Liminal Spaces: Theorising the permanence of transience

Nicola Livingstone
Bartlett School of Planning,
UCL
n.livingstone@ucl.ac.uk

Peter Matthews
Sociology, Social Policy & Criminology,
University of Stirling
peter.matthews@stir.ac.uk

Draft version only, to be revised prior to publication.
Please do not quote without permission from authors.

Abstract

Global capital continually and consistently ruptures our cities, affecting change and introducing challenges relating to how the spatial form is both manifested and mediated. Space is becoming increasingly transient, and it is questionable whether any urban landscapes can be considered permanent today. Ongoing adjustments in our multifarious and disparate built environment give rise to antagonisms and conflict particularly focused on the lived experience of temporalities. What was permanent can become temporary and marginal; what was temporary can become permanent, reflecting myriad relationships and conflicts, including localised activism, political mobilisation and the influence of the national state. The influx of capital into cities in pursuit of profit maximisation under neoliberalism gives rise to an urban form which is experienced and lived, yet illusory and detached, as we experience shifting spatialities in independent and contrasting ways. Our urban form is altering at pace, but how can we conceptualise these changes with a sense of time?

To this end, research into uneven spatial change from the perspective of communities, localised action and national governance is theorised through the concepts of liminality and temporality. We understand liminal spaces to be transitional and in-between. These spaces are examined through the work of critical social theorists, such as Lefebvre and Foucault. A duo of urban experiences is interpreted through case studies reflecting spaces of deprivation, including the emergence of food banks in the UK generally and specific localised changes in an Edinburgh neighbourhood, which represent ‘transient spatialities’. The issue to be addressed is the social form of these transient spatialities, the value of such spaces and how they are affected by the varied temporalities experienced with the urban environment.

This paper draws on a rich theoretical literature from critical human geography, and introduces new insight into critical temporalities. How we can interrogate and understand the
process of spatial change in time is examined through literature and case studies, which consider the following interconnected discourses in context:

- How the social value and repercussions of change, whether intended as temporary or permanent, creates a sense of permanence and a temporality of timelessness;
- How the historic past, the past, the present and projected future are imagined and used by actors in processes of evolving spatialities to understand context and develop political positions.
- How these different temporalities as experienced and exercised in the urban form give rise to antagonisms from the local to the national – what are the politics of various spaces?
- What role do the local communities have in actively engaging with such developments and how is this influenced by concepts of time and liminal experiences of space.

We argue that critical temporalities bring new insights into these liminal and temporary uses by focusing on the evolving spaces of food aid and neighbourhood change in the urban environment. However, the temporalities of communities are varied, contingent and context-rich. In our contribution we will address how conflicts can be effectively understood and accounted for. Temporary space will be informed by revisiting grounding literature on space and place, with key concepts, such as Foucault’s heterotopia and Lefebvre’s spatial triad informing our contribution on critical temporalities and theorising the permanence of transient space. The work will offer a theoretically informed assessment of the localised effects of transient space. It is a suggestion, a starting point, through which we encourage reconsideration of temporalities and their spatial expression through notions of liminality.

**Introduction**

‘Urbanism may be regarded as a particular form or patterning of the social process. This process unfolds in a spatially structured environment created by man. The city can therefore be regarded as a tangible, built environment – an environment which is a social product’ (Harvey, 1979: 196).

To better understand the socio-spatial form of the city has been the pursuit of diverse theoretical disciplines across the ever widening spectrum of time, examined through the lens of critical human geographers (Zukin, 1991; Thrift, 1996; Allen, 2003), postmodern theorists (Jameson, 1991; Harvey, 1989; Dear, 2000), and sociologists (Mumford, 1938; Castells, 1977; Hetherington 1997) to name but a few. The urban form of the city is dynamic and fluid, the social processes within it give rise to its particular spatialities and urban patterns. At once, today, right now, the city is both a temporal and spatial representation of Harvey’s social process.

Global capital continually and consistently ruptures our cities, affecting change and introducing challenges relating to how the spatial form is both manifested and mediated. Space is becoming increasingly transient, and it is questionable whether any urban landscapes can be considered permanent today. Ongoing adjustments in our multifarious and disparate built environment give rise to antagonisms and conflict particularly focused on the lived experience of temporalities. What was permanent can become temporary and marginal; what was temporary can become permanent, reflecting localised activism, political
mobilisation and the influence of the state. The influx of capital into cities in pursuit of profit maximisation under neoliberalism gives rise to an urban form which is experienced and lived, yet illusory and detached, as we experience shifting, uneven spatialities in independent and contrasting ways. Our urban form is altering at pace, but how can we conceptualise these changes with a sense of time?

This paper approaches the uneven spatial evolution of the urban from the perspective of localised community responses to experienced temporalities of the social form. The central theme of the paper considers how the development of spatialities is influenced by local realities, lived in experiences, and by the more illusory but omnipotent influences of non-local factors, such as the state form. Twenty-first century temporalities are situated through case studies which examine at the socio-spatial forms of food banks and lived experience of residents in a deprived Edinburgh neighbourhood. How we can interrogate and understand the process of spatial change in time is examined through literature and these case studies, which consider the following interconnected discourses in context:

- How the social value and repercussions of change, whether intended as temporary or permanent, creates a sense of permanence and a temporality of timelessness;
- How the historic past, the past, the present and projected future are imagined and used by actors in processes of evolving spatialities to understand context and develop political positions.
- How these different temporalities as experienced and exercised in the urban form give rise to antagonisms from the local to the national – what are the politics of various spaces?
- What role do the local communities have in actively engaging with such developments and how is this influenced by concepts of time and liminal experiences of space.

The case studies were chosen as current representations of ‘transient spatialities’, which we understand as spaces which may be permanent or temporary, established or diminished, vernacular or unique, but which reflect a liminal socio-spatial experience. Liminal spaces are described by Turner as being ‘betwixt and between…their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories’ (1967: 97). The derivation of the word liminal itself means ‘threshold’. Such spaces represent transition, transformation, an intermediate state. The concept of liminality was further developed by Bhabha (1994); suggesting liminality is an expression of cultural hybridity, and Zukin (1991), who adopted the term in relation to the urban form. In this paper, the concept of liminality is examined through the work of French social theorists regarding interpretations of space, specifically the writings of Lefebvre (1991, 1996) and Foucault (1986). Of particular influence to our interpretation of the liminal are the concepts of heterotopia and the spatial triad, which are discussed in detail in the following section.

We bring to this literature the emerging concept of “critical temporalities” (Bastian 2014). This highlights how the sense of time is experienced differently by individuals based on their experience. In particular, it focuses our attention on the role of social institutions, such as the state and global neoliberalism, in imposing temporalities onto communities. Allied with work from urban sociology on the historic nature of place-attachment, and the class differences in this (see: Watt 2009; Savage 2010; Matthews 2014), we have a rich repertoire of theory that has been underemployed in explaining the transience and liminality of contemporary places and spaces.
The literature informs the final sections of the paper, where the experience foodbanks and Wester Hailes, a peripheral social housing estate in the south-west of Edinburgh, Scotland are interrogated as ‘transient spatialities’, reflecting temporalities of the social form which are particular to contemporary space. This paper is a suggestion, a starting point, through which we encourage reconsideration of temporalities and their spatial expression through notions of liminality.

Theorising Transient Spatialities

The juxtaposition of space and time in the development and lived experiences of the built environment today presents us with myriad perspectives through which ‘transient spatialities’ can be interpreted. Massey (2007) encourages interrogation of what a place stands for, what does it represent? How can we understand its socio-spatial and temporal evolution? ‘Transient spatialities’ reflect antagonisms, conflicts and liminality. Such spaces may be permanent or temporary, established or diminished, vernacular or unique, but inherently they each reflect a liminal socio-spatial experience. The perspective adopted in addressing ‘transient spatialities’ marries historic outlooks on space with current literature on critical temporalities, blending the work of French critical theorists with present day interpretations. It is an opportunity to revisit the work of prominent thinkers on space, in particular Foucault and Lefebvre, by considering whether our understanding of ‘transient spatialities’ can be enhanced through their relative theories. Literature on spatiality is combined with that on temporality, to engage with initial thoughts on developing an original and novel assessment of two particular case studies understood as ‘transient spatialities’.

In introducing the notion of liminal space into research on the urban form, Zukin (1991) presented liminality as an increasingly present characteristic of modern cities. Such spaces are inconsistent, equivocal and ambiguous, representing aspects of global market change, their manifestation locally and wider cultural shifts. Liminality ‘captures the simultaneous advance and decline of economic forms, or the sense that as the ground shifts under our feet, taller buildings continue to rise’ (1991: 5). Conroy (2004) describes liminal spaces as eruptive and tension ridden, where transitions are inherently temporal, as relationships with time become representative of and yet distinct from the past, the present and the future. Such experiences of time also contrast and conflict, as people experience temporalities individually, through their own personal history, as well as through the history of the transitioning space. Our ‘transient spatialities’ are spaces of transition and liminality.

How spaces are formed and representative of social inconsistencies and differences was considered by Michel Foucault, who suggested that appropriation of the term heterotopia into discussions on the urban form would enhance our understanding of its evolution. Foucault first introduced the notion of heterotopia into the realms of spatial thought in a 1967 lecture entitled ‘Of Other Spaces’. Prior to this heterotopia was predominantly a term associated with tissue abnormalities in medicine. Foucault describes heterotopic, or ‘other spaces’, as ‘counter-sites…absolutely different’ (1986: 24) spaces, which exist in a way which invert and yet represent the social relations which mediate and reproduce space. They are unique spaces of conflict and tension, defined by Heynen as ‘constellations of the in-between’ (2008: 322). In the time since Foucault’s analysis of spatial heterotopias the designation has found expression in diverse research areas, from Shakespearian theatre (Fayard, 2011), to educational practices (Beyes & Michels, 2011) to sex shops (Evans et al, 2010). Foucault however, provided only minimal literature on the concept of heterotopia,
therefore it has been widely interpreted and yet heavily criticised as ‘frustratingly incomplete’ (Soja, 1996: 162) and ‘too slippery a term to be of any fundamental significance’ (Heynen, 2008: 311). Nevertheless, the six principles of heterotopias offer a taxonomy of concepts through which transient spatialities can be observed.

Foucault uses a rich, subversive language when describing heterotopias, as spaces of contestation and inversions, of crises and deviation, of incompatibility and isolation. These spaces of difference appear and disappear somewhere between the vast realms of dystopia and utopia. Heterotopias can emerge anywhere at anytime and can juxtapose spaces which have diverse characteristics. In the sixth principle, Foucault reflects on the nature of ‘real’ space, as either that of illusion or compensation. The former are spaces which either expose the fragile diversity and subjectivity of our lived experiences (adopting brothels as an example), or the latter, as heterotopias of functionality, where we are regulated by the enforced social norms (e.g. working life, age labour, religion). Within both of these heterotopias there is an implicit undercurrent of power relations, which influence the lived experiences of heterotopias at a particular time, in a particular place.

The notion of temporality is referred to in principles four and five. The fifth principle clearly defines heterotopias as spaces which are not freely accessible or public, but that they have restricted access. The effect of enforcing temporal restrictions on the space means that they are accessible and penetrable, yet isolated and controlled. In the fourth principle, Foucault suggests that heterotopias create ‘heterochronies’, a break with traditional time, which seems to be at odds with principle six where spaces are inherently temporal. It could be Foucault recognising the varied temporalities which continually create the changes and experiences manifest in our societies (leisure time, holiday time, family time, community time, the time yet to come). However, the interpretation depends on the adopted definition of ‘traditional time’ itself. In these two principles specifically we can see the frustrations of Soja and Heynen clearly exposed. The inherent weakness in the taxonomy provided is that it offers the potential to prescribe spaces as heterotopias as they ‘fit’ into these six categories, thus undermining the very social relationships they seek to understand by examining a specific space. There is also a risk that through the general and vague ideas presented by Foucault every space adopts heterotopic characteristics, however by considering the lived experiences of the people interacting and creating these spaces, they each emerge as unique, similar but different, alternative but every day. Within these spaces there is not necessarily an expectation of transformation, but an element of difference. Heterotopias are spaces which are contradictory but not necessarily temporary, tension ridden but not essentially representative of change or direction of movement. They are spaces which can be, but are not necessarily liminal.

Lefebvre, in his vast assessment of capitalist society, offers a more nuanced interpretation of socio-spatial time, as an amalgamation of language, culture, nature, location and power. His work is concerned with dialectical relationships, conflict and antagonisms, spatial forms emerging from specific moments, and unlike Foucault, less about defining external space. Spaces are diversified and fragmented, influenced by abstractions and specificities. What Lefebvre calls the ‘worst of abstractions’ (1991: 208), is that of power which influences our lived temporalities. Spaces of contemporary capitalism are spaces of power and poverty, culture and capital; in the UK they are neoliberal, driven by profit maximisation. Capital restructuring and redistribution drives the compression of space over time and space is not a thing, but rather a set of relations between things’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 83), primarily
influenced by power relations. For Lefebvre, such relations can be termed as ‘near’ or ‘far’. The near order in a city represent individuals and groups from a local, community perspective, the far order refers to the regulation of the city by institutions, legal codes and groups – the city is an amalgam of near and far. Our ‘transient spatialities’ are part of this social form of the near and far, which reflect the individualities of local communities and also the omnipresent influences of national and global regimes of power. Space is a symbolic praxis, produced by history, the present day and into the future.

Lefebvre, in attempting to understand space and the practices which simultaneously create and destroy it, introduces us to the ‘spatial triad’, which much like Foucault’s heterotopic principles, offers three different ways in which space can be understood. ‘Spatial practice’ is the first aspect of the triad. This examines the formation of space through particular locations and societal relationships, and represents cohesion and continuity. ‘Representations of space’ are the second aspect of the triad, referring to the symbolic nature of space and place, the signs and order imposed by social relations. The third aspect of the triad is ‘representational spaces’, which reflect the complex symbolisms which are specifically linked to clandestine elements of society. By examining spaces through one or all three aspects of the triad specific relations of space in time can be analysed in relation to the social activities creating spaces, without imposing an overarching defining term such as the moniker heterotopia. For this research, in terms of our ‘transient spatialities’, the triad presents an interesting lens through which we can observe the case studies, linked to the social form of deprivation in communities. The triad may only have three briefly described aspects to it, but unlike heterotopia, it does not seek to identify spaces specifically, but succinctly presents a means through which their ‘near’ and ‘far’ complexities can be interpreted. Unlike Foucault, the triad does not specifically address temporality, but it does account for the localised influences on space, as well as presenting a clearer and less confusing set of principles to consider. Soja (1996), after Lefebvre and Foucault, continued to develop ideas on heterotopia and the social consequences of spatiality, which recognises and embraces the fluidity of the socio-spatial form. Adopting a postmodern approach, Soja reflects on the interconnections between spatiality, sociality and historicality, in a ‘trialectics’. Here the influence of past time is recognised and rigidities of uneven development are interrogated to ‘open up the spatial imagination’ (1996: 17). And so today, attempts to understand spatialities and social form continue to emerge. The dynamics of how Foucault, Lefebvre and Soja are understood will continue to change as the urban form continues to be in flux. Each theory is presented in a way which can be understood from varying theoretical perspectives, which encourages and fosters conceptual interpretation of the socio-spatial forms we experience. But how can we further understand temporalities in society?

In the sociological literature on temporalities there is a widespread recognition that people experience different temporalities: the immediacy of passing time; historic time. There has been a long recognition that labour and work frame time, its flows and rhythms. In terms of community time, history is a shared cultural construct and part of creating the present (Blokland 2009). Community time itself has been recognised as having flows and rhythms that place it outside other structuring temporalities of society (Crow and Allan 1995). Importantly this work emphasises that:

‘the time of community [is not] compatible with broader social accounts of the past as something that is simply over … or the future as simply not yet … [and]… shared
representations of the past and/or future shape how a community is imagined and legitimised'

(Bastian 2014: 143)

A key way we understand the future as “not yet” is through policy and planning – evoking a future and utopias to reach. Importantly, the rhythms, deadlines and pace of policy-making create a specific temporality (Fitzpatrick 2004; Abram 2014). Some individuals and communities are more adept at fitting into this temporality and responding to these time pressures than others (Matthews 2014). Importantly for the exploration in this paper, a sensitivity to temporalities and time means that:

‘Questions about the speed, pace and directionality of time are crucial to work exploring communal futures and pasts, the experiences of accelerating global networks and the timing of economic modes of production.’ (Bastian 2014: 138)

Through living, working and acting, we produce space (Smith; 1990). Spaces which are ever changing and fluid, but which reflect our lived experiences through particular temporalities. The interpretation of the spatial which concerned French critical theorists like Foucault and Lefebvre in the twentieth century has progressed into contemporary discourses of both spatiality and temporality (Bastian, 2014), further opening up Soja’s spatial imagination (1996) to consider the liminality of ‘transient spatialities’ through case studies of deprivation.

Food Banks as Spaces of the In-between

Today benevolence and giving through charities has become an entrenched and accepted aspect of UK society (Livingstone, 2013), and the beginning of the twenty-first century has seen rapid growth in food insecurity with various charities evolving to provide food banks as an emergency food in response to hunger. The ‘transient spatiality’ of the food bank has become an expansive element of contemporary society and food aid is becoming a normalised aspect of the charitable community. Food aid providers play a significant social role in raising awareness of food poverty and concomitantly helping those experiencing food insecurity with food parcels when in crises (typically three days’ worth of food). All evidence indicates that food insecurity is becoming a more prolific characteristic of deprivation in the UK today (Cooper et al, 2014; Lambie-Mumford et al, 2014; Sosenko et al, 2013) and an All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry recently published research on the extent of hunger and food poverty in the UK (2014).

This research specifically considers the socio-spatial evolution of the Trussell Trust network of foodbanks, launched in the UK in 2004. The Trussell Trust operates as a ‘social franchise’, where churches and religious organisations can become affiliated with the organisation to launch and run foodbanks. The charity provides business guidance and advice on how to operate successfully and they are the key foodbanking organisation in the UK today. There are currently over 420 Trussell Trust foodbanks, with an average of two opening per week (The Trussell Trust, 2014a). In 2013-14 the charity distributed 913,138 food parcels (The Trussell Trust, 2014b) an estimated 20 million meals representing a year on year growth of 54% (Cooper et al, 2014). Ninety percent of these meals are donated by the public and the foodbanks have over 30,000 volunteers working within their network (The Trussell Trust, 2014b). To acquire a food parcel from a Trussell Trust foodbank you must be
referred by a professional, such as a doctor or social worker, and in this way the foodbank can ensure that the distribution of food reaches those who need it most. They also strive to avoid dependency and typically (but not exclusively) will only provide three parcels in the course of a six month period. They are emergency food providers, the speed and direction of their growth is reflective of the temporality of food poverty in the UK today, a momentum which currently seems likely to accelerate and expand into future socio-spatial temporalities.

As food bank numbers have been growing significantly they have simultaneously become a topic of much discussion and consternation in the media. Media speculation surrounding the causes and symptoms of food poverty in the UK suggest that the growth of foodbanking is directly related to welfare reforms and related austerity measures imposed by the current government (Butler, 2014; Green, 2013; Livingstone, 2014). With the ever increasing numbers of foodbanks the party line from the government has been denial of links between reforms and food insecurity, with the state commenting on lack of ‘robust evidence’ to indicate a link (Downing et al, 2014). However, this has been refuted in research compiled by various charitable sources (Cooper et al, 2014) and the Scottish Government (Sosenko et al, 2013). The wider repercussions of policies in the most recent decade reflects the state's detached and dismissive position, which although disputed, has remained unchanged throughout the current term of the Conservative government. Following on from the global financial crisis of 2008, the imposition of austerity measures and reforms, bedroom tax, fluctuating employment and the introduction of zero hour contracts, it is not just those out of work accessing foodbanks, but those in work who cannot make ends meet (Sosenko et al, 2013). The post-war welfare state is being reformed and dismantled, its apparent permanence is being eroded by the neoliberal position of the current government. The UK situation may soon mirror the experience of foodbanks in the US and Canada, where they are now a permanent feature in spatial and temporal discourses of poverty (Riches, 2002).

Foodbanks are representative of a temporality of detachment of the state, of disregard for those experiencing food insecurity. So far, this has promoted a spatial expansion, where more and more spaces are being acquired for foodbanks. The expansion of foodbanks inherently reflects Lefebvre’s concept of the ‘far’, as the state directly influences their growth and normalisation in society. As a feature of our urban form today foodbanks should be a temporary space, one which should become obsolete and unnecessary through the effective tackling of food insecurity. However transient and temporary we expect these spaces to be, the current temporal experience reflects a society which redistributes food to those in need in an emergency. Food parcels are distributed within a prescribed period of opening and closing, as with Foucault’s fifth principle of heterotopia. In this respect, as a potential heterotopic site the foodbank users are subjected to the specific ways in which the foodbank functions - in the case of the Trussell Trust, you must have a referral voucher from a professional, food parcels can only be collected during a specific time and their distribution is formalised by the Trussell Trust’s approach to the franchise as well as the volunteers operating the foodbank.

From the perspective of the local community, foodbanks are spaces of community mobilisation, empowerment and integration of human capital. Consistent redistribution of food parcels will not stimulate change in the lives of those experiencing hunger, merely provide a temporary respite. Food aid from the ‘near’ in society, the local neighbourhood, actively engaging with the community to assist those in need is certainly a short term benefit
to the food insecure, but it should not be viewed as a long term solution. Effecting the eradication of food poverty and influencing the ‘far’ state form from the local level is essentially illusory in the current temporality, as foodbanks are a response of and within the neoliberal system itself. That is not to imply that there is no possibility for change, as due to the continual reinvention of space and the lived experiences associated with foodbanking, there is an implicit opportunity for reconstitution and change in the future of foodbanks.

Although a food parcel can be useful in the short term what happens after the three days of food is consumed? Those experiencing hunger will continue to experience it and will be limited in their access to further food parcels. The experience of foodbanks is a temporality of discontinuity, of disruption and the individuals’ accessing the food aid themselves could be said to be experiencing a heterochrony, as in Foucault’s fourth principle, a break in their traditional use of time, an experience of something absolutely different from normality – which in this case reflects a new and contemporary experience of poverty. Further, ironically, this temporality could be undermining efforts, through policies such as the monthly payment of Universal Credit, in extending the time horizons and temporalities of those experiencing poverty; effectively keeping them within a temporality of desperation living from hour-to-hour and day-to-day. This is a temporality where the individuals have a choice of buying a tin of beans or heating a tin of beans.

They are symbolically complex and antagonistic spaces, both to those who volunteer and those who come to collect food. The space of the foodbank is one of the ‘in-between’, a liminal experience for those involved in their spatial and temporal representation today. The lived experiences and realities of the foodbank reflect and experience of sociality, one which channels the ‘ironic, complicitous silence of the oppressed [the foodbank users]. But sociality also refers us back to the power of the collective [the users and volunteers]’ (Shields, 1992: 106). Locally, foodbanks are a multifaceted form of sociality. The users accessing the more formalised Trussell Trust foodbanks are entwined in an intermediate, alienated and liminal experience of hunger, via a restricted experience only useable on an irregular and infrequent basis, a space which emphasises their poverty, a space akin to somewhere timeless: foodbanks to the individual are not habitually used or normalised, but restricted spaces which indicate deprivation and poverty. In this respect they can be considered to indicate each of the three elements of Lefebvre’s spatial triad, as spaces of the clandestine, of symbolism and social codes, of social practices represented in the reproduction of space.

The spatial form of The Trussell Trust foodbanks are symbolic of appropriated spaces of social relations, they are spaces of polarisation and alienation, but they are also spaces of community, sociality and engagement, inclusive spaces which simultaneously reinforce exclusion. In line with Foucault’s third principle of heterotopia, foodbanks are a juxtaposition of incompatible spaces. The foodbank creates a space of illusion, by providing short term nourishment and comfort, which expose every real space of poverty and hunger. The spaces themselves are indicative of the power of the ‘far’ state, but at the same time their spatiality is a curious one, which due to the association with religious association typically sits outside the need for capital accumulation and profit maximisation. Space is acquired and utilised where necessary and there is anecdotal evidence which indicates that storage and distribution centres for Trussell Trust foodbanks is provided ad hoc as part of particular corporate social responsibility targets, or at peppercorn rents.
Foodbanks are politicised liminal spaces, where the possibility of both effective change and ineffectuality in addressing hunger today are both potential threshold experiences. Where the complex and contradictory nature of the ‘transient spatiality’ that is the foodbank is lived and experienced through a multitude of relations. It will be interesting to see how these spaces continue to evolve through the ‘far’ and the ‘near’, as temporalities shift into the future.

**Temporalities and “yet-ness” in Wester Hailes?**

Wester Hailes in Edinburgh, can be regarded as an archetypal liminal space. As a deprived peripheral social housing estate, within the most deprived 15 per cent of neighbourhoods in Edinburgh, it has throughout its 50-year history either been on the edge of urban consciousness within the City, or brought to its fore by deprivation or criminality (Wacquant 2008). Historically, in response to the stigma towards the neighbourhood from wider society and the city, the residents created the neighbourhood as a representational space against the representation of the space (Lefebvre 1991). This representational space had networks of representation and activism in community development organisations - the Wester Hailes representative council - and a community newspaper, *The Wester Hailes Sentinel*. These networks of activism contested the negative representations of the neighbourhood and helped offer new futures through critical engagement in “regeneration” policies and practices (Matthews 2012)

This activism was taking place in a world that was becoming increasingly networked, yet excepting a brief period when Wester Hailes had Scotland’s first internet cafe, the neighbourhood was excluded from these networks. As has been widely recognised the use of new networked technologies has disrupted traditional geographies and temporalities (Castells 2000). Instant communication around the globe has led to the distanciation of propinquity (Amin 2000). Financial services companies are investing in superfast networks so their deals can get to markets milliseconds before their competitors. While these technologies open up new opportunities for capital, for many they also offer new opportunities for creating democratic spaces (Couclelis 2004). While a lot of the enthusiasm of early network pioneers that the technology would lead us into a new democratic utopia has been tempered, there continues to be a belief that new technologies can revive democracy. The growth of social media technologies – Facebook, Twitter etc. – and sophisticated campaigning organisations such as 38degrees and AllOut who use the technology to garner widespread support around issues rapidly, has led many to view the current networked age as different. Others dismiss such activity as barely engaged “clicktivism” that ignores the political realities of global neoliberalism.

Such activities find their local expression in the growth of hyperlocal media sites. These have a long tradition as photocopied local newsletters, or small commercial newspapers, that report solely local news and are supported by volunteers or local advertising. Free, easy to use technologies like blogs, video and audio hosting sites, as well as social media, mean these traditional sources of local news have either been supported or replaced by online equivalents. Research suggests that like the global “twitter storms”, many of these sites not linked to existing media organisations, grew out of specific local campaigns, such as school closures or controversial planning applications and new developments (Williams, Barnett et al. 2014). In the UK, the massive decline in engagement with local politics, starkly illustrated by pitiful turnouts for local council elections throughout the UK, has led many to associate
the growth of hyperlocal with aims to renew local democracy. In our second case study – a research project that supported the revival of a local newspaper as an online hyperlocal news sources – helps us interrogate our questions around the disruption of geographies and temporalities in the modern world.

In 2008 the local newspaper *The West Edinburgh Times*, formerly *The Wester Hailes Sentinel*, ceased publication after the City of Edinburgh Council withdrew its funding. As *The Sentinel* it had been a leading local voice since 1976 in fighting for improvements in the neighbourhood. In 2010 the local housing association, who had inherited the archive of *The Sentinel* began posting photos online in a Facebook group eliciting immediate engagement from residents past and present (Matthews 2014). This site created an online version of the neighbourhood – a site containing reflections on the history and place-attachment of a neighbourhood of 9,000 people – in a global cloud. To flip the notion of the distanciation of propinquity, this was a deep sense of propinquity held on server farms around the globe. Interest in this site led partners to hope that the engagement could be turned into a self-supporting online hyperlocal news site, *The Digital Sentinel*.

A project to understand engagement in the site after it had been running for a year began from the premise that it had failed. Most of the stories on the site had been produced by the paid worker, not local community activists. Hits to the site were low and it was struggling to develop a stream of news from local community organisations. There were specific organisational problems the site had which acted as barriers to engagement, and a further barrier was also identified as the challenges of digital inclusion in a deprived neighbourhood (see the stark differences in internet use between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods and residents in socially rented homes and owner-occupiers in the most recent Scottish Household Survey: Scottish Government 2014). However, unpacking the “failure” of *The Digital Sentinel* can also help us understand the transient spatialities and critical temporalities that are at the core of our thesis.

For community activists, the aim to revive the *Sentinel* came from a desire to revive local democracy, to take the community back to a shared history of community activism often evoked on the Facebook page. There was a hope that new technologies could allow a revival of the spirit of activism that created a contesting representational space among a new generation, again seeking to tackle the negative representations of the place in wider Edinburgh. However, this struggled to occur. Research on hyperlocal news sites more generally suggests that they tend to be successful when they emerge from campaigns around single issues, particularly disputes over land-use planning and school closures (Williams, Barnett et al. 2014). Extensive evidence suggests that more affluent people are much more likely to engage in such activities (Matthews and Hastings 2013).

This presents a negative case for why efforts to revive democracy through digital engagement were not successful: the residents of Wester Hailes were not affluent homeowners and their immediate investment interests were not threatened by a new development (Matthews, Bramley et al. 2014). However, how can we positively understand why residents were engaging in discussion about historic time on the Facebook page, but not engaging in the politics of the immediate needs of the neighbourhood? We can link the reminiscence on the Facebook page to the homely sense of place of working classing communities – being in place as (Matthews 2014). This is opposed to the middle class sense
of home as a position within a world of positions, which can be easily threatened by things such as new housing developments (Allen 2008; Watt 2009).

The sense of belonging as home meant that the residents had a much longer-term and general sense of place-attachment. A good example of this was the local time bank. Time-banks are a form of non-monetary exchange. Volunteers get time credits by offering their skills to other members to use. These credits can be “cashed-in” by buying the time of other volunteers to help you. Emerging from America, time banks rely on direct reciprocity in a quite immediate sense, with the time credits dealt with by a time-broker adding trust to this system of direct reciprocity. In this research, the West Edinburgh time bank struggled to get volunteers to take time credits. People were more than willing to give their time and skills, but unwilling to accept help and be a burden. The sense of home of the residents extended to a sense of generalised reciprocity – they were willing to provide support to the local community in the knowledge that they might get something back sometime in the future, with very little concern as to when this was. The longer-term temporality of this generalised reciprocity and commitment to the local community was incompatible with the presumed immediacy of the timebank model.

Another output of our research projects in Wester Hailes was a digital totem. This included quick-response codes (QR codes) for people to access online information about the neighbourhood, including the social history Facebook page. In First Nation cultures totem poles were traditionally temporary. Once erected at potlatch ceremonies, they were left to slowly rot away. For some nations, their dead were placed in boxes atop totems, which were left to decompose and be scavenged. Our totem pole is prominently placed in the neighbourhood, yet as with The Digital Sentinel to which it is connected, it is rarely used. Yet in our research it is valued for its permanence. In particular, it is regularly emphasised that after two years it has not been vandalised at all. In a neighbourhood where a great deal of street furniture and similar public art is vandalised and left to decay. This was particularly the case with items produced as part of earlier regeneration programmes, adding to a sense they had been a waste of money. The fact that the totem pole had resisted the passage of time helped it be aligned to a positive sense of place among research participants. Further, as a part of the public realm, the totem pole has sought to foster the creation of the representational space of activism within Wester Hailes, contesting heterotopic spaces, such as local foodbanks, the shopping centre, the Job Centre Plus and Police station, that seek to regiment the lives of residents through control of spatiality and temporality.

At their root the problems of deprived neighbourhoods like Wester Hailes are long-term. They are born of housing policies; the operation of housing markets and concomitant international finance markets; local economic development and the shifts in global capital as the economy restructures. Yet projects like those discussed here have at their heart at catalytic view of time – that a small investment will unleash unrecognised potential in the community. This leaves community workers and activists with a feeling described as “yetness” – that the projects will deliver their potential, but have not managed to yet. In regeneration policy, this belies a failure to recognise the long-term structural causes for neighbourhood decline and deprivation (Hastings 2000; Kintrea 2007; Matthews 2010). However, this belief in community transformation was also genuinely held by the community workers and activists. Hope for the future shaped short-term visions for transformatory change, while the reality of public spending cuts, continued economic depression and long-term structural problems stymied efforts to change the neighbourhood.
Conclusion

In this paper we have begun a theoretical discussion bringing together the geographical literature on spatialities with the literature on the sociology of temporalities, in a move to better understand the complex and nuanced spaces of deprivation being created in the UK’s contemporary urban form. Our empirical findings support a view of temporalities as socially constructed, contingent and power-laden. The temporalities created by policy impose a time framework upon individuals and communities - be that the imagined future of Wester Hailes as a “better place”; the time of the month-long budget in Universal Credit; or the time of desperate hunger created by benefit sanctions and maladministration. The temporalities experienced by communities and individuals rub up against these in conflict and contestation. These temporalities of conflict and contestation are reflected in their spatial forms, which are liminal, laden with opportunities for future change and activism, but yet reduced to spaces which consistently reproduce the neoliberal relations of power imposed upon them. The lived experiences of the spaces in the Wester Hailes community and those of foodbanks may be limited due to the effect of the ‘far’, but the latent potential for change at a neighbourhood level and beyond is potent. By thinking of these spatialities in line with Lefebvre’s triad, Foucault’s heterotopia and critical temporalities together, a context-oriented perspective on particular spatial and temporal urban forms can be presented and understood as ‘transient spatialities’ of poverty and deprivation.

By integrating critical temporalities, our approach allows us to rethink these spaces and temporalities and develop new opportunities that are empowering rather than the negativity that can be dominant within some theoretical approaches. For example, the temporality of temporary starvation embodied in foodbanks can be rethought along the lines of the slow-food movement, as community groups in Wester Hailes are doing - reappropriating green spaces the local authority can no longer afford to maintain to develop community gardens growing fresh vegetables and fruit for the community. Further, the futures of regeneration for Wester Hailes, and similar communities, can be found within their reciprocity, and within a temporality as experienced by their residents, rather than the imposed temporality of plans and policies, or the spaces of foodbanks and the temporalities of hunger.
References


Cooper, N., Purcell, S. & Jackson, R. (2014) "Below the Breadline: The relentless rise of food poverty in Britain" Church Action on Poverty, Oxfam & The Trussell Trust.


Green, C. (2014) 'Anger as Employment Minister Esther McVey denies food bank use is linked to welfare reforms'. The Independent (14/05/2014). Online at: www.independent.co.uk


The Trussell Trust (2014a) 'Foodbank stats'. Online at www.trusselltrust.org/stats


