

Habitual Favourites: A Sensory Sociology of Autism

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Declaration Page

Declaration of Authorship: I Robert Daniel Rourke hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.



Signed: _____

Date: 30/08/2017

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Abstract

This thesis emerges from a 10 month ethnographic participant observation project of an charity-run Youth and Social Clubs conducted between September 2014 - July 2015 that examines the sensory experiences of autistic individuals in relation to their favourite, routinised activities or “habitual favourites”, alongside taking part in club activities such as board games, console gaming, casual discussion and club trips to public spaces. The research included 6 focus groups with 6 Youth Club participants, all white with 4 males and 2 females aged between 16-25, alongside 4 focus groups with 6 Social Club participants, all male and white from age 25-65+.

The study uses a sociology of the senses approach to explore the habitual ways in which those with autism interact with their “favourites”. The thesis argues that the concepts of quasi-object and parasite reveal the complex interdependencies of stability and disruption in sensory experience. This complexity is also reflected in the author’s own experiences, and autoethnographic reflections consider how habitual and sensory experiences impact autistic academic identity, writing and research practices. Sensory experience is fruitfully understood through the influences of emplaced milieus of sensory and habitual interaction which are mutually constituted through distributed relations of human and non-human relations. Autistic experiences constitute a way to explore our taken-for-granted notions of social interaction and develop accounts that expand what we consider to be the condition of the human. Sociological attention to autism in the habitual favourites framework provides empirically rich and nuanced concepts to develop insights into autistic experience.

Contents

Declaration Page	2
Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	5
Contents	6
Introduction	12
Autism Spectrum Conditions - Reflections and Expanding Definitions	17
Outline of Chapters	24
Chapter 1 - Sensory Habits as - Pragmatic Quasi-Object Relations	30
Introduction	30
A Brief Sociological Trajectory Of The Senses	32
Pragmatic Habits as Mediating The Senses	38
What is a Favourite?	42
Habitual Favourites as a Concept	44
Beyond Dynamic and Diagnostic Definitions	48
Reassessing Sensory Sociology and - Habitual Favourites With Autism	52

Serres, The Parasite and Quasi-Objects	55
Habitual Favourites as Quasi-Objects - Through The Sensory Autistic Manifold	61
Conclusion	66
Chapter 2 - Research Design and Methodology	68
Introduction	68
Gaining Access to The Field and - Negotiating Research Design	68
Ethnographic Fieldwork and The Club Space	72
Focus Group Methodological Considerations	78
Methodological Challenges and Solutions	90
A Comment on Representational Bias	94
Autoethnography and Complete Member Research	97
Conclusion	107
Chapter 3 - Habitual Favourites - Modulated Thresholds and Parasitical Quasi-Objects	108
Introduction - an Outline of The Chapter	108
Factors Impacting The Relationship to Favourites in Autism	108
Developing The Quasi-Object Concept	113
Some Comments on Using an “Events” Based Analysis	115

The Different Modalities of Habitual Favourites	117
Doug - Cats, Technological Quasi-Objects and Soylent as Parasite	117
Garry - Multi-Modal Anxiety Relief and Social Management	123
Josh - Filming Breakdowns	131
Escalator Sickness	138
Conclusion - Reformulating Parasites and Quasi-Objects Through Autistic Experiences	142
Chapter 4 - An Auto/Autieethnography Part 1 - Methodological and Researcher Positionality	146
Vignette: An Multivocal Outline of Key Themes in The Autoethnographic Literature	146
Introduction - Of Vignettes and Autoethnography	150
The Evocative Uses of Vignettes and Multivocality - in Autoethnographic Accounts	151
An Evocative and Post-Structural Commitment to Openness	154
Autoethnographic Concerns and Challenges	156
The Slippage Between Autoethnography - as Narcissistic and Theory of Mind	161
The Question of “Proving” Autoethnographic Credentials	165
An Emplaced Concern With Relational Ethics	168

Autoethnography as Journeying and Pragmatic Balance	170
Beyond Poststructural Autoethnography - to Quasi-Object Relationality	173
PhD Work, Disability Support and Relational Ethics	178
Revealing The Analytic Potential in The Academic Mundane	183
A Concluding Multivocal Discussion	185
Chapter 5 - An Auto/Autieethnography Part 2 -	
PhD Labour and Autoethnographic Writing Vignettes	187
Introduction - Of Writing Vignettes and Autoethnography	187
Writing Vignette 1 Writing in Chaos - Autism, Home Care and Housework	188
Characters, Conditions and Concerns - Some Background	188
My PhD "Writing Day" Exhilaration, Exasperation - and Emotional Exhaustion	190
Discussion - Writing as a Mundane Academic Habitus	198
The Consequences of Writing in Chaos	
Thinking With Care in Writing	202
How Do You Cope? - Future Directions	209
Writing Vignette 2 - The "Glow" of Academic Thinking - and Writing as Habitual Favourites	211
Back to Caring - Intellectual Structure and Identity	216

Reflecting on a Sociological Imagination	220
Conclusion	224
Chapter 6 - Affective Atmospheres: Perturbations, -	
Haziness and Emplaced Affects	226
Introduction	226
What is An Affective Atmosphere?	227
Affect As a Concept, Beginnings and Critiques	229
What Can Be Called An Atmosphere? Boundaries and Effects	232
Atmospheric Interstices - Beyond Binaries and -	
Toward Ephemeral Mixing	235
Data Analysis - The Research Set-Up and The Material/Spatial	
Organisation of The Club	243
Empirical Case 1 - Sound Management, KISS Radio and	
Human and Non-Human Atmospheres	247
Empirical Case 2 - Echolalia, Gestural Semiosis and Blackadder	254
Empirical Case 3 - Creation, Disruption and Maintenance of	
Sensory Atmospheric Boundaries	260
Conclusion	265

Conclusion - Sensory and Disability Futures	267
Introduction	267
Habitual Favourites in Policy and Practice	268
Multi-Media Sensory Research	272
Habitual Favourites and Social Categories	276
Thesis as Quasi-Object	280
Bibliography	282

Introduction

This thesis is a sociological exploration and examination of the mechanisms, relations and actions that impact on the intersection between habitual relations with “favourites” and the sensory experiences and dynamics of those with autism. Favourites as a singular term here is treated as conceptual short-hand that brings together favourite activities, people, events, objects, places, consumption practices and areas of interest. I examine the ways in which the repetitive and creative potentials of habitual social action provide a theoretical and empirical basis in which we can examine the social and sensory lives of those with autism. This is important because of the perceived “deficits” and “challenges” faced by those with autism create insurmountable barriers to effective communication and recognition as right-bearing and self-identifying subjects in modern social life. This introduction will begin with a very brief overview of the core characteristics of autism in order for readers to have a frame of reference when working through the theoretical framework developed and applied in the thesis. This overview will remain descriptive and regrettably cursory due to space limitations, but, certain facets of the condition noted here will be exemplified and analysed across the thesis. I will then outline the contents of each chapter in the thesis and outline core themes and aims that shall be developed throughout the chapters and the thesis as a whole.

Autism is a life-long developmental condition that impacts on social and communicational abilities (Wing, 1997). Autism is described as a “spectrum” condition. This refers to the fact that each autistic individual manifests the core characteristics of the condition in unique ways that reflects personal life experiences, epigenetic development and expression. Because the condition is developmentally life-long, these unique manifestations alter over the life-course. This means that an autistic child may experience very different aspects of the spectrum's manifestations throughout the life course (Orsmond and Seltzer, 2007 and Bresnahan et al, 2014). In terms of intersubjective communication,

autism impacts a vast array of actions including: difficulty in reading social cues from others, whether these be uses of tone of voice or body language to convey feelings or concepts, difficulty in experiencing and being able to relate to others emotional responses, or formulating opinions on topics because of the inability to empathetically connect with bodily and verbal cues.

These intersubjective difficulties are further exacerbated by the fact that those with autism also struggle to identify *their own* thoughts, emotions and ways of thinking as distinct modes of existence or patterns of relating. Thus, pain and hunger may not be innately meaningful for those with autism and go unnoticed as the sensations have no way of being reconciled into purposeful action. Taken together, these intersubjective and self-identified traits make imaginative play and thought problematic (Harris et al, 2000). Without recognition of other's perspectives and means of making sense of complex situations, developing new and creative ideas is rendered a luxury for those who struggle highly with social communication and impaired by unfocused integration for those less affected. Furthermore, emotional and affective situations for those with autism share these problems without adequate social cues or environmental processing-capacities, feelings, affects and emotions do not become distinct entities, weaving and intersecting with each other into non-traceable origins and conflicted and confused responses to stimuli (Philip, 2009). Attempting to convey these confounding processes linguistically is met by the reality that for some on the more severe end of the spectrum, language difficulties and developmental delays may emerge during early years development (Wray et al, 2005).

For those without language issues such as people with Asperger's Syndrome, a less severe form of autism that emphasises the routinised and interest focused aspects of the spectrum, attempting to convey the tumultuous emotional and social uncertainties still remains a challenge when social cues are not easily identifiable. These emotional and social impairments can lead to empathetic

difficulties connecting with others concerns, motivations and feelings and on the part of the autistic individual. Lack of recognisable bodily, verbal and social cues gives an appearance of non-emotional or “bizarre” behaviours and reactions to events and actions (Prince-Hughes, 2004). The aforementioned environmental stimuli refer in more specific terms to the senses and the subsequent processing capacity of these experiences. Autistic individuals not only have difficulties in reconciling so much divergent and qualitatively different stimuli the sensory apparatus of the body and mind is compromised. Depending on the individual’s manifestation of the spectrum of characteristics, they may be hyposensitive or hypersensitive so that sensory stimuli are perceived as being too intense or too limited to be effective and stabilising. This immensely distressing array of troubling personal and intersubjective confusion causes autistic individuals to develop a number of what is termed stereotypical strategies. The foremost of these is development of very rigid routines and interests (Boyd et al, 2012). As such, novelty in everyday activities and spontaneous events and deviations from these clearly outlined patterns of action are very distressing and disorientating.

A number of approaches have been proffered for the divergent characteristics that comprise the autistic condition. None of them can be said to provide an overarching theory that adequately explains autism in a holistic manner. Rather, they offer piecemeal pictures of the mechanisms behind the characteristics that must be taken up as they are relevant to the autistic person and their social, environmental and epigenetic context. Starting with sensory and emotional difficulties, explanations for the emergence of hypo/hypersensitive sensory and emotional responses concern themselves with psychological and neurological explanations. A recent theory proposes that rather than being non-empathetic, autistic individuals actually feel emotional and interactional stimuli too intensely and this explains their apparent disregard for others concerns or feelings. This “Intense World Theory” (Markram and Markram, 2010) posits that if autistic people tried to focus on the bodily, verbal and social cues that the non-autistic population takes for granted, they would be overwhelmed, so much so that they

would permanently “shut-down” and remain cold and distant, only ever being able to retreat into themselves, protecting them from external stimuli. This results in them becoming too attached to people so that they cannot bear to be in love or be friends as their feelings would be too intense as to create physical pain.

On the other side of this empathetic divide, some authors argue that at a core level, autism reflects a highly impaired “Theory of Mind” (ToM) (Baron-Cohen, 2001). This is the ability to relate to others and identify communicational cues and integrate them so that they might put themselves in someone’s place to imagine how they feel and react to co-present circumstances. Because of this lack, autistic people are said to possess more “male-focused” brains. Thus, they prioritise rational, patterned and systematised modes of thought and excel at identifying mechanical systems and processes that follow distinct logical and ordered activity (Baron-Cohen, 2002). This goes, ToM theorists argue, some way to explain the intensity of interest in activities like scientific research, computer programming, engineering, mathematics and so on. These domains of social life value skill, results and technical competence and in some ways downplay social and communicational competence and mastery, thus making it easier for autistic individuals to focus on their talents and strengths rather than be troubled by their impairments. These strengths, another dominant area of “autism theory” claim, stem from sensory and informational processing capacities that autistic individuals display. This strain of thinking puts forth the notion that autistic neurology, physiology and psychology prioritises “local” over “global” processing (Happé and Frith, 2006 and Booth and Happé, 2016). Local processing refers to the ability of humans to identify patterns, objects or actions amongst a sea of sensory and informational stimuli. The whole is bracketed out to focus on the most important events at hand to complete them satisfactorily. Global processing downplays the smaller details in order to look at the larger context of the phenomenon at hand. They can look at a large body of material and identify the underlying and more abstract processes that generate their effects without being overwhelmed by the immense quantity of the specific

details that constitute such operations. Those with autism, with an intense attention to detail and focusing on the most pertinent stimuli and information for clarity, are adept at picking out specific patterns in visual images or abstract mechanical or logical systems. They can then work through the specifics of the components that make up such systems to gradually build up to a more global perspective.

This brief overview points to some of the key characteristics and stakes that come with researching autism. My research will be contributing to the much understudied area of adults with autism¹. This will be undertaken within a sociological perspective which is underrepresented in the large literature on autism². In particular, I will be exploring the ways in which autistic experience is distributed across human and non-human domains through discursive, affective and atmospheric mechanisms. Before I undertake these conceptual moves, I will first provide an outline of the medical characteristics of autism as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 (DSM-V). I do this in order to argue that such medical characterisations are limited to understanding autism. I will insist that the use of pragmatist influenced ideas of transactive habits and distributed sociality through human and non-human factors provide a more sensitive and empirically rich framework through which to think through the complexities of autism.

¹ Although, see Hofvander et al, 2009 and Leekham et al, 2007 for discussions of adult specific autism issues in relation to sensory and social experiences.

² The recent work of Damian Milton (2012, 2013) is developing a comprehensive account of a sociological perspective to autism from ethnomethodological concerns to philosophical issues of self and other relations.

Autism Spectrum Conditions - Reflections and Expanding Definitions

Autism is characteristically defined and conceptualised in medical and psychiatric terms as comprising a “triad of impairments”. These include difficulties in social interaction by not being able to read body language, difficulties in interpreting emotions from others and themselves, difficulties in adapting to social change which results in sticking to predefined routines leading to anxiety and lacking a social imagination which is conceptualised as difficulties in getting a sense of other people’s thoughts and feelings (Hyman, 2013).

It is important to note that just before I started to write this thesis, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 (DSM-V) was nearing completion and when released in May 18th 2013, altered the diagnostic criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorders/Conditions (ASD/CS). The most publicised change was the removal of Asperger’s Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS) and Disintegrative Disorder (Hyman, 2013). The triad of impairments noted above are now consolidated into two diagnostic groups labelled “Social Communication/Interaction” and “Restricted and Repetitive Behaviours” (ibid).

ALL of the symptoms below must be present for the Social Communication group:

“1. Problems reciprocating social or emotional interaction, including difficulty establishing or maintaining back-and-forth conversations and interactions, inability to initiate an interaction, and problems with shared attention or sharing of emotions and interests with others

2. Severe problems maintaining relationships - ranges from lack of interest in other people to difficulties in pretend play... and problems adjusting to different social expectations.

3. Nonverbal communication problems such as abnormal eye contact, posture, facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures, as well as inability to understand these.” (ibid).

For Restricted and Repetitive Behaviours, only two of four below criteria are required:

“1. Stereotyped and repetitive speech, motor movements or use of objects.

2. Excessive adherence to routines, ritualised patterns of verbal or nonverbal behaviour, or excessive resistance to change.

3. Highly restricted interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus.

4. Hyper or hypo reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment.” (ibid).

A point arises from the placement and wording of sensory behaviour for the definition and diagnosis of autism. To place them within “restricted and repetitive behaviours” and to delimit them from “social communication/interaction” characteristics may be necessary for strict medical definitions that categorise symptoms. Such an approach though, does not fully account for how a more holistic consideration of autism reveals a complex reality that unfolds in different times and spaces. A value judgement is present in the way in which “unusual” sensory engagements are presented as a “neurotypical”, or non-disabled and majority perspective on what constitutes normality and the constitutive deviations from this. Neurotypical or “NT” are terms used by autistic sub-cultures, found on online forums and advocacy groups that argue that autism, as a spectrum condition, is a part of the continuum of what it is to be human and are not necessarily “disabilities”. Rather, they are merely alternative modes of bio-social-psycho-eco of being in the world and hinder and highlight capacities of being human (Ortega, 2009).

The symptoms are based on criteria that ANY human could display (think of fanatical interest and engagement with football in the UK for example). These ideas are encompassed within the term “neurodiverse” and constitute, in much the same vein as the UPIAS statement, a way to show how the characteristics of autism, which are both genetic and cultural, are social constructions that change over time. I return later in this section to expand upon neurodiversity as a concept.

It is somewhat inaccurate, however, to suggest that the DSM-V in being written, debated and contested, has not sought to incorporate aspects of a more dynamic approach to identifying, classifying and treating medical conditions. As Greco (2015) has noted, the typical view that the DSM is the “Bible” of psychiatry from the first edition in 1952, bringing about a paradigm shift to a more categorical and static version of psychiatric practice is misleading. From a historical context, Greco refers to Stengel’s (1959) survey, commissioned by the World Health Organisation (WHO), where he notes that in 1959, 7 years after the first DSM, there were 58 different classificatory systems for psychiatry (Stengel, 1959). Further, both DSM-I and DSM-II utilised a different form of psychiatric theory than the DSM-III onwards, which used the surface based physiological symptoms classificatory system. The first and second editions incorporated elements of the influential psychoanalytic presence in the US during the 1950’s-60. This might be termed a “dynamic” psychiatry in contrast to “diagnostic” psychiatry based on symptomatic classifications discussed in Horwitz (2002). Dynamic psychiatry did not view surface symptoms as highly significant; rather, they indicated psychodynamic interactions that were unique to each individual cases’ biography and life history experiences. As such, these unconscious processes could not be empirically investigated directly and needed interpretative methods in order to work through intersubjective meanings, emotions and relationships. Because of this gradual, ongoing process of negotiation, the line between the normal and pathological becomes indistinct, as what is abnormal for one case may be normal and productive for another’s set of dispositions. This is not, of course, to romanticise or make light

of the many troublesome assumptions of the psychoanalytic framework in this period, including the homophobic and sexist assumptions underwriting the classification of “hysteria” and “homosexuality” as pathological states of being (Greco, 2015). Dynamic should not be attributed to being progressive or reflexive of social bias in this case.

In fact, a primary critique of the diagnostic mode of psychiatry, the over-medicalisation of human experience via the ever-growing entries to each DSM, can be attributed in part from theoretical orientations held over from the dynamic psychiatry era. The secular morality of the blurring of the normal and pathological boundary gave rise to the questionable inclusion of homosexuality and female emotional disorders. Even more than this, Horwitz (2002) goes on to argue that due to the individualised and context specific nature of dynamic psychiatry, the unique cases produced a huge array of symptoms and characteristics that described and analysed the whole gamut of human experience. It was only later that diagnostic psychiatry from the 1970’s onwards sought to categorise this diverse array of analyses into clearly delineated categories of disease (Horwitz, 2002: 41).³

In more practical terms the DSM can be considered a polyvalent “boundary-object”, an object with identifiable, yet mutable characteristics that can be translated across multiple contexts and retain a sense of coherence (Star and Griesemer, 1989: 393). It is polyvalent because it connects to the various actors involved in psychiatric affairs such as insurance companies, governments and pharmaceutical corporations. This means that the DSM here, in contrast to

³ I do not have the space to elucidate the many reasons why this continuity in approaches is often missed. See Greco (2015) for further discussion of the political and historical context of the battle fought over making DSM-III a scientific, diagnostic based system. These processes can be summarised as a strategy of “clearance”, which denotes “the erection of a barrier in the past, so that no information or knowledge can leak through to the present” (Bowker and Star, 1999: 257).

critical approaches that treat the DSM as a dominant force; it is ambiguously applied in practice. The standardisation of categories introduced new forms of bureaucratisation from stakeholders such as insurance companies that eroded clinical autonomy. This had the effect of leading psychiatrists to develop workarounds from strict adherence to the classificatory criteria and diagnostic practices outlined in the DSM. These practices included using alternative classificatory systems, over-diagnosing patients to meet quotas for insurance financial interests and utilisation dynamic psychiatry techniques of negotiation of diagnosis with clients (Whooley, 2010: 460).⁴ Because of this, the integrated category of “autism” in the DSM-V will, in practice, be utilised in divergent ways such that some with autism will still be characterised as having Asperger’s. Autism diagnosis is interesting in the context of the dynamic and diagnostic distinction, which as I have noted, blur into each other. Because of the social difficulties criteria, a high degree of socially interpretative and hermeneutical work is required to assess how those with autism interact in a variety of social situations. On the diagnostic side, because of the link of symptoms to biological function, sensory difficulties are often treated as physiological. Again, any form of dichotomisation is troubled because subsequent treatments for sensory issues, such as sensory rooms, also address the affordances and contextual milieus that impact sensory experience to dynamically and gradually alter sensory sensitivity and are sensitive to ways that this can be attuned to increased intersubjective interaction (Hussein, 2012, Stadele and Malaney, 2001).

In light of these ideas, neurodiversity as a concept is tied to the interweaving nature of diagnostic and dynamic modes of thought. On the one hand, the idea of a spectrum of human variation splits the diagnostic and dynamic binary

⁴ Whooley primarily focuses on the US context, but the increasing marketisation, privatisation and austerity pressures regarding funding and support for the National Health Service in Britain instigated during the coalition and conservative governments during 2010-17 asks us to increasingly consider these market forces in this context as well.

directly as neurodiversity is based on what Ortega has termed a “cerebralization of autism” (Ortega, 2009: 427), where the neurology of autism is tied directly to self conceptions of those who strongly identify as neurodiverse. As such, autism becomes medicalised in a reconfigured form as brain-based identity politics which risks reinforcing medical and biological (specifically neurological) reductionisms. The diversity of human embodiment is reduced to one form of bodily experience and being. This idea can be summed up as the “essentialism paradox” (Goodley, 2016: 152). While the majority of those who affirm and advocate for neurodiverse values do not ascribe to the idea that autism should be treated, corrected via normalisation techniques or “cured”, by inscribing neurodiversity so strongly in cognitive and neurological mechanisms, the radical element of “diversity” becomes lost. I will go to show throughout the thesis that a more distributed and post-human sociality is more adequate to account for the diversity present in autism.

On the other hand, we have the dynamic tendency to create a more flexible idea of autism through the notion of spectrum. The problematic question then becomes one of how to differentiate between the different labels given to those on the spectrum. Because of this, the notion and meaning of a spectrum becomes lost in definition and those who are labelled within such a spectrum can be lost within “a sea of floating signifiers of difference” (ibid: 154). I will show that by locating autistic sensory experience within habitual favourites, or, hobbies and special interests, it becomes possible to more accurately account for neurodiverse modes of social engagement. Equally, such a perspective allows for a depiction of the interaction between objects, events and subjects through the idea of quasi-objects. Here, the “floating sea of signifiers”, is given an anchor, as quasi-objects force us to slow down and consider the elements that constitute a given phenomenon. Following this notion, autistic sensory experience is grounded in specific and unique interactions and situations, that they acquire an empirical specificity. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to a sociological mode of understanding autism that can address the multiple forms

of interaction between objects, subjects and the environment in which they are located.

I finish this introduction with a broad outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 - "Sensory Habits as Pragmatic Quasi-Object Relations"

This chapter serves to provide an overview and introduce some of the core disciplinary and conceptual concerns that drive the thesis. I begin with a brief exposition of how the senses have been treated throughout the history of sociological thinking. I start with the classical sociologies of the founders such as Simmel (1950), the historical and cultural perspectives of Elias (2000) and Douglas (2002) before concluding with an explicit "Sociology of The Senses" (Vannini et al, 2012) perspective that seeks to integrate these divergent inquiries. My next concern will serve to introduce and elaborate a pragmatist inflected notion of habits and the importance of routinised, static habitual actions and the creative, open-ended capacity to develop new habits and modify old ones. This culminates in expressing a desire to account for the "transactional" (Cutchin, 2007) nature of habits that incorporates the subjective, environmental and material basis of distributed social action in specific contextual milieus. In order to account for these qualities, I develop the concept of "habitual favourites" that symbolises the spatial, temporal, material and social aspects of habitual engagement with "favourites". I proceed to critically examine the medical model definition of autism and the dynamism that is missed when a lack of attention is dedicated to the sensory and transactional ways in which autistic individuals relate to the world around them. I conclude the chapter by explicating

the work of Michel Serres (2007, 2008) and his development of the concept of “quasi-object”. This describes the way in which social relations are permeated by subjective and objective qualities and that these are distributed around vortex like events, objects and people. I support this analysis with a consideration of the way in which these processes are “parasitic” in nature and how this can enrich a sensory sociology of autism.

Chapter 2 - “Research Design and Methodology”

I begin with a descriptive outline of my entry into my research site of an Outreach Club run by a local autistic charity through deciding on an ethnographic location, gaining access, negotiating the terms of the research and the subsequent research design that emerged from these interactions. After detailing these events, I concern myself with methodological questions around participant observatory ethnographic field-work with a vulnerable population. In particular, I hone in on concerns around how much power researchers should have in determining the conduct of the research when dealing with those who have a much reduced ability to determine their own course of action and independence in life (Barr et al, 2001, Thomson, 2007). These ethical concerns lead me to discuss ways in which research can be made participatory rather than pre-ordained by an enlightened researcher. I focus here on specific factors that impact the activities and social life of activity and group identity oriented social spaces. I go on to introduce methodological aspects of what has been termed “autoethnography” (Anderson, 2006, Ellis and Bochner, 2006) that will be addressed in chapters 4 and 5. I outline the ways in which my status as someone with autism impacts my position as group member and researcher and the dynamics this generates. The chapter concludes with a summary of my research design and the key questions I aim to address through it.

Chapter 3 - “Habitual Favourites - Modulated Thresholds and Parasitic Quasi-Objects”

This first empirical chapter takes questions around habitual favourites and applies the concepts of the “quasi-object” and “parasite” to them. Each term is taken and developed further from their introduction in the literature review. I specify past frameworks that have examined the modulations and intensities of autistic sensory experience and incorporate them into my own discussions (Smith and Sharp, 2013). I then take the concept of quasi-object and add empirical specificity in talking about different “social” kinds of quasi-object that have differential effects on social action (Simon, 2013). Before I move to my four empirical case studies, I provide a brief theoretical explanation for focusing on events in my analyses (Savransky, 2016a). My first case study examines the interaction between mundane housework and my participant’s conceptions of the connections between the endless cycle of housework and the energy saving and parasitical foodstuff Soylent. The second case examines the difficulties of planned travel and the actual event of travel in their spatial and interactional contexts, before turning to the balance of physical and technological social interaction. The third case study examines the temporal duration and breakdown of a planned set of activities co-organised by group members, providing a habitual analysis of these events. The final case study examines the interplay between detailed knowledge of a topic and ad-hoc decision making based on sensory management and negotiation.

Chapter 4 - “Autieethnography Part 1 - Methodological and Researcher Positionality”

A different writing approach will be utilised throughout this chapter including multi-voiced vignettes and textbox asides. I explore the analytic and research usefulness of these devices through discussions of poststructural concerns with non-linear identity (Gannon, 2006). I address some prominent critiques that have been made of autoethnographic work around accusations of narcissistic navel gazing (Roth, 2005, Holt, 2003) and bring attention to the fact that these critiques may give weight to troubling conceptions of autistic being. This concerns the ToM approaches to autism that I argue reduce autistic self-identity and remove those with autism from the category of human (Yergeau, 2013). Although I subject this mode of thinking to poststructural critique, I acknowledge that this is not enough and does not fully reject the ToM issues that are raised. I thus develop an account of the ways in which autistic sociality challenges conventional modes of what it means to become a human being through developing social competency (Davidson and Smith, 2009). I specify how the posthuman condition of autistic sociality severely challenges a deficit account of autistic being. I conclude the chapter by considering the ways in which my nexus of support enables me to make the mundane strange and reveal hidden ways in which academic institutions can reduce potentials for inclusion.

Chapter 5 - “Autieethnography Part 2 - PhD Labour Autoethnographic Writing Vignettes”

This is an empirical chapter, but in an unorthodox sense. The approach in this chapter takes two different kinds of “writing vignettes”. One is a “working day vignette”. The other is the means through which my Asperger’s Syndrome impacts my writing and research practices. The working day vignette describes the challenges faced when writing is situated within a complex context of care,

disruption and habitual rigidity. I explore how my mum and I work with and against each other in allowing time to think and write. I note how my Asperger's impacts these encounters through difficult emotional management and the unpredictability that my mum brings to the forefront. The second vignette concerns the affective, material and conceptual ways in which my autism impacts on the means through which I think and write academic accounts. I note the "languorous pleasures" and "glow" (MacLure 2013), of research writing and analysis that I experience and the strengths and dangers this orientation brings. I reflect on the parasitical habitual nature of the struggle between writing in chaos and the joys of theoretical and empirical writing and argument formation.

Chapter 6 - "Affective Atmospheres: Perturbations - Haziness and Emplaced Affects"

This final empirical chapter concerns itself with the notion of atmospheres. I introduce the notion of atmospheres and the concomitant term affect (Anderson, 2009). I then go on to discuss the criticisms that have been made of reductive approaches to affect before developing a more nuanced account that incorporates both aspects of the dividing debates (Leys, 2011, Wetherell, 2012). I move on to connect this expanded definition of affect to atmospheres to produce the term "affective atmosphere". I make explicit the connections between habits and affective atmospheres through discussions of the notions of "resonance" and "gestural semiosis" (Miller, 2015, Albertsen, 2012). These concepts serve as a means to ground the potentially ephemeral idea of affective atmospheres to the distributed material "perturbations" of modulated intensities (Ash, 2015). I then provide three empirical examples of how atmospheres were present during my fieldwork. The first case examines the negotiation of sound levels of a radio station and the mechanisms that underlie the continuation and background maintenance of an atmosphere. The second case explores the ways in which echolalia operates to generate and modulate atmospheric conditions. The third and final example looks at how the management of

sensory atmospherics in relation to spatial design and organisation impacts upon the interactions that are possible in the club space.

Chapter 7 - “Conclusion - Sensory and Disability Futures”

This final section will summarise the main arguments made throughout the thesis across three key topics of discussion. Having done this, I consider ways in which the thesis framework can be applied and used in policy, practice and autism research more generally. I identify several research programmes and interventions where the insights developed across the thesis may be fruitfully applied and developed. Secondly, I move towards more exploratory questions regarding the lack of sensory data in my research and provide an example of how multisensory data could be understood through the framework developed in the thesis. Finally, I identify theoretical and conceptual blind-spots that occlude important social factors within the framework developed in the thesis. Primarily, I focus on the exclusion of a discussion of social markers such as ethnicity and gender, which have historically been underexplored in autism research. Then, taking a more positive outlook, I identify several areas of “Critical Disability Studies” (CDS) in which the framework developed here can be productively thought with to begin conceptualising the blind-spots identified (See Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009, Goodley, 2014).

Chapter 1 - Sensory Habits as Pragmatic Quasi-Object Relations

Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a brief exploration of some of the small, yet core material within sociology that has been dedicated to the study of the senses in society. I will be focusing in particular on how recent work on the senses as relational faculties of social conduct, impact upon how subjects relate to the world via their sensory capacities. This work accounts for the inflections of sensory experience that are shaped by embodied, ecological and divergent conceptions of self in relation to others, in order to explore notions of sensory understanding. These concerns will lead me to inquire more deeply into how such actions and conceptualisations are made stable and consistent and what conditions may lead them to be in flux and open to new possibilities. I use the notion of *habit* as a conceptual framing device to give theoretical and conceptual guidance on these matters. A *pragmatist* explication of habitual sociality will be worked through in order to develop a nuanced notion of habitual action, enabling investigation of the relationship between micro and macro dimensions of social life and how the environment and subject interact and intertwine. The central empirical example that will structure and thread many of the core themes in the thesis is the notion a “favourite”. A general discussion of what favourites are will be followed by an explication of a central conceptual, theoretical and empirical construct of the chapter and thesis as a whole, that of “*habitual favourites*”. I argue that by exploring the ways in which the process of habituation influences engagement with favourites, we can develop a novel social understanding of what it means to have autism.

I then provide an outline of what constitutes autism as a condition and the characteristics which will be the main focus of this research. My concern will be to critically explore the means through which the condition has been framed and whether they are adequate for accurately representing the broad spectrum of people who live and experience the totality of life via an autistic sensibility. These considerations will culminate in an in-depth outline of Michel Serres' concepts of the *parasite* and *quasi-objects*. These shall provide unique and insights and opportunities to conceptualise autistic sensory experience and understanding, speaking to the complexity and apparent strangeness of social-sensory engagements. This discussion will end with what I will argue is an "autistic" quasi-object par excellence, the *favourite*. A favourite can serve to anchor meaning in a confusing and disorientating world in which sensory experience and social events may go by with little understanding for those with autism. A favourite activity can help to give purpose and meaning to the world. Whether an object, person, activity or experience, the processes behind developing and cultivating engaging with favourites is an important aspect of autistic sociality and therefore serves as a powerful empirical lens from which to research the relationship between autism and sensory worlds.

This chapter aims to set up the aims and stakes of this project that seeks to make an innovative, theoretically informed empirical exploration of an underexplored topic within sociological thought. It will develop a greater understanding of autistic sensory worlds for sociological theory and research, as well as contributing to the autism community through empirical inquiry and exploration of issues central to experiencing and moving through social life.

A Brief Sociological Trajectory Of The Senses

The literature on the senses within sociology and social theory has a diverse history, with early concerns relating to sensory matters found in Simmel's (1950) reflections on the sensory nature of modernist urban subjects, to Mary Douglas' (2002) classic work on the uses of sensory laden metaphors relating to "purity and danger", to more recent concerns with utilising technology to capture sensory data and the political concerns with a focus on a "democracy of the senses" (Berendt, 1985: 32). Through the work of these thinkers, we can see the wide ranging impact sensory interaction has on social action and understanding, from the concerns of Simmel to relate the personal, micro interactions of individual and collective agents, to Douglas' concern to map the connections between biological sensory processes and the symbolic and discursive interpretations given to these. Finally, Back's (2007) interest in mediating sensory experience in ways that respect people's accounts of them. Despite these studies showing the central place the senses have in social life and with key concerns of social theory in understanding the modern world, the empirical importance of the senses has often been limited to the bio-cultural, with the cultural taking the crowning spot for theoretical and empirical interest within sociological thought. This is not to discounting particular specialist areas in sociology such as figurational sociology, that draw upon Elias' (2000) historical sociology which documents changes in societies across the centuries regarding how customs and habits alter over time in a range of areas. This cultural focus has been, in part, due to the dominance within sociology of signs, language and discourse. This has been alongside a concomitant commitment to abstract theoretical concerns such as the relationship between structure and agency.

As Turner (1999) argues, the reasons for sociology's lack of engagement with embodied social processes and by proxy, sensory experience, can be attributed to the specific foci of the classical sociologists. They were concerned with macro

processes to explore and explain the differences between traditional and modern societies and this required an abstract and conceptually reinforced framework in which to do so. These were based on “social” processes and as such, the “natural” was demarcated into its own realm. Human agency, as conceived by Weber (1978) for instance, required cognitive capacities such as rational action and was not seen to require embodied, sensory or emotional context. In a similar vein, Simmel (1950) was keenly interested in how the processes of modernisation and urbanisation impacted upon the means through which everyday interaction took place among vast numbers of unknown strangers. As modernisation and urbanisation diversified potential actions, whether through opportunities for new experiences such as amusement parks and mass mediated shopping advertising, made possible by electrification, or the increasing pressures of spatial immediacy due to the clustering of urban housing settlements. Simmel began to consider ways that urban citizens could manage these intense and varying demands. This raised questions of cognitive and sensory management of these emerging means of association, within a temporal frame that privileged novelty and accelerated development, caused Simmel to question how social agents could best engage within this social system.

Simmel argued that modern, urban social actors adopted a “blasé” attitude to adapt and cope with living with diverse sensory experiences and the proximity of strangers that we do not have a personal familiarity. This attitude can be summarised as one in which a disinterested emotional and behavioural schema should be developed by modern citizens so that they do not become too invested in relations and moderation of sensory engagements is encouraged. Thus according to Simmel, social intercourse should be kept to necessities only and attention must be trained and directed to those things that matter to the individual. This sense of unstoppable progress and increase in sensory stimulation in urban societies, following Enlightenment, modernist principles, developing from Simmel’s Neo-Kantianism (Turner, 1999), placed all of the substantive and social effort of actors on cognitive deliberation alone. If we must

direct consciousness to so many stimuli at once, little wonder that Simmel felt that not much could be done but to develop a set of attitudinal dispositions. Despite this somewhat subdued and flawed solution, Simmel's work provides an entry point to begin thinking about the ways in which autism can be considered from a "sociology of the senses" perspective. Simmel's postulation and set-up for his theories of the subjective conditions of modernity, in some ways describe a central problematic for autistic individuals and groups seeking to engage with modern, urban social life. Engaging in an overwhelming world of material, sensory and social intensification brings the core characteristics of autism into high focus. However, the aforementioned commitments to the liberal and humanist commitments of modernity meant that Simmel and other classical sociologists developed their theories in relation to an unrealisable ideal of the human being. As such, they could not develop their ideas in relation to what we now know and name as those who are "disabled" (Shuttleworth and Meekosha, 2012).

Unfortunately, this lack of application and theorising extends beyond the classical sociological period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Even within contemporary discussions, disability within the literature on sensory issues in sociology has been understudied in comparison to issues of class (Taylor, 2010), ethnicity (Back, 2011, Taylor, 2010) and gender (Allen-Collinson and Owton, 2015). This may be, in part, due to the influences and theoretical tools utilised in research around disability within sociology that has been drawn from disability studies. Much of this work has looked at how social norms, institutions and physical spaces impact upon and disadvantage those with disabilities. The first of these relates to a materialistic analysis of disability that looks at the economic and political motivations and practices that negatively impact upon those with disabilities. A central thinker in this tradition is Colin Barnes (1991, 1998, 2010), whose work has examined, from a primarily Marxist lens, how capital and labour relations impact negatively for those with disabilities (Barnes and Mercer, 2010). Materialist theories of disability also strongly subscribe to the conceptual and practical dichotomy established by the Union of the

Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) (1976), and forms the basis of disability studies. This union was a coming together of disabled people and activists, who were being ignored in society and systematically discriminated against, joined together to form a political movement that sought to theorise and provide a political mandate to remove the oppression disabled people and communities faced in their everyday lives.

The dichotomy in question comprises the paired terms of impairment and disability. Impairment refers to the physical or psychological condition that a person has that is medically classified and embodies an individualised and tragic deficit approach (Oliver, 2004: 19). Disability here points to the social dimensions that impact upon the impairments of individuals such as building design or social attitudes. This conceptual move draws attention to the socially constructed nature of disability and distributes the explanation of disability away from individual blame to showcase the collective responsibility socio-material worlds have in producing disability (Oliver and Barnes, 1998). However, it has been argued by Tremaine (2002) that a materialist approach does not pay due attention to the ways in which cultural practices and values shape how we understand disability. This discursive school seeks to examine the semiotic and discursive ways in which those with disabilities are constructed and portrayed negatively such as the stigma and prejudice that is inscribed through “staring” at those with disabilities (Garland Thomson, 2009). Within this work, the social construction of disability is shown through discursive analysis and attempts to bring positive representation to disability issues and showcase the biases and discursive resources that are used to reinforce disadvantaged positions. In return, those from the materialist tradition have argued that this focus on culture, discourse and language does not address the harsh physical and economic systems, within which those with disability are faced, especially at times of austerity (Barnes, 2012, Shakespeare, 2014).

Neither of these two schools of thought has fully managed to move beyond these binary understandings of disability and have been caught within a stalemate. Thus political/economic and semiotic/discursive/cultural analysis often takes precedence over bodily and somatic experiences of disability⁵. The contemporary nature of the study of the senses within sociology has meant that cross-over with disability studies has been underdeveloped. I return later in the chapter to think about an approach within the nascent Critical Disability Studies (CDA), framework which approaches disability from a different direction in relation to autism. For now, I wish to address a contemporary approach to the senses in sociology that has sought to breakdown boundaries between the embodied and discursive approaches to researching sensory experience.

These challenges to engaging with sensory perspectives and orders within social life and sociology as an intellectual endeavour to understand society has been taken up by Vannini et al's (2012) work on the "Sociology of the Senses". In this wide-ranging work, the authors outline a framework that is sociologically informed to analyse and theorise sensory experience. They argue that much of our lives are given over to taking for granted sensory engagements with the world that we find hard to conceptualise or rationalise fully if we remain indentured to either a purely embodied or cognitive means to express them. Our senses can be awakened by disruptions to habitual means of action in the world or particularly overwhelming sensory stimuli that overtake our capacity for linguistic or symbolic response. In these situations, we experience the sensory in its "qualitative immediacy". Drawing on Rochberg-Halton (1982), Vannini et al describe this as "sens(ing) certain objects for their immediate qualities and our

⁵ However, see Garland-Thomson (1996) for a discussion of the way in which bodily, somatic differences as embodied by "freaks" helped to constitute the humanist, rational subject. Explicit physical differences were central to this process. This approach mixes the discursive and cultural approach to disability with embodied studies of physical and somatic difference. Furthermore, Erevelles (2002b) has pointed to the ways in which impaired bodies are not beyond social consideration, but are bound up in physical and material relations such as dietary regimes, therapies and the environment.

carnal affective knowledge does not depend on abstract associations” (Vannini et al, 2012: 20). To develop this argument further, they utilise the example of pain, which may begin with a sudden, sharp shock or slow rising, noxious feeling that, at first, cannot be adequately expressed rationally and in the case of the former, may even physically prevent expression as the body responds to internal and external stimuli. Such stimuli: “can be very fleeting-things as they are: unique in and of themselves. “ (ibid: 30). These sensations are, following Peirce (1931), described as “iconic”. Once we begin to make sense of our emotional and carnal feelings, we may go to others to try and make sense of what we are feeling. This expands iconic meaning to include connections via “token-type” resemblance, whether something is or is not present within the current situation, or via an “indexical” process that enables connections to be made to causal relations such as a sharp pain being caused by inflamed nerves. Finally, we can make meaning from a sensation at the “symbolic” level in which we relate to what sensations represent. Collectively, these activities are described as “somatic work”, “Performing these kinds of somatic work, we come to know our body in multiple, nuanced, and at times even contradictory ways” (Vannini et al, 2012: 30). This approach attends to the multiple processes through which we engage with our senses, through discursive and embodied domains of experience. Vannini et al do not privilege either domain in their framework and are thus attentive to the empirical particulars of sensory experience as they arise in social life.

Key to this argument is the description and exploration of the “sensuous self”. This concept evokes the way in which humans are subject and object in sensory experiences, in which we are reflexively and materially engaged with the world with the self being “not only a knowing subject and the object of symbolic... knowledge, but also and more precisely a feeling and sensing subject and the object of somatic experience” (Vannini et al, 2012: 86). These concerns are brought together in two concepts: “reflexive rituals”, which comprise social and context specific reflection, and “somatic rituals” which incorporate sensory experience and the subsequent sense making activities that occur thereafter

(ibid: 87). By considering these two aspects together, the authors theorise a “somatic career”, whereby sensory rituals and sense making activities are implicated to produce meaning. Rather than being static habitual actions, following Dewey (2002), Vannini et al highlight the dynamic and embodied way in which social actors enter into cultural means of understanding. We learn, for example to take sensory hygiene such as shaving and washing to be part of a cultural habit that ties together personal idiosyncrasies and cultural norms.

The concept of habits has emerged a number of times in the above passages without comment. The next section will go on to explore the ways in which a pragmatist notion of habit can bring nuance to an understanding of sensory experience. This conceptual discussion shall then be joined and related to a conception of habitual interaction, via social actor’s engagement with favourite objects, activities and people.

Pragmatic Habits as Mediating Senses

Habits, within everyday discourse, are often taken to be something that is at once a series of actions that have become stabilised, and routine responses to set events or dispositions to an act that does not require extensive reflection. They emerge over time and are often difficult to break down if they have endured across long periods of time. However, habits *can* and *do* become disentangled from their patterned creation and can lead to an immense sense of disorientation. A line of social thought that has sought to address the complexities of how habits as dispositions and actions are expressed is classical pragmatism. Drawing upon this school of thought, we can begin to see habits as part of a somatic career and also gain an understanding of how the discursive, material and sensual aspects of life connect to socially embodied issues. As Shilling (2008) argues, a key focus in sociological thought is between traditions that view the possibilities of social action as being construed by the

impositions of the external, structured environment, such as the Durkheimian tradition (1995). There is also a focus on the internal capacities and potentials of social actors that lead to social action. This is exemplified in the Weberian tradition (Weber, 1949, 1978, Shilling, 2008). Against these two views, is that of pragmatism which seeks to develop an approach that incorporates the key elements of each of the two sides of the debate.

Shilling's (2008) understanding of habits takes the work of John Dewey (1980, 2002), as a key point of reference. Dewey was a central thinker for the late 19th to mid-20th century and contributed to a wide range of fields comprising philosophy, ethics, educational theory and practice. As an engaged thinker and public intellectual, participating in the civil and democratic development of American society, Dewey's founding concern was to ensure that he engaged with practical problems that would provide empirical or theoretical resources that contribute to meeting the needs of the groups that the work is engaged with. In relation to habits, this meant taking into account the issues, substantive characteristics and consideration of the social, psychological and ecological factors that give habits their unique purchase and developing open concepts that can account for these unique processes and provide insight into social problems that may arise due to habitual relations and actions.

Dewey offers a distinction between "routine, unintelligent habit" and "intelligent habit or art" (Dewey, 2002: 67). This distinction "dispenses with the conventional opposition between habit and reason" (Shilling, 2008: 14). Routine habit incorporates stabilised responses to specific circumstances that mechanically activate when a predetermined set of mechanisms are set in motion. Intelligent habit incorporates intentional thought and reflection that is mindful of the material, social and ecological nexus in which the actor is embedded. Hence, a degree of finesse or "artful" craft is possible to direct habits to specific ends. A further key concern of a pragmatic concern for habits relates to how habits can come to inflect and influence social and self-identities. As Dewey recognised,

central to human potential “is the capacity we have to manipulate things *outside* the topographical boundaries of our bodies” (Shilling, 2008: 10, emphasis in original).

Dewey describes how our senses are “a means of connection”, to:

what lies beyond (our) bodily frame [...] [The senses] unfold themselves onto, connect in their particular ways with, and gain information from, the environment [...] Embodied subjects combine, utilise and deploy these senses in ways that give rise to multi-layered perspectives on social and physical situations (Dewey, 1980: 13, 237 in Shilling, 2008: 10).

To expand upon this, Shilling connects Dewey’s work to that of George Herbert Mead (1934). Drawing upon Mead’s definition of the “I”, which denotes a continuous:

mutual relationship between the individual and the community; [this] describe[s] the creative source of “the constant reaction of the organism to its socialised selfhood [...]. This [...] provides the capacity to react to and depart from, the socialisation processes and cultural norms (Mead, 1934: 215, 202, in Shilling, 2008: 11, emphasis in original).

Complementary to the I is the “Me”, which is the sum of what we learn from our social environment and structures, and can be usefully related to the concepts of reflexive rituals and somatic rituals in which the interior and exterior processes of sensory socialisation occur. The Me incorporates external

influence and experience into our self-perception and is required so that the means to adhere or break away from social norms is grounded in particular cultural norms and values. These two processes entail that, as humans, we do not have a dominion over the environment or full, autonomous control over our agential capacities, but instead, have a form of interconnectedness that results from *adjusting* to and *integrating* these varying factors and dynamics. This theme is then developed into a matrix, of character positions from the highest form of connection between internal and external environments or the “integrated subject”, to the worst possible connection or a “fractured subject”. These are end points in this matrix and should be seen as describing a processual phenomenon (Shilling, 2008: 21-22).

Dewey connected his views on habitual relations to a moral and aesthetic sense of social interaction and norms. Moving beyond the view of habits as mechanical repetitions of actions, thoughts and behaviours do not absolve us from a moralistic discussion of whether habits are good or not. Dewey was not simply moralistic, however, and took a more ethical view of how creative habits and stabilised habitual structures of acting can best be co-ordinated, so as to provide the best conditions for allowing agents to express their agential capacities and for the environment to enable as many affordance possibilities as a situation allows. This dynamic co-constitutive relationship is important because it does not place an emphasis on either the individual/agential or structural/environmental capacities of social thought. Instead, it requires us to understand that habitual and, for that matter, sensual, action and being is “most fully funded where the transactive individual-social relationship happens - in places... of experience” (Cutchin, 2007: 511).

It is apparent that the above discussion on habitual relations remains at a certain degree of abstraction. In the context of this thesis, it is important to anchor any discussion of habits to a defined set or sequence of actions and behaviours in relation to a specific social or object relationship that promotes

mutual emergence, or stability. This anchor will be the “favourite”. A favourite can take the form of an object, person, activity, location or set of routinised actions/activities, they begin to give the forces of habit something to focus on and allow sedimentation and exploration to occur, as the need arises.

What is a Favourite?

For the time being, the notion of what a favourite is will remain on this abstracted plane, but will become more specified in the context of how favourites relate to social actors in specific milieus. I will begin with an outline of what favourites are *in general* before relating these insights to how those with autism may interact with and alter a more focused conceptualisation of what a favourite is in relation to the aims of the research. Favourites as a topic in their own right are relatively unexplored and the closest proxy regarding a discussion of potential favourites is as markers of identity or places formation (Proshansky, 1978, Schultz et al, 1989, Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, 2009). This research project, however, hopes to be more exploratory and inclusive of what a “favourite” can mean in terms of potential social interaction with the world.

What a favourite is cannot be defined absolutely, because a key feature of this term is specific to the participants, whether they relate to a relationship such as a favourite friend, a favourite object such as a medal, a favourite experience such as sky diving or favourite activity such as playing video games. A common conception related to favourites is that they are positive events or interactions that people experience and engage with. This is often further extended into claims regarding social self-esteem and brings a stronger form of connection between the object, person or event that provides emotional, physical, intellectual or spiritual nourishment. Favourites are also cyclical in nature in that they are often sought after in order to reconnect, re-experience, revisit, strengthen, renew or regain the positive social, physical and emotional valence

they have for social actors (Korpela and Ylen, 2007). Favourites are also difficult to define because the term in everyday use is relatively broad and non-specific. It can refer to a cultural event or experience such as films that capture the collective imagination of the audience, a collection of “old favourites” such as a collection box of biscuits, to more recent interpretations of the conceptual idea of favourites with digital services utilising favourite collections to sort and store “favourite” videos, articles, photos, screenshots and any other kind of digital artefact or process.

All of the above has so far related to the more individualistic aspects of favourites. Returning to favourites as cyclical, a question that occurs in everyday talk often will refer to “what is your favourite X?” These questions require the person to reflexively and performatively consider *why this* is their favourite and thus alters any stable notion of what a favourite means. Because such a question can be considered part of the mundane, everyday small talk stock (Garfinkel, 2006, Sacks, 1992) there is an expectation that social actors *will* have favourites and that it is expected that reasoning can be provided. If this question is asked amongst groups of people who share the same hobbies, interests or tastes, this simple question can offer a means for people to further bond with this interest group and also serve as an anchor in which to explore value differences. Questions regarding normativity, or what the discourses and historical background of a specific inquiry make possible to think of as a “norm”, (Foucault, 1972) come into play here as comparisons of what is acceptable in terms of a particular group of people who share a hobby will be defined or policed in some way.

Dewey would frame these kinds of matters around whether favourites provide the resources to develop wholesome relations that are positive for the individual, the group as a whole and the context they are located within. The anchor must remain stable in order for the group to remain coherent. We can extend this to a wider concern with activities that are frowned upon as deviant or

“weird”. Weird in this context is “a particular kind of perturbation. It involves a sensation of wrongness: a weird entity or object is so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist, or at least it should not exist here” (Fisher 2016: 15). This sense of being out of place and being wrong can take a number of forms including: being slightly weird or “a little funny, but essentially harmless”, interests can also be strange such as a quirky person having a fascination with and keeping a large number of cats, those that are “a little sad”, such as collecting stamps or other, seemingly non-beneficial items that provide a non-worthwhile investment in connection to the amount of wealth or effort that is put into them and the resulting sense of satisfaction that is to be gained from such activities from an outside perspective. Finally, there are those whose hobbies or interests are dangerous to themselves or others and are often subject to highly guarded and affectively charged social taboos which encourage adherence to these boundaries. Fisher has argued that the weird forces us to accept that we are in the presence of the new and that our old forms of reference and meaning are unhelpful (Fisher, 2016: 13). Those with seemingly odd habits are, in the dynamic sense outlined by Dewey, adapting to and making their own habitual engagements in connection to the resources available to them. Thus, I do not take a moralistic stance regarding the favourites of autistic individuals. Rather, they are seen as being means of managing and coping with the context in which they are located. As such, they should be investigated empirically and not assumed in advance.

Habitual Favourites as a Concept

In giving some beginning orientations to both the notions of habit and favourites, I will now begin to offer a preliminary outline of a core concept in the thesis that will develop over the course of this project. The central contribution of the thesis will be to demonstrate how a pragmatist inflected understanding of habits can be understood alongside how those with autism interact with their “favourites”. The conceptual short-hand that I will use to bring together the insights drawn

from pragmatist conceptions of habits and favourites is “habitual favourites”. Initially, this describes the ways in which those with autism come in contact with a favourite, and then enter into habitualised relations with this favourite through a number of different social processes, actions and events. I will explore the ways in which the notion of habitual favourites is inflected through discussions of the sensory dynamics at play in developing, defining and maintaining sufficient levels of engagement with a favourite so that it remains present within specific spatio-temporal contexts, I will argue that the dynamic interplay of sensory experience management is impacted significantly by the personal experiences of each person with autism and the specific modalities of the means of engaging with said favourite’s forces us to consider a multi-faceted exploration of what makes autistic favourites. Further, I examine how I, as a sociological researcher with Asperger’s Syndrome, is impacted by the very same dynamics I describe from my research participants, raising important methodological and theoretical questions regarding identity and self-expression.

Within a pragmatist inspired lexicon, the enfolding and interconnected relations between sensory experience, subjective experience, object interactions and environmental affordances is Dewey’s concept of transaction. This concept begins from the recognition that the social world and social agents’ responses to it are a “combination of continuity and action in the world... Dewey’s transactional view means that elements seen as separate... are really *part of each other*... person and environment are considered co-defining and co-constitutive” (Cutchin, 2007: 507, emphasis in original). These transactions are further seen as functional in that they rearrange and adjust the uncertainty and instability in a dynamic world that actualises for the benefit of entities that exist in a particular milieu for particular ends (Garrison, 2001). In order to refine and focus our attention to the sensory dimensions of social life, we can expand this transactional conception of social interaction through considering what Sarah Pink has termed an “emplaced” methodology. Pink, quoting Howes (2005b), argues that whereas “the paradigm of “embodiment” implies an integration of mind and body, the emergent paradigm of emplacement suggests the sensuous

interrelationship of body-mind-environment” (Howes, 2005b: 7 in Pink, 2009). Embodiment sought to examine how the body can itself be source of knowing independent and intertwined with the mind. Emplacement seeks to account for the relations between bodies, minds, materiality and sensuousness of the social and environmental milieu (Pink, 2009: 25). The concept of emplacement can then further be productively linked to the concept of “milieu”.

The notion of milieu describes:

the specific patterns of relevance that constitute a space of independencies in relation to which connections may take hold [...] [where] the world is not only open and dynamic, but it is also plural, that there is a relative outside to every milieu and that that these interactions between milieus may have a bearing upon the success of a connection (Savransky, 2016a: 135).

“Milieu” as such describes the way in which causes and effects interact with each other to influence the world in decisive ways. Instead of deciding in advance what matters, we need to attune our inquiries to the affordances and specificities of the event or phenomenon in question and to accept that we cannot influence or know what these connections will entail. As such, our emplaced body-mind-environments are open, dynamic and plural; they interact in ways that may reinforces some modes of action and prevent effectiveness in others. Here, causality is complex, emergent and divergent. However, I want to temper the use of the term environment in this context. Savransky argues along with Serres (1995a) and Canguilhem (2008) that environment is too static a term for the ecological relations of emplacement. Environment, for Serres, insists that other objects, subjects and events be situated and maintained around it, whereas a milieu refers to “a pure system of relations without supports” (Canguilhem, 2008: 103). As such, the centre ground is composed by

the relations that compose it and are intertwined with it. A milieu is thus a “debate” (ibid: 113), which denotes “a fragile, precarious and metastable negotiation between elements that are brought into contact” (Savransky, 2016a: 136). I will draw from these processual and pragmatist notions of emplacement and milieu to refer to the complex and inter-woven relations and specificities of mind-body-milieu events. Because these events are relational and depend on the specific elements through which they are constituted to persist and exist at all, the topics through which they are brought to bear will alter their constitution to reflect the demands they place on thinking. For example, thinking about Autietnography Part 1 and 2 (Chapters 4 and 5), means attending to the ways in which the autoethnographer and their relationships to others is affected by how they observe, react and write about and react to diverse experiences. Specifically, particular forms of emplacements that are inflected by autism impact and interrupt autoethnographic challenges of narcissist navel-gazing.

I now return to the discussion of “dynamic” and “diagnostic” modes of understanding disabilities to argue that we need to move beyond them. To do this, we need to alter our perspective by considering the ways in which those with autism blur the binaries between reason and emotion, systematising and creative cognitive styles. By performing this complexification of systematic modes of thought, we begin to see the diverse modes of engagement that those with autism embody. This alternative mode of thinking enables a more diverse and nuanced sensual appreciation of the emplaced experiences of those with autism. This approach simultaneously enables us to see how a transactive, milieu focused perspective highlights the distributed notions of sociality that mainstream autism theory fails to capture.

Beyond Dynamic and Diagnostic Definitions

Neither dynamic nor diagnostic modes are adequate to fully conceptualise and explain what autism is or how it can be lived without recognising that their interplay is central. We need new ways to think with and about autism to remove the static burdens of the diagnostic mode and the conservative moralism of the dynamic mode. I now want to explore some divergent ways of thinking about what autism is beyond the general DSM-V lists of characteristics.

Rather than having an innate or intuitive grasp of human social conduct, many people with autism relate to and understand animals and their modes of being in the world in more in-depth and attuned means than many NT groups. A famous example of such a phenomenon is Temple Grandin's (1996, 2000, 2015) interventions in the development of humane treatment methods for animals bred for food. She notes how her mind works much like several machines. In "Thinking in Pictures" (1986), she describes the way in which her brain operates like a tape recorder or video tape, where words and ideas are processed and imprinted on tapes and could be filled into relevant storage areas in her mind that could be accessed when required *if* she was calm and focused. Over the years, in a later article, Grandin (2000a) adds that additional processes, akin to a web browser also operate in her mind. She describes how when asked to come up with ideas, she searches through files for images and their many resonant associations, which are not necessarily related to the concern at hand. This requires cognitive intervention and she can visualise a 3D picture of a device she is designing and utilising processes similar to digital editing technologies to explore different affordances and capacities of such a device. (Grandin, 2000a).

Grandin utilised this capacity for attention to detail and systematic thinking to attend to the ways in which cows, when heading to slaughter, would panic and create chaos. She sensed their emotional and affective distress, apparent in their grunts, uptight bodies and manic attention switching. Having studied the way in which cows visually pay attention to the world, she devised two innovations that revolutionised the industry a series of lights to guide cows in the right direction based on their kinaesthetic affordances and herd behaviours, alongside the “hugging machine” (Grandin and Johnson, 2005). Based on Grandin’s own tactile experiences where intense pressure helped to stimulate her and relieve stress of dealing with intense stimuli, she translated her emotional responses into logical thought procedures and searched for ways to design a machine that could provide the same level of comfort to cows. This meant visualising and searching for material that would suit cows’ tactile and pressure tolerance, as well as the ways in which the kinaesthetic and haptic dimensions of the slaughter process intertwined.

Following Despret (2004) and her analysis of Little Hans, a horse who was thought to be able to compute mathematical problems due to an understanding of counting, because when asked mathematical questions, Hans tapped his foot to the number required for the answer. This analysis, however, on closer inspection, was flawed and a more complex answer was proffered. Researchers found that Hans attended to human body language and intentional gestures to gauge if he got the correct answer. In other words, Hans and the human handlers were communicating via bodily, gestural and linguistic affective processes that showcased a union of rational and emotional structures, where the boundaries mingled and waned depending on the scenario in which Hans and the humans were located. We can argue that in addition to the video/tape recorder and web browser logical processes of her brain, Grandin was also learning to be affected (Latour 2004)⁶ by the cow’s emotional and affective

⁶ Also see Despret (2004) and her account of being affected in relation to Hans which she in turn draws from James (1890, 1958a), another founding pragmatist philosopher.

responses and transduced these into a more rational, systematic means to solve the issue. She brought her own, self-emplaced knowledge of tactile comfort into designing a similar device or object that could be used to bring the cows into dialogue. The cows gave off certain affective cues that caused Grandin to consider how to best “become-cow” and figure herself as a member of the species and use her emplaced strengths. Again following Despret, the cows were not mere objects or non-agential subjects these categories were redistributed depending on the situation. Grandin learnt from the cows that her own solution to her problems could be used to transform the bodily states and kinaesthetic and haptic character of cow’s movement to the slaughterhouse.

The combination of rational, organisation processes of video recorders and web browsers and the emplaced and situated nature of tactile/haptic comfort showcases the interlocking rational, cognitive, emotional, affective and embodied processes that were mobilised for a person with autism to be “affected” by an event. Grandin is posing a direct challenge to medical definitions of autism that categorise the senses as a matter related solely to repetitive actions and not a domain to be considered in communicational spheres. For her, the encounter between autistic modes of experience and animal experience is “immersed... into a world populated with sensorial ebbs and flows, intensities of touch and pressure, agitations and anxieties” (Todd and Hynes, 2017: 10). Sensory engagement was engaged with creatively here and was a highly social event, albeit, one that incorporated animals more often than humans in many stages of the process⁷. The social is thus not separate from the sensorial. Further, Grandin demonstrates the potential of neurodiverse ways of thinking. She takes the metaphors of the brain like a computer literally, with the attendant associations of mechanistic, unfeeling process and yet, sought to understand the cows as beings-in-themselves with desires, motivations and non-human modes of interaction with their environment, rather than assuming

⁷ I will return to this observation in Chapter 4 in exploring how this intimate connection to animal sociality affects our conceptions of what it means to be human.

purely human, rational thought alone could solve the problems in the encounter between animal and human.

However, it is important to temper the idea that Grandin offers a “model” for going beyond representational modes of recognition. As Todd and Hynes argue, “In her rush to *identify with animals*, she performs her own abstraction... she reproduces the commonsense presupposition that to think is essentially to recognise” (ibid: 11, emphasis in original). This recognition of moving between representational and emplaced modes of engagement requires a framework in which distributed forms of relationality are allowed to co-exist and influence each other. Later in the chapter, I will argue that the concepts of the quasi-object and parasite provide such opportunities.

A key recognition by Grandin however, is that while she is able to:

control the rate at which pictures come onto the “computer screen” in my imagination. Some people with autism are not able to do this [...] images explode into a web of [...] pictures that are interrelated. The decision-making process can become “locked up” and overloaded with pictures coming in all at once. (Grandin, 2000a, no pagination).

The process is liable to break down or be disrupted by too much stimuli, whether cognitive, sensory, emotional or social. The numbers of possible disruptions and the increased impact they have on those with autism may be the central characteristic that separates autistic individuals and those without.

I will explore these ideas more in Chapter 4 and also explore in-depth the idea of “being affected” in Chapter 6. These chapters will consider an exploration of the nature of a distributed subjectivity in self-expression and affective interaction. I now want to turn to how we can combine sensory sociology’s insights with the concept of habitual favourites developed above to get a sense of how they relate to and connect to those with autism.

I now return to the notion of habits and their connections to favourites to apply some of the notions I have developed above in relation to pragmatism and sensory sociology to autistic ways of being explicitly. In doing so, I add detail and depth to abstract concepts in relation to the key study group, those with autism.

Reassessing Sensory Sociology and Habitual Favourites With Autism

As I noted earlier, the concepts of transaction, milieu and emplaced location help to underscore a relational and social-ecological approach to sensory experience and habitual relations. The transactional emplaced understanding of social action to describe how our senses can occupy multiple scales and can affect our bodies’ capacity to expand senses of selfhood can be further considered from a philosophical position. Jean Luc Nancy states:

to listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it open up in me as well as around me: it opens up inside me as well as outside and it is through such a double, quadruple or sextuple opening that a self can take place (Nancy, 2007: 14).

This statement points to the interweaving of the multiple and overlapping senses of interiority of the self and of the external environment. Just as we can have many scales of local transactions in the external social world via objects or relations to other social groupings, we can experience many kinds of different perceptions of our own sensuous sense of selfhood via a number of scales and relations to the sensory object or experience transaction. I will demonstrate below how such diverse considerations for people with autism can be explored with the concepts and literature I have already reviewed.

Returning to disability, we can understand disability as something that impairs people from engaging with social life and can be caused by divergent workings of the mind or body from what is considered “normal”. When understood in this way, a favourite activity then is, to a large degree, shaped by potential boundaries and difficulty of engagement alongside concerns with personal satisfaction and identity expression and building. Abbott-Chapman and Robertson (2009), focusing on how adolescents engage with their favourite places spatially, note that if we utilise the concept of affordance to explore connections possible between a social actor and their environment, it is possible to show the number and potential of connections for affordances is constrained, beyond a poverty of affordances, by barriers to access and engagement (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, 2009: 421). For those with autism, focusing on the sensory domains of engagement, an example would be of how a favourite communal place to hang out, such as pubs or clubs, may be highly uncomfortable for autistic individuals due to intensity in both sound levels and the concentration of people.

If we think of how sensory identities are constructed for those with autism, difficulties related to sensory perceptions and experiences whether internally via misunderstanding or lacking the tools to interpret and make sense of sensations, or, externally via a confusing torrent of images, sounds, smells, can cause social life to be highly problematic. This can lead to many idiosyncratic

practices and an increased attention to particular modes of sensory engagement. Taking a shower and getting ready in the morning, is hyper contextualised and hyper-focused, causing the person with autism to break down the components of the process into minutely detailed steps. Can I cope if the shower does not warm up as fast as usual today? Can I cope with the tag on the back of this shirt, or will I need to cut it out? These kinds of questions relate to and extenuate reflexive rituals outlined by Vannini et al (2012). Such an intense focus on these reflexive rituals can then cause problems for somatic rituals, because a sense of dislocation is established.

If such varied and intense considerations can occur for stable and mundane habits, to alter habitual actions can be a task filled with difficulties for those with autism. Dewey argues that in order to change our habits, it is imperative to not attempt to immediately break away from the rituals that sustain the actions and patterned behaviours of such habits. Instead, a series of careful considerations is required, to view the “means and ends”, of a goal, we must:

take our mind off from it and attend to the act which is next to be performed [...] To think of the end signifies to extend and enlarge our view of the act to be performed [...] to look at the next act in perspective, not permitting it to occupy the entire field of vision... Means... are intermediates [...] for the same series [of actions] taken distributively (Dewey 1922: 26-7).

To change habits requires us to see a divergent pathway, to note a similarity to a connected, yet not identical means of acting that enables the possibility of altering our habitual engagements. It allows us to see the multiple, “interpenetration of habits” and the means by which they “overlap”, and thus draw comparisons, which find their ground in stable socio-bio-psychological formations. These questionings and the intense confusion that may come from

processes of reflexive and somatic ritual disruption can thus be translated into Dewey's concern for how individuals sustain a sense of identity. For those with autism, a fractured identity may be one that takes its toll on their physical, psychological and social well-being. Sensory or other forms of overload may result from not being fully in tune with or able to adapt to their surroundings and as such require intervention. On the other hand, integrated subjects may have moments of epiphany or flow, where the connection between internal or external environments and the tasks at hand are synchronised to such a degree that a state of pure calm, affective pleasure and a sense of wholeness may arise. If fractured, reflexive rituals are not structured around a habituated, stable grounding of actions, the iconic or pure experience of sensory data overwhelms capacities to form indexical relations. If a key feature of autism is difficulty in understanding self-feelings and others' perspectives, indexical processing is a core problem in conceptualising autistic sensual experience in this way. It should be noted that these two dimensions are the extreme ends of this continuum and require very specific social, spatial and material conditions in order to become a reality. The vast majority of social actors will oscillate between these two extremes and will often occupy a centre or just left or right of centre position.

Michel Serres, The Parasite and Quasi-Objects

Michel Serres is a wide ranging and prolific author who has spent much of his life engaging with questions related to science, nature, ecology, information, language, connections between literature and scientific concepts and, most relevant for us, the sensuous nature of human existence. He has sought novel and nuanced conceptualisations of the mechanisms that connect humans to each other and the wider world. Serres is a complex thinker who is difficult to summarise cogently without losing some of the eloquence and subtlety of his writings. His work on the scientific developments on complexity, topology and literary poeticism go back on themselves, reorient to new foci and place almost

no boundaries on what can be drawn upon to conceptualise the question at hand. I have attempted to do this in this chapter by going back to my earlier arguments and supplementing them with the new material considered.

In “The Five Senses” (2008), Serres’ key concern relates to how western society has divided conceptions of the senses and become “drunk” and “addicted” to language. This has occurred to such a high degree in modernity that we abstract from the environment and become embroiled in the conflictual and divisive notions of language that seek to separate out the world into discrete blocks of experience. We seek to go beyond sensory experience and convey everything in language and informational terms; we seek to turn the “hard” world of material and physical sensations that seem so fixed, into the “soft” world of language and symbolic meaning, which we can play with through interpretation. Against this view, Serres argues that we should think of the senses as topological and the skin as a locus of a space of boundaries and weaves of interconnected dimensions such that we at once touch ourselves, touch others and others touch us. This also works for the other senses so that we can divide what we hear into our own internal bodily machinations, the external environment and the medium between such structures and experiences. In a surprisingly “autistic” means of describing sensory experience, Serres understands kinaesthetic and proprioceptive elements of mist and fog, such that they at once coat the skin with a light, thin film that produces an ephemeral and uncertain sensory landscape, or a thick, viscous material boundary that obscures our vision, disrupts our sense of smell, muffles our hearing. Serres points to the disruptive boundary crossings of not quite material, not quite ephemeral, not quite informational. Such a process describes a number of sensory confusions and difficulties in autistic individuals where light from strobe or fluorescent lighting can feel as though they are physically bearing down on their bodies, or, where hyposensitive individuals move through life not being able to get an intense enough experience to truly “feel” anything.

Serres can be utilised to further this innovative conceptualisation of sensory experience and the many kinds of mediums or connection vectors that bridge the gaps between structure, agency, language, and emplacement and so on. This process is denoted by Serres to be the quasi-object, which extends social constructionist arguments with the claim that social relations to objects are not “objective”, but are always mediated and thus are always constructed by social individuals. Objects can also construct social groups (Brown and Stenner, 2009: 56). Quasi-objects enable human groups to slow down their social connections to others and the world by referring social meanings, roles and attachments to objects. Thus, creating and connecting individuals and collectives to each other and the object and subject positions taken could not exist without this intimate comingling. This can be demonstrated by games of “It”, where the person is designated by a touch, or object icon to be “It” whereas the other chasers are anonymous until they are designated the status “It”. The game of football or the like also serve as demonstrative; the ball in these games mediates the social relations between the players, crowds, viewers and so on. The types of relations between them, the spatial configuring of the players, as a team and individually in formations to bring the ball to the goal, are inscribed and distributed in and through the actions of the ball. The ball becomes object when it is kicked with the disregard one might have for inanimate objects. It also becomes subject when it produces agentic change in human conduct and action, producing new forms of intermingling relationality and social interaction. Thus, the ball draws attention to itself as a kind of subject, able to be filled with meaning and intentions. These formulations can also be conceptualised to operate for autistic special interests. While these do not necessarily have to be objects, the intense and pleasurable, on specific subjects or sensory phenomena such as visual patterns or tactile sensations, serves as an autistic individual’s means of slowing down social relations. They bring together a diverse array of factors, into a manageable “quasi”-object of interest and use these to enter into the social world. Furthermore, the favourite becomes both subject and object in allowing those with autism to learn the social, material, temporal and spatial transacted affordances of the world through the qualities present in a specific

favourite. I explore these themes and further explore the quasi-object concept in Chapter 3.

The need for such a conceptualisation is given, for Serres, in his view that all social interaction is mediated by “third” terms that, while they are consciously excluded, such as emotional or affective responses in scientific work, are inescapably constitutive and so always remerge and shape the process. This phenomenon is thought through in the understanding of “the parasite” (Serres, 2007). The concept of the parasite is a multivalent one that Serres explores through La Fontaine’s fable of the farmer and the rats to introduce the practicalities and conceptual themes at stake. In brief, a country rat is invited by a city rat to dine at a tax farmer’s house. They are interrupted when the farmer senses his goods are being tampered with and flee, only to return when the disruption is gone. The country rat is a guest of the city rat, parasitising the hospitality of the town rat, both parasitise the food of the farmer, and then they are disturbed by the noise of the farmer who breaks the emergent parasitical relation. The farmer is himself a parasite as his food is based on tax levies and not produced by him, this relationship being disturbed by the rats. Brown and Stenner refer to this process as a “cascade” of relations where objects and events flow down the chain or relations (Brown and Stenner 2009: 47). The specific contexts are important here as Serres notes the key feature of the parasite is its specificity. The tax farmer is just like the produce farmers, rats can slip into houses relatively undetected and noise disrupts their raids. Parasitical relations are about taking without giving and thus prevent a system from reaching equilibrium until a disruption or “noise” distorts it, only for the original relation to remerge. By viewing a set of social relations in this way, parasitical relations force us to recognise that we never exist in an unmediated relation to our internal worlds or external structures. If communication between two objects or subjects were immediate, then it would stop being communication and become the exact opposite, immediacy (Brown and Stenner, 2009).

This is termed a third space in which we are open to expression and permits mediation to occur. A further intermediary is required:

a third who may have no relation to the two stations but who only relates to their relation. To parasite in this sense is to branch onto an existing channel and hence to intercept or interrupt that existing relation. (Brown and Stenner, 2009: 45)

Each relation in turn is attempting to reach the position where they do not have to parasitise others and stands above the chains of relationality.

How does this relate to autism? Autism as a neurodevelopmental condition which incorporates biological, genetic, physiological, environmental and social factors can itself be viewed as a parasitical problematic. For Serres, the parasite which in French refers to three, interconnected modes of reference: biological parasites, social parasites and informational parasites or a disruptive noise, is something that encompasses each of these domains and creates disruptive effects. Autism parasitises the brain, physiological and neurological pathways of the body, this in turn parasitises self and other understandings of social interaction which in turn parasitises the meanings and information that is conveyed through social and biological processes. This is not a linear process as Serres reminds us; space, time, matter and information are topological in nature (Abbas, 2005). This refers to the way in which biology, culture, sociality and meaning interweave and fold into each other so that they are interdependent, co-becoming entities. What matters are the specific ways in which these topological folds interact and become with each other (Savransky, 2016a). In summary, we could say that it is parasites all the way up and down for those with autism.

In a practical sense, and in a very interesting allusion to how an autistic individual who is hypersensitive to audio and proprioceptive sensation might experience such a scenario, Serres dissects a scene where a telephone call is made in the middle of a banquet:

At the feast everyone is talking [...] There is a ringing noise, the telephone. Communication cuts conversation, the noise interrupting the messages. As soon as I start to talk with this new interlocutor, the sounds of the banquet become noise for the new “us”. The system has shifted. If I approach the table, the noise slowly becomes conversation. In the system, noise and message exchange roles according to the position of the observer and the action of the actor.”
(Serres 2007: 68)

The noise or third position in relations must be suppressed or somehow accounted for if the border crossings and management of the noise at each role is to be somewhat successful. Additionally, Serres refers to the telephone ringing as a kind of taunt that no matter how repressed, will always return to parasite the individual. For autistic individuals, this process is even more fraught with the intense sociality of the dinner table already performing a parasitic function with the potentially overwhelming combination of smells, sounds, tastes and colours. Because autism parasitises itself in this context, it is at once a disruptive and negative force, but also one that enables unique kinds of mediation as noted with Grandin’s work. This tumultuous intermediate nature of autistic being is what the quasi-object and parasite concepts can help us to examine.

I will explore these conceptual themes in Serres in this chapter further in Chapter 3 (Habitual Favourites) on empirical manifestations of habitual favourites. This chapter serves as an introduction to my concerns and gives the context in which they have been framed.

Habitual Favourites as Quasi-Objects - Through the Sensory Autistic Manifold

If habits are responses to and actions on the internal and external domains of social existence, then we can now outline what a favourite object/experience consists of in theoretical terms and connect the discussion to Serres' conceptual matrix. We could say that such favourites serve as quasi-objects that strike a relationship between slowing down social life for those with autism and finding a means to balance degrees of social integration that are based on specific life experiences and external conditions.

Habits can be summarised as:

incorporat(ing) within themselves social expectations, physical objects, tools and technologies in the natural and social environment. Habits are *modes of connection* to the world, shaping us and the environment according to their specific logic and affordances” (Shilling 2008: 15 emphasis in original).

This means that habits can be transferred to objects, environments and inscribed as affordances to act and also constrain actions and thus are crucial to shaping the conditions of the possible. If, a favourite cannot be adequately defined in a general sense as an experience, object or person, this is because the formation and structuring of what a favourite is and what activities it entails

depends on the favourite in question. If they are media related, then replays and remixing may be important. If the favourite is a particular physical object, the spatial, temporal and material dimensions can be important. However, my argument is that the theoretical tools of quasi-objects and a pragmatist understanding of habit can be useful means to give parameters for research to focus upon. A favourite object/experience can then be described as an activity that is formed over time and serves a form of stabilisation. They are quasi-objects in that they slow down and mediate between conjoint intersubjective and interobjective relations to orient our attention and structure our capacities and potential for interaction. Via the myriad processes outlined above, these quasi-object relations, in duration, come to embody habitual routines, norms and practices, extending and constraining the kind of affordances we can seek to employ via our emplaced cognitive and embodied potentials. They also embody our relations to external structures and the ways in which we imprint our habits onto the environment and how they become incorporated back into subjects. This can take many forms such as a material object like a blanket that can serve as tactile, reliable comfort with a pleasurable texture. For those who are hyposensitive this may be a rough texture to stimulate them and for those who are hypersensitive, a soft texture to prevent excess sensory stimulation from external sources and force a singular focus for the person.

The parasite should thus not be viewed in a simplistic negative light, as noise is constitutive of the complexity of social systems. Without parasitic relations, the universe would be composed of simple, one-dimensional cause and effect patterns that would not allow for a world constantly on the fringe of the probable and possible (Serres, 2007: 127). Autism can thus be best seen through this lens if we view the parasite as one that “interrupts at first glance, consolidates when you look again” (ibid: 14). Autism can be viewed at “first glance”, in Serres’ terms, as the country rat, which is hesitant to return after the farmer’s noisy disruption. They “could live on simple and easy chains, but... is horrified of the complex. (They do) not understand that chance, risk, anxiety and even disorder can consolidate a system” (ibid 14). However, when viewed through the

lenses provided by Hacking's notion of the autistic manifold, the spectrum is replaced by the metaphor of the manifold as "Varied or diverse in appearance, form or character, having various forms, features, relations and applications... Manifolds are not simply linear; they come in any number of dimensions" (Hacking, 2010: 635). The possibility of multiple manifestations has the important implication that autistic behaviours, characteristics and issues, are not solely confined to the people with autism as a bounded subject. Rather, they emerge in relation to specific contexts and thus, habitual sensory relations are relational domains. The concern to view parasitic relations as at once negative and disruptive, a neutral mediating force of social and natural systems and as a positive force that can lead to novel conceptualisations and ways of being, is important for thinking about how to conceive of autism in the context of being a disability or as an extension of human neurodiversity.

One way we can relate Serres' insights into disability studies of the senses more generally is from the perspective of "dis/ability" studies (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014). This approach to dis/ability acknowledges that many disabled people want and desire to engage with modernist, liberal and humanist ideals and identifications such as human rights, independence and equal employment opportunities. At the same time, the means through which this is made possible often requires us to think again about the kinds of relations necessary in order to achieve these aims. In other words, disability "disses" (disrespects) ideas of ability such that we can think of "discapitalism", "disindependence" for example (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014: 2). Dis/ability requires us to accept the fact that for people with disabilities, the relations of wage labour, for example, are inherently ableist in their assumptions of a healthy, flexible and forever self-improving neoliberal subject⁸. Dis/ability "does some troubling work to the

⁸ See Gunaratnam (2013) on the intersections between race, disability and forms of care enacted in increasingly neoliberal health care settings. Also see Berger and Mohr (2010) photographic portrayals of migrant labour conditions and motivations for striving to be increasingly flexible in the face of discrimination and humiliation.

register of the normal and the condition of the human” (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014: 5). Dis/ability constantly asks us to think again about what we know and keep the contradictory tensions of norms of human and disability in constant flux. As such, they should be “viewed as frictional: rubbing up against one another in interesting, dare we say, desirable ways” (ibid: 5).

This friction-like desire precisely captures the positive, neutral and negative aspects of parasitical relations I have highlighted. Dis/ability both works the parasitical boundaries of the positive, neutral and negative modes of address, to make us aware of the fact that not even neurotypicals achieve the ideals of modern, liberal humanism. These virtuous abstractions parasitise our conception of what being human is. Goodley and Runswick-Cole refer to this as “the seductive nature of (hyper)ability” (Ibid: 5). Autistic modes of being rub against neurotypical notions of humanity and ask us to consider, in specific milieus, when desires for normative modes of relating are relevant and when the non-normative is most applicable for flourishing. I will return to these questions in the concluding chapter of the thesis and expand upon how the habitual, quasi-object and parasitic framework developed here can complement the dis/ability studies approach.

As discussed, Serres is concerned to displace what he viewed as an over determining focus on language that reduced our embodied and conscious attention towards the sensory aspect of life. However, as Connor (1999) has noted, this almost vitriolic attack on language is a surprising exception to his overall intellectual strategy of breaking down dichotomies and showing how they imbricate and co-constitute one another rather than being mutually exclusive and opposed. His formulations uncharacteristically reify language as removing us from sensation. Autism troubles this formulation in the imbrication of language and sensory experience and can be precisely formulated in Serres’ terms of variegated folds. The use and deployment of special interest frameworks in social settings take varied forms, but can be shaped around the

following guiding principles. The first of these is the interplay between cognitive and sensuous capacities of discussions and re-enactments of particular aspects of a special interest. This might involve quoting a particular line from a film, which will often be in the stylised manner of the actor who spoke it. To what extent are these cognitive capacities aided by sensual, perhaps haptic memories of the emotions and contexts in which the event and utterance occurred. The utterance should not just be taken in a linguistic sense, but the affective capacities inflected in the tone, pitch and other factors of voice impact on the meaning and effect of given utterances.

This relates to another known autistic trait of the difficulties and pleasures in the use of language. The former revolves around the literal understandings of metaphors, aphorisms and locally context bound statements that convey a group's social and cultural knowledge and dynamics in linguistic codifications (Motamedi-Fraser, 2015). Autistic individuals often display a love of word play and this can further extend into playful experimentation with grammatical forms and semantic structure. Some key examples include repetition of a particular word that may be fixated upon due to confusion, curiosity or the pleasurable sound or, more crucially, the touch of the tongue and mouth movements in combination with the aural utterance. The arbitrary nature of language is revealed as words are taken from their contexts in sentence structure and come to form a life of their own in an affective and symbolic mode of autistic sociality.

As Kanngieser (2012) notes, this capacity for tone, rhythm, timbre and other semio-affective phenomena, portrays a particular way of engaging with the political and performative dimensions of social life. Silence, for example during a conversation that has a momentum of turn taking, can abruptly distort this flow and bring attention to the fact that the aural and gestural atmosphere of the group takes on a life of its own. If we take a dialogic view of interaction as outlined by Bakhtin (1981), we can begin to note the senses of anticipation, preparation and co-construction of both listener and speaker positions. This

precisely concerns linguistic and material concerns given in a situation and thus cannot be abstracted purely to linguistic criteria. These examples showcase how the linguistic and sensory intertwine, but do not degrade from a sensory understanding of the world.

Conclusion

I wish to end this chapter by reminding the reader of the importance of integrating the social, biological and cultural in comprising a rich and nuanced account of sensory experience. The concern to encapsulate and develop such a framework is underscored by Serres approach to his work and the inspiration that it can foster. There are two ways in which his work relates to this project. First, his analytical strategy of searching for connections across the domains of natural and social sciences, humanities and arts, captures some of the background forces that inspire and drive this thesis. This is informed by a topological understanding of social relations and time in which the past, present and future all blend together in a topological space of intensities and boundary conditions. Serres famously uses the image of a crumpled handkerchief to demonstrate such a proposition where the creases and folds interrelate and weave each other's connections and possibilities of existing and collaboration (Abbas, 2005: 3). Abbas further notes that for Serres', the senses themselves are topological and quasi-objects in that the senses fold into each other and we can touch ourselves, be touched by others and thus involved in an active dynamic relation.

Serres' writing style is one that combines elegant prose consisting of poetry, myths, scientific facts and theories, creating one segment of rich imagery and in the next section, paragraphs of analytical insights that underpin his descriptive dimensions. As Johnsen (2005) comments, his work produces philosophy in the broadest possible sense and, does not write about philosophy as in

commentaries on ontology or metaphysics. While this chapter has followed a conventional academic style of outlining the literature concerning the thesis, two further chapters (Chapters 4 and 5), will begin to explore my own, embodied and sensual academic practice. Then, taking the lead from Vannini et al (2012), the empirical chapters will contain pertinent vignettes of sensory ethnographic events that serve to not only set the scene for the analytical context, but attempt to provide an entry point for the reader to gain a sense of the atmospheres, sense-scapes and dynamism that occurs with an emplaced methodology

Chapter 2 - Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss, describe and explore the methodological issues that were raised and put into practice during my research. The first section of the chapter will provide a breakdown of my research design, how I gained access to the field-site and the research methods employed, including open movement focus groups and participant-observation. Secondly, I will outline some methodological and practical challenges that arose from structuring my research in these particular ways. I will then go on to consider some representational concerns that arose from my sample that reflect on issues in autism research in general. I will then go on to describe my use of autoethnography in focusing on methodological issues in my research design. I will assess the potential of analytic autoethnography in thinking about my status and positionality. I will conclude by briefly introducing the next chapter.

Gaining Access to The Field and Negotiating Research Design

This section will outline the processes of setting up the entry into the fieldwork sites and the practices that were pursued during the fieldwork.

To begin with, the researcher contacted the head of the charity and the organiser of the clubs. The research was outlined to the gatekeepers as an exploratory and open-ended project and some of the practical activities that would be undertaken were outlined. My field site consisted of two clubs run by the charity, the Youth and Social Clubs. The details of each club are listed below:

1. Youth Club - Run each Wednesday from 6:00 - 8:00 at a local college in the Sixth Form common room, during school term times, with a one week break during half term, a 2 week break over each of the Christmas and Easter holidays and a 6-week break over the summer. The Youth Club is for young adults with autism aged 18-25 who attend independently. The group is primarily a leisure and social group, where the young members play board games, Wii console games and pool games and take part in time specific activities such as outdoor football during June and July.

2. Social Club - This club runs fortnightly on Tuesdays from 6:00 - 8:00 at the same local college as the Youth Club. This club is for adults over the age of 25 and has a similar role for members as the Youth Club. Many of the same activities take place and the same breaks over the school term apply to this club.

A number of pragmatic and boundary setting issues arise from the above arrangements. The first is that once members of the Youth Club reach the age of 25, they can no longer attend the Wednesday Youth Clubs and must attend the Tuesday Social Clubs. This age boundary does not apply however to special events such as Halloween and Christmas parties or to club trips to external locations such as museums. As such, my presence in both clubs did not have an overlap of participants and I thus could attend to the age specific differences between the two clubs. The primary difference that I noted was the preference of the Social Club members for more sedentary activities like trivia or board games or extended conversations, whereas the Youth Club members preferred more energetic activities such as ping pong or football and were more physical and excitable than the older members of the Social Club. The age range of the members of the Youth Club extended from 18 to 25 with the members comprising around 18 males and 5 females. The Social Club members were a mixture of people aged in their mid-twenties, early thirties, mid-fifties and early sixties, with the members comprising around 14 males and 3 females.

Gaining access to the fieldsite required careful negotiation with the Outreach Coordinator and Club Leader, who headed both the Youth and Social Clubs. Electronic correspondence was sent to the Head of Outreach Services at the charity during the summer of 2014 that led to a number of face-to-face meetings being held. This period of interaction was crucial in shaping the research design, which required compromises on both sides. I will first deal with the practical decisions during the negotiation and gaining access phase of the project. These gatekeeper meetings were held to establish the parameters of the research, for the researcher to gain a sense of the expectations and knowledge of the club staff on the habits, personalities and suitability of the club members and for the Outreach Staff to assess the level of suitability of the material developed for the research such as the information sheet and consent form. The Outreach Staff pointed to the diverse range of abilities, interests and motivations of the members who attended the clubs and were concerned that the research would disrupt these motivations. The clubs were viewed as places where members could go for leisure and to interact with other members. The other members were often their friends and they had often known each other very well over a number of years. Staff also raised the question of how to negotiate the boundaries between the participants in the research and members of the club who were not involved. The researcher sought to explain the role of consent in a long-term, open-ended project and discussed the possibilities of creating a fluid boundary between these two groups. The concern around disruption was also inflected with considerations around how those with autism prefer routine and familiarity and that the research process would disrupt a familiar and “safe” space for the members (Wick and Reason, 2009). A further temporal dimension was brought to my attention, as the club staff noted that due to the short duration of the clubs, around 2 hours, outside of special trips and events, and their weekly or bi-weekly occurrence, to have the research sessions too close together would be difficult for members. I address each of these concerns throughout this chapter.

Based on these factors, we decided that it would be best to space the focus group sessions to be one per month, so as not to be too disruptive to the members club activities. My participation within the club would be in relation to the activities and discussions that emerged naturally and this is where the focus on favourites became central. This allowed me to take part in these activities without needing to ask “awkward” questions about their activities. As a new member of the club, I could ask about and observe the ways in which existing members interacted with each other and engaged in activities in a naturalistic way.

When I initially introduced myself to the clubs via a brief, five-minute overview presentation of my research, I was unsure how the club members would react, let alone whether they would be in any way interested in taking part. However, in discussions with several interested members, some of whom would later go on to become participants, I discovered that the emphasis I placed on the use of qualitative and exploratory approaches was reassuring. Furthermore, this reassurance was also one of renewed interest in research requests as it differed from certain kinds of research projects some older participants of the Social Club took part in the past. This was research that involved filling in standardised, quantitative, psychology focused surveys that left little space for personal experience or exploratory expansion on the questions being asked. For many of the club members, this type of uniform, static and stultifying research was something they took part in because they were accustomed to this type of research. However, they often did not feel that much was gained from such research as the results were measured, codified and disseminated often in ways that were not immediately relatable to their own circumstances. They were either presented in near inaccessible form in academic journal articles or made to fit policy initiatives or agendas that were obliquely mentioned in information regarding the context of the research. In such research, discussions of the conditions of how the research was produced or which demands it was being tailored to meet could not be discussed. This led to a greater sense of rapport with the members as they viewed me as just another member with an interest in

their habitual and sensory experiences rather than my presence being solely defined by my academic interest. My long-term involvement in the clubs helped me to establish and maintain this awareness and conversations about my research entered into group discussions in a casual way rather than being marked as an “outsider” topic that was separate from the ordinary activities of the club space.

The next two sections will break down my use of ethnographic participant observation and focus group methods in my research. I will outline the factors that shaped my appreciation and framing of the club space and the focus group dynamics that I considered in developing my research.

Ethnographic Fieldwork and the Club Space

My participant observation comprised partaking in and observing activities, including: discussions about topics of the week such as school work, job issues or progress in hobbies such as drawing or favourite games. A storage cupboard in the club room housed a number of board and other games that were often used by members for spontaneous play. These were complemented by more permanent fixtures in the club room such as air hockey, snooker and ping pong tables. Here, members challenged each other and set up friendly rivalries, in which no money was involved, and they recorded their wins and losses. On a more mediated front, a TV screen had been installed at the back of the room and on occasion this used to watch events like football matches, if enough members were interested, or to screen DVDs of films or sitcoms, for instance, that the members had brought from home. A further role the TV served was to stream digital radio stations. Playing music could also be handled by a sound system in a separate room at the back to play custom music tracks. Another TV in the back right corner housed a Wii games console, which was often used in tandem with the central TV to play multiplayer games such as Wii Sports or

Mario Kart Wii. In the light of these observations, the fieldwork activities included participating in these activities and noting the ways in which sensory, spatial and temporal dynamics were handled by the individuals and groups. I took note of the different ways in which the members negotiated their different sensory thresholds and the means through which they sought to solve problems with regard to intensive positive sensory interaction. My field-notes were thus full of sensory detail including the smell of food brought in, the interaction of the two TV's sound levels and how different tempos of music and visual activity interrupted other activities like board games or faded into the background. I also went beyond the classic five senses by, for example considering the different modalities of movement in which the members engaged such as maintaining conversations while keeping track of their points and turn taking when playing pool. I also kept notes of the different personalities of the club members who were part of the focus groups and signed consent forms to take part in the research.

While I kept notes of non-participant club members, as much as possible, I have not used these observations in the thesis because of a lack of explicit consent. These "extended" field-notes were to remind me of the context and relationships between members and their relational interactional dynamics. For those who signed consent forms to formally take part in the research, once initial consent had been given, I with the club leader at the start of each focus group whether consent was still applicable for each participant. We thus enacted a form of "negotiated consent"; where attitudes towards consent can change over time, based on participants' engagement with the research, and where negotiation is not based on a deductive code of ethics, but rather considers discussions of what consent means across the period of research (Moody, 1992). Because the participants attended independently, without a designated carer, or parental supervision, I did not seek to gain consent from these parties. However, I did seek informal secondary consent from the club leader by corroborating with her several times over the course of the research to confirm that members were still happy to take part in the research. In ethnography, consent is negotiated and

reconfigured over time (Adler and Adler, 2002) and is relational and sequential rather than a pre-determined contract (Katz and Fox, 2004). In order to reduce the number of foreseeable risks (Corrigan, 2003) in the research such as subjecting participants to unpleasant sensory or social situations, I made explicit to members that topics related to favourites would be emphasised throughout my research.

A further central activity of the clubs is the numerous trips that are held throughout the year. These were to places within South East England and featured a number of different activities from visiting theatre shows or zoos, to seaside trips and theme parks. These events are funded by the charity and places are given out on a first-come first-served basis. Members who come along often meet at the nearest local public transport location, often a train station, for a specific time, travel together to the nearest stop and walk the rest of the way. These events allowed the research to incorporate a further mobile dimension, whereby the individually, routinely and habitually planned out routes of travel could be complemented by more unstructured situations. However, this unstructured nature was only in regard to the fact that the routes and personal compartments performed on them required more rigorous attention to detail. The routes are outlined in detail for service users by letters or emails to allow them a large amount of preparation time to adapt to how this might alter their everyday routines and to organise for these events. Nonetheless, these trips enabled me to compare a relatively “bounded fieldsite” (Candea, 2013) of the club space to several multi-sited ones. My research and note taking priorities remained the same as on the club site, but incorporated how the habits and routine engagements uncovered during the club sessions compared to the open nature of public places. I will explore the dynamics of the urban locations in which these trips took place in Chapter 3.

This is not to say that I fully engaged with a multi-sited ethnographic project as there were multiple practical and time management issues that arose. During the course of my research, the charity was expanding its services to include other boroughs aside from the one where my fieldsite was located. Just before I contacted the charity about the possibility of undertaking the project, the central administrative office for the organisation moved location to a better, centralised location to manage and develop more boroughs in which to provide services. This altered my perception of the boundedness of the project with my initial perception of the Youth and Social Clubs and evoked a sense of spatial and contextual renegotiation in terms of my own cognitive and spatial map(s) of the research. This expansion and foregrounding of previously distant institutional relations speaks to the multiple layerings of spatial and temporal scales that takes place, even within “single-sited” ethnographies.

As Candea (2013) reminds us, even small, tightly bound communities have members who develop and inhabit these spaces who have a variety of partial connections, where: “every encounter, every story, spoke of a different vector, a different temporal and spatial direction” (Candea, 2013: 252). As such, while my research focuses on two different groups within the same “site”, this site was over the course of my research, ever-expanding with new boroughs and groups attempting to be integrated into the charity’s infrastructure. In tandem with this, new services and locations were constantly being introduced to members with many anxiously inquiring into “project updates” across my research period. A primary example of this was the in construction “Hub”. This hub was to provide a centralising locus of services such as information, diagnosis, recreational activities and clubs. It was also open to being potentially reconfigured due to members interests. From my perspective as a researcher, I was also being introduced to these new initiatives in much the same way as the members. I, however, had no ethnographic interest in following these up as they would serve to complicate and expand the research into institutional and networked phenomena to which I could not do justice to. I have simply provided these details to give ethnographic and methodological context and not as an object of

study in and of itself, as part of a “multi-sited” ethnography. The location I chose is thus not an “arbitrary” one, in that it evacuates itself of meaning so that a study of an abstract, theoretical entity can take place (Candea, 2007: 179-180). Despite the partial connections of the members and the institutional networks of my research site, I want to keep the bounded specificities of the club space in mind as a distinct and real entity that has effects and does not allow space to cut through meaning (ibid: 180). This is in order to highlight the ways in which habitual and sensory favourites are shaped in a defined location so as to reveal their contextually specific dynamic complexity (Candea, 2007: 179, Savransky, 2016a).

As Fine (2010) argues, the key to studying local communities ethnographically is to focus upon the contextually spatial, temporal and relational dynamics of specific cultural and social groupings. Fine further argues that the spatial context of where a social group meets is important in structuring the kind of tempos of interaction that emerge and either become routine or are spontaneous. At the clubs, it was often the case that some members would utilise the common room’s music player and speakers or the television screen to watch events such as football or play music via digital TV stations. As the clubs were held in locations not owned by the club members or the charity itself, they were bound by the regulations of the institutions in which they were held, a local college Sixth Form common room. The capacity for the club members to structure and utilise the space in the way they wished was limited to some extent. However, this did not prevent members and staff from rearranging furniture and items within the club space. In the terms of Evans and Boyte (1986), the participants and members created a “free space” in which they could establish their own forms of communicational and spatial structural and micro-interactional social logic. The staff gatekeepers positioned the space during the negotiation process as one that was primarily geared towards recreational and leisure based activities. However, if a club member wanted to discuss an issue related to personal anxiety or social transition such as resolving or getting

support around employment or education issues, they could take a staff member aside and discuss the topic and develop strategies to resolve it.

This did not mean that the group's structure or members became undone; nor did the routines and habits that made up the interactional rituals of the group. New staff members and organisers were introduced to the club members. They asked them how things have been structured by other staff and treated members as experts in the process. One new staff member, who was introduced to the group during a trip to a seaside town, brought up the annual tradition in the club of a day trip to Thorpe Park, which many of the participants looked forward to and which was enshrined and recognised in publications sent to members from the charity. These factors point to a number of key features that sustain and constitute a social group, a recognition and application of the power of "knowing into telling", or entangling the past into the present to demonstrate group bonding, membership and recognition. The second key feature refers to what Goffman calls a group's "referential afterlife" (1981: 46). This refers to the capacity of social groups to develop a specific "idioculture" that marks them out as a specific socio-cultural group and goes on to develop into recognisable values, routines and norms that enable a shared understanding. This historical process is not perfect and is as infallible and biased as the group's memory practices and actions make it out to be, although the core dynamics remain intact and traditions continue as new members are introduced and old members leave. Having knowledge and understanding of these shared references is crucial to interpreting and understanding the place and importance of the chosen favourites of the participants and serves as a reminder that the group meetings are part of a continuum of activities within the duration of the club and the boundaries between these two dimensions are interlocking and affect each other.

I now turn to the use of focus groups in my research and the issues I worked through in their utilisation.

Focus Group Methodological Considerations

Focus groups, being a method that engages with group dynamics, brings with it issues of power in negotiating the terms of how interactions should take place. I will engage with these more localised forms of power relations below. First, I want to address some of the wider structural issues that impact on the use of focus groups with disabled and vulnerable groups.

Some researchers have argued that structures and institutions of power relationships enacted in classrooms and border control and arguably disability monitoring regimes, are reproduced in social research that utilise interviews in the standard structured or semi structured format. This can be found in interview research that tries to bracket off the dynamism of social life by conducting research in quiet rooms with dominant researchers probing participants for information (Sinha and Back, 2014). The sociality of research interactions is lost in this context. Sinha and Back argue that these sterile conditions are related to a form of “ethical hypochondria” (Sinha and Back, 2014: 484), where researchers fear and desire to maintain and enforce dominant and conservative ethical codes of conduct in order to keep professional standing and prevent negative repercussions on their careers or the institutions they are associated with. In this research climate, not wanting to reproduce these dominant research relationships of power is very much welcomed, but poses a problematic relationship to working with autistic individuals. Producing interviews that are imbued with sociality, as Sinha and Back have done, serves to reproduce power imbalances via intense socialities and sensory ambiences. However, the practicalities of not wanting to demarcate participants from other club members meant that I did conduct the focus groups within the activities of the club space. I shall return to this below. Thus, could not reliably audio record the discussions and thus do not have a one-to-one transcript. I did not want to codify my participants responses by recording them and relying on the crutch of audio recording. As Back (2012) has noted, sociological reliance on the audio recorder

has left other senses neglected and provided the spoken words of research participants with unwarranted solidity. This then leads to wanting to stay true to the words of respondents without allowing for interpersonal dialogue between participants and researchers. In order to combat this sense of sensory reliance on verbal responses, I only made a note of the most important quotes from members and participants, which contributed to a sensory analysis, rather than rely solely on words. My field-notes included, as I have noted above, sensory descriptions and interpersonal negotiations. This meant that I could vividly recapture the sensory dynamics unfolding across my field-notes via what Myers (2016) has termed “energetic” or “gestic” data analysis. This refers to the capacity of the body and mind to trace and remember lines of movement, gestures and other sensory modalities to transduce social and material actions in research. This can be combined in tandem with the senses’ capacity to recall and invoke memories (Vannini et al, 2012) of interactions, along with bodily memories and movements of thoughts and actions to develop a sensory engagement with my research.

Nonetheless, it is still necessary to take into account the very real power imbalances that such a static and linear notion of research relations entails. As a vulnerable research population, the autistic adults in this research have been scrutinised and subjected to discursive and material disciplinary techniques such as Annual Reviews, diagnostic assessments, support workers and assistants at school, and as such, this research did not want to place upon the group an additional burden that did not incorporate their interests. The use of exploratory and open discussions serves to get away from relying upon what Gallagher and Gallagher (2008) term “schooled docility”, where tasks such as filling in worksheets that reinforce the dominant and institutionalised power roles of schools where student and teacher are arranged in hierarchical and unequal power relations. Some of the participants attended college or Sixth Form and so this aspect became more pertinent and drew more attention to this dynamic in the consideration of the research relations and tasks. Equally, as I have already noted, the standardised psychological research which the members had taken

part served to reproduce these unequal forms of power relations and I did not want my research to be another forgettable and inconsequential event in my participants lives. I thus sought to view my participants as co-researchers who could reframe my conceptualisations and allow them to reframe my research concerns and aims.

As I have noted thus far, my research was based on the sensory and habitual experiences and relationships of autistic favourites. The participatory emphasis allowed me to develop an informed and co-constituted analytical practice. These empirical observations initially underwent deductive analysis by considering how my general terms such as the parasite, quasi-object, favourites and atmospheres, impacted on my empirical data. This led me to confirm that the notions of parasite and quasi-object were applicable to many of the empirical examples I discuss in the thesis. For example, Chapter 3 showcases the centrality of “habitual favourites” to the idea of parasite relations, structured by the logic of the quasi-object concept. This framing then underwent a further process of analysis where I sought to inductively work through my core concepts in relation to my empirical data. In relation to chapter 3, I realised that I needed to specify and make the concept of the quasi-object more specific by developing the notion of the “social” quasi-object to explore the specific modalities of action specific quasi-objects. Rather than emphasising my own researcher centred development of technical and abstract hypotheses away from my participants responses (Grbich, 2012: 87), I paid attention to the ways in which my interactions with the participants and their spatial, temporal and value positions impacted on my analysis in a co-constructed manner (Charmaz, 2006). For example, the concept of social quasi-objects arose to do justice to the empirical detail of my participants engagement with me. I will explore these positionalities in detail in the autoethnography section of this chapter.

A number of issues arise from the development of a participatory approach that can be raised and made directly relevant to this research project. The first of these, outlined by Holland et al (2010), points to the ethical and moral agenda of many participatory projects with children and young adults which posits that the power relations between adult or more senior researchers and participants, understood as emerging through agential processes and structures via their own voices. This creates a research relationship that assumes a focus on these power relations that is too static attributes static qualities to the concepts that participants receive and possess and which are given to them via the researcher. This emphasis on “participation”, per se, is paradoxically very one sided in that this participatory focus is not expanded to include the researchers capacity to be affected by the participants. As Thomson argues (2007), participants and researchers, whether children, young adults, vulnerable, skilled or amateur, should be positioned as “becomings”, which posits subjects as relational and enacted performatively in specific social and cultural contexts. When framed like this, it is possible to examine relations of vulnerability in relation not just to the socio-structural position of the participants, but also to that of the researcher. Being a sociological research with autism means that some of the sensory pleasures and problems of social interaction with club members will be familiar to me at a level of personal experience not possible for non-autistic researchers. As such, returning to Holland et al’s work, the researcher is just as susceptible to sensory cycles and disruptions as the participants, thereby the boundaries of vulnerability are relationally distributed. Power relations cannot then be simply conceived as one group having power over another, but are seen as a process that does not exist unmediated (Holland et al, 2010: 362-363). I again return to these issues in the fieldsite later in the chapter.

In this case, I wanted my participants to be seen as “peer researchers”, exploring and showing me what factors matter most to them in relation to their sensory experiences and favourite activities. Such a move was not unproblematic, however, and required a responsible consideration of the

consequences, benefits and drawbacks. Those with autism are likely to be socially withdrawn and as such they are more likely to experience isolation and loneliness (van Roekel et al, 2010). This is often reinforced through peer victimisation and a lack of access to supportive peers (Cappadocia et al, 2012). It is thus important to conduct focus group research in settings that are supportive and with people that the participants know and are comfortable with. One particularly relevant point when working with a group in which potentially not all of the members will become participants or peer researchers is to how they go on to deal with their “participation capital” (McCartan et al, 2012). In other words, the position of being a researcher participant or co-researcher reworks the boundaries, expectations and roles of the said relationships. This, paradoxically, reinstates the researcher/participant or adult/young person relation, as, by being a part of the research they gain insights, skills and interactions that their peers may not possess (Connolly, 2008). It may be the case that such participants do not need empowerment or a degree of influential power relations, as their willingness to step forward to take part in the research already indicates a certain degree of skills appropriate for the task decided by themselves, or relevant gatekeepers (Jones, 2000). I sought to avoid these problems by reassuring the participants that whatever modality of expression was best for them to convey their thoughts was OK, no matter what this involved. This attitude was present amongst the participants. For example, participant Josh encouraged Julia to display her affection for toy dolls by rubbing their hair to express her pleasure through bodily and verbal stims or sporadic and spontaneous bursts of movement, emotion or verbal noise. She thus conveyed the pleasure she got from the tactile sensations this brought her. No judgement or disapproval was shown and Josh and the other members were happy that the usually shy, non-talkative Julia was communicating an important sensory experience to the group in her own terms. Equally, I utilised gestic sensory recording to recall the tactile and vocal pleasures that Julia displayed and became affected by her displays.

The use of a focus group-like structure for the research supports the statement made by Cambridge and McCarthy (2001) that focus groups enable those with disabilities to engage in safe places, develop confidence and experience peer support and recognition of the issues and challenges, as well as the positive aspects that come with social interaction. Barr et al (2001), outlines some of the practical aspects of carrying out research with disabled people. The first of these is the importance of utilising spaces where the group of interest meet up. The use of the public space of the Youth/Social Clubs was central in this respect. As a consequence of this production and reproduction of spatial and temporal interactional spaces, Barr et al (2001) note the importance of established friendships as well as the understanding and reciprocal knowledge of the difficulties and quirks of living with shared disabled characteristics, which leads to an emergent feedback from each other rather than the researcher. This led me to develop a free-movement focus group structure in which the participants could move in and out of the focus group space depending on their interests or whether they were being called to take part in other activities in the club. This prevented me as a researcher from creating an absolute boundary between the research activities and the club activities. I did not wish to encroach upon the creation of “free spaces” (Evans and Boyte 1986), and, allowed me to keep a sense of the idiocultures of the members in the club space. Being engaged with other members and the club space in this way enabled participants to engage in focus groups within a context that was recognisable to them. Because the interactional framework was familiar, sensory thresholds⁹ were kept within manageable limits and the ambient background sensory experiences were comfortable for participants.

⁹ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of sensory thresholds for those with autism in Smith and Sharp (2013).

Furthermore, I recognised the differing levels of attention required in a formal focus group setting and I could work with this notion rather than resisting potential disruption. It was important for me to not see these disruptions as negative but rather see them as a part of working with and expanding how disability impacts on the focus group requirements of equal and open communication and fixed time sessions (Kaehne and O’Connell, 2010: 135-136). In order to keep the rapport and not deprive them of their leisure time unnecessarily, I gave pause to the discussion if the participants were asked something by other members and I did not “discipline” them to engage. This integrated and shared sense of understanding enabled a performative understanding of focus group communication where meaning and understanding were transformed (Markovà et al, 2007). I sought to respect and incorporate the idiocultures and free spaces that members and participants created during each club session and this in turn helped create rapport and respect. A problem that arose due to the club members knowing each other for many years was that the group power dynamics were simply reproduced and redirected in a focus group context (Baker and Hinton, 1999). In this case, much of the discussion could be centred on a consensus of group opinion or guided by the researcher or moderator to fit with the specific aims of the research rather than allowing for “off-topic” talk. (Caretta and Vacchelli, 2015). Again, I did not wish to redirect these tangents and found that participants, particularly the Social Club members, were respectful of the research group set-up. This was a result of the emphasis on integration of research and participatory activity developing rapport with members.

The club leader was very generous in offering to be a moderator for the focus group sessions. This was done so that the participants would feel more at ease when the “formal” aspects of the research situation were undertaken. Members had a friendly relationship with the club leader, but, disciplinary action was taken when necessary to resolve conflict or work through concerns. As such, light-hearted teasing and joking was mixed with disciplinary authority and reassuring confiders. This also had the effect of giving the appointed moderator a sense of

importance in ensuring that the focus group sessions were productive. It has been seen that moderators, who are not the main researchers, want to give relevant and useful data back to the lead researchers in order to maintain existing power relations of status and reputation (Baker and Hinton, 1999). Caretta and Vacchelli sought to avoid these biases impacting on their research by appointing two moderators for each group to collaboratively and reflexively explore any issues that arose (Caretta and Vacchelli, 2015). In my case, my one moderator was not given theoretical context or an outline of what I wished to discuss during each group. Therefore, they did not seek to corroborate findings, they made sure that participants were comfortable and could detect any imminent issues that might arise due to anxieties participants might have. I felt this role was more important for my participants. Rather than me going around and asking each club member to come together for the focus groups, the moderator gave brief reminders a week before and during the evening of the focus group. I return to the ambiguity of the disciplinary and friendship relationship of members and staff later in the chapter. Fraser and Fraser (2001) suggest that the often recommended size of focus groups of between 6-10 participants should be revised downwards when engaging with disabled participants, as being able to follow along and communicate effectively is more important than the type of communication utilised. However, the aforementioned familiarity and production of a safe space for the participants allowed for a group of 6 to effectively work together to ensure that each member of the group participated and was comfortable in doing so. Indeed, the group dynamics between the participants helped corroborate and nuance my ethnographic field-notes in regard to these same, dynamics specifically in relation to their habitual favourites.

A central issue with participatory approaches that I have sought to expand with discussions of the parasite is the idea that a “safe space” for research is required in order to create a productive and comfortable working environment. The notion of a safe space, seen through the light of Habermasian Communicative Action theory, assumes that if enough discussion and

interaction occurs, then, eventually, *some* form of consensus will emerge. “Ideal Speech Acts”, refer to the outcome of these processes in which the testing out and interactional debate leads to a form of consensus requiring “comprehensibility and its claims to objective truth; its normative rightness; and its expressive sincerity” (Wick and Reason, 2009: 245). This process is problematic within the framework of the parasite as it privileges consensus and clarity when these qualities in social interaction are the exception, not the rule. However, Wick and Reason go beyond this to suggest the setting up of safe spaces within the context of a communicative space:

is embodied in networks of actual persons [...] A communicative space is constituted as issues or problems are opened up for discussion, and when participants experience their interaction as fostering the democratic expression of diverse views” (Kemmis, 2001: 100).

Safe spaces require recognition of the fact that such processes are indeed ideal in the sense that the investment required to create such spaces is fraught with material, political and cultural challenges. The question of creating a safe, communicative space means:

being in that delicate place where lifeworld meets the system, a liminal, in-between space where two opposing qualities meet... these are not restful places but continually changing and offering new possibilities and challenges (Wick and Reason, 2009).

The lifeworld and system are concepts explicitly drawn from Habermas’ “theory of communicative action” (1984). The lifeworld references the symbols used by individuals and groups to represent society. This forms the ground from which

communities develop shared notions of who they are and what kinds of values they wish to embody and express (ibid: 245). These are qualitative processes that are developed through communication. The system, in contrast, refers to institutions that seek to reproduce social order through efficiency, predictability and control (ibid: 246). These are economic and bureaucratic and operate via hierarchical and dominating power structures. In modernity, the system has removed itself from the lifeworld so that the values developed in communication are not congruent with the system (Frank, 2000). In Serres terms, the system is trying to break the chain of parasitism but in so doing, is creating its own form of “third” relation by “colonising” the lifeworlds through economic and political processes of neoliberal capitalism and the politically invested interest in redistributing wealth and power to those with already immense wealth and power (Kemmis, 2001).

Habermas’ strict demarcation of these two domains does not account for the fact that the lifeworld and system can embody their opposite’s characteristics and thus the processes that enable these phenomena are often underplayed. This inherent tension has led to differing descriptions and conceptions of what communicative, safe spaces are in practice and methodology. Wadsworth (2005: 431) describes creating participatory research spaces as offering “containers” for developing democratic, non-biased and open discussions. Hence, ignoring the ways in which the research impacts on this contained space leak out into the vectors of differentially distributed times and spaces of individuals in local communities, as noted by Candea (2013). Other researchers have noted that in supporting women in maximum security prisons to: “craft the research questions, challenge each other to assure that varied standpoints (were) represented..., work(ing) through the specific of design, data collection, analysis and products” (Fine and Torre, 2006: 257), is to recognise that, as bell hooks notes, these are “space(s) of radical openness... a margin - a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a “safe” place. One is always at risk” (bell hooks, 1984: 149). Risk here should not be understood as being made to feel uncomfortable or distressed and my desire to

focus on favourites and not negative interactions is a direct response to this. Rather, researchers and participants should be willing to share, discuss and resolve dilemmas that arise during the research.

The research and participant communities that are created in this liminal nexus are thus dynamic and open to both “ideal” communicative development and tense, disruptive and contradictory relations of unease, personal and structural divides and power inequities. While I did not utilise a fully participatory action research approach in this project, this question of communicative spaces speaks to several issues that I pre-empted and discovered whilst doing the project. On the positive side, there were many moments where members reinforced a focused and unfaltering commitment to accepting the ways in which each member’s autism manifested itself. This helped in facilitating a comforting and familiar ethos from which any discussion or topic could be framed. Furthermore, this commitment to diversity enabled more honest and open discussions of favourites and sensory experience, including discussing emotional outbursts and engagement in activities that might be deemed deviant. Participant Phil, for instance, spoke of his unsocial approach to anger in which he sometimes felt that he wanted to destroy the Jobcentre building he visited. Participants were able to explore and in some cases recognise the way in which the parasitical relations between the lifeworld and system played out for them. For example, Josh saw structural inequalities in which those with criminal records could get job interviews, yet his social and emotional difficulties, due to his autism, prevented him from getting the same kinds of interviews.

The conflict between the lifeworld and system can further be specified in relation to wider institutional issues concretely in these interactions. As I came to learn over the course of my research, staff members were not allowed to interact with members as friends outside of the club or charity spaces. This meant that no phone numbers could be shared; no interactions could be had such as following or liking on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter. Furthermore, no meeting

up was allowed with members outside of the formal institutionalised spaces of the charity offices or locations where the activities and clubs were run. This was done in order to maintain a level of professional detachment and to remain value neutral when discussing and enacting medical, economic and political decisions and initiatives. On a structural level, this created difficulties with staff members being detached from management level decisions and simply being asked to enact them despite personal disagreement. On top of this, some of the staff and older Social Club members were dissatisfied with the neoliberal emphasis on marketization forced onto the charity sector by the coalition and conservative UK governments. With a lack of funding to make up the shortfall of these new directions, staff could only try to mediate the introduction of costs and fees for activities through exemptions for those with little money. On a local level, staff developed friendly relations with members that developed and matured over the course of my research period. The most prominent example was a staff member guiding, teaching and introducing a member who was an artist to new techniques, materials and styles of drawing to hone and develop his skills. This culminated with him presenting his work at art exhibitions within and beyond the charity's events line-up. Specifically in relation to the focus group dynamics, the tension of authority and friendship was caught in the attachment and detachment logic of charity regulations and friendship norms.

I did not seek to challenge this relationship of unequal power from the perspective of both sides. For the club leader as moderator, I relied upon their negotiation of the friend and authority roles they had to balance without me having to truly engage with the difficulties involved. Equally, I did not wish to engage with the staff and member frustration with the financial difficulties of the charity. I quickly realised, talking with another staff member, that engaging with these issues would lead my research onto an entirely different path. I did not have the theoretical resources or framing to consider the infrastructural concerns of the charity and staff members. In addition, it would place my access status in a difficult position in seeking to question administrative decisions and make my relationship with the club staff uncomfortable and take away from the

sensory and habitual focus of the research. I took part in discussion related to these issues when staff or members explicitly asked me, but I did not directly inquire into them. I did not want to create conflict or create “third” relations by adding conflict to the situation at hand. As such, my discussion here serves as a grounding context for my research practices.

Methodological Challenges and Solutions

The way in which my research design developed and emerged raised a number of challenges that I sought to work around. The desire not to disrupt the activities of the club, as I note in the focus group discussion, was driven by issues of power and openness in terms of movement during the focus group sessions alongside concerns about not wanting to disrupt the leisure activities of the club members. This led me to make a number of difficult decisions regarding taking field-notes and taking focus group transcripts. Conducting the focus groups within the club space itself prevented me from audio recording due to the high and unpredictable levels of background noise. I also wanted to prevent an unnecessary codification of the responses of my participants so as not to reproduce the standardised, quantitative responses to which my participants had become acclimatised. I include quotes from members that came from my “headnotes” (Ottenburg, 1990) in my empirical chapters where they are relevant, but I do not have verbatim transcripts of my focus group sessions. My memory of conversations was jogged by detailed records of how members interacted with each other, the mood and tone of a situation as well as notable body language and negotiations and conflicts between members. This situation was further compounded by the fact that I waited until the next morning in order to write-up my fieldnotes.

At first, I was unsure as to whether I should take breaks from my participatory engagement with the club activities and record my observations, or whether I should wait until the next morning to formally write up my notes from my memory of what had happened during each session. I made up my mind very quickly on this matter. During the first three weeks of my fieldwork, during one session, I decide to write down some observations in my notepad. Within five minutes, a club member came up to me and asked me, puzzled: “You’re not doing research now are you?” They were obviously distressed by me taking time out of the naturalistic activities of the club to act as a detached researcher. My transition from “insider” to “insider researcher” (Hodkinson, 2005: 136) had been disrupted in this moment and my participatory status was at risk. However, I found that acute attention to detail and taking part in the activities of the club allowed me to observe and track nuanced data much more empirically. As I moved around the club space, taking part in and watching different activities, I gained an enhanced sense of the sensory and habitual dynamics that underpinned the actions of the club members and my participants. Stepping away from the club activities to write down research notes would have meant missing important events and prevented the development of ongoing, theoretical and empirical categories. Some authors such as Roseneil (1993) have taken extended breaks after their research period. In Roseneil’s case, she took a break of four years in order to develop a critical distance from the political investment she had made with her female participants. Given the structure of a PhD thesis, I did not have the luxury of taking such a long period of time out between my research and write-up stages. I, like Hodkinson (2005), found that the practical elements of taking field-notes, conducting focus groups and comparing and redeveloping my theoretical questions in relation to my empirical data allowed me to develop from an insider to an insider researcher (Hodkinson, 2005: 146).

A more practical element of the focus group sessions, concerning the participatory idea to encourage the participants to bring in favourite objects, did not come to fruition. Many of the participants forgot about this aspect despite

keeping track of the dates we agreed for the next focus group. This can be attributed to me not wanting to keep reminding the participants a week before the session to bring something, which could have made it a disciplinary imperative, rather than a personal and independent action. The time gap of a month between focus group sessions was also detrimental to maintaining a sense of group participation and engagement with these group objectives. I explore in more detail in Chapter 3 the habitual mechanisms that broke down and were misaligned across a specific project in which several of the participants were engaged.

This is not to say that my explicitly participatory and exploratory focus did not lead to positive interactions with my participants. They were very happy to wait for me to make adequate notes about their experiences. Participant Phil in particular, was anxious for me to get “good notes” for my research and to ensure that I got what I needed. To this end, he was even considerate enough during one focus group to draw me a diagram of his spatial mapping of the different routes he took and the meanings and emotions he had regarding the people and places he came across. (See Image 1 below for a scan of this diagram and my write-up of the many meanings it had for Phil when describing the diagram to me).

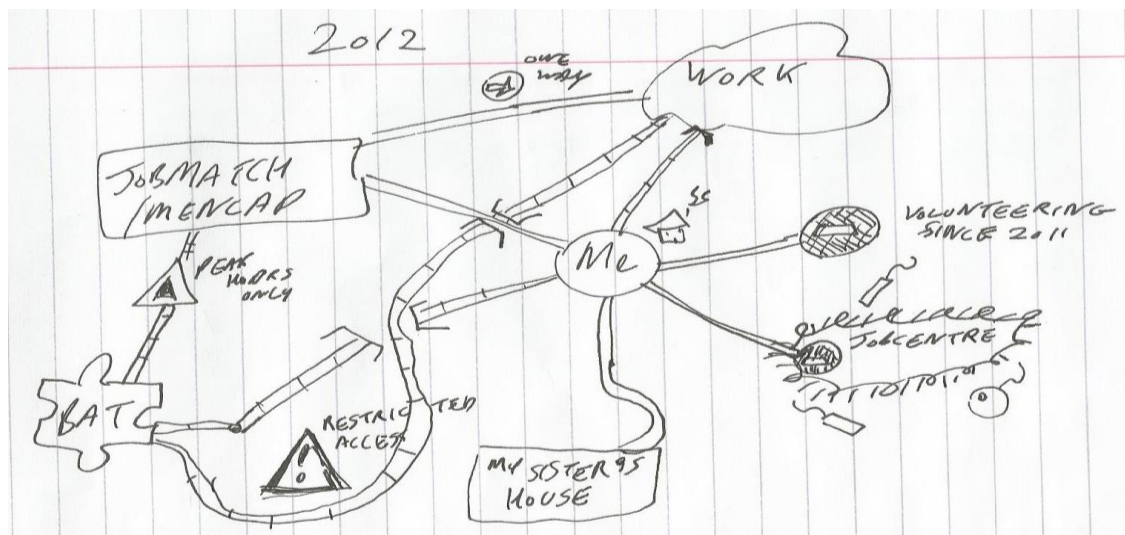


Image 1: Phil's diagram of the routine, day to day activities he undertook in the year 2012. Below are some notes taken from my focus group sessions I made of the discussion I had with Phil regarding the meaning attributed to each section of the diagram:

“Phil explained to me that the different “tabs”, as he called the bounded, named sections were important constellations of temporal and spatial meaning for him. The reason they are spaced out as they are is congruent with Phil's notion that the people and activities inside of each tab should be kept separate from each other. If he encountered a person who was “supposed” to be in the Jobcentre “reality” and he met them at the volunteering building, he did not know how to act or make sense of these interactions. He described this crossover as akin to “strange TV crossovers”, where each tab represents a different TV channel. In order to be attentive to a tab, Phil needed to bracket off the other tabs and focus on the social and structural dynamics of his immediate spatial and temporal location. In addition, the barbed wire and explosives around the Jobcentre tab indicated his distress, pain and depression at being forced to go and represented his desire to completely eradicate the building so that he could let go of his negative associations” (From Fieldnote Journal).

Phil was happy to give me this diagram as he said that he kept files at home for each year of these kinds of spatial diagrams to help him visually and spatially record his routine movements and interactions. My use of gestic recollection was bolstered by this intervention. I believe that the emphasis on the exploratory and open aspect of the research contributed to Phil's generosity in drawing a diagram and working through it with me. I got to gain a multimodal expression of habitual and routine engagement as well as the corroboration of Grandin's (1986, 2000a) metaphors of files and tapes to bracket off information and meaningful interactions¹⁰. More than this, I gained a spatial appreciation of the kinds of relationships between the key locations in Phil's day-to-day activities beyond just verbal or written description. Because I expressed a genuine interest in the different ideas and experiences of my participants and did not ask for answers to stick to pre-determined criteria, I found that my participants were more willing to enter into dialogue with me about these experiences.

A Comment on Representational Bias

A central issue that should be raised in relation to questions around research power relations and engagement comes from the composition of the focus groups and the clubs in general. The Youth and Social Clubs were both primarily dominated by male members with only 2 female members in the Social Club compared to 15 male members and 4 females in the Youth Club compared to 18 male members. While female members were part of the focus group sessions, the key examples I draw upon for my empirical chapters and their analysis and discussion are confined to the 4 male members who took part. I realise that this raises a number of important issues in relation to gender and autism that have foregrounded discussions on issues of diagnosis and the ways in which the diagnostic criteria are based on traits that are masculine biased. Depending on how you study and measure the gender differences in autism, the

¹⁰ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of this point.

results can vary quite dramatically. Lorna Wing (1981) found that for young children with Asperger Syndrome, males were 15 times more likely to be diagnosed than women. For those with a form of learning difficulty *and* autism, the ratio was 2:1. More recently, Brugha et al (2009) found that the percentages of young adults with autism living in households in England was 1.8% for men and boys and 0.2% for women and girls. Returning to the original studies that defined autism and Asperger's Syndrome, in Leo Kanner's (1943) study, he observed that the male to female ratio was 4:1. Hans Asperger, who documented a similar yet different diagnosis of Asperger's (1944), initially believed that females could not have autism of any form. He later had to revise this notion when empirical and clinical evidence showcased female diagnoses of autism and Asperger's. These vast differences in diagnoses suggest that the diagnostic criteria and ways in which the behaviours and characteristics of autism are represented and shaped by cultural, social and gender norms, impact on what is counted as autism rather than the condition itself being inherently genetically determined by gender (Runswick-Cole et al, 2016). While this thesis cannot go into the intricacies or history of these debates regarding diagnostic criteria and gender in autism, I do feel that some points should be clarified in regard to the way in which my research took shape in *relation* to these issues from a methodological and specifically representational context.

For example, some of the issues I go on to address regarding humour and in my empirical chapters (See Chapter 3) often took on a male-focused gaze in regard to sexuality and incorporated machismo elements of tongue-in-cheek knowingness in terms of objectifying and sexualising body parts. Group affirmation granted these forms of reference degrees of acceptability so that they were never questioned. Furthermore, while the special interests of the male members of the focus groups were based on repetition and routinised engagement such as playing with LEGO, the special interests of the girls were based on personal sensory interaction such as a sensory blanket providing comfort or female dolls wearing distinctive colours and exhibiting unique tactile responses. As Gould and Ashton-Smith (2011) argue, the focus on repetition in

special interests is based on male responses and behaviours which emerge from fact gathering and active learning. Girls are often more open to letting the world come to them and learn from observing from other people.

In many respects, I can only speak of a “masculinist” version of autism in my research. My focus on favourite activities and their cyclical engagement reinforces and perhaps exaggerates the repetitive aspect of habitual engagement, without adequate attention to the learning to be affected by the emplaced milieu. This, unfortunately, has the effect of reinforcing the above-mentioned gender stereotypes and does not provide a way to think about how structural and interactional norms and values around gender shape how we know about autism. Furthermore, I cannot speak in any informed or empirically focused way about ethnic differences or issues in relation to autistic experiences or diagnosis. This is something that is also lacking in the wider writing about disability, which has emerged from a primarily white, Euro/American context of writing, research and theoretical practices and development (Meekosha, 2011)¹¹. The question and controversies around gender and in particular the male bias in both research and the very constitution of what autism is as a condition stemming from ideas of an “extreme male brain” (Baron-Cohen, 2002) have caused ethnic and gender differences to be an understudied area. I will speak again of these issues in the conclusion of the thesis and discuss ways of rectifying this neglect in my thesis for the future of the framework developed in this thesis. In doing so, I will show how the framework of “Dis/ability Studies” can serve to highlight the importance of, and theoretical nuance that can arise from intersectional disability analysis (Goodley, 2014). For the purposes of this chapter, I want to make readers aware of the biases inherent in my research sample and subsequent analyses.

¹¹ However, see for example Brezis (2012) and Shaked and Bilu (2006) for studies of ethnic and religious experiences for those with autism beyond the Global North. This can also be productively read alongside discussions of the importance of an “intersectional” analysis of class, gender, ethnicity and disability (See Goodley, 2014 Ch. 3, Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009 and Shuttleworth and Meekosha, 2012).

Autoethnography and Complete Member Research

Having outlined some of the practical issues that contributed to forming my research design, ethnographic practice and focus group organisation, I now wish to discuss some issues that arise when a researcher shares a social and cultural marker with their participants. Although I am dedicating two chapters of the thesis (Chapters 4 and 5) to autoethnographic concerns, I wish to introduce some elements here that pertain to methodological issues in connection with participant observation in an institutionally run club space.

Autobiographical methods within sociology have been used and theorised most explicitly within a feminist perspective. I will now provide a brief outline of some of the key debates and features in this literature, before going on to relate these to the specifics of this thesis, autoethnography and incorporate my own position in relation to these questions. It can be argued that incorporating autoethnographic components in this research is, at a very simplified level, attempting to undertake what Stanley (1993) terms a combination of “sociological autobiography”, derived from Merton’s (1988) outline of the concept, which uses autobiographical accounts as data to engage in a form of participant observation to which the researcher has “privileged” access. This process is then filtered through theoretical and analytical social scientific practices and procedures, linking these to wider sociological themes in relation to individual actions and structural social and cultural domains (Davies, 2008: 222). The second approach “rather than understanding the social through its influence on the individual” sees the two levels “as actually symbiotically linked: the social and the individual, the personal and the political” (Stanley, 1993: 44, in Davies, 2008: 223). Drawn from feminist perspectives, this conceptualisation challenges how individuals understand and relate to the world in order to change their actions and potentially effect change at a wider, structural level. The word privileged has been placed in quotation marks to emphasise the fact that this should be viewed with critical scrutiny. As Stanley (1993) has further

argued, the dichotomy between autobiography and biography is a false one in that each is influenced and cannot exist without the other. I cannot conceive of my relation to myself without others to reflect upon and through and I cannot write about others if I do not reflexively engage with writing, researching and explicating a person's life and experiences. This reflects the pragmatist, George Herbert Mead's (1934) emphasis on the I and the Me discussed in Chapter 1.

If we take these debates as our backdrop to autoethnography, a more formal definition will now serve to begin explicitly underlining the means by which these method impacts on my research. Ellis and Bochner (2000), usefully break down the portmanteau of "autoethnography" to point to the central components that comprise such an activity:

autoethnographers vary in their emphasise on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto) [...] different exemplars of autoethnography fall at different places along the continuum of these three axes (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 740).

Chang (2007) refers to this as a triadic model and argues that autoethnography should be "ethnographical in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation". (Chang, 2007: 208-9). This has led the field into two different and divergent directions, characterised by Anderson (2006) as between "analytic" and "evocative" autoethnographies¹². The latter of these, primarily developed and promulgated by Ellis and Bochner (2000), contend that emotionally driven and narrative forms that seek to merely describe rather than generalise via theorisation better facilitate representation of others via emotional connection and subjective

¹² In this chapter, I will focus primarily on analytic autoethnography and I will give detailed attention to evocative autoethnographic commitments in Chapter 4.

fidelity to participants' accounts. Analytic autoethnography, in dialogue with this field of thought, embarks from a symbolic interactionist/pragmatist realist position in which emotional and subjective insights are tempered by methodological and theoretical reflexivity and a more balanced approach between emotional and critical argument (Anderson, 2006).

Analytic autoethnography stems from an approach outlined by Leon Anderson (2006), a realist ethnographer who is concerned with connecting evocative accounts of autoethnographic experience to theoretical and empirical frameworks. Anderson suggests that there are five main criteria for autoethnographic work that places the researcher as a full member in the research setting and thus observes and participates in a dual role, explicitly makes this identification within their writing and analysis and seeks to develop theoretical understanding of broader social phenomena (Anderson, 2006: 375). Anderson considers five main elements as central to analytic autoethnography. These are: (1). Complete Member Research (CRM), (2). Analytic reflexivity, (3). Narrative visibility of the researchers self, (4). Dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5). Commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson 2006: 378).

A few qualifications need to be made in relation to these remarks. As Anderson reminds us, it should be taken that CMR status does not give the researcher an all-knowing understanding of the fieldsite. Automatic identification with other members should not be viewed via a matching methodology as such a position eliminates in-and-between group differences and thus essentialises multiply expressed subject positions. (Rapley, 2004: 26). In other words, my own Asperger's diagnosis does not give me a privileged perspective on sensory experiences of my participants. I had to disrupt my own "sensory biases". In order to do this I sought to undertake sensory exercises outlined by Howes and Classen (1991). They suggest that we take "some object from one's environment and disengaging one's attention from the object itself so as to focus on how each of its sensory properties would impinge on one's

consciousness were they not filtered in any way” (Howes and Classen, 1991: 260). The beginning of Chapter 4 explores my own perspective on such an exercise. I focus on how autoethnographic reflexivity enabled me to account how a focus on sensory interaction biased my perspective on activities taking place in the club space.

Together with Vannini et al’s (2012) sensory sociology framework, the focus on habitual sensory engagements, as I discuss in Chapter 1, allows us to document the ways in which: “Distinct types of sensory perception take effect at different times in people’s lives” (Desjarlais, 2003: 342). I thus was attentive to the ways in which our sensory interactions are “continually resituating ourselves and remaking ourselves in relation to others” (Pink, 2009: 55). My CMR involvement was thus open to a more apprenticeship based approach where I allowed myself to be affected (Latour, 2004, Despret, 2004) by my participants modes of interaction. I did not assume my experiences were shared between participants and altered my interactional disposition in order to better engage with the activities and routines of the club space. I recognised and acknowledged how sensory experience were “related to our changing social environments and encounters... to the intersubjectivity between persons and to the way that our notions of self are continuously negotiated and reconstituted” (Pink, : 54).

Adler and Adler (1987) suggest that CMR roles can be divided between opportunistic and convert CMR. Opportunistic CRM refers to identification that comes through birth, group affiliation via leisure or other activities or entering via accidental circumstances. Convert CRM begins from a more detached data gathering phase before “converting” to immersion and membership during research for pragmatic, methodological or analytic reasons (Adler and Adler, 1987: 67-84). Referring to my field-site and participants, this thesis occupies a kind of middle ground as I am a disabled researcher with autism, a condition that people are born with and continue to “be” in for their lifetime. Sharing similar

interests, dispositions and hobbies with my participants made my entry into the field-site an opportunistic one. On the other hand, I had had previous connections with the charity organisation in multiple roles, mainly as a service user attending Youth Clubs, a voluntary support worker at the main office assisting with the administrative running of the organisation, alongside collaboration with the charity as an undergraduate and Master's student. I conducted research where the charity assisted in recruiting participants and running sessions for interviews and a focus group. This placed me in a more covert position as I had some understanding of the institutional dynamics of the charity and its relationship to its members. This places me in quite a complex position if we take these ideal type concepts into account. It places me in an ambiguous position in relation to staff members. Was I a service user or researcher? When do these labels apply and in what circumstances? What expectations are imbued into these categories and to what extent will they impact or produce performative effects on subsequent actions and meaning making?

Impression management (Goffman, 1959) was central to these questions, in that if I portrayed myself as a researcher, in a way that was authoritative and emotionally controlled and separated this from my involvement as a service user, that would have created a false dichotomy between participant observer and PhD student. However, emotional engagement, understanding and communication with others and oneself create major difficulties for those on the autism spectrum and thus the researcher needs to be aware of such complexities. As Strathern (1987) argued, the autoethnographic researcher must always bear in mind that they are both CMR's and members of the social scientific community, who are more than likely to require different orientations to participants that they view as secondary concerns. Note-taking, both observational and analytical, can raise significant tensions if participants do not share and hold the values and dispositions of a social scientist. Explicitly Strathern points to the fact that anthropological ethnography seeks to conceptualise and report on "others", whereas the ethnography of a researchers

“own” culture serves to share and contemplate our self-understandings of social life. As such, descriptions always contain analysis and analysis always involves a degree of description.

I should note here that I will be utilising more evocative forms of description, presentation and autoethnographic writing in Chapters 4 and 5 due to issues that arose when trying to develop analysis of my fieldsite relations in an early version of Chapter 5. After discussing this with my supervisor and reading Ellis and Bochner’s (2006) commentary on Anderson’s (2006) seminal article, I have removed the emphasis on CRM dynamics in Chapter 5. This is due, as I now recognise, to analytic autoethnography’s desires to reduce the: “unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative, and bring it under the control of reason, logic, and analysis” (Ellis and Bochner, 2006: 433). This “taming” of autoethnography also seeks to reduce “struggle, passion, embodied life” (ibid: 433). As such, my account was very dry and descriptive, offering little in terms of showcasing research vulnerability or openness or incentives for the reader to care, be empathetic or act (ibid: 433). As such, the account did not contribute to developing an awareness of the relationships between researchers and participants, only serving to highlight the empirical, observable events in the situation, without broader emotional or contextual elucidation. Focusing on following the CRM blueprint meant that the unique and specific insights that could be gained via a focus on the habitual and sensory dynamics at play were lost. I was unable to make a case for why such relationships and concerns developed in this now deleted section were made and sustained by practices of care.¹³ On reflection, analytical autoethnography, as I have described above, is useful in posing methodological questions and considerations when undertaking research that utilises techniques such as participant observation ethnography or interviews, *alongside* autoethnographic writing. It is less useful in accounting for the messy, uncertain and disruptive potential of non-normative ways of being in

¹³ See Autieethnography Part 2 (Chapter 5), for an in-depth discussion of the importance of care when discussing intersubjective relations in autoethnographic writing.

the world such as autism. Again, I will expand on these concerns in Chapters 4 and 5.

Given this critique of Anderson's approach, this is not to say that the CMR framework was not useful in allowing me to critically and reflexively consider my insider status as a young adult with Asperger's Syndrome. For example, while I identified and agreed with the political stances of the Social Club members, I was careful not to involve myself too heavily with their activities in regard to questioning and critiquing the club's neoliberal policies and agendas. I sought to develop a form of critical distance from my ideological agreement with the club members, in order so that I did not become a kind of "subcultural spokesperson" for the group (Bennett, 2003). This role was adequately taken up by other members of the club, such as Josh from the Youth Club, who was part of an ambassador organisation advocating for autistic rights and support that engaged with the needs of autistic people and their communities. My lack of engagement with the increasingly diverse networks of borough divisions with which the charity engaged also discounted me from giving a fully informed contribution to these issues.

Furthermore, a focus on analytical autoethnography enabled me to account for and be more aware of the shared social, emotional and meaning making processes that occurred and developed during my fieldwork. For example, growing up in a working-class, consumerist driven home meant that I am emotionally and ideologically captured by the commodity chains of entertainment in the realm of games, books, cartoons, TV shows and films. This facet of my upbringing enabled me to connect with members of the Youth Club who shared many of these interests and often brought up new games and cartoons in casual discussion. This enabled me to gain a point of purchase and thus entry into their social worlds and discussions and connect my own interests with theirs. My sociological training and training enables me to take a critical perspective on these activities. Equally, for those older members and

participants in the Social Club, a sense of connection was established through a sustained discussion and critique of the British Coalition government and in 2015, the majority Conservative Party government's policies. These discussions, pragmatically, often revolved around the neoliberal processes being implemented throughout the charity sector and the negative impact it had on their financial affairs. The resulting impact of this forced the charity to utilise strategies oriented towards consumer logic rather than a charitable ethos. My education and sociological awareness provided me with ways to relate to and discuss these issues with members and my own political beliefs and leaning became something I could share to members in discussions. I was able to simultaneously embrace and share my enjoyment of popular culture and my critical, distanced sociological insights to gain a well-rounded understanding of the club members and my own academic interests (Hodkinson, 2005).

These shared points of engagement and connection infuse the empirical examples, alongside the focus on the habitual, sensory, atmospheric and quasi-object relations I focus on theoretically. Some of the analyses offered in Chapters 3 and 6 are based on these interactions and account for the varying ways in which my CRM status allowed me to develop accounts that are based on shared, empathetic and sensory modes of engagement with the world. These forms of analytic reflexivity and visibility enabled me to following Anderson, showcase forms of "mutual informativity" (Anderson, 2006: 383), where the researcher shows how their visibility in the text and the experiences described are influenced by their participants in reflecting back on the experiences and theoretical frameworks they develop. I show this in Chapter 5 when discussing how a participant's frustration with housework mirrors my own frustrations with my working environment at home. In addition in Chapter 6, the members and I shared our appreciation of the comedy of *Blackadder*, which enabled a more nuanced and engaged discussion of the atmospheric importance it had for a scenario I examine there. In this example, I develop ways of developing theoretical insights into the atmospheric importance of *Blackadder* to club members in developing certain kinds of social moods and

interactions. These factors can all be considered as contributing to my status as an “insider researcher” which is common amongst researchers at doctoral level of youth and social clubs (Hodkinson, 2005). Following the notion that autoethnography is a triangulation method between the self, culture and the study of these relations. Montelli (1999) argues that because focus groups enable participants to question and challenge each other, the data can be more reliable as it is triangulated by other participants. CMR understandings can thus be developed from these accounts as they enable the researcher to converse with respondents based on their interpretative interactions with others.

In developing ways of accounting for the different levels of analytical reflexivity in my research, an approach that seeks to recognise the ways in which autoethnographic “data are situated within (a researchers) personal experience and sense making” (Atkinson et al, 2003), I have sought to account for the different ways in which my participants may be represented in this thesis. Different forms of autistic writing, by and about autistic individuals, groups and organisations have led Hacking (1995, 2010) to identify several “genres” of autistic writing that have emerged over the last few decades. Such genres form a “looping” relationship with the condition and the discursive and embodied practices of autism co-emerge and co-mingle together in reconstituted and new constellations. The ways in which we describe autism as a condition go on to structure and provide conceptual and symbolic resources for those with autism to see themselves within these looping genre constructions. This thesis serves as an academic genre of writing and creates its own forms of genre looping effects. This self-reflexive process of articulation cannot remain outside of the modes of speaking and discursive formations that allow the researcher to speak and present new ideas and data on autism. This does not mean that caricatures that emerge from these genres, such as the autistic child as “alien” or a detached rational being, will be reproduced or wholly denied and avoided in the writing. The concept of looping prevents such clear cut possibilities as a definitive end result, but rather serves as double backdrop for both the researcher and the reader. In the former instance, this awareness allows the

writing to be formulated with care and attention to the accounts and experiences given by the participants within this framework.

This mode of thinking also ties into ethnographies that have utilised the impact of fieldwork experiences on their data collection, analysis and wider embodied and conceptual categories (Briggs, 1970, Okely, 1992, Grimshaw, 1992). Of particular note is Okely's study of Gypsy culture, in which she sought to dress and adapt her bodily comportment to better understand and achieve a greater rapport with her participants. However, she found that these adaptations led to new disruptions and movements between social worlds when on extended fieldwork breaks and returning to academic social fields and cultures. In academia, she was subjected to particular norms that required conforming to dominant, middle class values that the Gypsy women themselves felt they were exempt from the wider culture they were a part of. From this, Okely concludes that this emplaced reflexivity led her to gain a conceptual as well as embodied understanding of the stereotypes imposed on Gypsies, but also, of how academic practices and values impact on research (Okely, 1992: 15).

From my perspective, because of the sensory difficulties around loud music, strong smelling food or the disorganised placement of the club furniture, I often experienced the same difficulties as the club members. In the immediacy of the moment, I struggled to maintain a degree of "sensory reflexivity" (Vannini et al, 2012). My "iconic", immediate sensory experiences dominated and the discomfort they engendered prevented me from developing "symbolic" meanings in regard to my sensory experiences. This is the way in which our iconic sensory experiences are developed through symbolic, linguistic and discursive meaning in relation to our internal sensory experience and others reactions and perspectives. My autism temporarily closed down my awareness to help me deal and cope with the oncoming sensory danger and discomfort. This problem was countered when I developed my field-notes the next morning. I had time to process and work through the events of the previous night's club

session and was able to work through the ways in which my sensory experiences and those of other club members were mediated by technologies, objects, spatial relations and interpersonal meaning making. I took what has traditionally been excluded in ethnographic field notes, the “unscientific” domains of emotion and personal experience (Van Maanen, 2011) and used them to help process and make sense of my sensory shut-down episodes. These potentially “disastrous research episodes” (Michael, 2004), when I became too stressed to try to make field-notes and observe club activities during times of sensory difficulty, were mitigated by my delayed field-note writing.

Conclusion

Researching groups with autism is a challenging yet rewarding process that can provide insights into not only their lives and experiences, but also question the basis on which research methods are grounded. I have sought to document and account for the methodological and practical reasons for how my research developed. In so doing, I have explored the competing ways in which my use of ethnographic participant observation and focus groups have been utilised to explore sensory habitual favourites in the best way I can with my skill set. I will address criticisms and potential different approaches I could have taken in this project in the conclusion of the thesis. The next chapter will be an empirical investigation of the importance of parasitic and quasi-object relations in understanding how those with autism relate to their favourites.

Chapter 3 - Habitual Favourites - Modulated Thresholds and Parasitical Quasi-Objects

Introduction - An Outline of The Chapter

This chapter will investigate the relationships between favourite activities, people, objects and places and the formation, breakdown, stability or dynamism of habitual engagement and activity. The motivations and potential reasons for autistic people to engage with favourite activities and the mechanisms that may drive this will first be defined. The remainder of the chapter will take the form of a series of empirical scenarios and examples that occurred during my participant observation fieldwork with a local charity running Youth and Social Clubs that highlight core themes in the relations between habits and favourites. The four examples developed will focus on the modalities that the favourites in question utilise and how they make sense and meaning to the participant involved. Each section will also consider the mechanisms and processes that enable a continued investment in the favourite(s) and how and why they were stabilised or broke down. My goal is to expand on the notion of quasi-object(s) to “social” quasi-objects by exploring habitual engagements of people with autism.

Factors Impacting The Relationships to Favourites in Autism

In Chapter 1, I outlined a number of different aspects of how habitual favourites and sensory engagement could interact within the theoretical framework of Serres’ theory of the parasite and quasi-object relations. The elements explored here will build upon these insights to give them more specificity within the framework and concerns of the research that this chapter draws upon.

Here, I want to begin to systematically think about favourites in a theoretical register to enable the empirical material to be given a wider context. In order for a person to engage in an activity over and over again, and to feel the level of connection that they do when they interact with a favourite, there must be powerful socio-psycho-ecological reasons. As Dewey (1922) argued, humans possess a core need to maintain a degree of stability and control within their lives and if this breaks down, severe, destabilising and distressing consequences follow. This process of establishing a stable sense of social being, in connection to personal, social and environmental needs, is found in many areas of life and forms a central activity within them. Think of the amount of time we spend repairing misunderstandings with others, or evaluating what we did. Those with autism, who have difficulties in interpreting multiple modes of social communication from linguistic to embodied gestures, must undertake a greater amount of performative work in these modes in order to ensure they are understandable to others and themselves. The point being that such a concern for forming a sense of stability is central to social and personal life and is not isolated to one sphere or domain, but interpenetrates with each of them. The fact that many of these performances of stability are temporary or often must be renewed, highlights the important relational and indeed, cyclical quality to these processes.

This does not, however, mean that these processes are inherently worthless or meaningless habits instead bring light to how complex and nuanced we must be in order to account for the myriad ways in which stability is brought into our lives. As Serres has argued (2007), dysfunction and destabilisation is as central to any social system or sociality as stability is and is thus productive in its own right. This dynamism of stability and instability enables a conception of novelty and emergence within the ongoing performance of interacting with our favourites. We can take in and integrate new elements, whether they are new objects, persons, materials, ideas or explanatory frameworks and fold them into our already formulated habitual favourite engagements. The analytical questions then become, what kinds of habitual favourites serve these purposes?

Why do social actors choose certain habitual favourites? What are the different modalities that these relationships take and the effects they have?

As I have noted, questions of stability are central to those with autism and yet, they remain problematic in a pragmatic sense as we also have noted. I will now provide some insights to the importance of favourites for those with autism and their use and dependence on notions of habituation and routine. At the core of the need for routine and stability for individuals with autism is the necessity and yet fundamental difficulty they have in understanding, filtering and managing social, emotional and sensory experiences, whether they be internal or external. As Park (2010) notes, in reference to autistic primatologist Dawn-Price Hughes reflections on how her emplaced relations with autism impacted her:

Most autistic people need order and ritual and will find ways to make order where they feel chaos. [They] instinctively reach for order and symmetry [For example] they rock back and forth, cutting a deluge of stimulation into smaller bits with the repetition of their bodies' movements. (Prince Hughes, 2004: 25 in Park, 2010).

Therefore, sense making and bodily, kinaesthetic, proprioceptive and haptic modes are thoroughly intertwined with emplaced intersubjectivity. This process also points to the noted autistic ability to perceive the world in intense, local detail, but then to subsequently have difficulty placing these perceptions within the global or larger picture of the situation (Bogdashina, 2003). Such intense relationality can be found in both human and non-human relations with a great sense of connectedness shown for books, animals and abstract systems (Davidson and Smith, 2009). Rather than beginning from pre-formulated notions of what is important researchers must be attentive to the emerging perspectives of the phenomena under study within the given context. We must give empirical depth and breadth to what is before us and in order to do this effectively and

with precision, the stakes for the group or phenomenon in question must be first identified and conceptualised.

Smith and Sharp (2013), in their grounded theory study of the sensory experience of adults with Asperger's, found that the degree of "abnormal" sensory experiences for their participants depended upon a number of factors, which together formed a matrix of modulating components that greatly influenced the degrees of social functioning of those with Asperger's. These "moderating factors" included: low intensity versus high intensity, single versus multiple inputs, order against chaos and being stressed against being calm. The lower sensory end of these dimensions was manageable if they were minimal and not continuous so as to overwhelm the participants. However, if participants were stressed, each sensory dimension was overloaded, causing pain and discomfort, this then led into a self-fulfilling vicious cycle whereby sensory perceptions themselves cause stress, further increasing the discomfort of sensory perceptions and the emotional toil and anxieties they provoke. This may lead to being overloaded and withdrawing cognitively, or physically (if possible) from the event to recover. The deployment of coping strategies such as manipulating the environment to block out sensations via earphones or pulling blinds will be compulsively undertaken in order to escape from the stressors as quickly as possible. It should be noted that the use of order, routine and planning could also contribute to anxiety and stress as some participants also explained how traumatic events made them wary to head out due to busy streets causing visual and mobility issues. The notion of thresholds is important for this model, as Smith and Sharp's participants noted that the tolerance of stressful stimuli was connected to how much previous encounters had affected them and whether they had time to recover and process this stimuli. The management of these thresholds was central to their overall constitution and required a high degree of internal management.

The interconnected and interwoven dimensions of Smith and Sharp's model adds further clarification and depth to the question of Dewey's fractured and integrated subjects as a performance. In order to achieve an integrated subject position, the degrees of each of the moderating factors needs to be on the *very* low end of stimulation in order for this to be even possible and very often requires a tightly controlled environment, such as described by Park's (2010) rocking autistic individuals. As Serres (2007) again notes, noise is central to any form of social life and this harmonious state of affairs can only but be temporary as some form of sensory/social input will disrupt this integrated state of affairs. We can then also speak of different degrees of fracturing that autistic subjects may experience, from complete mental and physical withdrawal, to perceptual disorientation, whether attentional, proprioceptive or any other form of sensory perception, to a constant sense of light anxiety and unease that makes the subject question if they are acting "normal" or they cannot identify the sensory/social source of this unease.

The mediating process that structures these domains, I want to argue, is the quasi-object. I contend in this thesis that quasi-object relations are central to what may be termed an "autistic sociality" or the actionable practices, objects relational, emotional, cognitive and affective ways in which people with autism understand and relate to the world. Key to an autistic sociality and the components that go into constituting and influencing this sociality are favourites. For a favourite activity to be able to be engaged with in an effective way, each of the factors contributing to anxiety needs to be on the low end of the sensory continuum. In this way, favourite activities require a degree of emotional and social management that contributes to and performs a sense of self-identity. When fractured, the possibilities of engaging with favourites on a complex level become reduced and may be as simple as rocking or clutching a soft blanket or repeating a set phrase until the situation passes. Favourites can thus be said to be a quasi-object like concept in that they serve to mediate between personal and collective self-identity, emotional and psychological well-being and stability and bring different domains and social worlds into recognisable and self-

generated means of understanding and experience. In this regard, I want to bring a central abstraction motive of the quasi-object, to slow down and move our relations from a universal principle, to an applied, empirical one that helps shed new light on key dynamics and characteristics of autistic sociality.

Developing The Quasi-Object Concept

If we can take favourites as a “social” object, we can, following Simon (2010), further account for the specific qualities of quasi-objects. Social objects can be: (1) Personal, (2) Active, (3) Provocative and (4) Relational.

1. Personal social objects are familiar objects that have unique and intimate connections to the people who are involved with them, provoking and instigating social interaction to share. An example could be an object such as a teddy bear that bore the memories of a person’s brother.

2. Active objects can insert themselves into spaces and force our attention to be drawn to their presence. This can either be forced or spontaneous and depends on the context of the situation, whether an event is routinised or whether unpredictable actions emerge. An example in this vein may be, in relation to the club space, finding a catwalk like stage in the middle of the room that is completely unexpected (discussed below).

3. Provocative objects engage interaction in their own right and serve as spectacles that require discussion in order to resolve social shock, excitement or produce clarity. This may refer again to the stage in the clubroom and requires explanation, otherwise people would obsess with it due to troublesome levels of ambiguity and lack of clarity regarding the situation.

4. Relational objects are objects which require intervention to be utilised and are compulsorily social as they cannot fully exist or function without social engagement. An example here would be an institution such as a charity, which cannot exist without being a result of human, material and discursive construction and maintenance (Simon, 2010: 127-132).

These categories are helpful in sorting out and highlighting the role played by different favourite objects or practices, as they speak to different forms of relations that constitute on-going, co-constitutive relations between quasi-objects and quasi-subjects. They also help us in understanding how people with autism may relate to different events and situations in the social world that is grounded in the activities, objects, environments or people and their favourite(s), in a way that is important and meaningful. These also arise from their own interests, perspectives and experiences, rather than externally imposed criteria of relevance.

The above framings that I have detailed shall now be developed, expanded and interrogated through recourse to some of my empirical material collected throughout my participant observation and focus group interviews. I will focus upon four moments that occurred throughout my research that shed light on the different ways in which habits, favourites and sensory engagement is experienced by those with autism. Each section will outline the scenario to give context to the cases which occurred during my fieldwork that points to a highly interesting, curious or puzzling incident. These scenarios will also represent the sensuous and affective processes that occurred to give the reader a more embodied sense of the research encounters presented.

Some Comments on Using an “Events” Based Analysis

The reason for utilising events as a method of analysis is because the concept works in synergy with the notion of “social” quasi-objects (discussed above). My thinking here is drawn from the philosophical-methodology of Savransky (2016a) on events. An event is, in the most basic terms, something that happens which causes a difference to occur. In a more nuanced fashion, an event is caused by something that happens, but is not reducible to the occurrences which bring it into being. It instead is a sustainable transformation that “subsists or inheres” as an incorporeal effect in the actions and passions of bodies and their practices” (Deleuze, 2004: 7 in Savransky, 2016a: 155). Because of this secondary separation from the original occurrence, the event can connect to other milieus, objects or persons that may be already receptive or open to becoming receptive to what the event opens up. It creates novelty in what occurs and is not the occurrence itself (ibid: 155). Because of these features, events create space and time around them, rupturing known understanding and causality, throwing them “out of joint” (Deleuze, 1993: 89) to create new fields of possibility (Savransky, 2016a: 155).

In quasi-object terms, they serve to provide novel anchors to the new possibilities inherent in social life and redistribute our knowledge of what a space and time means for a set of people. The different forms of social quasi-objects pertain to the certain ways that the spatial, temporal, material, social and interpersonal processes of events can emerge in concrete and practical ways. To draw out my empirical examples from the flux of the ethnographic research encounter betrays a reservation that must be kept in mind when talking about events in this manner. I, as researcher, do not have complete authority to dictate what an event is or what it means for the beings they emerge from and go on to affect. To do so would be to discount how events make certain things matter and others not, irrespective of human intervention or the mediums through which they emerge and how they are presented. In keeping with

thinking about the notion of habit, researching events should be about devising and creating ways in which to remain open to events and what possibilities emerge from them. What is the balance between solidified, routine and tacit knowing and acting and when does the novelty, spontaneity and uncertainty of developing and maintaining habits in the face of eventful happenings occur? This means that my examples are looking to explore not only when things get out of joint, but also the ways in which members sought to work through their concerns and develop mechanisms to cope *and* thrive with what life presents them.

The scope of the events in question is important in this regard, as Serres has put it, an events novelty “is proportional to the length of the preceding era concluded by the event” (Serres, 2013: 2). I have therefore been careful in drawing out examples that explore different spatial and temporal delimitations which explore and help elaborate on how different configurations of event and milieu impacted the habitual responses of club members. For example; the shock of a provocative object is dependent on the specific qualities of said object and the milieu which it is part of. The catwalk was a brief, one-time-only occurrence, but the impact it had on members in the club was highly noticeable, re-orienting routine activities and the means of navigating the club space around the object. However, the next week, the catwalk was gone and members acted as if it had never been there to begin with. The event inhered only for one session and can be contrasted with longer term alterations such as repainting the club walls which took a number of weeks, but did not receive as much interest as the changes were gradual and easy to digest. My reasoning to incorporate event-framed examples is to utilise a method that expands upon the social quasi-object concept I develop in this chapter.

The Different Modalities of Habitual Favourites

During the ordinary running of the club, people discuss in groups, engage in board and table games, set up and play with the Nintendo Wii console, head out to get cakes, chocolate and coffee/tea from the nearby student café, play ping pong or pool or organise one-off meetings and events for inside and outside the club space. These more structured activities were punctuated by specific, habituated activities that served to connect participants to their own senses of identity and familiar bodily and cognitive modes of engagement and attunement. This section will explore some examples of the different mechanisms that participants utilised in order to form habituated connections to favourites and the mechanisms that mediate their relationship to these favourites. Each example, focusing on a specific participant will provide a brief description of their personality, characteristics and how they interacted with other club members in engaging with club activities.

¹⁴Doug - Cats, Technological Quasi-Objects and Soylent as Parasite

Doug is a participant from the Social Club whose interests in cats, technology and the mundane routines of home life, showcase different dimensions of his relationship to a habituated mode of relating and acting. Doug is a young man in his late 20's with a kind and caring nature. This disposition meant that he was reserved and quiet when speaking and undertaking activities. He did not communicate in an extravagant manner, preferring hushed and muted tones of voice. Doug possesses high levels of curiosity and this often revealed itself in mildly obsessive interests in tracking the development of various projects. The most prominent of these was his interest in the development of the "Hub", a

¹⁴ All names in this chapter are pseudonyms and all locations are referred to in abstract detail so as to not reveal specifics.

centralised building that was being built during my fieldwork that planned to host activities, leisure events, support services and information through a dedicated library. Each week, without fail, Doug would ask the nearest available staff member how the Hub was coming along. They were happy to inform him and he was satisfied with the updates. Until he received this information however, he was restless until he found an opportunity to ask about the Hub. Doug also had many quirky traits that allowed the group to engage in friendly teasing and banter about his seemingly bizarre actions. The first of these was his brief interest in Soylent, which I will address in the analysis below. The second concerned his acquisition of a hhippet dog early in my thesis. In response to this, he decided that he should wear what he termed “northern English” attire. This consisted of a tartan jacket with a chequered flat cap, complete with price and brand tag still attached to the hat. The other club members teased and joked with him about these dress choices, but Doug took it in his pride, joining in the banter. This convivial atmosphere inspired me to take part in this teasing much of the time as I had observed that Doug was comfortable with it. Early on, this factored as an important part in building rapport with club members.

Doug’s interest in cats was nurtured at an early age and has stayed with him as he grew up and remains with him today. His engagement with them was a very intense and sensual one. He noted that he particularly enjoyed how they felt, their visual appearance (both their physical structure and fur colourations) and the different sort of sounds they made such as purring and meows. These different indicators of engagement for Doug did not point to a disparate or fragmented sense of what a cat was (breaking down cats into different, separate components) but he wished to talk about an essential “catness” that he found great comfort in. When he became older, he continued his affiliation with cats by volunteering at a local farm that housed cats. His appreciation of the cat “form” so to speak, has been widened as part of this ongoing engagement as he now appreciates the different personalities of the cats present and how they relate to his presence and how he could best interact with them. For him, the presence of cats was a very relaxing and reassuring experience that promoted a sense of

familiarity and allowed him to connect with another, sentient species that, in some manner, presented him with a set of behavioural and attunement relations to the world that he could relate to and understand to a greater degree than people. Cats are highly social and have sets of behavioural gestures and actions that refer to and indicate specific interests, feelings or orientation to an activity in question. The interactional rules were much simpler to relate to and understand, partly because specific intentions that lead to action can be more easily read with cats, as they possess less social complexity than humans. They also provided a highly pleasurable set of sensory relations for Doug, which appeared to contribute to a sense of security and stability. The most important of these sensory relations for him was the softness of their fur, that allow, or affords, a snug means of cuddling up to cats and promotes a tactile means for humans and cats to interact.

In this case, cats serve as a potent quasi-object for Doug, in that they serve to bring together a set of characteristics that enable him to enter a calm and relaxed frame of mind and bodily comportment. This sense of connection is not left as a free-flowing emergent relation. Doug has put much affective work into learning to be affected (See Latour, 2004) and affecting the cats that he has encountered. Like Grandin (2000a, 2015), who worked with and developed humane ways of dealing with cattle (discussed in Chapter 1), Doug has a profound respect for the capacities and properties of cats and appreciates their company. Due to the ways in which he was able to understand and relate to cats via sensory means when he was young, this familiarity has led him to connect back his later interests, such as researching and learning about technology related to ecological solutions and sustainability in productive ways. Doug had an interest in keeping up to date with the latest developments in technology and had a tempered faith that technology could provide solutions to many problems, including the aforementioned issues of environmental technologies. In this vein, he has begun to conceive and develop his project of the “cat toilet”. This device, he posited, would combine his love of cats and

technological solutions to issues of waste by funnelling urine and excrement into different sections and cutting them off to simplify disposal.

In this way, the cat toilet could be viewed as Doug's own self-conceived quasi-object. He wants to develop a device that is attentive to the needs and capacities of engagement that cats possess, but also contribute to the human endeavour for creative, technical solutions to social issues. The potential complexities around the environmental challenges faced by humanity are immense and cannot be conceptualised without an equally immense ensemble of collective human endeavours and technological action. In connection with this, the micro dimensions of this issue, that of on the ground, local developments, such as the development of individual or local group technical solutions such as the cat toilet, allow social actors to find meaningful engagements with such seemingly abstracted and large objects of concern. Doug's cat toilet forms the quasi-objective link between these two domains such that he can contribute something that is meaningful to him, but will, if the project comes to fruition, provide a means of engaging with technological development and ecological issues that draws upon his experiential expertise and sensory entanglements with the world.

I wish to stay with Doug to consider some of the ways in which his habitual engagements with more mundane routines and practices in his life showcased a contrast to this positive, quasi-object relation to one that was more based on parasitical relations. By this, I mean that there are attempts to exclude certain relations from consideration, only for them to remerge in new and debilitating ways. During a conversation with other members of the club, he expressed his frustration that the everyday domestic tasks he performed took place, in a circular loop. For instance, when he did the washing up, he would soon need to do it again, without really getting anything out of it, as the washing would get dirty again in a very short space of time and this continuous cycle distracted him from other, more preferable activities. He then imagined that technological

advancements may negate some of these issues and thus resigned himself to wait for the future. However, he took this concern for the incessant recurring, parasitical practices into other domains. This conceptualisation captures the sense in which Deleuze understands Nietzsche's concept of "eternal recurrence" not as "a repetition of the same, but on the contrary, to a transmutation. It is the moment or the eternity of becoming which eliminates all that resists it. It releases, indeed it creates, the purely active and pure affirmation" (Deleuze, 1983: xii). Over the course of a few weeks, Doug, having undertaken some research and "transmuted" his ongoing household chore recurrences into a new affirmation, shared with the group a product named Soylent, developed by a Silicon Valley engineer. The product, designed for cosmopolitan, middle-class professionals who did not have time to prepare full meals or stay in one place for too long, was promoted as having all the nutrients you need for each day with sufficient liquid intake.

Doug was not so interested in Soylent itself, but the potential it offered to not stop his other activities so that he could eat throughout the day and be in a continuous flow with what he was doing. The socio-psycho-sensual relations of food, such as the social meanings given to smell that speak to the historical, embodied and familial relations that speak to the formations of identity and remembrance (Vannini, et al, 2012), Doug eschews for convenience. The other club members and participants, who were present in this discussion, were relatively amused by this and asked for him to provide justifications and clarity to his enthusiasm for the project and product. Member and research participant John remarked that Doug was "a marketer's dream!" due to his naïve enthusiasm and interest in the product. Equally, they took Doug's aforementioned straight-faced approach to things and removed the "allure" of Soylent for him by noting that "Soylent is a verb for soiled". A month later, John asked Doug how his use of Soylent was proceeding. Doug responded with he felt "super-powered for a few days". These exchanges showcased that the group were not convinced that the product would deliver and that his motivations were not necessarily wrong, but the group posited that the issue

was essentially a non-issue and proceeded to joke around with him in a friendly way.

Doug's fascination with Soylent can help extend our understanding of the nature of parasitical relations when they are open to scrutiny from others. Soylent proved to be an intensely provocative social object, in that it served as a highly effective means for Doug to express his views and how he would rectify the everyday "problems" that he had. Its status as a quasi-object is interesting in this regard in its intersection between social norms of eating, questions of time management in relation to preparing food and the correct degrees of enthusiasm for a product that questions the taken-for-granted aspects of these social norms. Soylent can also be considered as a relational object in that the unique and perhaps bizarre combination of food/nutrient material that comprises Soylent needs to be accounted for in order for people to be happy to accept it as something that is edible. It will take some time before Soylent becomes a readily available food stuff that will be eaten without conscious consideration as to whether it is edible or even food in a habitual manner. These considerations for Doug were not central in factoring into his self-motivated frustration at mundane, cyclical repetitions. The above, socio-cultural and bio-ecological issues were left to one side and personal preference was given full rein. In this case, the contradictions between the ecological and social sensibilities of the cat toilets and Soylent may come to an ugly clash one day for Doug.¹⁵ For now however, these concerns were lingering third elements that threaten to emerge and complicate Doug's understanding and connection to his ideas and habitual emplacement.

¹⁵ In more familiar terms, this disconnection between Doug's two interests could be interpreted utilising mainstream autism theory as displaying difficulties in global/local processing (Happé and Frith, 2006). However, the social quasi-object framework deployed in this chapter demonstrates the reductionist impulse contained within autistic theory that prioritises and elevates one characteristic of autism as "the" factor to explaining autism as a complete condition.

In summary, Doug's interests in cats, technology and parasitical routine tasks, were mediated by different concerns and considerations that were geared towards being affected by cats, integrating future hopes and developments for his interests in technology and getting frustrated with the boring, repetitive nature of everyday living. The most ironic aspect of Doug's engagement with Soylent is the way it serves to reduce the complexities of eating into a single, simple act. These singular interactions, Doug hoped, would then become a habitual part of his everyday routines and fade into the background. In doing so, he was not solving the problem of eternal recurrence of tasks, but attempting to reduce the parasitical burdens on his time. He was working away at the symptoms of the problem rather than the source.

The next section will concentrate on Garry, another member of the Social Club, and how he dealt with anxiety and an emergent problem of computer mediated interaction causing him difficulties.

Garry - Multi-Modal Anxiety Relief and Social Management

Garry is a man in his early 60's who was very forthright in his views and opinions on topics. If something was bothering him or if he wanted to contribute to a conversation, he would make sure that he interjected and disrupted the conversation or activity flow in order to make his point. His compulsion to engage sometimes led to him making comments that were inappropriate and reflected his own personal interests, rather than necessarily the context of the discussion or activity in which he made a contribution. These disruptive comments were just as often counterbalanced by his penchant and affinity for picking up on wordplay, puns and innuendo in discussions. This was often greeted by groans by other members, but also recognition of the speed in which Garry caught onto the joke. His example often spurred the rest of the group to notice wordplay elements faster and reciprocate each other's wordplay prowess.

Garry has very low tolerance in distressing situations, whether they were sensory or socially inclined. Thus his lack of patience often led to frustration and his distress thresholds were very low, for example causing him to leave a busy and noisy cafeteria area on a museum trip due to the high pitched voices of schoolchildren present. He was the only member who needed to remove himself from this situation and showcased to me the importance of humour and being the centre of attention that I address below.

The central interest and favourite activity in Garry's life, was being a part of groups that provide services, entertainment, support and community to those with disabilities. This ranged from autism, ADHD, depression, anxiety, Downs Syndrome, hearing and visual impairment. He is proactive in a number of charity and wider autism committees and meeting groups that assess and develop services for disabled individuals and groups in the wider (and growing) communities that the charity serves. Alongside these concerns, Garry's favourite activity was to take part in and plan out the entertainment activities run by the organisations he was affiliated with. These included quizzes, stand-up comedy nights, talent shows and information sessions. The most enjoyable activity though was stand-up nights as he took pleasure in making puns and jokes and ensuring that people had a good time. Garry is particularly fond of winding up the crowd and getting a buzzing atmosphere, in a similar vein to the entertainer Bruce Forsyth. At other events, he would come on in-between sections of the event and do some stand up. This formed an important part of his general behaviour as he was *very* quick to catch puns, innuendos and wordplay.

This affinity for the performative dimension of joking around was important for Garry as he utilised it as a means for him to reduce his anxiety and to focus attention. He disliked multiple people talking at once in different streams on diverse topics, because he could not follow these multiple streams. (This is a common feature of autistic auditory processing (Bogdashina, 2003)). He would

use jokes to focus attention on him as a singular person or entity in the space. The whipping up of the general good natured atmosphere of joking and conviviality also appeared to be a way for him to reduce tension or to remove/displace uncomfortable or unfamiliar social atmospheres of discomfort, unease, uncertainty or the unknown in general. For the members and participants in the club, the use of jokes and wordplay was an enjoyable activity and appreciated and recognised via laughter, grins and echolalia like repetitions of lines from shows such as Blackadder and Red Dwarf. There was also recognition that this was an “autistic thing”. In other words, the eccentric behaviours of Garry in relation to his obsession with making cheesy and corny jokes was accepted, but also made fun of on its own merits, a “here we go again” mentality, registered in sighs and a rolling of eyes. This routine in the more mundane setting of the club, rather than on stage or at an event, did not discount Garry’s enjoyment of making jokes as the conventions and rules of this activity were very clear to him. He noted during a focus group session that this strategy was a way for him to control the auditory sources and space around him and direct them to him in ways that are more manageable than the spontaneous and uncontrolled sonic domains of everyday life.

Garry’s performative capacities can usefully be seen in relation to the concept of somatic careers identified in the literature review. The sensory ritual of controlling auditory and atmospheric attention towards one of comedy and laughter is a direct strategy that counters the unpredictability of life. This then went to infuse his everyday interaction with others and his reliance on the conventions and rules of comedy such as timing, wordplay and the different tones of comedy such as cheesy comedy or shock humour. This was highlighted to me during a discussion of Russian Communism; Garry’s first thought was to the “beautiful long legs” of a Russian tennis player!¹⁶ This led to

¹⁶ This objectified sexual desire speaks to latent heteronormative and able-bodied desires that I observed amongst my participants (Goodley, 2014). In the thesis’ conclusion, I will complicate this perspective to begin developing critical attention to gender and race categories through Goodley’s (2014) analysis of dis/ability detailed in Chapter 1 - Sensory Habits.

friendly teasing of his preference for East European women. It is possible to theorise this from Mead's (1962) analytical framework. Garry was here integrating the I, or, his affiliation for comedic interaction and performance in front of people and the un/successful integration of the genre conventions and social norms of comedy. In the capacity of the I, this integration further enables the person to reflect on them and generate new ideas and interactive frameworks based on their own experiences. The Me, in this case, includes the external influences, receptivity and response to the reaction and general mood of the audiences in which he presented, as well as the nature and status of the event in question. However, in order for this Me process to be undertaken successfully, the levels of anxiety and sensory disruption must be kept to a minimum, lest they remove the capacity to fully focus on social interactions to cope with them. If these conditions were in place, Garry could gain a controlled sense of social expectations within the genres of comedy, stand-up and social function entertainment.

When Garry felt anxious about an activity, he would turn his anxieties into different modal forms in order to gain different perspectives. He cited stories and poetry as the two most commonly used literary forms that he formulated his thoughts into. He has sets of routines that he would follow that he had established and if and when they were disrupted, he would become very upset. These activities required him to find a quiet time and place to put his thoughts into words and from what I observed and noted during my research, he did not find much time to do so and often had to express his feelings to the club organiser and leader or members of the club to express them. When he was stressed, he would often become emotional, and on occasion, physically threatening to prevent any further stress.

This is not to say that Garry lost his ability to formulate more literary reflections on events that he cared about. Indeed, when I inquired into why he had a fondness for caves and majestic buildings when discussing plans for the annual club summer holiday, he replied that you could just feel the sense of wonder and the impact of time on them. For example, you could see and touch rocks in caves that would show you, in their ruggedness, the forces of time and nature. Garry noted, “this timelessness was intriguing to him and wanted to go back and experience it again”. The darkness and range of spatial organisations from cramped tunnels to open, expansive caverns gave a sense of mystery and their seemingly stable and solid foundations gave qualities of timelessness that piqued Garry’s interest and he wished to experience this sense of wonder and captivation more often. These locations brought out evocations from Garry and allowed him and compelled him to express himself and share his ideas with others. This compulsion was not just from the exquisite qualities of these evocative places his anxieties and stresses equally compelled him to talk about his feelings and concerns.

This aspect emerged most clearly during two different scenarios that occurred throughout my participant observation. The first of these was when we were heading into a major city centre for a club trip to a museum. The vast majority of members travelled in a large group with the charity organisers and staff. Some of the older social club members, who were more independent, made their own way via public transport, rather than meeting at a predetermined train station as a group. Garry, making his own way for this particular trip ended up being late. We waited for him and some others in the group outside the main plaza entrance of the museum. After around 10 minutes of waiting, the head of the charity received a call on her mobile from Garry, saying that he would be arriving soon and was lost on the platform. He arrived a little while later and was visibly anxious and talking haphazardly. The club organiser sat him down and they discussed what had happened. Garry noted that he had outlined two separate routes to the museum on an online journey planner, but, throughout the trip, there was a disruption at each turn and when he tried to move to the

other journey outline, that too was cancelled. Having his thought-out and planned routes disrupted, compounded by the fact that the idea of pre-preparation, to counter as many unexpected events as possible, did not mitigate them in this case, causing a great deal of anxiety and stress. Garry also felt guilt as he, in his haste and stress, had pushed someone on the platform in order to get away from the crowded areas as soon as possible.

Following Smith and Sharp (2013), the compounding effects of the spatial disorientation, cognitive planning and route mapping disruptions and *ad hoc* relocating and mapping, present a distinct difficulty for those with autism. In this case the automatic reflex of shoving people away and the disorienting feelings of anxiety and stress themselves, all came together to pose difficulties for Garry. The spectre of parasite relations in this scenario would not be suppressed and the threshold level for each subsequent trigger, from the route disruption, to taking an unfamiliar train, to the disorienting spatial, kinaesthetic and auditory overload of the train station, was lessened as time went on. However, the telling of the story to the club staff, and having them work through it, helped to reduce this stress. Staff helped Garry to step back from the immediacy of the situation, to remind him that in the cramped and rushed process of moving through the train station, people being hurriedly shoved out of the way was a common occurrence and that no one would remember it after reaching their final destination. As such, Garry should not obsess over it and condense the layers of anxiety stimulating events into this one situation that would haunt him via guilt. This could be described as an emplaced quasi-object, distributed throughout Garry's mind-body and influenced and refracted through the environment in which he found himself. The scenario could have been played out over and over in his mind, the feelings of anxiety returning, with vivid memories of the shoving event. Regardless of the severity of the impact, these events will most likely go on to inform Garry's future use of journey planners and trains.

This event showcased the degree to which the blasé attitude suggested by Simmel (1950) is not tenable for autistic individuals as anxiety, spatial immediacy and diverse movement patterns do not allow for a passive approach to sensory experience. The modulating triggers cascade and exacerbate the sensory disorientation Garry was experiencing, producing autonomous reflexes and a need to remove himself from the situation. As Fitzgerald et al (2017) have argued, Simmel, as a late 19th and early 20th century figure, was focused on the organic and “proto-psychology” of the “nerves”. This coincided with thinking in Victorian psychiatry of “degeneracy” and the lack of moral constitution and fibre brought by commercialised distractions and the indoor nature of life (Lawrence, 2009).

A better way of framing Garry’s distress that does not attribute such negative conceptions of sensory and environmental interaction is the concept of the “neuropolitan citizen”. This:

describes an organization of physical spaces and social lives, of interpersonal exchanges and chance encounters [...] simultaneously lived and transacted through the embodied lives of *Neuropolitan* citizens (Fitzgerald et al, 2017: 223, emphasis in original).

This takes the distributed quasi-object point that the material, social, sensory, spatial and temporal domains of experience are based on interactive pathways of interaction. As such, the modalities of sensory and social stressors are woven throughout the emplaced bodymind of Garry and his distributed surroundings. Against conceptions of a “neurological city” that reduces urban stress to brain activity in connection to linear and topographic relationships to the environment. (ibid: 228), Garry’s encounter is replete with “chance encounters” and material and sensory exchanges that leave durable traces of their encounters. They then go on to form quasi-object anchors that force those with autism to slow down

and take account of their surroundings and interaction. Garry's social and sensory encounter was not a linear, cause and effect type relation, but comprise what Vannini et al (2012) describe as "com(ing) to know our body in multiple, nuanced, and at times even contradictory ways" (Vannini et al, 2012: 30). Therefore, physical distress and guilt coincide and lead to complex traces of sensory and social meaning.

The second scenario I want to draw upon here relates to Garry's ongoing and developing relationship with the organisations he is engaged with and how the large number of obligations caused him problems. During a meeting in the student café, he was explaining to me and other club members that he was having trouble with a large number of members contacting him from one disability activity group where he as a member. He was caught up in a dilemma; he was being overwhelmed by the number of people messaging him and friending him on his Facebook page, not being able to keep up with what was happening and getting disorientated. He, however, did not want to appear as antisocial or rude by rejecting people or removing them from his page. Not having the requisite time to think through the situation, he was not able to fully explore or inquire as to the different settings on Facebook, along with not being fully aware and competent with modern internet processes. Garry was thinking of devising a story in which he would state that he got a computer virus, which deleted his Facebook account and so he would make a new one in which he would make it private and would accept people one at a time, at his own pace. It took the club organiser around half an hour working with him on the club room computers to go through with him the different settings on Facebook and alter them to his own preference and to manage the amount of information available to him at once. For Garry, the desire to make a bold move and remove his account in one action was the initial best possible scenario he could envision for himself. The situation had threatened to unravel an integrated sense of subjectivity that would overwhelm and engulf his passion for performance and engagement.

He could not integrate the use of Facebook as a personal social object with their relational object component. In trying to delete his account, he would have turned it into a provocative object that would have caused more questions and confusion for all parties involved, causing discomfort. The sensory and social thresholds (Smith and Sharp, 2013) cascaded preventing clarity in Garry's thoughts and responses to the situation. The compulsion to withdraw from the situation as fast as possible sought to prevent negative, parasitic relations from encroaching on an incredibly enjoyable activity. However, working with the club leader to alter his preferences allowed him to create a more productive *quasi-object* filtering system that allowed Garry to manage his engagement and information flows with others. Assistance in working through the parasitical relations early on prevented the cascade from gaining momentum. The close connection of the club members and staff served to escalate this resolution before irreparable damage could be done. This event also showcases once more the destabilising tendencies of understanding our bodies in nuanced and contradictory ways (Vannini et al, 2012: 30).

The third and final case will be in reference to Josh and his interest and relationship to a film project and travel incident and the ways in which the temporal duration of events impacts upon habitual actions and motivations.

Josh - Filming Breakdowns

Josh, a member of the Youth Club, managed the relationship between forming new habits and favourite interests, which was strongly influenced by the gap between the origin and resolution of an event. Josh can be a loud, brash and somewhat self-centred young man in his early 20's who often got himself into trouble. He often referred to himself as "the wind-up merchant" of the group and that he liked to "take the mick" out of people. Unfortunately, he often took this too far and was not sensitive to others feelings or the context of his remarks that

required staff to remind him to “tone it down” or reprimand him. On occasion, he would show strong mood swings and experience intense bursts of anger. These were very short lived and non-violent, but were quick to emerge as Josh did not show easily observable displays of increasing irritation. This boisterous attitude transferred over to the ways in which he engaged with other members. He often wore large, puffy coats to make himself unintentionally very physically imposing. He also found it hard to be considerate of others people’s opinions or perspectives when he was stressed, angry or upset and would become very selfish. Behind all these issues, however, was a young man who was very motivated and focused on doing good things for the club and for representing those with autism on a wider level. Over the course of my fieldwork, Josh became part of an advocacy organisation as an ambassador for young autistic people. By the end of my fieldwork, he was preparing to address a group of MP’s at the Houses of Parliament on ways to support those with autism. This inspired him to take better care of himself and consider the way he spoke and dressed to convey his passion for advocacy. When the situation called for it, he could also be very gentle and intimate. This was shown to me when Alice, his close friend, was being overwhelmed by the noise and movement of the underground train; he took it upon himself to use his large frame and puffy coat to let her press into him to cover her face, eyes and ears to block the sensory stimuli out. This multi-layered character factored into the two events I now wish to focus on.

Early on during my fieldwork, Josh, who had expressed interest in taking part in the research, soon after the first focus group session, embarked on a mission to create a short film for the charity’s website section on the Social and Youth Club. This was spurred by a number of issues. His enthusiasm for and interest in working with technology including PCs, game consoles and mobile devices. He often boasted and informed people that he would buy all kinds of technological devices. This included an iPad, which he often took with him and used in different contexts and for multiple tasks. A central use for the iPad was the discovering and utilisation of apps. He would often be captivated by an app

and would engage with it for a few weeks and share it with the group, such as a quiz app or video clip player, before moving onto the next app. The idea for the film came about one evening when Josh was finding and downloading a film creation app that allowed the user to produce short clips with music, visual effects and production credits. Josh's ultimate goal was to make a short film that would showcase the fun, positive and accepting nature of the club and that would be a service user produced promotional tool that was directed by them, for other services users.

During one club session in early November 2014, myself, Josh and two other members, were brainstorming ideas for the film and settled on our different roles for the film including director, production director and camera operator. We then went to the clubroom entrance and made a short montage of each of us entering the door, making poses, with captions to mark the introduction to the video and show the audience who was behind the film. After this, we reviewed the montage and made adjustments until everyone was satisfied. During this time, we focused on the main content of the film, the activities and people to be showcased in the film and the style and effects to be used to highlight these aspects in the best possible manner. However, we ran out of time and initially made plans to continue with the work next week. Josh also agreed to show Alice (another participant of the focus groups and research) how the film app worked for the next week. It was agreed that apart from me, they would meet up in the park on Wednesdays, as they routinely did, to discuss ideas further and to get straight to filming on the club night. However, for the next 3 weeks after this session, Alice did not come to the Clubs she and Josh were quite close friends, who shared anxieties, important events and laughed and joked with each other. This removed Josh's initial enthusiasm for the film and we did not work on the film again for the rest of the time I conducted my fieldwork.

Josh's unwavering commitment to recruit me as part of the filming activities was a surprise. It was one of my first glimpses at his caring and inclusive nature, wanting to get people to be involved in group activities. On occasion, I would walk around the club space and observe the many different activities, rather than settle and take part in a specific one. This was in order to gain a more holistic sense of the social interactions of the club space. But, if I am being honest, this strategy was equally due to my social anxiety and subsequent difficulties in instigating conversation or knowing how to ask to take part in a board game mid-way through for example. Josh's impassioned request that I take part in the film project was a relief in this case as I had been invited to take part in club activities. I am grateful to Josh for this openness in this situation.

A number of factors led to this unfortunate conclusion, which fed into the problematic of how to best manage and introduce new habitual and routine sets of practices into an already well-grounded and stabilised set of habitual actions and structures. Let me note that when I talk about habitual actions and structures in this context, I am referring for the former with regard to events such as board game play, Wii use, arts and crafts or heading to the outdoor field to play football. The latter involves the weekly same location and time of the clubs, the same group of staff who attended and supported the members, the timing and occurrence of a break mid-way through the 2 hours and the signposting of these said structures throughout the session for clarity. Ordinarily, the club would begin by members entering the room and getting settled in. The staff would then retrieve from the Club store cupboard, depending on availability and ease of access due to clutter and mess, arts and crafts, board games or pool/ping pong equipment. This would continue until an hour had passed, when the group would head to the college café for the break. During the second half of the session, members may re-join the games or activities, or, they could take a more relaxed approach and sit on the sofas to have more laid back discussions, rather than having to manage and negotiate the social etiquettes and turn taking involved in playing a board game for instance. I bring up the general flow of a club session here, because the filming disrupted several of these conventions

and also alerted me to some new norms that had remained unnoticed until that point.

Firstly, the film planning activity had a clear sense of purpose to it and was highly structured and organised, this was in stark contrast to playing a board game or pool game, where members would often drift in and out of the activity, depending upon interest, general ability to maintain social composure and if another member or activity was calling to them or piquing their interest.

Secondly, the filming session was undertaken outside of the clubroom itself. We relocated to the small passage that led to the room and filmed the separate member montage clips walking down the passage, through the door. Aside from rare occurrences, often in the Youth Club, when people would chase after each other during teasing related to tactile discomfort and the above mentioned food breaks, the activities in the club were kept within the spatial confines of the club room. To be separated from the central activity hub of the club was thus a spatial demarcation that rendered it for the participants as a unique and different activity than would normally be undertaken.

On a more individual note in relation to Josh's connection between routine engagements and planning, during a focus group, he, with the help of the club organiser, revealed to me that he often had difficulty in initiating or undertaking activities that were not an immediate part of his established routine. If left to his own devices, he would remain in his room and play online multiplayer games like Call of Duty. In order to combat this, he and his support assistant devised a weekly timetable and outline of events such as washing and cleaning teeth, getting clothes on and so on. Phil, another club member inquired as to "Whether he would clean his teeth without the timetable". Josh replied that "I wouldn't unless someone told me to". Josh, however, took pride in the fact that he "did not need an alarm to wake up" and "I do all the jobs around the house without being told". His motivation to come out of his routine in this instance was guided by ease of access and familiarity of his devices, becoming immersed within

them sometimes to the cost of external engagements. Furthermore, I noted at the start of this section that Josh was motivated by his ambassador role to practise his speaking skills in front of the mirror consistently. This was a self-organised initiative and thus Josh embodies both aspects of independence and support that mix together in specific contexts. His interest in creating the film for the charity was later taken up by him becoming an ambassador for an associated autism organisation that wished to bring issues of work, political participation and access to government as central concerns. He also oversaw the process of assessing whether autism organisations were meeting their duty to provide support and services. He clearly had a motivation and interest in the film project and was just as keen to share that enthusiasm with the rest of the club members.

So, what were the habitual mechanisms that prevented Josh from doing so? The key to answering this query can be found in Dewey's (1922) work on how to effectively establish new habits so that they can become engrained and dynamic points of entry and action to a particular problem or situation. Dewey argues that too often, when we are trying to instil in ourselves new habitual formations and set of actions, we try to break away from our old habits and very quickly engage in the direct opposite of the behaviour we are trying to curb in order to sustain new action pathways. For Dewey, this misses the point entirely of what habits are and can do for us, as habits are a performance and continuum of actions and structures of being in the world. Thus, to try and stop smoking by suddenly not smoking *at all* is incredibly counterproductive and the highly negative effects of withdrawal will most likely convince the person to engage in the behaviour more and be less reluctant to try and stop. What is required in these situations then, is some mediating concept, activity, action or practices that serves to bridge the gap between the old and the new. Instead of cutting off smoking, the person may go to a support group that alongside helping to quit smoking undertakes leisure activities and becomes a social hub for the people involved (Dewey, 1922: 15-42).

For the film session, this scenario described by Dewey played out in a number of ways. The first problem was that Josh introduced the idea suddenly to the members of the group, and while the interest and passion he displayed helped to carry the project along, the lack of binding social arrangements, such as the people involved not being present for the next few weeks and the group re-entering the normal routine of the club due to this lack of engagement, led to the project's demise. The question of wanting to show Alice how the app worked was a good idea in this context. However, to introduce the idea to her at the end of the club session to be followed up in a weeks time, did not lend itself to forming a sustaining connection. Instead of say, introducing the app to Alice one week as part of a wider engagement with the usual routine of the club and then bringing the idea up to other members, interested in what they were doing and then the next week, sketching out ideas for the film and what activities would feature, Josh set up the production, allocation of roles, outline of ideas, activities to feature and the actual filming, all in the space of 2 hours! Following Dewey, in order to be more effective, the filming needed to be introduced gradually and as part of the wider interactional order in which the intrigue of activities is garnered by mulling around and interacting with other members. The gradual formation of a more organised, not necessarily formal, routine of filming, editing and planning procedures could have been set up, established and utilised over the course of a few weeks.

The reader may have noticed at this point that Dewey's argument is in some senses similar to Serres' (2007, 2008) notion of the quasi-object. To recap, Serres is more concerned with a general framework from which to study all mediating or third relations between objects and subjects. Quasi-objects and parasite relations are universal for Serres and can only be worked around, never removed. Dewey then, is engaged in a social and interest driven analysis of how to maximise the effectiveness of habitual engagement. Where quasi-objects allow us to slow down our perceptions and draw in the socio-spatial-temporal coordinates to particular events, Dewey's transactional approach to habits points us to the socio-psycho-ecological nexus' that are to be found in

play within a given situation. The filming situation can thus best be summarised as an event that was a temporary quasi-object to bring together members' commitments and organise them across different and diverse spaces. The transactional process needed in order to bring these to fruition was lacking. The lure and familiarity of the club routines and the lack of spatial or temporal engagement beyond the first and immediate session caused the breakdown. Josh's desire to not continue the project without the aid or the insights of the rest of the group reflected the shared and social nature of the endeavour that also enabled new spatial arrangements, such as the filming in the door passageway, alongside potential new socially mediated scenarios of members performing common activities for the film.

Escalator Sickness

I now want to consider another favourite of Josh's that serves to further point out possible transactive relationships that altered over time. During my research, Josh often brought up his interest in trains. When he was younger, his uncle would take him to work with him at the ticket office. Josh was then treated to an insider glimpse at the train network computer system that kept track of all the trains with various different graphic and visual effects, colours and data codes that enabled communication and operation of the train system. This sparked an interest in knowing where each train and network in London led to. Over time, he learnt about the vast majority of trains and their routes. In his teenage years, Josh noted that on occasion, he would often sit with his girlfriend at a station and train spot for several hours. This then led into the contemporary form of this interest. After a few months, people who regularly worked at the station and regular rail passengers noticed their presence and established a rapport with them. Josh then regaled his interest in trains and his knowledge of the networks proved very helpful for the passengers. He was thus very much appreciated and his knowledge was recognised, reinforcing his interest and desire to one day work on the train computer network.

I gained this knowledge by listening to and taking part in group discussions with Josh in a group discussion during a train journey and did not ask him about it personally. I did not have to in many situations. For example, when waiting outside the train station for the rest of the group to take the train on the trip, he would come up to me to discuss issues he was having with his freedom pass, trying to renew it. He exclaimed that he “I will argue for hours“ with the train officials and stubbornly insist that there were no issues with the pass. During these situations, I did not attempt to question Josh’s assumptions or suggest that it might be rude or overbearing to insist that he was absolutely right. I let him speak at me rather than engage in a dialogue. Perhaps this was not the best option as he was willing to make the whole group wait until the situation was resolved if it came to it. Ultimately, I did not want to appear as a figure of authority and left the situation for the club leader to handle. Josh’s overbearing conversational style and his stubborn disregard for the welfare of the rest of the group troubled me somewhat. Part of this was selfish reasons “if we are delayed, the plan of how the day will proceed I made in my head will be disrupted. That is going to cause some major anxiety”. My own autistic tendencies of desiring planned, routine disruption entered heavily into my considerations. On another level, I was concerned that Josh would make a public spectacle of the group in public and draw unnecessary attention to us and make us look disruptive and cause tempers to flare. Similarly to Garry, my thoughts became preoccupied by these anxieties and the weight of my interaction lingered. Whenever we approached train ticket stations and gates during our journey, I tensed up and my anxiety prevented me from being fully engaged with my surroundings. In these situations, my focus on the background was diminished and as such, my focus was on the immediate situation. In the end, no incidents arose and our journey proceeded relatively smoothly. Nonetheless, in contrast to Josh’s accepting gesture to take part in the film project, here, I gained a first-hand sense of his brash and overbearing character. While in-the-moment, the situation was uncomfortable, after waiting a day to write up my field-notes, I gained a more well-rounded perspective on the event.

Taking these interests together, contributing to self-affirming factors of recognition and self-taught knowledge, led Josh to be confident in his abilities in navigating and possessing useful guidance for people with queries about travel routes, such as when the group went out on club trips to museums, theatre shows or the seaside. On trips, he would often charge ahead of the rest of the group because he knew where he was going and how to navigate the various tunnels, passageways, stairs and platforms that made up the train and underground stations. He also was self-assertive and often ignored people's concerns when he stood near the yellow line on platforms or came across as smug when he retorted that he did not need help or guidance because he knew what to do.

This background is important in understanding an incident during a trip to a museum that combined Josh's use and interest in trains with his physical embodiment and proprioceptive management of navigating an underground station. We were arriving at our stop on the underground and had to climb several sets of steep escalators to get to the street. The group went up the escalators together, however, Josh soon became profoundly uncomfortable with the high concentration of bodies in close proximity and the inertia felt due to the slow momentum of the escalators. He made a snap, *ad hoc* decision to not wait for the escalators. Instead, he ran up the 2 or 3 sets of escalators needed to reach street level. However, when the rest of the group reached the top, Josh was suffering from an asthma attack. This went on for about 30 minutes as we slowly walked to the museum entrance. In essence, Josh traded his proprioceptive and socio-spatial discomfort for bodily, and in particular, respiratory crises. It is impossible to know whether or not he anticipated the risk of an asthma attack based on the quick, pressured decision that he made. But nonetheless in this scenario, he did not or could not gain a sense of the threshold levels that would trigger negative responses in his body and so one anxiety producing cycle, which could be viewed as a more general sense of awareness, was replaced by one in which the physicality of the body became primary.

Drawing from Serres' analysis, it is possible to theorise that Josh sought to escape from one parasitical relationship, only to become embroiled in another. I will explore how this played out in a future club session in a moment and how the relationship between reflexive and somatic rituals was enacted. But first, to finish off this scenario, because we had to travel back via the same method, Josh asked whether two people from the group could stand behind and in front of him in case he fell over due to vertigo, with little regard for their own safety or if they would agree to do so. He could not, in his strained and vulnerable state, formulate a considered solution to the problem that took into account the wider structures and micro processes that constituted the group dynamics of the travelling party. Following Mead (1934) once more he focused more upon the I, or the more individual and internal factors that impacted on his approach and struggled to extend his reflections beyond the iconic, or in-the-moment, feelings and sensations, to use Vannini et al's (2012) terminology. He struggled to walk with the group and assess whether or not his asthma attack had stopped, indicating difficulty in reconciling a "token-type" or making sense of his sensations through discussions with others. Interestingly, Josh's asthma served as a biological and social parasite, making it an active quasi-object that forced itself upon Josh and the group. This translated on occasion to being a provocative quasi-object that produced concern and status check-ups in relation to Josh's condition. The lack of symbolic realisation prevented Josh from contributing to effectively resolving his active and provocative status on his own terms. This contributed to his seeming lack of awareness on the part of other group members to bear the responsibility of aiding him during our journey.

Ordinarily, this is where the event would have ended, causing Josh to try and find self-sought solutions to his problems. However, it just so happened that around a month later, during a club session, a representative from Transport for London came to the Youth Club to talk to the club members about the latest initiatives and schemes to help those with autism. During the Q&A period at the end of the session, Josh asked if there was a way to get around using escalators if the station in question had no lifts. The representative replied that

during non-peak hours, it was possible to ask the station staff to temporarily stop the escalators and walk up them. This answer satisfied him greatly and he began to prepare to see how he could put it into practice. This epilogue to the escalator episode points to how the event became embedded within Josh's mind-body and enabled him to respond to elicitation for queries regarding disabled access using public transport. This space enabled him to become more aware of the somatic rituals inherent within the event that he could bring together and make broader sense of the event and devise new forms of action to tackle it. He was inspired both by his emplaced experience of the escalators and his wider and more historical developmental interest in rail infrastructures, along with his confidence and assertiveness in relation to this interest to forge new connections and pathways. In this sense, parasitical relations are not always negative and can lead to productive reflections on somatic careers that help those affected by them to relate to them in new ways that respond to concrete and emplaced problems.

Conclusion - Reformulating Parasites and Quasi-Objects Through Autistic Experiences

The process of forming quasi-objects is an essential and universal function of human engagement with the world. Quasi-objects are also bound up with and only emerge in connection to specific social practices and events in the world such that the processes called upon play specific roles and provide diverse responses (Brown, 2002). As this chapter has shown, the different uses and functions of quasi-objects in the formation of habitual processes is diverse and maintains a linkage between personal interests and the means to manage and negotiate them within wider social contexts. The degrees to which parasitical relations enter into this picture are also dependent on the situation and the emplaced character of the social actor and social environment in question. What is parasitical to one autistic person may be harmonious for another. As I have already noted, processes of quasi-object formation and parasitism are

inescapable, but this does not mean that complexity and dynamism cannot be found. In order to examine this proposition it is important to recognise the central tendency within the above accounts of balancing or modulating between becoming too immersed in an activity and being overwhelmed by sensory stimuli.

What is necessary, and indeed is inherent within Serres' notion of the parasite, is the productive capacity of third relations to produce connection between two seemingly absolutely demarcated domains to enable productive dialogue (Brown, 2002: 16). The favourite quasi-object enables this through several processes. The first of these is the connection of personal investments and material, social or technological mediators that enable this process to be possible. For Doug this meant bringing the seemingly unbridgeable gap between cats and their specific, ecological characteristics and the simultaneously global/local process of climate change into dialogue to produce effective and quirky technological solutions such as the cat toilet. In another sense, we could also argue that Doug is drawing upon an anthropological sense of temporality in that the history of domestication of cats is a form of biological parasitism so that we may sustain ourselves and produce new forms of relations for cats to embody.

Gary's struggles to maintain a comfortable sense of connection to his performing obligations is a dynamic example of how noise and interruption emerged over time and the ways in which social media intensify the need for successful solutions to be found. These forms of what it means to be a parasite all point to the complex ways in which autism is imbricated in processes of self-stability and destabilisation which are further complicated and augmented by technological advancements. Ultimately, this chapter has attempted to show the various relations of favourite quasi-objects and habitual interaction that served to structure and engage the participants in the research. It has offered analysis and insight into how parasitical relations and habitual action are co-constituted

and offer pragmatic solutions and responses to the transactive milieus in which autistic individuals find themselves.

What the examples demonstrate are the empirical means by which the universal need for humans to produce quasi-objects is made performatively, enacted within specific contexts for specific needs and uses. Here I have expanded Serres' focus on the material and symbolic tokenistic approach (Brown, 2002) to one that incorporates the socio-psycho-ecological dimensions of social life through various means of making quasi-objects social. The mechanisms used by my autistic participants are not completely powerless in the face of the universal and inescapable processes of parasitism that grounds and structures society and social relations. I have also complicated the notion that special interests are merely obsessive, stereotypical and repetitive. Recognition must be made to the immense amount of work and personal meaning embroiled and folded into the processes of habitual favourite formation and the diverse array of possible meanings and processes participants understood and related to themselves and the world around them.

The next chapter will take a rather different tack as the focus will shift to a reflexive account of the researcher's position as a disabled researcher within the contemporary neoliberal university. It will explore how the concepts and ideas within this thesis are inspired by my own sense of experiencing the world and how these concepts in turn can be used to make sense of my own role in this project. As such, the tone and writing style of the chapter will change to a more open, more informal and unconventional means of engaging with ideas and writing itself. In particular, I develop an account that takes the evocative nature of autoethnographic writings and reconsider them from the perspective of a researcher with autism. I will seek to challenge some of the assumptions underwriting critiques of autoethnography as narcissistic in relation to writing about oneself. In doing this, I will offer an argument that autoethnography, or

autieethnography, can offer insights into the mundanities of everyday academic practice that can highlight the taken-for-granted assumptions of such activities.

Chapter 4 - An Auto/AutieEthnography Part 1 Methodological and Researcher Positionality

Vignette - A Multivocal Outline of Key Themes in The Autoethnographic Literature

Descriptor Voice:¹⁷ - I sit at a table, in the middle of the club room, not actively participating in any activity in an engaged way, but rather, observing, listening, feeling and assessing the emotional state of myself, participants and the interactions between them, trying to gauge the unfolding events. Next to me is a club member, who preferred to be on their own, yet, was not averse to people being in close proximity (so long as they did not interrupt their activities). They were playing a solo game of Scrabble. I was attempting to undertake my usual form of “interaction” within a busy social scene, appearing not to be invested in anything, in deep self-thought, yet listening *and* looking **intently** at ongoing events. I might learn about a couples’ dinner plans, conversations on a work document needing to be referred to in a meeting, and so on. Trying to look deep in thought so that no-one disturbs me, but, in the club setting, I am slightly more relaxed..... as I get enjoyment out of the antics ongoing around me as the quirks of each member continue to evolve for me in new scenarios and topics of discussion.

¹⁷ The use of “voices” in this chapter and the next “Autoethnography Part 2” is part of my commitment to an evocative style of autoethnographic writing that I will explore in the first conceptual section. The “voiced vignette” that starts the chapter utilises a number of techniques to disrupt and draw the reader’s attention to the different modalities and events occurring in the vignette. If the reader is disorientated by the sharp introduction of a different writing style, they may wish to begin the chapter from “Introduction - of Vignettes and Autoethnographies” and finish the chapter before returning to the vignette for theoretical and conceptual context.

Writer/Reader Voice: Wait a moment, *Descriptor Voice*, you seem to be going coming out of your role here slightly. You're talking about and explaining the author's mode of sensory engagement when sitting down and still, but, that should be relegated to the Analysis/Interpretation Voice! You're setting up different kinds of voices as distinct entities and already the reader is seeing them blur together. Should I be talking about the club member's activity? Getting distracted by trying to formulate something like my everyday sensory coping mechanisms? Let's not ramble and try to fit too many ideas into this vignette like I try to do with the theoretical and conceptual ideas I wish to discuss!

Descriptor Voice¹⁸: (Right, back on track then). As I sit across the table, the club member is playing Scrabble with themselves, not wanting others to get involved, but also not totally averse to the idea, putting words together at their own leisure. I sit opposite them on the table and the board is upside down, so as I watch, I am trying to decipher the words backwards, *or slightly curved to the right or left based on my head and body's spatial positioning*. I PONDER THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRYING TO THINK OF WORDS BASED ON SINGLE LETTERS, SEPARATED INTO TILES AGAINST WRITING WITH THEM VIA PROSE OR POETRY WHERE THE UNITS OF THOUGHT MIGHT BE WITH WHOLE WORDS RATHER THAN LETTERS PLACED TOGETHER,

¹⁸ The different voices in this section are used to explore and make explicitly apparent the different concerns and forms of writing and thinking that are often erased from the final text such as deciding what to exclude from analytical considerations. The different grammatical forms, text sizes and formatting choices allow the words and ideas conveyed in them to be given a distinctive textual key and trace that deepens the immersive description of the ethnographic event. Central examples are the different **coloured text**, providing a multi-modal and thus multi-sensory context to the vignette that formal writing does not convey. Further, the use of italics in this descriptor voice serves a quasi-mimetic role in that the curved nature of italics is attempting to mimic the spatial orientation of moving my head and the insights this leads to. The subsequent capitalisation of the analytical insights are to shock the reader into a more cognitive mode of thinking that is attempting to shut down the evocative technique just utilised which the ethical voice goes on to reflexively question and disrupt a single, coherent narrative strain (Perselli: 2008).

ONE AT A TIME. Whilst doing this, I think of my research and how because I AM FOCUSED ON THE SENSES, THIS VISUAL, KINAESTHETIC EVENT OF READING UPSIDE DOWN SCRABBLE TILES IS WHAT I END UP FOCUSING ON, TO THE IN-THE-MOMENT AT THE DETRIMENT OF OTHER SENSORY MODES OF ATTENTION such as the level of background noise, the smells of food and how the **heated inside room** is contrasted with the **cold, dark** outdoors.

Ethics/Focus Voice: Pause again, should I REALLY include this vignette? I mean, the club member I am referring to is not someone who took part in the focus groups and was not as engaged with the research as other members. I had decided to focus most of my analysis and field-notes on the 12 members, (6 from both Youth and Social Clubs), in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of their ***sensory and habitual engagements with the social world.*** But, this member caused me to reflect on my own sensory and habitual biases when it comes to ***sensing***, not just observing the research setting. This club member gave me pause to think about my bias to cognising ideas in my head and the difficulty of not letting my emotional or affective sensations be mediated by disembodied theorising and conceptualising later on. (This point is being SHOUTED out above, but, is this too overbearing?) Nonetheless, should I include this vignette as an example, as the event is so brief and the description is being lost to the interpretative domain? (Also, am I being too self-absorbed?)

Analysis/Interpreter Voice: Well, this vignette is indeed valuable, as you have mentioned, but you have not mentioned the member's name or even gender and the activity they have engaged with, Scrabble, would not be too readily identifiable as many other participants engaged in solo Scrabble games and were part of the wider ecology of activities that took place in any given club session. I also just want to note that your descriptions of the *sensory* and *spatial* processes that you undertook to make sense of the upside-down Scrabble tiles displays a more emplaced and bodily sense of how particular ideas, concepts and meanings can come from specific environmental and bodily configurations.

It may just be the case that you are already showing awareness of different modes of emplacement and that different forms of literature presentation allow for multiple interpretations and readings of a single event. Just as autoethnography can encompass biographical writing, poetry, traditional storytelling and theoretically informed analysis.

Ethics/Focus Voice: Ah.... I suppose those are good points.

Descriptor Voice: Partway through the game, the club organiser and leader came over to see what was happening and make casual conversation with me and the club member. However, not long afterwards, the Scrabble playing member noticed the Wii game console in the top right corner of the room with Mario Kart Wii playing and became captivated by the sounds and colours of the graphics and character voices. They then went over to play the game with other members, leaving Scrabble rather abruptly without putting anything away or acknowledging the club leader. The club leader and I both shared a knowing glance that sensory stimulation overcame social niceties. I then went over to the Wii area where members and participants were located and *switched my modes of attention* to the interpersonal group dynamics of taking turns and expressing and sharing frustrations and successes in the game.

Writer/Author Voice: Ok, time to switch my writing/thinking process to the more formal, continuous prose writing of developing a traditional introduction.

Introduction - Of Vignettes and Autoethnographies

The above vignette serves to illustrate some of the key methodological, theoretical and ethical issues that have been raised in the literature on autoethnography. This chapter will discuss the most relevant literature and examples within the autoethnography corpus that have formed my perspective on the method and my reasons for developing my autoethnographic accounts as I have. I will first outline some of the writing techniques and devices I have drawn upon and used in my own autoethnographic writing. Reasoning will be given for my use of a vignette format, the inclusion and demarcation of multiple voices within the vignette account and the methodological and theoretical reasons for these decisions based on poststructuralist concerns with autoethnography.

Detailed attention will be given to the methodological, theoretical and ethical concerns that have been raised against and for autoethnography. In particular, I will address the accusation that autoethnographic writing is narcissistic or self-absorbed; arguing that viewing autoethnography in this way reinforces negative conceptions of autism in relation to developing relationships with others and conveying ideas to those others. I shall also consider some of the relational ethics that pertain to my account that is shaped by my connection to disability support and what this reveals about the mundane and hidden aspects of PhD writing and academic work in general. My conclusions will serve to reemphasise the importance and *possibility* of doing an autistic autoethnography or “autieethnography” and the importance of developing analytically informed research analysis.

The Evocative Uses of Vignettes and Multivocality in Autoethnographic Accounts

My use of vignettes is based on several inspirations drawn from Humphreys' (2005) outline of their use in the autoethnographic literature. Vignettes concern and develop a "vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life" (Erickson 1986: 149), that enhance "contextual richness" (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 83), giving depth and life to the charity clubs. They are "performance vignettes [that] elicit emotional identification and understanding" (Denzin, 1989: 124). They are performative in the sense that they bring into being aspects of their description and elaboration in their elucidation. I, like Humphreys, also follow Erickson who argues that vignettes should be "based on fieldnotes taken as the events happened" (Erickson, 1986: 150). In aligning myself as an emerging sociological researcher/theorist, I display my allegiances and emotions that serve to make the vignettes meaningful and are based not solely on my field-notes, but also, "headnotes": "the impressions, scenes, and experiences of the field that are far too numerous to record" (Ottenberg, 1990 in Wall, 2008: 45). This includes conjuring up the emotional and affective tonalities of the events in question, the arrangement of the objects such as furniture in the club room and the degrees to which the routines of habit had been disrupted. The use of memories in data or field-notes is often seen as problematic within conventional and realist ethnography due to their fragmented, unreliable and vague nature. However field-notes can often contradict remembered events and also remediate memory every time they are read, altering them in the process (Lederman, 1990). Utilising memory in this way prevents realist objectivity and gives access to some of the more spontaneous reactions during the research.

In the introductory vignette passage above, I describe and explore the multiple ways in which my subject position within the context of my research at the clubs was conducted. I have used different "voices", as well as colours, font sizes and formats to try and convey the different ways in which forms of connection and

relation to the subject matter intersect, diverge and relate to produce a particular version of an event. The event described in this vignette led me to reflect on how the research was altering my awareness, both bodily and cognitively, of how I interpreted actions and events in the fieldsite. In producing a fluid, evolving account of how responses to the event developed, applying a “multivocal” approach, I have drawn upon Robert Mizzi’s (2010) work of articulating the multiple subject positions from which Mizzi interpreted an autoethnographic episode. A multivocal approach seeks to attend to the “plural and sometimes contradictory *narrative voices* located within the researcher” (Mizzi, 2010, emphasis in original). The article in question is seeking to explore the multiple subject positions within Mizzi’s international development work in Kosovo to train teachers. The vignette he develops however, concerns issues related to the controversial issues of homosexual identity and state repression in Kosovo and the ambiguous ways in which Mizzi’s colleagues speak about the issue at the workplace regarding new employees. Mizzi deploys different voices related to cultural sensitivity, employee and teacher subjectivities to explore and detail the contradictory, congruent and intersecting positions from which Mizzi made sense of the situation.

I want to consider this approach from the perspective of giving multiple voices and positions to the researcher and participants and how this portrayal can contribute to autoethnographic accounts. Mizzi is careful to point out that the connection to wider social contexts in autoethnographic work should not be tied to legitimised or culturally or indeed, academically formalised categories such as class or gender. Rather, any autoethnographic account should be specifically related to the concrete, empirical detail of the situation and what the autoethnographer feels best captures the arguments they wish to make. We should seek to challenge stereotypical accounts of how the author may be perceived and which kind of writing “fits” particular kinds of events and the associated reporting style whether it be descriptive, analytic or narrative. For my purpose, this means showcasing how an autistic researcher conducting an

autoethnography can both embrace familiar means of description and also challenge them.

Mizzi argues that:

in an autoethnography voices can, in fact, layer and (en)counter each other [...] the narrative voices encounter and build upon what each is saying and, through this process, they situate themselves either in agreement or contradiction with each other. Sometimes they do so purposefully with the intention to express harmony, vulnerability, or conflict, and sometimes they just stand alone for consideration as part of a chorus. The shared goal here is that by bringing attention to narrative voices, an open orientation towards the reader emerges whereby the reader may become emotionally involved with what is being said [...] Effectively, multivocality can (a) highlight power differences in a research scenario between the researcher and participants, (b) encourage the researcher to consider how competing aspects of her or his identity shape relationships, and (c) expose underlying researcher vulnerabilities or tensions. (Mizzi, 2010: 7-8).

Multivocal autoethnography can give the context and analytical tools that are necessary to develop an awareness of the social, emotional, cultural and emplaced contexts in which power in social interaction occurs and the ways this impacts on the potential future directions of these interactions. Mizzi develops these insights with reference to Bakhtin's (1981) analysis of dialogic discourse that recognises the forms and techniques in which narrators introduce genres and speech patterns. This is done in order to produce different forms of meaning and understanding within a text that can challenge genre or linguistic conventions to expand and surprise readers and writers. This process is termed "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin, 1981: 263). This in turn allows for a "plural

consciousness” (ibid: 278) that enables social dialogue to emerge from developing the background context through to these heteroglossia processes. As Mizzi’s quote above suggests - in contrast to Bahktin who argued that multiple voices of an author do not overlap -in multi-vocal autoethnography, the voices build upon or disrupt each other to create new effects and meanings. This sense of multiple voices speaks to issues of author representation that I turn to below.

An Evocative and Post-Structural Commitment to Openness

My intention in thinking with these theoretical and methodological concerns, and drawing on Gannon (2006), is to develop an autoethnographic ethos that is sensitive to discontinuities in experience, and the dynamic, liminal and contested discursive domains in which we find ourselves and the multiple subject positions that we encounter and embody. Memories are written into the body, but they are not permanent marks. Rather, they are traces that are reinscribed and rewritten during each encounter. The use of particular events and other people’s accounts in autoethnography to show that the author is both owner and non-owner of a particular account and non-realist devices such as multivocality can contribute to disorientating readers. This sense of multidimensionality is not easy to take in all at once and should not be open to complete absorption. Instead, it can open up awareness of the contingencies in our lives and social structures. The materialities, socialities and affects of these encounters are interconnected to each other and cannot be reduced to a realist account that tries to retain objectivity and neutrality towards a (re)description of the events during research encounters. In some ways, I am trying to capture or provide readers with a sense of how autism can be experienced for some people. It can bridge “The Edges of the Known World” (Bogdashina, 2010). Hallucinogenic, multi-coloured, spatially fluctuating and other disturbingly uncomfortable phenomena can often be experienced by those with autism. The opening vignette of this chapter serves as a limited and partial representation of

how a highly over-stimulated individual might experience the world. I am not suggesting however that we should only focus on this perhaps over-sensational aspect of autistic experience.

Instead, I endeavour to develop a partial commitment to poststructural evocative autoethnographic writing which comes with important caveats (these caveats follow on from Hacking's outlining of the different genres of autism writing (Hacking, 2010)). Clough (2000b), for instance, has argued that autoethnography is a form of "postmodern trauma culture" that produces what she calls an "(over)excited subjectivity" (Clough, 2000b, in Gannon, 2006: 476). The accounts focus on limit and deviant experiences and posit a self that is grounded in experiences that are unquestioned. To avoid this, awareness of the genealogies of subject construction that are at play in the use of particular subject positions is important. The researcher then needs to find ways to ensure that the account is partial via the use of disjointed narrative, conjoining theory and personal experience. To avoid the trap of falling unquestioningly into the "autism as alien" story or "autistic affinity with technology" narratives requires that we know what kind of narratives these genre tropes conjure and what work they do to produce autistic subjects.

The use of the above poststructural strategies aims to resist any easy categorisation of autobiographical genres. This thesis serves as an academic genre of writing and while dedicated attention will be given to the process of writing and discussion, the self-reflexive process of articulation cannot remain outside of the modes of speaking and discursive formations that allow the researcher to speak and present new ideas and data on autism. This does not mean that caricatures such as the autistic child as "alien" will be reproduced or wholly denied and avoided in the writing. But rather caricatures serve as double backdrop for both the researcher and the reader. For the researcher, this awareness allows the writing to be formulated with care and attention to the accounts and experiences given by participants within this framework. For

readers, it allows attention to the ways in which the writer has created particular forms of mediation and enables awareness that other representational strategies and techniques are possible.

Autoethnography Concerns and Challenges

Mizzi's arguments for the value of multivocality can also serve to be useful and thoughtful responses to a common critique that autoethnographic work that is too much focused on the self. Anxious scholars have questioned autoethnography as a method that is not inherently, "academic", or, more sympathetically, are concerned that such focused introspection will lead to a form of "narcissistic reflexivity" (Roth, 2005). This concerns the notion that the positionality of the researcher is given in a static, ironically non-reflexive mode that does not address the impact such activities have on the research or critically question the status and authority of the autoethnographic subject. In this way, relations of power, responsibility and attention to social markers of difference are glossed over in order to produce a unified account of an autoethnographic self. A more productive and insightful approach to reflexivity within an autoethnographic framework may be developed by adopting "methodological" and "interpretative" awareness. Methodological reflexivity refers to specifies techniques and methods to conduct reflexive work concerning awareness of power differentials and locating the historical and cultural contexts of the research situation (Lynch, 2000). Interpretative reflexivity interrogates what is seen as normative frameworks of reference and works through them to investigate alternative ways of viewing the situation such that all parties question their obligations and responsibilities to such normative codes (Lynch, 2000 in Tsekeris, 2013: 72). In evocative autoethnographies, this is complemented by reflexive work that seeks to give voice to those who may be under-represented or lack the material, social or economic resources to represent their perspectives so that their everyday ways of making meaning are given recognition through means of "ethnomethodological" reflexivity (Lynch,

2000: 33-34). This combination of reflexive imperatives is what I want to suggest is a key reason why critics of autoethnography are so harsh in their criticisms. I will return to this shortly.

Further critiques of autoethnography show disdain for the apparent lack of focus on the wider structural conditions which shape the subject positions of the autoethnographer. In other words, reflexivity is invoked to strengthen the status and comfort of the researcher in contextualising their research without challenging or developing a dynamic account of such activities. These questions of methodological quality and debates within the reflexivity literature (Reed-Danahay, 1997, Motzafi-Haller, 1997) take on a more unique angle when considered within this project. The etymology of the word “autism” which derives from the Greek “autos” or self and “ismos”, of action or of state is implied to mean “morbid self-absorption” (Online Eytymology Dictionary, 2013). This connects to concerns around reflexivity becoming merely a narcissistic and personalised reflection without acknowledging the mutual co-constitution of this self via a community of social others and structures (Okely, 1992, Bourdieu, 1992). The charge of narcissism can also be seen as overzealous within evocative autoethnographies that express commitments to an ethos of co-construction between writers, readers and third parties. As Holt (2003) argues, the critique of narcissism is attributed to autoethnography as a universal enterprise without attending to the particularities of the piece in question. Holt further elaborates that the criteria for evaluating qualitative research still adheres to a scientific discourse in which trustworthiness, viability, credibility and so forth are considered the golden standards. But this is not necessarily what forms of evocative autoethnographic work are trying to achieve.

This universal, stereotyped response to autoethnography can be seen as an imposition of standardised criteria to forms of work that seek to explore the dynamic, fluid and chaotic areas of social life that cannot be defined to such criteria (Holt, 2003, Ellis and Bochner, 2006). Such attempts are trying to

impose forms of control on evocative autoethnography that do not acknowledge the fact that inserting such structures on them reduces the creativity and vibrancy that multiple-voiced vignettes, for example, may be trying to invoke (Tsekeris, 2013: 75). However, from the evocative side, the appeals to an expanded sense of reflexivity beyond acknowledging the situatedness of the researcher to consider the responsiveness and responsibilities inherent in the research interaction can become more parochial than is intended. Because co-creation of meaning and interaction in much social research is considered common sense, to neglect these qualities can be construed as a researcher not being adequate or sufficiently trained to the point that their moral and ethical character is questioned (May, 1999). Researchers who adopt reflexive methods are in danger of portraying themselves as all-seeing knowledge producers (Haraway, 1988) and arbiters who are aware of unconscious biases and the historical, cultural and social contexts in which these emerge (Harding, 1991, Alcoff et al, 1993). Only through reflexive methodological and theoretical practices can the sociologist open horizons and expand understanding for both parties (Pels, 2000b: 9). The desire for an objective validity criteria for social research becomes disruptive in this case as the lack of proportionality between causes and effects is broken, giving rise to new, emergent and dynamic processes and outcomes that are divergent from what could have been predicted (Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001: 988). The question then becomes how to manage the reality of complex, emergent and dynamic interactions and to develop a reflexive practice that can take these qualities into account.

These reflexive concerns have been explored in depth in various different literatures. The most important of these is Bourdieu's (1986, 1992) interests in the forms that different kinds of capital can lead to different forms of reflexive practice and standpoints. This is what we might call a "sociological" approach to reflexivity that recognises the structural and cultural influences on individual and group reflexive practice. Lahire (2011: 139-142) has argued that Bourdieu's emphasis on structural reproduction of habitus, the structures that shape social actors actions, beliefs and predispositions, reduces the materiality and

specificity of social action to abstractions of the habitus. To counter this, other approaches, which take a “psycho-social” approach to reflexivity in recognising biographic background, social context and conscious and unconscious and conflicting accounts and rationalisations (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013: 53), do not abstract social action, but ground it in psycho-social processes and practices just outlined. This approach considers psychoanalytic processes, such as transference or countertransference, the processes where analyst and client transfer meanings, openness or resistance to each other as “a resource for understanding that could not be achieved through cognitive analytic kinds of knowing” (ibid: 166). In this way, reflexivity can address overemphasis on theoretical readings and ask researchers to be vigilant of misreading, for example, protecting the researcher from distressing accounts. Further, researchers should not discount contradictory data as problematic, but as giving insight into complex social lives (ibid: 62, 74). What is problematic in Hollway and Jefferson’s account concerns the lack of attention to the non-human and the distributed senses of agency that this brings. Human cognitive and bodily processes and meanings are given precedence with non-human agency being measured against the intentions of the human subject. I will address these concerns later in the chapter in which the quasi-object, like framework of autistic being that I have been developing in the thesis is applied to these issues.

These issues of reflexivity and situated perspectives concern me beyond their theoretical and methodological implications to an understanding of autism that is indirectly derived from the etymological root discussed above. Namely, this concerns understandings of autism as intensely individualistic and unable to connect to others. Autistic people are seen to live in their “own little world” so that the bridge between their’s and others perspectives, feelings or actions is seemingly restricted (Huws and Jones, 2010). To the extent that people with autism are self-contained, the condition serves to sharpen a curiosity to seek understanding and, as a matter of necessity, to prevent being overwhelmed by social events. Indeed, recent evidence and debate has contended that for some autistic individuals, the desire for social connection and empathy towards

emotional expression may be hypersensitive, leading to a struggle to prevent identification (Markram and Markram, 2010). For a large group of autistic researchers, this gap between autistic and “neurotypical” modes of meaning-making and living is untenable and serves to demarcate boundaries of what is and is not human.

The Slippage Between Autoethnography as Narcissistic and Theory of Mind

The question of narcissism and self-absorption deserves closer attention, and can be framed through the concept of Theory of Mind (ToM). I will discuss this via Yergeau's (2013) work on ToM and how this impacts autistic representation and self-understandings of autistic people's place in the world. Yergeau is one of the few autistic autoethnographers that explicitly discusses, in a theoretical fashion, the issues uniquely and specifically relevant to those with autism when writing academic autoethnography. She demonstrates how theorists of Theory of Mind serve, through their depictions of people with autism, to disenfranchise them and make the prospect of even contemplating an autoethnographic account difficult, if not effectively impossible. Here, I am referring to how psychologists think about and with the term ToM which for them refers to

Box 1 - A Personal, Evocative Critique

In my case, I should be producing an empirically and theoretically developed chapter such as "Habitual Favourites", able to recognise patterns, themes and find the forces that shape the connections between these relations. But, I cannot contribute to an autoethnographic exploration of the issues that arise for an autistic researcher working in a neoliberal university context. I lack the social insights to gain an understanding of the views of others and my own views are skewed to cognitive and sensory biases that prevent an accurate and cogent account that can be easily assessed and absorbed by others. I should not even think I have the right to critique the grounds on which qualitative research or autoethnography in particular are framed because I cannot account for the interactional frameworks that structure all such accounts.

being able to: “infer the full range of mental states (beliefs, desires, intentions, imagination, emotions, etc.) that cause action... having a theory of mind is to be able to reflect on the contents of one’s own and other’s minds” (Baron-Cohen, 2001: 174). Baron-Cohen considers ToM to be a defining characteristic of what it means to be uniquely human. Difficulty with or a lack of ToM places a person on the boundaries of humanity. Yergeau points to various autistic psychology authors, such as, Francesca Happé (1991) who argues that, I, the writer of this PhD thesis, cannot develop an autoethnographic project because I can only write within the emplaced perspective of someone with autism. In other words “because autistic individuals lack ToM, they cannot express the autistic experience in non-autistic terms (which, of course, are the only “appropriate” terms) (Yergeau, 2013). Thus, being autieethnographic is, according to ToM researchers, an EXACT manifestation of a ToM lack. As Baggs (2003) wryly notes “Autistics are not expected to write autobiographies. We are expected to write textbooks, which happen to be about ourselves.” (see Box 1)¹⁹. In this case, Grandin’s (1986, 2000a) accounts are exemplary of this interpretation, utilising “rational” metaphors of computers to explain her processes of categorisation and argumentation in relation to her work. This, however, discounts the emplaced and inter-subjective processes involved in being in

¹⁹ My use of textboxes in this chapter and chapter 5 is a form of “intertextual” writing technique (Lather and Smithies, 1997). The boxes rub up against and vie for the reader’s attention in splitting the narrative between prose and textbox. These intertextual boxes enable construction of “a tangled web of meanings” (Serres, 1995b). This is recognition of the fact that speaking for any kind of narrative or analytical account is never clear and always marked by complexities of interpretation (Lather and Smithies, 1997: xvi). Just as Lather and Smithies argue that: “HIV/AIDS exceeds our ability to “master” it through knowledge, we wanted a book that used a “flood” of too much too fast, data flows of trauma, shock and everydayness” (Lather and Smithies, 1997: 48). I use the textboxes to explore returns to my writing to consider how events have changed in hindsight and also to draw a tonal change in my annoyed response to the notion of my lack of ToM. The angelic intertexts in this way, serve as a means to bring to attention the ways in which I am not just a sociological researcher and academic, but also as a learner, displacing myself, my analyses and seeking to create a sense of ongoing engagement with my work (Perselli, 2008: 240).

touch with the animals she works with and accounts for ToM discounting of embodied processes.

These problems are highlighted further by Yergeau (2013) who notes that when sensory, emotional or psychological issues do emerge and autistic individuals undergo a meltdown or find difficulty expressing their experiences due to withdrawal into themselves because of high stress levels, then these experiences are often ignored and cast off as merely “the autism talking”. This reflects a biomedical view that these symptoms are purely pathological and do not acknowledge the way in which these attitudes do injustice to the real and emplaced struggles of autism that interact with their other social identities. Yergeau further suggests that, if autistic individuals lack a ToM, giving people with autism a voice in political or social domains is perhaps the “ultimate oxymoron”. If we accept that “mindblindness” is a real phenomenon, those who promulgate such theories would regard a position of focusing on the embodiment of autism as a precise reflection of a lack of ToM. It is noteworthy, as Yergeau goes on to mention, that the definition of ToM is circular in that it is defined by the non-autistics and is then embodied in autistic people and thus forms a “looping effect” (Hacking, 2010). This discounts the real paradox that those who posit that people with autism lack ToM, themselves end up discounting the complexity of the condition.

On a more fundamental level, ToM is precisely that, a theory that discounts the emplaced and distributed nature of cognition in which even non-autistic or “neurotypical” people can be deceived, hence, no one could lie or mislead people. The problem with this disembodied approach is that it serves to place autistic individuals as monstrous spectacles that engage in strange bodily and verbal processes. They would be reduced as people and the emotional, cognitive and embodied turmoil of social life would be rendered impossible to parse or interpret. Because the bodies and minds of people with autism ToM lack are posited as being so different to a neurotypical manifestation of the fully

embodied and cognitive ToM, how is it possible to say that non-autistics can understand autistic ToM since the gulf of humanity is so large? In some ways, poststructural accounts of fragmented selves and unreliable narrators are inevitable for ToM theorists. With no unitary grounding in which to frame the experiences of the autistic subject, multiplicity abounds. This multiplicity is not an open or playful space however (Goodley, 2014: 52). Dominant modes of what it means to be human are challenged and place enshrined neurotypical ideals into question that leads to symbolic and physical violence (ibid: 55). Yergeau notes that she can only be an unreliable narrator. Her autism prevents her from being introspective and making meaning based on interaction with others. She emphatically asks:

Are my feelings to be trusted? Can someone without a body have feelings? Can someone without a body be subject to abuse? Can someone who lacks a theory of mind accurately narrate the lives and actions and abuses of others? Can she narrate her own life? Where is the body in theory of mind?" (Yergeau, 2013, n.p.).

All of these questions could be rerouted through poststructural, rather than negative, medicalised trait, positing autistic sociality through the prisms of liberal, humanist and neurotypical frameworks. However, the nexus of power for those with autism to embrace such poststructural domains is very much negated within this dominant understanding of autism. After all, if people with autism have no ToM, no sense of self-identity, no feeling bodies and cannot understand others: linguistic, gestural or psychical communications, to what extent can they be said to feel emotions or experience violence or pain? How can we ever take what they say seriously if their memories are biased without all these forms of reference? This leads me to matters of "proving" vulnerable and marginalised identity positions and viewpoints in autoethnography.

The Question of “Proving” Autoethnographic Credentials

How does the charge that autoethnographic accounts are too narcissistic impact the way in which they are produced? Further, how does this connect to the problematic issue of discussing autism as a ToM deprived condition, whereby individuals cannot develop their own ideas or express them to others? The reader may have noted the boxed discussion above, where I, briefly, gave my voice to my unrestrained thoughts on what ToM entails for me on a practical level in relation to writing my thesis. It forgoes academic restraint and formality in place of defensive anger and justification. But, to what extent am I justified in doing this? This section will go on to explore how autoethnographic thinkers have tackled the problem of academic rigour and the ways in which the questions regarding autistic ToM, I have discussed in this chapter, can bring new insights to these debates.

Wall (2008), has noted, when discussing her autoethnographic piece on international adoption with a committee of faculty members, that they: “cautioned [her] to guard against being a defensive adoptive mother... [and]... to engage with the literature unemotionally and to craft a text that portrayed balance and intellectual analysis” (Wall, 2008: 43). With this in mind, having gone through the literature, she felt that the arguments were based on the assumption that adopters were cultural dopes or pawns that were manipulated by media images of rescue children from insufferable conditions, without attending to the structural, political or economic motivations for this and ignoring these same conditions at the site of adoption itself. Wall argued that this was a prejudicial assumption by social theorists supported by biased analysis. However, based on the above advice, she toned down her revisions of this short and impactful argument into a more verbose paragraph that was more sympathetic to the authors who were focusing on more functional, structural issues rather than micro factors. Wall felt that this lessened her own contribution. She also did not feel that her own writing was catering to what

Tedlock (2000) details as: “women’s ethnographic and autobiographical intentions... [as]... powered by the motive to convince readers of the authors self-worth, to clarify and authenticate their self-images.” (Tedlock, 2000: 468). This is further implicated in a realist stance that sees transparent representation of writing as via an orderly and self-assured argument which ignores the fact that the ethnographic writing is a performative reproduction of what occurred in the field-site. This is done via memory and discursive reinterpretations of an account located in historical, political and personal situated contexts (Wall 2008: 42).

In the same vein, Yergeau’s arguments touch on these central issues in which those with autism are positioned as not even having the capacity to clarify their self-images and can only be reported on by others on their behalf. I included the emphasis on mechanical pattern recognition, because this is what people with autism are seen to be good at, taking a set of research notes, codes, themes, seeking out patterns and conducting, rational, carefully defined analysis and procedures to develop results. The issue Wall faced was that her advisors thought that she was being too rash with her analysis of the literature and was not nuanced enough to consider the theorists’ blind spots she critiques. This, however, was a key component of her account and having to discard it for a more traditional, balanced approach removed much of the intended punch of this section of her work.

My boxed discussion then, is a reply to those ToM theorists who would reduce what an autieethnography can be by stereotyping and reducing those with autism to the status of non-human. It is as Yergeau has poetically argued; because people with autism have no means to connect or understand others, they: “possess no rhetorical defense: they dwell in a world of mindless skin-bags, a life of utter interiority, an arhetorical wonderland of disempathy” (Yergeau, 2013: n. p.). Thus, to be reduced to a mechanical being who, ironically resonates on a more than intellectual level with mechanisms, patterns and laws on a scale that is supposedly beyond “neurotypical” comprehension. Is

to reduce my own capacity and even *right* to express my own feelings, opinions or theories about these social patterns and mechanisms and become an unthinking, data-processing device.²⁰ I must prove that I can make sense of and develop systematic connections from these mechanisms; my intellect must be *performed* rather than assumed, so that I can then have the *privilege* of inhabiting the space of opinion, debate and dialogue.

Yergeau, drawing on Bascom (2011) has referred to this one-sided nature of the “proof” required for those with autism to display a ToM as a “Theory of War” (ToW). ToW recognises that people with autism actually *do* develop an awareness of the fact that other people have motivations and bodily presence. As autistic individuals grow up, the social meaning of eye contact becomes more potent beyond just the hyper-sensitive sensory dimension the mental and social intent, experienced as motivation and beliefs are added onto the perceptions of those with autism. The term ToW comes from the belief that for people with autism to develop a ToM: “is to have a theory of how theory of mind theorists violently remove the autistic body-and it is likewise to have that violent removal denied... the autistic bodymind is inconsequential, fundamentally non-existent” (Yergeau, 2013: n. p.). This sense of an uphill battle is paradoxically located within the independent, isolated self, without apparent recourse to external co-constructive elements of social engagement. An autoethnographic attention to “relational ethics”, or the ways in which our accounts connect to the subjective, material and environmental elements that comprise and permit our accounts can help to correct this unjust perspective.

²⁰ In Autieethnography Part 2, I go on to demonstrate just how mistaken and naïve this perspective of what intellectual activity for those with autism is from my own embodied experience of conducting research and undertaking analysis.

An Emplaced Concern With Relational Ethics

The concerns with how autism can impact on how autoethnographies are written and read are borne out of a concern within the autoethnographic literature to consider the “relational ethics” of the accounts produced. These produce accounts that consider the impact they have on the participants involved, including how standard ethical devices and procedures (such as a commitment to anonymity) and the way they are implemented impact upon research participants. Linking this with Hacking’s (2010) insights, these concerns ask me to consider how I portray myself and my participants in my accounts. Do I seek out their “deviant/obsessive” behaviours related to favourites, habits and sensory experience that concur with their autism diagnosis and see all actions as manifestations of their autism? Is this then a reflection and confirmation of the ToM argument of *my* own self-absorbed understanding of autism that only sees the world through an autistic lens and cannot possibly speak outside of such a frame or are “encouraged” by academic cultures to perform or come across as neurotypical in order to accrue academic capital (Eddy, 2011)? These questions force us to undertake a situated reflexivity (Haraway, 1988, Harding, 1991) that questions power relations, author motivations and representational and inscription practices.

Ethics are relational in the autoethnographic literature in that they are reciprocal and reflect as much on the autoethnographers as they do other readers. Ellis et al, (2011) are also keen to point out that much of autoethnographic writing concerns itself with people, objects and institutional structures that are close to the researcher’s heart and also their conditions of existence and survival. As such, autoethnographic authors must be aware of how they write, so they can continue to live with and within these intimate domains. The relational dimension to ethics in autoethnography then cannot be reduced to a mere, post-hoc, reflexive process that displays the superior ethical consciousness of a writer. Rather, relationality is a part of the writing process itself. It must consider

the cultural and social structures and frameworks of meaning that particular forms of writing engender, alongside questions of how the topic at hand is constructed and presented within the societal context in which writers develop accounts for different audiences.

These issues of relational ethics can be put into more concrete focus in considering Davidson's (2010) work on how accommodations can be made to the sensory spaces of autistic people. She argues that it is important to go beyond approaches based on making accommodating alterations to social spaces that make autistic people aware of, and provide resources, through which they can understand spatial and sensory issues. What is needed is a relational approach that recognises the interconnected nature of autistic and neurotypical sociality and their respective modes of sensory navigation (Davidson, 2010: 310). Drawing upon autistic autobiographies that outline the many ways in which everyday sensory lives are made difficult through sensory and spatial disorientation, she asserts, following Shore (2003), that:

Inasmuch as people on the autism spectrum need to understand and interact in a largely non-spectrum world, people who are not on the autism spectrum need to work on understanding those who are on the spectrum. (It) cuts both ways. (Shore, 2003: 165).

I want to now extend this relational account that emphasises the desire and need to extend autistic and neurotypical mutual understanding, in line with Ellis' description of autoethnography as a process of "wander[ing] around a bit and (get) the lay of the land" (Ellis, 2004: 120). Singer's invitation is to "travel in parallel with us for (a) while and see how the world looks from our angle" (Singer, 2003: xi). Importance is given here to walking alongside and eventually to a crossing of paths as meaning and understanding is formed. Rather than foreclosing understanding of those with autism, based on an abstracted,

cognitive form of understanding such as ToM, we should be open to the multiple ways in which people with autism relate to and experience the world. Whether this is through intense affective engagement with animals, plants, technology or the materiality of the environment such as waves or sound forms, these co-produced interactions are more diverse and creative than ToM authors suggest. I want to assert and argue here that the Serresian notion of the quasi-object (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 3) is invaluable for showing how the distributed forms of cognition and, indeed, emplaced embodiment through different subject positions, materialities and environmental milieus can help us to see these diverse modes of sociality in action. This is ultimately what an autieethnography might look like if we are to develop an account of autism that respects and recognises the differential forms the “human” might take.

Autoethnography as Journeying and Pragmatic Balance

My use of descriptive vignettes attempts to create fully outlined scenarios to further explore and expand upon analytical ideas, alongside forms of varied presentation styles of writing and discussions of the differing levels of power, attention and feelings involved with writing these accnts. These practices serve to cut a path between the analytic and evocative distinction I described and explored in Chapter 2. This is what I mean by “pragmatic balance”, being able to navigate the two dominant “styles” of autoethnography in such a way that new insights are developed that are not possible without this conjunction. Like Wall (2008), I find myself staying true to a pragmatist focus and, from my reading of the autoethnographic methodological literature, suggest that a middle ground between realism and constructivism is necessary for ethnographic research. I respect the need for formal, thoroughgoing and rigorous theorising and analysis and gain a depth of understanding and perspective from them. I also enjoy the literary, artistic and free-flowing nature of performative and humanities-based work that explores what could be and investigates the limits and constraints of human and natural socio-environmental milieus. The debates between analytic

and evocative autoethnographic traditions have often been described by autoethnographic scholars, following Rorty, as “not issue(s) to be resolved, only (but) difference(s) to be lived with” (Rorty, 1982: 197, in Ellis et al, 2011). This pragmatic maxim has been invoked in the hope of reducing the tensions of wanting to, on the one hand, as argued by Grant et al, (2013), view the position and relationality of subjects to the external world around them as autonomous or intensely interconnected. On the other hand, Ellis et al, (2011) point to the seemingly impossible standards set by critics of autoethnography writing. Such critics wish for autoethnographic writing to be both more artistic and less theoretical, more like art and literature and more scientific and rigorous in its writing technologies and methodological principles. Rather than providing an answer or “middle-ground” to this debate, I want to acknowledge that autoethnographic writing, whether viewed through story-telling or theoretically informed self-reflection and analysis, is open to constant redefinition and alterations of meaning. This, in part, is because the process of undertaking an autoethnographic project and writing is likely to be conducted in an iterative process that returns to multiple aspects of the account, moving between external guidance and internal emergent elements (Ellis, 2004). However, ambiguous unfolding of writing should not be disavowed as negative or antithetical to the empirical quality of autoethnographies. It should be seen as a productive opportunity to “wander around a bit and (get) the lay of the land” (ibid: 120)²¹. I hope to show, through the vignettes and debates in the autoethnographic literature, that a theoretically aligned middle position and an emplaced, situated, middle position of autoethnographic writing can encompass the following two elements:

²¹ We should also not neglect Haraway’s dictum that situated knowledge is becoming “answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, 1988: 583). As such, differential, situated power relations between wanderers should always be kept in mind. The barriers to specific forms of wandering, such as a supposed lack of ToM or the situated standpoint of researchers should be reflexively accounted for and analysed to address the factors that impoverish autoethnographic writing.

1. Complete Research Member (CRM) - This means utilising my position as a researcher to develop theoretically and empirically guided reflexive methods to explore the ways in which I interact with my participants and how we create meaning together. Such an approach showcases how theory is informed by empirical material and a tempered realist focus shaped by participants' sense making practices that show the researcher and participants perspectives and how these interact with and through each other (Anderson 2006)²².

2. An “evocative” text which uses literary and writing techniques (outlined above) that complicate dominant modes of academic writing and reading regarding our understanding of autistic sociality and positionality when it comes to writing *on*, and *with* topics deeply intertwined with what it means to be autistic. This form of autoethnographic work seeks to expand the potential realities and experiences of writers and expectations of what form of expression these discussions may take. My aim extends beyond the need to encompass a diversity of representations of how people come to experience and communicate the ongoing events in the social world. I would like to incite readers to feel, connect and respond, not just intellectually via theoretical, methodological or conceptual discussion, but also sensually and emotionally via confusion, empathy, joy and frustration.

Further, I hope that, on a more textual level, the thesis being split into two styles of writing is one such way in which a pragmatic balance might be developed and put into practice. I also wish to write analytically evocative autoethnographic pieces that utilises different writing techniques alongside theoretical and field-note discussion to explore and contribute to the autoethnographic literature on how autism is experienced and expressed within an academic context.

²² See Chapter 2 for an elucidation of analytic autoethnography and for some hesitations and problems that arose when committing too strictly to the methodological guidelines of an analytic autoethnographic approach.

Beyond Poststructural Autoethnography to Quasi-Object Relationality

I am not unaware of the difficulties of using a poststructural position in exploring ways of expanding upon the presentation of autoethnographic accounts. To focus on a discursive ontology of subjectivity retains a form of abstracted cognitivism that reduces a focus on the senses and emplacement as attention is drawn to social discourses. It also runs the risk of reinforcing the more negative edge of Yergeau's (2013) engagement with the reality of autistic bodies, emotions and feelings. As Yergeau noted during her forced incarceration in a psychiatric ward, the gurney that she was strapped to "was more material than I am", due to the beliefs of the psychiatric workers that "it was just her autism talking" (Yergeau, 2013: n. p.). She was reduced to a discursive set of medical categorisations. A focus on the purely discursive within autoethnographic risks marginalising sensory and affective bodily experience and obfuscating the cognitivist bias in our understanding of autism noted by Yergeau.

As Davidson and Smith (2009) argue, in their research on autistic autobiographies, attention to "more-than-human" geographies and emotions, can serve to provide a corrective balance and addition to the above mode of thinking. These more-than-human interactions within a ToM perspective can only be thought of in ways that downplay or outright ignore the affective and non-human emergent meanings that arise from relating with animals and objects. Such ways of relating cannot be seen to be meaningful, precisely, *because* they do not possess human capacities, despite their significance in co-constitutive becoming and being in the world (Davidson and Smith, 2009: 905). The more-than-human geographies here comprise a set of sensitivities that extend to being able to feel, connect with and understand animals, plants and other materials beyond what is seen as a liberal, humanist version to what is seen as "human" characteristics or traits within a ToM framework (Goodley et al, 2014). For example, Williams (2003) talks about her childhood connection to trees, in particular, an old palm tree in her front garden that stood stout and

alone. The palm tree gave Williams the opportunity to be affected by the tree's silent, yet sturdy disposition. She would stand near it and in the process was able to share her emotions of rage and despair. These moments of venting were her ways of being:

a social kid: social with the dirt, the trees the grass [...] I felt the world deeply and passionately. I was cheerful in my own world and I had a fascination with anything that was not directly confrontational and which would allow me to simply be (Williams, 2003: 16).

The physicality of this relating was further reinforced by being able to climb the branches and experience a sense of belonging and friendship that was possible because of the lack of expectations or judgement. Williams appreciated and respected the sense of open connection that she felt the tree was signalling to her (Williams, 2003: 40). Miller (2003) emphasises that this respect and sense of humility felt in relation to the tranquillity of some forms of nature, can teach those with autism what it means to show empathy.

This and similar “human” capacities are taught through a connection to these more-than-human socialities that lead, later on, to an understanding and appreciation of how neurotypical people connect with other humans utilising the same kinds of affective and relational social understanding (Miller, 2003: 54). A prominent example of this is Dawn-Prince Hughes' (2004) ethnographic work with gorillas. Hughes observed and learnt the social codes and conducts of a gorilla society and utilised these tools in her human relationships to much success (Prince Hughes 2004: 117). The ability to develop these capacities *at all* for ToM theorists is fundamentally contradictory to their understanding of what autism is. Even more troubling for ToM theorists is that this learning emerges from non-human sources *and then* is translated *to* human

relationships, serves to showcase the limited means of understanding a restricted ToM approach to autism can have. As Davidson and Smith (2009) remind us, many neurotypical people often bracket off these diverse, quasi-object, relational processes to the world and thus can be as being artificially impoverished. The positive sense of multiplicity in Yergeau's questioning of autistic humanity can be found in diverse places. Cognitive, ethical and moral concepts such as respect, humility and empathy are connected and threaded through natural and animal quasi-objects which serve as anchors to be transferred to other scenarios. Thus, Yergeau's questioning of the capacity of those with autism to have feelings, present structured stories, experience and think through these narratives and emotions should not necessarily have negative repercussions. Those with autism *can* share these modes of experiencing the world if an appropriate milieu is present. These milieus recognise the sensory and ecological ways in which autistic ways of relating emerge and are shaped beyond a purely discursive-semiotic or cognitivist point of view.

If we wish to develop more in-depth and sensory ethnographic understanding of autistic worlds, then grappling with more-than-human relations and translations from the more-than-human to human sociality will be required. In Part 2 of the autoethnographic focus of the thesis (Chapter 5), I will attempt to do this through vignettes interspersed throughout the chapter. In particular, I will focus on the affective and embodied processes of my research encounters and the means through which I sought to at once be open and to learn to be affected to the events occurring around me. This will enable me to show the multiple ways in which my *emplaced, affective* subjectivity, alongside my discursive subjectivity was produced in the various encounters that shaped the practices of research and writing of my thesis. The introductory vignette has begun this process through a self-recognition of how my researcher sensory bias was formulated and originated through an awareness of my corporeal actions in tandem with my discursive rationalisations. This has been described by Myers (2016) as a form of "energetic" or "gestic" data analysis that utilises the bodymind of the

researcher to trace out or draw lines of movement, stasis and gesture to capture the affective and sensual means of moving, acting and thinking through and with the world. These forms of analysis can spark memories or sensations of the event being recorded via a transduction of materiality and social energies. In this ethnography, it meant paying attention to the many sensoryscapes of the club, for example, how did the soundscape impact my attention and how did I bracket this off or fail to do so due to sensory stimulation? This is only one step in developing a sensual awareness and the subsequent representation of this sensuality. In the conclusion to the thesis, I will outline some future directions in which the habitual favourites framework can be developed through sensory methods.

The co-constructed, quasi-object, like relationality of the world can better be accounted for in this formulation of autistic being. The question of representational practices then can be said to extend beyond Hacking's (2010) concerns with autistic genres that seek to demarcate hard-bounded "kinds" of representational experience. My research suggests the value of exploring the ways in which autistic experience can be couched in terms of the *degrees* of attention given to the portrayal of autistic subjects and their (quasi) objects of interest. In order to be respectful to the diversity present in autism, we should see sociality, I argue, as comprising an ecology of emplaced/milieu situated quasi-objects and subjects. Any account that has this as its main goal or guiding criteria should aspire to explore and account for this complex web. In so doing, I am extending the notion of "strong objectivity" that asks us to explicate our situated perspectives, biases and power relations to develop a reflexive objectivity rather than a stunted objectivity that would banish these qualities entirely from our accounts (Harding, 1991). However, rather than assuming that humans and their representations should have complete influence over what matters, we should take into account the non-human and material milieus in which relationships are located so that we can be open to what they have to show us (Savransky, 2016a: 66-68). It also requires us to go beyond our anthropocentric descriptions of social life and take seriously the notion that an

external world beyond ourselves is truly an independent entity that possesses unique characteristics that can challenge and enhance our understanding. Autoethnography, with a focus on the multimodal ways in which experience is lived, represented and written can enhance a notion of strong objectivity by highlighting the more-than-human world that intersects with habitual, quasi-object, based relations.

As Goodley et al, (2014) have discussed, attention to the limits of humanism, as noted by Davidson and Smith (2009), are integral to disability equality (as the recognition of rights that comes with humanist liberalism emphasises autonomy and bounded rationality), as some with disabilities are excluded from the category of the human. They argue, along with Braidotti (2006, 2013), that we have entered an era of posthumanism in which we are no longer bound by “moral rationality, unitary identity, transcendent consciousness or innate and universal moral value” (Braidotti 2013: 92). As such, life becomes through a process ontology that is not individualised but is expressed through connections (Braidotti 2006). Equally, a posthuman conception of life recognises that the humanist approach to humanity as the ultimate arbiter is the ultimate utopian ideal. It ignores how we are enmeshed within scientific, informational, cognitive and technological practices that make us just as much part of nature as nature is part of us. Therefore, we are co-constituted by the many non-humans around us, animals, insects, plants and even cosmic forces like the nebulous aftermath of exploding stars (Braidotti, 2013: 66-67). Thus, our solidarities with these others are not alien or anthropomorphic as liberal humanism would have it. We have all along been part and parcel of these non-human others, having folded and intersected with them to the extent that we can experience more than just human centric notions of social interaction and being. Because of all these factors, Goodley et al argue “that disability is *the* quintessential posthuman condition: because it calls for new ontologies, ways of relating, living and dying” (Goodley et al, 2014: 348 emphasis in original). “People with physical, sensory or cognitive impairments are plugged into a myriad of cultural, professional,

disciplinary and political practices that shape their embodied selves and inter-relationships with the world” (ibid: 348).

Because of these factors:

Disability [...] emerges in these contemporary (posthuman) times as a moment of relational ethics: urging us to think again about how we are all made through our connections with others *and* encouraging us to embrace ways of love and life that are not rigidly framed by humanistic values of independence and autonomy (ibid: 349).

If disability is the posthuman condition, then I want to argue that an engagement with autistic ontologies can help us think through these new posthuman relations with human interaction and non-human beings. The above discussion of autistic non-human engagement begins a process of highlighting the posthuman nature of autistic being.

Before I conclude this chapter, I want to consider some of the broader aspects of scholarly production that impact upon the autoethnographic process to highlight some of the specific autism-related factors that arose during the course of my thesis.

PhD Work, Disability Support and Relational Ethics

The last issue I wish to focus on in this chapter concerns the wider network of support I receive in relation to my recognition of having a disability and the impact this has on the production of my thesis. I had support from the disability services at my institution to connect with and advance my studies. The most important of these adjustments for my purposes here was my support worker,

who helped with a variety of tasks including: study skills, time management, administrative and bureaucratic support, academic reviews and advice and advocacy on disputes in relation to support provided and university policies and decisions. During the course of this thesis, a central concern of ours was to look over my drafts, independent of my formal supervision sessions (although in practice sometimes these overlapped and influenced each other). As Tregaskis and Goodley (2005) note, the use and employment of assistance for disabled researchers during a research project is an understudied area of inquiry. They point to a group project where a disabled researcher had a support assistant attend during his interviews and other data-collection activities. This support structure in which the research takes place is thus constitutively different in many ways as compared to other students. I raise this issue here because relational ethics entails getting others to read through an autoethnographic account to provide feedback and gain a sense of mutual understanding. The context and role of the persons chosen for this end are noted in autoethnographic accounts and reflexively considered as to their impact on the researcher and the people involved (see Jago, 2011, for several examples of this). This is a form of ethnomethodological, open reflexivity that does not take it as simply “boring” or “mundane” that these processes occur every day in ordinary people’s lives, but are dynamic and emotionally rich negotiations of meaning and action that take into account the chaotic and fractured nature of social life. This leaves open space for spontaneity, surprises and responsiveness to the writer and the people they write about (Tsekeris 2013: 74-5). Nonetheless, the context from which my co-readers and in some senses, co-author, the support assistant, (a professional paid to assist me), raises questions as to the degree of co-authorship and the way in which the development of the project was impacted by such concerns.

This situation can also be framed in a different way, to argue that the situation of having a support worker assisting me throughout the PhD process is not something that is necessarily “extra” help. If, following the social model of disability (Oliver, 2004, Barnes, 2012), we regard disability as the resultant

socio-cultural responses to impairments, then the support I receive is as much part of my autoethnographic framing as is the theoretical and methodological issues I have grappled with in this chapter. A society that is developed for the majority of the population without disabilities, results in purposefully excluding those with disabilities from society in a variety of ways, or, in a more limited sense, preventing them living lives with opportunities equivalent to non-disabled groups. Of course, this dichotomous logic still signifies a situation in which those with disabilities lack something and need more help than others to achieve social parity. This binary conception can only be upheld if we take for granted the idea, from humanist liberalism, that humans are autonomous, rational and non-disabled. This is matched against a largely abstracted and disembodied figure of an ideal human that takes as self-evident the normativity of social and cultural activities as though they were natural frameworks that have always organised interactions. One argument against such an ableist idea of the human asks us to consider that no subject acts in isolation and that feats of co-operation are essential to all forms of social life. This has been framed within the field of disability studies as the issue of universal vulnerability (Turner, 2006). This argument recognises that much of social life is based on a highly unrealistic expectation that people embody an idealised health profile that expects consistently good health no matter the circumstances. Deviation from this is seen as a failure or issue when, in realistic terms, it is an inevitable part of ageing and living. In this way, my support functions as a means, not to provide access to a social means of existence that allows me to reach parity with non-disabled students, but highlights the structures of support that any person could utilise, but are often in the background. Our bodies, as Wearing et al, (2015), drawing on Shildrick and Price (2006), argue: “are necessarily a part of interdependent alliances and prosthetic extension. Normativity works by making this interdependence invisible” (Wearing et al, 2015: 2). For example, the use of peer-support, post-doctoral groups where researchers talk through theoretical or methodological ideas related to a set of literatures or topics, is similar to my support worker talking through my ideas with me.

Nonetheless, it is important not to overemphasise the “extra” support I receive for a more methodological reason. As Chang argues and reminds us:

autoethnographers undergo the usual ethnographic research process of data collection, data analysis/interpretation, and report writing. They collect field data by means of participation, self-observation, interview, and document review; verify data by triangulating sources and content; analyze and interpret data to decipher the cultural meanings of events, behaviours, and thoughts; and write autoethnography (Chang, 2007: 209).

If I am undertaking all of these procedures, then, the use of a support worker can be construed as forming part of my procedures of triangulation. They do not just read through the chapters, but work with me in a professional capacity to develop my ideas and connect together themes and concepts. I am developing a unique form of triangulation that connects data with a professional working as part of a country-wide organisation that assists and helps provide resources and conduct research to support autistic people. My way of working with my support worker gave them insight into how autism is changing and the many factors that impact how I would write and present the thesis to an interested audience. I now want to demonstrate further that my relationship with my support worker organically developed best ways of working together through some of the key areas of relational ethics.

The relationship was not just one-way however. My worker was comfortable and accepting of the fact that particular sensory issues such as a room’s lighting or sound levels could be problematic. They would actively work with me to find rooms that were free *and* would make me as comfortable as possible to focus on developing my ideas. In return, I could attend more directly to being more positively “social”, in the sense of being able to interact with my worker and react

to their gestural, vocal and meaning-laden interactions more effectively. This allowed me to go on to more freely engage with the ideas that were co-generated from our discussions, leading to greater clarity in defining goals to work towards as well as refining and breaking down the various strands of thinking that would come to me as we talked. That I could develop and think so lucidly about my work and ideas resonates with Smith and Sharp's (2013) work on sensory feedback loops. I could attain maximise efficiency and give myself as someone who was socially considerate and open to communication, because I was comfortable both in terms of sensory stimulation and happy to talk with someone who was encouraging and open to giving me avenues to challenge myself, for example, attending a weekend-study away session, whilst working through the issues and challenges this would present. In these regards, we were enacting a form of a feminist ethics of caring (Collins, 1990), in which we were attentive to consider the more emotional, empathetic and relational modes of understanding ourselves and the audiences to which I was writing. We discussed our vulnerabilities, such as the difficulties of attending conferences or how caring for someone at home led to challenges in finding time to work effectively or the structural and financial issues that prevented support that was beneficial to my PhD work.

By thinking about my support in this manner, I am not only able to examine the power relations inherent, yet left unspoken by the non-disabled majority, I also reveal the ways in which networks and interdependences with multiple external others are constituted and valued as worthwhile by others (Goodley et al, 2014). As Goodley and colleagues note, we do not readily accept such tight integration and high numbers of people involved with our lives. Therefore, we require analysis that informs our thinking about questions of intersectional dependence that blurs the boundaries of self/other, nature/technology and ability/disability (ibid: 348). As the next section demonstrates, this potential of a posthuman disability framework serves to make the academic mundane strange.

Revealing the Analytic Potential in the Academic Mundane

Documenting the relationship of knowledge production and the power relations inherent in writing autoethnographic work is to develop an awareness of the mundanities of academic work and research. These banal practices are often overlooked in conceptions of research that take these questions seriously, namely, that of reflexivity are important to prevent researchers from taking for granted the conditions in which they work. As I have shown, in the worst cases, reflexivity is utilised to showcase a self-assured awareness of the conditions shaping an author's subjectivity, without recourse to the non-academic factors that led to these ideas and shaped them just as much as technical concepts and theories. This can be seen if we consider the case of a respected seminar series discussion of someone's developing research account, or the aforementioned informal PhD student and post-doc researcher discussion. These activities are relegated to, at best, an "Acknowledgements" section in a thesis or article, regardless of the impact and influence such contributions had on the argument. These aspects of work are not counted as citations of value, which are restricted to publishable, copyright-owned materials in a bibliography.

Further, this attention to the circuits of value, power and recognition are all the more important to someone with a disability and not just because of the power imbalance. For an author with Asperger's Syndrome, these kinds of networking relationships and acknowledgements are even more crucial for success. Difficulties in accessing and understanding the social complexities of these scenarios are thus inevitable, but, this situation can also be used to uncover and challenge the academic values inherent within the system to alter them for the betterment of all groups in the academic sphere. Highlighting the "everyday" practices of academic work then is not just a means of critiquing a distanced and elitist view of reflexivity poses opportunities to, as in the seminar example, expand upon the ability to track, record and share the development and alteration of ideas and concepts as they emerge from intellectual discussions. In

the second part of this autoethnographic account (see Chapter 5), I will develop this line of thought to consider how characteristics of autism can be used to give affective resonance to cherished methodological and analytical ideas to challenge the inner workings of academic life through the means in which autism brings out the hidden elements and mundane practices that go unnoticed within academic work.

This is not to say that work is not already under way to examine this understudied topic. Laura Micciche's, upcoming book "Acknowledging Writing Partners" (Forthcoming), looks at the roles and effects of feelings, time and animals in writing practices. Preliminarily, she argues, in accordance with the argument in this chapter, that Acknowledgement sections are formative for academic identity creation and solidification, but can also serve to promote the "animals, feelings, sound, and places" of writing that are repressed in the main text (Micciche, 2014: 499). For many, including Strickland (2011) and Donahue and Moon (2007), appreciation of people and animals are so close in proximity that they demonstrate the equal - if not primary, in the case of Strickland - importance of animals as necessary to produce writing as an inseparable element of authors' writing ecologies. Further, feelings like love and the inspiration it can engender, irrespective of the topic at hand, feature heavily in giving the reader a sense of the networks in which writers are located. Micciche frames these kinds of relational and co-constitutive acknowledgements within Ingold's development of an "ontology of dwelling" (Ingold, 2012). Here, humans are engaged and immersed in a world where an active, practical and co-emergent engagement emerges so that writing is part of the world and the things, places, people and objects that make up the world are essential to this writing. As such, by bringing attention to these forms of relation, it becomes possible to recognise the non-normative inspirations behind autistic being and thinking and that drives our inspirations as dwelling in the world.

A Concluding Multivocal Discussion

Formal Conclusion Voice: In concluding this chapter, I'd like to again highlight that rather than being a fundamental detriment to autoethnographic writing, autistic sensibilities do not preclude the possibility of such an account. Rather, what this chapter has done is to highlight the writer's position within the autoethnographic literature and consider some of the more pressing challenges and adjustments that took place in order to develop an autoethnographic account. I end with the consideration and reminder to have a more encompassing ToM and that those who cannot or struggle to speak to the dominant styles or frameworks of legibility or sociality, are not without their own means of understanding.

Future Orienting Voice: Ok, formal writing voices need to take a break for a moment. The reader needs to be made aware that what is to come in the next chapter may be a little unexpected. Right then, I am going here to make the reader aware of the next chapter's sharp change of tone. Having developed my position and stout defence of why I believe an autieethnography, or autism inflected autoethnography is possible and important, the next autoethnographic chapter will focus on developing evocative and uncomfortable writing that deviates from the self-assertive and organised formal writing that has so far dominated the thesis. The reader will be presented with two sets of long-form vignettes: one tackling the mundane writing and caring situation in which this PhD has taken shape. Another will tackle the affective and discursive forces that shaped my research thinking and practice. The conceptual discussion that I will engage in after these vignettes will, in this spirit, explore the fuzzy, not fully rational elements of what I have discussed rather than close them down. The chapter aims to develop what is noted as autistic people's ability to be honest and unambiguous about their feelings or what they think about a topic. This desire to not keep feelings or thoughts bottled up to prevent stress, uncertainty and anxiety will be the spirit that drives my work in providing an

autie ethnographic piece of writing that looks at the personal, interpersonal and structural elements that shape my writing and academic subjectivities.

Chapter 5 - An Auto/AutieEthnography Part 2 - The Conditions of PhD Labour - Autoethnographic Writing Vignettes

Introduction - Of Writing Vignettes and Autoethnography

This chapter is part conceptual, part theoretical discussion and part introspective and personal description. As such, my voices, perspective and emotional stances will be front and centre of much of the chapter. I will start each section or topic with a descriptive narration of the personal experiences and processes that led to their inclusion in the chapter. I will then consider the wider methodological, theoretical and practical effects that my experience raises in relation to these topics.

The first section and vignette will discuss the mundane and practical writing conditions that structure my academic, personal and family life. This story will explore the emotional difficulties that balancing such responsibilities entails and the impact this has had on my becoming a professional social researcher. The second vignette will detail an affective account of how my own manifestation of Asperger's Syndrome contributes to a unique form of subjective awareness that influences my approach to analysis and theorising. I will explore how such conditions affect the production of knowledge and I hope to provide readers with some insight into how neurodiverse researchers experience the emplaced cognitive and bodily processes of research. Both vignettes will serve to highlight the degrees of care that have been part of my writing context and research practices. I highlight the various ways I care for and care about the people, theories, events and words that make up my thesis. This leads to discussions of the different consequences that different forms of caring have, in particular, the degree to which caring too much is a detrimental and parasitic process that has important consequences for my academic identity. I conclude by rethinking how

a sociological imagination can be rethought when considered through the insights developed across this chapter and Chapter 4.

Writing Vignette 1 - Writing in Chaos - Autism, Writing and Home Care

I want to begin this chapter with a more personal, revealing and vulnerable dimension to working on my thesis. So far, I have displayed to readers of this thesis a more or less traditional, standardised, assured and professional academic persona and voice, able to purvey the relevant literature with insights and critique, display analytical prowess in exploring the different facets of such work and write arguments that constitute a rational, detached and recognisable form of discourse that progresses in a logical sequence to form sound conclusions. This chapter serves to disrupt this sense of academic identity by showing the ways in which emotions, responsibilities towards others and the sensory, informational and social aspects of my Asperger's interact with these accepted and dominant forms of academic identity. The vignette presented below outlines a typical day for me, working on my thesis, and demonstrates the external conditions, beyond the intellectual and writing obstacles that academics can encounter that press on my ability to work effectively.

Characters, Conditions and Concerns - Some Background

I usually start working at around 9:15 and... Hold on a moment, I think that some background is necessary in order for the vignette below to make sense. Most of the disruptions, breaks and frustrations that come with trying to maintain a stable and productive work schedule are related to the fact that I look after my mum, assisting her with many daily activities and other tasks intermittently on Monday-Friday from 7:15 - 17:30. My mum has a combination of conditions: Chronic Fatigue, a hypoactive thyroid and lowered and inflamed immune

systems that cause her great difficulty and discomfort in undertaking a wide range of activities. She gets tired very easily and has little energy regardless of her overall condition, so she is limited in terms of how much she can do before having to sleep for a few hours. Unfortunately, this is not helped by the fact that sleep does not provide rejuvenating effects despite the fact that on average, 2-3 sleep sessions per day are necessary to maintain some semblance of wellness. Beyond these more general conditions, mum is very susceptible to illness and debilitating effects and conditions such as colds, headaches, sore throat with no voice and skin rashes. This means that she cannot go out and can only do housework or other tasks in short concentrated bursts, with assistance from me or others. The level of dedication required often means that other tasks such as washing are left to pile up from four members of the house and so require further investment if another task has taken priority. Practically, this means we are fighting a perpetually unwinnable battle with the various household activities to keep backlogs from developing including: the washing, washing-up, sorting piles of papers into order, garden maintenance or assembling a new table, wardrobe and so on. Something always has to give in this scenario and gets delayed until mum has enough energy to tackle it or dad is off work at the weekend or for a holiday. When mum does not have the constitution to do these tasks, which is, sadly, much of the time, I often do some of these tasks such as cleaning as I am the only one at home for most of the time as a full time PhD student writing this thesis.

My difficulties with independence due to social and sensory informational issues mean that I cannot travel far beyond my local shops, a two-minute walk up the road without travelling with my dad or sister who work all day. I am also very routine-driven due to my Asperger's and disruptions to them, whether due to unscripted events such as a crisis in the house or due to special and infrequent events such as birthdays, cause great anxiety. If my routines are disrupted, I often get too wound up to be able to focus on working and even if they are small and short, disruptions prevent me from working effectively or in severe cases stop me working at all on that day. This is compounded by the fact that mum's

conditions cause her to experience mood swings and she gets frustrated easily due to pain and fatigue. I am very sensitive to these changes, being with her for so long and I often shut-down or get angry due to her slightly frenzied persistence on tasks or her making a bigger deal of things than I feel is necessary. I know she does not mean badly with these frustrated outbursts, but, I can never fully discount them and I feel uncomfortable because of difficulty in controlling and dealing with my emotions in a productive manner.

Having outlined the central background elements that feature in any “working day”, I now present a vignette, below, of a sample working day.

My PhD “Writing Day” Exhilaration, Exasperation and Emotional Exhaustion²³

***9:15:** I go down the stairs to the living room, sitting just beside the back right corner on the sofa. I sit down, open up and log on to my laptop and open up the Word document for the chapter(s) I will be working on today. Ted, our family dog is sitting on the sofa to the left of me today; he will most likely come over next to me on the right later on for a brief period. “Right, Word’s open, get document, no not that one, ah, there’s the chapter! Now, where did I leave off? Helping out over the weekend made me lose my place a bit... Ah, yes, the “Doug - Cats, Technological Quasi-Objects and Soylent as Parasite” section.”*

***9:20 - 9:50:** (Reading through my field-notes and focus group data, I locate the section describing Doug’s interests in technology and cats). “Hm, this is really interesting, Doug is seeking to develop his own quasi-object with the “cat toilet” idea. What need or role is this construction serving?” (Scrolls to the Soylent*

²³ My thoughts are placed within quotation marks in this section. When I am talking to mum, my internal thoughts are placed within brackets to mark them clearly as a different mode of address.

explanation in the field-notes). "I seem to recall him mentioning something about technology helping to mitigate social and natural problems and thus benefit both human and cat populations"... (scanning)... "There it is. This is a bit too abstract though. The Soylent event during the club session was filled with banter, friendly mocking and bemused interest as to Doug's personal motivations for engaging with it." (Ted jumps up beside me on the right at this stage). "Oh, this is good! Doug recognises the habitual, cyclical and mundane nature of housework and this frustrates him because it is using energy and resources which could be engaged in more practically relevant and enjoyable things for him. Soylent is acting as a quasi-object itself to counteract the parasitism of household chores by removing the need for food and water breaks. This is SO INTERESTING!" (The thrill of finding theoretical and empirical connections overcomes me and I start typing furiously, jumping from point to point as they enter my mind, rather than proceeding linearly) "The cat toilet is a quasi-object constructed by Doug, "oh yes" Soylent is acting like a relational social object," (double checks relational object definition). "Ah yes, I see how I can dev..."

9:50 - 10:10: *Then, just as I am getting into a writerly flow, a familiar voice and request echoes down the stairs. "RrOOOoob?" mum inquires, cheerfully wondering if I am in my room or downstairs. "Yes mum", I reply. Locating the sound of my voice, she says "Oh, there you are, what are you doing down there?" She asks with genuine inquisitiveness. "I'm doing my work". I say plainly, an automatic and unremarkable stock phrase at this point in the PhD process. "Oh... ROOoob? Could I have some tea and biscuits please?" The question is said with knowing cheek as she knows she is interrupting me and understands this frustrates me, but her tea and biscuits are important to her so I happily oblige. (Ted, hearing mum's voice, pricks his ears up and charges up the stairs to see her). I make the tea and take it up to her bed. ("Just think, if this was last week, she would have had to hobble over to the stairs and bang on the railing to get my attention because of her voice loss"). Ted is waiting on the bed next to her, looking forward to his little piece of digestive biscuit. As I set off to get back to my work, mum gives me a face of intent; she wants to ask me to do*

something she deems "vital". "Rob? Could you take the bin bag of rubbish down and take the tray of cups and plates down please?" "Yes Mum", I reply wryly, noting that the bag is only half full and the tray is not even fully covered with cups or plates. "Can these things really not wait?" I think to myself. "I have to make two trips", which I deemed unnecessary; "this is going to distract my developing analytic thoughts".

10:12 - 10:38: Having done all of that, I sit back down at the laptop and reorient myself to where I was. "Right Sigh... Doug would rather have convenience than sensual social experiences. Now, I need to develop an account from a different participant that highlights a different element of habitual favourites." (Going through my field-notes, keeping my attention focused on notes made about favourites or habits). "Hmm, Garry's management of extracurricular interactions beyond his leisure and disability support clubs is an interesting mediation between favourite activity and routine processes. His mediating process is..." KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!! (Woof, Woof, Woof). "Oh, is that a parcel at the door?" I go to the door and indeed, there is a parcel waiting for us a familiar face is present. Getting so many parcels has meant we get a number of recurring drivers coming to us. "Hello, how are you today?" The lady chimes with affection. "Hello, I'm good thank you". I take the package and sign the electronic PDA. "Thanks very much, bye, have a nice day!" "Cheers, bye". I take the parcel and place it on the kitchen table. I take a look at the time and see it is 10:40. "Well, as I am up, I suppose I could make my lunch while I am here. I know I could wait until 11:00, my normal time, but I am up now and might as well do it so as not to interrupt my workflow for the third time today".

10:40 - 11:10: I make my lunch and sit back down in my work space. As I am eating. (KNOCK, KNOCK, tap on glass), (WOOF, WOOF, GRRRRR). "Another parcel... Ah... up we go". I hurriedly swallow my current piece of biscuit, put my plate to the side, away from Ted's prying nose and mouth and get the parcel. I sit back down to finish my lunch. "Haahh... Right, let's finish lunch".

11:10 - 11:35: *“Lunch is eaten, now where was I? Oh yes, Garry’s management of interest and interaction. In this case, his lack of a nuanced understanding of technology reinforces with his “get away from overwhelming social stimulus” response and he seeks to remove outside contact beyond the club gatherings.” (I scan through my field-notes for a specific situation at one club.) But then, I hear heavy footsteps coming down the stairs, groaning after each two or so stairs due to the effort required. Ted, having gone upstairs after the last parcel was delivered, excitedly comes charging down the stairs at hyper speed, tail wagging, comes to the living room door and stares out, waiting for mum to come down. She arrives and sees me typing up Garry’s analysis. “Rob? Could you help me please?” Her coy, cheeky attitude from earlier on has seemingly vanished and a serious and determined intent has overcome her. (“Oh, we are doing stuff are we? You could have let me know that we were doing stuff today.”) “Yes mum.” (“I am trying to do my work and you can see that I am doing it and we have already done things around the house/fine..... SIGH, here we go again. I wonder how long this will take today and if I can return to work in good time?”) I get up and go on to face the horror of the backlog of housework.*

11:40 - 12:00: *Mum slowly makes her way into the kitchen and over to the sink (“Oh, it looks like we are just doing the washing-up, this shouldn’t take too long”) I hopefully reassure myself, looking at the moderately small amount of washing present (“This should only take 20 minutes, good, I can get back to work then”). We start washing up and I dry the plates and bowls and place them into their appropriate cupboards. As we are finishing up, Mum looks out to the washing stands out in the dining room, directly in front of us and I can see her tidiness gears turning. (“Oh no, she is going to ask me to help with this, isn’t she?”). “We need to place these into piles and then take them all up”. I look over to the four large piles that are already on the dining room table. (“Wonderful, even more things to add to these piles.”)*

12:00 - 12:50: Meanwhile, as I am outside, mum is pottering around looking for more “unnecessary” things to do in my mind. She simultaneously manages to put some MORE clothes into the washing machine for a short, 30-minute wash, for us to hang up later on. And she also manages to find some miniscule amount of dirt on the kitchen cupboard doors and starts to wipe them with anti-bacterial wipes. When I come in, she is panting and out of breath. “Rob...” (breathes heavily and takes in some breaths to get her voice back). “Could you wipe these doors please?” (“Is this really necessary? We do not have guests coming around every day judging us could we not just leave this?”) I would have said this out loud, but I have done so in the past to no avail and I just keep my admittedly petty frustrations to myself nowadays. As I finish wiping up, mum opens the fridge door, “oh my God, we’ve got to clear this out”. I peer into the interior and see a small amount of things to clean out, but oh no, of course, it is not that easy. When mum says, “we need to clean out

Box 1 - “Interjecting” Descriptor Voice:

Oh. Um, hello again reader, you may remember my “voice”, ahem... from Chapter 4. Anyway, I am “interjecting” here to give a kind of current status update when writing about the past as it relates to the present writing section. I just wanted to interject here by pointing out that, as my analysis/writer and emotional voices wrote this chapter, the events that transpired in the vignette continued. Sure, the details and specifics are a little different, but, if you change some of the events such as washing up to: hanging out the washing backlog in the garden, or, in less mundane situations, sorting out when our washing machine leaked water. Then the results are largely the same. I wanted to bring this to your attention to give you some idea of the temporal scale and nature of the circumstances I describe in this vignette.

the fridge”, what she actually means is, “ we need to take out the food, empty it into food waste bags and remove the shelves and clean them, including the vegetable trays and so on.”

12:50 - 13:25: After this has been done, I turn my attention, weary and frustrated to the ironing piles and pick one to take upstairs. As I carry the piles of washing up and down the stairs, with little cognitive stimuli to latch onto, my mind of course turns to feelings of guilt. Emotional and conflicting thoughts and feelings emerge. “Well, so much for doing any more work today! Look! It’s 13:05 now! By the time were finished, there will be no point in continuing as it will be my relaxation and dinner preparation time” Moderately irritated, I start lambasting myself, “I really should be doing my work right now. I helped tidy up for the majority of yesterday and I really should be doing my work to catch up”. I then start becoming resentful about my mum being so pedantic and in my mind, obsessed and manic about doing housework, “Why does she get so worked up about this, it is so stupid, it really is not worth getting this worked up about it. I know I am getting worked up about her getting worked up and.. Argh! “sigh.” I feel a surge of anger inside and I give in to the anger, grit my teeth and tightly clench my fists. I then release the tension and quickly calm down again. This is my “angry stim” that you could say that I often get when mum is in a bad mood due to her thyroid issues. Resentment soon becomes resignation and fatalism before turning into acceptance, “Sigh” I suppose there is not much I can do. I am so worked up now that I know that I will not be able to focus on writing properly and I will most likely be interrupted anyway. Besides, I have plenty of time until the next supervision session to finish the chapter off.” “Pile two”, “pile three”, “pile four”, “pile number five, up we go.” My emotional and cognitive defeatism is transferring to physical non-enthusiasm as my body feels the strain of going up and down the stairs more than it should. Anxious pangs are pulsing through my chest, my mouth is getting dry, teeth are clenching and grinding, I am feeling light-headed and my stomach is churning. These are the symptoms of anxiety I know intimately. They are so engrained in my habitual bodily and physiological disposition that I cannot even imagine what any other mode of habitual bodily

“normal” is like at this point. I experience an “anxiety cycle” where the symptoms of anxiety cause me to be more anxious and this in turn causes the symptoms to intensify. I have reached the cruel middle point where I know that nothing serious is ever going to happen, but the symptoms are strong enough, still, to cause me concern and intrude enough on my emplaced consciousness that I cannot block them out. “I think I understand on a more fundamental, emplaced level what Doug was talking about in regard to mundane household work now. That’s something for work, right?”

“Mind out the way Ted”. I chime in a high pitched, cheerful tone (Ted moves to the side)”Thank you”. This brief period of light affective communication does not feel “fake” as to the way I feel however and gives me a break from the negative mood I am currently in. Ted’s dog-like ways of acting and his innocent curious nature, which dogs often express regarding our activities, gives me a sense of comfort and I imagine ways in which he is thinking about what we are doing from the perspective of a dog and the ways in which he tries to make sense of our actions. I think, in some ways, this gives me another angle from which to personally connect to Doug’s interest in cats and their “catness”. I feel an emplaced connection to his affective and discursive constructions of this relationship, amongst the drudgery and frustrations of mundane housework and the insurmountable obstacle it presents.

13:30 - 15:00: As I finish off the last remaining piles, mum is hanging up the next washing load. “Rob, Could you get the tray and bring down the stuff from upstairs?” Because mum is in bed for most of the time, she accumulates cups, plates and cutlery due to copious amounts of tea consumption and lunch and dinner being brought up to her. I am ok with doing this, as I saw earlier that we would need more plates for dinner later at 17:15. I collect them all and cautiously carry them downstairs. We then wash these up and I dry them and place them in their appropriate cupboard locations. We take a break after this and sit in the living room and talk about various topics such as the news, politics

or what is going on in the life of my dad or sister. I do not continue working during these breaks that we have because I know we are going to get up again and be interrupted YET AGAIN before I can get into an efficient writing flow and rhythm. After about 25 minutes, we get back up and see if the washing machine has finished yet. It has 10 minutes to go, I take out the recycling bags that have been filled after clearing out the fridge and tidying the kitchen. I then take out the washing to hang it up on the line in the garden, which takes a little longer than doing it inside due to the pegs and rotating the outside line. We then both make mum some lunch and head upstairs at 15:00. Then I go to my room and have some solitary time in order to recover and recharge.

Discussion - Writing as a Mundane Academic Habitus

Reflective Voice: Hello, It has been a few weeks since I have attended to the working day vignette. I have noted, as the reader probably has, that the scenario I have depicted is very negative. This one-sided outline is at once an “accurate” construction of my thoughts and feelings *during* the events. But it fails to capture the more light-hearted and positive dimensions that these activities bring, like how mum gets immense satisfaction from making things tidy and improving the house, or how we laugh and joke about silly things like the absurdity of the storylines of the Soaps that mum watches or playing with Ted and laughing at his playful behaviours.

The above vignette about my working day is filled with many complex relations, emotional fluctuations, research practices, thought processes, caring responsibilities, analytic themes and habitual worldly engagements. I will, over the course of the rest of the chapter, explore each of these aspects in some form. I want to begin by examining and exploring the ways in which my writing experiences can be conceptualised in a very descriptive sense. I will then go on to explore how academic writing is shaped and constituted by the location and conditions from which it emerges. This process could be termed an academic habitus which structures and influences the kinds of writing and attitudes towards it.

In the most general sense, my writing can be understood as taking place within the unpredictable and chaotic nature of my home life-setting. I work through sections of writing and thinking that are *always* punctuated by external disruptions, pauses directed by my mum and family’s needs, as well as desires and requests. As such, I very rarely have the chance to enter into a truly

focused or flow-like state in my writing as my mind/body is eternally peripherally aware of the next task that my mum might need assistance with. Because of these constant interruptions and the consequent disorientating effects they have, it is difficult for me to go beyond the phase of reorienting myself to the arguments I am developing and integrating and consolidating my reading, empirical data and analytical insights into a coherent piece of written work. To focus on the in-the-moment domain of writing, I am less immediately concerned about the connections to the other chapters, the grammatical clarity and aspects like sign-posting or how my work connects more broadly to the relevant literatures beyond the immediate ideas and reading I am working with. Within mainstream autism theory, these challenges would be framed as displaying difficulties with global/local coherence (See Happé and Frith, 2006 and Booth and Happé, 2016). However, as I have noted in Chapters 1 and 3, this reductionist focus on cognitive-based explanations discounts the emplaced sensory and habitual quasi-objects that can provide a more nuanced account of autistic being and becoming. In relation to my working day vignette, retaining awareness of my writing and managing home care responsibilities can be more fruitfully understood through the sensory thresholds framework of Smith and Sharp (2013) I outlined in Chapter 3. Here, the material, sensory, bodily and cognitive interact together to constitute the factors that generate disruptive effects in terms of negotiating the complexities of the writing process. I thus find it much harder to relate parts to wholes or vice versa without extensive and considered detachment, analysis and review of the situation at hand. Later in the chapter, I will consider how these sensory thresholds interacted in relation to notions of care.

Following Kamler and Thomson (2014), developing my identity as an academic researcher has been complex and truncated by the many factors I have outlined above. In these terms, my writing is very unstructured. On occasions, days go by where I do not have a chance to think about or write for my thesis at all due to family commitments. Therefore, developing a unique and identifiable academic “voice” is something that emerges in spurts and bursts rather as a

continuous engagement. Indeed, my mode of working goes against the linear, standardised and simplified models of PhD guidance, exemplified by books such as “Writing Your PhD in Fifteen Minutes a Day” (Bolker, 1998).

As discussed by Kamler and Thomson, this presents the view that:

language is transparent, a straightforward conduit for thought. The process of writing is simplified into a linear process, where students are exhorted to think first, then write. They need to plan, get the chapter outline clear, and proceed, bit by bit, chapter, by chapter, as if meaning is already formed prior to the writing (Kamler and Thomson, 2014 :4).

My research-writing practice makes this overview of research-writing impossible to attain. Within this form of thinking, any deviations from these best practice tips are seen as the researcher/writer being negligent or not good enough to conduct thesis work. The deficits are placed solely on the individual writer and do not consider the wider social factors that influence the writing process. On a more personal level, this linear progression of working is not connected to the style of the thesis. This is because my core thesis aims, themes and overall research project is a unique and original combination of literature, concepts and ideas. I do not have the luxury of producing a draft where the argument and meaning of the chapters are set in stone and all that is left is the tidying and polishing of grammar, argumentative logic and spelling (ibid:4). Because of the way I work, the chapters benefit from scattered writing, thinking and reading practices that produce meaning piecemeal in liaison with feedback from my support worker and supervisors. This scattered nature of working however does not prevent concentrated bursts of activity. In the less busy times of helping mum and family, I am able to focus on thinking through some ideas away from the actual physicality and presence of staring at my computer screen. I have

found this to cause me to lose motivation to write on some occasions due to the repetitive nature of the work involved, when not motivated and spurred on by an existing idea of conceptual inquiry, as I note in the working day vignette. Further to this, as I discussed with my support assistant, whom I noted in Chapter 4, whenever I am not able to work on the thesis due to other commitments, when I next come back to it, I have an intensive and frantic writing session which I feel as a kind of intellectual and physical catharsis. These spurts come from ideas I have as I start writing, having come back from a break rather than ideas I have been consciously formulating during that break. My unconscious runs in the background and there are more ideas than I am consciously aware of, but it also points to the different material and medium differences of conceiving the ideas in my head and re-reading and reorienting myself to the chapter after a break.

Kamler and Thomson (2014) remind us that the process of writing a doctoral thesis is a complex and iterative process that goes beyond developing a finely crafted document to considering issues of “identity/text work” (Kamler and Thomson, 2014: 26). By this, they mean that as doctoral researchers go through the system and processes of PhD research such as vivas, conference presentations, working through articles for publishing and so on, they work out how to present an academic identity that is conducive and appropriate for diverse situations and audiences. Because of this, writing in a digital, word-processed document is an entirely different medium, process and experience than undertaking a verbal presentation at a conference or in a viva. Not discounting the fact that writing down ideas in a separate research diary in a fragmented format, requires a different set of cognitive skills than working through these same ideas within the structures and conventions of prose and argumentative logic and development. Kamler and Thomson contend that this cognitive process is not separate or distinct from the bodily compartments required for writing, speaking and working through an intellectual project. As such, these somatic habits developed during the writing process are embodied in the muscles, body compartments and nerves of PhD students and thus form a core part of a distributed student identity. These kinds of responses and

conditioned, habitual ways of interacting and reacting to writing and thinking can be framed as a kind of habitus or the socialised subjectivity of PhD students. The emplaced comportment and actions of doctoral students habitus are placed within a larger set of relations, which Kamler and Thomson (2014) develop in utilising Norman Fairclough's (1992) model of discursive framing to locate the writing of a thesis. These wider networks of relations can include the student supervisor relationship as well as the infrastructural and institutional practices of where the student develops their thesis the university, the library, cafes, on the train, in the home environment, or in the work office amongst many others.

I wish to address the working-day vignette in regard to the issues that Kamler and Thomson first raise in relation to the specific material, bodily and medium-specific nature of research writing.

The Consequences of Writing in Chaos - Thinking With Care in Writing

My desire to write the "Working Day" vignette speaks to a number of issues that come with the practicality of writing. A recent approach to discussing the complexities of the writing process can be seen in Les Back's (2007) work on scholarly writing, which examines the different ways in which the components of writing, the context, the writer's desk, as well as objects and rituals help the writer develop ideas and cope with problems, writerly or otherwise. These aspects, brought together, could be called a writerly craft and go on to constitute the ways in which the practicalities of writing emerge and go on to shape the subsequent output of the writer. However, I am concerned that, if left unquestioned or treated too romantically, the concept of craft could ignore the potential hardships that go beyond writing as something that is left outside of the purview of the craft concept. While this notion is invaluable to describe the object-focused, affective and emplaced subjective spatial and temporal factors that go on to constitute the writing process, it does little to develop ideas about

the practical and equally emplaced challenges that go beyond the writerly craft *as such*. What about those with processing disabilities such as dyspraxia? How does the writer's craft become influenced and shaped by conditions that serve, in some ways to challenge the very sanctity and expectations of what it means to be a writer? How do writerly rituals and habits intersect with non-writerly mundane and everyday rituals and habits of housework, familial responsibility and care when they press on the writer more than is expected? Rather than viewing academic writing as if it "can be plucked from the everyday and treated as a stand-alone activity, one that renders outcomes, fills pre-existing genres, serves as stable evidence of one kind or another", we might think of writing as "contaminated, made possible by a mingling of forces and energies in diverse, often distributed environments. Writing is defined, ultimately, by its radical *witness*" (Micciche 2014: 501-502, emphasis in original).

This emphasis matches the focus on quasi-objects I have been developing and will continue to develop in this chapter. As McRuer (2004) argues, normative, neurotypical forms of writing and composition play into neoliberal imperatives of standardised teaching in order to produce flexible and docile bodies to master measurable skills and techniques (McRuer, 2004: 49-50). As I noted in Kamler and Thomson's critique of Bolker (1998), deviation from standardised techniques and practices of reading, thinking and writing is located in the individual student, researcher and writer. To move beyond critiques that argue for incorporeal resistance such as creative and free writing, McRuer points to the importance of non-normative, embodied corporealities that speak back to normative composition. Therefore, in relation to my Asperger's or for those with dyspraxia, this means taking into account their unique modes of articulation, writing should not just be taken into account. They should be seen as constitutive of writing as a practice that cannot be displaced by normalising techniques of capture. I will address these issues in my discussions of my second vignette below in relation to writing milieu and non-normative writing and analysis practices.

As I note, this is not to say that writing as a craft cannot address these issues. For example, the work of Dorothy Smith (1987) has been central in pointing out the ways in which power relations intersect with the mundane activity of writing. Specifically, she speaks of how a sociological writer, in the privileged position of a university office, can speak about an external social world, without ever necessitating thinking about the usability or cleanliness of the floor or bins. These jobs are performed by night workers who never interact or intersect with the routines and writing practices of the academics in question. High-level questions and the conceptualisation of writing as craft can only be achieved if time is not taken up or occupied too much with tasks that take away from the activity of writing. If a specialised and demarcated spatial and temporal area of study cannot be maintained or created, then writing becomes less ordered by the structures of thinking and writing and more open to the strictures of non-writing-oriented tasks.

Because I have written the vast majority of my thesis in a home environment, these kinds of institutional questions are not directly relevant. But, we can also extend these questions of power and positionality into domestic study or writing settings. I want to focus specifically on questions relating to aspects of care. I want to focus on the care I give to my mum, the care I give to my writing and analysis and the care my mum gives to her concerns with the house. I want to work through what questions of care mean when I look at how mum and I understand the home situation. I will focus in on me and my mum's differently situated or punctualised (Munro, 2004, 2005) connection to the thesis/writing/house/maintenance relation can help to explain the frustrations and complexities of our responses to it.

I believe that a feminist consideration of care as a concept, practice and ethical-philosophical project can highlight the specificities of my writing and home life relationships. This framework seeks to account for “fostering [...] mundane maintenance and repair, [where] a world’s degree of liveability might well depend on the caring accomplished within it” (de la Bellacasa, 2012: 198). Caring is essential for any form of life or world-building to take place. Even when normally, care is not acknowledged as crucial to an event, someone has to take care of someone or something in order for it to be possible. Neglect leads to highly diminished results or the complete dissolution of the elements that constituted the event. In this sense and in contrast to more utilitarian notions of care, “the vital necessity of care means standing for sustainable and flourishing relations, not merely survivalist or instrumental ones” (ibid: 198). Equally, care involves emotions and material labour and can be based on exploitation or domination just as much as affection and attentiveness. Thus, we should not idealise care as, although it is an essential precondition to effective social relations, it requires work and necessitates consideration of the ways in which harmonious *and* troublesome relations intertwine to make care possible.

How are these insights related to my own situation presented in the above vignette? Firstly, my difficulties with independence mean that I rely on my parents during most weekdays to give me help with planning out and organising my days. This may include making sure that the dinner is cooked, giving advice on how to manage moving bank accounts and reminding me to undertake routine household tasks. This mutual dependence on each other is a central crux from which to expand upon the notion of care outlined by de la Bellacasa (2012). The material and emotional labour I outlined in my vignette speaks to questions of responsibility and dedication to two very different tasks the difficulties in managing the “head work” of my PhD writing and the “body work” of household tasks and the emotional negotiation for me and my mum. On the one hand, PhD writing is a positive, affective rush that heightens my conceptual manipulation and theoretical development capacities through tracing, highlighting and developing my own personal form of praxis, or the combination

of theory and empirical research. On the other hand, helping my mum around the house causes me to resent household tasks and consequently I lack motivation to take care of things independently. Equally, my frustration with my mum's frustration of her inability to keep the house as she would like prevents me from engaging with my PhD as much as I would like. The scale of writing and the sheer amount of material labour that is needed in the house, in the form of washing, cleaning and shopping for four people, two of whom work full time from Monday to Friday, never reach an equilibrium and both remain in a constant state of catch-up. Thus, without each other, my mum's and my worlds would be completely dissolved.

These insights lead me to consider de la Bellacasa's (2012) discussions about "caring too much" and the multiple ways in which this produces problematic relations in regard to those we care for and with. Firstly, caring too much, devoting too much to one form of association, person, object or activity can "extinguish the subtleties of attending to the needs of an "other" required for careful relationality. All too easily, it can lead to appropriating the recipients of "our" care, instead of relating ourselves to them" (de la Bellacasa, 2012: 209). For me, this means that my anger and frustration at my mum's obsession with what I consider pointless work in the house has become an all-consuming factor that interacts with all aspects of my life, not just my PhD writing. Because I spend much of my time at home, I am highly attentive to potential tasks that my mum might seek to undertake. The cupboards are *slightly* dirty that means we will probably end up cleaning the whole kitchen when mum notices it, even though the cupboard needs to be cleaned and nothing else does. This sort of anxious and frustrated form of anticipatory alertness and the resultant anger and resentment completely blinds me to other forms of relating to housework or feeling satisfied with the result of our labour. Just like Doug, the nature of housework is cyclical; it is never complete and thus my anticipatory alertness becomes integrated into this cyclical form of labour that can never be dissociated from my mum's attitude to the tasks.

I am experiencing what Smith and Sharp (2013)²⁴ have noted as the varying different forms of input emotional, sensory and interactional which are modulated through various thresholds of abilities to cope. My ability to cope and my inability to escape the parasitical nature of this household relationship, where the noise of housework or my thesis haunts each other has “asphyxiat[ed] other possible skills” (de la Bellacasa, 2012: 209), or ways of being or relating to housework. In other words, it has become a static, habitual, affective state of being integrated with mundane material labour. My emotional outbursts of anger and anxiety I discuss in the vignette and their anticipatory symptoms serve to add a physiological and psychological parasitical mechanism to our interactions. To balance and manage each of these parasites to prevent worry, distress or unease is very difficult and I have not managed to find a way to negotiate such diverse concerns. The same sorts of tasks, the same kinds of attitudes towards these tasks, the same spatial arrangements, the same familial petty disputes and laughs, all feed back into each other such that novelty is hard to produce, let alone imagine.

What I rarely have time to consider is the fact that mum cannot help but depend upon me and that ultimately, I could never not help her around the house as I could never not let go of the guilt that I was leaving her helpless. I could thus never appropriate my responsibility to care for her. Not only this, the parasite-like situation has taught me and drilled into me several important lessons that complement the deficiencies of my autism. These are, namely: being attentive to and learning to be affected by my mum’s different forms of care towards the house, I am more able to cope, to a limited degree, with the frustration, spontaneity and anxiety that my mum exhibits in relation to making the house look good. Furthermore, I have developed and expanded my skills to help my parents take care of their widowed elderly mothers with regard to memory issues. And, I seek to develop my ability to remain calm and considerate in the face of frustrating misunderstandings that occur due to forgetfulness. I have

²⁴ See Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion and application of this study.

come to realise that she is just as trapped as me in this habitual parasite of a relationship, in similar and different ways. Like me, she is trapped within the spatial confines of the house. The same sorts of tasks, the same kinds of attitudes towards these tasks, the same spatial arrangements, the same familial petty disputes and laughs exist for mum. But for her, they are related to the difficulty in keeping the house. No work, a lack of contact with friends and the resultant spatial and social isolation means that the house has become the one thing outside of family that she can care for. She takes great delight in planning how to improve things and internet shopping for new items for the house. Unfortunately, this love for house organisation turns to frustration when your muscles ache, and your thoughts are muddled and incoherent. When your emotions are destabilised due to hormonal and physical imbalances, care for the house becomes complicated and dealing with your son's neurodiverse sociality becomes something of a challenge to work through.

These issues can usefully be described as displaying forms of what Munro (2004, 2005) has called "punctualized" identity formation. Here, subjectivity is not directed to pre-existing social structures, but relates to them as they develop based on forms of structural emergence and agential actions responding to the spatial and temporal milieus that they inhabit. Identities are, in this sense, formed by the "demanding" elements of these times and spaces, because mum is isolated in the house, her identity, actions and thoughts are oriented to its care, maintenance and improvement. Spatial and temporal issues become centred on the ways in which the space can be made better through new storage options, for example, or by the time needed to paint a bedroom. This will then lead mum to consider how visitors will come to view us if we leave the painting unfinished due to fatigue and illness; thus, her sense of self is shaped around these interlocking questions. These responsibilities and obligations cause her to see these as "demanding" affordances because the care invested in them is so great.

How Do You Cope? - Future Directions

I want to end this section on the notion of care in relation to me, my mum and the house by ending on the same questions that de la Bellacasa asks in “Nothing Comes Without Its World” (2012). “How do you cope?” “Does the attention required to keep our knowledge aware of its connections and consequences lead inevitably to anxiety?” “Aren’t anxiety, sorrow and grief unavoidable affects in efforts of paying serious mental attention, of thinking with care, in dislocated worlds?” (de la Bellacasa, 2012: 212). The question of coping is intricately connected to care because these issues illuminate the affective nature of knowledge politics (ibid: 212). In relation to anxiety, sorrow and grief, I feel that in my case, as I noted in my writing-day story, it is a strongly habitual means of interacting with the world that has become interiorised to the extent that feelings and thoughts of being anxious create anxiety in a cyclical loop. This interiorised state is manifested in the anticipatory anxiety that I discussed earlier, such that I know in advance how things will play out, based on the way mum reacts and moves through space and the modes of address she uses when talking to me. de la Bellacasa also inquires as to whether these negative affects rather than being constitutive to a relational notion of care “belong to an out-of-place sense of *inaccurateness*: that something does not match, does not hold together, that something could be different?” (ibid: 212 emphasis in original). In our case, the situation could be different in the sense that a key factor of the tensions created is due to my PhD work.

After all, this situation is being sustained by the PhD I am writing. Once it is submitted and the writing has concluded, the parasite will be dislodged from its current hook in the habitual cycle of mum, the house and the thesis. It will change locations and thus the impact it has will change also. No longer will I have to worry about whether I am working enough on my thesis. No longer will I have to have to worry about time being leached away from me. Temporality will be freed in this case, as I will no longer be bound by the linear expectations of

my PhD writing, which has to be completed by a specific time. Although the path to completion is denoted as linear, the directions taken to reach the end goal of submission are mutable and uncertain, the trials and tribulations are open, yet the outcome and markers of progress are set. This dissonant disconnect is very troubling to a person with autism, as there is a logical disconnect between the intent, the actions and the justifications for achieving them. Then, only one side remains uncertain; mum's desire and urge to care for the house, based on impulse and frustration, become the new normal and, for me, temporality becomes more bounded to the spatial confines of the house. The emotional frustration and pettiness will most likely remain. Such firmly cemented sentiments do not dislodge easily, but they can exclusively be focused on trying to communicate to mum the problems with her excessive caring without having to risk putting my thinking and writing skills at risk due to social and emotional overload. I will be able to afford to care too much about mum's attitude to the housework situation.

In this sense, the anger and anxiety I feel can be better used and redistributed as something that is a sign of the unbalanced amount of care being placed into the house. In other words, I will be able to focus fully and bring attention to the inaccuracies in this relationship and work to resolve them and develop a more positive attitude to house-care and mum's understanding and subsequent actions based on this care. Instead of perceiving the situation as a damaging and draining affective state of being that prevents any form of negotiation or thinking otherwise in the habitual parasitic relations, I would then argue that caring too much for the house will always generate anxiety and sorrow for mum and me, because we care so much about the stakes of how we perceive the situation. Unless the imbalances are addressed, we will never be able to move to change the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

I now want to touch upon a more positive aspect in relation to the writing process as a whole. I will refer to concepts developed by MacLure (2013), which address the tension I noted in Chapter 4 regarding the autoethnographic impulse to combine both scientific and artistic means of writing research accounts. More specifically, I will discuss the tension involved with an autistic writer conducting an autoethnography of academic research, in being portrayed as only being able to be systematic and pattern-sensitive rather than attentive to the emotional and affective and meaning-laden aspects of research practice.

Writing Vignette 2 - The “Glow” of Academic Thinking and Writing as Habitual Favourites

MacLure (2013), in her discussion of analysis and in particular coding, notes that while coding is necessary in order to provide stability and meaning in the context of research and specific forms of understanding such as charting networks of power, knowledge and categorical differentiation (MacLure, 2013 :170), it is much less able to deal with issues that do not follow the conventional grammar of meaning-making such that the same kinds of associations are made (ibid: 168). Furthermore, coding cannot discuss questions that go beyond linguistic, discursive or semiotic domains of events that disrupt these categorising imperatives such as the bodily, affective and ineffable inherent in any social encounter. Following Stewart and her methodological call to “unforgetting” (1996: 11), these aspects of research and phenomena that go beyond, resist or subvert formal categorical meaning-making, disrupts the desire to submit all difference and fluidity to static and clearly mapped codes. MacLure argues that we might pay heed to language and its enactments in discursive mockery, jokes, lies, shrugs and embodied snorts, tears and laughter (MacLure, 2013 :171). These both prevent the serious work of analysis but point us to broader analytical strategies for research that include acknowledging, not disowning gut feelings and allowing guilt, fear, anxiety and other mind/body affects to influence and drive forward our empirical and theoretical discussions

and developments (ibid: 172). In what ways do these discussions relate to my workday vignette and the process of conducting an autieethnography? They first of all point to the entangled nature of trying to develop an analytical theoretical thesis in regards to topics as ephemeral as sensory experiences and atmospheric conditions alongside the “harder” domains of habit and favourites. I have already commented on this in Chapter 4, but MacLure allows me to go further by considering, in a very practical sense, the ways in which working through my empirical material can embody these processes.

Discussing sensory experiences in connection to favourites leads to productive and seemingly unproductive senses of unease. The ineffable runs up against the linguistic, and the affectively charged places uneasy questions against the strictly coded and rational linguistic description of research data. My analysis is in a constant antagonistic state. I am obliged to make my data meaningful and am strongly encouraged to develop representational meaning techniques that further encourage me to leave out or ignore the idiosyncrasies of autistic stimming or language use as these are regarded as just “the autism talking”. By not giving these qualities their own explanatory or analytical power to disrupt the analytical work conducted on them, they are reduced to discursive codes that in turn reduce these affective/rational coagulations to something other than themselves and place them within hierarchical and stultifying categorical markers. Therefore, these mark a physically and emotionally intensive gestural bodily action as one thing *or* another rather as a state of liminal working-through-the-world or an in-between affective and rational mode of everyday action.

I have sought to resolve this problem through the use of what I have mentioned in Chapter 4 as kinaesthetic energrams. These work through the discursive, gestural, and embodied ways in which these affective and rational mixes of action can be recorded, working through sensory memories and embodied re-enactments of the habitual, sensory and gestural actions made by myself and

my participants which can be used alongside the linguistic inscriptions of my fieldnotes. This emplaced technique goes beyond these concerns and can be extended to consider the affective and discursive processes of analysis itself. MacLure goes on to make a point that I found particularly resonant to my own form of autistic emplaced, affective/rational process of research,

MacLure describes this dynamic research process as:

“languorous, and not wholly cerebral pleasure in giving oneself over to the data [...] Maybe it’s just me, but I enjoy that part of the research process that involves poring over the data, annotating, describing, linking, bringing theory to bear, recalling what others have written and seeing things from different angles [...] The researcher is at this point a live conduit wherein the materiality of things, the struggles for concepts, one’s “shared entanglement” (Bal, 1999: 30) with others, and with the uncut and unbounded totality of the data, can be *felt*. (MacLure, 2013: 174, emphasis in original)

I can confirm that this felt aspect of the research process is not just based on her own account of the experience of research. It also speaks to one of my own “favourites”, the act of reading, analysing, thinking about and with and writing about social theory and research. I, like any person with autism, who has a special interest, can become so immersed in reading about a particular set of theories, a conceptual trail, different positions on the merits of an author’s perspectives, that it is not just a case of interest, but a compulsion to know. I *have* to know about the topic or I will get anxious, upset and frustrated that I do not have the answers and will not be satisfied or truly able to relax until I can find a way to work through the issues I am having. That is the thing about autistic special interests; they can imbue the entirety of the person’s being in regard to their beliefs, actions, reference points for comparison and

understanding other's perspectives. In more specific and theoretical terms, I get a sense of what MacLure, drawing on Taussig, calls "disconcertment" (Taussig, 1993). I am caught between affective intensity and cognitive clarity, which are in constant flux in relation to how I react to daily life and, in this case, social research and writing. I am not sure exactly how to proceed or where the inspirations come from, but I know that they excite and encourage me as well as disheartening me at the thought that perhaps they might not lead anywhere after all. However, when a particular idea, concept or theory makes sense and comes together, I experience what Deleuze refers to, in describing the passion of an event, as "a sort of leaping of the whole body" (Deleuze, 2004: 170).

My affective and rational capacities become hyper-charged, things flirt in and out at breakneck speeds, and ideas, concepts and applications all come to me at once. I feel a sense of connection to the totality of the data, theory or concepts at play, as if, for that moment, they are the centre of my universe of awareness. My emplaced mind/body becomes subsumed in the logics, arguments and empirical richness of the data or theory and allows me to feel alive and connected to something that I understand so profoundly. At times, it only reaffirms my passion for learning even more. I see the most abstracted theoretical system as something with an affective logic that gives me pleasure just thinking about it and understanding how it operates rather than just as a logical system. These processes and systems gain a sensory and affective charge that makes them multisensual, Deleuze's (1993, 2004) affective writings become emotional and material in very literal ways, Foucault's (1991, 2010) descriptions of disciplinary systems and their spatial, temporal and material logics and the concomitant use of techniques of the self become embodied, concrete feelings in my sense of self. Serres' (2007, 2008) parasites and quasi-objects become felt, co-existent things that prey and support my social actions and understandings. Practically, this means that developing a framework that accounts for the sensory, habitual and distributed, posthuman components of autistic experience invites a wide array of emplaced "languorous pleasures" in my writing and research. Doug's enjoyment of "catness" becomes something I

respect and feel intimately. Williams' (2003) description of tree companionship produces mimetic effects of acceptance and affinity for the processes of nature. Josh's brash and forceful interaction, that I discussed in Chapter 3, causes me to recoil and places the concept of social quasi-objects in an emplaced, sensory and interactional context that enhances my understanding of provocative objects. The conceptual and theoretical toolkits I utilise pleasurably intersect with the materiality of things and the totality of data to produce an intense mode of engagement.

I feel intense pulses of excitement rushing through my body as I make connections on a representational level by learning and utilising new concepts and on an affective level through expanding my knowledge for its own sake, not for any pre-determined goal, the activity itself is enough. My Asperger's Syndrome is a major component that shapes the cognitive, affective, and material responses I have in these excited moments. Why bother demarcating them when they mixing up is so comforting, exiting and profound in developing my learning, sense of self and emotional and sensory fortitude? That is what coding and written documents are for. As MacLure (2013) notes, the assertive, certain, liberal subject emerges during analysis. The process to get to this end point comprise the flows, connections in-between material, social and linguistic domains are open to experimentation to develop insights. MacLure summarises all of this as developing the researcher's "glow" and Stafford (2001), in describing the cabinet of curiosities, attempts to classify the edge of knowledge exotica of the world, and calls such multi-sensory experiences

intensification. As a kind of exhilaration of the senses, intensification is affectively complex: learning, enchantment, perception, cognition and seduction are caught up in each other (Stafford, 2001: 7 in MacLure, 2013: 180-81).

This quote captures my myriad engages with the authors, theories and analytic themes I highlighted above. In summary, my experience of doing research and writing is caught between the poles of interruptions and frustrations and times of exhilaration and affective/cognitive intensity. The question of balancing out the positive and negative domains of my research experience and the resultant anxieties and work balance issues I have outlined in this section is still unsettled for me. Facing forwards to the future, I am slowly but surely developing my academic identity by presenting my work to student audiences for the first time, having my work published in journals and developing blog posts. The process may be slow and may not perfectly fit the accelerated model of neoliberal PhD demands of flexibility, frantic multiple workloads and networked connections (Eddy, 2011). But, this work serves to challenge these expectations by drawing attention to the vast amount of work required to develop and maintain such work and networks, which often goes unnoticed.

Back to Caring - Intellectual Structures and Identity

I now want to take some time to reflect once more on issues of care. This time, however, the tone and focus will emphasise the positive and dynamic nature of my intellectual thought processes identified in the above section. Drawing once more on de la Bellacasa's (2012) thinking about the relationality of care, I will utilise her readings of Donna Haraway (1997, 2000), who details how caring is composed of thinking with multiple forms of existence and relations such that any form of existence is composed of semiotic, material, epistemological, political, emotional/affective and non-human objects and forces (Haraway, 2000: 403). In this way, caring in a non-moralistic and non-normative capacity shies away from and detests reductionism of any kind and constantly questions taken-for-granted categories and ways of thinking to generate unique insights and approaches to questions and problems. This approach thickens our sense of what the boundaries of any phenomenon or object, are as heterogeneous components make multiple relations and thus thicken our accounts and

diversified by “diffracting” patterns of difference. (de la Bellacasa, 2012: 199-200, Haraway and Goodeve, 2000: 193).

In this sense, my research sensibilities include representational techniques such as reading linguistic field-notes and examining and correlating theoretical and conceptual links to empirical data. This is combined with an attention to the affective sensibilities in my research practice including kinaesthetic energrams and the glow and languorous pleasures of writing. In doing this, I have actively sought to prevent any kind of autistic narcissism by making explicit the way in which my internal affective and representational research practice has been made possible and conditioned by the work of other intellectual figures. Equally, I have explored the biases and emotional and social weaknesses that characterise my caring relationships with my mum to develop a vulnerable position alongside that of the confident scholar. In fact, I have an immense dislike for making grandiose or egocentric statements about my work or sociological abilities. I do not want to present myself as too arrogant or omniscient due to a desire to subscribe to a modest sense of knowledge production that recognises the iterability, relational unfoldings and co-becomings of structures and actors (Haraway, 1997).

De la Bellacasa is equally concerned with attributing too much impetus to an author who seeks a “disposal of the gap” (Munro, 1999) between what past writers have argued and for the criticising author to develop a “critical insight” that will disrupt previous knowledge structures. Instead, we can engage with “fostering a style of writing-with, (it) is not who or what is aims to include and *represent* in a text, but what is generates: it actually *creates collective* (sic), it *populates* a world” (de la Bellacasa, 2012: 203, emphasis in original). The researcher constantly reminds themselves and their readers that they are not the only person or element that is present in developing writing-with-care. Furthermore, “writing-with is a practical technology that reveals itself as both descriptive (it inscribes) and speculative (it connects)” (ibid: 203). One way, in

which I have sought to develop this writing-with, referring back to Chapter 4, concerns the means through which a conceptualisation of what makes those with autism human may include the more-than-human elements that comprise their social worlds. The specific relationalities of the objects, people, animals or events that constitute such autistic socialities depend on the habitual quasi-objects that go on to make a meaningful difference to those involved.

Rather than assuming a universal representational schema such as Theory of Mind, we should be empirically specific about which factors matter to those with autism and respect their perspectives on these issues. In this way, following Stengers (2000), I am seeking to create interest by locating understanding in-between relations in such a way that we are taken up via interest in learning with and not in spite of those with autism in relation to their sensory and habitual quasi-object relations and what they mean to them. Because these relationalities are co-emergent alongside the actors and their milieus, the components that comprise them, whether they be a favourite location, object etc. are not distinct and demarcated “types” or “kinds” of phenomena (Savransky, 2016b). They subsist and endure for those with autism within specific frameworks of interaction that relate to negotiating sensory experiences.

The second, key reason why I wished to include this unconventional insight into the practical workings of research and PhD writing is to counter some unproductive tendencies within contemporary academic publishing practices. As Munro (2005) has argued, conventional publishing practices subsume the wider influence of writers beyond the bibliography so that the named academics are credited and counted, with the collective thinking being displaced to an “Acknowledgments” section, as I noted in Chapter 4. The thinking, activities and support that are noted in these sections are conferred no professional value or merit within a neoliberal academic institutional structure. Here, authors are objectified and separated from each other in order to be comparable. Metrics,

algorithms and administrative bureaucracy assign value to the works of these authors and become attributable to metric journal indicators, departmental publishing rates and citation analytics (Burrows, 2012, Knowles and Burrows, 2014). This leads to the work of academics being dissociated from their labour and being incorporated into structures that limit what counts as valuable (de la Bellacasa, 2012: 202). De la Bellacasa asks what forms of knowing these modalities of standardisation exclude; I want to argue that the “wonder” and “glow” of research writing and analysis is what will be lost when my thesis is complete. Once my thesis is deposited in the library and uploaded online for public viewing, it will be made compatible with and amenable to search engines algorithms, depository infrastructural demands and potentially, metrics of value.

However, these processes will mask the labour placed into the kinaesthetic energrams I have utilised when thinking and feeling with my field-notes. In addition, the multisensual sense of wonder and glow of research that I outlined above is not amenable to quantified notions of value. This significant aspect of my autistic modes of engagement with academic work is downplayed within these modes of valuation. Thinking with Bellacasa’s explication on care, I can only wonder whether I am caring too much and becoming too invested in writing, research and analytic thinking and investing too much into a form of autistic knowing that will be devalued. At the same time, I am hopeful that discussing these issues in this chapter will serve to bring these discussions into a wider conversation. McRuer’s (2004) emphasis on non-normative corporealities and writing is central to this objective and I hope that my discussions in this chapter can provide important empirical material for thinking with and developing such accounts, specifically, the kinds of power relations that are inherent in writing and researching within a wider sociological community and within what can be termed the “Sociological Imagination”.

Reflecting on a Sociological Imagination

In this way, I am attempting to encourage myself to move out of my comfort zones of habitual action and emotional composition and remind myself of the responsibilities and senses of agency (Pelias, 2000) I have in working academically through the issues I and other autistic people face. On this wider level, I also wanted to address issues that arise explicitly because of my Asperger's and give voice to some of the issues that arise when the challenges of autism, in general, impinge upon the expectations and mundane practices of academic PhD writing. Just as Jago (2002) has written about how her depression impacted on her academic career, something that she recounts as being downplayed by the university as a private matter to be dealt with in professional settings, I want to give voice to the hidden dimensions of my "hidden" disability which goes without being acknowledged if we only develop traditional, formal academic writing that deals in impartial analysis and objective, unbiased positions of the researcher and scientific authority. The most important and crucial of these has been invoking a therapeutic angle to these issues which resides in the capacity for autoethnographic work to speak to unseen cultural and social actions, behaviours and structures and then inspire others to identify with them (Ellis et al, 2011).

So, I first of all want to speak to those with autism in relation to sensory experiences to give them a frame of reference as to *why* and *how* their sensory engagements and negotiations are so fraught with challenges and confusion. It is not solely a matter of the individual or the environment in which they reside, but a combination of the socio-environmental milieu in which habitual, sensory quasi-objects reside, emerge and adapt to an interlocking web of social relations. The formal empirical and theoretical chapters of this thesis serve to provide concepts, case studies and theoretical tools to help those with autism and those who care for them to better understand their sensory and social experience on a holistic and fine-grained level. These tools are not prescriptive,

but serve to be used in specific contexts and the relevant social, material, psychological and environmental quasi-objects need to be applied when they are relevant to the actors or environmental milieus in which they are located.

All of these factors ultimately contribute to a sense of making the possibility of “witnessing” realisable. In other words:

the ability for participants and readers to observe and, consequently, better testify on behalf of an event, problem or experience [...] As witnesses, autoethnographers not only work with others to validate the meaning of their pain, but also allow participants and readers to feel validated and/or better able to cope with or want to change their circumstances (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011: n. p.).

My hope is that the two autoethnographic chapters will open up possibilities to develop a productive dialogue, bringing to light some of the issues, challenges and potential forms of action that could emerge from looking at the issues raised here. In some cases, I have specific answers and have explicitly worked out the reasoning for the issues I have raised, such as the connection between Theory of Mind and autoethnographic methodological critiques and challenges. With other discussions, the potential connecting relations are open to the future and less a question of theoretical discussion and more about empirical discovery and experimentation. As I write this thesis, I am working with my support worker and supervisor to develop strategies to present my work that embody the autoethnographic ideals of multiple-author reading and corroboration (Jago, 2011). To prevent issues of social and informational overload, for example, we had the idea for my worker to read the presentation that I developed as an independent scholar and then for me to answer questions from the audience, particularly concerning my autoethnographic writing activities. Not only will this method allow me to be more aware of the way in which different people may

view and read my work in an explicit way, but it will also allow me to develop an account that is at once academic but also accessible. This format, in subtle ways, also gives me the chance to point to structures of non-disabled academic conference presentations that are not amenable to those that have sensory or cognitive differences (Gunaratnam, 2015, Garland-Thomson, 2007).

This form of independent writing and then co-joint presentation can break up the process of academic presenting, from developing an argument, form coherent accounts for external audiences; the sensory, social and informational experiences of giving a presentation and synthesising and evaluating the comments, criticisms and insights from audience members and my own ideas. By splitting the work load, I am able to negotiate my sensory and social challenges as well as engage with audiences in a more concentrated and engaged manner. Rather than valuing “confidence, fluency, succinctness, clarity in speech, standing, the long days, the packed programmes” (Gunaratnam, 2015: n. p.), this form of diverse academic engagement recognises that:

There’s a sense that much more is going on here than at more ordinary conferences, where everybody just sits quietly and unobtrusively in rows of chairs staring intently at a placid speaker behind the podium” (Garland-Thomson, 2007: 120).

The social practicalities of my Asperger’s become manifest in splitting the labour of academic presenting to another non-conventional presenter. On the other hand, this display can be seen as a form of “super-surveillance” where “bodies that are out of place have to work harder to convince people that they are capable” (Puwar, 2004: 61). Only by acknowledging the distributed aspects of autistic experience can we acknowledge the ways in which sensory habitual favourites play into mitigating anxiety and parasitical disruption. Working between the positive and negative aspects of parasitical relations can prevent

our vulnerabilities from producing poorly articulated that nourishes defensiveness (Gunaratnam, 2015: n. p.). The interplay of excitement and anxiety in academic labour requires that we pay heed to questions of the interplay of affective and representational processes such that presentation anxiety has as much purchase as the ableist structures of academic conferences.

My final concern in this chapter is a call for researchers, autism advocates/activists, and social and charity sector workers to take heed of my experiences and thoughts to work through them. In order to develop issues, discussions, solutions and points of action to share and discuss other people's experiences that I have discussed in these two chapters. In the most general sense, I have threaded through my autoethnographic writings an awareness of the "Sociological Imagination". I have brought macro, and micro, level concerns together in discussing my specific experiences to create a more nuanced account of disability in academic labour. Autoethnographic concerns have been discussed in an attempt to dispel the common sociological issues with disability that treat the concept as a static category surrounded by negative associations of lack of agency, which go on to burden the category with generic modernist tropes of exclusion and frailty, rather than nuance and the actual experience of disabled people (Shuttleworth and Meekosha, 2012). I also have sought to address some criticisms of the Sociological Imagination which claim that while speaking to issues of openness and developing an experimental and plural understanding of the social world, they neglect important facets of social experience. As Shuttleworth and Meekosha (2012) acknowledge, Mills (1959, 2000) did not pay adequate attention to specific social markers like class, gender and disability due to a focus on structure and agency as concepts in and of themselves. Ignoring the specifics of these social markers bound to logical, structured modes of understanding the connections between individual milieu and social structures, do not account for the ineffable and ephemeral (Shuttleworth and Meekosha, 2012: 353, Lemert, 1995: 10). I develop these aspects in the conclusion to the thesis.

However, this is not to say that Mills does not speak to or anticipate contemporary sociological issues the most important to me here being the sensual aspects of social life. As Gane and Back point out (2012), alongside developing inventive and creative connections between the oil industry, psychology, the military, theology and the political issues in sociological theorising (Mills, 1959: 13-14), Mills also encourages us to examine the feeling of sawdust, and the dusky pink sky and listen to the energy and rhythms of jazz to gain a sociological imagination (Mills, 2000a: 174). Autoethnography and the focus on an autistic researcher, in general, speak to one of the core founding calls to sociological thinking present in the discipline. While I am aware that by drawing attention to my autism as a self-centred characteristic feeds into the ways in which autism is treated as an academic and intellectual commodity, which places value on the ways in which it unsettles and questions modernist, liberal and neurotypical assumptions above other forms of disability (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2012), I also hope to go beyond such utilitarian concerns to develop a critical awareness of the dynamism and challenging potential of autism and reveal hidden domains of power in the mundanities of life.

Conclusion

I believe that this chapter can point to the intimate and structural issues that shaped this research and can be used by others to consider the ways in which the Sociological Imagination might be shaped by autistic modes of social engagement and thought. In so doing, I have sought to highlight the complexities, anxieties and pleasures that are threaded through writing, thinking, researching and analysis that is accompanied by having autism. This focus can foster an engagement with the mundane and hidden dimensions of PhD and academic labour that present challenges for thought. It is not just a question of focusing on forms of power and taken-for-granted assumptions in a general sense, but about sensitising ourselves to how these questions are imbricated and constituted among specific social and cultural groups. By

focusing attention on the specificities of autism in relation to these concerns, I have sought to demonstrate how this can be done and open up further analyses to expand such work.

Chapter 6 - Affective Atmospheres: Perturbations, Haziness and Emplaced Affects

Introduction

A concern with atmospheres and their effects, conditions and forms of emergence and breakdown have become of increasing interest in the last 10-15 years. In particular, human geography (Anderson, 2009, Ash, 2013, 2015) and (post)phenomenological/philosophical inquiries (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2013, 2016) have sought to investigate, define, theorise and debate the contours of an inherently ephemeral phenomenon. This chapter will explore each of these different disciplinary areas to develop an atmospheric account that is capable of addressing the multiple empirical relationships between sensory experience and varied factors that influence atmospheres that develop and maintain quasi-object interconnections. The purpose of this chapter is to begin to explore the links between the micro-level interactions explored in the “Habitual Favourites” chapter (Chapter 3). That address individual and group collective meaning making concerning sensory and habitual favourites and move on to consider the more emotional, affective and “more-than-human” processes that impact these micro mechanisms. The chapter begins with a description of what has been termed “affective atmospheres”. I then proceed to develop critical accounts in relation to affect that take to task the demarcation between emotion and affect, body and mind that infuse influential affective frameworks. I then move towards expanding how atmospheric fields, containers and means of boundary management allow those with autism to connect or not to broader social structures.

The chapter will then go on to analyse key moments during my field-work that were central in atmospheric negotiation via boundary-making, intensity modulation or attempts to enact control over possible sensory/informational

streams that demand attention. I will show a number of affective and atmospheric strategies, conditions and possibilities that helped club members to bond socially, enact sensory management regimens, and navigate complex social atmospheres. I will also specify the material, environmental, bodily and social arrangements that were present to allow these specific atmospheres to emerge, to endure or dissipate through how these elements converge or assemble.

What is An Affective Atmosphere?

To begin, I offer a conceptual and theoretical description of the key framework for this chapter, “affective atmospheres”. This term is drawn from Anderson’s (2009) work that has sought to overcome some of the problematic binaries and contradictory developments that have led to stultifying and reductive accounts of affective and atmospheric processes in social life. After outlining affective atmospheres as a concept, I shall break down affect and atmospheres as separate concepts to develop a more nuanced and integrated account of what each term can refer to and how they can be utilised. For Anderson, affective atmospheres are:

collective affects that are simultaneously indeterminate and determinate. Affective atmospheres are a class of experience that occur before and alongside the formation of subjectivity, across human and non-human materialities, and in-between subject/object distinctions [...] Atmospheres are generated by bodies - of multiple types - affecting one another as some form of “envelopment” is produced [...] Affective qualities emanate from the assembling of the human bodies, discursive bodies, non-human bodies, and all the other bodies that make up everyday situations (Anderson, 2009: 78, 80)

There are a number of points I wish to raise from this diverse and in-depth description. First, Anderson suggests that affects do not just emerge from individual bodies, but can become collective and shared between people. Further, these affects are not just human perceptions of thoughts, emotions or actions, they include the materialities and potentials of non-human objects, processes and living things that have their own modes of relating that are different, even completely unknowable by human subjectivity. They nonetheless impact heavily upon atmospheric and human conduct and as such, must be included for any meaningful engagement with affective atmospheres. Second, the “in-between” of subject and object boundaries, is closely related to the concept of the quasi-object developed throughout the thesis. The boundaries between subjects and objects cannot be guaranteed in advance and are only realisable in action within a particular contextual milieu arranged around vortexes of interaction and emergence. This blurring of boundaries also raises questions as to the distinctions between the solid and “real” and the ephemeral and virtual as not dichotomous but mutually intertwined descriptions that become more or less applicable on the basis of the situation. Third, and as a lead into the next section, Anderson points to the ways in which affective atmospheres mediate the relationship between micro-interactions and macro-processes via techniques and mechanisms of “envelopment”. Affective atmospheres produce effects, affects and certain “structures of feeling” (Williams, 1977) within porous, yet loosely bounded “spheres” (Sloterdijk, 2005) of impact that can flow in and out of each other. Importantly, his inclusion of “discursive” entities in his explication is central to debates within affect theory. Namely, the degree to which affect is below, unaffected and autonomous from conscious linguistic conceptions of reality.

I now turn to a much more nuanced and detailed account of each of these aspects of affective atmospheres. I will first break down the terms “affect” and “atmosphere” to explore how they can be made more empirically and theoretically specific. In doing so, I highlight the problems when trying to move in-between realism and constructivist approaches to atmospheres and the

problematic assumptions of naturalistic biology on affect as a concept. I then offer alternative approaches that recognise the interplay of linguistic, discursive, material, ecological and social components of affective atmospheres.

Affect as a Concept, Beginnings and Critiques

The notion of affect is an enormously complex one that cannot be easily summarised. I will not attempt to cover each facet of the debates that have been fought over the meaning, consequences and potential of affect for studying social life. I will instead develop accounts that express ways of reconciling some of the contradictions, challenges and restricting arguments that have been made for affect. Before going on to explore more productive ways of considering how affect can be studied and conceptualised.

In the most basic sense, affect has been contrasted with emotion. Where affect is the nonsignifying and unconscious processes that exist below the level of conscious awareness, emotions are the “subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal” (Massumi, 2002: 28). Further explanation is given by Shouse (2005) who argues that: “emotions are *social*... and affects are *pre-personal*... An affect is a nonconscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential... affect is always prior to and/or outside consciousness” (Shouse, 2005: Para 1-5 emphasis in original). The body is given precedence in this context as affect is beyond and cannot be expressed in language because it happens below conscious awareness.

This is an extensive debate and one that I cannot fully explore in this chapter. It is enough to say that critiques of affect, as just outlined, are problematic in that it reinscribes a reification of emotions as distinct representational modes and

affects as primal, nonsignifying processes where the body and mind are separated. Further, this distinction becomes a universalising impulse where affect swamps everything without exploring the ways in which affect, gesture, cognition, discursive formulation and past experience and expectations (read habits) intersect and thus impact all social interaction (Wetherell, 2012: 61). This is further exemplified in Ley's (2011) central intervention in debating and critiquing affect theory as developed by influential theorists such as Massumi (1995, 2002), Thrift (2008) and Connolly (2002). Leys argues that because affects in Massumi's case are based on unconscious and pre-reflective processes of action, no possibility of context is possible. The research Massumi bases his theoretical accounts on, assumes a "nonintentional" stance on emotions which treats them not as being embroiled in social, interpretative contextual negotiation, but as hard-wired, neurological responses that when activated, produce stereotypical responses (Leys, 2011: 464). These assumptions can be seen by a discussion of experiments conducted by Fried et al (1998), showcasing how a girl with epilepsy, when her "supplementary motor area" of her frontal left lobe was stimulated, she laughed involuntarily and simply attributed this response to whatever stimuli was present, people, books read and so on. The objects, events or people do not have any intrinsic value for the researchers; they simply are an outlet for the girl to ascribe her confusing reactions to an anchor of meaning.

For affect theorists and neuroscientists such as Damasio (2003) who subscribe to the affect/emotion split, this demonstrates the power of the "half-second delay" between feeling and thinking. This is the gap between a physiological reaction to stimuli and our conscious recognition and reaction to such stimuli (Massumi, 1995). Because emotions lack intent and do not focus on any external object, they are simply organic and become materialistic processes without intentionality or meaning (Leys, 2011: 463). In this perspective, the body becomes a privileged vector of affective forces and actions and reinforces privilege to binary understandings of mind and body relationships.

This body however, is a static and mechanical one that is based on Tomkins and Ekman's approach to emotions that bracket out the complexity of human experience into discrete emotional states such as anger, fear, etc, (Tomkins 1962-63). These "primary" emotions are the basic building blocks of emotional life and any further complexities experienced such as resentful anger are directly based on these prime emotions. This is highly problematic, however, as the research these ideas are based on is incredibly faulty in terms of their generalisability and ontological weight as the "natural" emotional makeup of human beings (Leys, 2011). The methodology of using images of distinct human facial expressions in response to stimuli in a standardised laboratory or experimental set-up reduces our emotions and affects to what can be seen and ignores the interactional context in which they are located. Emotions or affects are not "basic" or primary a priori, they only become so based on the situation in which they become relevant. They are not merely reducible to the duplicative mechanisms of material physiological and neurological systems that only colour or "tinge" the external world without having a "real" presence of their own. Rather than assuming that human perception is central to affectivity, we should take into account the many non-human aspects of experience that motivate us and get us to engage with the past, present and future, not just duplicate without creative becoming (Stenner and Greco, 2013: 66-67).

Wetherell (2013) argues that the concept of "affective practice" can offer a more nuanced and critical account of affect. This approach examines the ways in which emotion and affect are relationally distributed through body language, micro-interaction phenomenon such as positioning, in which we place our accounts within a specific interactional context in order to make legible sense within an existing group's framework of reference (see Goffman, (1981) on idiocultures and referential afterlives). This also includes the material and multi-modal factors that influence interaction. For example, Wetherell draws on Katz's (1999) analysis of "road-rage" to demonstrate this perspective. Katz discusses how anger and blind fury in the phenomenon of road-rage is entirely based on socio-material organisation of western roads. Thus, the binary divide of ongoing

and oncoming traffic makes it so only those on the side we are currently located are eligible to get and be angry about. We cannot get a footing or position ourselves, literally, to direct our gaze, gesticulate and so on to these other drivers because of this spatial design. Affective outbursts are affected by the material, spatial and interactional designs and processes of driving on roads that constitute road-rage. Affect and emotions therefore are not split into discrete categories, but integrate with each other such that the body or mind is not privileged and that even unconscious affects are inflected by the milieu in which they originate.

I now move to consider how these diverse affects can be dynamically structured and emerge creatively through attention to the potential of the concept of atmospheres.

What Can Be Called an Atmosphere? - Boundaries and Effects

In thinking about atmospheric phenomenon, there is a wide array of factors that can be considered in relation to theorising and researching them. Atmospheres can provide the link between the human, non-human, social and material as Anderson (2009) has argued. In the most holistic sense, atmospheres would incorporate what Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos calls an “open ecology” of:

spatiality of bodies (humans, non-humans, linguistic... disciplinary), buildings, objects, animals, vegetables, minerals, money, communication, silence, open spaces, air, water [...] This [...] is a fractal manifestation [...] namely the assemblage of the natural, the human, the artificial, the scientific, the political, the economic [...] on a plane of contingency and fluid boundaries” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2013: 36)

This wide ranging initial outlining of what can constitute an atmosphere and its continuation and development is to point to the fact that any study of atmospheric relations is bound to a far larger range of intersecting questions and connections. What is important is that these atmospheric relations are grounded in specific milieus that must be defined in relation to a specific location and is immanent within an infinite possibility of virtualisation and actualisation (ibid: 37). Virtualisation, in relation to sociological problems, refers to a realm beyond immediate experience that contains all the potential ways a specific phenomenon may interact with the social world. Actualisation refers to the specific socio-eco-material means as to which virtual processes emerge in the world and the possibilities and limits of the particular phenomenon in question. As Motamedi-Fraser (2009) notes “the virtual... is not a blueprint... whether something is [going to be] important or relevant in a piece of social research cannot... be decided in advance” (Motamedi-Fraser, 2009: 75). The actual, in this framework, is a “temporary and contingent solution to a virtual problem” (ibid: 75). Because the relevant processes and events that actualise within a given social research project cannot fully be determined in advance, it requires a keen attentiveness to the emergent and novel processes of atmospheres and the ability to assess, in real time, when and why they matter. A central concern in this area of research has been to negotiate between the ephemeral, fluid nature of atmospheric constitution and the very real (actual) effects that they have on social worlds and the development of agential beings.

Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2016) argues that sensory experiences cannot be seen in isolation or as singular because, when so defined, they become universals and attain a level of abstraction that is problematic in practice. Instead, these experiences dissimulate and diffuse as mutually exclusive entities and create new combinations of possibilities. Such a wide conceptualisation of social engagement serves as a counterweight to much theorising in research on scapes where the non-human and discursive are demarcated by specific spatial logics. This kind of logic can be found in thinkers such as the phenomenologist, Gernot Bohme (2005), who notes that we need to

have a sense of ourselves in order to experience the atmosphere of spaces as external. This reinstates a division between subject and objects, which the scholarship on atmospheres seeks to break apart by exploring the ephemeral and diverse entities that constitute the social. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos via Schmitz (1995) believes that, if an atmosphere overtakes social actors, then the Cartesian subject/object division mystifies what an atmosphere is, rather replacing it with a more dynamic and inclusive empirical dimension. The human remains the locus of action, where Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos seeks to develop a “post-phenomenological” approach, asserting the complex meshing and weaving of these elements into topological outlines. He further contends that because atmospheres are topological, it is impossible to ever be outside an atmospheric container of some kind. This holds true for topologies that are social, affective, material or even cosmological. We are, in this respect, always bounded, in some way to specific conditions of possibility and boundary-making that fix and opens up possibilities based on our situated locations and perspectives (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016).

Further, in contrast to authors like Massumi and Connelly who treat affect as being beyond signifying political relations of meaning, contestation and struggle and as such, intervention is seen to be impossible (Leys, 2011). Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos states that political influence is inescapable due to the fact that atmospheric relations are, in large part, manufactured, by capitalist techniques of production and control where certain kinds of atmospheric conditions are filtered to select communities. For example, light, soft classical music is often played at elite, formal parties, and seductive low lighting and colours are utilised in shopping malls to encourage a numbed, affective embrace of consumerism to ensure stultified stability (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2016: 150-51). Individual affects are reduced to and made subservient to the institutional and political means of control of specific atmospheric affects such that they become elevated to general and institutionalised “glasshouses”. These intensify and focus these standardised relations back to the people, objects and spaces that constituted them in the first place. In order to undo this complex meshing and blurring of an

inside and outside distinction, where we are made to feel comfortable with specific atmospheric relations, we should heed the ways in which means to control atmospheric phenomena is never total and the human and non-human intermingling always introduces new dynamics. These then take on a life of their own and constantly challenge the status quo (ibid: 163-64).

Thus far, I have shown the ways in which atmospheres, in the most general sense, demonstrate means to aggregate, demarcate and manufacture consistency while always holding the potential for new relations. I now want to step away from Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos's highly abstract and theoretical writing to more theoretical-methodological thinking that makes the means and processes through which atmospheres are produced and manufactured empirically grounded and practical. I will then consider the non-human or material aspect of atmospheric generation that is removed from human awareness.

Atmospheric Interstices - Beyond Binaries and Toward Ephemeral Mixing

One concept that has been developed to take into account the explicitly sensual aspect of the in-between aspect of atmospheres is that of resonance. Vincent Miller (2015), a sociologist of forms of association, fragmentation and community, in his outline and exegesis of the concept of resonance and its impact within sociological thinking, speaks of the difficulty the discipline has with thinking about the domains of social life that are not explicitly connected to a concept of individual/collective, or, structure/agency. He suggests that these dichotomous, discursive binaries have caused social researchers and theorists to primarily focus on the extremes of these divides, such as Durkheim's collective rituals (Durkheim, 1995), without fully taking into account the means by which mundane and quotidian interactions allow such exceptional conditions to exist (Misztal, 2003). Or, in the case of more micro concern such as Simmel's

“Sociology of Sociality” (Simmel and Hughes, 1949) where sociality, as enjoying social interaction for its own sake, does not draw attention to the power relations of intergroup interactions. The concept of resonance is an attempt to provide an “inbetween concept”. In order to do this, Miller draws upon a phenomenological and embodied expression of the concept of resonance from the anthropologist, Tim Ingold (1993). Ingold describes this process through acts of:

watching, listening, perhaps even touching, we continually feel each other’s presence in the social environment, at every moment adjusting our movements in response to this ongoing perceptual monitoring [...] in the resonance of movement and feeling stemming from peoples mutually attentive engagement in shared contexts of practical activity, lies the very foundation of sociality (Ingold, 1993: 160).

Instead of thinking intersubjectivity through abstract concepts, that requires cognitive, rational processes and assumes a universal capacity of humans to perform this procedure, no matter the situation:

Resonance relies on common practical and emotional experiences connoting “sameness” in feeling-thinking engagements in the practical world [...] and is [...] cultivated through the mutual being-there of practical human experience which intertwines feeling, thinking and doing (Miller, 2015).

Miller notes that such a conception of atmospheres is not specific enough. By which he means that atmospheres or affective forces that pervade everyday life do not form enough of an impact on structural concerns, or, meaningful and shareable experiences for social actors. The concept must be grounded in a

framework that recognises how atmospheres can set their own distinct tone to a social situation. This can only occur through *and* because of the material, discursive and somatic entities within a specific milieu. Following Ingold and Miller, this translates to a shared, sensual mode of intersubjective connection that equates to an embodied sense of connection and engagement that does not overturn discourse or language, but complements them. In relation to habitual favourites, because favourites become situated within a cycle of ongoing temporal engagement, we develop deep and potent connections with these activities. We can explain, to some degree, why we feel so strongly about a particular favourite activity, but, there still remains an ineffable aspect of a favourite that can only be expressed when engaging in it which can lead to experiencing a sense of resonance. For example, taking a craft-based favourite hobby such as pottery, you can only get a true sense of the different textures of clay and the pots and other items they go on to form via connection to others engaging in the craft that can only be expressed via execution of deep, habituated knowledge and understanding. It is difficult for someone who has never used a pottery spinning machine to physically get a tactile sense of the materiality of the clay through language alone. It is also difficult for someone who has an emplaced and bodily appreciation of the properties of clay to fully articulate this knowledge without being located in a community of practice to share and develop these skills to fit community goals (Lave and Wenger, 1991). As such, my attention to individual and group perspectives in the club space enables a dynamic account of how habitual favourites are encountered and enacted atmospherically. I shall return below to the question of the negotiation of materiality in affective atmospheres.

Edensor (2015), agreeing with Wetherell and Leys that to divorce the affective and discursive from each other is misguided, argues that atmospheres are not just affective; they also incorporate the symbolic, conscious emotions and meaning-making within themselves that produce “a flow of experience” (Edensor, 2015: 334). Edensor then provides the example of his work on the famous Blackpool Lights display that runs through much of autumn to display

this interconnection. They at once feature characters from popular culture such as cartoon characters like Basil Brush, The Mad Hatter or Noddy that elicit explicit symbolic and discursive reactions as to their personalities, behaviours and how people should react to their presence in the Illuminations. These may be viewed as being too tacky, “just for the kids” or recognition of pertinent popular cultural events such as TV revivals. Equally, “as forms of illumination, (the illuminations) also transmit qualities of sparkle, animation, colour, intensity, temperature and glow that sidestep symbolic meaning” (Edensor, 2015: 334). In bringing attention to these dynamics, Edensor enables us to view affective atmospheres as more defined and empirically nuanced than can be captured by dominant notions of affect.

How then to go about exploring and conceptualising such a complex, difficult, yet unavoidably essential task? The next section will outline some methodological and conceptual work that explores ways in which atmospheres as material-affective-discursive-emplaced phenomena can be empirically examined.

As Niels Albertsen (2012) argues, atmospheres have been discussed and theorised in contexts where they occur *in situ*, however, scholars have neglected to consider how such affective situations and accounts can be performatively reproduced to others *ex situ*. Utilising Wittgenstein’s (1980a) argument that gestures merge sensuousness and symbolic meaning, that in order to speak, we must know what it is to smell for instance and then differentiate *specific* smells to categorise and make meaning that can be shared. In combination with Actor Network Theory’s (ANT) focus on translation, the material, social and discursive processes that must be in place for meaning to be communicated. Albertsen notes that in order for an atmosphere to be effectively communicated, what is often required is a relatively homogenous cultural group, but within this group, meaning can be conveyed via sensuous and affectual atmospheric conditions to others. For instance, we often

communicate our experience of music by referring to qualities of art. These can be further structured by non-discursive elements such as timbre, rhythm and tone that can conjure up particular atmospheres. This can be achieved and summarised via the concept “gestural semiosphere”, which incorporates Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblances” (1968) in language to gesture. This term refers to sets of cultural meanings and shared understanding that operate in tandem within particular groups that can be thought of as forming a kind of short-hand that integrates diverse knowledges. Albertson asserts that the same can be said about a set of culturally defined gestures. We can convey meaning through the particular cadence or rhythm of our words, through the constellation of colours in a painting to create cheerful atmospheres that have a life in and of themselves. Utilising ANT, Albertsen argues that unlike material or informational immutable mobiles, or obligatory points of passage, where ideas, objects or people *must* pass through in order to be part of the network (Latour 1986), atmospheric conditions must be created anew and are thus performative, requiring particular formations of gestural semiospheres incorporating multi-modal and multisensory dimensions. This performative dimension brings to light “kinds of “presencing” [which] can be “person making” as when the expression “I love you [...] uttered rightly” i.e. with the right “trembling of the voice” (Latour, 1998 428, 435), with the “*gestures*” of “the words exchanged by lovers” (Wittgenstein, 1990 712) [...] a “redirection of attention” towards giving presence to each other” (Albertsen, 2012: 73). This ongoing cycle of performativity is grounded in emplaced processes and negotiated discursively by social actors.

However, the problem with this view of atmospheres and affective relations is that there is no way to account for relationships between people or objects that do not directly relate to each other. Because object relations can only be viewed when in connection to something else and not as unique, individual entities, it becomes difficult to discuss aspects of these relations that relate to the ways in which relations produce gaps and intervals where objects are at rest or inert

because they, to human perception at least, do not react or respond in any way to specific stimuli (Harrison, 2008, 2009).

Drawing on Object-Oriented Ontology (See Bryant, 2011, Harman, 2009, 2010a), Ash (2013, 2015) argues that, due to the specific perturbations of human-to-human or object-to-object or human-to-object relations we experience specificity in affective phenomena. This specificity can only arise because of the capacities of the entities in question; there can be both a relational dynamism and also an inaccessible aspect of objects that cannot be accessed despite the potential multiples of relations. This inaccessible core is not an essentialised domain, because no amount of relational perspectives will ever exhaust the core's inherent individuality. This allows us to go beyond an atmospheric approach that privileges the human and their affective relationalities, which would not account for objects that are not in direct relation to them, but still contribute to their atmospheric attunement and envelopment. Ash describes object perturbations as creating their own space-time perturbations that are unique to them and that humans both create the conditions of their interaction but are also shaped by hidden or non-accessible perturbations that they move through without necessarily even being affected at all (Ash, 2013: 21). This means that objects produce forms of temporal and spatial atmospheres that shape humans' capacities to engage with the world. So, a lonely, unmoving rock may make time seem immovable, but a human observer may see or feel the wind across the rock and feel time slowly (ibid: 24).

The multiple perturbations and interactions between objects and people allow us to consider the relational qualities that make up atmospheres so that time and space are developed and maintained between objects themselves. Further, inorganic affects are impacted by the material capacities of the objects that are created for humans, yet remain exclusive to the objects themselves. Following Guattari (1995), Ash uses the example of a lock and key, where the lock and keys have to be made of specific materials in order to enable constant use

without wearing out or breaking down all of the time. They need to display their own forms of homeostasis so that they remain a key and lock. If the key is used too aggressively, it may break or snap and become a new object capable of new actions and capacities such as using the sharpened and uneven broken key stem to pierce paper or similar materials. However, inorganic affects are not free-flowing, desire-producing machines, they have absolute material thresholds that, if crossed, will turn them into new objects and open up new relations (Ash, 2015: 87).

Following on from Ash's discussion of the ways in which objects and technologies have their own atmospheric properties, Bille (2015), in his discussion of light and the notion of comfort or *hygge* in Danish, refers to the ways in which the introduction of incandescent energy-saving bulbs changed the ways in which practices of light use and appreciation have been shifted due to industry-led alterations in light quality and colour intensity. Of further interest to Bille, is to avoid taking for granted people's conceptions of atmospheric processes as wholly defined or sorted out in their conceptualisations or emplaced enactments. If atmospheres are performative and enacted, in the sense that they are selectively felt by the preconceptions, biases, emplaced bodily and cognitive affordances, how do they enable certain realities over others? How do we then account for the fuzzy and uncertain aspects that lie outside of conscious conceptualisations such as object-centred atmospherics? Finally, how do the mechanisms where multiple conceptions of phenomena such as *hygge*, are always uncertain and based on how people respond to atmospheres?

Further expanding upon Albertsens' engagement with Wittgenstein, Bille refers to Wittgenstein's iconic example of "aspect-seeing". In the famous example, when shown a "duck-rabbit" drawing, a person can only see one or the other depending upon their perspective and positioning in looking at the picture (Wittgenstein, 2009: 205). This inherent ambiguity of sensory perception and

experience in relation to atmospheric processes is central to the empirical realities of people's understandings and negotiations of what atmospheres are for them. In the example of *hygge*, which comprises seemingly contradictory notions such that light is at once cosiness itself, is just a metaphor, or if it is just convenient shorthand for a general sense of the intermingling of warmth, light, homeliness and national pride, the question becomes how to make sense of this ambiguity. These complex meanings and their interaction in the lives of Danish communities, leads Bille to frame atmospheres as a hazy, in-betweenness of life that is:

“both an ontological reality that exists and an analytical implication of studying people's practices and understandings of spaces, as well as material and social life. It cannot be confined to the physical boundaries of room or place but is the volatile and changing sensation through which reality comes into being as a unity with innumerable nuances without borders or direction” (Bille, 2015: 268).

Bille argues that this conceptualisation moves away from notions of relational materialism, where things are enacted away from their surroundings and not as something that *is*, but, rather, objects are defined through how they come to be via the contacts between bodies, affects and objects and how the atmospheric relations between them influence each other. We cannot decide in advance what a participant means when they talk about atmospheric relations or how they act or are influenced by atmospheric fields, but must pay attention to the specific relational and unique modes through which we are open to, influence and create atmospheres. It is also important to stress that atmospheres are not just constitutive of intensive affectivities. They are also everyday mundanities that are “just there” as a form and force of social life that instigates and influences the ebbs, flows and grounded, material relations of the world (Pink, Mackley and Morosanu, 2014: 352). They form the taken-for-granted element

that Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos talks about. Yet, he did not go into or take fully into account the hazy aspects that Bille describes so cogently and insightfully. Even if atmospheres are all encompassing and stultify, withdrawal is not the only option and neglects the haziness of sensory atmospherics.

Having outlined these diverse ways of exploring atmospheric phenomena, I will now draw upon several empirical examples from my fieldwork that exemplify, expand and allow for greater understanding of how each of the components I have discussed so far played out for the club members.

Data Analysis - The Research Set-up and The Material/Spatial Organisation of The Club

It is also important to keep in mind that as Bille (2015) has argued, doing research and analysis is also infused with atmospheric qualities and dynamics. This can include the kind of fieldwork environments and forms of research participation that are utilised to give participants a sense of ease, friendliness and trustworthiness. These elements are then transferred to the analysis and writing stages of the research where the researcher will attempt bring out these atmospheric dynamics into their writing by modulating a verbal transcript with devices such as ellipses or formatting to convey emotion or intention behind the words. Or, we could think of ways in which rapport is demonstrated to have been established by looking at processes involved in making participants feel listened to and at ease around researchers (see Horowitz 1986, Russell et al, 2002, Ryan and Dundon, 2008)²⁵. This atmospheric focus is crucial for Bille, as

²⁵ Interestingly, Ryan and Dundon explicitly use the term “atmosphere” when discussing how to attain research rapport that led to research relations that were “open, engaged, and trusting (Ryan and Dundon, 2008: 446). This was achieved via “establishing empathy” in which commonality of the research objective led to more nuanced examples, expansive narratives and confidence in the researchers (ibid: 447). The problematic nature of a “communal”, supposedly

the kinds of atmospheres created by researchers and participants will shape how research encounters proceed and what atmospheres are allowed to develop and be sustained will shape what kinds of social relations and encounters are possible. In my case, the disrupting of members' leisure time to take part in the focus groups was something that created new boundaries between the groups. Despite the fact that participants were free to move in and out of the focus group "space" at any point to engage with other members, the sheer fact that the focus group existed, albeit for 30-45 minutes at a time, generated new atmospheres of expectation and awareness for club members. As such, this expectation and anticipation of being part of the next focus group was something they needed to keep in mind and my presence at the club reinforced this relationship as to when the session was happening. Looking to me as an authority for example, Josh's enthusiastic inquiries to me: "Is the next session today?", this was not just predicated on my desire to host sessions, but these kinds of questions were only asked if more than three participants were present. Co-location was thus a central part of this anticipatory atmosphere and was much reduced if members were absent. Responsibility and desire to act and be swayed by this anticipatory potential was linked to these key factors and was something that I took into account when organising focus groups in the later stages of my fieldwork.

One way in which to conceptualise and think through these implications is through the insights developed by McCormack (2015) in writing about researching, thinking and writing atmospherically about the impacts, affects and events of balloons. As he notes, balloons are multi-faceted as an atmospheric phenomenon as they contain meteorological components, helium and other gases. Alongside socially infused meanings and affects, the symbolism of celebration and anxious anticipation of a loud *BANG* when they burst are mundane examples. But, more importantly, balloons are useful to think with in

unilateral agreement between both parties is unexamined here and neglects the hazy, continual performance and indeterminate nature of atmospheric relations as I have discussed.

terms of researching atmospheric questions because of the challenges of moving balloons in the air. Balloons are almost coterminous with the milieu in which they are located, aside from the thin skin that surrounds and forms a quasi-barrier to make the balloon a distinct object (McCormack, 2015: 103). Because of this, it becomes of crucial importance to work out how to influence the trajectory of movement in order to produce movement in the desired direction. However, this means working against the milieu in which the balloon and subject are submersed, going against the gradient, so to speak, of the atmospheric surround. However, this is never a purely antagonistic relationship, it requires “working within the medium and what it affords, while responding to its obligations” (ibid: 103). This attention to the possibilities inherent in the situation and being open to divert our modes of thought and action, McCormack argues, is a way of attending to the atmospheric aspects of social life by being open to and giving oneself up to new practices, thoughts and experiences. In my research, my position as an ethnographer with Asperger’s Syndrome investigating autism, can directly attest to these kinds of concerns.

On the one hand, I share a condition with the participants in my research and so atmospheric differences, at first anyway, were harder to detect as the demarcation between my ways of being and theirs did not produce much movement in understanding. The boundaries between our modes of being were on an undifferentiated and general level such that I was, in effect, coterminous with the social dynamics of the club space. Thinking back to the ideas regarding Complete Research Membership (CRM), while I do share a condition with my participants, I do not share their emplaced life experiences and, as such, could not fully attune into them in ways that make sense and matter to them. But, because of my education as a sociologist have attuned me to the social and affective dynamics inherent in social situations, I began with generalised atmospheric affects such as boredom, excitement and discomfort to describe the events going on around me. As I noted and became embroiled in the dynamics and interactions of the club space, I developed more fine-grained

understandings of atmospheric interactions, some of which will inform the empirical analysis in the next section.

In terms of the material and technological elements that contributed to atmospheric effects in the club space, there were a number of technical media devices that were often in use, all at the same time. These included a widescreen TV, latched up about 7 feet above the floor, right at the back of the club room that, could tune in to digital TV stations as well as digital radio stations. There was a second widescreen TV, at the very back and right of the club, that had a stand and was thus a more traditional table, desk or cabinet supported set. This TV was used to play Nintendo Wii games such as Mario Kart Wii or Wii Sports, and, on one special occasion, when it was moved to the latched TV so that a Just Dance competition could be held. Finally, there was a relatively old CD/Cassette player that appeared to be from the late 90s or early 2000s. This was evident in the fact that it did not work properly on several occasions and needed additional tinkering in order for it to play the CD or cassettes brought in by mostly Social Club members of 80's- 90's pop music. These more stationary and set technological devices, not discounting the fact that their locations often changed throughout the course of the year due to the college students moving them or the school to accommodate for events, were complemented by more mobile technologies.

Members also brought their own devices such as Ipads, Ipods, mobile or smart phones and, on occasion, portable gaming consoles such as a Nintendo DS. The atmospheric dynamics and members negotiation of the balance between the sound levels, channels listened to and activities undertaken in these contexts were important interactions during club sessions. To my surprise, many club members were able to negotiate these different boundaries sensory and social profiles needed to move between different interactional situations with relative ease. A central and potent example for me included two members being able to play a game of pool, have a conversation and keep track of where they

placed their food and drink on different resting points across the nearby club space. They were also able to keep track of the rules of the game and keep a smooth transition between players. Ultimately, we should note the potential for club members to be able to shift their awareness and boundary-setting activities as key skills in their interactional repertoires.

Having said something about the general human and non-human atmospheric set-ups regarding the club space, I now want to develop three central moments during my research that sparked my awareness too the atmospheric dynamics present in the club.

Empirical Case 1 - Sound Management, KISS Radio and Human and Non-Human Atmospheres

For this example, I will explore the interactions between sensory negotiating between members, the material capacities of different sound sources and how these go on to form atmospheric dynamics in the club space. In particular, I wish to focus on a specific set of negotiations regarding the different sound levels of the central TV, the back left TV with Wii connected and the balance of their volumes. The central TV was used to play radio music on occasion and the back TV was used to play Wii games. The conflict arises due to the relative and absolute material thresholds of sound being confused when both radio and Wii sounds intermingled with each other. On their own, as long as they were not too loud, neither sound source posed a problem, but, when combined, the unruly tempos, sound spikes and lulls were too disorientating to parse for members and the relative and absolute thresholds became blurred causing discomfort, anger and confusion.

During one particularly tumultuous session in the Youth Club, one of the club members²⁶ had turned the latched TV to a metal digital radio station. I later came to learn that this was a very important identity to him and he had played a metal song on his smartphone a few months later after this incident. Whilst the song was playing, he was very clearly becoming immersed in the intensity of the music, head-banging, gesturing guitar playing and contorting his face to match the conviction of the vocalists. He was surrounded by a group of members who partly listened along and partly shifted back and forth between groups and activities. They did not interrupt him in anyway. Once the song had finished, a staff member asked “Did you enjoy that?” Clearly, based on his engagement with the song, he did and they knew this, of course. It was a kind of test to see if he was aware of the fact that he was so engrossed and that others would pick up on this. Slightly out of breath, he replied “Yes, I did”. This was more a confirmation of his personal enjoyment rather than a marker of outside awareness. It was clear that the energising and affective rush was important to this member. When he turned the digital radio to the metal station, he quickly caught the consternation of other club members who were trying to play board games and could not focus or talk to each other comfortably. When asked to turn the TV down by a staff member, he taunted “can you not handle the metal?” The staff member said “yes they could”, but they were concerned for the other club members. This led to another member suggesting that they turned the radio station to KISS radio. Unfortunately, this led to some discussion regarding whether this was what everyone wanted, after some disagreement, KISS did go on in the background. Eventually though, people became indifferent to the music as they focused on their activities and discussions. Thus the music eventually died down and was finally turned off later during the club session.

²⁶ I leave the club members in this case unnamed, including a lack of pseudonyms as they were not part of my focus group discussions and thus less involved in the research. This member’s conflict around sound however, impacted the club space as a whole, including the central participants I focus on here and thus forms a central component of atmospheric management.

This is not the end of the discussion however, as this disagreement raised a number of important distinctions between the use of particular kinds of music in creating atmospheric moods. In asking if the staff member could “handle the metal” they were laying down a test of whether they had the sensory, cognitive and embodied aptitude to listen to metal music comfortably and without being overwhelmed. This was important to their self-identity not just because of the metal, punk or other subcultural ethos that was behind the music, it pertained equally to their pride in their capacity to listen to metal without being overwhelmed or upset by it. Their sensory profile enabled them to become engrossed in the music so that they could share the emplaced, affective and gestural intensities that come with listening to the music as outlined above. It gave them a sense of belonging and social understanding that they may not have elsewhere in their lives. This habitual favourite served as a personal social object for the member and a provocative object demonstration for the other club members. In anchoring their own affective desires through metal, the member created disruption for others. As such, atmospheric analysis can enhance social quasi-object analysis. The ephemeral nature of atmospheres, in this specific instance, become entangled and anchored to specific cultural activities and actions. This anchoring is done, in part, by the person and their attunement of their sensory capacities and sensitivities and the particular technological frameworks in which they are embedded. Returning to Ash’s (2013, 2015) discussion above, the use of a smartphone is important in that sound quality, volume and type are controllable with different degrees of modularity. For instance, different remixes of metal songs may be available that may increase the tempo and rhythm to make a techno or electronic dance version which may increase the affective intensity and rush of the music while reducing the harshness of scream singing. More importantly, I now want to turn to the disagreement about what music would be played in the club as it points to a number of factors that can increase our understanding of the way atmospheres are mediated, created and extended via the intertwining of the social and technical means of mood management.

Key to the disagreement was the statement made by a club member, who was keen to have KISS radio playing, that “everyone likes KISS!” In general, this statement is overgeneralising and imposing the views of one person upon the rest of the group. As was inevitable, much debate was had about such an assertion, some agreeing and some disagreeing. KISS was put on and played to allow people to decide on their position. Some members were open to the music, enjoying the upbeat, youthful tone of the DJs and presenters in the breaks. Others disliked it for these very same reasons and because the music was played at such a frequency as to be discomforting. I will explain each of these reasons in turn and the extended means through which atmospheres are shared, expanded and demarcated, not just through gestural and social interactional rules, but also through technical auditory attunement, taste and networking markers. The first dimension of this can be seen through the way in which KISS radio presents and transmits its music, messages and creates its own brand identity. Some club members noted that KISS was not pleasant to listen to. This is not just a subjective sensory experience; it can be detected by comparing KISS with similar popular music stations such as Capital. The sound quality is of a different register with KISS such that adverts, songs and DJ commentary and presenting talk has a much more rough, guttural or “fuzzy” quality to it. Such is the case that their affective qualities are enhanced so that the narrators’ of adverts voices are accentuated to highlight their pleasant, consistent tones. Equally, upbeat popular music is given more “kick” by accentuating the beat, tempo and creating more bass for electronic or synthetic dance pop music. Because KISS is played on a number of different radio formats, TV, digital radio, car radio digital, tablet and phone playback via external speakers or internal headphones, this standardised sound format is liable to be disruptive or pleasurable depending on the situation and capacities of the speakers,

By utilising these affective and sensory techniques, KISS radio creates a particular series or set of expectations or responses to the auditory crafting and management of sensory affective engagement with the radio. However, the

ephemeral and fuzzy boundaries of cultivating this sensory-based atmospheric set of relations are not enough to sustain a reliable or profitable relationship to listeners. An attempt to make these connections more concrete and quantifiable for the station and listeners can be seen from the deeply interconnected multimedia presence that radio stations now develop and manage. For the young adults at the Youth Club, the central focus of KISS Radio is its social media presence, primarily Facebook and Twitter. This can be seen in the short gaps between songs where the presenter or DJ will read “shout-outs” of people tweeting KISS. The most read-out comments are those that reaffirm their enjoyment of the music, “I love the KISSStory remixes” (KISSStory is a scheduled slot where “old school anthems” are played from the 80s to early 2000s). “I am dancing in my living room getting ready for a night out”, “Doing revision while listening to KISS, keeping me motivated”. Each of these statements are exemplifying the power of music to create action and thus sustain the sensory-affective potential of upbeat popular and dance music to create a feel-good and positive atmosphere, solidifying a sense of community. Members of the club would often relay conflicts, gossip or news from their social media usage and were often performatively engaged in these social activities. This enabled them to take a stance on issues that occurred beyond their local spacetimes and KISS music enables these affective atmospheres to be carried over into other social domains. When KISS fans engage with each other and the radio station directly on Facebook or Twitter, they may use combinations of emotes, slang, images, video clips and formal prose to convey their atmospheric engagement with KISS. These multiple forms of engagement are not an example of a free-flowing affective desire, unhindered by representation or material forces.

As I have shown and following Bille (2015), this performative engagement does not remove the multi-modal specificities of listeners’ engagement, they take onboard and accentuate the desired affective atmospheres promoted by KISS. Thus, emotes, for example, have exaggerated, cartoon-like expressions and faces that convey emotion and affect through creases in the face, tears and hearts for eyes to convey a playful and engaged sociality. Listeners are affected

by them to become localised to specifically crafted spaces and times, as Ash (2013) and Edensor (2015) have argued. They also reinforce Wetherell's (2012) point that multimodality again reminds us that these affective-discursive practices have social, temporal, spatial and material specificities that allow for particular kinds of social/affective positioning and accountability. In this case, KISS listeners are positioning themselves as being part of a collective mood or ambiance that gives them accountable reasons to be excited, motivated or intensely engaged in the specific activities they are undertaking.

To finish this section, I wish to refer to McCormack's (2013) discussion of radio commentating and what it can reveal about the sensory affective atmospheres present in the club space. While McCormack is referring to sports commentators relaying live games, his discussion can be expanded to explore the affective dynamics of presenters and DJs of a public radio station. Just as sports commentators are anticipating and relaying the actions of the players in sports such as football through techniques of voice modulation and attentiveness to the specificities of players histories, so do radio presenters set up the upcoming tracks with comments such as "timeless classic", or "pumping dance song". Even if no presenter is present or speaking for a segment, they still must set up the order of songs to produce the smoothest flow between the songs as possible without disrupting the expectations of the listeners.

McCormack first reminds us that:

radio remains an important participant in the "materialist energies" of contemporary technocultures and the atmospheric sensoria they generate: it operates very much in the familiar background of sonic cultures, part of the taken-for-granted and mediatized spacetimes of everyday life (McCormack, 2013: 119).

As I have noted, this background for KISS is very carefully constructed and the intended effect of playing the right music in the correct format is to create a sustained, middle-level, feel-good ethos for listeners. The level of effort expended to constantly achieve this is directly opposite to this affective ethos. In this case, radio is both an affective field that moves between bodies and objects and a representational one in which words and images are created and rendered to relate specific songs to specific artists or lyrical composition. Radio broadcasts “continues to “occupy” a voluminous space of variable intensity that expands and contracts, a space composed of noise, sound, voice” (ibid: 135). Presenters and DJs just like sports commentators, need to relay details and provide facts and updates as to the progression of the songs being played. Just as equally, they need to infuse what listeners could potentially be feeling about the music with what the representational elements that comprise it suggest should be the case. They need to be open to the rhythms and potentials of the music and social media engagement, this is why many presenters on KISS are young and utilise urban dialects and pronunciation of words such as inserting silent “t” intonations to words like water. They are being moved and learning to be affected by the bodies and sensibilities of their core, young, adult audience and cultivating affective spacetimes through relating the actual through the virtual.

This is what Serres (1995c) terms “semiconducting”. The presenter is placed in the dizzying rush of experience, sensory modulations, affects, words and images (1995c: 66). They are constantly remaining vigilant to what is going on and can anticipate what might happen and what could happen alongside the actuality of what did occur. The semiconducting presenter is both inside and outside in that they occupy an isolated booth spot in the radio studio, but are also connected affectively through social media and the representational power of classics, popular hits and anthems that define groups of music listeners.

We have thus seen that a seemingly simple disagreement regarding music and noise levels is much more complex when viewed from an atmospheric perspective. These instances can be broken down to consider the elements that shape autistic peoples potential interactions with negotiating their sensory boundaries and balancing sensory hyposensitive and hypersensitivities to function effectively. This first example also shows the level to which the material, social, affective and representational interact to create a specific field of spacetime modulations and sensory management that fosters community and sustains certain kinds of atmospheres with different intensities.

Moving on now to the second empirical example of atmospheric interaction at the club site, I will explore the ways in which gestural and embodied means of communicating produce another distinct set of atmospheric conditions and effects. These were much more consequential for in-the-moment, mundane talking and social interaction rather than the background nature of radio music.

Empirical Case 2 - Echolalia, Gestural Semiosis and Blackadder

The second set of ideas I want to discuss relates to the intermixing of movement, gesture and the shared sense of understanding and in-group knowing that is generated from these. This discussion was inspired from club member Doug and his use of echolalia, or, the repetition of words, phrases or sounds that are overheard. The key to what words or sounds develop into a constant form of echolalia is that they must have some form of meaningful connection such as a particular voice actor from a cartoon, or, have a positive affective/guttural quality which may stem from the way words in the quote sound, such as their rhythm, phonetic pronunciation, or the way in which the mouth and tongue need to move in order to produce the words or sounds. Rather than being habitually static, echolalia can convey interactional patterns and motivations (Sterponi and Shankey 2014). This can be demonstrated

through what we have seen with Wetherell (2012), positioning and accountability in affective practices. Echolalia can be described as a transactional resource for those with autism which develop an ecologically dynamic relation with their milieus.

In Doug's case, he would create a form of atmospheric awareness through particular, calculated uses of specific echolalias. These sought to interrupt atmospheres of boredom, general lethargy or social discomfort due to a lack of sustained social conversation. For boredom and lethargy, the echolalia interventions were to provide a shared sense of comedy and entertainment value for the group. Doug achieved this through the use of relaying quotes from the Blackadder comedy series from the titular "Blackadder" character. A central example of this is when, for one session, we were waiting to enter the clubroom due to another college-related film class overrunning for 10-15 minutes. As we were waiting outside, without the added stimulus of activities, the ongoing conversations in the group were beginning to die down. The aforementioned boredom and slightly impatient lethargy was emerging. Doug, sensing and feeling the general unease in the corridor, got the attention of a number of group members and started to quote from Blackadder. This served to inject a sense of light-hearted and familiar set of references to the group that functioned to create an extremely temporary, enclosed, atmospheric bubble/sphere. These echolalia based atmospheres, were intended to provide brief relief to the anxiety-producing uncertainties of not knowing how to rekindle interaction that had ceased. This function also served the equally important task of bringing people together from their own isolated thoughts into a collective of social and cultural recognition. Saying that the atmosphere was transformed or entirely altered is not properly accurate however.

The use of Blackadder in these kinds of situations was never to fully *replace* the sense of boredom or lethargy so that the attention would be drawn to Doug. They were more to bring brief respite from the unease which these non-

standard situations brought for participants. In fact, during another club session, when “I Want to Break Free” was playing, myself, Doug, Garry and two other club members were sitting in a group chatting about the past week’s events. During a lull in the conversation, the intensity of the power ballad started to rise during the first chorus and Doug burst into song along with chorus. The gap in conversation meant that all eyes turned to him and he very quickly covered his mouth and regained his composure. Having been swept up by the increasing energy of the song, it had come to impact him in a way that prevented him from assessing the situation as to whether his action would cause undue social attention. I, in hoping to reduce the uncomfortable embarrassment felt by Doug and the other members, noted that he was literally, “trying to break free”, by getting so caught up in the energy and power of the song. This form of accountability seemed to satisfy the group and we returned to our general discussion. In being swept up by the affective rush of the song, Doug had made himself an active and provocative quasi-object, rather than merely remaining an interior personal quasi-object enjoyment. This may have contributed to his attunement to the social atmospheres of the group and club space. Yet, as Bille reminds us, atmospheric meaning-making and interaction always remain hazy and are never certain. Doug’s vigilance to maintain these barriers serves as an important example of this.

In touching upon the socially and culturally shared understandings of the use of Blackadder, I now want to address the specifics of what this entails. As I have noted, the use of Blackadder echolalia is not meant to alter the atmospheric tone of the situation at hand completely. The reason for this is because of the style of comedy Blackadder utilises and which Doug and other members seek to embody in their recreations of these memorable quotes. Blackadder is a sitcom where each series parodies, satires and renders ridiculous a specific period in history, whether this is Elizabeth the 1st’s England (Blackadder: 1986) or trench warfare in World War 1 (Blackadder: 1989). The titular character, played by Rowan Atkinson, Blackadder, is seen, from Series 2, to play a misanthropic, self-aware, sarcastic, and scheming character who always tries to get the better

of his situation, but never quite has the insight or connections to fully escape the confines or structural inequalities that limit his potential in the era he is located. The most important aspect for my purpose here is the way in which Blackadder is set apart from the other characters in that he has the sensibilities of a 20th century person. He is not blindly enamoured by the courtly politics of Queen Elizabeth 1st and recognises the contradictory absurdities and tragic injustices that were brought by World War 1. Blackadder is attentive to the discrepancies between the soldiers, commanders and the humanity of the Allied and German soldiers fighting for causes they never fully understood. The way in which Blackadder approaches these issues is most important for our purposes. His voice remains on a flat affect, with his characteristic sarcastic, unenthused feeling towards anyone he comes across. Gesturally, aside from some rare moments of anger or giddy joy, he remains straight-faced and grumpy. The most common reaction to any statement or event is a despondent roll of the eyes accompanied with sighs.

Albertsons' (2012) discussion of gestural semiosis is relevant here. The particular emotional and collectively shared affective displays by Doug and the recognition from the other club members signify the cadences, rhythms and temporalities of Blackadder's comedic engagements and antics are shared between members such that they do not have to discursively explain what is going on. They are "in on" the shared cultural resonance and utilise gestural, vocal and emotion-laden bodyminds to mutually attend to the atmospheric situation at hand. The flat affect and diminished reaction to situations prevents Doug's echolalia recreations from being overstimulating or disruptive for himself or others. The use of rhythm, cadence and tone is carefully considered and crafted, as Albertsen notes. Doug is thus considerate for himself and other's comfort and ensure that Blackadder echolalias retain a positive capacity.

In bringing our attention to the specifics of Blackadder's character, I want to suggest that Doug's use of quotes and phrases from the show is the utilisation of a gestural form of producing an atmospheric sense of light relief and also demonstrating Miller's (2015) description of resonance. Doug is able to pick up on the ambient level of boredom and lethargy and instead of being entirely lulled into a sense of stability or be fully complicit with the prevailing atmospheric conditions of the current time and space, he is able to, after taking a few moments to ensure the mood is appropriate, take this mood, and channel the character of Blackadder with his mannerisms and comic awareness. The club members mutually attend to the situation at hand and develop practical, emplaced, body/mind solutions and actions to these scenarios, to momentarily make apparent the socially bizarre nature of a whole group waiting outside in a small corridor to enter a room. When this process breaks down, as in the spontaneous outburst of singing to "I Want to Break Free", quick reparations and the use of positioning via accountable excuses are provided and members move on before discomfort is extended too far. The flat affect, exaggerated use of facial expressions and the sarcastic levels of mockery and self-awareness come to life in this brief recreation. Importantly, the arrogance, condescension and antagonism is gone. Instead, the equally silly mannerisms of Blackadder are highlighted.

This gestural and bodily form of working through atmospheric sociality enables the group to develop a sense of the wider structural mechanisms that form the ground from which to make sense of specific social contexts. This is because of the way in which the resonances of utilising well-known British sitcoms' use of tropes, character types and storylines convey and highlight the absurdities and idiosyncrasies of everyday life. The utilisation of the stable and codified emotional, gestural and affective character traits of TV shows enables for a standardisation of these highly volatile, social acts of communication. Echolalia can then be used as a form of controlled repetition and to practice performing the emotional, gestural and affective tonalities of quotations. They can then be utilised in emergent situations and be given new life, despite their standardised

and familiar construction and utilisation. This is not to say that the standardised resources of echolalia are not open to change and can equally be altered to suit the situation at hand. This dimension also speaks back to Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos' (2016) concern that atmospheric conditions and effects are codified and made stultifying. The use of these habitual responses to the situation at hand may be seen to embody such an imperative, but emerges from an individual and then becomes a temporary collective awareness before it dissipated as we were able to enter the clubroom.

If nothing else, it shows that individuals are able to take the institutionalised character tropes and social interactions codified in BBC sanctified sitcoms and translate them into something new. Of course, this is not to deny the fact that the negative traits of Blackadder could manifest if Doug or another member was experiencing sensory overload, or very angry and lashing out due to overstimulation and extreme discomfort. It also does not go into providing tools to develop a critical role in thinking about how Blackadder, embodying a smug or arrogant 20-21st century know-it-all who knows better than the historical characters, serves to embolden a form of God-like knowledge and privilege that is not questioned regarding the complicity of the viewer in looking down upon or laughing at historical blunders rather than learning from them.

Finally, in keeping with Wetherell's (2012) critique of overly affective theories of social interaction, Doug's Blackadder impersonations are not random, non-representational affairs, but are choreographed so that they have a series of "affective-discursive" (Wetherell, 2012: 81-83) logics that shape the atmospheric spheres that are created. These are: temporal duration, recognition of the general mood, shared cultural recognition and echolalia which at once codifying and emergent. These logics also speak to questions of power and positionality. Blackadder is undoubtedly a White European perspective on history and, as I noted, a position of authority that is smugly all-knowing and self-aware. I return to this problematic in the conclusion of the thesis. My analysis also points to the

ways in which Doug is positioned and takes his “turn” to interject his impressions and thus creates a local cultural criteria for responding to the atmospheric mood (ibid: 90).

I now wish to turn to broader issues concerning the atmospheric and sensory boundaries that were developed, maintained or broken during my research at the club spaces.

Empirical Case 3 - Creation, Disruption and Maintenance of Sensory Atmospheric Boundaries

The final example and topic of interest I want to bring to light in this chapter is the use, maintenance, creation and removal of atmospheric boundaries in the club space. I want to focus on examples that highlight the sensory dimension of these demarcation activities. For the club members, the experience and management of space, light, sound and a sense of spatial belonging were the most important factors that impacted their navigation of atmospheric boundaries.

These kinds of spatial belonging often extended to other more judgemental forms of relating to the club space, such that a few club members, in both the Youth and Social Clubs, were often dismayed with the way in which the clubroom was left when the students left for the day in the early evening. For the Social Club members, this was used as a temporal and thus generational marker of degeneration of values and caring for the environments and spaces that situate and nurture their education or relaxation and leisure times. For the Youth Club, the moral judgement was present, but lacking the sincerity of the Social Club and often stated in a sarcastic or belligerent manner, some Youth club members even calling for students to be forced to pick up the rubbish

before the club began. There was to be no compromise on this request, even to the extent that the club members, who called for the action, did not take it upon themselves to tidy up. What struck me most about this was the way in which this distaste and disappointment with the students was forgotten about once members had settled down and began to generate discussions or take part in activities. This speaks to a number of dimensions that shaped the atmospheric boundary-making processes that structured the different levels of awareness for members, the first of which serves to illustrate the fact that a visceral reaction to events and situations as they first arose, to not being at all bothered by them is a hallmark more generally of the interactional dynamics of club members. It also points to the ways in which “tidy” and “messy” for participants is perhaps a “hazy” classification (Bille, 2015) that takes on different resonances depending on the threshold levels of sensory difficulties (Smith and Sharp, 2013) (see Chapter 3).

The levels of engagement were different depending on the context. So for a more specific example at one point, the clubroom was being used for an event that had a makeshift mini-catwalk in the middle left of the room. This caused a rather diverse mix of simultaneous, interweaving reactions, including confusion, intrigue, concern, fascination, excitement and compulsion. Some members were compelled to walk the catwalk and parody a fashion show while others simply confusedly tip-toed around the large obstacle in the middle of the room. Some members took it upon themselves to create a display that located them as the centre of attention by hopping on and off of the catwalk. While others voiced concerns over damaging or misusing the college’s property. It is here that we can see how the boundaries between atmospheric actions and reactions are dynamic and open to becoming intermixed so that no one emotional-cognitive or discursive-affective stance took complete priority over any other. Indeed, the exotic nature of the catwalk’s intervention into the club space enabled a sustaining of members engagement with these newly emergent relations to boundary-making. However, after around 45 minutes, the catwalk faced the same fate as rubbish strewn all over; it faded into the background and normal

activities resumed. The active and provocative nature of the catwalk as quasi-object became parasitic for a short segment of time, but did not have the quality of endurance as the spatial and material capacities of it were lacking in dynamism. In the rubbish example, the differential distribution of rubbish strewn each week as leftovers of the mundane goings-on of the Sixth Form college students, gave new specific details to focus on each time and thus allowed for continued engagement and consternation. The “purity” of the club space was polluted and made to be visually and morally dangerous for club members. (Douglas, 2002).

Such a discrepancy between such visceral initial reactions to almost total indifference is based on the fact that to dwell too much on the unexpected changes would cause too much anxiety for the members. But it also points to the strength, immediacy and relatively unmediated and “raw” dimension of the visceral reaction to rubbish and/or external objects like catwalks. Such a strong relation to this object/event is unsustainable if members are to have the social reserves to maintain conversations, take part in game activities and filter out background noise or deal with future unexpected scenarios. Simply put, it is unwise to focus so much on the small details because of the multiple forms of social quasi-object processes at play. Due to obsession or not being satisfied with the lack of information, as thing stood for the members nonetheless, they took to creating conversation groups or activities groups that had more familiar dynamics. Activities such as board and other game activities played had clearly written-down rules that could be mobilised around, even allowing people to enter and leave ongoing games due to the stability of their operations. Theoretically, the move from indifference to change is marked by an intriguing shift from the visceral and affective immediacy of raw, unmediated reaction, to deliberately organised, calculated and familiar discursive and emotional spheres of activity. Instead of moving from affective to representational forms of acknowledgment, as was the case for Edensor’s (2015) study of the Blackpool lights, the boundary-making activities moved from spontaneous, reactions and verbalised responses of disdain. The affective and representational are mixed in

different ways in this example and provide an insight into how atmospheres are created, maintained and diffused.

Looking at the specifically sensory domain of atmospheric boundaries now, I want to address and deepen the discussion of auditory management above and internal and external boundaries by focusing on how light became important for members. When conducting one of the first focus group sessions early in the autumn of 2014, an unexpected issue arose that was specific to the seasonal timing and lighting conditions of the clubroom. To give some context, at the back of the clubroom, there are a number of large windows that give an almost complete view of the entire college field that extends outwards from these windows. The windows are separated by sections of the back wall and so were not continuous. I say that you could *see* the field, but, during the autumn and winter months, for the majority of the time, you could *not* see the field in the dark and there were no field or pitch lights, just some small spotlights on the outside wall of the club to illuminate the fire escape door back left corner. When I and the club leader set up the focus group sessions by moving away from the seating area near the centre-back of the room to the back left of the room, we were in purview of two small sets of windows. This just so happened to place us within the purview of a cycling club that was ongoing just outside these windows (cycling is limited to this area).

Due to the limited lighting conditions, the bicyclists had to utilise a high light beam from their bikes in order to be able to cycle around the obstacles that had been put in place for them. Unfortunately, for the participants of the focus group, the flash of these beams was quite harsh as the cyclists turned corners around the obstacles in a constant string. The light in the clubroom was consistent and uniform, due to the arrangement of their positioning on the ceiling, the fluctuating shining beams entering the group's perceptual field on a constant, almost rhythmic level due to the obstacle course navigation activity of the cyclists disrupted this familiar situation. The tempo of these illuminous

intrusions was so that just as participants recovered from the last beam flash and the emplaced thoughts and feelings dissipated, another flash arrived to reset the discomfort on a continuous loop. Further, a sense of anticipation, tinged with dread and tense, hyperawareness became the dominant atmosphere of the focus group area. As participants were experiencing and being subject to the light beams created by activities in an entirely separate and isolated sphere from the club, they developed ways of reacting to their outputs. Participants were anticipating the next beam, tensing up muscles, not being able to focus on other events and finding it difficult to filter out. If there was a gap in the beams, then this was not a cause of respite, as they could start up again at any moment, the intensity of the darkness outside did not make the cyclists visible, so they were indistinct silhouettes that remained unrecognisable. Lacking cues as to when the next activity might start, the only thing participants could do was simply anxiously wait for the next beams to arrive.

After a few more rounds of this sensory bombardment, we moved back to the sofas next to the wall mounted TV and continued the remainder of the focus group session there. This event drew my attention to the clubs boundary-making practices. The back-left area of the club was a location that was not utilised for group activities to the same degree as the rest of the club space. As such, the spatial, material, atmospheric and social dynamics of this space were less well developed or could be accommodated by members' sensory capacities. The club leader and I initially intended to utilise this space because it was far away enough from the other activities to allow for a degree of focus on the research questions, and it also provided an overall view of the rest of the club space so that participants could still be aware of what was going on in the rest of the club space. We did not or could not anticipate the light beam issue as it had never been a consideration for the club leader due to the aforementioned lack of use and also, because the cycling group only met a few times during the autumn and winter months of my research. This example has demonstrated the way in which the club's and by extension, club member's atmospheric boundaries and sphere formations are created through both already existing and familiar

spheres of activity alongside external and unfamiliar spheres of activity. They then go on to give rise to new atmospheric conditions and subjective experience and adaptation.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to outline some core aspects regarding theoretical work that has been done on atmospheres within a social scientific context. I have examined the debates around the ways in which atmospheres have been described, categorised and conceptualised to explore their material, social and affective qualities that have real, felt consequences for social action in the world. However, I have also suggested that those atmospheres are also always ephemeral and “hazy”, blurring the boundaries of structural or conceptual formations and questioning the certainty or readability of subjective experiences. This means that, in order to study them empirically, we need to develop ideas and approaches that capture and think through these hazy, intangible phenomena that become variably tangible through their effects and affects.

The concepts explored in this chapter such as gestural semiosis, resonances and the materiality of atmospheres can be used to develop and deepen accounts of affective atmospheres that do not stultify bodily and emotional/affective processes. Empirically, we can focus on the material, auditory and social effects on the negotiation and management of atmospheric conflicts that arise when atmospheric thresholds are disrupted from their mundane cultivation via affective engagement and technologically mediated, inorganic modulation. The gestural semiosis analysis of Albertsen, I argue, can provide nuanced and critical insights into how phenomena like echolalia are dynamically habitual and creative in integrating affective atmospheres into social action. Finally, the degree to which spontaneity and routinised

expectations inflect and impact autistic engagement with sensory and spatial relations, points to means of exploring the way quasi-objects do and do not parasitise social relations based on intensities of interaction. Affective atmospheres then, have a productive place in highlighting the simultaneously concrete and ephemeral nature of autistic being and acting in the world.

Conclusion - Sensory and Disability Futures

Introduction

The arguments and analysis developed across the thesis have covered a number of topics from habitual engagements with favourites, to autieethnography and atmospheric relations. What has united these topics is a focus on their sensory and their parasitic, quasi-object character. I have sought to showcase how the underlying framework that is used to make sense of autistic sensory experience is guided by and fruitfully analysed through attention to the interconnections between these areas of study and concepts. These connections take place in empirically specified milieus of action and meaning-making.

In concluding the thesis, I want to explore some of the ways in which the framework I have developed here can be expanded upon to develop potential future lines of inquiry and address shortcomings of the project. I will address three key areas and briefly sketch how my approach could be utilised and expanded upon. These sketches will by necessity be preliminary; nonetheless, I believe that the groundwork is present in my thesis to begin an in-depth discussion of the uses my research could have. I will first attend to questions regarding the ways in which my theoretical framework can be used around questions of policy and practice. The two examples that I will use to explore potential uses are the “sensory funnel” approach adopted by the “Asperger Experts” organisation. My second example will refer to the, at the time of writing, ongoing campaign run by the National Autistic Society’s (NAS) “Too Much Information” campaign. The multimedia and multimodal focus of my discussion in this application of my arguments leads me to my second focus, the use of multisensory methods to complement the framework developed in this research. I will explore some of the competing arguments about the use of sensory

methods before ending with how I could use such methods for future research. Finally, I will address concerns that I raised in Chapter 2 regarding representation. I address issues around gender, sexuality and ethnicity in relation to my fieldnotes.

Habitual Favourites in Policy and Practice

In keeping with the pragmatist spirit of this project, I now wish to highlight some of the ways I believe this research can be utilised within domains of both policy and practice. The first of these discussions relates to ideas and themes that were developed in Chapter 3 on habitual favourites and the various sensory “thresholds” identified by Smith and Sharp (2013). The “sensory funnel” approach developed by the “Asperger Experts” organisation (Asperger Experts - Defense Mode, 2017), seeks to redress a dominant focus on issues of executive functioning and social interaction to address what they view as the primary importance of the senses. The organisation is run by people with Asperger’s including parents, teachers and therapists and thus emerges from a breadth of experiences and perspectives. The “sensory funnel” perspective argues that sensory experience is crucial to the other domains of executive functioning and social interaction because the senses, including beyond the five classical senses such as visceral sensations like heartbeats, are the essence of being alive. These guttural and interior sensations are highly confusing for those with Asperger’s and cause them to enter what is known as “defense mode” (Asperger Experts, 2017). This is where those with Asperger’s become so wrapped up in their confusing sensory internal and external experiences that they shut down their awareness so that they become closed to developing their own capacities and the world around them. The ability to develop social skills in this context is very difficult for those with Asperger’s, as they are trying to negotiate sensory confusions and anxieties that often lead to depression in relation to their self-esteem and anger towards others in pushing them away. In order to counteract this tendency, the “sensory funnel” approach argues that we

should not try to bottle up our feelings and let them be open, not controlling them or manipulating them in order to change them. This should be used in conjunction with a process of “holding the space” (Asperger Experts - Holding Space, 2017). This is where people with Asperger’s should just be without judgement, without a need to be productive or any other form of goal-oriented action and to accept who they are. These strategies are conducted within a supportive community context that enables recognition of the importance of connection. This can be with feelings, sensory experience, environmental awareness and emplaced, bodily processes such as thoughts of confusion and the bodily sensations of anxiety.

The “sensory funnel” approach connects with a number of arguments made across the thesis. It namely points to the way in which parasitical relations, on a sensory level, are highly disruptive for those with autism and features as an all-encompassing phenomenon. As I show in Chapter 3, sensory experience is modulated through a series of habitual quasi-objects. The processes of letting things be and holding the space in the “sensory funnel” approach, I argue, are best formulated around habitual quasi-objects that are anchored in emplaced milieus. As Chapter 4 brought to attention, the posthuman condition of autism points to the ways in which distributed and more-than-human engagements are central to giving autistic individuals a sense of connection to the world. The “sensory funnel” approach enables these connections to flourish as no judgements are applied to the forms of interaction that are highlighted in my approach. The “sensory funnel” also does not reproduce stereotypical ideas of what autism or specifically Asperger’s is because of this focus on non-judgemental acceptance of letting people express their individuality. Unlike psychiatric and medicalised understandings of autism that perceive autistic characteristics as a reduction of their capacity to be human, which view expressions of self through emotional distress or physical discomfort are seen as “the autism talking” (Yergeau, 2013: n. p.). The “sensory funnel” approach does not dismiss these behaviours as inhuman or reducing people to diagnostic labels; rather, these constitute the very essence of what it means to be human

for those with autism. It is by accepting these qualities as essential to autistic being that we can work to address sensory issues that go on to impact social difficulties. The approach developed in the thesis can ultimately provide empirical and conceptual grounding for the processes outlined by the Asperger Experts organisation.

A further and more wide-ranging initiative is seeking to not just inform policy, but also to advocate and expand on how people perceive the abilities of those with autism. The “Too Much Information” (TMI) campaign, being developed and coordinated by The National Autistic Society in Britain, focuses on detailing the ways in which the sensory and social difficulties of autism prevent those with skills and abilities from accessing jobs and reaching their potential. As the main website page states: “Employers don’t see my ability. They see my autism, They see a problem. That makes them quick to judge me, quick to dismiss me. Simply because they don’t understand me” (Too Much Information, NAS Website 2017).

The TMI campaign has produced a film titled: “Could You Stand the Rejection?” (NAS, 2017), highlighting and exemplifying the sensory issues for those with autism during job interviews. The film shows a multimodal and multisensory experience of autism. This is achieved through a number of techniques including: varying the levels of background noise, focusing on unusual details such as the white teeth of an interviewer, bodily tics like tapping on tables to indicate anxiety and distress and the use of floating text to display the concerns of the autistic interviewee discursively. This film embodies a number of insights developed across the thesis. The first relates to the use of atmospheric affective practices as I discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to Wetherell (2012). The use of stims or bodily and verbal comforting mechanisms is not portrayed in the film as bizarre or deviant behaviours that have no rational meaning, leaving just “the autism talking” (Yergeau, 2013: n. p.). Rather, they are positioned as being responses to specifically crafted, social situations that embody a parasitic

cascade of distress. The film highlights the complex intermeshing of human, non-human, discursive and affective processes that accompany an interview event. However, more attention could be made of the specifically “inorganic” (Ash, 2015) qualities of the material objects that are independent of human intention. This would allow for employers to understand that sensory experience is as much bound up by the materiality of the interview situation they are bound to the social and intersubjective practices involved.

The quasi-object-focused, habitual relations framework developed in this thesis can further develop this insightful portrayal of emotional and sensory autistic experience by providing employers who view the film with a theoretical framework to make sense of the film’s depiction. The arguments developed here can be used to develop strategies to mitigate the ambiguous and anxiety-provoking context of an interview situation. A poignant example can be found in the focus on the shiny white teeth of an interviewer showcased during the video. Rather than conceiving of social positioning in the interview context, as purely based on discursive constructions of employability via skills, or qualifications, employers might take heed of the affective sensory details noticed by autistic candidates. A nonthreatening and open attitude should be taken in this context. Rather than being made to feel uncomfortable by such attention, the interviewer may playfully inquire into this attention to detail and take it into account when comparing the job’s roles and skills the candidate brings.

Due to the difficulty of assessing and verbalising his sensory overload and anxieties, at the end of the film, the male interviewee storms out of the interview room out into the street. He squats down, shudders, rocks into a tight, foetal position, gasps and shudders with fear. The parasitic cascade has broken down his ability to make sense of his situation. Employers, in trying to untangle the messy emotional and sensory challenges at play, may find it useful to work through and consult Vannini et al’s (2012) framework of sensory experience, defined in Chapter 1. They may wish to use the typology of iconic, token-type,

indexical and symbolic processes and practices to systematically work through the sensory experiences a person with autism may be going through. For instance, if the autistic person was experiencing problems in developing indexical relations, or making causal connections based on sensory experience, it may be possible to trace the iconic, or the in-the-moment sensory experiences that constitute such struggles. This can be combined with affective practices of positioning and accountability (Wetherell, 2012) to assess the way in which responses are being tailored to the intersubjective context and emplaced sensory experience.

I offer only two examples of potential practical applications of my framework here. But, the potential scope of possible uses for the insights developed across the thesis can be adapted to the situation at hand. This adaptability is intentional and arises from the pragmatist commitments expressed in Chapter 1. The multiplicity of uses the concepts and topics of investigation throughout the thesis can offer to understand autism cautions against approaches that would strive to make a “one size fits all” strategy of address. The individuality of each person with autism should be allowed to thrive and go beyond the standardised job interview scripts of skills, qualifications and previous experience. Exploring the non-human and affective modes of attention autistic candidates can expand our understanding of diverse socialities and can in turn change the perceptions of disabled groups.

Multi-Media Sensory Research

The use of multimedia techniques to represent autistic sensory experience addresses a neglected aspect of my research project concerning the non-use of multimedia technologies to capture, analyse and present sensory experience. The primary focus of this thesis has been to develop a theoretical framework that can assist us in understanding the habitual and sensory experiences of

autistic individuals and groups. Now that this has been established, we can consider options to develop the framework *sensually* via developing sensory research methods. For the purposes of this section, I will focus on how the use of the method of “soundwalks” could enhance the analysis conducted in Chapter 3 on Garry’s urban interactions.

Soundwalks emerged as part of social and cultural geographer’s interest in detailing the multi-sensory aspects of life and in particular, urban living. Barns (2014), presents a useful outline of soundwalks:

where the material world becomes a quasi-cinematic “image” to the mobile soundtrack [...] [where] the mobile audio device acts as what Biggs (2008) calls “a sort of emotional and aesthetic prosthetic”, which is capable of extending and transforming the listeners surroundings (Barns, 2013: 11).

The use of professional audio-recording devices for research or personal music players such as Ipods or Walkman’s, allows us to develop nuanced, attuned attention to soundscapes. Combining the use of these technologies allows us to gain insight into “the construction of a mediated, augmented listening experience that layers recorded sounds with the contemporary aural environment” (ibid: 11). Soundwalks then allow us to create empirically detailed sensory experience data while also keeping and reflecting the permeability of aural phenomena. In the case of Garry’s altercations during his train journey, for example, if a researcher was present with Garry, it might have been possible to document the aural background of the train and stations. In doing this, we could manipulate and analyse the impact of what Biggs (2008) has termed the “push-pull” dynamics of urban audio experience. This concerns the relationship between the “cinematic lull” enabled by private audio devices and the hypersensory awareness engendered by the multi-mediated and multi-sensory

capture of attention in modern urban cities. These processes have been summarised by Thibaud (2003) as the construction of “city screens” that act as kinds of probes into the multisensory experiences of social life as they are interiorised and simultaneously projected out to others (Simone, 2012: 206). My use of Smith and Sharp’s (2013) framework to analyse Garry’s situation could thus be given a technically mediated character, possibly leading to a production of a film similar to the “Could You Stand The Rejection?” film. The use of multimedia effects could provide another provocative and moving insight into autistic experience. The combination of uncomfortable sensory stimuli and clear distress of the autistic individual may induce empathetic recognition through emplaced sensory experience (Pink, 2009: 50).

The risks of focusing on a more multimedia-guided study of sensory experience are noted by a number of researchers. Deference to technology is something that has often been undertaken in sociological research in order to reduce the labour of researchers combing through ever increasing amounts of data (Back, 2013). Guggenheim (2015) argues that such an uncritical use of technology is problematic. For example, in the use of cameras in visual sociology, researchers often view those tools as black boxes, whereby the technical aspects of its workings are not investigated by the sociologist. Guggenheim instead suggests that we should understand technologies in research as translators of a multiplicity of data that transform elements of the social world. This involves utilising “tight” and “loose” translations of the technology, like a camera and the object it represents to create a combination of mechanical and non-mechanical recording and representational strategies. One way to prevent such neglect in relation to soundwalks is to consider drawing on the quasi-object, parasite and inorganic (Ash, 2015) analyses developed throughout the thesis. Thibaud (2003) notes that private music players and the mediation of audio recording technology acts as a kind of quasi-object that mediates third relations between social action. They seek to slow down auditory experience and shape it to ways useful to the individual. Equally, if we consider the notion that the use of audio-recording is a technological relation, we need to consider

the technical aspects of these devices in a theoretically informed manner. Thibaud argues that different material properties disrupt Hertz waves and act as “sonic parasites”. For example, the noisy interference of roadworks highlight the benefits of being able to rewind or fast-forward to specific points in a song or being able to volume balance this audio in the case of soundwalk recordings. The technical aspects of sensory recording are inherently and constitutively social. As I noted in Chapter 3, Garry liked to write letters or poems in order to express his feelings, thoughts and anxieties about activities in his life. These could be fruitfully examined alongside a soundwalk of train journeys to explore the multimodal and multisensory nature of the encounters I analysed.

As Mason and Davies (2009) argue, the sensory domains of social life should not be studied or conceptualised as a pure domain in itself but rather, we should explore their interconnections between social categories, the primary concept in this case being disability (Mason and Davies, 2009: 598-99). We should thus not rely solely on multimodal or multisensory technologies or experiences in order to make sense of research data. The balance between a material focus that recognises the quasi-object character of material-social relations and the fleeting and abstract, sensory experiences need to be combined in any adequate account of sensory experience and meaning. In practical terms, Mason and Davies (2009) argue that resonances (see Chapter 6 - Miller, 2015) between sensory experience and the research topic are central in order to not rely on the material or closed-connection relationship between objects, environments and sensory experience. Researchers should also seek to examine the ephemeral, hazy and incomplete sensory resonances that people have with such things as family resemblances in photographs or feelings of *déjà vu*. To expand upon the discussion, these experiences are not inconsequential or irrational and so should not be ignored; they are formative and formed by atmospheric conditions and the expectations, sensory biases and past experiences of those who are participating within a specific social context (Bille, 2015).

I have focused on one sensory modality in this example, but future research can explicate how other senses could be investigated in this framework.

Habitual Favourites and Social Categories

As I address in Chapter 2, there are problematic issues of representational diversity in this thesis. In this conclusion, I want to address these issues in a more theoretical and conceptual manner that engages with questions of intersectional analysis in relation to disability. My treatment of autism as a category in this thesis has remained relatively undefined in relation to other social markers such as age, gender and ethnicity. This is partly due to my desire to create a sociologically informed framework that was explicitly addressed to issues directly connected to autistic experiences. The lack of attention given to autism within sociology was something I wanted to correct. Now that a framework has been established through which we can analyse the habitual and sensory experiences, practices and actions of people with autism. It is time to consider some potential lines of future research and inquiry that connect autism as a disability to questions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. In doing this, I will be expanding upon my use of Goodley's (2014) and Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2014) approach of "dis/ability" I explored in Chapters 1 and 4.

As I noted in Chapter 5, my experiences of research, infused with the characteristics of autism, are at risk of being erased and excluded from meaningful measures of academic achievement and worth. To subscribe to such normative practices would be a disservice to my goal of revealing the academic mundane as embroiled in power relations. Further, to compete in academic labour markets serves to reproduce institutional privileges that seek to mitigate such struggle through ableist protections of prestige (Burrows,

2012).²⁷ To avoid this, we need to connect autism as a dis/ability to other struggles involving social markers such as gender and ethnicity. Goodley (2014: 35-36), suggests that an intersectional approach to disability in relation to social markers like gender or race allow us to analyse how the processes of dis/ability become empirically defined in relation to these social categories. We can show how the processes of sexism, racism and disability intertwine to show the processes of disablism and ableism. As Chapter 1 argued, this is the process by which disability disrupts the neurotypical assumptions of liberal humanism that governs modern, Western societies. Equally, those with disabilities also aspire to reach and maintain levels of competence that embody these idealised notions of human being. Intersectional approaches recognise that no social category experiences, struggles and identity negotiations are separate, demarcated issues. No adequate or just account of the experiences of women for instance, is complete without equal attention to questions of race or class (Hill Collins, 2000). Equally, these experiences are co-constitutive of each other and should not just be an addition to appease the other groups. Issues of discrimination, exclusion and violence are shared, but their empirical specificity is only attainable through conjoined analysis of their constitution. I will now attend to several instances in my research that I have developed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 where this dis/ability intersectional approach can reveal new insights.

Intersectional dis/ability studies challenges the “malestream” focus that much autism research reproduces. I have contributed to this reproduction in only focusing on male expressions of sexuality and sexual desire. Garry’s comment on the legs of a Russian tennis player in Chapter 3 serves as a case in point. His seemingly throwaway comment is actually a form of: “Compulsory able-bodiedness (that) bolsters heteronormativity. Boys show their virility through their bodies while girls are encouraged to seek the desirability of others through their bodies” (Goodley, 2014: 42). However, these moments should not always

²⁷ These protections are nonetheless still vulnerable to neoliberal-able tendencies of infinite flexibility, self-care and individualised competition (Goodley, 2014).

be read as negative or along normative lines of desire. Garry and the other members and participants of the Youth and Social Clubs disrupt ableist practices in that rather than being self-sufficient, flexible and always available or socially or emotionally prepared for labour or civic engagement, they require support in order to eat, sleep, be independent, access leisure and employment opportunities. These questions of interdependence are of particular relevance for our purposes, in relation to assistance required in managing sensory and emotional experiences of sexuality. My participants at once embodied heteronormative practices of sexuality, while also potentially requiring assistance in working through sensual and intimate relations and desires with others. Equality of gendered interactions in this case is bound up in notions of dis/ability (Erevelles, 2002b). This opens up opportunities for "crip" and queer relations that:

moves us outside the politics of shame and toward a praxis that neither denies the complicated messiness of the body nor redefines these characteristics as normal or a strategy of stigma-management (Meleo-Erwin, 2012: 395).

To queer and "crip" disability is to show how "sexuality and disability link into one another" (Goodley, 2014: 42). Garry's heteronormative desires and comments are just one part of the puzzle in this instance. This emphasis on desire disrupts the "male-brain" (Baron-Cohen, 2002) perspective that privileges logic, mechanical reasoning and downplays emotional or sensual thoughts and feelings. It does point to evidence that the preference for local processing (Happé and Frith, 2006), or cognitive styles that may enhance the capacity to objectify female bodies and reproduces heteronormative desires and structures. At the same time, unique sensory experiences of sensual interactions are likely to pose unique problems for intimate relationships that challenge heteronormative assumptions of sexual citizenship. How to untangle the

heteronormative and crip possibilities of disabled sexuality is a topic that could be explored in future research.

The fact that Garry's comment related to a "Russian" tennis player, speaks to a form of othering that arises from equating non-majority, white European others as "uncivilised, emotive, fearful but is also exoticised, fetishised by white cultures" (Goodley, 2014: 46). Russia's position as a "far" Eastern European country speaks to a unique form of "orientalism" (Said 2003) that incorporates repulsion and fascination with a Soviet, Communist past that rubs against the Metropole of western capitalism (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 124). Here, the cultural differences between Central and Eastern Europe feed into Garry's desire for the legs of the tennis player.

A future research project may wish to challenge these stereotypical representations of ethnic others and develop more benevolent conceptions of these groups. A way to do this is to utilise and embody traits of what Kannen (2008) has termed as being a "race traitor". Race-traitors "expose the ways in which privileged identities are constructed (i.e. whiteness, ablebodiedness, heterosexuality) elucidates how resistance to oppressive identity categories is possible" (Kannen, 2008: 149). Goodley adds to this analysis by incorporating disability into this concept, turning the researcher into a "race-able traitor" (Goodley, 2014: 46). These intersectional traitors reject both racist injustices and reject the stereotypes of disability representation and understanding. For example, the use of the Oriental concept of the "mongol" has been used to represent and understand the physical features and characteristics of those with Down Syndrome (Goodley 2014: 46-47). In applying this to my research, we can think back to Chapter 6's discussion of the atmospheric use of Blackadder echolalia. There, I briefly noted the Eurocentric conception of history depicted in the programme and the smug knowingness that Blackadder displayed to others. One way to challenge this distorted view is to discuss with members the political and historical significance of the European focus in Blackadder. Such

discussion might include the stereotyped depiction of cannibalistic savages in Series 2, Episode 3 and the colonial imperatives of Sir Walter Raleigh's journey to the Americas. However, rather than viewing autistic echolalia as uncritically reproducing vocalisations that solely symbolises linguistic and interpretative difficulty or lack of capacity, we can, as Starponi and Sharkey (2014) have shown, view echolalia as forming meaningful and symbolic interactional dynamics. Echolalia is not thus an enhanced sense of interiority, but is just as complex as traditional linguistic communication whose meaning can be negotiated in individual and group interaction. Both forms of discrimination can thus be debunked and lead to more inclusive and engaged understanding for the groups involved.

My discussion of these issues are again only indicative of the kinds of in-depth analyses that could be undertaken within a dis/ability studies framework. Future research could connect my framework of habitual quasi-objects in sensory experience to these questions of gender, sexuality or ethnicity and the nuance such accounts can give to intersectional analysis of autistic groups.

Thesis as Quasi-Object

My attention to these issues can best be encapsulated by Woodyer (2008):

The body, the subject, is never fully determined; not bounded, but provisional, relational and enacted, in constant dialogue with objects, environments, spaces, times and ideas. This multiplicity results in complexity, but this complexity is so fundamental to our being, so commonplace, so everyday, that it is taken-for-granted; it is lived not deliberated (Woodyer, 2008: 353).

My commitment to making the academic mundane strange in Chapters 4 and 5, has pointed to the multiple vortexes of significance outlined by Woodyer. In particular, my second writing story in Chapter 5 described and explicated my discursive and affective responses to research. These were at once bodily and cognitive processes of discernment. I endeavoured to break down these habitual means of encountering research and relate them to wider discourses of power relations within academia that reflect on the significance given to marginalised perspectives.

I have sought to recognise the complexities and unravel what we might take for granted in relation to habitual and sensory experience. In giving these domains critical scrutiny, this thesis has asked us to slow down and think again about what we think we know about autism, sensory experience, atmospheric relations and parasitic chains of action. The argument developed here is then its own form of quasi-object, placed in the volatile and turbulent academic debates that have structured and framed my investigations. My hope is that my intervention is meaningful, useful and novel to those who read it and can provide insight into autistic experience.

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