terms of what these practices *can do*.

Chapter 6 shifts focus away from the subject yet further through approaching laughter as an ethical force in its own right. Drawing on literatures around affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2014), it positions laughter as an affective-material phenomenon with creative capacities to change the nature of care spaces and relations in a manner that exceeds human intentionality (see Hughes, 2016). Crucially, the excessive spatialities of laughter’s atmospheres point towards their capacities to affect bodies differently depending on those bodies’ circumstances and situations. This, therefore, adds further complexity to the ways in which we think about laughter’s ethical relations with care and suggests a need for engagements that are more generous to the multiplicities contained within the singularity of each event of laughter (Nancy, 2000).

Chapter 7 begins to draw these trajectories together somewhat through exploring the relationship between laughter, life and death. Given that death is a relatively ordinary occurrence within care homes it is often encountered through bursts of laughter, in much the same way that the rest of the thesis outlines. Where most scholars position the relation between laughter and death in terms of coping, the chapter seeks a more affirmative account, positioning it instead as a means of carrying on: a taking of our emotions forward with us and folding them into our sense of self rather than pushing them away. Through this, I thus argue that the ways in which laughter is deployed around death are suggestive of a wider form of vitally pragmatic politico-ethic for care, whereby carers often work towards the “as well as possible” (Tronto, 1993: 103) rather than grand, idealistic political visions.

The ethos of the thesis as a whole is one of opening up possibilities, rather than trying to contain them within specific analytical or ethical frameworks. As such, although the **Conclusion** does offer a summary of what has been said, it works through another exemplar, taken from the day after the UK’s vote to leave the European Union, and uses this to suggest ways in which the ideas in this thesis might be productively taken forward, morphed, and repurposed along the same three lines with which I have begun: laughter, care and ethics.

Chapter 2: Ethical refrains for approaching laughter with care¹

We always make too much of laughter, we overload it with meaning or nonsense, we take it to the point of tears or to the revelation of nothingness... Let's not make too much of it. If possible, let's let it present-lose-itself

(Nancy, 1993: 368)

We need to start from laughter, rather than the joke. And then we will be able to see that we do not *need* to stifle our laughter just because the joke is sexist

(Parvulescu 2010: 118, emphasis mine)

2.1 | Introduction

Having set out the 'story' about how this thesis and its engagement with laughter, care and ethics emerged in the previous chapter, this chapter looks to engage more specifically with the various theoretical works that surround these concepts, and thus set out the conceptual terrain within which the thesis looks to approach laughter with care. In this regard, the chapter has two

¹ Elements of this chapter have been published in a revised form as: Emmerson P (2017) Thinking laughter beyond humour: atmospheric refrains and ethical indeterminacies in spaces of care. *Environment and Planning A* 49(9): 2082–2098.

primary aims. First, it acts as a literature review for the thesis as a whole, setting out the main bodies of literature and conceptual ideas within which the thesis is both situated and makes its contribution. Second, and perhaps more significantly, the chapter looks to unsettle and expand both conventional and academic understandings of laughter, care and ethics, suggesting new ways of thinking, acting and knowing the worlds in which we live. Together these suggestions thus provide the base for the analysis that follows in later chapters, and thus the contributions of the thesis as a whole.

Of the three concepts, laughter, care and ethics, the chapter engages with laughter most prominently, seeking to augment and advance the ways in which we might consider laughter's ethics in two key ways. First, through drawing on non-representational styles of ethical thinking, I look to afford more attention onto laughter itself rather than analysing it in terms of the jokes, humour or scenarios that precede it (see also Parvulescu, 2010) – opening up an expanded ethical terrain in which we might move and think about laughter's affective/ethical capacities (McCormack, 2003). Second, in looking to abate some of the critiques of non-representational ethics for failing to engage with the plurality that emerges from being 'in-common' with others (Olson, 2017; Popke, 2009), I turn to an expanded, non-normative, conception of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Raghuram, 2016) which I argue allows a way of thinking through laughter's multiple ethical potentials in terms of its capacities to "maintain, continue and repair our 'worlds' so that we can live in them as well as possible" (Tronto, 1993: 103) without necessarily needing to

prescribe what these practices ought to look and feel like, or towards what ends they should be directed. Surrounding this narrative on laughter is a wider movement in ethics themselves, whereby I push back against the 'hegemonic' trajectories that have emerged from the so-called 'moral turn' (Smith, 1997b) which have pushed for increased engagement with normativity and universal critique (Olson and Sayer, 2009; Sayer, 2000; Sayer and Storper, 1997). Instead, I suggest a much more fragmented understanding of ethics as a 'refrain' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; McCormack, 2013) capable of territorialising in different ways at different moments, for different people. Such an approach belies universal understandings of ethics and instead demands more multiple, speculative and situated engagements, which therefore sets up the ethos out of which the later chapters emerge.

The chapter's arguments are thus organised across five sections. The first outlines the key literatures and debates in geographical ethics, focussing particularly on normativity and justice in the wake of the 'moral turn'. The second section turns explicitly to laughter's ethics, again discussing key literatures, debates and approaches – although suggesting that these approaches are lacking somewhat in their focus on laughter itself. The third section thus looks to enact a "(re)turn to laughter" (Parvulescu, 2010: 3) through engaging with non-representational theories, reframing both laughter and its ethics in terms of their multiple affective-material capacities. As noted above, however, this brings forth questions about how these affective-material approaches might be used in order to understand the in-commonness of

laughter, society and indeed Being (Nancy, 2000), with the fourth section addressing these questions through engagements with care at both an empirical and at ontological-ethical registers. Care here is again treated as a plural entity which, when held in contact with laughter's plurality, serves to multiply both of their ethical potentials yet further. As such, the final section outlines the 'refrain' in more detail, suggesting how it might be used to further understand laughter, care and ethics in worlds of multiplicity and pointing towards the ways in which this territorialises throughout the rest of the thesis.

2.2 | Ethics and geography

Over the last two decades or so, attention has increasingly been afforded to ethical issues within a wide range of geographical processes (Popke, 2010). These engagements have raised key questions about the nature of 'our' collective obligations and responsibilities to ensure that "decent and sustainable" forms of life can be afforded to all those who inhabit the Earth (Smith, 2004: 197), whether they be human or otherwise (Ginn, 2014; Olson, 2017; Pitt, 2018; Whatmore, 2006). Similarly, questions have also been raised about the relationship between ethics and various ontological, epistemological and political frameworks, and how these affect the nature of judgements around ethics and morals, with various debates emerging around the merits and effectiveness of each in terms of understanding and engaging with the ethics of different systems, processes and phenomenon (e.g. Barnett, 2014; Dekeyser and Garrett, 2018; Popke, 2006; Raghuram, 2016; Yusoff, 2013). Together, these accounts have thus generated "a more careful consideration of

just what a ‘decent form of life’ can and should look like, and how we might collectively organise our communities, our institutions, and our political forms in such a way as to bring it about” (Popke, 2010: 242).

There is some level of debate and open interpretation amongst geographers as to exactly what the concepts of morality and ethics mean, with some arguing that they can be used interchangeably (e.g. Smith, 1997b). For me, however, distinguishing between the two terms opens up a wider conceptual vocabulary through which to discuss and differentiate the components within and between various modes of ethical thinking. As such, in broad terms, I use *morals* and *morality* to denote an implicit, evaluative framework against which people make judgements about theirs or other’s actions and the nature or outcome of particular situations, often along the lines of good and bad. *Morals* in this sense can be individual or collective, they can be fixed or mutable, they can be cognitively reasoned or implicitly felt as a ‘gut reaction’ (Barnett, 2014; Olson, 2016). Yet *morals* are always both subjective and singular in that they tend towards a specific (normative) judgement. *Ethics*, on the other hand, for me, denotes a broader engagement with the relations that are produced from actions, behaviours, and situations, particularly in terms of the changes to these relations. *Ethics* in this sense is not a specific framework of judgement, but rather an open field of inquiry that seeks to understand the effects of these changes to relation, without subsuming them to ideas of conscious choice (see Barad, 2007). This distinction, therefore, poses a dualism between *morals* as an explicitly human phenomenon, whereas *ethics*, although involving humans,

also extend beyond this, interweaving human and more-than-human agencies together (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Although these distinctions are contestable in themselves, they allow a means of articulating both the various movements and debates that have occurred around morals/ethics in geography and subsequently where my contributions sit in relation to this.

Although geographers have engaged with questions of the ethical and moral since at least the writings of Kant (Popke, 2010), the ways in which these issues are addressed and understood in contemporary human geography have largely emerged in relation to the so-called 'moral turn' proclaimed by Smith in the mid-1990s (Smith, 1997b). For Smith, the moral turn was intended as a means of capturing and codifying an existing turn towards questions of morality in geography, with the intention of making them more relevant to both the post-/modern world, and to ethical philosophies more generally (see also Barnett and Land, 2007). In this sense, the moral turn has its own intellectual specificity, emerging in reaction to engagements with ethics through postmodern theoretical frameworks – which tended towards an unsettling of ethical relations and the development of a plurality of projects for social change rather than a unifying ethic (Popke, 2010: 248). Key proponents of the 'moral turn' thus looked to counter this through generating broader frameworks for social and spatial justice, couched in (often Marxist) critical thought (see Proctor and Smith, 1999; Sayer, 2000; Smith, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2001, 2004). As David Harvey (1989: 328) argues, postmodernity means: "the confidence in the association between scientific and moral

judgements has collapsed ... ephemerality and fragmentation take place over eternal truths and unified politics.”

Perhaps the strongest conceptual position to emerge from the moral turn has been a “reawakening of normative theory” (Sayer and Storper, 1997: 14) through which it is argued that ideas of morals, ethics and the ‘good’ can be engaged with, not just as implicitly meaningful, but in a rational manner that explicitly justifies their worth through argumentation. This is therefore seen to provide a stronger base for critical thought and engagements with how ethics/morals differ across space and time (Olson and Sayer, 2009; Sayer, 2000). Indeed, it was the relevance of geographical thinking for moral philosophy that was put at stake in this call, with Robert Sack arguing both that geography is the “foundation of moral judgment” and that morality “must be set and justified by us in places as inhabitants of a world” (Sack, 1997: 8, cited in Jacobs, 2010: 13).

Although this normative imperative is something that has been broadly (although not universally) accepted across the discipline (Popke, 2010), debates have emerged around how normativity and ideas of ‘good’ themselves might be approached (Bridge, 2000). Jane Jacobs (2010) for instance notes two distinct modes of approaching morals: ‘normative moralities’ and ‘charting everyday moralities’. The former seeks the promotion of “ethical principles that ought to be realized in an otherwise imperfect world” whereas the latter sees the moral as emerging from and enforcing particular styles of power

(Barnett, 2014: 151). The former approach can be seen most clearly in work that engages with 'The Right to the City' (Harvey, 2008; McCann, 2002; Mitchell, 2003; Purcell, 2002), or 'just cities' (Fainstein, 2014; Marcuse et al., 2009), but also within engagements with environmental justice (e.g. Walker, 2009), and through more recent (re-)engagements with Anarchism in geography (e.g. Gibson, 2014; Springer, 2012). 'Charting everyday moralities' is perhaps more prevalent within engagements with more intimate and embodied issues, such as: sexuality (e.g. Hubbard, 2000); body image (e.g. Colls, 2004); home and family life (Blunt and Varley, 2004; Valentine, 2001); the workplace (McDowell et al., 2005); and around lifestyle practices, such as Veganism (Gillespie and Collard, 2015).

Overlapping with these distinctions in approach, questions have also been raised about the ontological foundations through which we might consider the normative and its implications for thinking about ethics in geography. Most notably in this regard have been movements away from a "particular model of moral selfhood" according to which "people are implicated in their actions by reference to a linear chain of relations between free will, knowledge, voluntary action, causality, responsibility and blame" (Barnett et al., 2005: 25). Instead, attempts have been made to foreground understandings of the moral/ethical subject as constituted by and through its relations with o/Others (Cutchin, 2002; Jones, 2000; Massey, 2004; Popke, 2003). This shift in ontological framing thus serves to move the ethical imperative from one based on "incontrovertible facts of sameness" (see Popke, 2010: 249), onto

intersubjective notions of ethics, often couched within understandings of ‘society’, ‘community’ or ‘in-commonness’. These ethics re-engage with postmodern/post-structuralist thought (see Popke, 2003, 2004; Slater, 1997; Valentine, 2003; Welch and Panelli, 2007; Whatmore, 1997) through holding onto the implicit *differences* between people, places, organisations, and politics (Popke, 2007). This, in turn, involves a “relocation of the normative reference point for critique to the *conditions* of social interaction” (Barnett, 2014: 156, emphasis mine) rather than the details of those interactions, and thus a shift in critical attention away from trying to set out and evaluate judgements of morality and instead onto questions of our ‘responsibilities’ towards others (Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004; Noxolo et al., 2012; Popke, 2007, 2009).

Perhaps the best cited examples of these relational ethics emerge from engagements with ethical consumption (Barnett et al., 2005; Barnett and Land, 2007; Clarke, 2008; Hughes and Reimer, 2004), with Barnett et al. (2005) in particular looking to rethink the idea that ethics of consumption is rooted in consumers’ moral choices, instead arguing that the ethics of consumption are embedded in a constellation of relationships between consumers, supply chains, brands, manufacturers, places, political systems and so on – what Freidberg (2004) describes as ‘an ethical complex’ – and involving non-rational ‘choice’ structures such as necessity, habit and emotions. Similar arguments have thus been made in relation to a whole host of commodities and their production-consumption processes, most notably in relation to food (Cook, 2004; Cook and Harrison, 2007; Eden et al., 2008; Goodman et al.,

2010), but also flowers (Hale and Opondo, 2005), furniture (Reimer and Leslie, 2004) and fashion (Crewe, 2004; Gregson and Beale, 2004). Beyond consumption/consumerism, relational-ethics have also been drawn on to engage with a number of other ethical issues across a variety of scales, including: development and post/colonial relations (Corbridge, 1998; Noxolo et al., 2012); health and social care provision and restructuring (Gleeson and Kearns, 2001; Milligan and Wiles, 2010); the ethics of education spaces and delivery (Kraftl, 2006; Watkins, 2011); and more-than-human relations (Ginn, 2014; Whatmore, 1997, 2006) often in relation to environmental degradation or climate change (Boykoff, 2008; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010). Together these accounts, therefore, articulate a sense that ‘justice’ can only be achieved through *collective* endeavour, thus reframing the concept of *responsibility* as a “collective practice” which “is distributed across complex networks of causality and agency ... and [involves] issues of power, privilege, interest and capacity for action, as well as spatial relation” (Barnett, 2011: 251–252; see also Young, 2004, 2007).

It is thus through these versions of relational ethics that this thesis looks to approach the ethics of laughter. In doing so, however, it draws more firmly on two further significant conceptual positions have emerged in geographic-ethical theory: ethics of care and non-representational ethics, each of which have sought to rethink the normative frameworks for ethics in geography. Ethics of care, for instance, have suggested that ideas of justice might be better replaced with ideas of care as the normative foundation for moral/ethical

theorising (see Tronto, 1993). Feminist care ethics in this sense frame care “not so much an activity as a way of relating to others” (McEwan and Goodman, 2010): one that is fundamental to all existence, if often marginalised (Lawson, 2009). Unlike justice, which frames morality, ethics and responsibility in terms of rationalised notions of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ (Gilligan, 1982), ideas of care suggest that people are always engaged in overlapping sets of responsibilities, many of which are contradictory, and therefore ethical questions should be addressed through “context-sensitive and emotionally-engaged moral deliberation than by the application of schematic [universal] reasoning” (Bowden, 2000: 44). Also pushing back against universalism, non-representational theories have sought to challenge the normative as the basis for ethics altogether, instead seeing ethics as something that is ‘enacted’ (McCormack, 2005), arising from the “unfolding of events” (Darling, 2010: 241). Non-representational theories in this sense offer up more of an ‘ethos’ than an ethics per se. that is “attentive to the nature of our bodily encounters, without seeking to submit them to an a priori set of rules or moral judgments” (Popke, 2009: 82). In other words, borrowing Thrift’s (2008: 8) phrasing, we might suggest non-representational ethics as the ‘ethics of what happens’.

I will elaborate further on these two approaches as the chapter develops, drawing more explicitly on their ideas in order to develop the specific approach to laughter’s ethics that this thesis adopts. In doing so, I also seek to advance the ways in which we might imagine non-representational care ethics, building on already existing relations between the two at both conceptual and

empirical registers (Conradson, 2003b; Darling, 2010; Popke, 2006; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Thrift, 2005). Crucially, reimagining laughter in this manner requires something of a fundamental rethinking of the ontological, epistemological and ethical foundations through which laughter has largely been approached in the social sciences and humanities. These have largely been framed as questions of its causes, rather than affording attention to the kinds of ethical relations that laughter itself might engender (Parvulescu, 2010). As such, in setting up the foundation for this renewed approach, the next section briefly outlines these existing approaches to laughter and morality/ethics.

2.3 | Laughter and morality

Although a relatively recent matter of concern to geographers, laughter is a phenomenon that has been of long-standing interest to a number of philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, medical researchers and performance studies scholars. As such, there is now a large body of literature and theories have emerged that seek to understand both the causes of laughter and how it affects social forms and functioning. These theories of laughter are often intensely moral in nature, evaluating acts of laughter in terms of normative conceptions of what is 'good', 'proper', 'fair' or 'virtuous' (Buckley, 2005; Gantar, 2005). Indeed, although the majority of thinking about laughter has emerged since the turn of the twentieth century, much of this work is grounded in a longer (Western) intellectual history of conceptualising laughter (Elias, 2017; Parvulescu, 2010), which arguably

intersects with the development of moral philosophy itself (see Goldberg, 1999), most notably in relation to what Elizabeth Olson (2016: 831) has recently described as the most prominent debate in Western thinking about emotions and morality: “that which pits reason against emotion in the achievement of a moral life or moral society.”

As Simon Critchley (2002) notes, despite the vast array of literature and explanations of laughter, three theories prevail overwhelmingly: the superiority theory; the incongruity theory; and the relief or release theory. Of these three theories, superiority theory is arguably the oldest, somewhat recognisable within the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Quintilian (ibid), although modern conceptions emerge most clearly from Hobbes (1999: 54–55) who argues “that the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others or with our own formally”. Incongruity theory emerges around this same time, through the work of Francis Hutcheson and the 1st Earl of Shaftesbury in the mid-eighteenth century (Billig, 2005), but is more often attributed to the work of Kant, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard (Critchley, 2002; Goldberg, 1999). Incongruity theory argues that laughter emerges from the coming together of two apparently incompatible elements into a single event – with ‘the pun’ being the exemplar of this idea (Billig, 2005). Release theory is relatively new in these terms, emerging during the late nineteenth century in the wake of increased scientific attention on the physiology and psychology of bodies with laughter seen to be caused by a

release of energy from the body. Although originally suggested by Spencer as release of muscular tension, relief theory has now become somewhat synonymous with Freud's (1928, 1989) writing on laughter, humour and the unconscious, whereby laughter is seen to cause pleasure "because it allegedly economizes upon energy that would ordinarily be used to contain or repress psychic activity" (Critchley, 2002: 3).

Although these theories are primarily causal, seeking to understand the essence of why laughter emerges, they hold within them implicit moral undertones (see Buckley, 2005; Gantar, 2005; Parvulescu, 2010). This is most obvious in terms of superiority theory which not only suggests laughter as expressing feelings of moral superiority, but is also rooted explicitly through Hobbes' own moral theorising (Goldberg, 1999), and particularly his desire to suppress the passions (including laughter) in favour of more 'reasonable' temperaments (Billig, 2005). Although subtler, this similar moral impetus can also be attached to incongruity theory, whereby laughter is seen to express enjoyment when the rational emerges from the otherwise chaotic world (Goldberg 1999). This imperative can be read clearly in Kant (1987) whose judgements on laughter continually favour those with the 'required' reasoning skills to control their engagements with incongruities, as well as those with the 'intelligence' to construct them (what we might call wit – see Billig, 2005), over those who laugh uncontrollably. Similarly, in relief theories, this moral imperative becomes about controlling laughter in order to manage subconscious desires (Freud, 1989) – learning to express laughter in the

correct time and place in accordance with morality and manners. Therefore, together these theoretical trajectories add up to what Norbert Elias (2017: 284) terms the civilising of laughter which has both “pruned laughter increasingly to a moderate size” as well as increasingly restricted the ways in which it is morally acceptable to laugh or joke (see also Bakhtin, 1984; Gantar, 2005; Parvulescu, 2010).

These theoretical precursors can be seen to give shape to contemporary understandings of laughter’s ethics. Indeed, discussions about the morality of laughter often draw on Freud as a foundation of their own moral theories (see for example Billig, 2005; Buckley, 2005; Critchley, 2002). That said, sociological conceptions of laughter perhaps more commonly frame Bergson (1980) as their starting point, positioning him as the first ‘modern’ theorist of laughter (Brigstocke, 2014; Goldberg, 1999).

Indeed, Bergson’s (1980) essay on laughter is arguably the first to affirm laughter as having key functions in social life. As Stephen Crocker (2010: 78) writes, “Bergson’s thesis on laughter is beautifully simple: laughter is the recognition of our failure to submit life to mechanism”. More specifically, for Bergson (1980) laughter forms a means of correcting “a certain automatism or mechanical inelasticity, a clumsiness or rigidity”, whether that be in terms of “bodily, mental or character deficiencies” (Parvulescu, 2010: 86–87) all of which Bergson sees as ill-equipped for the dexterity required of modern life (Buckley, 2005). In this sense, there is, again, a clear morality underpinning

Bergson's (1980) understandings of laughter, albeit one which affirms laughter's place in maintaining social manners and moral order (Crocker, 2010; Goldberg, 1999), rather than seeking to repress it. Frank Buckley (2005) describes this as a 'positive' thesis of laughter and morality, whereby it frames laughter as crucial in maintaining normative ideals, albeit in a way that is ultimately 'good' for society: "he [sic] who laughs must in his own way be a moralist. Through their laughter, wit and listener reaffirm a shared vision about how life should be lived and proclaim that the butt [object of laughter] is guilty of a comic vice" (Buckley, 2005: 10).

Despite the 'positive' nature of Bergson's (1980) original thesis, his ideas have largely been drawn upon to suggest an association between laughter and morality that is far less affirmative (Gantar, 2005). Perhaps most significant in this regard is Michael Billig's (2005) 'critical' account of laughter, which begins with the premise that laughter is perhaps the most influential, insidious and *negative* social force in contemporary life. Like Bergson, Billig connects laughter implicitly to ideas of ridicule, arguing that, regardless of the specificities of its specific causes, laughter always serves to construct its targets as Other, abject or outside of the norms of social convention. Indeed, this is true for Billig, even when it is not actually present: "for the possibility of ridicule ensures that members of society routinely comply with the customs and habits of their social milieu" (Billig, 2005: 3). In this sense, laughter is drawn into a parallel with ideas of power and normalisation: a means of disciplining those who do not socially conform. As Emily Douglas (2015: 146)

writes: “[l]aughter can reinforce norms of appearance, of disciplinary boundaries, and of oppression.” Billig’s (2005) thesis is therefore a version of what Buckley (2005) calls the normative thesis of laughter, differing from the positive thesis in that it suggests the power structures (superiorities) highlighted by laughter are genuine rather than assumed, and thus that laughter actively serves to reinforce these rather than simply acting on the imagination of those taking part in it. This in turn changes the ontological nature of how we understand laughter’s ethics.

Although, as will be discussed in the next section, there are key theorists who have rallied against these moralised conceptualisations of laughter (e.g. Bataille, 2001; Derrida, 1978; Nancy, 1993), broadly speaking it is these two, post-Bergsonian theses, and the ways they have been associated with power, that can be mapped onto most contemporary understandings of laughter in both sociology and geography (see Ridanpää, 2014a). In discussing school children’s laughter, for instance, Kehily and Nayak (1997: 83) draw on normative conceptions, noting that “it is usually those with most power in the situation who tell most jokes”. Similarly, in discussing laughter and geopolitics, Colin Flint (2001) argues that the capacity to laugh is directly connected to confidence in one’s socioeconomic position held within the world, an *‘arrogant’* laughter of winners and thus one not as easily afforded to those at the margins. Elsewhere, Klaus Dodds (2003, 2010) argues that jokes about national identities often caricature other nations in order to generate feelings of superiority, thus maintaining geopolitical power structures at the everyday

level (see also Ridanpää, 2007).

Alongside these engagements that see laughter as an expression of power, others have suggested that laughter might also be used as a form of resistance (Douglas, 2015). At its simplest, we might see this in terms of 'laughing upwards' (Amarasingam, 2010): the challenging of hegemonic hierarchies through ridiculing those who are in positions of power themselves (Davies, 2007; Robinson and Smith-Lovin, 2001). Billig (2005: 192) also suggests another form of resistance through his concept of unlaughter: the active "display of not laughing when laughing might otherwise be expected, hoped for or demanded" which thus challenges the norms of laughter itself (see also Dodds and Kirby, 2012). Most often, however, these modes of normative resistance are connected to ideas of transgression (Douglas, 2015; Foucault, 1998) and satire (Stott, 2005; Thorogood, 2016), with Bakhtin's (1984) accounts of medieval carnival arguably being most famous. The carnival for Bakhtin is positioned as a space in which social rules and norms can be suspended and hierarchies can be turned upside-down, liberating those who take part in it. Laughter, mockery, ridicule and subversion all play key roles in this process (Macpherson, 2008), becoming modes of challenging oppressive powers and re-thinking politics. For some, the 'carnavalesque' has thus served as a key model for thinking about resistive laughter (Brigstocke, 2014; Gregson and Crewe, 1997; Grindon, 2004; Shields, 1990; Wills, 1989). Others however have challenged its efficacy, arguing that it risks a turn to 'sentimental popularism' in which the proximities of laughter and oppression

can become ignored (Eagleton 2001, cited in Macpherson, 2008) and thus that laughter acts merely as a kind of safety valve through which social pressures and tensions are released leaving social hierarchies intact or even reinforced (Davies, 2007; Grindon, 2004; Mbembe, 2001).

These understandings of laughter in terms of power have thus set up a normative association between laughter and justice (Gantar, 2005). As Hynes and Sharpe (2010: 45) suggest:

[i]f laughter serves to ridicule oppressive powers or galvanize marginalized peoples, then it is judged as having been put to the service of the good. Conversely, if laughter signals social exclusion or political apathy, then it is said to have been used for malevolent ends

In taking a more relational approach, however, feminist and postcolonial scholars, in particular, have looked to add further nuance to understandings of laughter. Sara Ahmed (2006, 2010) for instance suggests that women and people of colour are often 'required' to laugh in social situations and that this reinforces norms around race and sexuality, creating ideals such as the 'happy housewife' or the 'jolly' colonial subject (see also Fanon, 2008). Similarly, Achille Mbembe (2001; Mbembe and Roitman, 1995) argues that postcolonial subjects are often constructed through an expectation of laughter in the face of horror, which serves to entwine laughter's subjectivation together with past and present forces of fear and oppression (see also Obadare, 2009). Others have drawn on ideas of release to frame laughter as a coping mechanism, suggesting that humour and laughter can form a cathartic means of collectively

expressing emotions, helping people to deal with adversity (Crawley, 2004; De Moor, 2005; Sullivan, 2000; Willems, 2011) albeit in ways that are similar to the ‘safety valve’ described above and thus often reinforce power structures.

These relational approaches thus look to shift the moral imperative away from laughter’s directionality and instead onto a distinction between laughing *at* and laughing *with*, where the former is seen as less moral than the latter (Davidson, 2001; Gantar, 2005). Working in this vein, a number of scholars have drawn on laughter’s capacities to produce and mobilise communities of conviviality and solidarity between peoples (Finney, 1994; Gouin, 2004; Ridanpää, 2017; Routledge, 2012), arguing that it acts as a key communicative device to (re)produce group affinities (Davidson, 2001; Delph-Janiurek, 2001), whereby “a sense of sameness [or being in-common] is realized through shared laughter” (Ridanpää, 2014a: 705). Discussions of laughter in the context of marginality often combine these approaches to give complex accounts of laughter’s socialities. Both Teela Sanders (2004) and Randi Nixon (2017) for instance note the ways in which sex workers use laughing-together as a means of initiating new members into the group, and distinguishing sex-workers from their clients (Sanders, 2004) but also as a way of fostering ‘pride’ in sex-workers at both individual and collective registers (Nixon, 2017). Similarly, others have discussed the ways in which disabled people use laughter to (re)define their position in relation to able-bodied people, suggesting that laughter forms a way of *both* negotiating their dependence on others and simultaneously asserting their independence from others

(Albrecht, 1999; Macpherson 2008). Writings on marginality thus pose challenges to understanding laughter's ethics through opening up questions of the partiality of moral judgements. As Albrecht (1999: 72–73) notes:

What is humorous and accepted by disabled people in their inside world may not be understood by people in the outside world ... What they accept from their peers they may not tolerate from others because of the perceived intent of the language or joke.

As such, although these various accounts form a foundation for understanding the ethics of laughter, we might begin to question the basis upon which these judgements are made. Indeed, what becomes clear when looking at these accounts as a whole is that laughter has no clear moral status (Macpherson, 2008), but rather becomes *moralised* through the ways in which we approach it: what we consider it to be and mean (Buckley, 2005; Elias, 2017). Indeed, we might note, as Parvulescu (2010: 3) does, that most of these theories do not actually concern themselves with laughter: “[t]hey conceive of it as a response to something else, and it is this something else that they are after – the comic, jokes, humour, the grotesque, the ridiculous, the ludicrous, etc.” In other words, we might note a form of lexical slippage that often occurs in work on laughter, whereby laughter and humour become synonymous, and thus discussions of ‘laughter’ almost always equate to a discussion of humour. This, in turn, serves to blur together questions of laughter's causes and laughter itself, creating a disjuncture between normative accounts of what laughter is *assumed* to do (often based on the humour that precedes it, following the three

theories), and what it *actually* does at various moments. Ultimately, this generates ambivalent accounts of it that may reflect what happens, but equally may not. Within all this, as Samuel Weber (1987: 695) puts it, “laughter imposes itself as the ineluctable problem.”

In seeking to negotiate this problematic, therefore, the next section looks to enact what Parvulescu (2010: 3) describes as a ‘return to laughter’ which seeks to augment these existing accounts through generating ways of understanding laughter’s ethics without reducing this understanding to normative judgements of its causes. Specifically, I draw on non-representational theories and the approaches to ethics that emerge from them in order to re-imagine laughter as a multiplicity capable of acting in ways that exceed both representational understandings of its causes and ideas of intentionality or directionality (see also Hughes, 2016). This reimagining thus moves towards an approach to laughter’s ethics that is “responsive as much to the transformative potential of the event as to the subject and object of ethics” (McCormack, 2003: 500), although this, in turn, opens up further questions for how we might hold this in tension with ideas of politics, context and the plurality of being-with-others (Nancy, 2000; Popke, 2009).

2.4 | Non-representational laughter

As briefly noted above, non-representational theories have been suggested as offering “a different set of resources for considering matters of ethics and responsibility”, generating accounts that are “less about dour denouncements

of injustice or sober analyses of normative principles, and more about enhancing, and celebrating, our immersion in Being” (Popke, 2009: 81). This set of resources emerges directly from the ways in which non-representational theories have sought to rethink the ontological and epistemological foundations of geographical knowledges, moving past discursive/representational accounts of experience (Thrift, 2008) and instead paying attention to “how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions” (Lorimer, 2005: 84). Crucially, these ontological and epistemological resources also provide a means of cutting through the discursive and representational ways through which laughter has largely been approached in social sciences, and instead affording more sustained attention to both the geography and ethics of ‘what happens’ (Thrift, 2008) during moments when laughter bursts into society and space (Parvulescu, 2010). In moving towards a discussion of ‘non-representational laughter’, therefore, it is useful to briefly unpack some of the ‘tactical suggestions’ (Dewsbury et al. 2002) offered by non-representational theories more generally, particularly in terms of the ways in which they have approached ideas of embodiment and emotions, and the ethical implications that emerge from this.

As noted in the previous chapter, although the category of the subject has remained present in this thesis in some respects, for the most part, non-

representational theories have looked to displace subjects “as the starting and focal points for geographic investigations of people’s relationships with the world” (Simpson, 2017: 1). Instead, attention has been afforded to bodies themselves, usually guided by the Spinozist (ethical) question: ‘what can a body do’ (e.g. Anderson, 2006, 2012; Grosz, 1994; McCormack, 2002, 2008a)? As Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 257) write: “[w]e know nothing about a body until we know what it can do”. The question of what bodies can do, therefore, is answered in part through non-representational theories’ interest in practice: which, in crude terms, can be defined as the performances, movements, habits and so on, that bodies physically *do* as part of everyday life (see Simpson, 2010). More specifically, Thrift (2008: 8) describes practices as “material bodies of work or styles” and as “productive concatenations that have been constructed out of all manner of resources and which provide the basic intelligibility of the world.” Practices, in this sense, are conceptually positioned as a form of both thinking about, and relating to, the world (Dewsbury, 2012; Simonsen, 2007; Thrift, 2003), and have been used to think through a whole manner of embodied experiences, including: placemaking (Duff, 2010), obsessive-compulsive disorders (Segrott and Doel, 2004), listening to and making music (Anderson, 2002; Wang Jing, 2012), dancing (Gil, 2006; Nash, 2000); yoga (Lea, 2009), street performance (Simpson, 2010), and care (Atkinson et al., 2011).

Entwined with this interest in practice, and perhaps more obviously relevant to engagements with laughter, non-representational theories’ have also

addressed the question of what bodies can do through engagements with ideas of *emotion*, and more specifically *affect* (Cadman, 2009). Although affect is often framed as an equivalent to emotion, non-representational theories have maintained that the “notion of affect is neither reducible to nor interchangeable with emotion, although it is nevertheless implicated in the emotional sensibilities of experience” (McCormack, 2003: 495). Following Massumi (2002: 28), emotion is thus seen as a conscious “sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience” which gives it “function and meaning”, whereas affect can be seen as ‘vague’ pre-conscious and pre-personal intensities which implicate the corporeal materialities of (both human and non-human) bodies (see also Anderson, 2006; McCormack, 2008a). Put in another way, affect and emotion might be seen “as unmediated sensation and conscious recognition respectively” (Simonsen, 2007: 176, n. 4). Drawing on the same Spinozan root, affect has also been defined, in broader terms, by Ben Anderson (2006: 735) as the “transpersonal capacity which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications)”. Anderson’s definition thus opens up space for thinking about how affective encounters might generate a wider set of corporeal responses (Anderson, 2014), invariably transforming, or ‘moving’, bodies (human and non-human) in physical, emotional, kinaesthetic, imaginative, collective, aesthetic, social, cultural, political or ethical ways (McCormack, 2008b: 1823). Crucially, however, affect is always a relational process: “[b]eing affected-affecting” can be seen as “two sides of the same dynamic shift, or change in what a being is and does”

(Anderson, 2014: 78–79).

These engagements with practice and affect have thus served to animate non-representational understandings of ethics. As Popke (2009) notes, on the one hand, this ethical impetus emerges as a search for practices that have the potential to amplify “corporeal response-ability” to events and other people and thus enhance our “affective capacity” (Thrift, 2004b: 127, 128). Through this “everyday moments of encounter can be cultivated to build an ethics of generosity by stimulating affective energy” (Thrift, 2004c: 93). In this manner, scholars have sought to rethink the ethical potentials of a number of everyday encounters (e.g. Adey et al., 2013; Darling, 2014; Kraftl and Horton, 2007; Obrador-Pons, 2007; Wilson, 2011). On the other hand, drawing more directly on the philosophies of Spinoza (1970) and subsequently Deleuze (1988b, 1990; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), ethics can be conceptualised in non-representational styles of thought as the ethological study of affects themselves (Braidotti, 2011; Gatens, 1996; Malabou, 1996; see also McCormack, 2008a). As Moira Gatens (1996: 167) explains: “ethology may be understood as offering an ethics of the molecular – a micropolitics concerned with the ‘in-between’ of subjects with that which passes between them and which manifests the range of possible becomings.” Crucially this second style of ethics is resolutely non-normative: rather than judge an encounter as ‘ethical’ or ‘unethical’ through normative ideas of morality, the impetus is instead simply to attend to the enhancement or restriction of a body’s power to act, regardless of what form this power takes, and towards what it might be

directed (Braidotti, 2011; Popke, 2009).

It is also in this vein that a small but significant non-representational engagement with (the ethics of) humour and laughter has emerged. Often drawing on a similar conceptual base to the 'relational' understandings of humour described above (e.g. Ahmed, 2006, 2010), this work is characterised largely by attempts to understand the (molecular) movements that humour and laughter can generate, the capacities that this affords to different bodies and thus the complex ways in which power is mobilised by them at various scales (e.g. Bissell et al., 2012; Brigstocke, 2014; Dittmer, 2013; Sharpe et al., 2014; Sharpe and Hynes, 2016). Sharpe et al. (2014), for instance, discuss the comedy performances of Stewart Lee, arguing that their aesthetics enable audiences to generate new 'affective habits' through which prejudices might be altered and made less certain. Elsewhere, Hynes and Sharpe (2010) note that humour affirms already existing desires and the social constructions through which they are made into moral judgements. Brigstocke (2014: 85) similarly suggests humour as offering an "alternative cultural vehicle for making the limits of socio-biological life visible and felt at the affective registers of experience". Humour and laughter are thus again seen as a means of accessing power geometries to enforce control onto bodies in subtle ways (Bissell et al., 2012), to resist these structures through modes of creative interruption (Brigstocke, 2014; Sharpe et al., 2014) or creating 'sensuous solidarities' (Routledge, 2012). In this sense, whilst these discussions do augment traditional accounts of humour, adding further ways of

conceptualising laughter's socio-ethical functions – as a form of affirmation (Hynes et al., 2007; Hynes and Sharpe, 2010) or 'violence' (Brigstocke, 2014) for instance – they largely still fall under the category of scholarship that Parvulescu (2010) critiques: maintaining analytic focus on humour rather than laughter, meaning the two often become conflated.

Also engaging with ideas of practice and affect, a number of scholars have however sought to be more precise in distinguishing between humour and laughter (see Bataille, 2001; Derrida, 1978; Macpherson, 2008; Nancy, 1993).

Hannah Macpherson (2008: 1083) for instance notes that:

Humour, while not necessarily verbal, tends to involve the intellect: for example, a 'sense of humour' is thought to entail the ability to detect a tension between expectation and actuality [incongruity theory] ... Laughter is distinguishable from humour as laughter is also a muscular phenomenon which interrupts breathing.

Through this separation, Macpherson (2008: 1084) thus moves towards a 'non-representational' approach to understanding laughter, arguing that laughter "defies the limits of discourse and dislocates our sense of a rational reflective subject". Extending Macpherson's argument further, Jason Dittmer (2013: 499) "crudely" maps humour onto the "discursive" and laughter onto the "affective". It's worth noting that Dittmer's distinction between 'the discursive' and 'the affective' here engages with one particular understanding of affect, arising from the phenomenological tradition, "as a set of embodied practices that produce visible conduct as an outer lining" (Thrift, 2004a: 60),

or what Jack Katz (1999) describes in terms of the *doing* of emotions. This version of affect therefore essentially frames laughter as a corporeal (sub/semi-conscious) response to an external (humorous) stimulus. It is perhaps for this reason that Dittmer (2013) ultimately argues that humour and laughter cannot be teased apart, and thus returns to analyses based around the three theories of laughter outlined above, albeit augmenting them through the language of affect.

Unlike Dittmer, Macpherson (2008: 1083) remains adamant that some form of separation between humour and laughter is possible: “laughter is not always the response of a conscious reflective and controlled subject and at times laughter has no clear basis in humour – we may laugh and not know precisely why”. Similarly, whilst laughter may correspond with the discursive formation of a joke, Macpherson notes that it may also be embedded within the wider histories and circumstances of the situation, meaning laughter’s intensity can easily exceed the apparent funniness of the joke. This distinction thus draws further parallels with the writings of Georges Bataille (2001) who argues that we cannot know the causes of laughter because it emerges from the ‘unknowable’ itself, and therefore trying to understand it through humour transforms it into something different. In other words, there is no point in attending to laughter through humour because that would require a mode of representational ‘knowledge’ that cannot be applied to laughter (see also Parvulescu, 2010). This disjuncture between the ways in which we understand the ‘causes’ of laughter and its actual emergence thus serves to challenge

ethical understandings of it based on normative ideas of a 'subject' whose morality is constituted through the process of laughing *at* something and instead places the ethical (or ethological) imperative onto the moment of laughter itself "as an event of the body, which transforms us in spite of our ideals and will" (Hynes and Sharpe, 2010: 45). Jean Luc Nancy (1993: 384) describes a similar idea in terms of the subject's coming to presence through laughter: "It is thus that presence laughs: it laughs at coming into presence without intention and consequently without presentation other than its coming".

This capacity of laughter to create subjects through affect is thus suggestive of what Massumi (1996, 2002) describes as the 'autonomy of affect', whereby "[a]ffect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is" which Massumi goes on to argue "is why all emotion is more or less disorientating" (Massumi, 1996: 96). Jack Katz (1999) also describes this quality through noting that we not only do emotions, but they also do us in return (sometimes 'doing us in', or 'doing us over'). In terms of laughter this can be seen most obviously through the ways in which embodied capacities are not only mobilised to produce laughter but are also mobilised by it in turn, often unintentionally changing its relations with the world (see also Hughes, 2016; Nixon, 2017). In laughter for instance: the diaphragm rhythmically contracts, the neck elongates and the mouth opens (Cixous, 1976; Parvulescu, 2010); bellies, breasts, arms, legs and heads shake (Bakhtin, 1984; Mbembe, 2001);

electric currents run through nerves and brain synapses, hormones and endorphins flush through our veins and muscles (Rokade, 2011); air molecules move as a sound is projected outwards from the body (Provine, 1996, 2004). As we have seen already, however, laughter does not only move bodies materially, but also in a variety of emotional, intellectual, social, and political ways (Parvulescu, 2010). It can generate feelings of embarrassment, discomfort, alienation, joy, surprise, and so on (J Katz, 1999) which in turn reveal, and sometimes change, what we think about the world and our place within it (Emmerson, 2016) and therefore disrupt or reinforce particular power structures and cultural 'norms' (Ahmed, 2006, 2010; Douglas, 2015).

Perhaps more significantly in terms of laughter's ethics, however, we might also note the ways in which this autonomy manifests through interactions between different bodies (see also McCormack, 2003). In other words, we might note that although the ways in which laughter is experienced is mediated to some respects through particular cultural and historical modes of relation, there is also always a level of 'manoeuvrability' in terms of the exact ways in which it can register in specific bodies at a given moment (Anderson, 2014). "While our own laughter may coincide with another's laughter it may not always correspond with the purpose, object, or effect of another person's laughter" (Macpherson, 2008: 1084). Following McCormack (2003), therefore, we might note two key implications for how we think about laughter's ethics. The first is that all moments of laughter can be considered to contain within them *multiple* lines of ethical potential. In other words, different bodies will

encounter affects in different ways, at different times, meaning the same affective-event may inspire very different feelings, emotions, actions and potentials within them (Kraftl and Adey, 2008). Connected to this, the second implication is a need to move away from talking about laughter in ways that “make assumptions about what a person might have been feeling” in laughter, or why they laughed the way they did (McCormack, 2003: 500), which project a personal (and therefore partial and situated) judgement onto the situation of another, generating moral or ethical evaluations based on the same assumed rather than actual premise. Together these premises thus suggest a need to reduce the emphasis on (human) ‘intentionality’ within ethical evaluations of laughter (see also Barad, 2007), particularly given that there is no way of knowing the actual or potential outcomes of laughter in advance (McCormack, 2003).

When held together, therefore, these mediations on laughter serve to augment existing ethical approaches to it through unsettling ideas of the laughing-subject as the location of moral action and instead emphasising laughter itself as capable of enacting multiple lines of ethical potential. As Parvulescu (2010: 118) argues: “[w]e need to start from laughter, rather than the joke.” Even in starting with laughter, however, there is a clear need to recognise that laughter itself is not a singular entity but rather a multiplicity. Laughter, for instance, can be seen as something that *we do* in lots of different ways: consciously; unconsciously; at another; with another; habitually; out of politeness; out of pity; out of care; loudly; softly; silently and so on. Similarly, laughter can be

seen as an entity in its own right: a 'thing' that is capable of acting on us beyond our control (J Katz, 1999). Our own laughter, for instance, can affect our bodily movements, emotions, moods, social positioning and influence. Yet encountering another's laughter can affect us in these ways too, even if that is not their intention when they laugh, if indeed they intend to laugh at all.

Similarly, we might reframe laughter's relationship with the (ethical/moral) subject along similar lines of multiplicity: simultaneously situated, dispersed and relational (see Mol, 2008a). Laughter is situated because it is located in a specific body and often at particular sites of that body – notably the mouth and guts. Similarly, it is also always located in relation to the specific spacetimes of that body: the room it is in; the people that surround it; the cultural norms of gender, race, sexuality and age that it is 'supposed' to uphold, or possibly resist. Laughter is also dispersed, exceeding the control of the conscious body-subject: moving parts of the body in ways that are not intended; disrupting predictable and rational patterns of thought; offending, insulting and otherwise affecting other's bodies in ways that may not be intended. In this way, laughter is (at times) invested with its own (more-than-human) subjectivities. Finally, laughter is relational: connecting similarly situated/dispersed body-subjects to one another or pushing them apart; circulating within and between them, 'sticking' to some and passing over others (Ahmed, 2004); sometimes affecting, other times not, but always forming webs of sociality and inter-connection in some way or another (Haraway, 2016).

As such, where non-representational approaches to ethics have been variously (although far from universally) praised for their engagements with the first two of these subjective positions (Barnett, 2012; Olson, 2016; Popke, 2006), the latter has been suggested as an area in which the non-representational ethos might be yet further extended. As Popke (2009: 84) argues for instance:

If there is a lingering ethical challenge in such work, it might consist in thinking through the extent to which a fidelity to the event can be considered in any sense a shared commitment – whether, that is, the immanent ethics on offer perhaps emphasizes individual encounters and experiences at the expense of a more extensive vision of collective responsibility.”

Similarly, Olson (2017: 7) has more recently noted of non-representational theories, that

When complemented by concepts of justice or care, they also point toward new responsibilities, or an understanding of responsibilities as also emergent from shared space, and therefore not things that can be individualized in the form of human moral agency.

Of these two concepts, justice and care, it is perhaps the latter that for me holds the most promise for expanding non-representational ethics for two reasons. First, there has already been a sustained engagement between the two in empirical work (e.g. Andrews et al., 2014; Cloke and Conradson, 2018; Conradson, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, Darling, 2010, 2011). Second, and perhaps more significantly, ideas of care and non-representational ethics share a

conceptual orientation towards interconnections, generosity and kindness, as noted above (see Thrift, 2005). As such, in the next section, I will explore these ideas further, speculatively engaging with the ways in which care might extend our ethical imaginations of laughter yet further.

2.5 | Thinking with care

As introduced earlier in this chapter, ideas of care as a moral/ethical framework emerged from a series of feminist thinkers through the 1980s and 1990s (see Fisher and Tronto, 1990; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1993) and has been adopted widely within geography as a way of challenging “the (arguably masculine) emphasis on rights and obligations” and instead “stressing relationships with one another, the importance of context, and nurturing relationships” (Hay, 2015: np). Often building on Joan Tronto’s (1993: 103) definition of care as “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” (see also Fisher and Tronto, 1990: 40), advocates of this kind of ethic have thus argued that caring activities should be placed at the centre of all social and political life (see Lawson, 2007, 2009), often in opposition to notions of liberal-democratic political theory (Popke, 2006).

This is not to say that a clear understanding of what care *is* exists, with many suggesting that it is simultaneously: a practice, or work; an

emotional/affective disposition towards others; and a transformative politico-ethic (see Conradson, 2011). Crucially, although these three elements are present in most care, they “are not necessarily equally distributed ... nor do they sit together without tensions and contradictions, but they are held together and sometimes challenge each other in the idea of care” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 5). This tryptic understanding of care as practice/affect/ethic thus opens up space in which we might connect it to the non-representational approaches outlined in the previous section – allowing each to productively augment the other’s style of ethical theorising. As such, the discussion in this section looks to unpack these connections, using the various textures and tensions surrounding care in order to suggest ways in which we might extend out considerations of (non-representational) laughter’s ethical potentials yet further, without foreclosing the exact forms these ethical potentials might take. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 1) argues “while ways of caring can be identified, researched, and understood concretely and empirically, care remains ambivalent in significance and ontology.”

Geographic engagements with care have largely focussed on questions of who cares, where this care takes place and how it shapes spaces and societies in turn? In part, this has involved highlighting the ways in which care work and caring responsibilities are disproportionately taken on by women, people of colour and migrant workers (Dyer et al., 2008; Lawson, 2007; Milligan, 2000), and unpacking the effects this has on ideas of gender and race (McDowell, 2004, 2009; McKie et al., 2002). Yet it has also been about how these factors

affect transnational and local economic relations (Dyer et al., 2008; Raghuram, 2012). Significant attention has also been afforded to the ways in which the responsibilities for care provision are being both ‘de-institutionalised’ (Milligan, 2000; Parr, 2003) and ‘down-loaded’ from the state (Milligan et al., 2007; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). This down-loading has shifted the ‘burden’ of care onto communities and individuals, and into ‘new’ spaces, such as: drop-in centres (Conradson, 2003b; Darling, 2011); community hubs (Andres and Round, 2015; Parr et al., 2004); and returning it to the home (England, 2010; Williams, 2002) – thus further blurring the boundaries between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ care sectors and providers (McEwan and Goodman, 2010; McKie et al., 2002; Twigg, 2000). Attention has also been paid to the ways in which particular spaces of care are experienced, often drawing on Gesler’s (1992, 2003) concept of ‘therapeutic landscapes’, with geographers thus exploring the roles that ‘nature’ (Conradson, 2005; Lea, 2008); the built environment (Parr, 1999); and institutional settings (Andrews et al., 2005; Disney, 2015) play in experiences of care. More recent engagements with non-representational theories have sought to extend these ideas further through thinking about therapeutic or caring ‘assemblages’ (Foley, 2011, 2014), suggesting that health and care are constituted through a “more-than-human, assemblage of spaces, forces and bodies” (Duff, 2014: x) each of which interweave with one another.

Although these questions around space and place are crucial in understanding care, closer connections to the specific themes of this thesis are found within

literatures around the embodied performance of care. Indeed, through drawing on ideas from emotional and affective geographies, a number of scholars have sought to further understand the complex ways in which care is performed and experienced across a variety of scales and scenarios, from intimate proximities (Maclaren, 2014b), to engagements with distanced others (Barnett and Land, 2007), and more recently in terms of care for non-human bodies (Gorman, 2017b, 2017c). Others have sought to challenge the “notion that care is a warm pleasant affection or moralist feel-good attitude” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 2). Drawing on Hochschild’s (1983) concept of emotional labour, for instance, both McDowell (2009) and Dyer et al. (2008) discuss the way in which caring serves to performatively reproduce idealised notions of emotional femininity (also Wolkowitz, 2002). Elsewhere Julia Twigg (2000) discusses the kinds of emotional ambivalence that are both produced, and to some respects required, by carers, particularly when doing ‘dirty’ jobs such as washing bodies and re-dressing wounds. A number of others have similarly outlined the multitude of emotions and affections that care and caring can generate, including frustration, dependence, anger, annoyance and helplessness (Andrews, 2017; Hughes et al., 2005). As Liz Bondi (2008: 250) notes, therefore, care is often paradoxical: it “oppresses and inspires; it hurts and it nurtures; it demeans and it fulfils; it enrages and it moves; it evokes love and it evokes hate.” Similarly, Conradson (2005) argues that care is constituted by a ‘jostling’ mixture of interactions between the self and others which serves to destabilise the notion of care as a simple relationship between

‘self’ and ‘others’ and frames it as a collective and relational mode of becoming.

More recent conceptual work in geography has also sought to extend care beyond engagements with ‘women’s work’ and ‘normative care settings’ (Bartos, 2018; Raghuram, 2016), instead framing care as a vital force holding together collective life (Lawson, 2007; Popke, 2010) – drawing parallels with Jean Luc Nancy’s (2000) work, once again, particularly in terms of his ideas of Being as always a Being-with (or ‘being-in-common’ – see Popke, 2010). As Victoria Lawson (2007: 3) writes, care should be understood “not as a separate kind of relation, but as endemic to (potentially) all social relations that matter ... care is embedded in all of our encounters and interactions, even when care is ignored.” In this sense, life is framed as a “shared accomplishment” (Conradson, 2003b: 503) in which obligations and responsibilities are distributed throughout a ‘web’ of interconnected bodies (Popke, 2006) – similar to Freidberg’s (2004) ‘ethical complex’. Indeed, although ‘smoothed out’ for the sake of clarity, it’s worth noting in this sense that many of the discussions around relational ethics as outlined above do themselves engage with care in this manner (e.g. Barnett, 2005; Barnett et al., 2005). As Popke (2006: 510) notes for instance “ethical consumption can, in fact, shrink psychological distance, and thus establish a relational ethic of care toward human and nonhuman actants within particular commodity chains.” Similarly, through drawing the work of Nancy, JK Gibson-Graham (2006: 86) look to rethink the economy as a form of ‘being-in-common’ thus positioning it as a space in which ethical relations of care and cooperation might be fostered.

Within these literatures, a small body of work has also engaged with ideas of humour and laughter in relation to care. Indeed, laughter is often framed as a form of coping (De Moor, 2005; Sullivan, 2000), with Linda McDowell (2009) for instance arguing that humour and laughter help workers in the care industries to cope with 'dirty' and 'underpaid' jobs through re-establishing a sense of self-worth and subjective autonomy. McGregor (2007: 802) similarly notes the ways in which Zimbabwean care workers coming to work in care in the UK joke together as a means of affirming their otherwise subjugated positions (e.g. talking about "joining the BBC" – "British Bottom Cleaners"). Other accounts have drawn on laughter's capacities to generate forms of intimacy (Green, 1998) and to reduce communicative distances (Davidson, 2001), in order to frame laughter as something that aids the provision of care directly through establishing forms of connection and relationality between carers and those being cared for (Dean and Major, 2008; Leiber, 1986; Mora-Ripoll, 2010). In a similar manner to that discussed with regards to sex workers above (see Nixon, 2017; Sanders, 2004), laughter has also been argued to generate 'positive' forms of relationality and social cohesion between care workers themselves, with Dean and Gregory (2004: 142) noting for instance that for nurses delivering palliative care: "[l]aughing together created cohesiveness that made the team both tighter as a group and better able to thrive in difficult circumstances. This experience was identified as a sense of community."

Approaching laughter with(in) care, therefore, allows for an expanded ethical

conception of it through forcing particular attention onto the ways in which it interplays with ideas of being-in-common with one another (Popke, 2010). On the one hand, given that many of these understandings of laughter and care draw on traditional humour theories, we can augment them through a more sustained engagement with the ways in which *laughter* itself affects the different bodies involved in care, paying particular attention to the kinds of capacities and relations that are enhanced or diminished through its happening (see Braidotti, 2011; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). As McCormack (2003: 503) notes, in this conception, the ethical “question is not only ‘how far can we care’ but also becomes one of cultivating a commitment to those relations that may increase the intensity of attachment and connectivity” (see also Darling, 2010). On the other hand, however, we might also use care to augment our existing non-representational approaches to laughter, whereby we might frame ethical questions not only in terms of how laughter increases or diminishes the intensity of ‘attachment and connectivity’ but also how it can work to “maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto, 1993: 103). To my mind, this second approach is perhaps most pertinent, particularly given that it has the potential to maintain a more open understanding of ethics (of care), which does not rely on “normative assumptions about a universal paradigm of ‘good’ care and legitimate care-givers” (Bartos, 2018: 67), but rather is more attentive to the plurality of practices, emotions/affects and politico-ethical positions and subjectivities through which laughter can enter into relations with care in

different contexts and circumstances (see Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Raghuram, 2016).

This commitment to a more open engagement with care is one that is present, in some respects, throughout the literatures cited thus far, particularly those which have sought to unsettle ideas of care as a particular kind of ‘women’s work’ (Brown, 2003; Lawson, 2007) and as driven by particular emotional/affective dispositions (Bondi, 2008; Tronto, 1993). This line of thinking, however, has been intensified more recently by a number of scholars who have sought to further rethink the ontological and ethical significance of care through engaging with its happenings through a broader set of ‘non-normative’ conceptual and empirical contexts. In thinking through care in the Global South, for instance, Parvati Raghuram (2016) argues that there is a need to move away from ‘global’ conceptions of care (ethics) and instead pay attention to the plurality of ways in which care emerges and takes place in specific localities. In other words, geographers have, for the most part,

simply drawn down on care ethics and applied it to their cases, not explored how this care ethics may be variable in different places. They have not built care ethics back up through a deliberate and sustained engagement with their empirical research (Raghuram, 2016: 524)

In a somewhat different manner, and closer to the conceptual themes of this thesis, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) engages with ethics of care as part of human/scientific relations with soil, in order to ‘trouble’ the idea of care as a purely anthropogenic activity. Drawing on a ‘speculative’ ethical position, she

highlights various forms of more-than-human caring agencies, arguing that there is a need think beyond intentionality as a requirement for care and ethics more generally (see also Barad, 2007; Olson, 2017).

In this sense, Puig de la Bellacasa's (2010, 2012, 2017) speculative ethics not only connects with the ways in which I have already moved to think about laughter through non-representational theories – as something more-than-human and thus capable of acting beyond intentionality (see Hughes, 2016) – but also provides “an enticement to probe further into the meanings of care for thinking and living with more than human [, more than representational,] worlds” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 4). In particular, two related questions emerge from this way of thinking. First, “what is included in ‘our’ world?” (ibid: 57); or, what counts as a legitimate caring agency? Second, in what direction(s) could these expanded agencies be considered: that is to say, what politico-ethical forms and agencies might we identify as care and, more importantly, how does this identification shape the ways in which we might think about laughter with care?

In terms of the first of these questions, Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) specifically mobilises the works of both Bruno Latour (2004, 2005) and Donna Haraway (1991, 1997, 2003, 2016) to suggest that there are a multitude of (hidden) caring relations (such as city maintenance schemes) that when identified and examined, highlight the (inter)dependence between actors/actants (see also Bennett, 2004, 2005). Crucially, she questions what might happen if these

matters are framed, not simply as matters of ‘fact’ or ‘concern’ (Latour, 2004), but rather as matters of care: not through “a fixed explanatory vision or a normative stance (moral or epistemological)” but rather through “a speculative commitment to think about how things could be different if they generated care” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 61). There are certain parallels here with work already existing in non-representational theories. Johnny Darling (2010, 2011) for instance, calls for more experimental approaches to space in order to try and promote care whilst still recognising the plurality of forms that this care might take. Also building on Latour, Thrift (2005) discusses the ways in which hatred, malice and ill-feeling emerge from cosmopolitan city assemblages, contrasting these against the everyday forms of care that Latour (2004) speaks of, and thus suggesting that we might seek to develop “an affirmative micro-politics of productivity which attempts to inject more kindness and compassion into everyday interaction” (Thrift, 2005: 144). Crucially, Thrift (2005: 145) also rejects the normative impulse of ‘care’ as kindness or similar, suggesting that these politics are “not attempts to build utopian realities so much as they are attempts to ‘produce ways of living and models of action within the existing real’, thereby ‘learning to inhabit the world in a better way’ (Boudriaud 2002, 13).”

These attempts to loosen the bonds of what counts as both world and care thus open up questions around the ways in which we might (re)think its relationship with both the political and the ethical (see Raghuram, 2016). Here Puig de la Bellacasa focusses her attention on the “as well as possible” within

Joan Tronto's (1993: 103) definition, arguing that "it points to how the 'ethics' in an ethics of care cannot be about a realm of normative moral obligations but rather about thick, impure, involvement in the world where the question of how to care needs to be posed" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 6). Furthermore, the "as well as possible" renders care as something that is not only ontologically and morally ambivalent, but also politically ambivalent, posing questions about who decides what as well as possible might mean in a given moment, and thus which directions and forms care should or could take (see also Mol, 2008b). This once again expands the question of what counts as care through opening up space in which we might recognise a plurality of caring agencies and practices that centre around a series of politico-ethical motivations that might not in themselves appear caring in its normative sense – including those that generate conflict or seek to control others (see Disney, 2015; Schliehe, 2015; Tait, 2011). Ann Bartos (2018) illustrates this well through engaging with the various caring agencies involved in the "Brock Turner" rape case, demonstrating how care can be encapsulated not only in terms of the work done to aid the victim but also through the work done to maintain, continue and repair the worlds in which Turner himself inhabits so that he may live in them as well as possible.

Together, therefore, these discussions around care open up a number of questions for how we might augment non-representational ethics of laughter in new and productive ways, posing a series of further propositions through which we might consider laughter's relation with care itself. First, they give

space for a consideration of laughter as something that is capable of enacting (or indeed disrupting) care in a manner that exceeds the intentionality of the laughter themselves and thus enabling a further displacement of the (moral-)subject as the locus for ethical thinking (Simpson, 2017). Second, they enable a broader conception of the plurality of ways in which care might manifest (emotionally, practically spatially, politically etc.) which provides a wider set of resources for thinking about the myriad of ways in which laughter and care might affect one another, including in ways that might be occluded at first. Third, they open up a wider range of political standpoints within which we might consider laughter's engagements with care, allowing a speculative and somewhat generous mode of attention to the specific (ethical) work that laughter is doing at a given moment – the ways in which it might be maintaining, continuing and repairing worlds – allowing us to 'value' it, without necessarily requiring that we 'agree' with it. Indeed, as Raghuram (2016: 526) argues, sometimes "we need to focus on uncomfortable relations inherent in care and to use those to re-think care as practice and ethics."

Ultimately these questions suggest a need for both a more multiple and a more situated approach to laughter with care: one that is capable of attention to both the multiplicity and plurality of ethical potentials that emerge from them at a given moment, without reverting to universal or normative ideas of what forms these engagements 'ought' to take (see Nancy, 2003). In drawing these ideas together, and thinking forward to the rest of the thesis therefore, the final section of this chapter (re)turns to the idea of the 'refrain' (McCormack, 2013)

posing this as a vital framework for experimenting with, and enacting, this singular-plural ethical imagination (Nancy, 2000).

2.6 | Ethical refrains for worlds of multiplicity

The experience of time and space has changed, the confidence in the association between scientific and moral judgments has collapsed, aesthetics has triumphed over ethics as a prime focus of social and intellectual concern ... ephemerality and fragmentation take precedence over eternal truths and unified politics (Harvey, 1989: 328)

When David Harvey wrote these words of the postmodern condition, at the outset of geography's 'moral turn' (see Smith, 1997b), they were something of a lament: harking back towards a moment in time now/then lost, when, as he perceived it at least, there could have been a global, unified and universal struggle towards "a decent and sustainable form of life" for all (see also Smith, 2004). We might well question the situated nature of Harvey's version of events here, particularly in terms of who sets the bounds of what these ethics might and ought to look like, how 'eternal' his 'truths' actually are and indeed whether there ever could be such a thing as a 'universal' politics, but either way, he is right to note that postmodernism has killed this vision. Instead, ideas of the singularity and universality of the world have been replaced by the idea of many different worlds, each containing many different people, with many different experiences, ideas, politics, struggles, passions and cares: worlds of multiplicity, in which 'ethics' might never be a unified/ing force but rather emerges from the particular contexts and circumstances of encounters, affording them a multitude of possibilities and potentials (McCormack, 2003).

It is thus within these worlds that I look to approach laughter with care, offering a series of tactical suggestions through which we might not only engage with their worlds of multiplicity, but actively use these worlds to frame both laughter and care as ontological and epistemological multiplicities, unbounded from their normative assumptions, and therefore hold their ethical potentials as always contingent and emergent, rather than pre-determined. I have suggested the advantage to such an approach is that it belies a Panglossian account of laughter as a social 'good' or 'ill' (Buckley, 2005): neither producing dour denouncements of its capacities to insult (Gantar, 2005), ridicule (Billig, 2005), or subjugate (Eagleton, 1989); nor suggesting that it is actually 'the best medicine' (Amarasingam, 2010; Francis, 1994; Provine, 2004). Rather, such an approach seeks a more generous style of engagement that affirms laughter's capacities to "maintain, continue and repair our worlds so that we can live in them as well as possible" (Tronto, 1993: 103) whilst always remaining attentive to the sense that "as well as possible" may not mean the same thing to everyone involved, or affect them in the same way (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

For all its advantages, however, such an approach also makes what Maurice Blanchot describes as a "fragmentary demand" on the ontological cum ethical thinking and writing that it envelops (Blanchot, 2003, cited in James, 2006): "the demand imposed by a thinking of Being in which any possibility of unity and identity has withdrawn, and where the multiple demands to be thought without reference to any overarching unity or totality" (James, 2006: 3). As

briefly mentioned in Chapter 1 therefore, in attending to these fragmentary demands throughout this thesis and beyond, rather than seeking unity or totality as suggested by Harvey (1989) and others (Olson and Sayer, 2009; Sayer and Storper, 1997; Smith, 1997a), I follow Derek McCormack (2013), Kathleen Stewart (2010) and Isabelle Stengers (2008) in suggesting ‘the refrain’ as a conceptual resource through which we might grasp at the specificities of these fragments, without foreclosing their or our potential to be or become otherwise (McCormack, 2013: 8).

Everyday understandings of the refrain position it as a rhythmically repeated element of a song or poem, that has lyrical or melodic consistency to it: a “talismanic referent point in a song or composition, a repetition to which a tune is anchored, and often the cathartic moment of vibratory crescendo and resonance in which all singers and instruments enjoin” (Gerlach, 2015: 282). Following Deleuze and Guattari (1988), however, the refrain takes on another, only partially related, conception within non-representational theories. As McCormack (2013) and Stewart (2010) both note: a refrain can emerge around anything that adds structure to an otherwise chaotic world, scoring it with intensity and attachment. These refrains may appear at consistent rhythmic intervals and be exactly repeated, yet they do not necessarily have to be this way, sometimes occurring in slightly different forms and at uneven intervals. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 120) themselves describe refrains of colour, posture and architecture. Similarly, slogans (Anderson, 2014; Closs Stephens, 2016), maps (Gerlach, 2015), sports commentary, dance

and other rhythmic movements (McCormack, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2013), and even the arguments of human geography as a discipline (Gerlach and Jellis, 2015; McCormack, 2010, 2012), have all been positioned by geographers as refrains capable of drawing together blocks of space-time, and marking out some consistency within an otherwise differentiating world (Stewart, 2010).

Crucially, refrains are not simply aesthetic qualities but rather capture the (multiple) modes of 'territorialisation' through which spacetimes are composed around specific, situated "practices, techniques and habits" (McCormack, 2013: 7) such as the ways in which different animals use many methods (sounds, smells etc.) to mark their territories (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). Similarly, "the refrain is radically impersonal, or at least more than human. It does not necessarily originate through the expression of some inner psychological impulse" (McCormack, 2013: 8). As such, refrains should (once again) not be thought of as predetermined, but rather as modes of 'valence' that can draw and hold multiplicities together, but can also interrupt the existing functionality of spacetimes, and the bodies that inhabit them, 'deterritorialising' them and 'reterritorialising' them into different forms capable of doing different things (Dewsbury, 2011). These de/reterritorialisations can themselves take a number of forms and be apprehended in different ways – both as relatively 'concrete' spatial entities such as ideas of 'place', and more ephemeral spatialities such as 'affective atmospheres' (Stewart, 2011). Furthermore, despite the refrain not being "a strictly phenomenological concept", as McCormack (2013: 8) notes, it "also

points to the affective consistency of what Guattari calls ‘existential territories’” and thus also suggests that subjectivity is another way in which refrains might territorialise (see also Guattari, 1995, 2000).

My contention, therefore, is that in approaching laughter with care, we might frame each concept as a refrain: repeated reference points around which bodies, experiences and spacetimes can acquire resonance (Gerlach, 2015), yet are always also capable of territorialising in different ways, at different times. In terms of laughter, for instance, the refrain offers a means through which we can grasp the multiplicity and the indeterminacy of laughter, as well as its capacity to do things – to de/re/territorialise bodies, spaces, modes of relation and subjectivities – without necessarily determining what that something might be. In this sense, the refrain allows us to think through the sense that laughter sometimes seems to territorialise in ways that match the assumed consequences of its ‘causes’ yet can also territorialise in ways that are more surprising: mobilising actions and affections that have very different trajectories to those that humour theories might suggest. In a similar manner, we might note the multiplicity of ways in which care can territorialise: through a plurality of different practices; as a plurality of emotions and affects; and, indeed, from a plurality of political and ethical standpoints. The emergence of care can also have a multiplicity of territorialised outcomes: enhancing capacities and generating intimate relations; but equally capable of restricting or controlling bodies, making them feel helpless, dependant angry or upset. Indeed, as will become apparent, both laughter and care can arguably

territorialise in multiple different ways at the same time depending on the situations, circumstances and orientations from which they are encountered (see Ahmed, 2006).

In one sense, therefore, this thesis serves to uncover the multiple different ways in which laughter and care territorialise and unpack the ethical potentials and implications of these different territorialisations. Indeed, although the refrain itself is somewhat implicit in later chapters, it remains present, through discussions of ‘enactment’ (Chapter 4), folded subjectivities (Chapter 5), atmospheric territories (Chapter 6), and (non)relationalities (Chapter 7)² – each of which generates particular styles of thinking about practice, affect and ethics (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Perhaps more significantly, however, in attending to the territorialisations of laughter and care together, the thesis produces another more complex refrain – the refrain of *laughter with care* – through which the ‘individual’ multiplicities of laughter and care, and their possible de/re/territorialisations, fragment and multiply yet further. This further multiplication is, of course, also a further multiplication of their ethical potentials, and therefore of ethics itself, meaning an almost unlimited combination of different possibilities and potentials can emerge from a given situation and thus further precludes any sense of a (universal) understanding of the ethics that can be applied in relation to

² Although I have ascribed these concepts to the chapters in which they are most central, in truth they all permeate throughout each chapter to more or less of an extent

anything other than the specific singular-plurality of the circumstances through which laughter and care take place (Nancy, 2000).

In following this fragmented pathway still further, therefore, we can start to realise that ethics itself must also be understood as a refrain: a particular mode of impersonal territorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) which allows a consistency to the ways in which we analyse, address and otherwise think about situations, yet must never be foreclosed to a particular set of normative principles and ideas. Indeed, we might well argue in this sense that ethics themselves may sometimes “wander beyond the familiar” (McCormack, 2013: 8). It is for this reason that I am only seeking to ‘approach’ the ethics of laughter with care: to get close *enough* to suggest ways of thinking and moving within their ethical spaces without ever suggesting that these ways of thinking and moving are the only ones that exist or that we might deploy, or indeed that the specific modes of orientation might be the only angle from which we approach.

Indeed, this recognition of the limits of approaching refrains is what guides the structure and form of the later chapters themselves, which can be seen as a series of different approaches, each deploying different modes of abstraction in order to ‘experience’, and experiment with, different ways of thinking and knowing the ethics of laughter with care (McCormack, 2012). Each chapter is thus situated differently in terms of both conceptual terrain and modes of enquiry: they listen (Chapter 4); practice (Chapter 5); affect (Chapter 6); and

press on the limits of life (Chapter 7) – meaning that although in many ways they address similar ethical questions and circumstances, the outcomes of these approaches and the ethical knowledges they produce are somewhat different each time. That said, all the chapters do have a particular situation in-common: taking place within a particular methodological framework (ethnography) and set of locations (care homes in the UK) which both serve to bind them together and to frame the kinds of ethics that emerge from them. As such, the next chapter seeks to set out these frameworks and the specificities through which I engaged with them – pointing towards the ways in which these serve to situate the partiality of the knowledges produced in later chapters (Haraway, 1988; Madge, 1993; Mol, 2002; Rose, 1997).

Chapter 3: Situating knowledges

We learn to be worldly from grappling with, rather than generalising from, the ordinary.

(Haraway, 2008, p.3; cited in Wilson, 2017: 14)

3.1 | Introduction

In thinking about the ethics of laughter, the previous Chapter argued for more situated approaches that are both non-representational and imbued with care. In doing this, I argued for a need to recognise both laughter and care as more-than-human forces capable of affecting, and being affected, by various bodies in different ways and thus to attend to the specifics of each event when making ethical judgements (McCormack, 2003). Indeed, this is a running argument throughout the thesis, with later chapters looking to apply various theoretical frameworks to events of laughter and care, in order to generate ethical accounts in such a manner. These later chapters, however, are also framed by another wider situation, both in terms of the places in which they happen and the ways in which they have been approached by me as a researcher. Arguably, none of this is particularly novel. The fact that space and place matter in terms of constructing the forms, functions and, crucially, meanings of both laughter and care is widely recognised. Similarly, the claim that knowledges are always

partial, and situated with certain sets of embodied power-relations (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997) features in a countless array of geographic and social-science books, papers, chapters and theses. Needless to say, however, these things do still matter, and crucially they matter in different, new and novel ways, whenever a researcher enters the field, picks up a pen, or opens their mouths to speak.

As such, this chapter looks not to make these claims specifically, but to unpack some of the ways in which they matter in this thesis, and crucially to set out how I have negotiated them in constructing the knowledges, ideas, and judgments that follow. This chapter thus outlines the methodology on which the claims in this thesis rest, with three elements to this methodology being of key importance: first, it involves a specific kind of method – (non-representational) ethnography; second, it involves specific places – nursing care homes in the UK; and third it involves myself as a specific researcher with a specific set of embodied, emotional, ethical engagements and attachments to the other two factors. It is, therefore, the relationship between these factors that serves to situate this research in a particular way, and it is those relations that the chapter looks to outline.

In doing this, I first discuss ethnographic research in general, thinking particularly about the ways in which ethnography can be and become folded into non-representational theories and methods (Vannini, 2015a) and the differences between this way of working and conventional ethnographies.

Following that, I look more specifically at the research undertaken, firstly by discussing the research sites, and secondly by focussing on the specific ways I engaged with them which I have framed in terms of ‘becoming a body at work’ (McMorran, 2012). Within this section, I also discuss other, supplementary research encounters, notably with two theatre groups, and reflect on the challenges, difficulties, successes and failures of these various methods. The final substantive section focusses on the ways in which the research translates from ‘field’ to ‘page’, through a discussion of the various modes of writing that have occurred alongside and around the methods themselves. Key throughout this section is a recognition of the ways in which writing serves to displace ‘the subject’ and generate multiple modes and forms of subjectivity, each with their own situations and capacities to affect and be affected. The concluding section looks forward to the chapters that follow, highlighting the connections made between them and this chapter.

3.2 | Ethnographic research

Ethnography was developed within anthropology as a means of studying various indigenous cultures (e.g. Malinowski, 1922). The emphasis of ethnography was to generate qualitative accounts of the ways in which different societies’ cultures shape the ways in which people live their lives (Watson and Till, 2010). Following the cultural turn, the landscape of ethnography shifted, however, with ethnographers reflecting critically on both the ontological status of ‘culture’ in an increasingly mobile world and the often-problematic ways in which it is represented within ethnographic

accounts (see Clifford and Marcus, 1986). It is thus within this milieu that geographers have primarily engaged with ethnography, simultaneously adding a more nuanced understanding of how different spatialities both generate and affect the processes and phenomena through which different forms of culture, society and power emerge and take place (Watson and Till, 2010). Indeed, given the interest of both feminist and non-representational theories in performance and performative culture, ethnography is increasingly being adopted as a means of producing more research that is based on close, 'active' and embodied attention to these processes, rather than wider surveillance of trends and patterns (Crang, 2003, 2005; McCormack, 2003; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000).

Geographic ethnographies are diverse and differentiated across site and subjects, with notable works including Arun Saldanha's (2007) ethnography of the social spaces of rave culture in Goa; Nick Megoran's (2006) writing on the political landscapes and borders of Uzbekistan/Kyrgyzstan; and Hester Parr's (1998, 2002) engagements with various (ab)normal bodies in terms of mental and physical health in urban spaces. Despite these differences, Megoran offers a definition that captures in broad terms what ethnography involves.

[I]t classically denotes an extended sojourn amongst a group of people where the researcher immerses himself or herself in daily life, continuously reflecting on meticulously kept fieldnotes, to learn the social understandings of the group *in their own terms* (Megoran, 2006:

625, emphasis mine)

Megoran's definition is useful in highlighting several key elements of ethnography: an extended engagement; immersion within a group; a focus on the everyday; and the continuous reflection on, and negotiation of, relationships between researcher and researched, insider and outsider, self and other, field and home, body and world (see also Watson and Till, 2010) – with this last category forming an increasingly significant element of geographic ethnographies (Dewsbury, 2010; McDowell, 2009; Parr, 1998; Paterson, 2009; Vannini, 2015a). Another key area in which geographers have advanced ethnographic thinking is in enacting what George Marcus (1986, 1995) terms multi-sited ethnographies. As Watson and Till (2010) argue, geographers are particularly well placed to conduct ethnographies in this vein due to the ways in which they have theorised the complex relationships between local and global configurations, including through migration, citizenship and networks of information, communication and knowledges (e.g. Massey, 1994, 2005).

Exemplary of this advantage are Cindi Katz's (1994) discussions of the ways in which her fieldwork in Sudan and New York City generated a series of unexpected interconnections through which the differences between the two places become juxtaposed to their similarities as part of shared networks of globalized capital and culture. Significant here are the ways in which recognition of the interconnected nature of places complicates notions of 'the

field' itself; a recognition of the "double displacement" (C Katz, 1994: 68) that leaves the research always somewhere else: whether that be in relation to the locale (being away from home); the relationship with the peoples they are researching (being within different power structures) or being displaced from the field itself whilst 'writing up' the research, either in a field notebook or as a research paper afterwards. Katz thus calls for a recognition that

By operating within these multiple contexts all the time, we may begin to learn not to displace or separate so as to see and speak, but to see, be seen, speak, listen and be heard in the multiply determined fields that we are everywhere, always in. (C Katz, 1994: 72)

Ethnography can thus be seen not just as a method, but rather as a wider approach to research, involving "long-term and open-ended commitment, generous attentiveness, relational depth, and sensitivity to context" (Ingold, 2014: 384) – in turn dislodging claims about a particular set of methods or theoretical approach as being ethnographic in and of themselves. That said, there are particular methods that tend to be deployed within ethnographic work. Indeed, ethnography often acts as a synonym for 'participant-observation' (Watson and Till, 2010), but it can also involve multiple other techniques including, but not limited to: interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and at times even textual and online sources (Harbers et al., 2002; Ingold, 2014; Marcus, 1995; Megoran, 2006; Van Maanen, 1988; Vannini, 2015a). Hockey and Forsey (2012) have even argued convincingly for a form of ethnography based entirely on interviews and involving no participant-

observation at all.

My focus here remains predominantly on participant-observation given that it has both arguably held the most sway in non-representational ethnographies (Vannini, 2015a) and more importantly formed the central element of my own methodology. Participant-observation encompasses the documentation of 'everyday worlds' (observation), done by a researcher who is actively involved within the context of those same worlds (participation) (Watson and Till, 2010). Participant-observation thus looks to obviate the structured and controlled environments through which much purely discursive research is conducted by embedding the researcher within social interactions that are somewhat beyond their control. As such it seeks to move towards emic (self-ascribed) rather than etic (researcher-ascribed) modes of analysis, categorisation and thought (Megoran, 2006).

Of course, none of this is intended to deny the various power relations that are involved within any research process (C Katz, 1994), particularly in terms of the ways in which they might affect the social interactions in which they are taking part (Madge, 1993; McDowell, 1992; Megoran, 2006). As such emphasis is placed once again on being reflexive and paying keen attention to the researcher's positionality (Rose, 1997). This is, in part, about recognising one's position as either 'insider' or 'outsider', or gradients between the two, but also through detailed engagements with the researcher's own bodily sensations, emotions, experiences and affective capacities (Crang, 2003, 2005; Dewsbury,

2010; Madge, 2016, 2018). These movements are intended to harness the multiple subjectivities and positions through which the field is encountered, juxtaposing them against one another in creative and productive ways (C Katz, 1994, 2017; Lancione, 2017; also Madge, 2018) – albeit following Gillian Rose’s (1997) important intervention, the impossibility of knowing the self fully is now widely recognised.

Non-representational theories have made a number of contributions both to and through participant-observation based methodologies (Andrews, 2017; Dewsbury, 2010; Thrift, 2000; Vannini, 2015a). Indeed, the attempt to move beyond representation, for Thrift (2003: 3) at least, precludes the kinds of research based on interview and survey data in which the world becomes “nicely packaged up in a few supposedly illustrative quotations”. In these non-representationally informed methods, therefore, the body again takes a more prominent role although with the recognition of it as an unbounded and volatile subject, rather than a discrete object of knowledge (Dewsbury, 2010; Grosz, 1994). As such, the impetus of these styles of engagement is to generate an attunement “to thought as inclusive of affect, and, in general, a sense of the ‘tone’ of any situation, the play of singularity, which might (and only might) produce new virtualizations” (Thrift 2004: 85, cited in Dewsbury, 2010: 328). Thrift (2000) thus suggests ‘observant-participation’ rather than ‘participant-observation’ as a way of distinguishing this style of engagement and foregrounding the researcher as an always active participant in the worlds they are observing (also Dewsbury, 2010). As Andrews (2017: 12) writes “this

involves doing the same thing as the participant, getting more entangled in the action and invested in the effort and experience.”

Andrews (2017) adds further clarification to this style of observant-participation by noting two separate but connected modes through which it can be enacted: ‘witnessing’ and ‘acting into’. ‘Witnessing’ is similar to the mode of research described above and involves the researcher exposing themselves to the multitude of things, events, rhythms and matterings, which, even if they seem inconsequential, serve to constitute space-time and allow the emergence of different worlds. In this sense, we might argue that witnessing has been the primary approach through which non-representational theories, ethics and politics have developed. McCormack (2003) for instance argues that through witnessing (rather than representing) the world, we can develop a means of describing and analysing events that have more fidelity than those accounts based on the representational economies of signs, symbols and meanings. Dewsbury (2003: 1908–1909) similarly notes that “witnessing sees us move ethically beyond being ‘all too human’ to being open to the world as a whole”.

Acting into is a somewhat more recent form of engagement. Although similar to witnessing, it refers to the generation of an intimate relationship between the (subjective) researcher and what happens in the field (Andrews, 2017). Acting into thus marks a significant muddying of the relationship between the scholarly and the lived, thus enacting an account of the field through what

Bourdieu (1990) describes as a scholastic point of view – one imbued with theoretical insights and concepts that are generated in conjunction with the research rather than deduced from it (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; Massumi, 2002). Different to witnessing, acting into is therefore characterised by an increasingly deep entanglement between the descriptive and analytical, as well as the speculative and the imaginative – with recent works by Kathleen Stewart, Derek McCormack, and Paul Simpson (amongst others) proving exemplary of this ethnographic style (McCormack, 2014; Simpson, 2009, 2013, 2015, Stewart, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2017). Whilst I adopted both modes, overall my research is perhaps more reflective of acting into rather than witnessing, given that my experience of the field remains intimately tied to theory and the generation and application of various concepts rather than simply describing what happens in the field.

Given this element within my own work, I am therefore forced to question whether my own research practice is indeed ‘ethnography’. On the one hand, it clearly is ethnography. My research involves extended sojourns for instance and focusses on everyday life, practices, relations and emotions between the inhabitants. Similarly, it involves significant moments of reflection, focussed on my own body, feelings, and thoughts, and the wider social-relations, power structures and cultures in which I am enmeshed. My work has involved complex negotiations of ‘home’ and ‘field’ in which these two locations become increasingly blurred (C Katz, 1994); and a written text in which information about these worlds is narrated in order to tell stories about the relationship

between laughter and care across multiple spacetimes (see Marcus, 1995). On the other hand, however, I remain vitally aware of a recent call by Tim Ingold (2014) for more precision in what we mean by ethnography in order to preserve the rigour and critical impetus of the method; and thus, a recognition that my own engagement falls short of his and others' definitions. As such, whilst I will ultimately continue to discuss my research as ethnography, I wish to offer two key caveats before I do so.

The first caveat involves thinking back to Megoran's (2006: 625) definition. I am hard pressed to make any claim to be engaging with these worlds and the people within them "in their own terms". This again is because of the conceptual shifts I have made in cultivating a sensibility towards laughter, rather than humour – which has generated both a way of thinking and a vocabulary that is somewhat divorced from most people's everyday terminologies. This particular issue was apparent throughout the various engagements I had with people 'in the field', however, has become intensified subsequently through my attempts to feed back the findings to various participants. This is something that is perhaps relatively common to theoretically informed 'ethnographic' work, also discussed by Annemarie Mol (2002) in her discussion of ontologies of a disease through Actor-Network Theory, in which she notes that when presenting back to medical professionals, she had rendered their worlds altogether too strange to be recognisable.

The second caveat is one that I wish to make more productive and relates to the research focus. “Quite literally”, as Tim Ingold (2014: 385) notes, ethnography “means writing about people”. Whilst my research may be people-focused, this is not its sole focus. Indeed, the theoretical move to render laughter as more-than-human (and therefore as about more-than-people) complicates the idea that I am researching or writing about people. Furthermore, the framing of this thesis within geographical literatures means that attention is paid as much to the space-times and places that people occupy and emerge out of, as to the people themselves. In this sense, I am not attempting to replicate anthropology here. My interest and approach are somewhat different in that I am writing about worlds – literally conducting geo-graphy, rather than ethnography per se. These worlds, in turn, are not just human, people, worlds but rather ones that form alongside, around and sometimes in absence of people, and equally, serve to ‘form’ the people themselves. Indeed, it is these worlds that augment the power of my whole approach to laughter with care. As such, whether technically ‘ethnography’ or not, it is this writing about worlds that I wish to hold onto as I move on to the next section.

3.3 | Researching in care homes

Having begun to situate the knowledges presented in this thesis within geographic-ethnography as a particular methodological framework, it’s important now to think more clearly about the situatedness of the spacetimes in which these research engagements took place (Carmalt, 2011; C Katz, 1996;

Lancione, 2017). As already noted, the primary research sites for this thesis are two individual nursing care homes both located on the outskirts of Birmingham in the UK. We might thus argue that the ethnographic engagement is one that is multi-sited, or multi-local, with the research sites connected by their placing within wider geographies, networks and flows of capital (Marcus, 1995). Put in another way, the research can be seen as simultaneously situated within both the idea of 'the generic nursing care home' and the more specific details of the two nursing care homes themselves. Indeed, both ideas frame the thinking and ethics that emerge, shaping (and somewhat limiting) the structures, forms and meanings of care and laughter that I engage with, and therefore, the kinds of relationships between the two that I draw out.

This is not to negate the utility or power of engaging with care homes. Indeed, nursing care homes form remarkably nuanced research sites for thinking about the interaction between laughter and care. They are, after all, places in which laughter and care enacted and often celebrated. Similarly, they are places imbued with power relations; places where social, economic, cultural, political, ethical issues emerge, are contested and negotiated, sometimes resolved, sometimes not. They are incredibly diverse places in terms of their inhabitants. Places where residents, carers, nurses, activities co-ordinators, managers, cooks, cleaners, caretakers, family members, doctors, ambulance and delivery drivers, and a whole host of other non-/more-than-human actors all interact in different ways at different times. Perhaps more importantly, for

this project at least, they are also places in which many kinds of emotions and affections emerge and are felt: love, joy, sadness, upset, hurt, longing, boredom, excitement, smiles, tears and of course laughter. In other words, they are places in which many different ‘lives’ are lived.

As such, this section explores the wider context of care homes in the UK, before moving on to discuss the details of the two specific homes that I primarily engaged with. Following these two parts, I offer a longer discussion that outlines how I engaged with those homes, framed through the idea of becoming a body at work (McMorran, 2012), and detailing the ways in which my body, emotions, positionality and other ethical issues shaped the relations I have with the research. Finally, I move on to discuss another set of (more minor) engagements with nursing care homes that also inform the thesis – time spent with two theatre groups who perform in care homes – recognising the importance but also failures of these attempts to expand the empirical scope of the thesis.

3.3.1 / Care homes in context

There are multiple types of institutions providing care for people in the UK, however, the biggest constituent of this sector are care homes for older people. There are two main types of care home: a residential care home, providing “care and support throughout the day and night”; and a nursing home which offers the same service but with the additional support of a 24-hour qualified nurse (Care Quality Commission [CQC] 2017: np). In referring to ‘care homes’

here, I am therefore following the definition set out by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as including “all residential and nursing homes registered with the Care Quality Commission³ where mainly older people live” (NICE, 2015: 1), however it’s worth noting that primarily I have engaged with *nursing* homes.

Lievesley, et al. (2011) set out a detailed discussion of the history of the care home as an institution. Prior to the introduction of the ‘Welfare State’ in the 1940s, older people were either expected to work, or if they were ‘infirm’ would fall under the effects of the Poor Law, meaning either a very low stipendiary income, or an institutional place in a workhouse (although there were a small number of care homes from the early twentieth century – see Thomson, 2008). In the 1950s and 1960s, much of this responsibility of caring for older people was transferred onto the state, bringing with it an increasing number of care homes (Lievesley et al., 2011). The sector was, however, relatively quickly privatised, with growing numbers of homes being bought out by private providers from the 1970s onwards. ‘Local authority beds’ thus dropped from around 60% of the market in 1970 to the contemporary figure of around 8% (LaingBuisson, 2015). Within this historical perspective, it’s also important to note that there has been a relatively static number of care home places and residents over the last two decades or so (Smith, 2016), perhaps

³ The Care Quality Commission (CQC) forms the primary regulator for care homes, with a remit for ensuring the quality, standards and safety of care provision across the sector

reflecting a wider shift, noted within the geographical literature on care, towards people being cared for in their own homes rather than within institutions (see Atkinson et al., 2011; Dyck, 2005; England, 2010; Williams, 2002).

That said, the contemporary care home sector remains vast in the UK. There are roughly 16,000 care homes (CQC, 2017) providing full time medical/social care for around 300,000 people over the age of 65 (Smith, 2016). These homes are split across three main types of ownership; private ownership is the largest, providing about 200,000 beds (about 76% of all places); with voluntary sector making up around 16% and local authority beds the other 8% (Jarrett, 2017). These figures are however perhaps misleading and so it is worth noting that local authorities still pay for at least part of around 60% of all care home places in the UK (Competitions and Markets Authority, 2017). These various statistics, therefore, point to an increasing reliance on neoliberal market principles in the UK care sector (Barnes, 2012); a factor that is perhaps crucial in understanding both the structures and challenges facing contemporary care homes.

Indeed, the current economic and political climate in the UK has increased pressures on the care home sector over the last ten years, generating several claims more recently that the sector is experiencing (or on the verge of) a crisis (Jarrett, 2017; Roberts and Barnard, 2017). In 2011 for instance, the largest private provider of care homes in the UK, Southern Cross, collapsed, causing

750 care homes to close, or be sold off (Roberts and Barnard, 2017) and there have been increasing numbers of homes run by smaller private providers closing in the years since (Competitions and Markets Authority, 2017). Much of the issue relates to increased budget cuts and financial pressures on Local Authorities, emerging as part of the Conservative/Coalition government's austerity agenda which has seen local authority funding fall by around £4.6 billion over the last five years (Roberts and Barnard, 2017). Given that, as noted above, local authorities are the biggest purchasers of care home beds, this reduction in their purchasing power affects the whole sector, not just local authority run homes (Jarrett, 2017).

Another key factor placing pressure on care homes are issues around staffing. In part, this relates to cost: with the CQC reporting that on average staffing forms around 60% of a care home's overall costs (Roberts and Barnard, 2017). Roberts and Barnard argue that this high level of cost is compounded by two key factors. Firstly, the recent introduction of the 'National Living Wage' has forced costs up, with most staff members paid at Minimum Wage levels – currently set at £7.50 for people over 25, but due to rise to £9 by 2020. Similarly, there is a shortage of experienced and willing care staff, nurses and managers. Indeed, given that non-British EU workers constitute around 7% of the adult social care workforce this problem is currently being further compounded by the UK's decision to leave the European Union. Ultimately this means that care homes are increasingly having to supplement their staff with more expensive 'agency' staff, employed through external providers for short-

term contracts (usually a single shift).

This discussion of care homes thus sets the backdrop for thinking more generally about the ways in which ‘care’ is enacted in care homes themselves. In part, this relates back to a distinction made by Tronto (1993) as to the various roles people can play in relationships of care, particularly through recognising the entrenched ethico-political responsibilities of the state/private providers in ensuring that older populations have access to good quality care when it is needed (see also Barnes, 2012). There have been studies that have confirmed a higher standard of care within privatised care homes (e.g. Comondore et al., 2016). That said, even these studies seem to question the premises of their own findings, particularly noting the disproportionately high costs associated with private care provision and thus the extra burden ultimately placed on older people and their families (e.g. Kane, 2003).

Perhaps more directly apparent in this thesis, however, this discussion sets up some key structural issues that emerge, either explicitly or implicitly, throughout the empirical details in the chapters that follow – notably around staff shortages and lack of money. Indeed, this often-occluded relationship between the experiential registers of being in care homes and the socio-structural geographies within which the care home sits is somewhat vital to engage with the lives (and laughter) of those in care. These issues after all frame not only the feelings, emotions, affective and physical capacities of staff members who are delivering care, but also shape the experiences of the

residents themselves in much the same way, although often without the agential-capacities to do much, if anything, about them. That said, even within this shared wider geography the ways in which care is enacted in individual care homes can also differ dramatically, with the majority of the empirical detail in this thesis focussing on two such places. It is thus to explaining these two places that I now turn, focussing on the similarities and differences between them.

3.3.2 / Two care homes

The majority of the research in this thesis took place in two nursing care homes, both on the outskirts of Birmingham in the UK. For the sake of this thesis, the homes have both been given pseudonyms: Winterbourne and Summerview Care Homes. My engagement with these two particular homes was facilitated by the Enabling Research in Care Homes (ENRICH) network, a group focussing on the facilitation of research within care home settings, as part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). In this sense, I was not entirely in control of choosing the care homes I engaged with as each initial interaction was conducted by ENRICH's coordinator, Mary. Indeed, Mary suggested both care homes because she felt they would fit with the ethos of the research project, describing them as homes "where lots of work was done with humour", and "where there is an almost constant laughter" respectively.

On paper, both care homes are similar to each other. In terms of their location, they both had similar demographics in terms of age, ethnicities, deprivation

levels and the political makeup of the local authority. They are both also somewhat typical of the sector described above. Both homes, for instance, were privately owned by small group providers (two and one home groups respectively), yet had a large number of residents who were (at least partly) funded by the Local Authority. Each also had beds for around forty residents and were at near maximum occupancy for the whole time I engaged with them. The majority of residents had some form of dementia, as is typical of care homes more widely (NICE, 2015). Similarly, the majority of the staff in both homes were women, with high proportions of these women being non-British/British Migrants from both EU and non-EU countries. At the time of the research, both care homes had also been assessed by the CQC and deemed as 'needing improvement', although have subsequently been deemed as 'overall good'. Despite these similarities, however, it's worth noting key differences between the two homes, both 'hard' and 'soft', as well as in terms of the ways that I engaged with them.

In terms of hard differences between Winterbourne and Summerview, perhaps the most obvious is in terms of their buildings. Winterbourne is both an old and relatively new building. Originally, a large house, it was expanded in the 1990s as a custom-built care home. The two sections of the building are connected by a single door and essentially operate, for the most part, as two separate facilities (although sharing kitchen, laundry and administration). The older section forms a 'dementia unit' with space for nine residents and was set up more like a 'communal home' rather than a care home, whereas the larger,

newer section (to which I will now be exclusively referring unless explicitly stated otherwise) was more akin to a 'standard' care home. The new section has two floors: the upper floor is largely 'residential', containing bedrooms and bathrooms, alongside storage rooms for linen and laundry; with the ground floor providing largely 'communal' and 'work' spaces such as the kitchen, dining room, two lounges (one big, one small), laundry room, maintenance room, nurse and admin offices, and five further bedrooms. The home has a relatively large garden space although this garden was not used by the residents at all during my time there.

Summerview was built in the 1930s, and perhaps unusually for a building of that age, was originally designed as a care home. Despite this, however, it, for the most part, resembles a conventional house built over three floors with an additional basement containing the laundry facilities and staff room. Unlike Winterbourne, Summerview does not have a single space big enough to act as a lounge for all the residents, meaning that each floor of the home has its own lounge and dining areas, serving the residents of that floor. In this sense, each floor has a more mixed function than Winterbourne, providing both 'residential' and 'communal/work' spaces alongside each other (although the whole home is again served by single kitchen, laundry, and administration facilities). Summerview similarly had some outside space although for residents this was limited to two small patios – one on the ground floor and one on the first floor – with an additional garden area at the back of the basement used exclusively by the staff.

Beyond the 'hard' differences of the buildings, other softer differences also exist between the two nursing care homes. One such difference was in the number of 'agency staff' who were working in each nursing care home. In Winterbourne, agency staff were a very common feature – more days than not, there would be at least one agency staff member working and on one day I observed a shift where there were four agency carers working and only two permanent staff members. In Summerview on the other hand, agency staff were also present, but far less often – mostly staff absences were covered by permanent staff members rather than agency staff. Another noticeable difference is the makeup of the residents, in terms of their abilities. In Winterbourne, there was a relative separation between those who were mobile and those who weren't. The larger section, where I spent most of my time, had only one resident able to walk (although even then, with assistance). In Summerview on the other hand, each floor had a mixture of residents who were independently mobile, and those who needed assistance at all times. This was explained to me as being a purposeful way of avoiding "segregation in terms of ability". Following a similar set of logics, another key instance of these softer differences can be seen through rules about wearing uniforms. In Winterbourne, everyone had and wore different uniforms depending on their jobs – e.g. nursing tunics, chefs' coats, or overalls. (I was asked to wear black trousers and a plain white T-shirt in place of a uniform.) Contrasting this, in Summerview, there was no uniform. The staff were all asked to wear whatever they would be comfortable wearing, as was I. Some people chose to wear more

‘work-like’ outfits – the chef and cleaners, for example, worked in a chef’s coat and ‘pinafore tabards’ respectively – but most carers wore casual everyday clothes (jeans, T-shirts and hoodies for example). When I asked why this uniform policy was adopted, I was told that the logic of this was “to make it feel more home-like”.

These various differences, therefore, start to frame the kinds of logics, experiences and knowledges of care in terms of the ways in which it is located within different places and cultures. Perhaps the more significant element of the ways in which the research was situated however relates to the ways in which my own experiences of being within these spaces occurred. As such, the next part of this section turns to look at the specific ways in which I engaged with the homes.

3.3.3 / Becoming a body at work

There have been a number of ethnographic engagements within care homes addressing a diverse range of topics, narratives and issues including quality of health provision (DeForge et al., 2011; Diamond, 1986); embodied and emotional labours (Diamond, 1992; McDowell, 2009); ideas of comfort (Bland, 2007); eating, diet and food (Harbers et al., 2002; Mol, 2014); and the general cultures of care home life (Henderson and Vesperi, 1995). Each has provided critical insights through focusing “on the actual daily social relations between individuals, rather than analysing the framework of texts, regulations and instructions within which care assistants must perform their work”

(McDowell, 2009: 179). The advantages of such an approach are set out eloquently by Hans Harbers, Annemarie Mol and Alice Stollmeyer (2002: 219), who note that ethnography allows an attention to care in terms of its “practicalities and materialities” rather than through traditional ethical or professional approaches, forcing attention onto specific issues – “like the taste of chocolate” – that are continually at stake within practices of care. Significantly, they note the advantages of ethnography’s expanded timescales in constructing a ‘situated ethics’, allowing judgements to be made, not just in relation to the moment or individual events, but rather contextualised as a series of dynamic, collective socio-material (affective) practices in a complex and dynamic world. Indeed, this is something that Annemarie Mol’s expanded works similarly deal with across a variety of settings beyond care homes (e.g. Mol, 1999, 2002, 2008b; Mol and Law, 2004; Struhkamp et al., 2009).

Methodologically, many of these previous ethnographies have taken place through traditional participant-observation techniques whereby the ethnographer would accompany members of staff during their daily work – similar to the ‘go-along’ described by Kusenbach (2003). My own research practice looked to take this approach further through becoming what Chris McMorran (2012) terms ‘a body at work’ and actually undertaking care work myself. I thus worked voluntarily in each care home, undertaking a variety of different tasks, including: housekeeping and washing up; helping with meal times; assisting with the administering of medications (under the watch of a nurse); helping to move, clothe, wash, and take residents to the toilet; and

helping with socialisation through working as an ‘activities co-coordinator’. Alongside these elements of work, I also endeavoured to have conversations with people and pay close attention to the other things going on around me, noting down both what happened and my thoughts, feelings, and emotional responses to these events in a field diary and linking them to different theories.

The rationale for conducting the methodology in this manner was about trying to enact a more performative, non-representational methodology (Dewsbury, 2010; Vannini, 2015a), in which I could take up the role of *observant-participant* and become intimately enmeshed in the practices, rhythms, routines, and affectivity that makes up care home life, rather than simply observing from a somewhat more displaced position. As McMorran writes

There is much that can be learned about work through working participant observation that goes beyond the verbal ... Experiences like learning new tasks, negotiating one’s position within complex hierarchies and social networks of employees and management, and sharing the emotional and physical stresses and joys of work all provide place-based insights into workplace attitudes, behaviours and meanings that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to learn (McMorran, 2012: 491)

The advantages laid out by McMorran here thus frame many of the kinds of knowledges that I would also argue I gained from researching in this manner, particularly in terms of the nuances, intricacies, contexts and particularities that frame embodied experiences of working, caring and laughing within the kinds of contemporary care systems described above. Although only obliquely

referenced in the chapters that follow, I found myself starting to see some of the ways in which funding cuts, the CQC and staff shortages, for instance, played out at the scale of both the individual homes and in many cases individual bodies within these homes. Similarly, experiencing the differences between the two homes pointed towards the significance of different care home 'cultures', both at the management and staff levels, in terms of the ways in which these pressures and issues are negotiated on 'the front line'.

Similarly, it's worth noting that the kinds of activities I undertook in each home also shaped the kinds of knowledges gained. Although my assigned role in each home was similar – in both cases intending to act as an activities coordinator and care assistant for 'non-personal' care – there were certain differences that meant the actual tasks I undertook were varied in each home. In Summerview for instance, the manager was insistent that I undergo a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, whereas in Winterbourne they did not. Given the nature of the role I was supposed to take, there was no legal requirement for such a check in either home. However, Summerview undertook one as additional legal protection for both them and me. My having this check, however, did mean that I was legally able to undertake personal care in Summerview, which I began to do on occasion in order to assist when they were short staffed, giving me an insight into the spacetimes of 'personal care' (bed baths, getting residents dressed and toilet spaces for instance) that I did not have in Winterbourne. In both cases I was also supposed to work alongside the existing activities co-ordinator. However in Winterbourne the activities

coordinator left her role shortly after I arrived and so I ended up being the sole activities coordinator for most of the time I worked there. This meant that my days at Winterbourne were less structured and I spent much more time working on my own than I did at Summerview where I worked alongside the activities co-coordinator on almost every day I worked (although often we would work in separate areas of the home).

Another key difference that shaped the kinds of activities I undertook in each home relates to the time of year in which my engagement took place. My engagement with Winterbourne occurred between September and December 2015, whereas I engaged with Summerview between June and August 2016 (thus informing the choice of pseudonyms). The seasonal difference between the two kinds of engagement thus informed the kinds of activities that occurred and that I witnessed within the two homes. In Winterbourne, for instance, there was a lot of focus on activities around Halloween and Christmas and, notably, the residents never went outside (at least not in my presence) largely because of the cold/rainy weather. In Summerview on the other hand, because of the warmer weather there was much more emphasis on “getting the residents out of the house”. During my time there, there were picnics, barbeques, outdoor games, as well as two trips to the local pub. This meant engaging with different challenges, such as moving residents outside, but also seemingly afforded more opportunities to do different activities from day to day, making both the residents and my experiences more varied. This difference in participation in each home thus informs the kinds of knowledges

that I gained, however, it's also crucial to think about differences in my own position when encountering each home, and how this shaped and formulated the kinds of knowledges and judgements I had of each and both (see C Katz, 1994).

It is important to state that prior to starting work at Winterbourne, I had never worked in care, nor indeed ever entered a care home. As such, my research often involved elements of learning and adapting, finding myself increasingly able to negotiate both the major elements and the subtleties of care work itself as the research period progressed. I learned both practical and emotional skills, such as: how to move residents safely using a variety of techniques and equipment; how to feed a resident or give them a drink; how to fill in charts to monitor their behaviour, moods and eating habits; how to calm a demented resident down when they are upset; and even how to do a basic manicure. Perhaps more important, however, was my forced engagement with the more minor, yet often more important sides of care work: understanding different relational dynamics between both residents and staff; knowing which people liked which foods, drinks, perfumes, games, television programmes; knowing how to negotiate and motivate people in personal ways. Through these two kinds of knowledges, therefore, I gained increasing levels of both experience and confidence during my time researching – as indeed is arguably the point of doing ethnographic research in this manner. This increasing experience/confidence, however, also generated significant differences in the kinds of knowledges I produced at different moments throughout the

research. Indeed, the kinds of practical and ethical judgements that I made and recorded about the care homes, and the practices of carers within them, shifted from what was largely a speculative style of judgement earlier on – for example “that doesn’t feel right but I guess could be normal” – to judgements that were made with much more certainty.

Another key element of my positionality beyond a growing knowledge and experience base relates to my emotions (see Askins, 2009). Perhaps unsurprisingly the ethnography affected me significantly, particularly within Winterbourne where I experienced something of an ‘emotional shock’. Much of this was, I think, to do with a lack of emotional preparation. As ridiculous as it is to say given the context of this research project, I had never really considered what it would mean for me to actually start to care about the residents in the care home at an emotional level, nor that the residents I would care about might also die whilst I was there. Indeed, during my time working at Winterbourne nine of the residents died, many of whom I had spent significant amounts of time caring for, mostly through helping them to eat or drink. This lack of emotional preparation, therefore, affected me in a number of ways. I cried many times on my way home from work for instance and often got angry at myself and others within my field diary notes. I also started to get increasingly depressed during my time at Winterbourne, and, by the time I left, I weighed around eight kilogrammes less than when I started. Given this experience in Winterbourne, by the time I started at Summerview I was more prepared emotionally for the experience of working in care. Although I didn’t

know that to be true at the time, I remember walking home with my then flatmate at one point and telling her about a resident who had died that week. She turned to me and said, “you care a lot less than last time, that’s probably a good thing”. As such, it seems that unconsciously I was less emotionally invested in both the residents and Summerview as a care home than I was during my time at Winterbourne.

This is important in two respects. First, it again demonstrates the power of ethnography for non-representational and emotional styles of research within care homes whereby a researcher can start to experience the kinds of emotional guarding and ‘distancing’ that workers involved in emotional labour often talk about (Dyer et al., 2008; Hochschild, 1983; McDowell, 2009; Sanders, 2004). Second, it is important in this particular case because it once again actively shapes the kinds of knowledges and writings that I produced, and still sometimes produce about each care home. Indeed, looking back over my field diaries and various writings now, there is a clear difference in affective tone between each home.

In telling the story in this way I risk setting up a narrative that is perhaps typical of classic ethnography in which I can be seen to move from ‘outsider’, with little knowledge of the world I am engaged with, to being an ‘insider’ who is adept at the jobs in care homes and has a broad and detailed knowledge of their cultures (see Malinowski, 1922; Van Maanen, 1988). Whilst this in some ways reflects what happened to me personally, I wish to distance myself from

any claims towards being an 'insider' within either care home. To do so would, I feel, be to both obscure the other elements of my positionality that preclude any such kind of interaction. Indeed, there were certain key differences between myself and other care workers that mean my engagement with the care home could never be considered equivalent theirs (Crang, 2003; Rose, 1997).

Perhaps most obviously was the fact that I was a voluntary worker with a stable income that came from elsewhere (my PhD stipend) and indeed was more than a full-time care worker earns. This meant that my being in the care home was not connected to the same physical, material or financial consequences as many of the workers, and therefore potentially came with a different set of emotional attachments. Similarly, I had an end date for my placement, whereas, for many care workers, their time in the care home was indefinite. Another small but significant factor relates to my being a man. Although there were other men who worked in the homes, they were overwhelmingly occupied by women. This element manifested mostly in the form of jokes about female residents fancying me, but also meant that at times my presence was obviously shifting the kinds of topics about which they might have otherwise spoken to each other. I noticed on several occasions for instance that conversations shifted from relatively intimate discussions of male partners to more banal topics when I entered a room.

Alongside these more banal elements, my status as 'outsider' also generated a

number of further ethical issues. At times, for instance, I was turned to as a supposedly independent arbitrator of disputes. This generated a number of moments where I had to make an ethical choice as to whether or not to pass judgement. I shied away from this the first time it happened, however, excusing myself with a veiled “I dunno really,” and following that decided to make it a rule not to pass judgement at any future time either. At other times, I became a ‘sounding board’ for other workers’ complaints, both about each other and the management. With these instances, I again reserved any specific judgements but did continue to let people moan to me, ultimately treating these kinds of interaction as a way of contextualising and understanding the ways in which care work can affect different bodies.

The final area in which my status as ‘outsider’ played a significant role is within the way in it affected the methodology itself. I had initially intended to conduct interviews with other staff members alongside the observant-participation. However, when I broached the issue with people in Winterbourne, it received something of a frosty reception and only one person was willing to be interviewed. I have to admit, I was a little confused at the time. I felt I had built a good rapport with people and couldn’t understand why they were unwilling to talk to me individually. When I did conduct the one interview with the person who had agreed, I was informed of the reason for this reluctance. Apparently, the staff had become suspicious about why I wanted to talk to them *individually* and had started to worry that I wasn’t actually a researcher at all, but rather a journalist or a member of the CQC, making them unwilling

to share their thoughts personally with me. By the time I knew this, however, it seemed too late to change my approach in order to ease this worry. I had finished my placement and could feel the ties built up starting to erode on subsequent visits to the home.

Augmenting this reasoning was the fact that when I did conduct the one interview, it became apparent that the terms of my research were too abstract for a meaningful engagement (it is partly for this reason that I noted earlier in the chapter that I was definitely not engaging with people in their terms). Indeed, my attempts at having a reflective discussion about *laughter*, inevitably fell back into a discussion of the humour of the care home with the participant seemingly unable to articulate moments of laughter to any meaningful effect and instead resorting to common tropes and idioms – for example “if you don’t laugh, you will cry”. What’s more, much of the discussion echoed many of the more informal conversations with various people in the care home, and which had already been recorded in my field diary – somewhat rendering the interview (at least in that form) an unnecessary burden on both myself and the participant. As such, rather than risk a similar scenario, and ask people to take part in additional engagements that might well not add anything further to the research, I decided to abandon the interviews during future elements of the research both at Summerview, and within the other element of my research, discussed in the next section.

3.3.4 / *Other experimental engagements*

Whilst most of the empirical material and discussion in this thesis thus centres on this idea of becoming a body at work in these two care homes, this was not the only form of research that I conducted, nor the only ones that have informed my thinking about the relationship between laughter and care. Alongside this, I also engaged with another, very different kind of care home work through spending time with two theatre groups who perform (humorous) shows within care homes and other institutions of care. My engagement with these two groups formed something of an experiment intended to try and better understand the issues and effects of a more 'active' introduction of laughter to nursing care homes, as well as a chance to engage with more 'extraordinary' rather than 'everyday' relationships between laughter and care.

As with the care home, the choice of who and how I engaged with the theatre groups was partly considered and partly circumstantial. I encountered the first theatre group during my time at Winterbourne where they performed a Christmas show. Essentially, their presence alerted me to an element of care home life of which I had not been aware before and in which laughter was extremely apparent. In this sense, I saw an opportunity to engage with the group, contacted them and they agreed. The group were doing a national tour of a pantomime version of *Beauty and the Beast* over the Christmas and New Year period and I joined them for the ten days that they were in the Midlands during January 2016. Given this short (but interesting) engagement, I decided

a second period was necessary in order to both produce a more 'prolonged' (and rigorous) form of engagement, as well as generating another opportunity for comparison (see Rahm, 2012). As such, I contacted a local theatre group who also performed in care settings, spending five days with them during April 2016.

Whilst there were similarities between the shows it is perhaps their differences that are most apparent. The Pantomime Group was part of a private 'for-profit' company who provided theatre performances and workshops to both institutions of care and schools. The company itself is one of many companies and individuals who provide 'entertainments' for nursing care homes, usually involving music, dancing, magic, comedy or mixtures of these elements. Indeed, it's worth noting the size of the market for these kinds of shows, an insight into which can be gained simply by inputting "care home entertainers" into an online search engine. The Theatre Group, on the other hand, is part of a charity based in Birmingham. The shows were funded by a specific funding-grant given to the charity in order for them to produce and perform a show based on the theme of 'spring' which folded in narratives from research conducted with older people in the Birmingham area. While the show was not necessarily always intended to be funny, it had a distinctly 'jovial' style and many elements of it proved to be very funny indeed. The theatre group's show was also highly participatory, with members of the audience being picked to offer 'words of advice' to the characters at different moments, providing a number of extra (unplanned) moments of humour and laughter.

My time with both theatre groups was again intended to replicate the same idea of becoming a body at work (McMorran, 2012). There are some obvious difficulties with positioning this as a working ethnography, however, particularly given that I did not perform in any of the shows. Instead, I travelled with both casts, helping carry and set up the sets, stages and props and then watched the actual shows from the audience. As such, it might be more appropriate to revert back to participant observation in order to describe these research engagements. The groups also at times used me as an unofficial joke writer for the shows – drawing on my background interest in comedy writing and performance (see Emmerson, 2015, 2016) – with them trialling the jokes in the show as we went along. With the pantomime group there were three shows a day and with the community theatre group there were two. As such, the majority of my time with each group was spent in their respective vans and cars, either travelling between shows or sitting waiting for the care homes and institutions we were performing in to be ready for us. In this sense, I experienced a completely different style of work to that which I was expecting. There were significant elements of care on display and a huge amount of laughter. However much of this took place in separation from the care homes and residents, instead occurring between the cast themselves.

In some ways then, my experimental engagement with these theatre groups did the job that it set out to do: demonstrating the opportunities and difficulties associated with the encounter between the laughter and the nursing care home, as well as highlighting the various rewards and difficulties

that frame this kind of performance work, as ‘care work’, albeit in a somewhat different style to that of a conventional care worker. There were also a number of supplementary outcomes emerging from this element of the research – notably the chance to survey a number of care homes in a superficial, yet un-intrusive way. That said, framing it as an experiment is also useful in recognising that in other ways the two theatre group elements have formed something of a failure (or at least not complete success) in terms of the wider project, ultimately remaining too fleeting to provide a truly informed account of either the lives of the performers, or the effects of the shows in which they performed. Similarly, their inclusion in the wider framework has often had the effect of unnecessarily broadening and obfuscating conceptions of care, away from the core arguments of this thesis. As such, they are mainly discussed in Chapter 6.

The mixed self-response to this set of research engagements has thus left me in something of a lurch. I have considered omitting mention of this element of the research from this thesis altogether by way of focussing or smoothing out the narrative. My worry, however, is that this would negate a potentially important element of my own learned relationship with care homes, both at general and specific registers (Harrowell et al., 2017). Indeed, this notion of failed (or not fully successful) experiments is one that sits at the heart of non-representational methodologies (Vannini, 2015b) and particularly these kinds of ethnographic methodologies that I adopted within my engagements with care homes in that they “may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative,

more surprising ways of being in the world” (Halberstram, 2001: 2, cited in Harrowell et al., 2017).

3.4 | Writing worlds

This story about researching in care homes thus sets up the particular ethico-political, spatiotemporal and relationally embodied *situations* through which the research for this thesis took place. In total, I amassed around six hundred hours of time spent working within the care homes, around another one hundred spent with the theatre groups, and nearly 100,000 words of field diary notes, reflections and other pieces of writing. Yet, perhaps obviously, this is only one element of the story. The question remains as to how all these notes, reflections, writings and other unwritten memories and experiences relate to the knowledges presented in this thesis? Crucially this is neither a politically or ethically neutral question. It is underscored by the recognition that these writing processes matter intensely in terms of their presentational techniques (Van Maanen, 1988), and their conveyance of an always partial meaning (Clifford, 1986), both of which are indicative of differentiated power-relations and agencies, and within which my position is once again of key importance (Askins and Blazek, 2017; Braidotti, 2014; Clifford and Marcus, 1986). As Annette Markham (2005: 822) summarises, “every attempt to create precision and coherence in representation will be equivocal and incomplete, insufficient”.

This process of translating and re/presenting experiences and knowledges

from 'field' to 'page' is framed by various forms of (creative) writing – where writing is taken in its broadest sense (Cresswell, 2014; Delyser and Hawkins, 2014; Dewsbury, 2014; Kitchin, 2014). Some of this writing is clear: the thesis itself being the most obvious; but also, the various drafts out of which it has emerged, and before them, the writing in my field diary out of which the knowledges presented here are extracted. It's also worth noting however that writing has not simply formed a mode of presentation but also one of thinking/analysis. Indeed, there are much subtler modes of writing that have taken place throughout the research process that are less formed and obvious, yet crucial in working through and performatively (re)constructing the ethnographic material in conjunction with the various theoretical elements of the thesis.

For me, this form of analytic writing started within the field diary itself. As noted above, much of my field diary contains moments, not just of description but also of theoretical speculation, with these initial speculative moments forming the basis for much of my analysis. Indeed, many of the ideas that are displayed within the following chapters can be traced back to the field notes directly, or to notes made in the margins of various copies of them and as such, I have used the field diary notes verbatim throughout a number of chapters that follow.

These initial moments of theorisation are augmented by more traditional modes of 'coding' which worked to the same effect. Here I used a digital coding

software (NVivo 10), to organise the field diary into different themes, ideas and theoretical applications. In doing this, I largely adopted an approach based on 'grounded theory' whereby the data was coded using a combination of open-coding (including *writing* notes onto these codes in a similar manner to that described above), then axial-coding (the grouping of codes) before finally organising the codes into wider thematic groups (roughly following the methods laid out in Strauss, 2003), so that it was structured into a well-considered and delineated set of themes based on my own rational thought.

In some ways, it was a 'good' outcome: the data made sense and was well divided, themes had emerged and there was a level of coherence to my thoughts. Yet there remained an issue at this point – similar to that noted by Turner (2016) with regards to her use of Nvivo – that everything felt a little sterile, it seemed to 'cohere' too much, the entangled affectivity of my experiences of the care home had been carved up and thus eroded. In other words, some of the liveliness of the fieldwork had died (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). Turner's remedy to this problem involves the creation of data ensembles: "a performative assembling of the spoken word, that conveys something of these diverse voices and the emotional charges, sustained preoccupations, and anxieties" (Turner, 2016: 542). My 'data', differ from Turner's (hers being largely spoken data in the form of interview and focus group transcripts) yet this desire to invoke an affectivity in my data remained the same.

As such alongside my analysis through Nvivo, I started to produce longer pieces of writing, whereby the aim was to tell the stories in a manner that evokes rather than represents different events of laughter and care (Vannini, 2015a). These writing pieces took on a variety of forms and were inspired by different writers (although notably Kathleen Stewart). In these pieces, I tried to compose the concepts/objects/subjects of laughter and care, not as 'academic' or 'critical' entities capable of being rationalised, but rather as a series of affects (Stewart, 2013). In doing this I took the scenarios from my field diary which felt most affective (either because of the affective imprint they had left on me, or because of the content within them) and experimented with how to write them in order to invoke a set of feelings on the page and in the reader (Vannini, 2015a). At times, this involved 'amplifying' the affects (Probyn, 2005) by furnishing the scenario with minor details from another scenario, thus challenging the 'truth' claims within the writing (Clifford, 1986) or generating a style of writing that 'flirts' with reality rather than tries to represent it objectively (Thrift, 2000; Vannini, 2015a).

The aim of these sets of writing was to begin to unearth the ways in which affective life and power (Anderson, 2017) operate – to uncover the moments in which affect makes difference, and better understand how it makes a difference (Wilson, 2017). Whilst some proved more successful than others, it is this combination of experimental pieces of writing that proved a key way of relating my own singular, situated understandings of different events, to the theoretical ideas in this thesis, the wider experience of working within care

homes over a longer period (Harbers et al., 2002), and to the multiple ways in which they might be apprehended when approached from different positions (Ahmed, 2006).

Together then, these various forms of writing form a bricolage out of which the knowledges in this thesis have emerged (Madge, 2018). In writing up, or presenting, these knowledges, the ethnographic materials thus switch function away from something analytical, towards something more exemplary (Dewsbury, 2003) – a way of mobilising theories through ‘grounding’ them within ‘real world’ scenarios (see for example Edensor, 2012a; Lim, 2010). These exemplary moments thus appear in parts of this thesis as short ‘vignettes’ written in what John Van Maanen (1988: 102) describes as an impressionist writing style: “put together and told in the first person as a tightly focused, vibrant, exact, but necessarily imaginative rendering of fieldwork”. Impressionist modes of writing thus look to actively involve their audiences within them by invoking affective capacities. Crucially, it is perhaps this mode of writing that has also been most utilised by non-representational ethnographers (J Lorimer, 2008; Saldanha, 2006; Stewart, 2007; Swanton, 2010). As Vannini (2015a: 318) argues:

Non-representational ethnographers consider their work to be impressionistic and inevitably creative, and although they are inspired by their lived experiences in the field, they do not claim to be able or even interested, in reporting on those in an impersonal, neutral, or reliable manner.

In writing up the ‘data’ therefore I have also made two key stylistic choices – one pragmatic/ethical and the other two for theoretical reasons. First, I have chosen to follow conventions used when writing up case studies around elderly care whereby workers are referred to by a single forename whereas residents are referred to as Mr/Mrs followed by a letter. In both cases, these are pseudonyms of the real people. This is also true of the theatre groups whereby I have either referred to them in generic terms (e.g. “one actor”) or described them in terms of their role within their respective plays. Second, I have tried to write all the data in as open a way as possible whereby I illuminate one aspect without foreclosing the other (possible) relations contained within it. My intention here is in maintaining a fidelity to the multiple entanglements, trajectories and embodiments (McCormack, 2003), out of which different moments of (affective) life emerge and thus to avoid generating ‘nicely packaged’ data in the way that Thrift (2003) warns against. Indeed, the point is to maintain the subjunctive potential, in which the reader is forced to confront the uncertainty contained within each moment described (Lim, 2010).

This latter choice is therefore used to productively engage with, if not fully know (Rose, 1997), my positionality through recognising the ways in which my knowledge and experience of the research is located in a series of multiple-selves (Madge, 1993), each with their own capacities to affect and be affected by it. Simply put, my engagement with the research from the office in which I write this now in mid-2018, is situated very differently from the moment in

which I was sitting a little lonely, and a little depressed, in the car on the way home from Winterbourne in late 2015. This means that the knowledges produced also differ, becoming more distanced, more layered and more academic. Working between these various positions thus allows my various subjectivities, in these various spacetimes, to come into contact with one another, press against and augment one another and, of course, sometimes disagree with one another. Ultimately therefore this situates the research within a more pluralised mode of thinking, writing and theorising – one that aligns with ideas of decentred or nomadic subjectivities (Braidotti, 2011, 2014; Colls, 2012; Mol, 2008a; Simpson, 2017) and thus lends itself to a way of approaching laughter with care in worlds of multiplicity.

3.5 | Conclusions

Within this chapter I have looked to engage with the ways in which my own knowledges of laughter and care have formed and solidified. Throughout I have remained critically aware of the situated nature of knowledge (Haraway, 1988) and expressed what this means in practice. I have done this through examining the ways in which the research methods, sites and my own body have intermingled, entangled and affected one another. What was apparent in the previous chapter was the need for multiplicity within engagements with laughter and care, particularly in recognising the ways in which the forms, functions and meanings of each vary depending on the situation from which they are encountered. In this chapter, therefore, I have attempted to make clear the various situations through which I have encountered them in order

to frame the discussions that follow.

Of particular importance are the ways in which these various embodied experiences and knowledges have been written and translated onto the page, and as such the efforts I have made not to silence or occlude the often difficult, contradictory and uncertain forms out of which the discussion in this thesis has emerged (see Gregson and Rose, 2000). Crucially, I am making no attempt to end this discussion here. Indeed, I have chosen the writing style that I have in order to extend these discussions into and through the chapters that follow, rather than present them as finished, finalised or straightforward narratives. Doing so, is once again about ‘staying with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016) rather than smoothing out the world’s complexity. Indeed, the first empirical chapter seemingly starts where this one has left off, with a subjunctive and ambiguous encounter with laughter and care within Summerview Care Home. This encounter thus essentially looks to take the ideas from these first two chapters and demonstrate their power for thinking about laughter within care homes, and thus the importance of cultivating a way of thinking about laughter *with* care.

Chapter 4: Listening to laughter with care

Listening with care is an active process of intervening in the count of whom and what is ratified as concerned – it affects the representation of things, adding mediation to the mediations

(Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 58)

4.1 | Introduction

The two previous chapters have addressed the key ontological, epistemological and methodological terrain upon which this thesis looks to make its mark. In Chapter 2, I set out the main premises of the geographical debates around ethics, laughter and care within which this thesis looks to intervene. In Chapter 3, I then described the situated nature of this intervention, with its specific focus on *ethnography* within *nursing care homes*, and discussed the various possibilities and problematics that have emerged with regards to generating practical, ethical knowledges from this. These two discussions have thus done much of the necessary work in setting out some of the key questions that emerge around trying to generate an ethical approach that is more attentive to the fidelity of events of laughter with care (McCormack, 2003), both as separate and related occurrences or happenings. The role of this chapter, therefore, is to transfer, or translate, these ideas onto the real and complex spaces of care homes around which this thesis has

formed. Doing so not only serves to illustrate the importance of framing ethical questions in the manner that I have set out, but it also sets up some of the more specific effects and implications that emerge from approaching *laughter with care* – particularly in terms of the troubles of thinking about morals and ethics in worlds of multiplicity (Haraway, 2016) – therefore establishing the need to adopt multiple, situated and somewhat speculative approaches when thinking about laughter with care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

In this chapter, therefore, I specifically question how different modes of listening to laughter can affect the ways in which we understand it as an ethical force. In doing so I look to enact something of a speculative experiment in the spirit of many other non-representational forms of ethnographic writing (e.g. McCormack, 2014; Simpson, 2015; Stewart, 2007, 2011), and thus attempt to create various different spaces through which we might imagine what is going on as laughter bursts, resonates and affects different bodies. Listening has been conceptualised widely within geography, (e.g. Engelmann, 2015; Janus, 2011; Macpherson et al., 2016; Simpson, 2009; Wang Jing, 2012; Watson, 2014). However, this chapter is inspired most significantly by Jean Luc Nancy's (2007) ruminations on listening, through his trying to bring about a pause within, or at least slow down, the movements that take place between the burst of laughter and the point in which its meanings emerge, sediment and solidify. In particular, I highlight three different ways in which we might listen to laughter: as a signifier of some meaningful interaction; as an affective force; and as a circumstantial event (see McCormack, 2017; Serres, 2008) – a mode

of listening which somewhat encompasses the other two, yet also attends closely to the spacetimes in which the laughter itself occurs.

Crucially, each mode of listening also impacts the ways in which we might understand laughter's relationship with care and thus the kinds of ethical force that we ascribe to it in a similar manner to the ways in which Annemarie Mol (2008b) notes with other judgements and 'logics of care'. The first offers a representational view of care ethics through which we might make judgements about whether laughter is caring (or not), based on its content or (perceived) function (see McCreddie and Wiggins, 2007). Listening to care as an affective force, perhaps unsurprisingly moves these judgements about care into the affective realm (Conradson, 2011; Popke, 2009), developing a disposition towards thinking about laughter and care as particular forms of encounter (Wilson, 2016) and thus a reading that focusses on questions of what laughter can do (Spinoza, 1970): the ways in which laughter can make different bodies feel, and thus the different capacities for action and affection that it can either enhance or restrict (Anderson, 2006; Braidotti, 2011). These first two forms of listening position laughter and care's relationship as something emergent within the moment or the event of laughter itself. A circumstantial mode of listening thus looks to add further context to this through recognising the complex relationships between individual events and the historical and cultural geographies within, and out of, which the events themselves emerge (Critchley, 1999; Nancy, 2000). In other words, it recognises that the meanings of both laughter and care, and thus the sense of

whether an event of laughter is caring or not, are always already rooted within existing relationships that frame the worlds in which they occur (see McCormack, 2017).

In working through these different ways of listening to (and thinking about) laughter and care, this chapter focusses on an (arguably failed) attempt to make some sort of sense out of what is happening during two connected moments of laughter. Both moments occurred during my first week at Summerview Care Home, both centre around similar kinds of laughter, yet each has different consequences and evoke different relationships with ideas of care. In portraying these events, I have adopted a performative writing style, trying to capture the uncertainty with which I encountered these moments, and within my attempts to make sense of them. As such, the story is presented over three parts and intercut by conceptual discussion, academic analysis and further ethnographic detail. Each section and mode of listening builds on the previous, adding increasing complexity to the analyses they provide. Between them, therefore, these three modes of listening to laughter with care serve to build up a fragmented and complex picture of the multiple forms, functions, affects and ethics that can emerge from any given event. All three are useful and problematic in their own ways. As such, my argument in this chapter is not to espouse one manner of listening over any other, but rather to push for a more multiple and speculative approach when listening to laughter with care: an approach which holds open all of their different potentials, rather than closing them down. Through this, I argue, we might enact what Karen Barad

(2007: 392) calls an “ethic of worlding” whereby “[a]ll bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the world’s ... performativity” and thus ethical differentiation “is not about othering or separating but on the contrary about making connections and commitments.” This multi-modal listening, and the ethos of connections and commitments afforded by it, thus open up key trajectories through which I approach laughter with care throughout the rest of the thesis in which the uncertainty of this chapter gives way to a more certain style of analysis.

The event: part 1

It’s my third day working in Summerview Nursing Home ... Fire safety training. I sit in a room that is too warm with too many people in it. There is a feeling of slight aggravation and a sense of frustration from those who had come in on their day off. Perhaps because of this, a slightly mischievous mood hangs in the air.

A moment’s break emerges as the trainer goes to make a cup of tea. The door opens out onto the downstairs corridor. Hubbub, music, TV spill in. The bodies in the room begin to converse, voices piling on top of each other, fighting for a space in the sensory web of the ensuing din. The noise level raises, step by step, moment by moment. Conversations become extensive – stretching across the room.

Through the open door, a resident’s voice cuts through: “help me ... help.” Two

or three seats down from me a different voice pipes up, similar sounding, possibly identical. “Help me ... help.” Laughter bursts, filling the room. Everyone is laughing. At least they seem to be. I’m at once amused and angry, not sure what to make of the event. A decent impression, sure, but such little care. Why is it bothering me? All care homes are like this ... but it doesn’t normally feel this way. Have I laughed at similar impressions in the past? Probably. No, definitely. But I care, she doesn’t seem to ...

As suddenly as it started, for some reason, the laughter stops. A moment seems to last forever. Nothing has changed, yet everything suddenly feels different. “Shall we get going again?” Calm returns with the fire safety trainer...

4.2 | Listening to laughter as a representation (of something else)

Traditionally laughter has been framed as a phenomenon that is both distinctly human and distinctly social. As Bergson (1980: 65) writes, for instance: “laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have social signification”. As was discussed in Chapter 2, however, laughter’s social signification can take on many forms, each of which serves to situate it within it a particular set of power relations (Brigstocke, 2014; Douglas, 2015; Ridanpää, 2014a). Although not often framed in exactly these terms, the general argument within many studies of laughter is thus that through listening to the laughter in a situation we can start to unpack various social structures, dynamics or hierarchies and thus the power relations that

frame particular groups (Albrecht, 1999; Amarasingam, 2010; Delph-Janiurek, 2001; Flint, 2001; Gray, 1994; Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Sanders, 2004). In this sense, laughter is seen within this framework as ‘meaningful’ both through its specific roles within social interactions themselves, and through its capacities to represent something much more serious, and therefore more significant about the groups, organisations and societies that are under study (Macpherson, 2008; Watson, 2015). Again, as we have noted already, broadly speaking, there are three main theories that are most often used within these styles of analysis – superiority, incongruity and release/relief theory – with each theory designating the emergence of laughter a different cause: from a sense of feeling superior; a sense of surprise; or as a release of emotional tension respectively – which together form a framework through which we might begin to understand the event of laughter described above.

Perhaps the most immediately obvious of these theories to apply to the story above would involve designating the laughter as a moment of superiority: laughter at the impression generates a “sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves; by comparison with the infirmity of others” as Hobbes describes it (see Elias, 2017: 296). Through this, we might thus argue that, in simple terms, to hear this laughter is to hear certain power structures within the care home being reproduced and reinforced: a performative citation of political and ethical spacings between different bodies. Furthermore, drawing on Bergson (1980), we might argue that the laughter serves as a form of ‘corrective’ to the image of the ‘helpless’

resident and thus reinforces the idea of carers and other staff members as a 'norm' in comparison to the resident Others (see also Billig, 2005; Douglas, 2015). This kind of analytic would therefore designate the laughter as having a social function that serves to generate differences, borders and boundaries between different people and groups (Wilson, 2017) and therefore as precluding relational forms of embodiment such as empathy, openness and respect between residents and staff – what Bergson (1980: 64), describes as an “anaesthesia of the heart”. As such, we might argue that, as a moment of superiority, it is also a moment that lacks the necessary ‘requirements’ for a relation of care and therefore is a care-less moment of laughter.

Crucially, however, superiority theory is not the only route through which we might understand the emergence of this laughter. Indeed, arguably both release theory and incongruity theory could also be used to explain this particular event. Through release theory, for instance, we might well argue that the laughter is a means of releasing a collective tension within the room (Meyer, 2000). This tension is somewhat evident within my telling of the story, through the overcrowding and the heat, the frustration felt by members of staff who have come into work just for the training and through the absence of the fire safety trainer which generates an absence of purpose in the room. As such, thinking through release theory positions laughter as having a particular social function in that it acts as an “escape valve” (Dittmer, 2013: 500) and thus enables the workers in the room to continue in as normal a manner as possible. This reading of laughter thus engenders a different way of understanding it in

terms of care, particularly in terms of Tronto's (1993: 103) definition of care as anything that we do to maintain our worlds so that we may continue living in them as well as possible – with laughter, framed as a release of (negative) tension, capable of being positioned as means through which the workers can continue to live as well as possible. In other words, we might see the laughter here as part of the moral economy through which the various bodies in the room are able to care for themselves (McDowell, 2009). This kind of argument is most often framed through notions of coping (Astedt-Kurki and Liukkonen, 1994; Duncan, 1990; Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Macpherson, 2008; Sanders, 2004). However, it's worth noting here that I offer a re-reading of 'coping laughter' for care workers in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

Thinking through incongruity theory is arguably the most diverse and the most complex means of understanding this laughter. In terms of incongruity, we might argue that the laughter emerges from the sudden divergence between expectation and reality (Critchley, 2002). In other words, the laughter emerges from the surprise encounter with the impression, either because impressions of residents such as this one are social taboo and therefore unexpected in a place framed around care, or because an impression of a resident was not expected at all. Crucially, many scholars who use ideas of incongruity do so in conjunction with ideas around both power and emotional release in a similar manner to that described above, with both Bergson (1980) and Bakhtin (1984) offering key discussions around the ways in which (planned and unexpected) incongruous moments serve to generate particular

power relations and social formations. Indeed, given that an impression of an infirm resident needing help might be seen as a form of 'dark humour' or intentional breaking of taboo, we might well frame the moment of laughter through similar ideas to Bakhtin's carnivalesque, whereby particular styles and forms of laughter that would otherwise be socially unacceptable, are sanctioned in particular spacetimes (Brigstocke, 2014; Macpherson, 2008). Readings such as this one, therefore, provide a particular moral and ethical complexity to the ways in which we understand laughter, and thus add another level of complexity to judgements of it as caring or not.

Indeed, echoing Tronto's (1993) definition of care once again, Bakhtin (1984) frames the carnivalesque as a means of maintaining people's worlds, yet crucially many have noted that within the carnivalesque Bakhtin is discussing a particular kind of laughter, and as such it is important to remain critical, rather than giving in to this idealised vision of laughter which risks belying the slippery relation between laughter as liberation and laughter as oppression (of someone else) (Barnard, 2004; Grindon, 2004; Macpherson, 2008). In this sense, whilst out of these three theories incongruity theory can be used most widely to understand laughter's emergence, it is perhaps the least effective way of generating moral or ethical judgements about whether or not the laughter itself contributes to an ethic of care.

In thinking about these three theories together therefore, we can start to see that each has certain strengths in producing understandings of why laughter

emerges and together can thus be used to generate a clearer understanding of the reasons that people laugh within care homes, generating connections between the objects of laughter (what is being laughed at) and the psycho-social movements that produce laughter as an embodied action. Indeed, within my analysis I did experiment with such a task, taking all of the moments of laughter that I had noted down and mapping them onto an object of laughter, the space within each home in which this occurred and then trying to ascribe each moment to either superiority, incongruity or release theory. This analysis thus gave a great indication of where people were laughing, and to some extent what people were laughing at (although notably the most populated 'node' was the one for an 'unknown' object of laughter), yet it proved extremely difficult to make judgements about which theoretical category each moment of laughter fitted best with. As with the single example given in this chapter, many of the moments of laughter could be ascribed to more than one, or all, of the theoretical frameworks: the question, as always, was which one to choose?

This exercise proved even more problematic when trying to map these moments of laughter onto an ethic of care. Again, as we have seen in terms of the example here, each theory of laughter generates a different understanding of its functions and therefore its ethical and moral status within the care home. Indeed, in using the three theories to understand a single event of laughter, it is possible to see the ways in which laughter's meanings, and thus the ways in which we understand and make judgements of it, can be refracted in multiple directions and generate an ethically uncertain response. In other words,

through drawing out ideas of care-full or care-less laughter based on the idea of laughter as a representational practice, I ended up enacting an intervention that reduced the possible meanings and performances of care (as well as laughter), to a set of codes, signifiers and (perceived) intentions rather than recognising the multiple and often conflicting ways in which care ethics are practised, felt, followed and lived both within and outwith moments of laughter (Bartos, 2018; Bondi, 2008; Brannelly, 2006; Mol, 2008b).

As such, although there is a significant value within listening to laughter in conjunction with these representational theories – particularly in understanding how and why laughter emerges within particular settings – my feeling is that they remain too simplistic to really grasp a full sense of what is going on within both this and other moments of laughter. In conceptual terms, one reason for this simplicity emerges because this form of listening to laughter assumes that laughter is a purely intentional action (cf. Sills, 2017): something done by a (human) body and directed towards another (not necessarily human) body. As such, listening in this manner tends to negate the agential inter/intra-actions that can occur through the performance of laughter itself (Barad, 2003) – rendering laughter always “as a response to something else” (Parvulescu, 2010: 3) instead of as a phenomenon in its own right. As such, through listening in this manner, we end up never actually listening to laughter, but rather listening for this something else.

Perhaps more significantly, however, I have a vague sense that I have

encountered this kind of laughter before. I know instinctively that both within Winterbourne and with the theatre groups, similar moments of laughter have occurred, yet in those cases they felt different, they felt less lacking in care. Indeed, looking back through my field diary notes confirms this fact. There are many notations of laughter that emerge from either impressions of residents or laughter that is sparked by the actions of residents who, usually because of their dementia/Alzheimer's, tend to say or do things that are distinctly incongruous, and break the mould of normative interaction. As such, it is probably this vague sense that provided the most forceful and lasting impression and thus the particular intellectual and affective confusion that emerged from the situation. Interestingly, however, this factor was one that emerged just as forcefully two days later...

The event: part 2

... A day or so after the training, I sit eating in the staff room with a nurse and two other carers. We are chatting quietly, enjoying a moment of rest. The nurse receives a phone call from upstairs. A few words are spoken in a business-like manner ... "I'll be up in a minute" ... Phone hangs up. He looks at his sandwich contemplating something. Another impression of a resident emerges. Laughter bursts from all four of us sat around the table. This one feels different for some reason. I do not feel the anger or frustration. The nurse's impression does something different. It matters less. The whole situation is different ... somehow ...

4.3 | Listening to laughter as an affective force

Without this second encounter, the story of the first event would, I suspect, have featured in a very different form in this thesis. The juxtaposition of the laughter emerging from the first and second impressions, and their establishing profoundly different meanings, however, served to add another layer of complexity to my thinking about the moments of laughter described in this chapter, and thus the ways in which we might listen to the laughter within care homes as a whole. Indeed, the similarity between the causes of laughter, yet the differences in how they are received, serves to further erode the utility of positioning laughter as a representation of something else. It does so in particular through breaking down the connection between object or style of laughter and the ways in which it affects different bodies, and affects bodies differently: “This one feels different for some reason.” Ultimately, therefore, this suggests that perhaps a different form of listening to laughter with care might be required.

In cultivating this renewed approach, therefore, we might draw on the work of Nancy (2007), particularly through the distinction he makes between ‘listening’ and ‘hearing’. *Hearing*, for Nancy, is a practice that involves searching for the intentionality of a sound (its object or direction) and therefore assumes that a sound inherently means something, and that something is already there to be understood (Simpson, 2009). *Listening*, on the other hand, is a practice in which the body does not seek to understand, but rather attunes to the sensation itself, opening the body up to the possibility of

a meaning yet to be revealed: “to listen is to be straining towards a possible meaning, and consequentially one that is not immediately accessible” (Nancy, 2007: 6). As Simpson (2009) notes, Nancy’s approach to listening is therefore characterised by six themes, three of which are more general to his philosophy as a whole (the body, the subject, and sense), and three of which are more specific to engagements with sounds (resonance, timbre, and rhythm). It’s worth noting here that although all six of these remain important for this re-working of laughter, there remains a certain difficulty in attending to the more specific sonorous elements of laughter given that my descriptions were written ‘after the fact’ and that I was not necessarily looking to attend to these issues whilst I was in the field, and I will therefore mostly concentrate on the first three.

My intention here is not necessarily to provide a ‘Nancian’ reading of the ways in which we might listen to laughter (see also Nancy, 1993), but rather to draw connection between Nancy’s arguments and non-representational geographies more widely (in a similar manner to Simpson, 2009), through arguing that we can listen to laughter, not through its assumed capacity to represent some other social force, but instead through its capacities to affect bodies in ways that exceed their representational characteristics (see also Janus, 2011; Wang Jing, 2012). In particular, I wish to destabilise the notion that the subject precedes the actions and cognitions that ‘it’ produces through ‘its’ body, and instead recognise the ways in which the subject and the spaces of its actions, movements, emotions and thoughts are co-emergent

performative entities (Barad, 2007; McCormack, 2013; Simpson, 2017; Wylie, 2006, 2010). In other words, paraphrasing Judith Butler's (2006) famous proposition that the doer does not precede the deed but is created from it, I want to recognise that neither the laugher, nor the listener, pre-exist the laughter, but rather that they are brought into being in conjunction with the laughter itself (Harrison, 2009; Nancy, 1993).

This manner of listening, therefore, has two connected implications for the ways in which we understand the relation between laughter and the subject (and therefore between laughter, care and ethics more generally). First, in listening to laughter in this manner we essentially position it as a 'thing', or a 'matter of concern', in a similar manner to that described by Bruno Latour (2004, 2005), Jane Bennet (2004, 2005, 2010) and other scholars working within the realms of what we might loosely term agential-materialisms (e.g. Barad, 2003, 2007; Braidotti, 2011; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Laughter is rendered, not simply as an extension of the human subject, but rather as a body in its own right, capable of acting on and affecting different bodies in ways that exceed the control, or indeed the intention, of the joker or laugher themselves (see also Deleuze and Parnet, 1987; Massumi, 1992). Second, therefore, are the ways in which this form of listening challenges the phenomenological intentionality of laughter, and particularly the assumption that laughter is directed towards, or means, something in particular (Sills, 2017). Indeed, for Nancy (2007: 20), listening (rather than hearing) dislodges the assumed intentionality of sound: "sound (and/or sense) is what is not at first intended.

It is not first ‘intentioned’: on the contrary, sound is what places its subject, which has not preceded it with an aim” – that is to say, the listener does not precede the listening. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 2, elsewhere in Nancy’s work, we find the suggestion that perhaps this process might be further intensified by laughter itself. “Intention is abolished in laughter, it explodes there, and the pieces into which it bursts are what laughter laughs – laughter, in which there is always more than one laugh” (Nancy, 1993: 384).

In essence, therefore, both of these implications – the positioning of laughter as a thing and the displacement of its perceived intentionality – serve as a mode of ‘spacing’ the subject in relation to laughter (Crouch, 2003; Doel, 1996), where spacing refers to “an active and ongoing process, a movement of differing and deferral, where ‘the subject’ is always already in relation to what it is not, always emerging from these relations, but where such relations are by no means fixed or certain” (Simpson, 2017: 6). Although a seemingly abstracted apprehension of the relation between bodies, subjects and laughter, it’s worth noting that this chapter emerges directly from these processes of differing and deferral: the lasting sense of my not knowing in which manner (or direction) to think about these moments of laughter. What’s more, this spacing holds open laughter’s contingent multiplicity (Grosz, 2005) (the ‘more than one laugh’ described by Nancy (1993) above), in the sense that laughter, even when directed at something, in particular, can generate multiple outcomes, affects and meanings, some of which remain contradictory. We can see this to some extent within the telling of both events where I have

tried to capture the sense of uncertainty and unknowing which consumes my body as it is jostled into a place through the encounter with each laughter: the mixed feelings of amusement and anger, a recognition of my own complicity within the moment, the confusion and the questions of care that emerge throughout. Yet this mode of spacing is perhaps accentuated and expressed best within the relations between the first and second event, particularly through the ways in which their affective tonality, subjective positioning and senses of care, contradict and therefore differentiate themselves from each other.

Crucially, therefore, through the spacing of the subject in each moment of laughter we can start to question the a priori nature of its matterings, the way it comes to 'mean' something and therefore the kinds of ethical judgements we might make of it. Indeed, the meaning of laughter is no longer attached to the intentions of the joker, nor to the intentionality of the laughter itself, but rather is held open, "pregnant with possibilities" (Latham, 2003: 1994), capable of attaching itself in multiple directions and mattering in different ways. Presumably in each case I could have made very different moral judgements about the relationship between laughter and care, yet because of the ways in which each moment of laughter affects me, or, the ways in which I am 'moved' by it (McCormack, 2008b), or the ways in which my subjectivity is placed somewhere in relation to the event (Nancy, 2007; Simpson, 2009), the decision ultimately falls one way and then the other. In listening to rather than hearing laughter, therefore, we not only destabilise the ways in which laughter's

meanings are understood, but also the ways in which care's meanings are understood as well. This happens through shifting from an 'objective' understanding of laughter and care based on forms of practice (e.g. the style of the humour) and instead towards more embodied, situated and subjective judgements. These judgments are rooted in the question of what laughter *can do*: the ways in which laughter affects bodies (in this case my body specifically) either to increase or reduce their capacities to act (see also Anderson 2006; Braidotti, 2011; Deleuze, 1988a).

In mapping this back onto Tronto's (1993: 103) definition of care and into the wider ethical landscapes of the care homes, therefore, I would argue that through listening to laughter based on its affects we move the ethical impetus of its relationship with care away from the notion of intended practice (i.e. "care as everything we do") and instead onto the outcomes of those practices (i.e. their capacities to "maintain, continue and repair our world"). Indeed, this is useful in cutting through some of the non-normative elements of joking and laughter, such as the moments in which an apparently 'cruel' joke (such as an impression) actually generates a level of affection between the joker and the target of the joke; or the converse, where a comment made in jest generates offence or hurts the target without that being the intention of the joker. In this sense, this way of thinking also shifts the manner in which we are forced to make judgements, away from universalised ethical norms and principles, which Derek McCormack (2003: 503) describes as "ethics-as-rule-following" and which presumes an advanced notice of how different people will act or

react to certain ‘unknowable’ situations, and instead towards a more situated affective ethics which “demands an openness to the uncertain affective potentiality of the eventful encounter as that from which new ways of going on in the world might emerge” (ibid). In other words, it demands that we make ethical judgements about different moments based on an attunement to “what happens” (Thrift, 2008: 8) through an encounter with laughter, rather than what we think will or should happen (see Barnett, 2012). In this sense, each judgement needs to be made about each event: new and unexpected, different every time.

This mode of listening, therefore, serves to add a level of precision to our understanding of laughter’s ethics. It forces us to consider not the expressions out of which laughter emerges, nor the assumed direction of its travel, but rather the ways in which it matters and therefore why and how it matters in each encounter (Wilson, 2017). It is an ethical approach that opens itself to the unexpected and well noted contradictory elements that make up laughter’s cultural politics (Brigstocke, 2014; Dittmer, 2013; Speier, 1998): its capacities to work in between the discourses and modes of power that surround it and to enact something of a ‘doublespeak’ that remains ambiguous until it registers as alterity. As with much non-representational thinking, however, there is a potential critique that needs to be acknowledged here, in that we might argue this mode of listening remains too focused on the singularity of each event (individual moment, individual listeners etc.) without fully recognising the wider cultural-political-historical-spatial forms, textures and tensions within

which, and out of which, these encounters take place (Cresswell, 2006; Nash, 2000; Olson, 2017; Popke, 2009), thus meaning that they may not always be as surprising as one might first expect...

The event: part 3

That evening I sit on the sofa at home, reflecting on the day and writing in my field diary. My attention turns to the moment of laughter and draws a comparison with the one a day or so before. I write: *"It didn't feel so bad today which was strange. I think the laughter the other day gave me a feeling malice which just wasn't present today. [Carer] probably had the same attitude as [Nurse] however. I guess it may be important to attend to wider circumstances in which these events occur..."* (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 16/06/2016)

4.4 | Listening to laughter as a circumstantial encounter

Retrospectively, thinking about laughter's meanings (and therefore its relationship with both care and ethics more generally) as being dependent upon the worlds within which it is embedded is perhaps not that radical. It is a factor of laughter that most people know instinctively: a sense that sometimes and in some spaces laughter is more appropriate than in others. Similarly, this recognition of contingency is also held within Tronto's (1993: 103) discussion of care, in which she 'insists' that care "is largely defined culturally, and will vary among different cultures." The key question, however, rests around how we define these different spacetimes and cultures

themselves, which are, to my mind at least, too often understood both in terms that are too static rather than being seen as processual entities that are always in flux, continuously emerging in relation to the events, practices and performances within them (McCormack, 2013), but also without taking into full account the historical, social, cultural, material and embodied geographical contexts that always surround such performances (Cresswell, 2006; Massey, 2005; Nash, 2000; Noxolo, 2009).

In this sense, my use of the word 'circumstances', although written without too much thought at the time, gains a new resonance, particularly through engagement with the work of Derek McCormack (2017) who has recently pushed for an understanding of worlds as 'circumstantial spacetimes'. Drawing on Michel Serres, McCormack (2017: 3) thus describes circumstance as "a way of naming the extrusion of the impersonal forces excessive of a life into the worldly textures and trajectories of that life" and thus generates an approach that is not "centred on the human experience of life worlds" yet "remains attentive to the affective force of worlds, to how their 'pinch' is felt in the stances of bodies and forms of life." What this claim about the circumstantial nature of worlds (variously conceived) does, therefore, is to move away from purely phenomenological ideas, in which the 'world' is only that which is experienced or perceived (in the moment) and instead adds a recognition that there are various other elements, forces and bodies that also actively contribute to experiences themselves (even if we are unaware of their existence), and which are therefore crucial in contextualising the meanings of

different events.

Working through the concept of circumstance, therefore, pushes our understandings of the events in this chapter further towards a post-phenomenological stance (Ash and Simpson, 2016; Wylie, 2006) and therefore again makes contact with the post-phenomenological style of thinking within the work of Jean Luc Nancy (1993, 2000, 2007). In this sense, a circumstantial form of listening to laughter with care captures much of what has already been discussed in this chapter, yet serves to further disrupt the 'authenticity' of immediate affective/cognitive experiences, instead rendering them as only one element within the myriad of ways through which meaning is produced. In other words, whilst laughter's capacities to affect at each moment are important for understanding its ethical force (Braidotti, 2011; McCormack, 2003), it is also crucial to recognise the complex and often contradictory ways in which these events are situated in relation to the wider ethical landscapes or worlds in which they take place (Popke, 2009).

In this sense, listening to laughter as a circumstantial encounter establishes an attunement that straddles both the immediacy of the event and the wider spatiotemporal structures within which, and out of which, the event itself emerges (Nancy, 2000). In other words, it moves towards an evaluative judgement of ethics that is not just about the emotional/affective spacetimes of the events themselves, and what laughter can do in the here-and-now, but also questions how the event of laughter relates to, and affects, other elements

of the care home as a 'landscape' or 'assemblage' of care (Foley, 2014; Gorman, 2017a, 2017c; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). In other words, I am suggesting that ethical judgements about the relationship between laughter and care should be made, not just in terms of the individual moment (whether that be representationally or non-representationally), but rather as a balance between these individual moments and their place within the 'culture' of a care home more generally. What this does is to recognise ethics (and politics) as something that is situated across multiple different spacetimes: emergent during the singularity of every event, but also existing and emerging as an aggregate of the multiplicity events that make up the world.

In terms of the events of this chapter, therefore, there are perhaps two key factors that we might draw upon to illustrate the potential of this way of thinking: the sense that care is practised in multiple ways within the care home itself – not all of which are expressed through empathy, compassion, love, kindness or any of the other emotional traits we might normatively ascribe to caring relations (Bondi, 2008) – and that the care home is also a place in which various relations exist that have nothing to do with caring for the residents at all, notably forms of friendship between staff members.

The first of these factors is something that can already be found explicitly within the literature on care where care is variously described in terms of not only providing physical or emotional assistance directly to the body of a person to make them well, but also through dwelling practices and

housekeeping/homemaking (England, 2010; Schillmeier and Domenech, 2009), disciplining people (particularly in terms of caring for children – see Dunkley, 2009; Schliehe, 2015), maintaining the environment (Bennett, 2005; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), and through the production of wider policies and governance (Barnes, 2012). Similarly, as Liz Bondi (2008: 250) makes clear, care can also sometimes involve emotional traits that are somewhat paradoxical: “[c]are oppresses and inspires; it hurts and it nurtures; it demeans and it fulfils; it enrages and it moves; it evokes love and it evokes hate”. This set of paradoxical feelings is one that can be seen and felt throughout my field diary, primarily through the various moments of frustration and anger from carers and myself, where our efforts were either apparently not appreciated by the residents, or where the residents would actively work against the assistance that was being provided. I was once punched in the lip by a resident for instance when trying to help put an oxygen mask on her, making me both frustrated and angry with her, despite knowing it wasn’t really her “fault” (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 02/12/2015). In this sense, we might see the laughter from the events in this chapter as part of this wider emotional landscape of caring relations with an affective tonality that is akin to these other paradoxical emotional experiences (Bondi, 2008) and therefore as something that is part of working within and through care itself rather than as something that cuts against it.

The second point, about various relations existing in care homes that are not necessarily framed around caring for residents is far less recognised within

the literature, which, perhaps for obvious reasons, has largely focussed on 'therapeutic' practices and relations for people in care, although there is some literature that recognises relations between therapeutic aspects of landscapes and wider socio-spatial assemblages (e.g. Foley, 2011, 2014; Gorman, 2017a). Experiences of working within care homes, however, bring to the fore a series of other relations that exist, frame and shape the worlds of the people within them – which in and of themselves can perhaps be seen to exceed notions of 'therapeutic' encounters (Emmerson, under review). Although there are perhaps too many of these relations to map out in their entirety here (including economic relationships, rivalries, and personal and medical issues for care workers themselves), the most significant in this instance are the personal friendships that develop between different workers within care homes.

Friendship is widely recognised as a specific context in terms of personal relations between people in that it is governed by different 'rules' and social conventions than relationships between colleagues, strangers, 'superiors' or 'inferiors', because they are usually marked by a levelling of power relations and a sense of mutual respect and understanding (Green, 1998). Friendship is also something that is culturally defined to some respects, with noted differences in the ways in which women and men, older and younger people, and different classes of people, do friendship (ibid). Recognising friendships within the care home, and treating them as a different kind of entity to collegiate relations, thus adds a further layer of complexity to the ways in

which we understand and contextualise the relationship between laughter and care, in both representational and affective terms. Friendships create different forms of ‘acceptability’ and thus different registers of morality surrounding what can be, should be and is laughed at and about (Kotthoff, 2006; Sanders, 2004) – something we perhaps recognise instinctively, given that many of us will joke and laugh about things with our friends that would be completely unacceptable in terms of wider societies. We might thus argue that friendships in care homes enable the production of affective spacetimes that are both different, and somewhat separate, from the normative responsibilities, practices and affectivities of care and care work.

In this sense, we might think about the events of laughter in this chapter as something that, although ethical in the sense that they do shape and change the world and people’s experiences of it (as we have seen), might actually be sometimes better thought of as situated in spacetimes that are spaced apart from the wider ethics of care within the home, and therefore as something that ultimately doesn’t affect care itself in any significant way. In other words, we might just see it as something that happens, and affects people, but doesn’t actually matter in terms of the wider workings or ethics of care in the care home.

It might seem strange to come towards the end of a chapter focused on a particular set of events, only then to say that perhaps they don’t matter. What this proposition does, however, is highlight a particular strength of listening

to laughter as a circumstantial encounter. Indeed, what this kind of listening does is open up intellectual space through which we might (re)think the events themselves, beyond the immediacy of their representational or affective qualities, and open them up to a form of analysis that is simultaneously more open, more speculative, and potentially more generous in its assessment of the ethical impetus of the bodies involved in each scenario (Bartos, 2018; Haraway, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Put in another way, it serves to contribute a level of uncertainty to specific forms of judgements and understandings (or indeed misunderstandings) that we produce when we are, ourselves, enrolled within the affectivities of the event. In this sense, this final form of listening opens a space in which the events described here, for one reason or another, may not necessarily have meant what I thought they did at the time, mattered in the way I thought they did at the time, and therefore may well have had a very different relationship with care than my first thoughts might have suggested. In other words, listening (and re-listening) through a circumstantial mode, opens a crucial space for the listener to be wrong or change their mind.

4.5 | Conclusion: Listening to laughter with care

The rest of my time spent in that care home with these same people (and indeed reflection on my time in the one before) does seem to suggest that perhaps my initial assessments of the first event in this chapter did indeed require a little more nuance. Indeed, whilst it affected me in particular ways, establishing emotional/affective alterity with my own sense of morality,

seemingly that particular moment had very little effect on the wider ways in which care was provided to residents, both those who were the subject of the impressions and more widely. Indeed, life seemed to carry on 'as normal' over the next few days and weeks, with reference to this particular moment never occurring again throughout my time in the home. I also never brought it up and so ultimately, as I suggested in the opening to this chapter, I remain unsure of exactly what happened during these moments, and what it means. In this sense, a cogent ethical judgement about the relationship between laughter and care within this set of events remains impossible. In terms of the aims of this chapter, however, it perhaps doesn't seem to matter either way.

Where the experiment in this chapter does make its mark, however, is in unpacking how the ways in which we listen to laughter shapes the ways in which we think its relationships with care, and ultimately how we think about laughter with care as an ethical force. In this sense, the chapter has pushed towards a recognition that when we make judgements about care's presence or absence, and about whether we are witness to good, bad, better or worse care, we are always ourselves enacting an intervention (Mol, 2008b). Indeed, as we have seen throughout the chapter, listening through the three different modes can territorialise often drastically different understandings of laughter in terms of the ways it can induce affective states, feelings and forces, understandings and misunderstandings in the body, and that these often exceed the intentionality of the laughter or listener themselves. Together these forces thus generate meaning, and these meanings in turn also produce

different understandings of laughter's relationship with care: situating it as either care-full or care-less, or indeed sometimes as something that is somewhat separate from ethics of care in care homes themselves.

Overall, the chapter has therefore looked to destabilise the certainties of each mode of listening and thus unveil some of the generative precarity that is held within their capacities to mean different things, to different people at different times. Although I lean most heavily towards the circumstantial forms of listening within this thesis, the point of this experiment has not been to establish one form of listening as 'better' than any other, but rather to understand how each situates laughter within a different relation to care therefore generate worlds that are framed around multiplicities, rather than universal 'certainties' and 'rules' (Barad, 2007; McCormack, 2003). Movements such as these are important, as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 61) argues, because they can "leave open the ... specific relational arrangements of caring in each situation instead of presupposing there is only one way of caring" and therefore become crucial once again for thinking through what the "inescapable troubles of interdependent existences" (ibid: 70). As such, it remains important to listen through all three modes at different times when making ethical judgements about laughter. This allows the listener to move, think, feel, imagine and speculate from multiple directions and locations; shifting between centres and margins; and thus, generate accounts of ethics that are more open, affirmative and generous towards laughter's multiple roles, forms and functions within the landscapes of care homes

themselves.

Ultimately, the residual uncertainty surrounding the empirical events of this chapter, although significant in opening up these multiple potentials and meanings of laughter and care, perhaps belies the power of this way of thinking about their ethics. As such, the next three chapters of this thesis build on this approach through addressing laughter's multiple relationships with care in terms of three key elements: their performances and practices; their affective spatialities; and the ethico-political impetus that surrounds them. Although there is significant overlap between these three elements, focussing on them individually is useful both in mapping laughter onto the version of care ethics as outlined by Tronto (1993) and others (e.g. Conradson, 2011) and used throughout the thesis; as well as onto geography's (emergent) ethical landscapes as outlined in Chapter 2. In focussing on each individually, therefore, we can not only begin to diagram the multiple relations that emerge between laughter and care – the ways in which laughter works with, towards or against the maintenance, continuation, and repair of worlds – but also to plot a way of thinking through the ethical refrains that make up the world more generally, and that geographers are, I argue, forced to confront in making ethical sense of these worlds more generally.

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Chapter 5: Performative folds of laughter and care

[W]hat kinds of subjects are we when we laugh? What does it mean to be a laugher, to anchor one's subjectivity, however provisionally, in 'I laugh therefore I am (or am not)'?

(Parvulescu, 2010: 3)

5.1 | Introduction

Where the previous chapter was concerned with the ethics of listening to laughter with care, this chapter shifts concern to the ethics of its practices and performances in care homes, questioning how these intersect with other practices and performances, notably those associated with care. In attending to these performances, however, I again pay heed to the circumstantial arrangements surrounding laughter's bursting, recognising the ways in which the meanings of laughter in relation to care are affected by the contexts, cultures, spaces and times in which it emerges, but also, *who* is doing the laughter (McCormack, 2017). Although this approach risks a return to representationalism, such as producing an argument that laughter's ethical acceptability should be read through identity politics (e.g. Albrecht, 1999; Ridanpää, 2017), I resist this through framing the subject as an emergent

entity that is both provisional and plural (Saldanha, 2010; Simpson, 2017): simultaneously situated, decentred, and relational (Mol, 2008a). In other words, this chapter diagrams the multiple ethical possibilities afforded by the doing of laughter as part of everyday care practices through engaging with the different, yet overlapping, modes of relational-subjectivity that constitute 'being-with-in' care homes themselves (see Nancy, 2000).

In framing this discussion, I draw inspiration from Nixon's (2017) writings on laughter and pride, specifically her deployment of Deleuze's (1988a, 1993) concept of 'the fold' (*le pli*). For Nixon (2017) the fold enables an affective and ethical attentiveness to the multiple ways in which laughter comes into being and thus what it can do at different moments through recognising the multiple 'scales' across which it occurs, in her case: the individual; the collective; and the structural (although following Guattari (1995) I refer to 'the institutional' rather than 'the structural' in my analyses). My argument is thus that applying this framework to laughter with care enables a more holistic understanding of the multiple ways in which both laughter and care are practised within care homes, the ways in which they fold into and out of one another at different times and for different reasons and thus crucially enables an attentiveness to the ethical differences that emerge within and between 'the subject' at each of these registers.

The significance of this approach, therefore, is in its 'undoing' of normative conceptions of the 'the carer' as a moral subject (Bartos 2018), instead posing

a more multiple, differentiated, distributed and diverse understanding of the singular-plurality through which subjects of laughter and care come into being (Nancy, 2000). This means recognising the multiple ways in which practices of laughter and care fold into and out of different modes of subjectivity. This once again moves us away from universal ethics and towards a more minor “ethics of enactment” in which the *ethical subject* and the *ethics of the subject* can be seen as emergent and distributed entities (McCormack, 2005: 142), brought into being through the circumstantial specificity of the encounters they have with a variegated set of O/others across a variety of ‘scales’ (Wilson, 2017). As such, this movement “provides a space not for the application of pre-given moral tenants, but rather for the emergence and cultivation of ethical sensibilities that value moments of generosity and open engagements with difference” (Darling, 2010: 241).

I begin the chapter with a discussion of the fold, drawing linkages between it and performativity and thus setting out how we might deploy these two concepts together in thinking about laughter and/with care. Within this section, the emphasis is placed on the ways in which different practices serve to constitute and transgress various forms of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. Following this, I briefly turn to the care home itself, positioning it as a ‘folded place’ constituted through multiple different bodies moving between ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’ at a variety of scales. This discussion thus sets up the individual, collective and institutional as three key registers through which ‘care’ can be enacted. These three registers thus frame the discussion of laughter through

the rest of the chapter. At the individual register, I note the ways in which laughter serves to ‘externally’ express ‘internal’ qualities, but also how it can reinforce ‘the internal’ in relation to external practices. At the collective register, laughter can be seen to generate and reinforce the boundaries of different groups: including and excluding people from them at different times. At the institutional register, laughter becomes enveloped into the logics and matters of the care home, generating particular ways of being-within it which often exceed the idea of conscious *choice*. The conclusion, therefore, notes that because these three registers serve to fracture any sense of a singular subject of laughter, in thinking about the ethics of laughter with care we need to adopt a more generous ethos that recognises the multiple positions from which laughter emerges.

5.2 | Performative folds

Non-representational theories have increasingly worked to decentre and multiply the idea of a pre-existing singular ‘subject’ (Simpson, 2017), although they are by no means alone in this regard. As Wylie (2010: 99) notes: “the status of the ‘I’ – the gazing subject, the writing subject, the body-subject – has been one of the standout problematics for several generations of critical inquiry in the social sciences and humanities.” In non-representational geographies more specifically, we might argue that the resolution (a word I use very tentatively) to this problematic has primarily taken two forms. First, there has been a desire to expand what we might consider to be a ‘subject’, primarily through the inclusions of non-human animals, objects, forces and

affects (ibid). Second, there has been a more substantial movement to unsettle the association between the ideas of a singular subject with a singular embodied 'housing' and instead to position the subject as an emergent entity that is co-constituted through its relations with the spatial, social, cultural, economic, political and ethical worlds that the 'self' inhabits. As Thrift (1999: 319, n7) writes: "subjectivity is not an isolated state... but is distributed within particular situations among 'dividuals' of many kinds." Conceptualisations of the subject along these grounds, whether that be as 'hybrid' (Whatmore, 1997), 'nomadic' (Braidotti, 2011; Colls, 2012), 'distributed' (Mol, 2008a), 'more-than-human' (McCormack, 2013), or 'post-human' (Roelvink and Zolkos, 2015) therefore all share a relational understanding of the subject as something that defies a neat classification between 'in here' and 'out there' (see also Wylie, 2006). In more recent work, Simpson (2017: 10, emphasis mine) pushes this further by suggesting that there are "opportunities for recognising both the internal and relative differentiation of subjects *from themselves*". Whilst I will return to the first of these reimaginings of the subject in the next chapter, I will focus primarily on the second in this. In this section, in particular, I look to forward a means of thinking through Simpson's recognition of the internal differentiation of the subject, particularly through drawing on Deleuze's conception of 'the fold'.

The fold (le pli [the pleat]) is a conceptual schema that permeates throughout Deleuze's work, although appears most recognisably within his books on Foucault (Deleuze, 1988a) and Leibniz (Deleuze, 1993). The fold is essentially

one of Deleuze's ways of negotiating the boundaries between the 'inside' and 'outside' of various entities including buildings, capitalism, thought, power and life (Colebrook, 2002). His most substantial deployment of the concept, however, occurs as a means of understanding subjectivity and processes of subjectivation.

In simple terms, the fold outlines the idea that the 'internal' is always held in continuous state of encounter with the 'external' whereby the inside is always both unfolding into the outside, and the outside being folded into the inside (Nixon, 2017). Elizabeth Grosz (1994) adopts a different imagery to express this same idea, in the form of the Mobius Strip. The overtly anti-Cartesian and relational characteristics of the fold, alongside its inherent spatiality, thus draw parallels between it and a variety of other poststructuralist, feminist and phenomenological thinking from within and outwith geography, which equally stress the porosity of borders, boundaries and territories and thus the inherent fluidity of the spaces, places, bodies, subjects, objects, matters, practices and affects that make up 'the world' (Grosz, 1994; Longhurst, 1995; Merleau-Ponty, 2002). These connections thus enable, in a resolutely Deleuzian fashion, a series of linkages to emerge with other conceptual apparatus frequently deployed in geographical thinking. However, there are two key conceptual differences afforded by the fold. As Wylie (2006: 529, emphasis mine) writes:

The precise distinction of Leibnizian philosophy, as Deleuze presents it, is that it offers a *non*phenomenological alternative to Cartesian

accounts of spatiality. The world is neither a *res extensa* of three indifferent, rectilinear dimensions nor, pace Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the existential context of being-in and being-there. Instead, 'the world is an indefinite series of curvatures or inflections ... the world is the infinite curve that touches at an infinity of points an infinity of curves' ([Deleuze] 1992, page 24). In this world, the fold, rather than the subject or object, is primary...

Whilst the full implications of this differentiation are perhaps too numerous to outline within this short section (see Doel (1996) and Wylie (2006) for detailed accounts from a geographical perspective), the fundamental point of importance here is that placing the fold as the primary element of the world serves to de-essentialize the subjects of both laughter and care (and their associated ethics), instead positioning the subject as an always dynamic, relational becoming that is constituted differently depending on the particular configuration of foldings surrounding 'its' emergence (Deleuze, 1988a). In other words, 'the subject' can be seen 'simply' as an expression of the circumstantial arrangement of foldings (material, practised, affective, discursive) that constitute a given spacetime (McCormack, 2013, 2017). This fundamental point of importance thus leads to a second, yet equally significant implication for thinking about the subject which is: given that foldings are themselves always multiples, so too must be the subjectivities that emerge from them, even within a single body. Whilst Deleuze does address this issue of subjective multiplicity in his own writings (particularly through the "four folds" outlined in the Foucault book), it perhaps crystallises most clearly through his work with Guattari (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, 1988),

encapsulated by their understanding of 'the subject' as inherently schizophrenic: always many selves. In building on this work, Guattari (1995) would later pose three modes of subjective territorialisation – the individual, the collective, and the institutional – which I have deployed here as a structural typology, for thinking through the internally differentiated subject, particularly within the context of care homes.

The fold, therefore, offers a means of conceptualising the variegated circumstances that surround the subjects of laughter with care as always multiple: always in excess of a singular, universal, moral/ethical positioning. There is, however, a need to think more clearly about how these folds affect practices of laughter and care themselves, particularly in terms of the capacities of laughter and care to fold into and out of one another. In doing this, we might turn more explicitly to Nixon's (2017) writings around laughter in which she deploys the fold alongside somewhat more central socio-geographic concepts, notably ideas of inclusion ('inside') and exclusion ('outside'). Although never made explicit, Nixon's paper is in this way suggestive of laughter as a kind of performative action that serves to (re)produce both spaces and subjectivities in a variety of ways (perhaps unsurprisingly given that both performativity and the fold have a shared Foucauldian root).

On the one hand, therefore, engaging performativity and the fold together therefore, particularly through non-representational theories (see Dewsbury, 2000; Latham, 2003; Thrift, 2000, 2004b; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000), can be

seen to facilitate further understanding of the ways in which laughter and care enact differently folded relational configurations, particularly through moving or reinforcing the 'boundaries' between bodies, matters and affects. On the other hand, the performative also speaks to the ways in which bodies' differentiated relationality can fold into, and shape, the enactment of laughter and care themselves, particularly in terms of the kinds of circumstances out of which these doings emerge. As the previous chapter attested to, the ways in which we do both laughter and care amongst friends, for example, is markedly different from how we might perform them with strangers or senior colleagues.

Crucially, however, these two elements are not mutually exclusive, but rather establish a dynamic relationality where each becomes both the inside and outside of each other. As Deleuze (1988a: 96–97) writes, “the outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside”. Furthermore, as Nixon (2017: 36) argues:

That Deleuze evokes peristalsis and digestion is not unintentional; he references bodily processes as exemplary of the movement of folding to describe the embodied negotiations between inside and outside, absorption and repulsion, a body-subject perpetually undergoes (Deleuze, 1988). Food and drink, consciousness, spatial negotiations, encounters with ideas, feelings, other human and non-human animals, are material affective encounters with our environments that involve negotiating foldings both above and below conscious perception.

The burst of laughter has long been associated with the fluidity of bodily functions (see Bakhtin, 1984) and clearly demonstrates a mode of material unfolding from inside to outside of the body: “a process of breaking bodily boundaries”, with the “emphatic involvement of guts as a designated source of the utterance” which thus serves, in some ways, to “turn the body inside out” as Jack Katz (1999: 322, 340) suggests. Yet laughter also does social work that might equally be considered as performative foldings (Nixon, 2017). Emily Douglas (2015) for instance argues that laughter serves as a means of normalising certain kinds of bodies and behaviours through mocking difference (see also Billig, 2005), but also through modes of compulsory happiness. Quoting Sara Ahmed (2010: 55), she argues that “happiness is not so much what the [happy housewife archetype] has but what she does ... any deviation from gender roles in terms of women being trained to make men happy is a deviation from the happiness of all” (see Douglas, 2015: 148). Elsewhere, Ridanpää (2017: 64) discusses the role that laughter plays in the narrativisation of belonging, arguing that it can be “simultaneously understood both as a performative act of narrativization and also as a topic of narrativization”, thus reinforcing feelings of inclusion and exclusion depending whether or not you are ‘in’ on the joke. Nixon’s (2017) conceptualisations are somewhat more fluid in that they speak to less static positions of norm, centre and inside, instead posing laughter as something that works to continuously fold different people into and out of specific social configurations at different moments, thus shifting the boundaries between

what it means to be included or excluded within a given situation.

Care too can be conceptualised as a form of performative folding. In practice, the doing of care often involves the 'sharing' of emotional states to create modes of sympathy, empathy, support and even love, which similarly speak to the blurring of boundaries between the 'internal' self and the 'external' other, as well as movements between feelings of inclusion and exclusion. In material terms, care work also often involves the blurring of bodily boundaries, sometimes through the active folding of matters into a body (e.g. administering medications), but also through dealing with bodily fluids and matters that come out of another's body, whether that be blood, mucus, saliva, urine or faecal matter (see McDowell, 2009). As such, to care (and to be cared for) can be seen as a reciprocal movement in which the self becomes affectively entwined, or folded together, with the self of another in order to enact a change of some sort (Conradson, 2011): the interwoven web of life to which Tronto (1993) speaks. The doing of care however is also often bound up with a series of wider structural forces which fold together to associate and normalise particular cultural expectations about the kinds of people who are considered responsible for care work – notably female, black and migrant bodies (Lawson, 2007, 2009; McGregor, 2007) – as well as the kinds of (moral) subjectivities that these same people should perform emotionally and practically (Barnes, 2012; Tronto, 1993).

What we start to see through this brief discussion, therefore, are the ways in

which the folding and unfolding of bodies, matters and affects into different configurations through doing both laughter and care can not only emerge from particular subjective positions but also serve to (re)produce these same positions. What's more, underlying these movements of folding, there are often implicit ethical presuppositions whereby the enactments generated through folding take on differentiated meanings depending on the ways in which wider foldings produce 'the subject' under question. As such, in thinking about the ethics of folding laughter and care together it once again remains absolutely vital to attend to the particularities of the subject in terms of its complex folded relationship with both space and society and thus understand the circumstantial implications of what is happening at each moment. In thinking about doing laughter with care in care homes specifically, however, this is complicated further through the recognition of the plurality of enfolded subject positions (individual, collective, institutional) that care homes produce. As such, the remainder of this chapter looks to draw out the doing of laughter with care through these three positions and question how this recognition of the plurality of folding can shape our understandings of the ethics of laughter and care themselves. In setting this up, however, it becomes important to outline how these subjective positions emerge through examining the ways in which the spaces of the care home itself emerge through, and enact, a series of foldings.

5.3 | Care homes as 'folded places'

Places of care, such as care homes, are increasingly being conceptualised in

relational terms with a series of different scholars suggesting that we examine them as ‘landscapes’ (Gesler, 1992; Milligan and Wiles, 2010), ‘ecologies’ (Conradson, 2005), ‘assemblages’ (Duff, 2014; Foley, 2011, 2014), or indeed simply that we must view them as relational places constituted through their interconnections with other places (Andrews et al., 2005; Gorman, 2017c). Although these approaches differ in their conceptions of exactly *how* we should approach spaces of care, they all recognise “the individual, objects and the milieu of place as open, connected and mutually constitutive” (Lea, 2008: 91). In other words, all of these accounts recognise that the interrelation of forces that are both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ specific body/ies and environments all play a crucial part in constituting the experiences of ‘the self’ who is caring or being cared for in particular places (see Conradson, 2005). Drawing on from this, therefore, we can start to see how the fold might contribute further to understanding the dynamic and contingent nature of these places, particularly through recognising how various bodies, things, ideas and affects serve to fold, unfold and refold these relations as they move ‘into’ and ‘out of’ the places of care in question (Nixon, 2017).

In thinking about care homes specifically, therefore, we might note the ways in which various external ‘bodies’ influence the internal workings of the home itself. Perhaps the most obvious of these are the political, medical and legal institutions (briefly discussed in Chapter 3) which dictate both the funding available to care homes, as well as making and enforcing rules and regulations around care practices specifically (e.g. from the Care Quality Commission) and

more general laws around employment and statutory rights for workers. Similarly, we might note a series of other socio-economic structures that also shape the spatialities of different care homes. Again, as noted in Chapter 3, in both homes that I worked in residents' care was primarily funded by local authorities meaning that the access to funding, and thus the facilities available, were fewer than in comparison to the large-scale 'up-market' private care home providers⁴ that I encountered during my time with the theatre groups. These private care homes "were completely different in terms of both environment and set-up. Much nicer, more open, with everything looking new and fresh" (Field Diary Notes, Pantomime Group, 22/01/2016). As such, we can start to see the ways in which the 'insides' of care homes are always in part a reflection of their relations with the 'outside' world.

Socio-economic foldings do not just affect the materialities of the space, however, but also the kinds of bodies who enter particular homes, both in terms of workers and residents. At a more general register, for instance, we might note that in both homes that I worked in the staff members were predominantly working-class women, many also being recent migrants to the UK (both from EU countries such as Poland and Romania, but also from countries in the Global South, notably India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Nigeria and Zimbabwe) These are all common traits amongst care workers in 'Global

⁴ "Sunrise Living" is a typical example of such a provider in the UK, see <https://www.sunrise-care.co.uk/>

North Countries' and is well recognised within the literatures on the geographies of care (see Dyck, 2005; McDowell, 2009; McGregor, 2007). At a more specific register, however, we might note the interconnectedness of the residents and 'the places' in which each care home was situated, with almost all of the residents in each home previously living within close proximity to it. This meant that they often knew about the home prior to entering it and in many cases would have some form of personal connection with at least one staff member from within the home (who might be friends with one of their children, nephews or nieces for instance, or in one case, a resident used to be one of the care worker's teachers at school). This again speaks strongly to how certain interconnections between the insides and outsides of care homes shape the kinds of (caring) interactions that occur within them.

It's also worth noting that these processes of folding can occur in much more banal and subtle ways, through the literal movement of different bodies into and out of the home. Indeed, a huge variety of different bodies cross the threshold of the home on a daily basis with: workers arriving to start shifts and leaving at the end of them; family members and friends of relatives coming in and out to visit them; delivery drivers bringing in food, drinks, medications and other goods, or taking away rubbish and medical waste; and, indeed, as residents arrive into the home for admission into care and leave to go to appointments, to hospital or because they have died. Each of these movements thus marks a moment of folding which has the capacity to change the nature of the care home as a place. At its simplest, this change emerges through

reworking *who* is involved within the care home and thus who might require, aid or disrupt the care that is provided – with family members, in particular, seeming to fold into and out of the home in different ways in that they sometimes help staff with everyday tasks, but sometimes also ‘get in the way’ a bit, or challenge staff on certain issues.

Often this change seems to occur simply within the immediacy of the moment: a resident might seem happier when a particular staff member is on shift or their family are present; people might become excited if a dog comes in with someone; a staff member might become annoyed by someone else; or someone might not arrive for work, leaving the home short staffed until cover can arrive. As Conradson (2005: 340) notes, however: “[h]umans have the capacity to psychically internalise their experiences, in a sense folding particular events into their selves, so that even short-lived relational encounters may resonate and have effects beyond their immediate occurrence”. At one stage, for instance, I questioned whether the disruption caused by being short-staffed the previous day had rolled over on the next, suggesting the ways in which the folding together of particular collectives of bodies (human or otherwise) within the home can shape how particular care practices are given, received and experienced:

The home felt very sedated this morning, with the residents and staff seeming quieter than usual. I wonder if this is a knock-on from the day before when we were short staffed and everything was running behind which always seems to leave residents unsettled. There is something here

about the rhythms of the home and how sensitive these are to forms of disruption – almost like an ecosystem I guess?

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 28/06/2016)

We might also note the ways in which the folding between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of individual bodies are directly implicated in practices of care within the home. Often care is about repairing the internal spaces of the body, both in terms of material dysfunction (illness) whereby other matters, such as medications are folding into bodies in order to make them better, or in terms of emotional unrest, whereby certain forms of emotional labour are deployed in order to help people feel better *in* themselves (Dyer et al., 2008), or perhaps most often a mixture of these two forms of care is undertaken (see Atkinson et al., 2011). Similarly, the staff members’ health and emotions also inflect practices of care in various ways. A staff member might, for instance, be in a bad mood which can shape their capacities to perform the kinds of emotional labours described above (see also Hochschild, 1983). Furthermore, the health of the staff members can also intersect with their capacities to perform care. On several occasions staff members had to leave work because they were feeling unwell, and I noted at one point that because I was starting to feel unwell I was finding it more difficult to concentrate on the work I was doing in the care home, feeling a “little less able to attend to the residents’ wants and whims or listen to their stories” (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 22/06/2016) – with the language used here perhaps indicating my reduced capacity for care.

The internal spaces of care homes themselves, therefore, are far from homogeneous entities, but can also be seen as a series of foldings between insides and outsides of various kinds. We might note that the internal spaces of the office, lounge, bathroom or a resident's bedroom are qualitatively different to the other spaces of the home both in terms of their functions and the kinds of practices that happen within them. This is again not to say that they are bounded in any way: there is significant movement across the thresholds of these spaces, both in terms of the physical movement of people into and out of them, and in terms of various symbolic interactions, rules and procedures around what can and should happen within them, which are implemented from outside the specific rooms. Alongside this, however, there is also a sense that the spaces of particular rooms are constructed through processes of unfolding, or externalisation, of the individuals who inhabit them (see also Valentine, 2001). Although this was visible within both care homes more generally, it is perhaps in terms of the bedrooms that this becomes most obvious:

The bedrooms upstairs were strikingly different from each other (and to the feel of downstairs). They were all decorated individually – making a small statement about the people who live in them. If I'm honest, I hadn't really noticed the differences too much until I walked into a room that had even been carpeted differently. The floor felt softer underfoot and walking on it made me feel warm and cosy. It was funny as well because I found myself paying extra care in the room, spending longer making the bed and arranging all of the cushions nicely. I wonder if she will notice. It was a nice

difference in that room. It felt like home.

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 12/10/2015)

Here then we start to get a sense of the ways in which places of care fold into and out of different bodies, generating differences within the ways in which care itself is both felt and practised: the unfolding of an individual resident into the space and the subsequent folding of that expression of space into my body seems to cause me to pay extra care to the room. What's crucial here, therefore, are the dynamic processes of folding that cut across and between different bodies, matters and affects which together influence the kinds of care that occurs. In many ways, therefore, this example serves to exemplify how the various foldings that make up places of care come to matter, often in relatively banal ways: whether that is through the inclusion of certain bodies into the home, which changes its capacities to run smoothly and efficiently, or through new forms of 'best practice' which change the nature of what can and should be done at particular points.

In bringing this section to a close, therefore, it's worth noting a clear similarity between this idea and other relational approaches to care noted above, particularly assemblage (Duff, 2014; Foley, 2011, 2014) and ecological approaches (Conradson, 2005). Yet my argument would be that 'the fold' adds a further level of multiplicity and nuance to these approaches through its capacities to think both 'holistically' and 'finitely' at the same time (Nancy, 2003): that is to say, through focussing on the fold, rather than 'the subject', we can start to understand care (and the people who 'do' it) as something that

is always distributed and differentiated through(out) the places in which it occurs. Across this section as a whole, therefore, it becomes clear that ‘care’ emerges in care homes across a number of different foldings simultaneously, notably: individual, collective and institutional folds (Guattari, 1995). In other words, care in care homes is not just provided through institutional frameworks, collections of bodies working together, or individuals doing things for other individuals, but rather it works across all three registers in different ways at the same time. This, in turn, means that the idea of a singular ethic of care for care homes itself becomes fractured, distributed and differentiated, something that becomes crucial for understanding the ethics of laughter’s working within them. As such, the remainder of the chapter offers three sections that piece through laughter’s capacities to inflect care at each of these registers, starting with the individual, then the collective and finally the institutional.

5.4 | ‘Individual’ practices of laughter with care

As briefly touched upon above, much of what happens in care homes is guided by ‘individuals’, each with their own personalities, identities, histories and lives outside of the care home. This is true not just of the staff members, but also family members, other support workers, visitors and, of course, the residents themselves, each of whom brings these subjectivities into the home with them whenever they cross the threshold. Indeed, people would often share elements of their lives with each other and with the residents through talking about their friends and families, sharing stories about holidays and

activities and seeking advice from others about problems or issues that they were facing. These activities sometimes occurred somewhat in separation from care itself, but more often would end up becoming folded into the ways in which care is done within the care home, albeit in relatively banal ways. For example:

I spent most of the morning working on the ground floor with Melissa. We were supposed to be doing activities. However, Melissa has her driving theory test later this week and was worrying about it quite a lot. She kept pulling up the test app on her phone and doing questions (which she kept getting wrong). Both David and I were trying to help her, whilst pottering about getting bits and pieces for the residents. Eventually, we started asking the residents the questions from the test, which they mostly didn't know the answers to, but it became a sort of activity in and of itself.

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 03/08/2016).

Whilst this example is relatively rare in its overt nature it's worth noting that individual subjectivities become folded into the care practices that they provide almost constantly within care settings, albeit in subtler forms. One carer in Winterbourne Care Home, for instance, would tell almost all the residents about her recent successes and failures at Bingo whilst she was undertaking whatever form of care they needed, and many others, across both homes, would show pictures of their children or dogs to the residents and tell them about things that were going on at home. At a more generic level, we might note the ways in which different people's personalities affect the ways in which they both engage with the residents whilst caring (e.g. being friendly, cheery, distanced or nonchalant) and the ways in which they actually do care

itself, particularly in terms of how they imagine what might be 'good', 'enjoyable' or 'comforting' for the residents at different moments. Some staff members, for instance, are much more intimately 'touchy-feely' with the residents, hugging them and kissing them on the cheeks and foreheads for instance, whereas other carers (myself included) were seemingly a little less intimate in their touching, perhaps holding a resident's hand or squeezing a shoulder, but not more.

One of the most obvious foldings in this manner, however, relates to laughter. In a similar manner to touching, the ways in which individuals do laughter within care homes can vary widely depending on their disposition towards laughter (including their sense of humour), which shapes how often, when, where and at what they would laugh. Some people, for instance, would involve laughter relatively ubiquitously within their everyday practices: laughing at a whole manner of different things (many of which were, to my mind, not at all funny). Others would be much more reserved with their laughter, rarely laughing despite their good 'humour'; and others still would tell numerous jokes, but rarely laugh themselves. In terms of jokes, these were also often inflected through individuals' personalities and lives. In Summerview, for instance, one of the carers spent a whole lunch break trying to teach the rest of us to swear in Polish, causing huge amounts of laughter, both when we pronounced the words right and when we pronounced them wrong (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 21/06/2016). There was a similar moment of significant laughter in Winterbourne relating to a video of a band

who performed parodies of AC/DC songs, whom one of the carers had seen recently at a music festival (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 05/12/2015). Together, then, these brief examples show the ways in which the enactment of laughter within care homes can emerge as a folding of factors that are both outside and inside their walls.

In terms of the doing of laughter with-in care itself a similar mode of folding can be seen to apply whereby the ways in which carers do laughter serves to express something of the individual 'self' when attending to matters of care. Here laughter can perhaps most clearly be seen as a way of 'showing' that you are kind or friendly (to echo the CQC report from Chapter 1), and thus as a means of demonstrating that you care. Often, this is a relatively banal occurrence – simply a case of either laughing at the appropriate time when a resident makes a joke or trying to make the resident laugh by making jokes yourself. Laughing in these instances, however, demonstrates another form of folding at the individual level whereby doing laughter becomes a means of folding together two people, shifting the boundaries between them as individuals, and thus enabling forms of intersubjective connection to emerge (Simpson, 2015, 2017). One of my early reflections on laughter, for instance, notes that: "I bonded with one of the residents primarily through laughter (and smiles). She was in the care home recovering from a stroke and so struggled with speaking. Smiles and laughs seemed to form a connection, however" (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 06/10/2015). This folding and unfolding not only shapes the 'internal' affections of bodies in terms of how

connected to others they feel, however, but can also change the ‘external’ relations through which a body, and its subjectivities, are understood. As I once noted:

I should perhaps be honest here and say that up until now I had been unsure about Ella. It's not that I didn't like her, just for some reason, I felt that she was a bit disconnected from the residents. Today changed that. We were giving out tea and toileting a few residents. Seeing her working closely with the residents for the first time gave a completely different impression. I could sense how much she actually cared about them. Laughing and joking with them, you could see real connections and it was very heartwarming. She said at one point, however, following a burst of laughter, "I have to laugh, otherwise I would cry."

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 28/10/2015)

Here, then, we can see how the ways in which ‘Ella’ does laughter seems to project or express a something that informs the ways in which I make (and indeed change) judgements about the care that she provides to the residents. There is a sense here that her ‘internal’ subjectivity is unfolded onto both the practices she is undertaking and the spaces in which she is doing them (Deleuze, 1993; Grosz, 1994), changing their nature in some way. This way of thinking thus maintains something of a connection with the idea of laughter as representing something about people, discussed in the previous chapter (see also Albrecht, 1999; Ridanpää, 2014a; Watson, 2015). However, it differs in that it focusses not on the precise form of the enactment of laughter, through joke structures and discourses for instance, but rather on the affordances of doing laughter more generally (see Green, 1998). As I wrote elsewhere, “I’m

really starting to recognise the advantages of talking about laughter rather than humour, as it allows you to think beyond the content of the ‘jokes’ and to start to think what it is that laughter (or even humour) can and does do” (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 13/11/2015).

Drawing on from this then, we might note that the final point of the extract above, in which she suggests she has to laugh or she will cry, is suggestive of another way in which the doing of laughter serves to generate particular kinds of subjective foldings, albeit ones that reinforce the individual subject’s boundaries, rather than opening them up. These kinds of utterances were common in my interactions with people, forming something of a trope in terms of how people talked to me about their practices of laughter. Another notable instance emerged at a time when a carer of Indian origin was hit by a racial slur from a resident as she was trying to help him. “She continued to work calmly but let out a little chuckle which I copied and she then offered a smile which seemed to say, ‘what can you do, eh?’ She then turned to me and said, ‘you sometimes just have to laugh. The residents can be so abusive but you just have to put up with it. They don’t really mean it’” (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 19/10/2015). These kinds of laughter are thus indicative of what we might think of as a ‘coping laughter’ (Harris, 2013; Korczynski, 2003; Macpherson, 2008; McGregor, 2007) – although again it’s worth noting that in Chapter 7 I look to add nuance to the language and idea of ‘coping’ laughter. Indeed, describing a similar kind of laughter in one of her participants, Nixon (2017: 36) notes: “Laughter literally and metaphorically

inflates her body and self, acting as a protective barrier ... transforming her body into an entity that takes up space and has secure boundaries, and keeping feeling (fear, exhaustion, rage, grief, pain) at bay.” As such, we can start to see how laughter can also serve to unfold intersubjective connections, and fold the self in on itself, thus becoming a way of (productively) ‘not caring’ rather than the other way around.

Despite the relative frequency of moments such as those described above, this in-folding through doing laughter was arguably most common within the much more everyday encounters surrounding personal care. The doing of personal care practices has sustained significant academic attention (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2011; Dyer et al., 2008; McDowell, 2009; Twigg, 2000), particularly in terms of the emotional and subjective implications caused by frequent and intimate contact with “dirty”, “messy” and naked bodies (Wolkowitz, 2002: 497). Twigg (2000), for instance, specifically notes the ways in which a mixture of abjection and routinisation around these moments of care engender subjects with something of an ambivalence. This is recognisable in my own experiences whereby in describing the first time I wiped a resident’s bottom, I noted: “It was strange but also normal doing jobs like this. I guess by this point I have had so much exposure to care homes that the rules have definitely changed in my own mind. My barriers have been broken down significantly” (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 13/06/2016). There is a certain complexity to the modes of folding occurring here whereby the repeated experience of these practices serves to open the

subject up to a more ‘normalised’ engagement with what ‘outsiders’ might deem to be ‘objectionable’ tasks. This is not just the case for staff members, but residents too who often seemed somewhat more uncomfortable during personal care tasks when they first arrived in comparison to when they had lived in the home for a longer period of time. Although not the only practice through which these modes of normalisation occur there is much to suggest that laughter plays a key role within this process, as the following moment suggests:

Whilst some carers had lunch, I helped with taking to residents to the toilet for a while with Amelia. Whilst we were moving Mrs E into her wheelchair and then into the toilet, she was singing Amelia’s praises to me, telling me how much she liked her and how good a carer she was. As Amelia moved her onto the toilet and helped her trousers down, she made a small joke (although I didn’t hear what it was). Mrs E piped up again, “that’s the best thing about her,” she said, “she always manages to turn everything into a dirty laugh which helps you not feel so embarrassed or uncomfortable”

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 12/07/2016).

This encounter thus suggests the doing of laughter within personal care tasks as enacting a complex set of foldings in which the borders of the individual self (as neither embarrassed nor uncomfortable) are reaffirmed, which in turn enables a sense of routinisation and normalisation through which the individual (both carer and cared for) becomes more ‘open’ to the deeply intersubjective and collective nature of these kinds of caring relations. “All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation” as Nancy (2000: 5) notes. What this indicates, therefore, is a reconstitution of

what it means to be an ‘individual’ within a care home: the refolding of subjectivation itself as something that ‘requires’ prosthesis. Indeed, we might see this process as a somewhat extreme augmentation of the same process we might go through if wearing glasses for the first time whereby at first they are uncomfortable, even laughable, but as time passes they fold into our sense of being, becoming part of who we are as individuals (see Horton and Kraftl, 2006).

In this manner, then, we must recognise the necessary folding of the individual with the collective: that the individual is always constituted through the foldings of that which is ‘outside’ of itself (Deleuze, 1988a) and thus is never simply being-in-the-world, but always being-with it (Nancy, 2000; Wylie, 2006). Yet attending to the collective doing of both laughter and care within care homes demands a different form of attunement to both their practices and their ethics: a “need to theorize the meaning and contours of the in-common, and the ways in which its spaces can become sites of ethical responsibility” (Popke, 2009: 84). As such, it is these contours that I attend to in the next section.

5.5 | ‘Collective’ practices of laughter with care

Perhaps the most resounding impressions from my time working in both care homes relate to the collective nature of being-within them. By this, I don’t just mean the impression left by the sheer number of bodies within them, as described above, but rather the effects and affects generated by the jostling of

these bodies into and out of particular social formations. As such, whilst I once might have been tempted (in a somewhat idealistic manner) to think about care homes as truly 'collective' sites of care, where people work together for the good of the whole, my actual experience perhaps speaks to something that is much more frictionous and combative than this, with different people and groups often 'butting heads' over a whole manner of matters of concern. To speak of collective ethics in care homes, therefore, demands an attention to the ways in which people and matters get folded into and out of different groups and the effects of these folding movements.

It's also worth noting that these 'collectives' can either be relatively enduring or much more fleeting. One clear example of an enduring collective surrounds the various cliques that emerge between members of staff themselves. As one care worker expressed to me having found out she had to work Christmas Day for the second year running: "It's always the people close to the manager who get what they want ... the rest of us just get shit" (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 20/10/2015). As alluded to above, we might again note friendship groups as similar formations, often held together not just through interactions at work but also through more lasting connections where carers might have been at school or college together. Indeed, in Summerview two staff members lived together (as friends) at the time I worked there and two nurses were married to one another, once again suggesting a sense of the 'external' world being folded into the care home itself in a similar manner to the previous section. The more fleeting collectives, on the other hand, are

enacted primarily through the undertaking of practices as pairs or groups:

One thing I have been thinking about on my way home has been working as a team versus working alone. I have done the tea round both ways today and it's fair to say that working as a team is much better, not only for the workers but it means that things get done quicker too – perhaps that is obvious. It does also make it easier to care. There is a sense that talking to the residents is sometimes not quite the same as talking to other staff members ... many have lost any sense of the world really and so it can be hard to connect with them. Instead, you just seem to be connecting with yourself through them, perhaps reflecting yourself off the interactions that you have with them. When you are with another staff member, however, it seems easier to connect with residents in a more personal way. This is perhaps because you are reflecting off the other staff member rather than just the resident. I'm not sure.

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 26/11/2015)

Retrospectively, I have some concerns with this particular passage of my field diary. It was written following a very specific and relatively intensive engagement with the upstairs section of Winterbourne Care Home where many of the residents remain bed bound because they are both highly frail and highly demented. As such, I wish to make clear that this is not a universal account of the role of the residents within care home collectives. Indeed, at many times, the residents were themselves deeply enrolled within the same kinds of being-in-common as I depict in relation to the staff here. Despite its problematics, however, this passage does offer a relatively clear portrayal of the modes of folding through which these being-in-commons are, and sometimes are not, enacted. Specifically, it describes the ways in which an

unfolding of the self can either reinforce boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (in this case the staff members and resident respectively), depending, in part at least, on whether or not it is met by a reciprocal unfolding. Perhaps more importantly, it notes how this reciprocal being-in-common exceeds the bounds of the bodies between which it is occurring (Maclaren, 2014a), and ultimately makes it ‘easier to care’ for and about others – thus foregrounding the complex ethicality of ‘the collective’ within the provision of care.

The idea of a reciprocation also provides an entry point into thinking more specifically about collective doings of laughter within care homes in which being part of the ‘collective’ often requires being ‘in on the joke’. Sara Ahmed (2006: 556), for instance, notes that “shared laughter”, more often than not, is “about returning laughter with laughter”. Similarly, Michael Billig’s (2005: 192) concept of unlaughter, “a display of not laughing when laughter might otherwise be expected, hoped for or demanded”, offers the counterpoint to this through its capacities to resist ‘inclusion’ and compliance within group joking behaviours (see also Douglas, 2015). However, it’s worth noting that not laughing might more generally suggest a sense of being an ‘outsider’ to the collective circumstances through which laughter is being enacted (Nixon, 2017). The language of folding here thus allows a way of thinking through the roles in which sharing in laughter, or not, serves to fold people into and out of particular groups, thus producing modes of inclusion and exclusion respectively (ibid). One of the clearest examples of this emerges from a reflection on my own transition from ethnographic ‘outsider’ to ‘insider’

within Winterbourne Care Home, where I actually use the language of the fold, albeit colloquially, to describe my position in relation to a group of staff members:

Increasingly I am finding myself being folded into the everyday humour of the care home. A recurring joke has emerged that I am either the 'The Secret Millionaire' or 'Undercover Boss' (I have assured them I am not!!).⁵ Today a different kind of joke came from Maureen. She asked me, "Do you have to write a report or something at the end of this?" to which I replied, "Yeah, sort of,". "I've always liked you, Phil, you remember that," she retorted dryly, to which a wider group of carers laughter heartily. It's good! I feel like I have transitioned into the care home well which is pleasing from a methodological point of view but I guess it also comes with many responsibilities too.

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 30/10/2015)

My direct inclusion in the humour and laughter of the care home here thus formed an important marker of my position – a becoming one of 'us' rather than one of 'them'. Crucially, as Nixon (2017: 37) notes, however, laughter in these cases is not so much "a test of identity (are you 'like' us), as much as it is a test of humility (can you be 'with' us)" and therefore remains much more open to intra-group heterogeneity than traditional humour theories might suggest (e.g. Ridanpää, 2017). We see this in the example above, whereby the joke is based not on my similarity to the rest of the group but rather my

⁵ Both of these are references to television shows, whereby someone will enter a situation or business incognito to find out what "real life" is like and then usually reward the people in some way at the end.

difference, seemingly working as a 'tester' for whether or not I can be part of the group despite that difference. In other words, it is my ability to take part in the moment of laughter that is significant here, rather than the precise wording of the joke, once again suggesting these doings as something that exceeds representationalist interpretations.

As the final sentence of the diary entry notes, however, envelopment into a group in this manner brings with it ethical implications and responsibilities. As Donna Haraway (1997: 182) astutely writes: "I laugh: therefore, I am ... implicated. I laugh: therefore, I am responsible and accountable". When writing this passage initially, I was actually referring to the responsibilities surrounding ethnographic writing (as discussed in Chapter 3). However, being 'within' a group also comes with further responsibilities, notably the need to support and care for the grouping itself both in terms of the individuals within it and the collective as a whole. At its most basic, these forms of caring and support are often about expressing a sense that 'you are not alone', or 'others are *with* you'. These expressions come in multiple forms, including the forms of 'touch' described in the previous section, although laughter arguably remains one of the most common: "I think my 'inkling' about laughter during brief encounters might have something to do with it – may be something to do with 'patting people on the back' – a sort of we are all in this together type thing" (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 15/06/2016). These moments of laughter are thus about maintaining the boundaries of the group, performatively re-iterating, and thus re-folding, different subjects' placing as

inside or outside (with or against) it.

Crucially, however, the group's boundaries, and thus who is included, are always also (consciously or less than consciously) defined by its exterior: who and what is *not* within it, who and what is Other to it. The doing of laughter, then, is equally important in maintaining this other, particularly through modes of laughing *at* or ridiculing this other (such as was suggested to be happening in the previous chapter). This other is by no means static, with my field diary notes containing examples of staff members laughing *at* residents, the management, other staff members and various 'imagined' (or not present) others in an almost equal measure. Within my notes, however, many of the most poignant examples of this emerge once again in relation to family members, whose presence, as noted above, can drastically affect the experiences and practices of being-within the home for both residents and staff members.

In this sense, family members serve to somewhat exemplify a need for both complexity and multiplicity in terms of how we might understand collective foldings within care homes. Some, for instance, seem to hold the same capacity to be-with (Nixon, 2017) the staff members as described above, particularly those where the resident has been in the home for a long time and therefore a level of trust and humility has presumably been established between the staff and family members. Others, however, seem to be more combative, challenging the staff members on the kinds of care that their family are

receiving. These challenges are often around simple things such as what they have had to eat, what kinds medications they are receiving, and the level of social interaction they are getting, always with the aim of improving life for their family member. On more serious occasions, however, I have seen the competence of the collective staff themselves being brought into question, usually because of incidents such as falls in which a resident has hurt themselves. Here, then, laughter can again work to generate foldings that reinforce the collective 'us' of the staff members, versus the 'them' of the family, as demonstrated in the subsequent description of the events which took place following a morning in which exactly this happened, and where a group of staff members use laughter in order to protect and reinforce their collective sensibilities, particularly through the 'exclusion' of the complaint itself:

After lunch, the staff were all sat around in the dining room and they started laughing and joking/complaining about the whole situation. There was a general feeling that the family were being totally unreasonable. Stephanie was sweeping up and kind of shouted over "I think it must be really worrying to leave your mother in a new place." No one seemed to hear her except me, possibly they just didn't want to hear her, but I kind of agreed with her ... I guess the laughter emerges out of these tensions, but there seems to be a somewhat self-preserving nature about it where staff place themselves in a position where these worries of the family/residents are laughable, beyond the realms of reason etc.

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 19/11/2015)

Whilst this scene does demonstrate the ways in which laughter generates

modes of inclusion and exclusion in terms of the staff members and families respectively, it is augmented and complicated further by Stephanie's dissent (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, 2017) or unlaughter (Billig, 2005), which can be seen as form of unfolding from the staff member collective in order to offer generosity and care to the family members instead. This, therefore, becomes suggestive of the ways in which people are folded into and out of many different collective formations simultaneously within care homes, with each group demanding different modes of being-with, responsibility and care (Guattari, 1995). Indeed, in the lines that directly followed my account of this incident I reflected that: "I find myself often positioned in an in-between state of empathy for the resident (and their families) but also empathy for the staff. Both are often in highly stressful and emotional positions where they are essentially fighting for the same end goal but from very different viewpoints and experiences" (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 19/11/2015).

This recognition, therefore, moves us again towards the sense that the folding together of different groups (and individuals) fractures the idea of a 'singular' position through which we might understand the meaning of laughter's doings (see James, 2006; Nancy, 2000). Indeed, the implications of this play out through one final encounter with laughter on that same day, in which I reflect on the fragmented nature of laughter, and thus its capacities to fold people into and out of particular collectives:

Over lunch, whilst waiting for the food to be plated, Ruby and Kelly started

to flick each other with rolled up napkins, giggling as each blow struck the other. Stephanie told them off, to which they tried to claim that it was “entertainments for the residents, making them laugh.” Stephanie said, “it’s not entertainments unless they are involved!” She is right of course, but I think their laughter was actually doing something else in this instant: it was cheering them up, and “professionalism” aside, this is, in fact, important, perhaps as important as entertaining the residents in some ways.

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 19/11/2015)

Whilst this moment in many ways reflects the other moments discussed in this section, particularly in terms of how the doing of laughter serves to fold different people into and out of collectives, it also brings to the fore a series of what we might call institutional logics about laughter within the care home (Mol, 2008b): how, where and when it should be done in order to maintain ‘professionalism’; who it should involve in order to be considered as a viable and appropriate form of care; and how this, in turn, impacts the doing of laughter by both individual and collective subjects. As such, the final section of this chapter will turn to these institutional logics.

5.6 | ‘Institutional’ practices of laughter with care

I’m starting to get a sense of the truly collective nature of the laughter in the home. It’s a way of folding different people (and more-than-humans) together into a political ecology of laughter. It mediates the space in some respects, making the home (as an institution) into an assemblage, with its own milieu (rules and regulations)

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 13/10/2015)

Whilst this moment of reflection in some ways captures elements of what has already been said in this chapter, particularly in terms of how the doing of laughter can 'fold' individuals into collectives, it also pushes further through foregrounding 'the institutional' as a specific relational formation (an 'assemblage' or a 'political ecology'). In this sense, the institution as a relational formation differs in that it has a more 'structured' formation, albeit one that folds out of the interactions of the individuals and groups within it. As Guattari argues, subjective relations are always decentred "with an outside to whichever institutions and academies the individual happens to be 'part of'" (see O'Sullivan, 2008: 4). Here then, my note about the more-than-human gains further significance by suggesting the importance of entities in excess of human bodies, including rules and regulations, within these institutional frameworks. As such, in looking to push the discussion in this chapter to its completion this final section will attend to this the more-than-human institutional 'outside' and how it further augments the subjective doings of laughter and/with care in care homes.

As noted above, 'institutional' foldings within care homes are perhaps more overt in terms of the various policies and guidelines which are distributed to care homes from external professional bodies, and then implemented within them. This means that, whilst the provision of care does take place as both as an individual and a collective doing, more often than not these doings are informed, shaped and constrained by policies and guidelines such as 'best practice' models which directly affect how caring bodies perform certain tasks

(Mol, 2008b). Ultimately this serves to (intentionally) reduce the ‘individual’ or ‘collective’ responsibilities for care through dictating what should happen and what shouldn’t, implicitly setting the boundaries of what is ‘ethically acceptable’ behaviour in care homes. Although this is most obvious in terms of care, laughter is also often folded into these kinds of institutional logics. Indeed, the doing of laughter within care homes is often presented as a form of ‘best practice’ – I was often told for instance that “it is important to laugh whilst caring” or “it is good for residents to laugh”, and judgements of ‘good care’ can be made based on the presence or absence of laughter within care homes (as is seen in the CQC report quoted at the outset of this thesis). Similarly, we might suggest that the conducting of ‘activities’ and entertainments (including those provided by external theatre groups such as those I spent time with) also fall under this category. Although here it’s important to note, as the example at the end of the previous section showed, that laughter for this purpose is not always deemed to be good practice.

The imposition of external policies, however, is not the only way in which ‘institutional subjectivities’ emerge. Alongside this, a series of performative phrases and enactments also serve to generate particular modes of being-within care homes. One common refrain, for instance, was the phrase: “all I care about is the residents”; which I questioned at one point noting: “it [the phrase] sometimes just seems like a performative action. It’s often clearly not true, often being said at a time when the person definitely does care about something else, but just doesn’t want to deal with” (Field Diary Notes,

Summerview Care Home, 21/06/2016). In this sense, I might suggest that these kinds of phrases serve to enact a mode of folding which reinforce ideas of caring about certain matters (notably the residents) and exclude cares about other matters, such as home-lives, money and often 'the self'. Laughter again plays a role here, often serving to enact these kinds of folds and thus reinforce the 'values' of being part of the institution:

At some point during the afternoon, two carers started to talk about pay. They were talking about someone they knew who worked at Lidl [a supermarket] and saying that the workers there get paid £8 per hour, which is about £1 more per hour than the care workers. One of the carers suddenly started to laugh however and said "well I guess all they do is bleep, bleep, bleep," miming the action of passing shopping through a scanner whilst she said it, "whereas we get to wipe arses and clean up sick all day", continuing to laugh at her own joke for a moment.

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 18/07/2016)

We might note that within the doing of both laughter and care in this manner there is a moral impetus at play here which might again be read as a form of performative 'compulsory happiness' in which workers become unconditionally expected to perform the role of the 'happy carer', regardless of their individual or collective emotional states (Ahmed, 2010; Douglas, 2015; see also Hochschild, 1983). Indeed, often they seem to face the sanction of moral judgment if they do not perform in this manner. In one case, for instance, a group of staff members in Winterbourne began calling an agency nurse "a miserable cow" because she was deemed not to be jovial enough whilst doing her job (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 05/12/2015), and in

another a worker was told she “had to cheer up” when she was feeling stressed because the person who was caring for her child had cancelled on her (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 07/07/2016). In this sense, we can start to see how the institutional generates its own distinctive boundaries of ‘acceptability’ (Crawley, 2004), which then fold into and out of the individuals and collectives who inhabit it (Guattari, 1995). Again, we have already seen this process at work to some respects through discussion of personal care whereby I suggested processes of folding as producing subjects who “seem to be somewhat immune to the kinds of tasks and situations that outsiders would find distressing, uncomfortable or abject” (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 16/06/2016).

None of this is to suggest that ‘the institutional’ is a homogeneous entity that subsumes all bodies into continual care. Indeed, a series of institutional frameworks also serve to differentiate people in terms of the care they provide. One such performative can be seen within the assignment of different ‘roles’: e.g. carer, nurse, activities coordinator, cleaner, cook; which serve to divide and distribute (fold and unfold) care across multiple bodies, with each being ascribed particular boundaries to their ‘responsibilities’ at different moments. This affects different practices in a variety of ways, but crucially sets up particular moral and ethical frameworks around what and when different matters *should* be cared about, and perhaps, more importantly, what and when matters need not be cared about. At an individual level, for instance, it was not uncommon, for people to decline to do certain tasks by uttering the equally

performative refrain “that isn’t part of my job”. Similarly, we might note the ways in which doing laughter can be used to ‘resist’ institutional pressures such as when staff mock the management or each other.

Although I have largely focussed on the ways in which moments of laughter serve to fold people into and out of ‘the institution’, it’s worth further noting that the institutional also folds into the ways in which laughter itself is done. This occurs both in terms of what kinds of objects are acceptable to laugh *at*, but perhaps also through the ways in which the various materialities of the care home become folded into practices of laughter itself, both individually and collectively. One good example of this surrounds a group of staff members who were putting together a joke present for another staff member’s fortieth birthday: “They had put a box together which included things like net knickers, an incontinence pad and a bag for soiled clothes, laughing each time they added a new item” (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 13/11/2015). Other, more banal examples included: pushing each other around in wheelchairs; pretending to the residents that the home had run out of tea, coffee or food; imitating each other’s actions (as we saw in the previous chapter); and putting ‘thickener’, a substance that increases the viscosity of drinks to aid residents who struggle to swallow, into staff members’ tea and coffee.

Each of these moments thus marks a doing of laughter that is inflected through what we might conceptualise as a form of institutional morality, acceptability

or an ethic that is somehow differentiated from what exists 'outside' of the institution itself. Interestingly, at one point this institutional subjectivity actually impacted laughter not just in terms of what was being laughed at, but in a manner, that was somewhat further ensconced:

Whilst we were handing out cups of tea, Nicole and Mrs J started telling me about what they did yesterday. Nicole, in particular, was stressing to me how much they had laughed all day. "We laughed so much that we kept having to change your [incontinence] pad, didn't we?". Although the fact that they had been laughing was interesting, what struck me most was how the materialities of the home were making their way back into the jokes and laughter that were going on. The toilet humour of what is essentially a statement of 'we laughed so hard that you wet yourself' gets folded over into the material and emotional relationships between the carer and the person cared for. They adopt a new 'language' – one that extends far beyond the laughter – but one that has become so mundane in the setting of the home that it can be used in a form of a joke; it's no longer a sensitive issue. This is also a highly contextual affair, something that I guess could be called 'care home humour'. For most people, I guess incontinence would be a subject that is humorous in itself, through its taboo nature. In the care home, however, where incontinence is an everyday reality, it can be used as what might be known as a 'topper',⁶ a way of creating a further set of imagery to describe laughter itself

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 12/11/2015)

Within this moment, therefore, we can clearly see not only the ways in which institutional foldings (re)produce certain forms of subjectivities but also the

⁶ A 'topper' is a concept that comes from Stand-up comedy. It is essentially an additional punchline to a joke, that allows multiple moments of laughter to emerge from a single set up.

ways in which these subjectivities serve to reproduce themselves. In many ways this is an archetypal example of what Deleuze describes as a 'double': "But the double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different" (Deleuze, 1988a: 98). In this sense, it is arguably here that the most significant forms of institutional folding can be apprehended. 'Institutional foldings', therefore, are always about more-than-just the ways in which different ideas, things and matters from the outside are folded into the practices of different bodies (individual or collective), but rather how these elements become 'internalised' or 'doubled'. The repetition of these foldings enacts a form of habituation (Dewsbury, 2012). As I reflected in both Winterbourne and Summerview:

I feel like I have really learnt to embody the work. It has become so routine to me, mechanised and 'everyday'. This is perhaps important it means that the experience of working in a care home has set into my body, perhaps been folded into my own sense of self, changing it on the way

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 26/11/2015).

I am really starting to understand the 'banter' at the home though and am able to make little jokes more regularly. I am also finding it easier to make myself useful, although continuously presenting myself as insider/outsider, moving between modes as it seems most appropriate

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 22/06/2016).

Whilst the implications of this 'institutional interiorization' are perhaps both

too multifaceted, and too expansive, to discuss in their entirety (there are, for instance, a number of implications for how we understand the ‘political’ subject of laughter with care, some of which I will return to in Chapter 7), here I will focus specifically on the implications in terms of how we might understand the ethics of doing laughter with care in care homes. In particular, we might note the ways in which, through institutional foldings, the idea of the ‘singular’ moral subject (individual or collective) becomes further distributed, differentiated and pluralised across time and space (see Braidotti, 2011; Colls, 2012; Mol, 2008a; Simpson, 2017). In other words, the subject’s actions (whether that be laughter, care or another) become inflected through the habituated actions (and non-actions) of multiple other bodies that make up the institutions in which they reside. In this sense, we might note that many of the practices of both laughter and care discussed in both this chapter and the rest of the thesis can be further contextualised as (possibly) habitual, preconscious refrains rather than conscious, intentional *choices* (Dewsbury, 2012; Massumi, 2015).

This is, of course, not to say that these foldings are all-encompassing. I note for instance that I remain in a process of folding/unfolding as I ‘present’ myself as insider/outsider (worker/researcher) at different moments, meaning that ‘the subject’ can and does unfold from the institution also. Rather, it is to suggest that the practices that occur within care homes might themselves be considered as more-than-human singular-pluralities (Nancy, 2000), “plural and polyphonic” as Guattari (1995: 1) describes, always in excess of a singular

moral subject. In other words, to recognise all of these modes as part of institutional foldings is to remain hesitant in terms of our representations of the actions of individual or collective subjects as moral/ethical or not; and instead to offer a little more generosity through recognising the multiple foldings that make up the circumstances in which laughter and/or/with care is enacted.

5.7 | Conclusions

In this chapter I have looked to think about the ways in which laughter is practised with and alongside care in care homes, specifically questioning how we might understand the ethics of this. In particular, through drawing on Deleuze's (1988a, 1993) concept of the fold (see also Nixon, 2017), alongside notions of performativity, I have both disrupted the idea of laughter and care as done by a singular (moral) subject, and in turn shifted away from 'the subject' itself as the primary focus of ethical attention (Simpson, 2017; Wylie, 2006). Indeed, the fold has enabled a way of thinking about the 'doing subject' in a manner that is distinctly multiple: "more than one, but less than many" as Annemarie Mol (2002: 55) eloquently puts it. Following Guattari (1995), I have thus offered three registers through which subjects in care homes perform both laughter and care: the individual; the collective; and the institutional. Each register is different in terms of the kinds of folding it involves; yet they are also connected, folding into and out of each other at different times and to different effects.

In terms of laughter with care more specifically, at the individual register laughter can be seen as a means of expressing 'internal' qualities, therefore helping to establish emotional connections between people that enhance their capacities to care and be cared for, in both affective and practical senses. Laughter, however, also serves as a mechanism through which 'subjects' can maintain distance and thus a sense of individuality, despite the demands of the inter-corporeal/intersubjective engagement that comes with care. At the collective register, laughter enables a sense of solidarity to be maintained, often in direct relation to Others. Doing collective laughter, therefore, becomes a way of moving and maintaining borders and boundaries between different groups of people, generating processes of inclusion and exclusion. As such through laughter, different people can fold themselves into and out of different groupings at different times, shifting their ethical responsibilities in each case. At the institutional register, the performance of laughter can become folded into various logics around 'best practice' (Mol, 2008b) and thus reinforce particular moral subjectivities such as the 'happy carer'. Similarly, laughter can become inflected through the particularities of the matters of the institution, forming particular ways of being-with, speaking and practising care work. These performatives, in turn, establish modes of habituation through which particular ways of doing laughter and care can be understood as less-than-fully-conscious rather than as rational choices made at each moment.

The significance of such an approach to the ethics of laughter with care, therefore, lies within its multiplicities. Addressing these three registers as

different, yet related, establishes practices of laughter and care as always having multiple directions and relations with subjectivity. In this sense, there is no single moral subject to be understood (or judged) in each encounter; rather the subject is always both distributed across multiple sites *and* internally differentiated within 'its self' (Simpson, 2017). As such, ethical thinking demands both an understanding of this relationality, and a generosity towards the different ways, or reasons, for laughter's emergence in each moment (Darling, 2010). We need to not undertake an ethics that attends to the subject directly but rather an ethics that attends to the multiple folds and foldings that form the particular circumstances through which different forms of laughter with care are enacted for different reasons (McCormack, 2003, 2017). This, in turn, means that we need to be attentive to the different responsibilities that different people in care homes may have towards both matters inside particular 'boundaries' and matters beyond. Ultimately, as this chapter has shown, this belies an understanding of practices of laughter as ethically 'good' or 'bad', and instead demands a more minor (Jellis and Gerlach, 2017; Lancione, 2017) attention to what these practices *can* do (Spinoza, 1970).

Ultimately, therefore, this chapter has offered a further approach to laughter with care through decentring the singular subject in relation to the laughter 'it' performs. Although I have resisted approaching this in terms of humour theories, or 'representationalist' accounts of particular joking structures, we might note that the approach offered in this chapter is one that remains

centred on the idea of laughter as something that is 'done' by people within a particular set of circumstantial arrangements. In this sense, whilst this chapter has offered a sense of the ethics surrounding why, where, in what form and for what reasons laughter takes place within and with care, it has remained less clear on what laughter can do as a thing or a force in its own right. As such, the next chapter turns to this question, looking to understand how the presence of laughter itself (rather than just its doings) can affect different people's experiences of giving and receiving care.

Chapter 6: Atmospheric laughter in spaces of care⁷

Laughter is a chain. Something like contagion. It fuses and diffuses, fuses
because it defuses

(Serres, 2012: 81)

6.1 | Introduction

One of the aims of this thesis has been to take seriously Anca Parvulescu's (2010) argument that most theories of laughter are often not concerned with laughter at all, instead positioning it as the response to something else – humour, jokes, the ridiculous or the grotesque – and therefore theorising these things instead. Whilst the preceding chapter looked to push away from these particular registers, and to generate a more multiple and generous account of the ethical capacities surrounding laughter's emergence, in bringing it to a conclusion I noted that it too could be critiqued for maintaining analytic focus on the doing subject of laughter rather than laughter itself. In other words, it could be argued to generate an ethical account of the (intentional) practice of

⁷ Elements of this chapter have also been published in a revised form as: Emmerson P (2017) Thinking laughter beyond humour: atmospheric refrains and ethical indeterminacies in spaces of care. *Environment and Planning A* 49(9): 2082–2098.

laughing, rather than addressing the question of what *laughter itself can do*. As such, this chapter looks to redress this balance through offering an approach to laughter with care that moves away from the *laugher* as the subject of ethics, and instead foregrounds laughter's spatial and ethical potentials as distinct from its causes, once again framed by the question what can laughter do?

In framing this approach, I turn to geographic engagements with the concept of affective atmospheres which have become a key means of understanding how different entities “emerge, relate, and are distributed differently across space and are enrolled into the social” (Edensor, 2012b: 1105; see also Anderson, 2009a, 2014; Ash, 2013; McCormack, 2013; Stewart, 2011). Although somewhat defying definition, both Anderson (2014) and McCormack (2008a) note that atmospheres mark diffuse spatialities that can be both material (thingy) and ephemeral (qualified), each of which is useful for thinking about laughter. In everyday language, for instance, we might both speak of laughter's sounds as ‘filling a space’ and we might ascribe a quality to this laughter as ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘unusual’, ‘unsettling’, ‘callous’, ‘soothing’ or a whole host of other terminologies (as indeed I have done already in this thesis – see Chapter 4 in particular). Perhaps more importantly, atmospheres do not only impress on the spaces in which they are felt, but they also change them (Anderson, 2014) allowing a means of thinking through what *laughter can do* when it bursts forth (McCormack, 2008a).

As such, engaging with atmospheres offers not only a means of thinking about

laughter as a spatial thing but also the ways in which laughter can affect spaces of care themselves and thus the ways in which it can make a difference to how care is experienced (Wilson, 2017). The significance of this approach, therefore, rests on its ability to conceptualise laughter as having the capacity to affect and be affected in a manner that exceeds the intentionality of both humour and of the bodies who produce it (Hughes, 2016; Nancy, 1993). In part, this is a movement to further decentre the 'moral' subject of laughter and thus offer further generosity to the ethical happenings that surround it, yet perhaps more significantly, the chapter also offers a distinctly geographical way of thinking about laughter – one that not only sees laughter as contextualised by, or expressive of, particular spaces and places, but rather as something that actively contributes to the processual generation and emergence of spaces and places themselves.

The chapter thus opens with a discussion of atmospheres, particularly as Ben Anderson (2009a, 2014) has conceived of them, and their potential for thinking about laughter. Atmospheres provide a useful framework for attending to laughter as something that is simultaneously materially embodied, sonically diffuse, affectively charged and socially potent, but crucially also as something whose capacities to affect are never predetermined. Following this, the chapter briefly discusses atmospheres within care homes more generally and the role that laughter is perceived to play in this, noting that atmospheres can be both spontaneous and staged. The next section turns to laughter's atmospheric capacities, positioning it as

something that can affect in ways that exceed both humour and the bodies from which it emanates, arguing that this demonstrates a form of ‘nascent creativity’ (Williams, 2016). The next section furthers this creative capacity through discussing laughter’s capacities to generate spaces, particularly noting the ways in which these can enhance, or repair, felt qualities and relations within spaces of care. Where these initial discussions emphasis laughter’s role in aiding care, the final substantive section looks to re-orientate our approach (Ahmed, 2006), adopting a speculative ethos (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) in order to attend to (potential) other experiences of laughter’s atmospheres in which its affects might be understood as somewhat less positive. Whilst these affective happenings are less common (in my field diary at least) they point towards a need adopt more critical, more careful and more multiple standpoints when making ethical judgements about laughter’s atmospheres within spaces of care whereby any question of what laughter can do must always be followed by the critical suffix ‘for whom?’.

6.2 | Atmospheric laughter

Throughout the thesis thus far I have maintained a dual position for laughter, stating that it is both ‘something we do’ and ‘a thing’ that is separate from us (see Chapters 2 and 4 in particular). Indeed, although the previous chapter focused mainly on the first of these propositions, I did speak briefly to the second, whereby laughter was argued to be produced by a body, but also to *leave* it, turning the body ‘inside out’ in the process (J Katz, 1999). This chapter thus largely attends to this second proposition. However, I do not want to do

away with the first completely. As such, I am inclined to suggest that we might instead position laughter as a quasi-thing (Griffero, 2017): not quite an object proper, nor technically a subject, but rather adopting a “position in-between humans and objects” (Bille et al., 2015: 33). This conception speaks to the phenomenological sense that laughter (which is essentially a bundle of percepts and affects) is rendered as such by an encounter with ‘a subject’ who interprets it as laughter, yet also knows it to be distinct from, outside or beyond the intimate spaces of that subject themselves. Indeed, even when the laughter encountered is produced from the subject themselves it still remains somehow distinct, uncanny even, in relation to the subject proper: we can laugh and not know precisely why (Macpherson, 2008). In this sense, we might repurpose Derek McCormack’s (2008a: 415) words to argue that laughter has, or perhaps more precisely ‘expresses’, an “affective materiality [which] is not necessarily reducible to the terms of an individual subjective experience” giving it the same qualities as an affective atmosphere.

Emerging from a mixture of aesthetic, spatial and affective theories, affective atmospheres have been positioned as a means of addressing the vague, yet highly palpable felt qualities of particular spacetimes (McCormack, 2013). Like meteorological atmospheres, affective atmospheres are seen to envelop and surround bodies, as well as being apprehended through both material and qualitative registers (McCormack, 2008a, 2018). In material terms, we might note that atmospheres are always associated with something particular – bodies, sounds, events, encounters, spaces, epochs – and can therefore

arguably be held in separation from other ‘things’ (Anderson, 2014) (although they can overlap with and affect other ‘things’ including other atmospheres – see Ahmed, 2006). In qualitative terms, they provide a particular tone, mood, intensity, feeling or aura to the something in question which although might be difficult to describe, allows a specific (singular) understanding of its qualities to emerge. Atmospheres may be ‘staged’ (Bille et al., 2015) through modes of design such as architecture (Adey et al., 2013; Edensor, 2012b, 2015) or through performative actions (Bissell et al., 2012; Closs Stephens, 2016; McCormack, 2008a, 2013); yet they may also emerge accidentally or spontaneously, becoming ‘unruly’ occurrences (Shaw, 2014; Simpson, 2013). In both cases, atmospheres are generated through modes of relationality between multiple types of different bodies (Anderson, 2014; Bissell, 2010). These bodies may be human but they might equally be non-human bodies such as animals and technologies, or indeed discursive bodies and bodies of sensation such as colour, lights, smells or sounds interacting with one another (Ash, 2013; Edensor, 2012b).

Atmospheres “at once describe a particular quality of the environment from which they emanate, just as they require a sentient subject for their signification, their coming into meaning” (Duff, 2016: 62–63). They are themselves quasi-objects: “objective and subjective at the same time, meaning that they are both and neither” (Anderson, 2014: 146), simultaneously the quality of something, yet never entirely reducible to that something, or the experience of it either (McCormack, 2008a). As with the fold (Chapter 5)

therefore, atmospheres speak to the blurred distinction between ‘subjectivity’ and the external world, “a class of experience that occur *before* and *alongside* the formation of subjectivity, *across* human and nonhuman materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions” (Anderson, 2009a: 78, emphasis in original), once again drawing connections with both Bataille (2001) and Nancy’s (1993) conceptions of laughter as pre-subjective or more precisely as an event out of which subjectivity is made present. That said, affective atmospheres offer a somewhat different spatial imagination to the fold in that they suggest an encounter with something that remains somehow separated or spaced from the formation of subjectivity, rather than something that necessarily becomes ‘incorporated’ *into* it. In less abstract terms, therefore, we might follow Anderson (2014) in suggesting atmospheres as having a ‘radiant’, ‘voluminous’ and ‘spherical’ spatiality (see also McCormack, 2018), rather than one made of joints and folds (cf. Doel, 1996):

...atmos to indicate a tendency for qualities of feeling to fill volume like a gas, and sphere to indicate a particular form of spatial organisation based on the circle. Together they enable us to think how atmospheres are connected to particular ‘envelopments’ that surround people, things and environments. Note how an atmosphere ‘surrounds’ a couple or one finds oneself ‘enveloped’ by an atmosphere. The centre and circumference of an affective atmosphere may, however, be indefinite or unstable; especially if an atmosphere is taken not only to occupy a space but to permeate it. Thus affective atmospheres may ‘leak out’, overflowing ways of bounding a sphere ... Atmospheres within a specific site may come into contact with one another, changing as they do (Anderson, 2014: 148–149)

In this sense, atmospheres arguably offer a more tangible account of laughter's spatial forms than the fold. We can think for example about the ways in which laughter radiates from individual or collective bodies, expanding outwards like a gas to 'fill' space and envelop the bodies within that space. Similarly, we might note, as I have done already in this thesis, that particular laughter can have particular qualities, both in aesthetic (e.g. 'harsh', 'soft', 'short', 'deep' or 'hearty') and affective senses (e.g. 'soothing', 'friendly', 'unnerving' 'cruel' or 'caring'), each of which change the ways in which people feel about and understand the laughter. Indeed, in everyday language, we might well describe the tone or feel of laughter as atmospheric in much the same manner (Ahmed, 2010). Crucially, because of laughter's voluminous, and enveloping qualities, each of these apprehensions can also affect the ways in which different bodies apprehend the nature of the spaces in which it occurs whereby the space takes on an associated quality through becoming an atmosphere of laughter.

We might also note the ways in which laughter is hard to contain and how it too may 'leak out', be heard and affect bodies beyond the specific spheres of its emergence, often changing affective capacities in the process. Emily Douglas (2015: 147), for instance, gives the example of "a book club made up primarily of black women" being "evacuated from Napa Valley Wine Train in California because a white passenger complained that they were laughing too loudly" which speaks to the ways in which the *overhearing* of laughter from a different atmospheric sphere can lead to markedly different affective, political and ethical outcomes (see also Bergson, 1980; Bissell, 2010; Maclaren, 2014b – all

of whom also discuss laughter's affective capacities in the context of train travel).

This latter point, and the specific example given by Douglas (2015), thus opens up space for discussion of two further critical facets when thinking about the ethics of laughter's atmospheres. The first, and arguably most obvious in this case, relates to the ways in which atmospheres overlap with other forms of spatiality and are thus informed by the circumstantial nature of the worlds in which they take place (McCormack, 2017), including other atmospheres (Anderson, 2014). In simple terms this means that although each atmosphere forms a spacetime with singularity and specificity (haecceity) (McCormack, 2013), it is important to appreciate that atmospheres can, and will, be experienced differently by different bodies (Bissell, 2010), informed in part by historical processes of interaction (Edensor, 2012b). This is an important recognition in terms of paying more attention to the relation between bodily difference and encounters with atmospheres (Ahmed, 2006; Colls, 2012), and therefore in moving away from some of the more universalising tendencies within affective thinking (Nayak, 2010; see Tolia-Kelly, 2006); as well as in attending to the very well documented effects of culture, gender, race, age and ability on the ways that bodies laugh and are affected by laughter (Albrecht, 1999; Douglas, 2015; Macpherson, 2008; Mbembe, 2001). Similarly, it becomes important in terms of spaces of care within which laughter can emerge from multiple different reasons between multiple groups of people many of whom exist in close spatial proximity (as we saw in the previous

chapter).

Building on this, therefore, the second facet that emerges from the above example is the ideas of atmospheres of laughter as always 'unfinished':

[A]tmospheres are unfinished because of their constitutive openness to being expressed and qualified in specific encounters. Atmospheres are indeterminate. They are resources that must be attuned to by bodies ... Atmospheres are, on this account, always in the process of emerging and transforming. They are always being taken up and reworked in the events of lived experience: being expressed in feelings and qualified in emotions that may themselves become elements within future atmospheres ... Atmospheres, emanating and enveloping particular things, sites or people, are endlessly being formed and reformed through encounters as they are attuned to and become part of life. (Anderson, 2014: 145)

Positioning laughter as an 'unfinished' atmosphere, therefore, captures a sense of ambiguity that emerges from the plurality of encounters that give it a collective form. This sense draws a direct parallel between atmospheres and refrains, with McCormack (2013) arguing that the refrain provides a mechanism for explaining the ways in which certain atmospheres are drawn together, and atmospheres, in turn, capture some sense of the territories that refrains produce. Similarly, this plurality serves to affirm the idea of "sometimes" in relation to laughter's affective capacities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 312). Laughter for instance, *sometimes* affords bodies with increased capacities for action through drawing them together (Routledge,

2012), offering (atmospheric) modes of critique (Bissell et al., 2012) or transforming corporeal experiences of space (Brigstocke, 2014). Yet *sometimes* it reduces capacities, through disciplining bodies (Douglas, 2015), excluding them (Nixon, 2017) or generating negative affections (Ahmed, 2010). Indeed, *sometimes* it can do both to different bodies at the same time; or, *sometimes* neither. The fundamental point is that because atmospheric laughter operates between bodies and pre-subjectively its outcomes can be neither fully determined in advance nor always attributed to the intentionalities of laughers themselves (Hughes, 2016; Nancy, 1993). In this way, laughter maintains the potential for what Nina Williams (2016: 1550) describes as “nascent creativity” – a capacity to create something new out of the relations between corporeality, materiality and affectivity themselves rather than through cognitive agencies (thus echoing Macpherson’s (2008) distinctions between humour and laughter).

This capacity also serves to highlight the complex relations between cause and effect when thinking about both atmospheres and laughter which serves as a key challenge to ethical accounts of both. In part, this is because of the complex and heterogeneous composite of elements out of which atmospheres emerge (corporeality, materialities and affectivities of many kinds), which ultimately means that “[i]t becomes impossible to pin a cause to one element within the ensemble from which an atmosphere emanates and in relation to which atmospheres are enhanced, transformed or intensified” (Anderson, 2014: 153). Rather than preceding in a linear fashion from cause to effect we might,

therefore, instead think about laughter as enacting an “emergent causality” (ibid; see also De Landa, 2006) in which it becomes *impossible* to understand its ‘causal’ capacities before its effects have registered and vice versa. Every moment of laughter is, therefore, rendered precarious and unpredictable (Anderson, 2014) which erodes any universal sense of its ethicality, particularly when held in relation to care (McCormack, 2003).

In drawing this section to a close, therefore, we can note that thinking about laughter through affective atmospheres thus opens up both a theoretical and practical space in which we can consider laughter with care in terms of its capacities to shape affective spacetimes and people’s involvement within them. More specifically in this chapter this becomes a question of laughter’s capacity both to generate new atmospheres and to disrupt the existing atmospheres within the care home itself, changing the ways in which different bodies inhabit spaces of care (Duff, 2016) and therefore altering their capacities to care and be cared for. Again, it’s worth reiterating that under this conception laughter’s atmospheres are neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’ in and of themselves but rather their apprehension as such is situated (Mol, 2008b; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), with their specific affective capacities often dependent on the angle, position or situation from which they are encountered (Ahmed, 2006, 2010).

Although atmospheres are deployed within this chapter primarily as a way of thinking about laughter, it’s worth noting that the idea of atmospheres is also

something that also features within care and care homes more widely, shaping how their spaces feel and the kinds of capacities that they engender at different times. As such, the next section looks to situate laughter's atmospheres within spaces of care through briefly discussing these more general atmospheric properties in terms of the ways in which they emerge, register and how they come to matter for care.

6.3 | Care home atmospheres

Alongside their more general use, affective atmospheres have been taken up and deployed in thinking about the affective capacities of different spaces care. Gavin Andrews (2017: 9) for instance notes that increased attention to atmospheres can aid our understanding of how “a host of material and affective environmental stimuli ... block or open up positive or negative affection in clients.” Similarly, Cameron Duff (2016: 59), as part of his work on the assemblages of health, introduces the idea of ‘atmospheres of recovery’ through which he seeks “to prise open the spatial and embodied rhythms of recovery, the real experience that propels a body along a line of becoming well”. There are echoes here with Conradson's (2005) discussion of the relational-self within landscapes of health and wellbeing in which he depicts the complex ecologies that generate particular affective experiences and the ways in which these facilitate the differentiation (enhancement) of bodily capacities. Moving away from issues around health specifically, Tucker and Goodings (2017) also use atmospheres to attend to the ways in which collective emotions such as distress, support and care can unfold and be

mediated through online forums and social media. Although perhaps more distanced from formal spaces of care such as care homes their analysis allows key insights into the ways in which care can be held together in ‘fragile’ atmospheric forms where proximity and distance are blurred. Perhaps more importantly for this chapter, however, they also suggest the ways in which these atmospheres can both be ‘unintentionally’ enhanced or destroyed by non-human actors and forces which in turn affect a wider ‘ensemble’ of entities than simply the immediate atmospheric sphere of the (web)site and its inhabitants.

In this sense, we can start to glimpse the role and the significance of affective atmospheres within care homes, particularly through their capacities to generate co-constitutive relations between the spaces of the care home, the bodies and subjects who inhabit them (human or otherwise), to influence relational forms of sociability across a number of subjective registers and, of course, to affect the care that is given and received within them. Indeed, it’s worth noting that we have already encountered some of these atmospheres within this thesis, albeit not naming them as such. In Chapter 4, for instance, the moments of laughter were seen to generate certain kinds of spacetimes characterised by different affective tonalities: frustration, calm, surprise, relaxation, care, not care, confusion and so on. Similarly, in the previous chapter, although laughter was seen as a means of producing or reinforcing particular relational configurations, *alongside* this many of the examples also generated a series of affects which “become conditions that shape without

necessarily *determining* capacities to affect and be affected” (Anderson, 2014: 137, my emphasis). These configurations for instance sometimes facilitated feelings of connection, togetherness, complicity and care, but equally had the capacity to sometimes enact moments of frustration, anger, dissent and alienation – all of which seem to exceed, or cut across, the delineations between the various registers of subjectivity/objectivity being enacted.

I will return to the significance of laughter’s affective atmospheric capacities more specifically in the next section. However, for now it’s worth noting the ways in which the ideas of atmospheric capacities also permeate care homes in a more everyday way. Indeed, the idea of atmospheres is common within my field diary notes where I often described the feel of the two homes on particular days through reference to particular affective qualities: ‘calm’; ‘peaceful’; ‘stressed’; ‘rushed’; ‘unsettled’; ‘brighter’; or ‘manic’, for example. Whilst this is perhaps not surprising, given my inclination towards non-representational theories, it’s worth noting that this kind of language was also used by staff members, residents and visitors to describe the home’s particular felt qualities:

I arrived at Winterbourne and immediately went to help one of the carers, Chloe, giving out breakfasts. Riding up in the lift with her, she turned to me and said, “I’m struggling today, I have already had a cry. I’m just working so much and I’m really tired. Don’t get me wrong, I like working here but not when there is an atmosphere, and today there is. Something seems to be up with Angela, she is in a mood. And then I cried and Amanda just

shouted at me, telling me to stop it!!"

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 20/11/2015)

Here we can start to see more clearly the ways in which affective atmospheres are apprehended and understood by people in care homes (and indeed the similarities between this intuitive understanding and the theoretically informed one discussed above). In particular, we might note the specific use of 'atmosphere' as the term to describe the care home's affective feel, albeit in a way that remains ambiguous – there is simply '*an* atmosphere'. The qualities of this atmosphere are qualified in similarly ambiguous terms. Angela is in '*a* mood', *something* is up with her. 'Chloe' also furnishes this ambiguity with further details about the ways in which it affects her and the others around her:

she is struggling

she doesn't like it

she cries

someone shouts at her

Within this short moment, therefore, we can start to see the ways in which various combinations of bodily practices, emotional expressions and somatic feelings can combine and generate particular atmospheric qualities which 'shape' the relations that occur between people and generate different capacities to provide care (or not) in the process.

In a similar, yet different, manner we might also note the ways in which these atmospheric qualities are often ascribed to particular individuals or collectives of people. At one point, for instance, I noted the ways in which particular groups of people generate a different feel to the home: “I think that the days feel better when certain staff are on rather than others. Today’s group I think like each other and so don’t seem to moan at each other in the way that some groups do” (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 12/11/2015). Similarly, during my initial visit to meet the manager of Winterbourne Care Home, she talked to me about how different staff members could “make or break” a day in the care home:

We get nurses who come in here and are full of energy. They bring a buzz into the home and it can last all day, really lifting everyone’s moods. They are brilliant. Other nurses however just seem lack energy. They become like the Dementors from Harry Potter, sucking all of the energy and life out of the home and bringing people down with them

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 16/09/2015)

Again, here we get a sense of the ways in which different nurses’ ‘energy’ can affect the atmospheres of the home, either giving it a palpable sense of buzz which enhances the mood or alternately bringing people’s moods down and deadening the shared experiences of life. This ‘energy’ although probably corresponds directly to a sense of speed and movement (see McCormack, 2008a), arguably emerges in an ambiguous manner that is difficult to pin down to a single property but is sensed through its capacities to change the felt nature of space and thus the interactions other people have with it. Within this

quote we might also note the moral undertones that emerge, particularly through the juxtaposition of the ‘energetic’ nurses and those who become like ‘Dementors’, with the Dementors described in the Harry Potter books as resembling evil spirits (see Rowling, 1999). In this way we can start to think through the ways in which particular kinds of affective atmospheres carry with them symbolic and performative associations with ‘good’ or ‘bad’ care in much the same way as the ‘happy carer’ trope that I described in the previous chapter.

Although most, if not all, of the atmospheres discussed thus far have been spontaneous, because they are instinctively understood often with moral undertones, they too often also become folded into ‘institutional’ logics of the care home (see also Chapter 5). This can be seen clearly through attempts to ‘stage’ particular kinds of atmospheres and suppress others (Bille et al., 2015) with the aim of shaping the kinds of relations these bodies have with the spaces in which they inhabit and thus enabling the care home to feel caring, supportive, safe and homely (Andrews et al., 2005; Hauge and Heggen, 2008). Often these attempts at staging were both subtle and relatively banal. In both care homes that I worked in, for instance, I remember being asked to wear ‘soft soled shoes’. This was in part for safety reasons (to avoid slips), but it was also emphasised to me that “these places are people’s homes” and as such soft soles mean that there is no ‘clip-clopping’ noise as you walk down the corridors. Another example of this staging of atmospheres relates to the spatial organisation of residents, particularly in Summerview Care Home. I had

always assumed that the placing of the residents across the three floors of the Summerview was random, dependant simply on the availability of rooms in the home. Over lunch one day, however, I was talking to the manager who “explained to me that she actually puts considerable thought into it, trying to ensure that the carers are matched to residents in ways that promote positive, and easy relations and therefore generate atmospheres (although not the word she used) that would reflect this” (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 13/07/2016).

Perhaps the most obvious example of staged production of atmospheres in care homes, however, centres around outside entertainments groups such as the two theatre groups I spent time with. As McCormack (2013: 7) notes, following Gernot Böhme, “performative spaces, and particularly the practices of set and stage design through which these spaces are produced, offer privileged opportunities for exploring this question [of how atmospheres are produced]”. Indeed, although never stated in such a manner, care home entertainments, such as theatre performances, are arguably centred around atmospheres. Usually based around artistic performance – such as music, comedy, dance, magic or mixtures of these – they are intended to enact sensations (both perceptive and affective) that deterritorialise the ‘ordinary’ feel of care home spaces and reterritorialise an atmosphere that feels more ‘special’ or ‘enjoyable’. As I described having watched my first performance with the pantomime group:

Having settled into the audience I was immediately struck by how different the room feels. Minutes ago, it was just a dining room, like any other in a care home I guess. Now a stage had been erected. There was music on – show tunes that bounce and skip around the room. A buffet lunch was being set out on one side of the room. People were beginning to gather. The noise of the room started to raise. There was a sense that something was about to happen, but no one seemed to know quite what. I was sitting on a table with a couple of elderly ladies. They talked at me excitedly, clearly pleased by the change of scenery and the special occasion. “It’s so nice to have something different going on,” said one of them tellingly. I remembered the excitement from when the show came to Winterbourne, knowing inside how much these shows matter to people.

(Field Diary Notes, Pantomime Group, 18/01/2016)

The theatre performances, however, also open up space for thinking about the limits of staged atmospheres given that several factors exist that affect the capacity of shows to enact these kinds of atmospheres, particularly surrounding what Sharpe et al. (2014: 117) term the capacity of performers to “habituate” their audience. Within the shows that I witnessed, for instance, many residents had dementia and therefore found it difficult to engage with the performances. Similarly, a reduced capacity to hear meant that several struggled to follow the plot and thus maintain interest. Some residents did not necessarily wish to be present but were often ‘forced’ to watch shows, unable to leave due to needing mobility assistance. Several times I overheard, or was told statements, such as: “I hate pantomimes”; or “this is not very good”; and in one case “I wish they hadn’t brought me in here” – again reducing engagement from audiences and often meaning that shows struggled to

provide their intended outcomes.

In this sense, we can start to recognise the ways in which certain embodied, cultural, emotional and personal differences can affect the capacities of atmospheres in care homes more generally to generate their intended feelings of care, support, safety and comfort, thus throwing open the question of both their practical efficacy and their ethical capacities. This is perhaps most pertinent in terms of laughter which, as we have seen already, is often actively promoted in care homes yet carries with it a number of affective/ethical ambiguities and uncertainties. As such, much of the remainder of the chapter will look more specifically at atmospheres of laughter, addressing their capacities to enhance care, but also questioning the limits of these capacities when approached from different angles or orientations (Ahmed, 2006, 2010). Before this, however, the next section turns to laughter's atmospheres in care more generally, looking to outline their 'excessive' nature (Bataille, 2001; Nancy, 1987, 1993), particularly in terms of the ways in which it can affect without and beyond humour, as well as the ways in which it exceeds the boundaries of body-subjects and the representational economies usually associated with its emergence (see also Anderson, 2006; McCormack, 2003).

6.4 | Laughter's excess

In thinking about the ways in which laughter becomes 'excessive', and therefore has the capacity to affect beyond and without humour, one of the most obvious places to begin the discussion is with its contagious capacities.

As the sub-title to Robert Provine's (1992) article outlining his experiments with 'canned laughter' states for instance: "[l]aughter is a sufficient stimulus for [further] laughs and smiles". Similarly, Macpherson (2008) argues in her discussion of contagious laughter that laughter itself can provoke laughter in others but also that people who are already laughing may find it more difficult to stop. Contagious laughter thus means "opening ourselves to the present moment, the flow and rhythm of laughter" (Macpherson, 2008: 1083). In this way, laughter can be seen to enact modes of relational sociability between different bodies which in turn generate "contagious subjectivit[ies]" (Lawtoo, 2011: 74) 'born' out of the affections of laughter itself (Nancy, 1993). Similarly, contagious laughter, because of both its material and affective qualities, has often been offered up as an exemplar of the 'transmission' or circulation of affect (see Bissell, 2010; Bissell et al., 2012; Brennan, 2004; Brigstocke, 2014; Nixon, 2017) thus pointing explicitly its affective atmospheric qualities, as the following moment suggests:

I was sitting in the dining room feeding breakfast to Mrs S with a number of other carers and residents. The room was fairly calm and quiet so Laura decided to put some music on. She pressed the button on the stereo, there was a click and a whirring of the CD in the drive. Suddenly, the calmness of the room was shattered by an eruption from the speakers as ABBA's 'Dancing Queen' blared out at top volume. At that exact moment, Mary arrived, wheeling Mrs F in front of her. Both of them were in fits of laughter, Mrs F rocking back and forth in her wheelchair and Mary half folded at the waist, tears glinting in the corner of her eyes. They had been laughing all the way downstairs and as they enter the dining room, their guffaws and

giggles combine with the sound of Swedish Pop, to create an excess of jovial energy that instantly filled the room. The whole room was suddenly in a state of laughter. I couldn't stop myself, it just came from my belly and out of my mouth, a hearty laugh that shook my whole body. I looked up at Nina – she caught my eye – her face creasing up – her laugh intensifying. Then the same thing with Tara, then Mrs S, then Mrs H, Karen, and Laura. The room, the walls and tables almost pulsated – a crescendo of laughter and music moving around like a wave. I sat in the middle of it all shaking and gasping for air. Slowly over the next few minutes, the laughter faded back, my breathing returned to normal. The room itself remained thick with a certain tension, and from time to time bursts of laughter punctured the air only to be quickly stifled by sharp intakes of breath...

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 20/10/2015)

Although a relatively 'extreme' event in terms of my experiences, this encounter provides an overt example of laughter, rather than humour, generating actions and affections within bodies. There is no obvious joke present. I found out later that a perfume bottle had broken which meant Mrs F had been covered in perfume, providing the initial catalyst for hers and Mary's laughter, but this remained unknown at the time. As such, we can start to see laughter here as forming a means through which the expressive relations between bodies can be redefined, realigned and reterritorialised. The laughter draws out an atmospheric territory which is physically and affectively felt within different bodies and circulates between them, through actions of creasing, folding, rocking, shaking, swaying and, of course, laughing further. The laughter fills the space of the dining room with waves and bursts of jovial energies of differing intensities, forming a "unique totality that incorporates

individual bodies by subsuming them within an assemblage of forces” (Duff, 2016: 64). Of these forces, sonorous sensations are clearly central, yet they act alongside other modes of atmospheric expression – the glancing and catching of eyes and the crumpling of faces – and constellations of music, food, smells of perfume, wheelchairs and other affective intensities and memories (of the earlier calm and quietness for instance). The atmosphere of laughter thus draws all of the bodies in the dining room into a new relational assemblage characterised by common affection (Edensor, 2012b). We were no longer individual bodies but instead what Bataille and Nancy might call, not unproblematically, a ‘community of laughers’ (Parvulescu, 2010).

The example, therefore, shows how laughter can become a primary way through which bodies relate to one another and space itself. It is important to recognise, however, that there is an element of precarity here whereby laughter can also mobilise bodies in similar, yet smaller and more subtle, ways, generating affections in just a few people within a larger set:

Sarah and Kate were hoisting Mrs P onto her chair. All three were laughing about something (I’m not sure what exactly). I was talking to Barbara at the time and watching them out of the corner of my eye. Suddenly I let out a little laugh myself. Mrs P looked directly at me, “Why you laughing?” she barked at me. I felt too rude to admit that it is just because they were

(Field Diary notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 12/11/2015)

Here, the three women’s laughter draws me in even though I am not involved in the joke (cf. Chapter 5). Once again, therefore, we can start to see how

laughter can move bodies in ways that are not necessarily related to humour through modes of contagious or infectious affectivity. The spatialities of this laughter again display atmospheric characteristics through its dispersal out across the lounge and creation of affective proximity between the group and myself, rhythmically aligning my body with theirs, eliciting a moment of 'shared' laughter (Edensor, 2012b; Macpherson, 2008). Yet what we also glimpse within this encounter is a sense of indeterminacy within the laughter – the ways it affects (or doesn't) bodies differently. Although there were several other people in the lounge, I seemed to be the only one who was prompted to laugh. The reason for my 'openness' here is probably due to my positionality – my research focus making me more attuned to laughter and thus more likely to be affected by it – however the differences demonstrate a key element in responding to critiques of the 'universalising' tendencies of some affective thinking (Tolia-Kelly, 2006) through recognising the differing capacities of bodies to be affected by atmospheres depending on their positions, situations or orientations (Ahmed, 2006; Nayak, 2010).

In both of these cases, therefore, we can start to see the ways in which bodies can become involved in atmospheres of laughter, even when there is no recognisable humour to cause this laughter. Although in each case there was a 'joke', I was privy to neither and yet still laughed. Laughter can, therefore, be seen to affect bodies in a manner that exceeds humour itself. We might similarly note, however, that even when the joke is clear and recognisable, laughter can still exceed the intentionality of that joke (cf. Sills, 2017), through

generating actions and affections that contradict (or work differently to) the representational economies held within its form. This is seen clearly in the following description of a show performed by the pantomime group:

The third show of the day was turning out to be slightly sluggish. We were in a care home for people with dementia and mobility impairments. The cast seemed to be a little bored of each other and the performance – probably tiredness from the two shows earlier today, the driving, and the months of being on the road. The jokes from the start of the show produced very few laughs – it definitely felt like a care home rather than ‘the theatre’. ‘The Beast’ entered the stage ... He looked slightly unkempt, his shirt was supposed to be tucked in neatly but it hung down slightly from the side and had become increasingly creased by being stuffed into a suitcase throughout the day. Suddenly a voice became audible towards the back of the room as one man turned to his neighbour and says, loud enough for the whole room to hear, “what a scruff!” For just a moment there was a palpable tension in the room and then all of a sudden laughter erupted – residents, carers, actors, and me – deep and uncontrollable. The cast could no longer carry on, corpsing every time they tried to get going again. When they did manage, there was a noticeable change: the audience seemed to sit up a little straighter, eyes more focused on the performance and the next few jokes prompted a much greater response. Together we were taken from a care home in Birmingham to a magical world of Beauties, Beasts, talking candlesticks and clocks...

(Field Diary Notes, Pantomime Group, 18/01/2016)

Within this example there is a clear joke present yet, in many ways, it exemplifies the argument that there is an advantage to thinking about laughter ‘beyond the joke’ even if a joke is present. While it is possible to interpret this laughter in terms of humour, particularly superiority theory – laughter as

emerging from a ridiculing of the scruffiness of 'The Beast' (see Billig, 2005) – there is again a disjuncture between the theories of laughter and its actual workings. Superiority theory is usually associated with feelings of power for laughers over those who are laughed at yet, in this instance, the actions produced by this encounter with laughter seem to demonstrate a bringing together of all the bodies (including 'The Beast') rather than separating them into different parts. I would thus suggest that it is instead the event of laughter itself in this situation that serves to disrupt or interrupt the unfolding experience (Dawney, 2013) and reterritorialise bodies around new matters of affective and corporeal expression that are themselves distinctly atmospheric (Stewart, 2011).

Although there is a contagious element to this laughter – a moment in which we can all enjoin – the laughter here also enables a transition between two different atmospheres: the first, of tiredness, subdued bodies, and slight disinterest; the second is more attentive, allowing for a 'magical' and immersive experience; thus, suggesting its capacities to generate forms of affection beyond simply further laughter. Leading on from this we might further note that although in the moments of laughter discussed thus far my body has formed an active component – always joining in with the act of laughing – there were many more instances during the fieldwork in which I encountered laughter but did not laugh myself. Although these occurred throughout the home, certain spacetimes seemed more likely associated with them, notably during personal-care tasks such as washing, dressing and

assisting residents going to the toilet as already discussed in the previous chapter. Crucially, these laughs not only fill the rooms in which they occur, but also exceed these spaces, often audibly passing through the care home's doors, walls, ceiling, and floors, as the laughter extends ever outwards. My field notes describing these encounters are full of further indicators of activity and affect – the sound of laughter as making me feel: 'nice', 'pleased', 'less bored', 'less lonely', 'intrigued', 'cheerier'; or making me: 'skip', 'sing', 'hum' or 'smile' – which demonstrate the haptic nature of my body becoming enveloped by the affective sensations of laughter shared by others (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; McCormack, 2013). In pushing this further, I might note that there are even moments in my field diary that suggest laughter's atmospheres as being able to be felt, even in the absence of much actual laughter. As I reflected:

I spent the afternoon with Olivia sorting out the upstairs a little bit, moving furniture around, tidying out the big cupboard, throwing lots of things away, and generally just cleaning up. It was really hard work, but enjoyable. We had a bit of a laugh. I'm not quite sure how much actual laughter occurred but the mood of it seemed to capture a similar feel.

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 04/08/2016)

I remain unsure as to whether the colloquial terminology around 'having a laugh' (which generally means just to have a bit of fun) should actually be counted as a moment of laughter per se., and as such I am not going to dwell on the implications of it to a great extent. Yet, together, these examples all suggest laughter as capable of affecting bodies in a manner that exceeds the intensities of its actual doings. This has key implications for how we think

about cause and effect in terms of laughter through not only positioning laughter's affective capacities as somewhat distinct from its humorous causes (jokes) but also rendering it somewhat distinct from actively laughing (or not) itself (Billig, 2005). Indeed, this places us in a similar position to the affective form of listening outlined in Chapter 4 and thus again points towards a sense of co-production, or emergent causality, whereby the causes of laughter's affective capacities are only apprehensible through the various effects they have on the body (Anderson, 2014; De Landa, 2006).

Furthermore, this disruptive cause and effect relationship also throws open the question as to whether laughter causes an atmosphere, or vice versa. Therefore, this poses key implications for how we think about the ethics of its affects and effects (particularly in relation to human actions) and thus once again suggests a form of ethical attunement is needed that does not focus on the 'who did what and why' style of analysis but rather one that is more open to the complexity entanglements that make up laughter's excess. As such, it is this attention to laughter's excess, in terms of the ways in which it can act beyond bodies, humour, intention and even the intensity of laughter itself, and the complexity of its entanglements that emerge from this, that I take forward into the next section, which attends more specifically to the ways in which laughter's atmospheres overlap with the provision, and affective spatialities, of care itself.

6.5 | Laughter's creative force

Although the analysis in the previous section focussed on laughter's capacities to become excessive, within the examples discussed it is also possible to see how these excessive capacities serve to shape the affective spacetimes within which, or perhaps more precisely alongside which, laughter bursts. In this manner, and particularly through the explicit attention afforded to *laughter's* role beyond humorous intentionality within this, we can start to see the ways in which laughter can enact forms of nascent creativity (Williams, 2016) which change the ways in which bodies interact with space. Although this is again somewhat ambiguous, defying any sense of definiteness that laughter *will* shape spacetimes in a specific way, there are two connected kinds of broad affective movements that we might highlight, particularly in thinking about how these atmospheres of laughter intersect with care specifically: the capacity to shift the 'direction' of unfolding trajectories and create something processually new (Massey, 2005; McCormack, 2013); and a capacity to generate (different) forms of being with one another (Cloke and Conradson, 2018; Popke, 2009).

In terms of the first of these capacities, therefore, this is most clear in the section above within the example of the pantomime show where the laughter serves not only to bring bodies together but also enables the atmosphere of the show itself to be 'lifted' and thus for it to provide its intended outcomes. In terms of care more specifically then, we can start to think about laughter's capacities to "maintain, continue, and repair" affective relations between

people, places and spaces, particularly when there are points of friction, tension and disagreement (Tronto 1993: 103):

Towards the end of the day, I sat with most of the carers in the lounge whilst they were filling in the charts. One asked if she could check her payslip with the shift supervisor. She doesn't feel that she has been paid properly. They were gone for a few moments and when they returned, a thick tension followed them, enveloping the room. The rest of us were throwing a ball to back and forward between a few of the residents in between writing in charts. A moment later, a cascade of events unfolded: Mrs J didn't quite catch the ball; Mrs B cried out her favourite line: "Help me... I am in terrible pain... I fell and broke my arm ... and my bottom" (none of these things is true and she can call it out about 50 times a day), and I Mr L raised himself from his slumber in his chair, shouting, "Fuck off you bastards!" into open space. Suddenly the tension in the room cracked and we all laughed. It was like we realised why we were there ... It felt like the individual feuds were worthless compared to the predicament of the residents. We were, for a brief moment, a collective – an assemblage – who had been restored to our roles in the machine that is the care home.

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 08/10/2015)

Within this example, we can see clearly the ways in which laughter can serve to repair the worlds in which caring itself takes place, in this case through the removal of tensions between people which enable a different, less frictionous, form of being-together to emerge. It's worth noting the connections with 'release theories' here, whereby we might see the laughter in this instance as something of a 'safety valve' through which 'psychic tensions' can be received and made collective (Lippitt, 1995). In this sense, there is nothing particularly 'ethical' about this form of laughter in and of itself. Instead, the ethics are

situated within the new trajectories that emerge from this laughter, such as the *enhanced* capacity to act, think and care for people other than ‘the self’. In other words, where the tense atmosphere preceding the moment of laughter is marked by an apparent concern for the self, the atmosphere following the moment of laughter seemingly enables a more communal concern for others, including the residents, and therefore implies a reinstating of care as the way of being and acting in the world (Lawson, 2007). In this sense, we might argue for a dual enactment of care in this moment of laughter – both a repair of the world through the release of tension, and the emergence of increased capacities to attend to others, both of which are enacted by the sense of laughter itself as a mode of being-with-others.

This latter point, therefore, moves us to the second of atmospheric laughter’s key capacities: its capacities to generate moments of collective becoming between people, whether that be for all or just some of those who encounter it. We might note here something of an echo of the previous chapter, particularly in the way the example above discusses a movement between individual, collective and institutional registers. However, there is also a need here to recognise the ways in which the atmospheric qualities of laughter itself (rather than the subjectivity of the person doing it) can bring about particular kinds of affective movements that cut across these somewhat representational categories. For example, I wrote at different moments:

Laughing with Heather was much more personal than it is with the others.

Her laugh is much softer and it draws you into her, enveloping you into her world. It seems perhaps to be much more similar to the descriptions of 'women's laughter' than the more brash style of many other carers.

(Field Diary notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 22/10/2015)

... Laughter also seems to do something else, however, in drawing you into a more 'intimate' relationship and making you linger that little bit longer. It often sparks questions and conversations that can create a sense of closeness.

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 30/06/2016)

These examples, therefore, show the different ways in which atmospheres of laughter can produce affective relations that enable distinct forms of being with one another to emerge. More specifically, in these two examples, we can see the ways in which laughter envelops bodies within a 'shared affectivity' (Lawtoo, 2011) that can enact forms of spacing between bodies and create moments of 'intimacy' or 'closeness' (Maclaren, 2014a). That said, in each case the mechanism through which this closeness is generated is slightly different, thus again stressing the ambiguous workings of atmospheres in relation to the bodies who encounter them (Anderson, 2014). In the first for instance, affect can be seen to emerge through the aesthetics of 'Heather's' laughter – the tone, timbre and rhythm (Nancy, 2007; Simpson, 2009) which give it a certain 'softness' that draws you in. In the second, laughter's affects emerge through its capacities to change movements, generating a desire to 'linger' and talk further. Laughter's capacity to generate 'intimacy' in this manner thus opens up further space to think about atmospheric laughter's relation with care, with the idea of intimacy often being seen as a key component of generating and

maintaining the affective connections between people out of which care emerges (see Bowlby, 2011; Cloutier et al., 2015; Conradson, 2011; England, 2010; Seo, 2016).

Furthermore, both laughter and intimacy are often seen as ‘antidotes’ to impersonal, institutional affective forms of care (Maclaren, 2014a): a way of enlivening and introducing a more personal (and human) atmosphere to the otherwise highly homogenous, mechanised and routinised spaces of the care home. In this sense, both laughter and intimacy often work to erode the ‘functionality’ of the spaces of the care home as places in which ‘care work’ happens, and thus creates a space in which other forms of interaction can take place, although these often still involve ‘care’ more generally. Again, although not solely working through laughter, we can see this quality on display clearly in terms of both theatre performances and through activities, both of which are intended to stage particular kinds of atmospheres that are different to the normal feel and function of care home spaces, and both of which often involve intimacy and laughter of various sorts. As I noted following an afternoon spent painting residents’ nails: “It is a good chance to spend a little time one on one. It’s also a chance to ‘have a laugh’ on a more personal level with people. Mrs P was making fun of me today because I kept slipping with the nail varnish and getting it on people’s fingers” (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 01/07/2016). Beyond this, however, there is also sense that laughter’s capacities to help produce spaces that are less ‘functional’ can also make room for the provision of care in ways that are also less ‘functional’ and thus once

again enable more 'human' and intimate connections:

Today was the first day I had stayed later into the evening. Much of the last hour or so was spent just sitting in the lounge. Many of the residents had gone to bed with just a couple left sitting in the lounge. The curtains had been pulled shut, Coronation Street was on in the background and the staff gathered to write the final notes in their charts. Most of the day to day work had been completed, so their only real job was to react if anyone calls through from their rooms, and just to be there until the next shift started. Grace left and came back with a big glass of sherry for one of the residents. She has another smaller glass for herself and the two of them clinked glasses gently, smiling at each other and giggling as they did so. I sensed a feeling of naughtiness between them. I and the staff just sat there talking between ourselves and the residents. Laughter popped up as jokes were made. Small bursts of different intensity and tone. The room felt somehow lulled by the sense of genial laughter. There was what I can only describe as a family atmosphere: a sense of familiarity in which boundaries between staff and residents became blurred and broken down, as did the distinctions between 'work' and 'home'. The weight of the day melted slowly, replaced by a firm, almost heavy, comforting feeling.

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 23/10/2015)

Here then we can see the ways in which this atmosphere of familiarity and 'homeliness' helps to transform the space and erode the 'functional structures' that usually surround care work, creatively transforming the spaces in the process and producing something new in their place. In this instance, this transformation enables a new set of circumstances to emerge, within which, and out of which, different forms of care can take place: a 'more human' form of relation which cuts against the structured, automated, impersonal or

machinic forms of care work that make up the majority of everyday practices within care homes. In this sense, we might thus position laughter and its associated atmospheres in the same way that Bergson (1980) does, as an antidote to the 'mechanisation' of bodies (see also Goldberg, 1999) and thus as a means of reintroducing care as an emotional/affective disposition rather than just something to be done to other bodies (Conradson, 2011). That said, it's worth noting the somewhat complex position that laughter maintains within this transformative process whereby it both emerges from within the 'homely' atmospheric mixture *and* simultaneously aids the production of the atmosphere itself through further intensifying the effects that it has on the space and the bodies who engage with it.

As such we can start to address the unfinished nature of atmospheric laughter within encounters such as this one whereby it can be seen as both central *and* peripheral to the production of particular affective spacetimes and social relations. In other words, whilst in this case it seems that the atmosphere of laughter does serve to produce particular forms of socio-spatial relations that can be *qualified* as more caring through their capacities to generate a more personal and intimate style of engagement, it's very difficult to say with any certainty that laughter is either *the cause* or simply *an effect* of this affective movement, and as such we must always think about it in terms of emergent causality (Anderson, 2014). Indeed, although I have no direct comparison noted in my field diary, it's not difficult to imagine that if the circumstances before, during, or after this encounter were other than they seem to be in this

instance – if for instance there was a complaint about the staff member drinking alcohol on shift – then this particular atmosphere and its qualified meanings might become drastically different, and seem far less caring.

This idea of emergent causality is, therefore, crucial in connecting this section to the last and thus in thinking through the ethics of laughter's transformative capacities in conjunction with its always being in excess of singular meaning. Indeed, where all of the examples in this section have suggested an affirmative relation between laughter and care – whereby laughter's atmospheres have been presented as having capacities to differentiate existing relations between bodies, matters and spaces and therefore to create new circumstances of care that are somehow 'less functional', 'more human' and 'more caring' – it's important to recognise that these outcomes are both situated within the specific examples used, and are not the only possible outcomes of that could emerge from each moment laughter, particularly if we approach it from a different angle, position or orientation (Ahmed, 2006). As Sara Ahmed (2010: 125) writes "we may walk into a room and 'feel the atmosphere', but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival." In drawing this chapter towards its close, therefore, the final section looks to add a further critical standpoint in asking what *else* laughter can do, and perhaps more importantly, *for whom?*

6.6 | Differential encounters

As already noted, one of the key critiques levelled at non-representational styles of thought is that they often do not seem to attend enough to how a

plurality of bodily and social differences influence the kinds of engagements and encounters that people have with affect and its worlds (see Bondi, 2005; Nayak, 2010; Thien, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2006). One key response to this has been to think through the variegated means through which both encounters between different bodies produce certain forms of affect (Ahmed, 2004) and how encounters with affective spacetimes and atmospheres become differentiated depending on the embodied and geographical positions of those taking part (Ahmed, 2006; Colls, 2012). Helen Wilson (2017: 456) thus argues that we need to approach encounters holding difference at the forefront of our thinking, adopting an ethic of attunement that is “not only about researching encounters in less self-focused ways but about attending to and embracing failure, unbecoming, ambiguity, ambivalence, rupture and the fleeting.” In this section, therefore, I look to engage in a more speculative form of ethical attunement (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) through which we might think further about the ways in which differences, pluralities and multiplicities emerge through encounters with atmospheres of laughter.

In particular, I look to outline the sense of possibility afforded by juxtaposition (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987) through drawing on two similar moments of laughter which are experienced from different positions and thus create different affective outcomes; once again suggesting the ethical indeterminacies held within atmospheres of laughter, particularly in terms of how the ‘same’ moment of laughter can generate multiple affections in different bodies, depending on their situations (both present and historical).

The particular juxtaposition drawn on relates staff breaks in Winterbourne Care Home. Where most breaks in Summerview happened in the staff room, which was in the basement of the building, in Winterbourne breaks often happened in the dining room due to the staff room being around five minutes' walk from the main working areas and so going there was seen to 'eat into' the break itself. As such, a certain flexibility in the ways that the space of the dining room is engaged at different times is therefore necessary. As with the transformative capacities of laughter described above, once again atmospheres of laughter seem to form an important aspect of this flexibility, often working to deterritorialise the function of the room as a workspace and reterritorialise it as a break space with different emotional and affective attachments:

I walked into the dining room where some carers were sat at a table having a break. "Join us!" they called over to me, and for the first time in the three weeks I have been here, I got to sit down and have an 'official' break with other people. Today had been running smoothly and so everyone was in a good mood. The carers sat chatting with each other and eating a plate of biscuits. It was nice, they were 'bantering' and making fun of each other a little while they talked about stuff that is going on at home. Moments of laughter peppered the conversation, short intense bursts at relatively consistent intervals which started to blend into one another. Each one seemed to relax the muscles in my back and sooth my feet a little. I just sat there, remaining silent, and bathing in the laughter rather than joining in myself

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 29/10/2015)

The atmosphere and its effects are again clear in this moment: I can 'bathe' in

it; it affects my body, physically relaxing my muscles and creating feelings of enjoyment, rest, inclusion. Laughter, again although not the only element of this atmosphere, marks something of a refrain around which it becomes territorialised. Indeed, on my preliminary visit to the home, one carer told me “we do laugh a lot here, especially over a brew [cup of tea]” (Field Diary notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 16/09/2015). This is, of course, not to say that all breaks felt exactly the same. However many of the breaks I was involved in did share a similar affective imprint – feelings which mark those spacetimes out as breaks rather than work – which is again suggestive of the ways in which atmospheres of laughter can both emerge from these kinds of affective relations and creatively transform particular spaces, enabling bodies to do different things, perform different actions, affect and be affected in different ways.

As noted in the discussion of laughter’s excessive nature, however, laughter is never bound within a particular space – overflowing and exceeding individual rooms meaning people will experience it from different locations, positions and situations which in turn generates ethical differences within its capacities to affect bodies and to generate or undo caring relations. To demonstrate this, I juxtapose this first encounter with a staff break with a different one from a month or so later. The events of laughter are themselves very similar but experienced from different locations, and thus produce palpably different affective experiences:

I was sitting in the little lounge talking quietly with Mr H. Three of the carers were on break at a table just inside the dining room, the murmur of their conversation buzzing away in the background. I couldn't see them but an open archway connects the two rooms and Mr H could just about see them from where he was sat. Suddenly a cackle of laughter erupted from their table, reverberating through the archway and into the lounge. Mr H's face lit up, the corner of his mouth creeping upwards and his eyes widening. He turned towards them join in, shouting "what's that?" One of the carer's faces appeared in the archway as she rocked her chair backwards. Seemingly, without noting what he said, she automatically replied "we are on break [Mr H], we will come in five minutes" and she swung forwards again, seeming to think nothing of it. A second or two passed, the murmuring continued, and then again, a second wave of laughter washed outwards from them and into our room. His face fell, seeming to grey. Looking at him, I felt his pain, his isolation, his rejection. My body tensed, and he obviously no longer wanted to chat ...

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 5/12/2015)

Both encounters with breaks can be seen as 'arrivals' (Ahmed, 2010). The first is a literal arrival as I enter a room, the second emerges as laughter spills-over into an adjacent room. Clearly, each of these events affects bodies in different ways – I am easily incorporated into the first; Mr H is rejected and thus restricted by the second. We must, therefore, recognise the contingent nature of the various material/affective forces that compose laughter's atmospheres, and particularly the ways in which the arrival of a new body requires a creative 're-composition' – either to destroy or incorporate that body's forces (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). The second encounter also demonstrates the fleeting nature of these compositions and the way that they can enact multiple

‘trajectories’ that produce different affective responses and relational experiences, at different times. Initially Mr H experiences a positive affection – his face lights up, he turns to them, he is feeling positive, included, wants to join in – yet he is rejected and therefore the second burst of laughter produces a negative affection – his face drops, there is exclusion, isolation, his actions become limited, and he no longer wants to talk to me. This reiterates the point that atmospheres of laughter are not homogenous entities but are rather a multiplicity of material and affective qualities, trajectories and intensities, capable of shifting and thus affecting bodies differently at different times (Edensor, 2015).

In both of these cases, therefore, it is imperative to recognise how bodily and spatial differences can affect the meaning and ethics of encounters with laughter’s atmospheres (Wilson, 2017). In the first encounter I am incorporated into the atmosphere of laughter, in part because I can enter the space of the table without physical assistance – distinguishing me from most residents. I am also identified as ‘worker’ and thus seen as entitled to a break, a chance to rest my body and mind in the same way as ‘regular’ workers. Mr H does not have the same potential. Not only is he physically unable to move into the room and thus must shout to try and join in, but as a resident, his body is layered with meaning (both representational and non-representational) that designate him as ‘work,’ and thus beyond the realms of what constitutes a break space. We can start to see how atmospheres of laughter are not only enacted within the bounds of the spaces in which they occur but also the ways

in which they, alongside a myriad of social, material, and discursive resources (Duff, 2010), can produce space itself – although a space that might not feel the same for everyone within it.

Although moving away from the direct nature of this juxtaposition, in fleshing this out further we might also note the ways in which atmospheres of laughter and their associated effects can affect as much through physical movements of bodies (or lack thereof) as they do through their sonic spreading (McCormack, 2013). Indeed, related to my comment in the previous section about atmospheres of laughter facilitating a desire to ‘linger’, I noted a number of times within my field diary that laughter sometimes seems to have the capacity to distract bodies from what else is happening around them. Often this was just a case of spending a moment or two here and there, enjoying a moment of shared laughter, without necessarily impacting care provision directly, but at its more extreme, it can also have a more profound effect on experiences of care itself:

I got very frustrated today. Mr J had been needing the toilet for a while and I had told the staff a couple of times. They were busy as always so it took a while to get to him. Just as they were about to come and take him through someone did something funny in the little lounge and a huge burst of laughter roared through. The carers who were coming to help him suddenly stopped, turned back and went to join in with whatever it was. He had to wait about ten more minutes before they finally got back to him

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 12/07/2016)

This moment of distracting laughter thus also speaks to a problem associated

with laughter's capacities to produce spatialities that are outside of the 'structured' nature of care spaces. By 'eroding' structures in this manner (even momentarily), attention can potentially be drawn away from the residents in favour of other matters of care – in part re-iterating the 'need' to structure care in the first place. In other words, whilst it may seem at first glance that the undoing of structure through laughter is a 'good' thing because it can make the home feel less 'clinical', more 'lively' and more human, it's worth recognising that from the residents' perspective, this may not be what they want, need or require from the care home, or indeed the care that is (or sometimes isn't) provided.

This section has thus looked to add another layer of speculative complexity to our thinking around laughter with care through attending to some of the differences between the experiences of those who encounter them. More specifically, the section is about recognising that although many moments of laughter may feel positive at the outset when approaching them from a different angle, things might not feel quite so 'positive' after all (Ahmed, 2006, 2010). It's worth noting that these other experiences are relatively infrequent within my field diary (although this is possibly due to my positionality), yet their presence prompts us to recognise their imminent potential within every moment of laughter and thus pushes us towards a need here to think more fully about the ethical multiplicities within the singularity of each event (Nancy, 2000).

What's more, their co-existence with laughter's positive potentials – their happening at the same time and through the same kinds of laughter – enables full recognition of the 'messiness' of the worlds in which laughter happens, particularly given that these movements from 'good' to 'bad', 'better' to 'worse' and vice versa, are often somewhat disconnected from the intentions of the laughers, and the intentionality of their laughter. As such, there is arguably a need, as both Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) and Helen Wilson (2017) note, for an ethical attunement to these atmospheres, and different people's encounters with them, that recognises the variegated ethical affects they can enact, to enhance or to restrict bodies' capacities (see Braidotti, 2011), or sometimes both simultaneously, whilst still offering the generosity towards the fact that often these outcomes are excessive and unintended, and therefore can sometimes be held outside of normative moral judgements, or blame, about those who happen to be laughing.

6.7 | Conclusions

This chapter has looked to move away from thinking about laughter as something that is 'done' by humans and instead consider what it can do as a thing or force in its own right. I have drawn on the concept of affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009a, 2014), arguing that positioning moments of laughter as affective atmospheres allows a means of not only conceptualising their often diffuse and ephemeral spatialities but also their capacities to affect bodies in a manner that exceeds human and humorous intentionality (Hughes, 2016). In this way, I have somewhat echoed both Nancy (1993) and Bataille's

(2001) claims that laughter's capacities are separate from those of humour, and that it is, therefore, something that occurs "beyond, around, and alongside the formation of subjectivity" (Anderson, 2009a: 77). That said, in piecing through the empirical detail in the chapter, I have tried to avoid any universalising tendencies through remaining attentive to the wider constellation of forces beyond simply the affective (Nayak, 2010), out of which atmospheres are produced and apprehended and thus recognise how different social, cultural, historical and geographical positionings also shape the capacities for laughter to affect and be affected (see Ahmed, 2006, 2010; Colls, 2012).

In empirical terms, therefore, the chapter has addressed how we might think through the ways in which laughter's atmospheres serve to interrupt and reshape the affective spacetimes of care homes (McCormack, 2013), and thus how they affect different people's experiences of giving and receiving care. I opened this discussion through recognition of the ways in which various atmospheres exist within care homes beyond laughter, and noting the ways in which this can affect care itself. I then outlined the ways in which atmospheres of laughter can be seen as always in excess of singular humorous intentions or representations, having the capacities to occur both without and beyond humour, as well as sometimes seeming to exceed the doing of laughter itself. Following this, I noted the ways in which laughter can enhance caring relations through its capacities to remake the spacetimes in which it occurs, sometimes working to repair them when tensions emerge (as was seen in the example and

surrounding the disagreement about wages), but also through creating spaces and relations between people which feel somehow less functional and therefore more 'human' (see Bergson, 1980). As the juxtapositions in the final section affirm, however, there is clear need to recognise that the excessive nature of laughter's atmospheres means that they will be experienced differently by different people depending on their situations, and therefore that a moment of laughter, even if encountered from just around the corner, might have ethical potentials that are very different and more complex than those which initially appear (Ahmed, 2010).

The significance of this discussion in terms of ethics, therefore, is in its complicating of the relationships between cause and effect within moments of laughter. Not only does thinking about laughter's atmospherics enact a break with the intentionality of humour and thus further erode any ethical thinking based on humour theories, but the complex nature of atmospheres themselves also makes thinking about its causes in a linear fashion somewhat problematic (Anderson, 2014). As we have seen, it often becomes difficult to distinguish whether or not atmospheres are a cause or an effect of laughter, meaning it often seems more precise to think about emergent causality whereby this relation can be understood in both ways simultaneously (Nancy, 1993). In this sense, the ethical potential of laughter must also be seen as an emergent property that can only be apprehended 'after the fact' and through its capacities to either enhance or restrict different bodies' capacities to act (Braidotti, 2011), which is further complicated by the fact that it probably does

both to different bodies at the same time. As such, I would argue that there is a need to move away from ascribing laughter to an individual moral position based on its effects, particularly when attempts to intentionally ‘stage’ atmospheres through laughter end up affecting some people in a manner that is unintended. Instead, we need to once again recognise, that “what care [and laughter] can mean in each situation cannot be resolved by ready-made explanations” and that thinking with and through care, therefore “requires critical standpoints that are [themselves] careful” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 85) and somewhat more generous in spirit.

Indeed, this ethical sensibility towards laughter is compounded when the previous chapters are also taken into account, particularly in thinking through the ‘reasons’ for laughter’s emergence, and therefore its intentions, as often being curtailed by the particular socio-spatial circumstances in which it occurs (McCormack, 2017), which are often somewhat removed from an abstracted and idealised scenario. This recognition in turn adds a political edge to our thinking about the ethics of laughter with care, through placing ‘boundaries’ or ‘limits’ on the possibilities and potentials of each, in turn pushing the ethical impetus away from the ideal and instead towards the “as well as possible” (Tronto, 1993: 103). Perhaps nowhere is this more the case in care homes than in relation to death, which is often positioned as the limit to ‘life’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘relationality’ (see Bataille, 2001; Harrison, 2007; Romanillos, 2011). As such, the next chapter engages with death by means of unpacking what this might mean for the ways in which we understand the ethico-political

positioning of laughter with care.

Chapter 7: The vital pragmatism of laughter, life and death⁸

How does one lead a good life in a bad life? ... we have two problems: the first is how to live one's own life well, such that we might say that we are living a good life within a world in which the good life is structurally or systematically foreclosed for so many. The second problem is, what form does this question take for us now?

(Butler, 2012: 9)

7.1 | Introduction

This chapter begins in the lounge of Winterbourne Care Home. The lounge was quiet, except for the sound of daytime TV coming from the corner just above me. All the other residents of the care home were in the dining room and the carers were either with them or upstairs. It was Thursday and, for the third day in a row, I was charged with feeding Mrs B her lunch. At that time, I was the only reason she could eat. I raised my hand to her mouth, letting her bite a jam sandwich weakly. She chewed, sucked, slurped. And then it happened. The same thing that had happened every day since I arrived... I recoiled my hand

⁸ Elements of this chapter have been published in a revised form as: Emmerson P (2018) From coping to carrying on: a pragmatic laughter between life and death. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*: 1–14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12252>

quickly as moist bread, jam and saliva propelled across my wrist and rolled along the floor. “No more!” she said, with a force that I would have been surprised by if I hadn’t heard it many times before. I sat there, the useless and unwanted appendage of an ageing woman, contemplating the mostly full plate of jam sandwiches that sat on my lap. Then I looked at her, staring into space through eyes that hadn’t seen for an eternity, and watched her slowly dying. “No more,” she said again, with a renewed frailty. I don’t think she knew what she was saying. She had hardly eaten for weeks. I let out a little laugh. Stifling it I looked around. We were still alone, and the laughter bubbled through again. It seemed as though we laughed together although she didn’t make a sound. I don’t know if I knew it before, but, at that moment, it was overly apparent. She was going to die. I knew it, I think she did too. There was nothing I or anyone else could do. It was only a matter of time. I picked up another jam sandwich and lifted it to her mouth. She bit it weakly...

Everyday understandings of the relationship between laughter and death, such as this one, generally position laughter as an emotional release through which negative feelings can be ‘pushed aside’ and replaced by positive ones. Academic work also largely confirms this line of thinking through engaging with nurses (Harris, 2013), social workers (Sullivan, 2000) and the terminally ill (De Moor, 2005), for example, to argue that laughter acts as a means of distancing or detaching oneself from the emotional or affective consequences of dealing with death. This way of thinking is one based on a conception of death as negative, abject or taboo and thus something needing to be pushed to

the margins of 'life' itself (Romanillos, 2015). Yet this mode of removing death is neither available to, nor enacted by, all those who encounter death (Mbembe, 2001) and therefore at certain times and in certain spaces, people generate other ways of laughing with death – ones that enliven (Stevenson et al., 2016) and affirm death (Harrison, 2015; Romanillos, 2011); folding it into practised, material and affective modes of living.

Following Madge's (2016, 2018) call for more visceral and emotional accounts of death and dying, this chapter thus looks to explore the ways in which experiences of laughter, life, and death – such as the one described above – can be understood in more affirmative terms. It argues that for care workers, in particular, the relationship between laughter, life and death often remains experientially separate from governance theories such as bio/necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003) and therefore needs to be apprehended in terms of more pragmatic politico-ethical projects, similar to those found in vitalist philosophies of life. I exemplify this argument by offering a new understanding of the relationship between laughter and death as a form of carrying on rather than coping. Although a subtle shift in language this move is significant in reconceptualising laughter as a means of reshaping affective relations and rendering them productive rather than simply as pushing other emotions away. This move towards pragmatics is, in turn, crucial for thinking about laughter, life and death within practices of care, where the politico-ethical impetus is often realistic rather than idealistic: paraphrasing Tronto (1993: 103) 'simply' about the maintenance, continuation and repair of (life)worlds

so that they can be lived in as well as possible.

As such, the chapter responds to recent debates around the geographies of laughter and of death/dying, and in doing so begins to draw together some of the wider themes within this thesis as a whole. In terms of the first aim, I question the ways in which key concepts are deployed and offer three ways through which these research agendas might be advanced. First, I suggest laughter as an exemplary means through which we can empirically engage with the paradoxical nature of death and dying (Romanillos, 2015). Second, an alternative reading of the function of laughter around death: as carrying on rather than coping. Third, I propose pragmatics as a key framework through which to think about caring for life and/or death – albeit drawing on a form of pragmatics implicit within the vitalist philosophies of Bergson and those who follow him, rather than American pragmatists such as Dewey or James. Together these highlight a politico-ethic of “as well as possible” (Tronto, 1993) within caring for life and death through which different people’s practices, affections and ethical positions can be better understood and assessed and thus provide a framework through which we can (re)think the politico-ethical potentials of the other moments of laughter, discussed throughout this thesis so far. In particular, the provisionality of the “as well as possible” offers a means of being more generous (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) and affirmative about laughter’s place as good or bad, through recognising that these kinds of judgements are themselves always held in a provisional status, given the complex, messy and imperfect nature of the worlds in which we live, die, laugh

and care for one another.

As such, the chapter begins by outlining some of the ways that human geographers have conceptualised life and death, before turning to laughter's role within these debates more specifically. The emphasis is placed on the different political modes through which these three phenomena have been engaged and the argument made for providing more 'ordinary' experiential accounts of them. The bulk of the chapter develops this approach through discussion, first of laughter's relationship with the 'politics of life' in nursing care homes – in terms of both biopolitical governance and vitalism. Following this, I shift focus onto death, specifically thinking about the various ways in which laughter, life and death fold together within care homes, and outline the move from thinking about coping to carrying on as exemplary of an underlying pragmatic politico-ethic. I conclude by proposing these more pragmatic accounts of laughter, life and death as forming a new direction through which we might frame the politico-ethical stances surrounding the ways in which many ordinary people approach laughter when caring for theirs and others' lifeworlds – both within care homes, but crucially beyond them too.

7.2 | Conceptualising life and death

The concept of 'life' is arguably a focal point around which most of Human Geography has circulated, yet through preceding adjectives such as biological, social, political, public, private – and more specialised terms such as 'bare life' – life also becomes apprehended in multiple ways. Within discussions of life's

politics, however, it sometimes feels as though there is a lack of plurality. As Anderson (2012: 28) notes, for example, the concepts of 'affect' and 'biopower' have become "increasingly popular placeholders for a broad concern with life, albeit in ways that might initially appear to be quite different". Biopower describes the ways in which life has become the 'object-target' of political intervention – a taking control of 'life' both at the individual bodily scale and at the scale of whole populations. Affect contrasts this somewhat, providing a 'sense of push' to life through which new ways of living continuously emerge. Despite this difference, Anderson brings these two together to argue that affect has also become the object-target of state-level political interventions.

That said, non-representational, new materialist and other vitalist theories have offered a different vision where life can be seen as a more-than-human entity with a more pragmatic political impetus. Grosz (2004), for instance, traces the concept through the work of Darwin, Nietzsche, and Bergson, arguing that 'life' here is marked by an incessant vitality that 'propels' bodies through time and space. Indeed, as Bennet (2010: 76) notes, Bergson's use of 'life' in particular, "names a certain propensity for 'the utmost possible' activeness, a bias in favour of mobile and morphing states" and thus relies on a distinction between fixity in the present and a more dynamic reach for the future (Braidotti, 2011). In framing this as pragmatic, therefore, I am exploiting the fact that much of Bergson's work on vitalism, and those that follow him, hold within them pragmatic force – the sense of doing what's necessary rather than following a specific ideology.

Complementing this interest in life, a growing literature has also emerged which addresses the geographies of death and dying (for excellent overviews see Romanillos, 2015; Stevenson et al., 2016). These engagements with death have similarly traversed different modes and scales, including: mapping projects (Dorling and Gunnell, 2003); discussions of mortality rates and governance strategies (Tyner, 2015, 2016) including bio/necropolitical frameworks (Allinson, 2015; Jassal, 2014; Mbembe, 2003); social/cultural geographies of different deathscapes and places (Brown and Colton, 2001; Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010); and philosophical discussions of finitude (Harrison, 2008, 2015, Romanillos, 2011, 2015). In part, this scholarship is about recognising that the ways in which relations with death are influenced by the cultural settings in which they occur, including factors such as faith and generational based differences (Maddrell, 2016). As Dunn et al. (2016) argue, for instance, emotional, material and practised engagements with death differ between European, North American and urban Asian settings in comparison to more rural areas of the Global South and, therefore, require engagements with different styles and scales of political theory.

Closer to the specific themes of this chapter, there have recently been calls for 'enlivened' geographical accounts of death and dying (Stevenson et al., 2016). These kinds of accounts have largely focussed on personal, embodied accounts of survival, grief and remembrance (Maddrell, 2013, 2016, Madge, 2016, 2018; Stevenson, 2016). Maddrell (2016), for instance, has looked to revitalise the ways in which we might 'map' the geographies of mourning and remembrance

in ways that account for emotional/affective spatialities alongside wider social relations that help to formulate senses of place. Similarly, through discussing ‘suicidal journeys,’ Stevenson (2016: 191) argues that death and dying are “vibrant and vital” and that we need a more relational understanding of death in terms of the ways it is folded into the practices of life. Elsewhere Tyner (2016) suggests a need for political engagements with death ‘on the ground’, particularly in terms of survivability, with Clare Madge (2016, 2018) advancing this idea through arguing for a more compassionate and caring politico-ethic that places the visceral and emotional aspects of encountering death, dying and surviving at its core.

Much of this recent work is informed by a theoretical turn away from the ‘broken bonds’ model based on ‘putting aside’ or ‘moving on’ and towards the ‘continuing bonds’ model “which recognises the importance of people’s continuing attachment to their dead loved ones” (Young and Light, 2013: 136). Continuing bonds are perhaps most explicit in Maddrell’s (2013) work on absence and presence. She challenges the notion of death as absence, instead developing the idea of ‘absence-presence’ as a means of exploring the dynamic relationality and experiential tensions between physical absence and emotional presence. Specifically, Maddrell argues that material forms, embodied practices and emotional performances form ‘conduits’ between the bodies of the living and deceased and through which the deceased can continue to act within the present. As such, memorials are places that “need to be recognised as moored in the embodied past life, present memorial and

ongoing emotional journey of the bereaved” (Maddrell, 2013: 504) but crucially also that memorials can take on a “life of their own” through their capacities to engender actions and affections in other bodies – once again echoing vitalist pragmatic thinking.

The politics of life and death in geography can thus be seen to emerge from a tension between two positions: a macro-politics in which life is “made productive through techniques of intervention” (Anderson, 2012: 28) and a more micro-political engagement in which life’s politics emerge at an experiential and embodied level (Madge, 2016). As Stewart (2007: 1) reminds us, these modes and scales of life are not completely separate, yet often “[t]he notion of a totalised system, of which everything is already a part, is not helpful (to say the least) in the effort to approach a weighted and reeling present”. As such, it is within the spirit of this embodied, visceral and emotional micro-political engagement that I situate my own discussions in this chapter, thinking about how life and death become entangled within care home spaces. In doing this, I turn to laughter as one specific emotional/visceral response to death, arguing that it forms not only a means of ‘enlivening’ death but also allows insights into a more pragmatic politico-ethical engagement with a distinct emotionality at its core (Madge, 2016).

7.3 | Laughter, life and death

As noted within this thesis already, laughter is starting to acquire increasing purchase within geographical thought as a means of addressing different

forms of (micro)political life (Brigstocke, 2014; Dittmer, 2013; Macpherson, 2008; Nixon, 2017; Ridanpää, 2014a; Sharpe et al., 2014; Sharpe and Hynes, 2016). Laughter, for instance, is often positioned as a disciplinary mechanism, both for individual bodies who may be laughed at for breaking social norms or conventions (Bergson, 1980; Billig, 2005; Douglas, 2015), and for whole populations, through engendering a sense of 'banal nationalism,' often couched within a politics of stereotype and racist humour (Billig, 2005; Dodds and Kirby, 2012; Ridanpää, 2007). Laughter can also challenge these disciplinary mechanisms: through disruption of power (Hughes, 2016); providing alternative narratives (Brigstocke, 2014); and creating 'sensuous solidarities' (Routledge, 2012) – all of which, can engender bodies with a capacity to exceed the control of structural powers. These conceptions of laughter also touch on its position as affective, that is to say, its capacities to prompt actions and affections within and between bodies through generating different rhythmic engagements with space (Sharpe et al., 2014) and the sense of (often atmospheric) push through which 'liveliness' can emerge within and between different bodies (Bissell et al., 2012; Brigstocke, 2014; Dittmer, 2013).

In a similar manner to 'biopower' and 'affect' (Anderson, 2012), laughter itself can, however, also be a 'placeholder' for life. "As Vladimir Propp tells us, laughter is par excellence the sign of life" (Parvulescu, 2005: 495). Although emerging from multiple philosophical orientations this claim is perhaps most overt again within Bergson's (1980) work in which he positions laughter as a

‘vital impulse’ through which a sense of life (or liveliness) can be (re)introduced into bodies that have been rendered static or mechanic (see also Brigstocke, 2014; Goldberg, 1999; Parvulescu, 2010). It is worth remaining critical of Bergson’s account, however, which again often seems to remain blind to the effects of (bodily) difference which, as the previous chapter notes, is often key to understanding how laughter affects different people and affects people differently.

Laughter has also been brought into geographic dialogue with death, recognising the different ways in which each are perceived and embodied across different socio-cultural settings (Mbembe, 2001; Parvulescu, 2005). Galvany (2009: 58) for instance notes the ways in which laughter for the Chinese Zhuangzi can serve to “neutralize the usual political exploitation of the emotions by means of methodically channelling them” thus enabling forms of friendship to endure beyond death. In Europe, the USA and Australasia particularly, the relationship between laughter and death is most often understood in terms of coping, highlighted by frequent reference to ‘gallows’ or ‘black’ humour in spaces where people are emotionally exposed to pain, death and grief (Dean and Major, 2008). Laughter in these instances is seen as “a survival tactic, a defence mechanism, a way of lessening the horror, and a method to attain a certain amount of control” and therefore to remove the individual from the ‘pain’ of death and dying (De Moor, 2005: 739). In these conceptions, laughter is thus depicted as a means to ‘move beyond’ or ‘put aside’ death and so risks returning to the ‘broken bonds’ model described

above.

In this sense, we might see ‘coping laughter’ as an affirmation of life, although an affirmation that runs the risk of what Harrison (2015: 286) derides as “forgetting dying, or of forgetting finitude, and forgetting the give and take of living”. Romanillos (2011) attempts to mitigate this ‘forgetting of finitude,’ through turning to Heidegger, Foucault and Bataille arguing that all three reveal the ways in which finitude does not mark absence but instead is made indicatively present within experiences of life (cf. Maddrell, 2013). Bataille in particular, folds laughter into his understandings of death and finitude, noting that it forms a non-positive affirmation: “a yes saying or rather yes-laughing negativity ... a moment of joy and laughter in the face of death” (Parvulescu, 2010: 80).

For Bataille (2001), encounters with death fall into the realms of ‘inner experience’ – sitting at the margins of what is ‘liveable’ and ‘can be felt’. Inner experience, like affect, exceeds both representation and ‘conscious experience’ (Lawtoo, 2011) and therefore again has an affinity with many of the vitalist theories already discussed. Laughter is seen to offer a means of dramatizing this inner experience, “punctuat[ing] the ‘experience’ of death with a burst of laughter” (Parvulescu, 2010: 82) and generating other relationships with the past and future. It is an ontogenetic becoming of ‘life’ itself (Dewsbury, 2012). The affirmation of Bataille’s ‘laughter in the face of death’, therefore, marks a very different political project from that of laughter as a means of ‘coping’ or

forgetting death, instead providing a means of exploring the multiple possibilities that encounters with death afford and suggesting that different outcomes and futures might well be possible (Romanillos, 2011).

Within these various conceptualisations of laughter we can again start to see two dominant political perspectives emerge that somewhat align with Anderson's (2012) discussions of life. On the one hand, laughter serves as a means of disciplining bodies and (re)placing them within a biopolitical system – either through shaming them into conformity (Billig, 2005) or providing a coping mechanism through which negative feelings can be pushed aside. On the other hand, there is the kind of excessive, transgressive laughter evoked by Bataille, which serves to disrupt both the representation and the functioning of biopolitical economies. Again, however, this dichotomy both fails to recognise that these ethico-political stances are neither open to all who laugh around death (Mbembe, 2001) nor do they necessarily map onto the visceral and emotional experiences of laughter with death that Madge (2016) calls for.

Indeed, as the moment that opens this chapter demonstrates, in spaces such as nursing care homes these encounters are often complex, messy and entangled with other politico-ethical commitments, orientations and sensibilities that suggest laughter as not sitting neatly within either position of the biopower/transgression dichotomy but rather as something more mobile, vital or pragmatic. This is not to say that these modes of power do not

exist within care homes however and as such, in developing this point further, I now turn to think more specifically about laughter in relation to care home life, and its relationship with forms of discipline, governance and vitality.

7.4 | Laughter and the politics of care home life

Although not specifically writing about care homes, Phillip Vannini's (2015a: 320) description of everyday life as "a mix of taken-for-granted realities, habit, and routine, as well as impulse, novelty, and vivaciousness" captures a sense the two care homes I worked in with somewhat remarkable precision.

Indeed, care home life *can* be highly structured, regulated and controlled – often through particular modes of (biopolitical/disciplinary) governance. The residents, for example, are often woken, washed and taken to the toilet at specific times, which, due to needing mobility assistance, can be beyond their control. They are also subject to a near constant gaze, both medical and social. Biology, cognition, eating and mood patterns are tested, noted, charted and compared with previous days. Movement around the home is watched; whereabouts are shared among staff; and, if needed, people are returned to their 'correct' positions. In Winterbourne Care Home movement was further controlled by doors that needed a passcode to be provided in order to open them. This second gaze is often just as applicable to staff who have arrival, leaving, break times and position in the home monitored (with Summerview Care Home intensifying this process using 'biometric' system which scans workers' eyes at the start and end of each shift); and to visitors who also have

to log in and out. As noted in other chapters, at a wider scale, there are also a series of other institutions that govern the workings of the homes themselves, notably the Care Quality Commission (CQC), whose ability to conduct an inspection at any time without any notice, generates an almost quintessential panoptic power structure (Foucault, 1977, 1986) through which discipline, order, regulation and routine can be enforced.

Within this regulatory framework, laughter can become an object-target of power (Anderson, 2012). As we saw to some extent in the previous chapter, for instance, certain logics surround laughter within care homes which shape the various ways in which activities and spaces are 'curated'. This might happen through discourses that promote laughter within practices of care, through placing particular people in proximity to one another in order to promote more laughter or through staging particular activities and events, such as theatre shows, with the intention of producing laughter itself. Furthermore, these logics extend to value judgments about care itself, as seen within the quote from the CQC that opens this thesis, where the presence of laughter is seen as a key means of showing the residents that staff members care. Again, as noted in this thesis already, at times laughter can also become a matter for censure – with staff members, in particular, being told off by managers for standing around laughing, rather than working or for showing a lack of care through laughing at something in a manner that is 'inappropriate'.

Alongside this, within care homes laughter can also become the mechanism

through which power is deployed or resisted, in a similar manner to that described in the section above. As noted in Chapter 5, for instance, in some cases laughter was deployed as a means of (disciplinary) ridicule (Billig, 2005) in the care homes. This was usually between staff members themselves, and often revolved around a moment of 'soft' censure, either when someone did something within their working practices that was deemed 'silly' (ridiculous) or through modes of humorous mocking with an intended purpose: "I can't believe you have had your nails done so nicely, when you know you are going to have to remove them before your next care shift – haha – you're such a numpty" (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 24/06/2016). Laughter emerges in a manner that could be framed as resistance to these disciplinary powers. Again, most often this occurred through staff joking about, and mocking, the management – again deeming their actions to be ridiculous – as a form of laughing upwards (Davies, 2007; Douglas, 2015) – but there were also a few instances where the residents would do a similar thing to the staff: imitating their actions or words in an overly exaggerated manner.

Although there is a sense of liveliness to these moments of laughter; this framing for a discussion about care homes risks positioning them as 'gloomy' Foucauldian spaces (Thrift 2007 cited in Philo, 2012) in which power is heavy and stifling. As many have conceded, however, analysing in this manner is often to miss what else is happening, to miss the moments the exceed control (Anderson, 2012; Philo, 2012), or to miss the moments of vital life and vivaciousness within these otherwise 'dead geographies' (Thrift and

Dewsbury, 2000; Vannini, 2015a).

These moments of vivaciousness arguably revolve around two different, but connected, kinds of event: laughter and unexpected situations. In terms of laughter, vivaciousness often emerges through laughter's capacities to generate differential atmospheres, which enable different forms of engagement with space and other bodies – in much the same way as was discussed in the previous chapter:

The home seemed quiet this morning; people were working together but not really chatting. The nurse was courteously handing out medications to the residents, room by room, one by one. I did my usual: walking up the floors of the home and saying good morning to the residents who were awake; getting a series of muted responses; their eyes flicking to me and then back to the TV or just off into space. On the top floor, Mr F gave me a little more, so I sat with him for a moment talking about the weather and then cricket. It was cordial and pleasant. Suddenly there is a shriek as one of the carers squealed and ran past the door, the cleaner following her and squirting water from a bottle. Both laughed and playfully wrestled in the corridor. Mr F and I chuckled together as we watched them. The cleaner entered the room greeting us both cheerily; a bustle of movement, noise and laughter that brightened the mood.

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 01/08/2016)

This simple example is, again, demonstrative of how laughter can cut through, overflow or escape the rhythms and routines of the care homes. Again, in many ways, these instances reflect Bergson's (1980) claims that laughter is an antidote to mechanised bodies. Yet in line with the overall thrust of the thesis,

rather than universalise laughter in this way, we might simply note here that the example shows some of laughter's potential to affect people, practices and spaces (Brigstocke, 2014) and in turn to re-shape individual, collective and institutional bodies into different forms of relationality (or indeed non-relationality – see Harrison, 2007).

As the previous chapter also alludes to, however, these moments of laughter are not completely separated from the circumstances of power that surround them. Indeed, they often work in a similar manner to the mocking resistance mentioned above in that they can create spaces that are in many ways beyond the structures of disciplined care home life. Where this laughter differs from these moments of humour, however, is in its relationship with 'intentionality' (Hughes, 2016), specifically its capacities to exceed, and thus work on a different plane or terrain, to normative modes of governance. Indeed, laughter in instances such as these exudes a something of 'vital impetus': a pragmatic liveliness that is not necessarily couched in one political stance (e.g. discipline) or another (e.g. resistance).

The second kind of vivacious event centres around unexpected situations such as the breaking down of equipment; the sudden arrival of families or new residents; staff members being off sick, causing short staffing; or perhaps most commonly through the actions of the residents themselves, who often do or say unexpected things. In these cases, ordinary procedures become inappropriate for the provision of care in the moment and so staff members

alter and improvise prescribed procedures and routines: improvising lifting techniques; offering alternate activities; or reordering tasks, for example. These examples thus relay an ethic of care that is driven by a pragmatic desire to “maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it *as well as possible*” (Tronto, 1993: 103, emphasis mine) even if that as well as possible does not quite match the ideal.

These two kinds of event – laughter and pragmatic improvisation – are not mutually exclusive, however, but rather can become entangled together within care home life in various ways. As we have seen, often laughter emerges during moments in which carers are being forced to compromise and adapt. Although not always the case, I repeatedly noticed more laughter in both care homes on days where we were short staffed and postulated at one point that “perhaps this laughter becomes a way of re-centring the world – of facing two incongruous realities” (Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 27/06/2016). In this sense, if care is about generating a world that can be lived in as well as possible (Tronto, 1993), laughter can be seen as a means of both recognising the difference between the ideal scenario and the limits of possibility, and therefore as a way of enabling the continuation of life ‘as well as possible’. Whilst this idea is visible throughout care home life, it is perhaps most pertinent through encounters with death specifically.

7.5 | Laughing with death

Death is a relatively frequent occurrence in care home spaces and therefore

also becomes folded into the matters, practices and affects of ordinary life. Indeed, many of the observation strategies outlined previously are designed to manage/delay the event of death, but other practices also emerge around it: attending funerals, telephoning coroners, thank you cards from families, packing up belongings, deep cleaning rooms, moments of sadness, moments of quietness and moments of tears. Despite these emotional aspects of death, however, ordinary life in care homes cannot cease to continue. As the manager in Summerview care home told me:

We don't hide from death here. We can't. It's sometimes really emotional and that shows. We don't hide that from the service users either, sometimes we are sad, and we explain to them why, in the same way we would if we were happy. But at the end of the day, I can't sit in here and talk my staff through each death either, wrap them up, and make them feel better because in the end they will just have to go out there again and it will all be the same. You sometimes just have to have a laugh and get on with it.

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 02/06/2016)

Through her recognition of death as an unavoidable feature of care home life the manager here is pointing towards a need for staff members to confront it head-on rather than try to hide from it, and thus that the emotions surrounding death are not necessarily needing to be pushed away but can be maintained alongside the provision of care. In doing this she seems to echo much of the literature on death and dying discussed above which have sought to recognise that “death is implacable in its presence and immanent to every human life” (Braidotti, 2011: 343) rather than something that is ‘beyond’ life.

Interestingly her openness with the residents starkly contrasts Winterbourne Care Home, where there was an unofficial rule about not mentioning death in front of the residents, and whenever bodies were removed from the home the curtains were drawn so the ambulance could not be seen. This attempt to hide death from the residents sits somewhat incongruously with many of their own actions, however. They would often provide recognition of their own mortality, often alongside a moment of laughter:

"I will be 105 in December," said Mr W with a slight wheeze, "I will get a second card from the Queen!" he pauses for a second, carefully adding, "If I make it that far." He laughed playfully.

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 12/10/2015)

"I'm ready to die. I feel useless attached to all these machines and unable to get out of bed, I just want it to be over really ... [chuckling] ... I mean, if I was a dog they would just put me down, wouldn't they?"

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 03/08/2016)

Drawing on theories of humour here, we might read both of these events of laughter as moments of release through which the individual can let go of their fears of death and replace them with moments of joy, an opening of oneself up to the possibility of death (Parvulescu, 2010). Yet, there is a necessity to remain critical of these readings, particularly given the "assumptions that old people 'know how to die'" which can perpetuate ageist attitudes and social injustices (Lloyd, 2004: 237). As such, it becomes important to pay attention to the capacities of laughter itself in these instances, rather than assuming their workings based on humour or stereotypical ideas about the meanings of

different people's laughter, such as older people evoking a 'Dunkirk Spirit'. We might return instead to the idea above, recognising that these moments of laughter do not necessarily push away emotions such as fear of death, but rework them so that life can be lived as well as possible – albeit in a world where this possibility is somewhat constrained within the particular emotional/affective, practical and ethical circumstances of each person in question.

The imminence of death is also made materially present in care homes through the presence of corpses which become 'normalised' in a variety of ways. At the point of death it is customary for care staff to wash and dress the body before it is removed. In some instances, new members of staff or those undertaking work experience were taken to see a corpse as an unofficial part of their training. Possibly because of this normalising effect, corpses too sometimes become the locus for moments of laughter:

The four of us sat chatting over a cup of tea. The conversation eventually settling on a resident who had passed away a day or two before I had arrived. "Mike played a trick on me that day," said Karen, "he asked me to go and give Mr J his morning tea, I didn't know he had passed away so I went in and tried to wake him up. When I came out, Mike was just stood there laughing at me."

"He's very naughty," said another of the carers.

Karen replied "Yeah... but it's fine, I got him back. I rang the emergency alarm in the room later on and then hid in the next room and he came

running”

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 28/06/2016)

We might well question the tastefulness of this enactment of laughter, yet it displays an interesting moment where the corpse becomes entangled within a playfully vital moment of life. Most people would probably conceive of it in terms of transgression (Foucault, 1998) – moving past what is traditionally seen as ‘acceptable’ behaviour around the dead. Yet this moment might equally be understood in terms of non-positive affirmation: ‘making present’ death within the life of the care home (Harrison, 2015) and thus of exploring the ‘limits’ of living with and through death (Foucault, 1998). My sense is that neither of these positions quite captures the banality of this particular encounter, in which the deceased body features within the laughter, rather than necessarily being its target. Indeed, this kind of practical joke is in many ways not that different from the other kinds of pranks played by care home staff such as the water fight described above. As such, it again prompts questions about the agencies involved in the various forms of relationality/non-relationality between bodies (living and deceased) and thus about whose life is enlivened by it – although, in this instance, these questions are very difficult to answer with certainty. That said, the example is again suggestive of a capacity for care workers to adopt pragmatic (if crude) strategies for continuing with their work and lives in as ordinary a manner as possible, and thus reflects the manager’s sentiment about life needing to carry on in care homes regardless of death.

7.6 | From coping to carrying on

As noted already, most literature on laughter and death focusses on coping through ‘gallows humour’: a means of ‘making light’ of situations that are potentially serious/life-threatening, or of death itself. As Watson (2011) notes, this kind of laughter is neither light-hearted per se or necessarily cruel, but is instead often self-derogatory:

“Mr K’s family wrote such a nice card to us,” said Laura, “it made me well up reading it ...” she sat up a little straighter “just what I needed today, to feel more depressed in this place” and she let out a short laugh. “Here you go Rach,” she said handing it over, “I haven’t seen you cry for a while.” She laughs again.

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 13/06/2016)

Crawley (2004: 419) argues that through moments of laughter, such as this one, “emotional experiences which are hard to express verbally are made collective, and communicative; cognitive and emotional dissonances are lifted, and reality is restored.” Whilst I agree with the thrust of this assessment, I remain critical of the idea of ‘restoring reality’ which both suggests that there is an underlying reality which is somehow separate from ‘hard to express’ emotional or affective experiences – an idea that feminist and non-representational geographies have resolutely disavowed (see notably K Anderson and Smith, 2001; McCormack, 2003) – and that these experiences can be easily pushed aside. Indeed, as we have seen already, care homes are places in which emotional experiences are not easily pushed aside and so must be folded into the ongoing constitution of life.

Following the previous sections, we might again understand this laughter as bringing together two incongruous realities and thus enacting different futures in which life can be lived as well as possible. The laughter in the example above becomes exemplary of times where the emotional relations between bodies are affirmed and then re-worked, rather than removed. Through this laughter they are, therefore, rendered productive, forming a means through which workers can continue living on and crucially continue to care. As such I would argue for a subtle move in language away from understanding laughter as ‘coping’ towards understanding it in terms of ‘carrying on’ – in turn shifting the emphasis away from ‘restoring reality’ towards enacting a different reality (see Mol, 1999):

“Where is Mrs M?” I asked. “She is in room 21,” said Anna. In the background, Rhoda’s mouth dropped open. “Mrs M passed away on Friday,” she said. Neither Anna nor I knew quite how to react; there was a moment of tense silence as we were forced to contemplate the recent death. I felt uncomfortable. I looked at my hands where I was holding the tray of Weetabix that I had been sent to give to Mrs M. I looked up again and said with a cautious laughter in my voice “I guess she won’t want her breakfast then”. Rhoda’s face creased and she bent slightly at the waist letting out a wheeze of a laugh. “Probably not,” she said chuckling, “Why don’t you give it to Mrs T instead.” I smiled, letting out a low chuckle and walked off towards Mrs T’s room.

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 30/11/2015)

Examples such as this one, clearly invoke a sense of laughter as ‘carrying on’ rather than as ‘coping’ through showing the ways in which it enables people to

continue acting *without* negating the emotionality/affectivity of an uncomfortable encounter with death. Indeed, thinking about ‘carrying on’ provides a metaphor that suggests carers taking their emotions with them and folding them into their sense of self which in turn reconfigures the future towards something different. The laughter in these instances also foregrounds the ways in which these emotional encounters take place as modes of relationally and non-relationality between bodies (Ahmed, 2004): an affective circulation between the bodies of the two care staff, myself, as well as the tray of food and perhaps most pressingly the absence of Mrs M’s body from her room.

As such, we can start to see the importance of movements not only between bodies that are present, but also those that are absent (Maddrell, 2013), as well as modes of relationality/non-relationality (Harrison, 2007) in the taking place of emotions around death. Following the death of a resident in a care home, for instance, their body and belongings are removed from their room; the room is made empty; inscribed with ‘absence’. As Maddrell (2013) notes, however, this absence does not mean that residents cease to be present within the social, vital, affective and political life of the home and instead they often enact an absence-presence – ‘haunting’ the home at moments through often highly tangible memories such as “voices which seem to be engrained in my head” (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 10/10/2015). Similarly, material objects serve as markers and reminders of the shifting forms of relationality/non-relationality. In one instance, it was an encounter with a big

TV in an otherwise empty room that became the locus for this changing relationship between myself and the (now deceased) resident which in turn manifested as a highly visceral emotional/affective response: “I held back the tears, biting my lip as my throat tightened up with a sickly feeling. It still makes me feel sick now” (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 26/10/2015).

Through these moments, we can thus begin to see the ways in which moments of absence-presence generated by death in care homes emerge and are felt in many ways. This can be feelings and emotions such as sadness, loss, anger, sickness and tears; but it also can generate moments of joy which manifest through a shared laughter. Perhaps the most prevalent way that this laughter emerges is through the telling of stories about residents who have died, which serve to animate and dramatize the deceased person’s life in much the same way as other forms of memorial might do (Maddrell, 2013). These stories and the laughter within and around them have the potential to enable the deceased person’s life to continue, albeit in a different form, through their ability to invoke actions and affections in bodies (Grosz, 2004). As one of the care workers in Winterbourne Care Home told me:

Yeah, it’s sometimes hard thinking about residents who have died ... Though it’s often the funny things they did that I remember. Like each resident has their good days and bad days, they are sometimes horrible to you and sometimes you laugh loads with them. It seems to be those funny moments you remember though ... and it helps you with new residents; it’s part of your experience of working in care for a long time

(Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 19/11/2015)

This statement foregrounds the relationship between laughter, life, and death as one that is spatiotemporally dynamic (Braidotti, 2011). Laughter (real or remembered) can be seen to transcend the boundary between life and death and forms a 'conduit' through which the deceased can be made immanent to, and thus continue to act in the present (Maddrell, 2013). The concept of 'carrying on' can once again be utilised here, whereby, through laughter, the dead can be seen to carry on acting, and therefore carry on 'living', potentially *ad infinitum* (Grosz, 2004). The temptation is perhaps to frame this example as a form of continuing rather than broken bonds here, in much the same way as Maddrell (2013). However, I would argue that the idea of continuing bonds perhaps does not quite capture what is actually happening within this statement.

Indeed, the care worker highlights a nostalgic (and pragmatic) form of remembrance in which some bonds get broken whilst others are maintained, continued and repaired: a 'forgetting' of the horrible moments and remembering instead moments of laughter. In other words, he is pointing here towards an active re-composition of relationality/non-relationality between himself and the residents which in turn shapes his capacities to provide future care. Drawing inspiration from Grosz's (2004) vitalist reading of Darwin and Bergson here, we might thus argue that relationships between living and dead do not occur through bonds that are either broken or continuous, but rather as a kind of evolution: a re-composition of these bonds to generate a relationship that is qualitatively different from that which existed before.

My claim about moving from understanding encounters with death in terms of coping towards carrying on thus hinges on two facets. Firstly, it involves recognising that emotional encounters with death are constructed as a composition of various entities, absence-presences and forms of relationality occurring at differing intensities (Stewart, 2007). Secondly, it involves examining the ways in which these compositions are folded into the production, generation and emergence of ongoing life so that it can be lived as well as possible (Tronto, 1993). The 'as well as possible' therefore not only frames laughter's dual role within this process: both as a means through which these compositions can be reworked; and as a means of exploring and negotiating the limits of possibility and the constraints of circumstance (McCormack, 2017), but also frames this movement within a wider and more pragmatic understanding of care.

7.7 | Rethinking the relationship between laughter, life and death

The idea of laughter as a form of coping is well established: epitomised by references to relief theory, gallows humour and emotional distancing. Whilst it may be appropriate for some situations, 'coping' is neither the way that all cultures engage with death (Galvany, 2009) nor indeed a politico-ethical possibility for all (Mbembe, 2001) and so people also generate other ways of laughing around death. Indeed, for care workers, encounters with death are relatively banal and so become entangled with the practices, matters and affections of ordinary life and work. This sets up a specific mandate for

encounters with death; to paraphrase the manager quoted above: there is no hiding from it or pushing it away, so you just have to get on with it in the best way possible.

Returning to the story that opens this chapter, I wrote in my field diary of that moment that it was a “laugh out of hopelessness” but crucially followed up with “I was enjoying the hopelessness” (Field Diary Notes, Winterbourne Care Home, 8/10/2015). I have often reflected on that moment, particularly in trying to understand many of the other events that have been presented in this chapter. I suspect my vocabulary failed me at that time. On reflection, I would argue that the laughter in that moment was not one of simple hopelessness, but rather something more affirmative – an event through which I could imagine, explore and think a different kind of relationship with both past and future. Significantly, laughing at this moment did not mean the encounter becomes devoid of all emotion (Bergson, 1980); it was a sad time (and still is) and therefore remains a moment of political and ethical attunement that is framed by complex emotional and affective encounter (Madge, 2016). Yet the laughter brings these various incongruous emotional, affective, imaginative, hopeful, hopeless, affirmative and negating modes together to animate or dramatize “the intricacies, intimacies and hesitancies involved in facing finitude” in some way (Madge, 2018: 246). Neither does laughter mark a forgetting of finitude (Harrison, 2015). The imminence of death remains – I know that Mrs B is going to die (and my suspicion is that she does too) – yet the laughter allows the emotional meanings of this death to be reworked and

rendered less painful: enabling these emotions to be more productively folded into my ongoing life.

This is clearly only my own, situated, account of the event. There is much we cannot know from it – particularly about Mrs B's, or other residents' experiences, thoughts and feelings of their own encounters with death and the laughter that surrounds it. There is thus a clear need to extend geographical engagements to this constituency, also. Nevertheless, engagements with care workers' laughter provide key insights and advancements into both the geographies of laughter, and of death and dying in three interconnected ways.

The first contribution of the chapter is to position laughter as an exemplary means through which geographers can empirically engage with the paradoxical nature of death (Romanillos, 2015) by demonstrating laughter as operating across apparently incongruous conceptual schema. Laughter thus proves a useful methodological prompt through which geographers can engage with the visceral, embodied and emotional aspects of livingdying (Madge, 2016), although it's important to remain aware of falling into pre-existing assumptions of laughter's functions, rather than engaging with its (multiple) emergent meanings in each present moment.

The second key contribution is a reframing of the function of care workers' laughter around death as one of 'carrying on' rather than 'coping'. Through this laughter can be seen to both affirm emotional experiences of death and re-compose their meanings rather than simply negating them or pushing them

away (see Harrison, 2015). This reframing, and the examples used to explain it, also advance existing approaches to thinking about death through forcing a blurring of the boundaries between broken/continuing bonds, relationality/non-relationality and affirmation/negation. Instead of staying within one or other of these positions, the capacity to carry on relies on emergent and shifting mixtures of both broken bonds, continuing bonds, relationality, non-relationality, affirmation and negation; which together transform the kinds of relationships that people have with the future, enabling them to carry on living and working as well as they possibly can.

The third key contribution emerges from attention to this ethos of living as well as possible or in the best way possible and sets up the wider context for this reframing: the role of (vitalist) pragmatics within care home workers' actions, politics and ethics. Indeed, often the capacities for care workers to act are bounded within the limits of possibility which more often than not falls short of an ideal situation. Here laughter plays another, connected role in dramatizing the incongruities between idealised and actually lived circumstances and space-times (Bataille, 2001). Although discussed most explicitly through encounters with death, the section on laughter and care home life serves as a reminder that this function of laughter can also emerge throughout care home life more generally. This recognition is important in paying heed to an implied pragmatics within Tronto's (1993: 103) reference to living "as well as possible" or within the realistic bounds of possibility which sets up a politico-ethic of care as limited in some way by the nature of the

spatiotemporal circumstances in which it is enacted.

In bringing this all together, therefore, I propose that closer attention to the role of pragmatic vital impulses (such as laughter) can facilitate more generous geographic understandings of the micro-politics of caring for life and death, both within but also crucially beyond nursing care homes – as we shall touch upon in the next, concluding chapter. Whilst biopolitical structures clearly have significant influence over how life and death are politically mapped out, these frameworks do not necessarily match the experiences of those navigating these spaces on the ground; where life and death are often negotiated through an ethic of ‘doing the best one can’ to ensure life can carry on being lived in the best way possible in each situation, even if that ultimately involves a series of compromises that end up perpetuating the systematic structures themselves. As Judith Butler (2012: 18) notes, in bringing the same lecture from which the opening quote to this chapter is taken, to its conclusion: “Such movements do not seek to overcome interdependency or even vulnerability as they struggle against precarity; rather, they seek to produce the conditions under which vulnerability and interdependency become liveable”.

It is thus through drawing on non-representational approaches, as I have done both in this chapter and throughout this thesis, that I would argue we can recognise the plurality of ways in which these kinds of minor politico-ethical events emerge and come to matter. As such, in moving forwards and thinking

beyond this thesis, I would argue that it is imperative for geographers to both recognise and engage with this pragmatic force in order to expand the terrain through which we come to understand and assess the multiplicity of ways in which ordinary people care for life and death in complex, messy and imperfect worlds.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

Vive le multiple!'; le multiple, il faut le faire.

Proclaiming “Long live the multiple” is not yet doing it, one must do the multiple

(Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 16)

8.1 | Extending scenes

I opened this thesis with a scene that enabled a movement *into the specific* terrain that it has discussed and posed some of the questions that the thesis has looked to address. It was a scene presented from a position ‘outside’ of the specificity of the care home looking in; a scene with political significance: being situated within an official report and therefore offering an official judgement about the ethics of laughter with care. In bringing this thesis to its close, therefore, I wish to pose one further scene: a scene that similarly has political significance albeit in a different way; a scene that can be seen as presented from the position of an ‘insider’ looking out; a scene that I hope will help to enable a movement *beyond the specific* empirical terrain discussed in this thesis, and of the questions it has looked to address, and therefore might help to not only bring together the approaches to laughter with care discussed in this thesis, but also open up wider trajectories in which both *approaching*

laughter with care, and the idea of ethical refrains for worlds of multiplicity might become significant in new and productive ways.

*

I woke up, groggy from a disrupted night. Hauled myself from bed. Dressed silently. Left the house. Walked down the road. Thinking. Questioning. Hoping. I was somehow numbed by the weight of it all.

Arriving at the train, I picked up the paper, knowing exactly what the cover will say. I threw it back down on the seat next to me and tried to read my book. At the other end, I wandered from the train, up to Summerview slowly, still thinking, or perhaps not knowing quite what to think. When I saw the building, I knew what I must do. I forced a smile and quickened my step, headed through the door, signed in, and then straight downstairs to drop my bag off.

Two carers were sat in the sun outside the staff room having a cigarette, I headed out to join them for a moment before starting work. When they see me, one jubilantly calls over "We're out!" following this with a burst of laughter. It unnerved me a little. A direct encounter with the other 52% – people that I knew existed, but never knew were so numerous or so close.

We spoke for a while down there, it became a memorable encounter in many ways – forcing me to face up to the realities not only of what had happened but also why – the disenfranchisement, but perhaps more strongly, the hope, excitement and joy that came with a chance for change; a chance for something different, something better.

Heading back upstairs I quickly encountered another sense, not one of jubilation or laughter, but rather of uncertainty and fear. A Polish carer stood, feeding a resident and staring at the rolling news on the TV. He

looked exactly how I felt, somehow numb.

“You happy about this?” he asked.

“Not at all,” I replied,

“What are people thinking? Do they no know their food will get more expensive, their rights won’t be protected, that it’s all going to change ... for worse?”

All in all, there was a confusing and deadening atmosphere in the home this morning. The change in TV schedule unsettled some of the residents, and the staff kept stopping to watch. Perhaps needless to say, I didn’t feel much like laughing. I did easy jobs, painting some of the ladies’ nails and spent some time coming to terms with the whole thing. Towards the end of the morning, once the news had run out of new things to say and the TV schedule switched back to normal programming, bits of laughter crept back in. Each one in some way started to deflate the thick atmospheric bubble and lifted the mood slightly. Slowly something like the ordinary feel of the home emerged.

The world had changed, however, possibly forever.

(Field Diary Notes, Summerview Care Home, 24/06/2016)

*

Although this scene takes place within the specific location of a care home, just outside of Birmingham, UK, my suspicion is that it will resonate more widely. Indeed, the event of ‘Brexit’, the decision made by the people of the UK to leave the European Union through a referendum on the 23rd of June 2016, which it describes, has become an unavoidable feature of life in the UK for almost all of its inhabitants. As Ben Anderson and Helen Wilson (2018: 292) argue, Brexit

has been animated “through a turbulent mix of dramatic scenes of jubilation and devastation, joys and despairs, which punctuated more familiar moods of resignation, apathy, or indifference” a sense of which emerges from this scene as it is described here. In drawing out this final scene, therefore, my intention is not to offer a comprehensive account of Brexit, but rather to make a final set of “tactical suggestions” (Dewsbury et al., 2002: 439; also Colls 2012) for how we might use the ideas in this thesis in order to think through the potentials and problematics around being in-common that the scene itself exemplifies: a way of de- and re-territorialising the trajectories that have been explored in this thesis, and posing some of what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) might call their ‘lines of flight’.

As such, this final chapter works through the tones and textures afforded by this specific encounter with Brexit in order to both draw together the themes and arguments posed within this thesis and think about new ways of taking them forward. In this sense, it traverses terrain that has already been mapped out in this thesis, but also speculatively explores terrain that is somewhat uncharted (in this thesis at least). The scene, for instance, contains moments of laughter, each containing a multiplicity of ethical potentials (McCormack, 2003) which can be engaged with in different ways through drawing on the different approaches outlined in this thesis. Alongside this, however, the scene also poses a broader set of potential questions about Brexit as a politico-ethical event. In engaging with these questions, therefore, we can start to draw on some of the other, subtler arguments of this thesis in order to suggest ways in

which we might approach Brexit *with* care, and as a refrain, and thus speculate as to how these ways of thinking and moving might allow us to “wander beyond the familiar” (McCormack, 2013: 8).

8.2 | Approaching laughter with care

Before embarking on the more speculative elements of this conclusion, however, it seems important to first outline the themes it has addressed and the arguments it has posed. Indeed, as stated at the outset, the primary aim of this thesis has been to re-imagine the ways in which we might think about the ethics of laughter and care. Crucially, this project has never been about simply applying ‘ethics of care’ *to* laughter, nor about attempt to create a prescriptive set of rules or norms through which we might promote ‘good’ laughter in care settings, and reduce ‘bad’ laughter. Similarly, it has not been an attempt to generate a Panglossian account of laughter as either morally dubious (Billig, 2005; Gantar, 2005) or an inherent social good (Bergson, 1980; Buckley, 2005). Rather, the thesis has sought to stage an encounter that holds the two in relation to, or ‘with’ one another, and thus generate an ethical approach that builds out of the specificities of this particular gathering. I have framed this renewed approach within a multitude of concepts and ideas that emerge from non-representational theories (Thrift, 2008), and particularly the concept of ‘the refrain’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; McCormack, 2013), which, I argue, enables engagements with non-normative thinking-spaces through which we can grapple with the multiplicity of ways in which laughter and care can emerge and affect bodies, space and one another in a given moment, and thus

the multiplicity of ethical potentials that are held within them.

This re-imagining of the ethics of laughter with care thus starts in **Chapter 2**, which draws together various literatures and theories around laughter, care and ethics in order to set out the expanded ethical terrain through which the thesis moves. In doing this, I looked to unsettle many of the normative assumptions that surround laughter, care and ethics, offering a looser, more fragmented and more multiple conception of the possible relations, social formations and corporeal-affective transformations they can engender. More specifically, the chapter offers a critique of normative theories as a way of thinking about laughter and instead poses both engagements with non-representational theories and ideas of care in turn as a means of mediating the problematics, and multiplying the possibilities, of the ethical. Finally, it turns to the idea of the refrain, posing this as a key conceptual/methodological vehicle through which we might approach the plurality and multiplicity of ethical forms that can emerge from singular interactions between laughter and care without foreclosing the possibilities that these outcomes might be different, uncanny or unfamiliar in different spacetimes and under different circumstances.

Having situated the empirical work of the thesis in **Chapter 3** – both in terms of its specific engagement with care homes in the UK, and in terms of (non-representational) ethnography as a methodology – I then forwarded four different, yet entangled, ways of approaching laughter with care: through

multiple modes of listening; in terms of the multiplicity of folded subjective positions through which laughter is practised; in terms of its diffuse affective spatialities; and as a pragmatic force through which often imperfect worlds and relations can be recomposed and made productive. Although overlapping, each approach offers a different way of imagining laughter and, therefore, offering a significantly expanded conception of what laughter *can* do.

In **Chapter 4**, I experimented with the multiplicity of ways in which we might listen to laughter with care. In particular, I highlighted three different ways of listening to laughter: as a representation of something else; as an affective force; and as a circumstantial encounter. The first draws on more traditional approaches and humour theories in order to suggest laughter as expressing something about a person's subjectivity. The second draws on Jean-Luc Nancy's (2007) distinction between listening and hearing in order to attend to the affective capacities of laughter's sounds. The third augments these first two approaches through situating them in relation to the wider subjective and spatial contexts within which laughter takes place. Each mode of listening, therefore, imbues laughter with a different set of meanings, and crucially also changes the ways in which we understand laughter's relations with care.

In **Chapter 5** I explored ways of thinking about laughter with care as it is *practised*. In doing this I deployed Deleuze's notion of the fold (see Nixon 2017) in order to pose laughter and care as emerging from three subjective contexts – the individual, the collective and the institutional subject – each with their

own meanings and functions. In this sense, I noted the ways in which laughter both folds into and out of particular relational configurations, as well as serving to fold subjects into and out these same relational configurations primarily through modes of inclusion and exclusion. This recognition of the multiplicity of subject positions within which each laugher is enfolded thus serves to break down the idea of the individual moral subject who practices laughter with care and instead distributes this across much wider relational lines.

In **Chapter 6** I drew on literatures around affective atmospheres (Anderson 2014) in order to pose laughter as a spatial thing that occurs beyond subjective intentionality and, therefore, as having a nascent creative force in its own right. In particular, I noted the ways in which this creative force can reshape affective spacetimes and can, therefore, generate new forms of affective relations between bodies and the spaces they inhabit, often in ways that promote closer relations between people or in ways that enable fractured relationships to be repaired. Crucially, however, the spatially dispersed nature of laughter's atmospheres mean that it can also be encountered from other spaces and contexts, sometimes generating very different affects. In this way, positioning laughter in atmospheric terms serves to open up questions about cause and effect, further distributing its ethics away from the idea of the laugher as an individual moral-subject.

Finally, in **Chapter 7**, I turned to think about the political force behind laughter

with care, particularly in relation to ideas of life and death. Where most scholars position the relation between laughter and death in terms of coping – laughter as a means of pushing away emotions during encounters with death – I looked to offer an alternative and more affirmative account whereby laughter can be seen as a ‘carrying on’: a taking of our emotions forward with us and folding them into our sense of self rather than pushing them away. I thus argued that the ways in which laughter is deployed around death are suggestive of a wider vitally pragmatic politico-ethic for care, whereby carers often work towards the “as well as possible” (Tronto 1993: 103) rather than grand, idealistic political visions.

Although in this sense each chapter makes its own specific contribution to the thesis and to understandings of laughter, care and ethics, perhaps the biggest contribution of the thesis emerges from the assemblage formed through their being gathered together. Indeed, in thinking through the refrain once more: each chapter can be seen as a particular territorialisation of the wider refrain that is ‘approaching laughter with care’. That is to say, that whilst each chapter to some respects addresses similar situations, scenes, events and happenings – moments in which laughter and/or care actualise – in approaching these situations repeatedly through different conceptual frameworks and different locations and orientations, we can start to generate a much more complex, multiple and fragmented understanding of the various different ethical potentials afforded by moments of laughter with care: accounts that “don’t add up but are always threatening to” (Stewart, 2008: 72).

Given this uncertainty, an obvious critique would be that this ‘ethical’ approach contains a ‘normative deficit’ (e.g. Olson and Sayer, 2009), and thus offers no way of fostering transformative politics and relations (Harvey, 1989). Yet, as I hope I have shown, it is an approach that fosters a different style of ethical engagement: one that both requires, and inspires, a mode of generosity which seeks less to judge, and more to *understand, sympathise with* and *affirm* the multitude of practices, affects and politics, that people seek (and indeed are forced) to adopt, in order to maintain, continue and repair our worlds so that we can collectively live in them as well as possible (Tronto, 1993). Put in another way, it is an ethos of generosity that allows us to affirm, promote and indeed celebrate the ontological necessities and responsibilities of ‘being-in-common’ (Popke, 2007, 2009) through both laughter and care, without necessarily requiring us to be in agreement about exactly how these could or should take place (see Thrift, 2005).

8.3 | Concluding in the middle: laughter, care, ethics

It is thus through the ‘generous’ ethos that emerges from the thesis as a whole that I wish to engage with the scene presented above – drawing out the multiplicities within it and seeking to offer suggestions as to how we might approach it. In this sense, I approach the scene (and Brexit itself) here in a manner that is not so much ‘analytical’ as it is speculative. In other words, this is not a section that aims to map out a specific understanding of the entangled relations between Brexit, laughter, care and ethics, but rather positions itself in the middle of this scene, questioning, and to some respects suggesting, how

we might begin to think and move through it. In doing this, I begin with the elements of the scene that are closest to the themes of the thesis, namely the moments of laughter, drawing directly on its arguments. I then move on to think beyond the laughter directly, drawing on the thesis' more peripheral arguments to suggest how we might approach Brexit, both *with care* and as an 'ethical refrain' currently taking place in worlds of multiplicity. This style of engagement thus serves to subtly pull out and emphasise the ways in which this thesis has sought to push and pull at the various literatures, concepts and theories it has engaged with, and the ways in which it has served to contribute to them.

The scene presented above is punctuated by two kinds of laughter: the laughter from the carer as she greets me outside of the staff room and the 'bits of laughter' that crept back in towards the end of the morning. Each of these moments of laughter can be analysed using 'traditional' theories of humour, as set out in Chapters 2 and 4. The first can be seen as a moment of 'superiority' – 'jubilant' in its proclaiming, "we're out!" – and therefore as somewhat exemplary of what Colin Flint (2001: 6-7) describes as "the laughter of the winners who are arrogant about their position in the world." We might see it as demonstrating feelings of 'moral worth' having been on the winning side of the referendum, and indeed also somewhat unjust in its negation of the position held by those who voted to remain – the 'losers' in Flint's analysis. The second moments of laughter, those that pepper the home as it returns to normal, suggests laughter as a kind of release, diffusing the emotional tensions

of the morning (Ridanpää, 2014a) and therefore providing a crucial function in restoring social and moral order (Bergson, 1980; Buckley, 2005). Despite the apparent clarity in this style of analysis, however, we might again note that these kinds of approaches to laughter's ethics remain somewhat lacking in their attention to *laughter* itself, framing it simply as a consequence or representation of something else (Parvulescu, 2010), and therefore missing many of the other kinds of socio-ethical relations and functions that it can generate – often in ways that are somewhat occluded at first. In this sense, we might offer a little more generosity in our approach through engaging more broadly with the multiplicity of circumstances, spaces, bodies and affects that emerge around, alongside and within these moments of laughter, thus seeking to understand and sympathise with how and why they happen rather than make explicit moral/ethical judgements about them.

In one sense, therefore, this generosity can be found through engaging with laughter's non-representational elements, particularly in terms of its material-affective capacities (Macpherson, 2008) and in recognising the 'nomadic' relation that laughter has with body-subjects (Braidotti, 2011; Simpson, 2017): as an embodied practice (something we do) and an affective force in its own right – capable of affecting us and others in ways that we might not necessarily have intended (J Katz, 1999; Nancy, 1993). In this sense, we might question the ways in which laughter's affects emerge, register and circulate in the scene above: its 'jubilance' in the carer who calls to greet me and the ways in which that registers in my body as 'unsettling'; the ways in which this initial

encounter juxtaposes itself against the Polish carer's and my own reluctance to laugh; and the ways in which laughter creeps back in, later on, feeling and functioning at a somewhat different register. Similarly, we might think about how these circulations of laughter's affects exceed, create and reshape the affective atmospheres of the home – generating a multiplicity of different inter/intra-actions and experiences:

We stare at the TV,

And, do easy jobs

And, have conversations about politics,

And hope, wonder, and question

Alongside this, we might wonder what else might be going on during these encounters if we view them from a different angle or orientation (Ahmed, 2006): what other affects register and what capacities do they enhance or destroy in bodies that are differently situated? What else might possibly emerge from these moments of laughter (McCormack, 2003)? Crucially, it's worth noting that the scene, as presented here, lacks the details needed to definitively answer these questions, and therefore precludes any attempts to make 'universal' or 'objective' judgements about laughter's ethics in any meaningful way.

Connected to this latter point, in generating yet more generous engagements with laughter, we need to recognise the tensions that emerge around its taking place within worlds of singular-plurality (Nancy, 2000) where being is also

always being-in-common (Popke, 2010) with different others. Following Donna Haraway, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 70) describes this as “the inescapable troubles of interdependent existences”, arguing that because of these troubles, we need to engage with ethics through thinking with care. In terms of the scene above, thinking laughter with care is thus partly about affirming laughter’s capacities to “maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto, 1993: 103). In other words, it is about seeking out the vital roles that the presence or absence of laughter’s affects play in celebrating the situation (as with the first carer), repairing it and returning it to normal (as with the moments of laughter in the late morning), and indeed more generally in making the imperfect nature of the situation ‘liveable’ (Butler, 2012) – something that the shared absence of laughter between myself and the Polish carer could be suggestive of. Holding these together thus allows a complex and fragmented picture of the multiple forms of ‘caring’ works, affects and politics that laughter can generate, but also the ways in which “they are held together and sometimes challenge each other in the idea of care” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 5).

Through this, thinking with care can thus also become a broader (non-representational) ethos which demands the speculative extension of our ethical/moral imagination beyond the current situated position of the ‘self’, and the placing of it in sympathetic relation with the positions of others. We might, for instance, imagine what else *could possibly* be happening during the laughter in these scenes in order to question whether the presence, or perhaps

absence, of laughter in these cases might be affecting the care home in ways that are occluded from its telling. Might my slightly dour and unsettled mood emerging from the first moment of laughter have subconsciously caused me to be less attentive to the residents' needs wants and desires? Similarly, we might extend this generosity and sympathy towards those who are laughing themselves. Though engaging with the multiplicity of folded subject positions that surround the first moment of laughter, for instance, we might suggest that it probably wasn't 'arrogant' (cf. Flint, 2001), but rather an attempt to *include* me in the moment of celebration, based on an assumption that I was in agreement about the result of the vote. Similarly, we might extend this further through also recognising the multitude of structural foldings (Nixon, 2017) that, for a significant number of white, working-class people, seemingly imbued a decision to leave the EU with a series of somewhat hopeful and optimistic affective capacities (Anderson and Wilson, 2018).

Whilst there is an element of continuity with the rest of the thesis in this last statement, through engaging with the performative nature of '*structural folds*' (Nixon, 2017), it also begins to move beyond the 'boundaries' of the care home as an 'institution' in a way that the rest of the thesis has not. Doing so thus, allows us to start speculatively prizing open a series of 'wider' spaces within which the ideas of this thesis might also find some resonance, particularly in relation to thinking ethics across political differences such as these.

Indeed, Brexit and the (everyday) events that have happened in the UK since

the vote have been argued to leave Britain as an inherently divided nation (Dorling, 2016). These divisions have manifested in a number of ways. The actual result was a 52:48 split, meaning that in the loosest terms the UK has a relatively even divide of 'leavers' and 'remainers' (although the actual 'evenness' of this remains a point of contention – see Kenny, 2016). Yet this relatively simple political division has in turn been multiplied: invariably posed as a series of social, cultural, economic, generational, educational, racial, class and geographic divisions in turn (Goodwin and Heath, 2016; Hozić and True, 2017; Kenny and Sheldon, 2018; Noxolo, forthcoming). Moreover, these divisions have also played out in both grand political terms (e.g. through debates, speeches, policy papers, and negotiations) and everyday terms (Anderson and Wilson, 2018), through the “billions of happy or unhappy encounters” (Thrift, 1999: 302) that have taken place between 'leavers', 'remainers' and 'leavers' and 'remainers' since that moment. Crucially, these divisions can generate a multitude of practical, affective and ethico-political movements in individual, collective, institutional and structural bodies of all kinds, as indeed the scene that animates this chapter alludes to: silence; hope; numbing sensations; a desire to throw a newspaper back on a train seat; forced smiles; quickened steps; laughter; lack of laughter; confusing and deadening atmospheres; altered TV schedules; disruption; continuity; and so on – each of which resonate in, and affect, different bodies differently at different moments.

Given these divisions and the affects they can generate, therefore, we might well extend the manner of approach developed in this thesis towards Brexit

itself: framing it too as a matter of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). This once again requires a multiple, fragmented and somewhat speculative mode of address which sees Brexit not just as a matter affecting care – through potential reductions in the number of EU workers available to provide care (Jarrett, 2017) or through the potential economic downturn and any subsequent government spending cuts (Competitions and Markets Authority, 2017) – but also as one that might be seen as an act of care itself. In other words, particularly for those of us whose politics do not align with the decision, it's important to recognise that despite the often contentious, uncomfortable and even violent ways in which it manifested, for many people voting to leave the EU was very much an attempt to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible (see Bartos, 2018). Furthermore, engaging with these tensions is also something that itself requires a care-full ethical disposition: one that affirms positive affections, relations, collectives and being-in-common, encouraging 'kinder', more sympathetic and more generous encounters across difference (Thrift, 2005), through which new possibilities and potentials for living-together (as well as possible) might emerge. Indeed, as Noxolo (forthcoming: np) notes, Brexit can already be seen to have produced an increased engagement with politics from previously marginalised BME voters in the 2017 general election, as well as helping to catalyse a series of wider and more progressive moves "to imagine a more inclusive view of the making of Britain as a shared place" by these same groups.

Beyond the specificities of laughter and care what I hope this speculative foray has begun to demonstrate are the ways in which we might adopt and adapt the approaches outlined in this thesis in order to think beyond “analysis that approaches Brexit as a symptom to be understood by reference to a set of already known causes and conditions” and instead engage with the multiplicity of ethical potentials that emerge from in the midst of “people’s ordinary ways of encountering, relating to, and living with, Brexit” (Anderson and Wilson, 2018: 294). In this regard, Brexit must be addressed, not as a singular moral issue but rather as an ethical refrain, capable of territorialising, deterritorialising and reterritorialising in different ways, at different moments, under different circumstances and for different people. As with my approach to laughter with care, therefore, I might speculatively suggest that we need approach Brexit in multiple ways, from multiple angles, positions and orientations and multiple times – with all of these different approaches generating a more complex and fragmented ethical space within which to move and think, and through which we might be able to “wander beyond the familiar” (McCormack, 2013: 8) and find innovative ways of being-in-common, even if that does not necessarily mean that we are always in agreement.

8.4 | Final conclusions

I have chosen to conclude this thesis through engaging with Brexit in part because it serves to highlight some of what is at stake within the relatively banal occurrences of laughter and care that have been discussed. Indeed, moving from the untimely ways in which care home spaces have been

presented into a moment in the midst of the timely present that has surrounded its emergence serves to trace some of the ways in which laughter might help us to both animate and understand the world. Indeed, Brexit is just one territorialisation of a wider refrain that characterises the worlds that many people of my particular age (and it must be said levels of privilege) have grown up in. These worlds are not just post-Foucault, post-Derrida, post-Deleuze and Postmodern (Thrift, 2000); they are also post-human, post-relational, post-political, post-truth, post-Thatcher, post-Blair, post-9/11, post-financial-crash, post-Postmodern worlds. They are worlds of seemingly infinite multiplicity, fragmentation, paradox, precarity and variation. The thesis has thus sought to highlight the ways in which thinking through laughter might help to guide our thinking about the worlds in which we live.

Indeed, laughter, like the contemporary world, is also a mutable and paradoxical multiplicity: simultaneously celebrated and criticised; caring and callous; inclusive and divisive; individual and collective; normative and transgressive; human and more-than-human; loved and hated; productive and destructive; creative and stifling. In this sense, engaging with laughter as a multiplicity might generate “a more sensitive, more effective and more creative means to make human bodies sensible to the material traces of other bodies archived around them” (Noxolo, forthcoming: np). My own engagements in this thesis have cut at one small slice of this potential: focussing in particular on how we might imagine new ways of understanding the ethical refrains that constitute these worlds. I have tried to remain

optimistic – affirming laughter as a somewhat vital means of negotiating “the inescapable troubles of interdependent coexistences” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 72) – yet I have made no attempt to deny that it is also a potentially harmful element of the world, whether we intend it to be or not.

Through happenstance, whilst I was preparing the final version of this thesis, my friend Colin sent me a link to an article in the Guardian newspaper that was being shared on social media. In it the novelist Charlotte Wood (2018) makes an impassioned argument that laughter is vital to the continued survival of the human condition. Her argument, although largely couched within conventional understandings of laughter, is one that draws a number of parallels with my own in this thesis: she talks about laughter’s capacities to connect people, build optimism, resist the insipid pressing down of the world and to imagine and create something new. Crucially, she argues that, given the relatively ‘dark’ nature of the worlds in which we live in, “[t]he embrace of laughter in our art and in ourselves is an ethical choice that we can and must make”. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, I read her piece with a mixture of excitement, interest and critique (as well as a small bit of trepidation in case my own arguments might not seem so novel). Ultimately, broadly speaking, I agree with her – embracing, or affirming, laughter is an ethical choice. Where this thesis might add to her argument, however, is that in making this choice, we always also need to remain resolutely aware of the multiple ethical potentials afforded by laughter: ‘good’ and ‘bad’, intentional and unintentional, to be expected or completely surprising – and thus maintain our response-ability to

it when it emerges (Thrift, 2005).

Simply put: yes, embracing laughter is an ethical choice (Wood, 2018), but not one we should make without reserve. Instead, let us always endeavour to approach laughter with care.

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