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The violent uncanny: Exploring the material politics of austerity

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A B S T R A C T

Austerity erodes the foundations of our being and stunts the modalities of our becoming. This paper turns towards the austere materialities of decomposition, through the out-of-place presence of mould in the home, to document the violence of the austere housing crisis. Through an empirical engagement with the housing worlds of private and social renting tenants across the central belt of Scotland, I build upon geographical concerns with precarious home ownership, and the loss of material 'things', and begin to explore the decaying materialities of homes not-yet ours in ways that highlight how austerity is felt through the growth of, occupation by and presence of material 'things', in this case mould. By bringing into conversation housing studies and the geographies of violence, I introduce the concept of the 'violent uncanny' – the changing relation(s) between (non-)human actants through the collapsing of spatial ecologies that reshape 'known'/normative (spatial) relations between material things. In so doing, three broader contributions are made: (1) the paper engages with the housing crisis violently, arguing for the importance of using the language of violence, (2) it adds to existing work on austere materialities, thinking about the ways in which austerity materially 'presents' itself, in order to render visible aspects of austere living that remain hidden from view and (3) it introduces a new theoretical concept to interpret how austerity is experienced within the home. Together, these contributions seek to foreground the political importance of documenting lived precarity to expose austerity for what it is: violent.

1. Introduction

Austerity erodes the foundations of our being and stunts the modalities of our becoming. Geographical work on austerity has shifted across multiple terrains, consider for instance the spatial violence of toxic landscapes (Davies & Mah, 2020), the trauma of deindustrialised cityscapes (Emery, 2020; Pain, 2018) and the violent temporalities of truncation (in constricted potential and in death) by neoliberal logics of capital accumulation (Tyner, 2016). In turning towards a focus on the austere materialities of decomposition, this paper interrogates the heterogenous articulations of austerity through the out-of-place (Cresswell, 1996) presence(s) of mould within the domestic. Such a focus on the materialities of the home offers three broader contributions to the field of political geography: (1) this paper brings together disparate bodies of work in engaging with the housing crisis violently, (2) it advances work into austere materialities and, in so doing, (3) it introduces the concept of the *violent uncanny* in understanding the violent material politics of austerity.

Scotland has long been the home of the housing crisis, from cramped, unsanitary slum tenements (Wright, 2018) to the ongoing epidemic of homelessness. A 2020 report by *Shelter Scotland* estimates that a household becomes homeless every 17 minutes, with 11,665 households currently living in temporary accommodation (Wright, 2018). Crucially then, the housing crisis is largely associated with access *to* and possession *of* a home (Brill & Raco, 2021; Nachmany & Hananel, 2019). While such issues have an unquestionable importance in unpicking the geographies of the housing crisis, this paper calls for understandings to move beyond narratives of ownership and to think about the ways in which its violence is felt through the micro and multiple materialities of homes not-yet-ours. In turning towards austerity's occupation of the home through the materialities, spatialities and temporalities of the agentic, this paper documents the housing worlds of private and social renting tenants in the central belt of Scotland, with a specific focus on how they *live with* and *contest* the presence of mould. This paper sees mould as an agent of austerity, a symbol of the state's violent absence, and sees the housing crisis as not only indicative of a loss of the domestic but as productive of newly emergent – and violent – registers of co-existence between the (non-)human. A focus on the agentic materialities of mould is central to this paper's core argument: the housing crisis, and the multiple ways in which it appears in our lives, is a form of political violence, and mould is one way in which people come into contract with such violence.

In progressing this line of thought, this paper responds to significant gaps within the conceptualisation of austere housing. It firstly offers a materialist assessment of housing conditions under austerity, challenging the relegation of the non-human to the backdrop of austere happenings. This paper similarly introduces the discursive framings of the violent as a means of not only speaking to the actualities of living with non-human 'intruders'- through the psychic and spatial topographies of feeling/being 'on-edge' (Philo et al., 2019) - but to the political foundations of austerity itself. As a result, this paper will argue, that austerity's violent articulations are illustrated through the out-of-place presence of mould and in so doing, calls for a greater sensibility towards the material politics of austerity.

I begin by mapping the existing empirical and conceptual engagements within the realm of housing studies and its subsequent intersections with the austere in which I highlight a surprising reluctance to engage with the materialities of the domestic. In section III, I will briefly engage with the practicalities of exploring the materialities of the home in times of austerity. In section IV, I will introduce the paper's empirical material that works to construct mould as an agent of austerity. These discussions will work towards this paper's core contribution: the introduction of the *violent uncanny*. This concept is used to speak to the out-of-place presence of the agentic, when matter 'out there' moves in and occupies the home as an unwanted Other, an unpaying tenant. This paper will argue that this experience is a common characteristic of the housing crisis in which the most intimate of spaces become shared and, in so doing, offers scope to rethink the everyday lived experience of austerity. Furthermore, in section V, I will conclude by underpinning the role of the agential in the production of violent worlds, arguing that such engagements with the material politics of the housing crisis offers new insights for considering the violence(s) of austerity. Specifically, paying attention to the ways in which matter acts violently allows this paper to foreground the differing material and temporal articulations of political violence, bringing into view what has been previously hidden. It highlights the importance of speaking with the language of violence in order to work against it. Austerity's violence will also be rooted in matter, allowing us to consider not only what austerity takes away (food, money, community) but also what it brings (excess decay, mould, rats, insecurity). In being able to root austerity's e/affects in our own lives, in this case the lives of tenants, this paper offers insights in order to challenge the parts of austerity that remain normalised and, in turn, offers scope to challenge that which allows austerity to function the way it does.

2. Housing worlds: conceptualising the violent uncanny

2.1. Austerity and the housing crisis

There is no denying housing's role in the 2008 financial crisis through the situating of US mortgages in the global flows of financial capital, resulting in the diminishing of state spending, further exacerbated by pre-existing neoliberal policies, leading to the (un)making of the domestic through further privatisation (Van Lanen, 2020, pp. 1–22). The everyday 'personal crisis' (Hall, 2019) invoked by the housing crisis has been explored by Mooney and Poole (2005) into the counter-hegemonic movements against the transfer of housing stock in Glasgow and the correlated deployment of neoliberal logic surrounding community participation as a means of self-regulation. These mechanisms are internalised through explorations into the emotional and ontological. For example, McKee et al. (2019) offers a critical assessment of 'generation rent' and the correlated experiences of worthlessness, Hiscock et al. (2010) investigate experiences of ontological (in)security and the psycho-social benefits of housing tenure, while Abrams et al. (2019) discuss the gendered geographies at play in women's experiences in high-rise social housing. While some of this work extends beyond the timeframe of the austere it, nonetheless, reveals a genealogy that while underpinning the power-geometries at play in the distribution *of* and

access *to* housing opens up unexplored terrain for constituting the housing crisis as a form of political violence.

Significant engagements have, furthermore, been made with Berlant's (2011, pp. 1–268) 'crisis-ordinary' whereby the existential conditions of precarity within post-Fordist neoliberal economies (see Lewis et al., 2015) become banal features of the everyday. While these move beyond narratives of the housing crisis as indicative of the loss of matter, in this case exclusively the home, there remains scope to explore the centrality of non-human matter in austerity's articulations: as the way in which austerity is felt. A focus on austerity's material e/affects is documented by Pain (2018) in the slow violence of housing dispossession – as a form of chronic urban trauma – experienced by those in the Northeast of England. Pain's (2018) important reflections are representative of a greater geographical tendency to focus attention on what is 'lost' in times of austerity – in this case seeing austerity's affects through the loss or absence of matter, of broken furniture, empty cupboards and the closing of public spaces (see May et al., 2020; Hitchen, 2019). In seeking to add onto these geographical concerns, turning towards what austerity has brought with it, we can gain greater insight into different everyday experiences of neoliberal policy. Expanding what we know, exposing what has been (purposefully) hidden, allows us to challenge the foundations of austerity itself.

Beyond the geographical however there is an emergent concern with the vibrant materialities of the home that offer fruitful exploration. For instance, Soaita and McKee (2020) explore the (in)tangible materialities of the domestic from makeshift sofas to producing/feeling warmth (via electrical heaters). Acting as a basis for my work, Soaita and McKee (2020) offer scope to further explore the ways in which such (in)tangible materialities ('things' and 'feelings') become spatialised in the home. Taking this forward, this paper seeks to build upon geographical concern with austere materialities and begins to document the political presence, and not just absence, of matter in austere times (Raynor, 2017; Stenning, 2020).

2.2. Political ecologies of austerity: Matters of violence

Feminists have contested the hegemonic constructions of the home as a site of refuge. Since Pain's (1991) ground-breaking work on gendered violence, feminist geographers have attended to the spatial politics of domestic violence within the home and have considered the ways in which survivors flee, seek refuge and are displaced from their homes (see Brickell, 2012; Fluri, 2011; Warrington, 2001). Building upon feminist work, this paper proposes to extend feminist engagements with the violent to the material politics of austerity. Extending this spatial lens to the non-human is important in exploring the ways in which austerity's articulations are not only worlded but homed. There are, however, cautions to be had. Extending feminist theorisations of domestic violence to the matters of austerity and, more specifically, the framing of mould as an agent of political violence may risk being seen as counterproductive to feminist theorisations of domestic violence. I acknowledge here that there are notable, and politically salient, differences between mould and domestic abusers around intentionality. Mould harms its victims, as will be shown, indiscriminately, domestic violence abusers do not. I am cautious then in using feminist work on violence as a pillar in progressing my construction of mould as an agent of austere violence in that it risks reinforcing problematic tropes that abusers are not in control of their actions. I therefore prematurely caution against seeing mould, and other out-of-place materialities, as agents of domestic violence. They are, instead, indicative of the political violence of austerity which so happens to take place *in* the home. This, however, is not to say that feminist thinking limits what can be said about the material world. In fact, there is an extensive body of feminist materialist thinking that provides this paper with the necessary foundations to expose the ways in which material things become violent (see below). For instance, Sharp's (2021) exploration of what a forensic approach offers for considering the material in the feminist geopolitical,

allows this paper to explore the explicitly material aspects of everyday life while also giving space to consider how such 'events' are made sense of by offering a line of thought that allows us to capture the (fleshy) materialities of 'things' while being attentive to the ways in which these shape and are shaped by the representational.

In building upon feminist conceptualisations of the domestic, this paper takes forward emergent geographical concerns with violence (Galtung, 1969; Nixon, 2011, pp. 1–282) that are attentive to the material. Geographical work on matters of violence has been explored extensively, as seen in Springer and Le Billon's (2016) special issue on *Violence and Space,* where they set out a geographical agenda for engaging with the spatialities of violence and the ways in which violence shapes our everyday lives. Concerns have ranged from the violence of colonialism (Gregory, 2004), warfare (Flint, 2004), the violence of borders and political inaction (Davies et al., 2017), the already discussed geographical concern with gendered violence (Pain, 1991; Valentine, 1992) and, perhaps more recently, the intersections between structural inequalities, capitalist petrochemical infrastructures and the colonial as illustrated in Davies' (2019) adoption of Nixon's (2011, pp. 1–282) slow violence to explore the toxic geographies of Cancer Alley, Louisiana. Davies (2019) exceptionally draws our attention to the decaying materialities of toxic spaces, in which our homely borders –windowpanes and doorframes - begin to erode. The identification of decaying material landscapes brings into sharp focus the presence of violence - that which is no longer 'out of sight'. Davies (2019: p.11) skilfully denotes the ways in which violence occurs before our very eyes: "slow observations and corporeal reasoning have allowed the 'deferred causalities' (Nixon, 2011, pp. 1–282, p. 61) of toxic spaces to gradually perceive - if only partially – slow violence taking place". To this end, there is emergent theoretical thought that is challenging the assumed invisibility of violence through a specific focus on the material. Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar (2019), for instance, explore the everyday right to be weary in negotiating the housing crisis which acts as a "form of suffering and violence that is felt as a kind of steady on-going form of endurance, rather than a sudden eruption … [it is] neither passionate nor intense, but instead listless and still, generating feelings of inertia, flatness, impasse" (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar (2019), pp. 155-6). The framework of violence therefore not only offers scope for theorising the ways in which austerity co-opts the everyday temporalities of life - of being slowly worn down - but also space for assessing the ways in which tenants use these temporalities to resist their violent subjectification.

2.3. Towards the violent uncanny: the material politics of austerity

The understanding of the world as intrinsically interconnected, always already relational and constantly in the making (see Truman, 2019; Fox & Alldred, 2019; Latour, 1996), is integral to the reconceptualisation of the anthropocentrism embedded within both housing and violence scholarship. This paper therefore calls for thinking materially about the domestic and begins to see the home as a site of co-existence between multiple differing trajectories of becoming in which networks co-evolve under specific political – even violent – conditions.

In taking forward this material concern with the austere and its reconstitution of the socio-political relationship between 'things', of more-than-human worlds whereby the human is "just-one-amongst-many-others, co-mingling, jostling, jousting, jesting" (Philo, 2017, p. 257), this paper appeals specifically to Barad's (2003) posthumanist performativity and the intra-active. Barad (2003: p.813) uses the work of physicist Niels Bohr – and the rejection of a 'atomistic metaphysics' that sees non-human entities as ontologically singular - to theorise a posthumanist performative account of the production of material bodies, to argue for a causal relationship between discursive practices and material phenomenon. 'Intra'-action as opposed to interaction, then, speaks to the ways in which 'things' do not exist as independent entities whereby "intra-actions are causally constraining

nondeterministic enactments through which matter-in-the-process-of-becoming is sedimented out and enfolded in further materialisations" (ibid: p.823). 'Things', in short, are not ontologically separate entities, but are constantly co-mingling and are always already multiple. The intra-active has been taken up extensively by geographers concerned with visceralities, fluidities and bodily 'bigness' (Colls, 2007). There is however scope to build upon these geographical engagement by applying such thought to (non-)human relations.

This concern with the co-mingling of actants is inherently hinged upon the theorisation of 'thing power' and, more broadly, the vitalistic. Through Spinozian thought, namely the construction of 'vital' continuity between (non-)human phenomenon, Bennett (2010: p.4) foreground the ways in which 'stuff' – "glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick" – come to act in the world and are both affected and affective. Key to this material vitality is the ability of non-human 'things' to not only inhibit the will of their human counterparts, but to also act as 'quasi agents', even forces, that enact their own trajectories. Bennett's (2010) theorisation of agential vitalism is therefore fundamentally embedded within the notion that non-human matter ceases to be inert.

Bennett's (2010) work has been picked up by geographers seeking to document austerity's e/affects. Strong (2019) explores the vital (bio) politics of food poverty and the ways in which disciplinary mechanisms are utilised to determine the 'deservingness' of hungry bodies. Within Strong's (2019) assessment, it is clear that the material is integral, both as absent and present matter, to the experience of austerity's violence by acting *on* and *through* the body in the form of hunger. An engagement with austerity's affective materialities are similarly explored through the psychosocial geographies of 'feeling the squeeze' embodied through the absent materialities of tins and the imagery of the empty cupboard (Stenning, 2020), in Hitchen's (2019: p.102) uncanny atmospheres and paranoid temporalities emplaced within public libraries, denoting the ways in which austerity is "made both affectively and materially present", the careful/caring knitting of clothes (Hall & Jayne, 2016), the virtual spaces of credit scores (Anderson et al., 2019) to the vital materialities of the mobile phone (Hall, 2019). These examples reflect the ways in which violent atmospheres are intimately-felt through the delayed temporalities of emergent 'things' thereby providing scope to move beyond hegemonic focus on austere material absences to begin to theorise the violent presence, even absent-presences, of the non-human.[1]

This paper does not argue that the geographies of austerity lack a concern with materiality, to do so would be unjust. Instead, it develops a line of thought that demonstrates the systemic violence inherent within their production. Without such engagements the former, using Philo's (2017: p.257) concept of the 'less-than-human' (denoting the centrality of violence to the vibrancy of matter), is seldom "alert to what diminishes the human, cribs and confines it, curtains or destroys its capacities … not what renders it lively, but what cuts away at that life". Specific to Philo's (2017) argument is that a turn towards more-than-human thought seldom sees the ways in which non-human 'things' – "of machines and bodies; of plants, animals, flesh, blood, bone, gut" (ibid: p.257) – are productive of the less vital instances of exhaustion, decay and pain. Building on Philo's (2017) work, this paper seeks to readdress hegemonic articulations of non-human lifeworlds which are largely concerned with the positive affirmation of the agential – that which assists or enhances human life. Similarly to Philo (2017), I underpin a reluctance for materialist thought to engage explicitly with the violent. In cases where such engagements are made, theorisations of

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[1] There has also been work undertaken at the intersections between the geographical and psychoanalytic with regards to the materialities of the domestic (Hitchings (2004) on the 'jostling actors' and 'creative presences' within the domestic as a means of living at home with 'someone' nonhuman; Ginn (2013) on the sticky entanglements of life through the 'domestic monster' – the slug – and the formation of a relational politics of distance).

harm are hinged upon the spectacular - the expulsion of blood, the breaking of bones, the killing of slugs (Ginn, 2013). This paper therefore reflects an attempt to extend these less-than-human theorisations to the modalities of violence that are banal, structural, and sometimes slow. In so doing, this paper rethinks austerity's present violences through mould's (affective) presences in the home, positioning the non-human as an agent of political violence. To speak to austerity's violences, this paper therefore introduces the concept of the violent uncanny as a means of speaking to the problematic and harmful relationships between things that feel familiar and thereby are afforded a sense of 'acceptability' in times of austerity. This paper illuminates austerity's violence then by documenting the uncanny presence of mould – of that which creeps into the home and occupies its corners like some ghostly entity that even in its absence – after hours of scrubbing – it remains ever present. What makes this uncanniness violent is austerity's ability to shrink space, collapsing the public into the private and vice versa, which in turn has real bodily and emotional affects that lead to the wearing down of the tenant. The violent uncanny then allows us to understand the everydayness of austerity's articulations and the importance of matter in determining austerity's power.

3. Methodology

The empirical material that follows is grounded within a ethnographic project, using interview, photographic and participatory mapping data to work collaboratively with private renting and social housing tenants in the city of Glasgow and North Lanarkshire – areas of significant deprivation (The Scottish Government, 2020). This project was undertaken at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent pivot to online research. Participants were thereby recruited through advertisements made on social media, with interviews and other activities undertaken digitally to ensure participation in 'live' research at a distance (Salmons, 2020). There were 16 participants in total. Prior to the interview, participants were asked if they would like to take part in more participatory methods, for example 'photovoice'/elicitation (see Soaita and McKee, 2020). For this, participants were asked to take picture of their home or anything they felt drawn to. These were then used to shape our discussions. The visualisation of the violent conditions in which tenants live does, however, raise concerns regarding the objectification of visceral violation (Harley, 2012). While my decision to not enter the homes of the participants at the time unworks some of these issues, the inherent visibility upon which the empirical data is hinged remains an area of personal discomfort. Specifically, this paper publicly documents the material violence of the housing crises and in so doing risks making a spectacle of the harm the participants experience.[2] To mitigate these concerns, although never fully resolve, I chose to share my own experiences with mould with the participants.

Alongside photovoice the participants were also given the option to engage in an exercise of mapping which sought to explore the relational spatialities of the domestic as a means of illustrating who/what is 'in' or 'out' of place (Cresswell, 1996). Participants were asked prior to the interview to sketch the space of their home and to map onto these the location of 'things'. During the process of analysis, the maps were digitised (as shown below) to triangulate the empirical material – allowing different facets of the lived experience to be overlapped. The adoption of this method sits alongside the onto-epistemological rootedness of this research in the feminist new materialist – as a means of "[doing] research differently" (Kesey et al., 2005, p. 144) - and its subsequent concern with exposing the vibrancy of matter. As Askins (2018: p.1289) argues, "collaboration as resistance holds the potential

of moving/becoming beyond rational and verbal selves and knowledges, to include other local capacities for raising awareness of injustices and mobilising community support and action for change".

While the inclusion of the self is not central to this paper's findings it became a credible means of engaging with participants in ethical and reciprocal ways. Its inclusion also brought with it practical benefits. Initially, participants justifiably assumed that I would not understand their experiences based upon bodily and circumstantial differences. My institutional identity,[3] combined with my age and student status and still 'living at home' became a barrier to participants opening up. As Alison comments during the interview, ""*I guess because you live at home, you're removed from it. You don't really have to deal with it.*". Alison's response prompted me to reconsider how the participants viewed me and my relationship to both them and austerity, spontaneously resulting in me sharing some of my personal experiences with her. This seemed to alleviate Alison's interview anxieties and encouraged her to use our 'sameness' (although we remain remarkably different) to see the specifics of her experience as shared. From here, I chose to openly explore my own "personal conditions of austerity" (Hall, 2017) with the rest of the participants. While I am cautious that this focus on the biographical legitimises the Cartesian 'I' or even the 'god-trick' (Rose, 1997), I position this a method of critical feminist knowledge production in which my experiences with the worldly phenomenon of mould fosters reciprocal research relations through a collective exploration of our (differently) violent conditions.

Furthermore, the inclusion of my own experiences of living with mould unquestionably shaped the analysis of the empirical material. I began to analysis the material generated during the fieldwork period by coding the data into thematic groups via open/axiel coding (see Secor, 2010). The 'reading' of the material, however, felt 'easy'. The themes popped out with ease because what was written felt familiar and was somewhat already known which removed a proportion of the emotional and intellectual labour of analysis. It was however possible that my own experiences could shut down those that differed from my own - bulldozing the 'quieter' themes, the material that was astutely specific to the participants. To alleviate the severity of this, the participants were consulted throughout the analysis phase and were asked whether they felt the themes that emerged, and the reading of their stories, were reflective of their experiences. With participant consent, some parts of interview transcripts, photographs, and maps were also shared with colleagues and mentors who were asked to analysis the material for alternative readings.

4. Violent conditions: the 'uncanny' presence of the more-than-human

In mapping the violence of austerity, this paper turns to the materialities of the housing crisis through the multiple presences of mould, and in some cases smaller non-humans, within the private and social renting sector. These materialities act as agents of austerity by reshaping our attachments to our homes. This paper further explores mould's spatial occupation of the home, its affectivity as something ever present despite its absence and begins to explore the management of the austere through the issues of abjection and expulsion. Following tenant's attempts to renegotiate their new relations to their homes provides insight into the ways in which austerity is not only felt materially but violently, and uncannily. The uncanny is documented in three different scenes: the uncanny presence of 'things', the ways in which this uncanniness is violent and, latterly, the ways in which tenants negotiate the violent uncanny.

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[2] This discomfort is also concerned with the potential voyeuristic benefits of researching, writing, and publishing research depend upon the systemic misery of others (Bondi, 1990).

[3] Which problematically masks my own precarity.

4.1. The spatial articulations of 'things': uncanny spaces

The housing crisis is more than not owning our own homes, it is a spatial violence that makes the spaces in which we live fall apart, erode, even crumble. It is experienced through having non-human Others share the spaces we claim as our own, permeating the borders between inside and out, of non-human 'things' that make claim to our space as un-wanted and unpaying tenants. This 'moving in' of the Other, in this case mould, is experienced through differing temporalities of emergence. From the running of water down the living-room wall, strips of black-speckled mould forming around a burst pipe in the kitchen, to brown water marks eroding the liminal spaces of the ceiling (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1 visually illuminates the heterogenous materialities in which the non-human appears present within the domestic as both hard and fluid in texture, light and dark in appearance, alongside the emergent presence of mould transgressing from water to darked speckles to the erosion of homely borders, in turn, marking the different textualities in the emergent presences of the non-human is evident. Throughout, acts of 'thing power' (Bennett, 2010), of non-human agency and their ability to act on and within the parameters of the domestic, unworking the fixed materialities of the home (walls, doors, ceilings) as destructive agents of the austere, erode. As Amy (a graduate in her 20s, renting in the private sector) continues, "*There had always been a mould issue the whole time we lived there … little bits in the paint. There was a damp patch above the shower. Our ceiling actually fell in due to the damp last year. We kept phoning the landlord and telling them the roof was beginning to sag and obviously that there was a leak … and they never came. Then one day we were in and the whole thing just crashed down with the light and the shower and … everything. It could've been really dangerous*". Here, we can see the vibrancy of non-human matter through their ability to exert power *over* and *through* other non-human bodies in this case, the ceiling (Bennett, 2010). These destructive presences are produced through the slow temporalities uti-lised within the geographies of violence (Nixon, 2011, pp. 1–282). While a focus on slow violence is productive in explaining experiences of austerity, such a hegemonic focus risks seeing austerity as solely expe-rienced as a linear deterioration of 'things'. Through such a lens, aus-terity risks only being seen through the absence or loss of matter. While the loss of matter is undoubtedly present within the experience of the housing crisis (Van Lanen, 2020), the empirical detail here indicates that the austere housing experience is far more nuanced. Bypassing these different experience risks homogenising austerity's violent manifesta-tions and means we are unable to consider the ways in which austere violence may be highlighted not only by carpet-less floors (Stenning, 2020) or empty cupboards (May et al., 2020) but through the material presence of 'things'. I therefore argue that the discussions here readdress this theoretical rupture, in turn, decentring the human as the sole inflictor of violence.

In discussing the emergent presence of matter, tenants embodied a sensitivity towards matter's out-of-placeness (Cresswell, 1996). Mould's ability to move into the home further highlights the porosity of homely borders as expressed by Hitchings (2004) but reveals the ways in which experiences of austerity, in this case embodied through cuts to public services and the pushing of precarious bodies to 'the edge' (Philo et al., 2019) through the legalities of private tenancy. The violent spatialisa-tions of austerity is further highlighted here where, for instance, 'outside matter' – that which belongs *out there* - of water, bugs and even rats - spill *in*. In such an assessment the home becomes austerity's battlefield – the site in which it is negotiated, contested, and most intimately-felt. The violent liminality of the home – the ease in which its borders can be eroded - is illustrated in the map produced by Jennifer (Fig. 2).

Jennifer's (a graduate in her 20s, renting in the private sector) map visualises the ways in which the non-human permeates the 'fixed' bor-ders of the built environment by transgressing the taken-for-granted spatialisations of the home which seek to legitimise the distinctions between the 'inside' and 'outside' (Blunt, 2005). In line with Baxter and Brickell (2014: p.134), the destroying of the home's 'fixed' borders is indicative of the unmaking of the home – whereby such 'unmaking' is marked by a "precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of home are unintentionally or deliberately … divested, damaged or even destroyed". Mould's out-of-placeness in the home was discussed by all participants who routinely sought to inscribe discourses of spatial belonging onto (non-)human bodies.

Cathy (a single parent in her 50s, living in social housing) reflects on where non-human agents (here beetles, attracted to the damp mould in her home) belong:
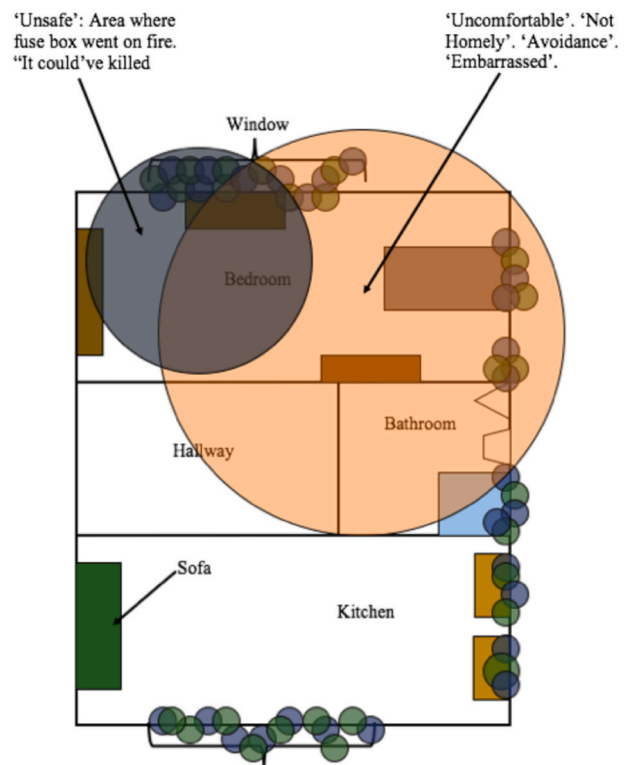

Fig. 1. Watermarks stretching beyond tape placed on the ceiling to try and keep water out (Charlotte, student in her 20's, living in social housing).

Fig. 2. Participatory map produced by Jennifer showing the spatial occupation of mould on the periphery of her rented flat. Mould is seen in the blue/green circles lining the parameter of the image. These circles were picked to closely resemble the choices participants made in their own drawing before they were digitised.

"I think part of the embarrassment is that you know these things shouldn't be in your house. They don't belong here …. We have wee black beetles that crawl everywhere, and they shouldn't be here either. They make my skin crawl, and they make you think you're the one to blame. That it's your fault they're here. That you must be dirty or not taking care of yourself … but I guess you wouldn't be freaked out if you saw beetles in your garden … but there's something about them being inside, on your things …".

The ability of non-humans to move easily into the spaces they are seen to not belong in has intense psychological effects on Cathy. Her embarrassment is directly a result of the home's porosity, the decaying and crumbling of its exterior due to poor upkeep and diminished resources that allow non-human actants to express their power. Cathy identifies the collapsing of spatial ecologies in her encounter with the non-human whereby a violent relationality is produced through the out-of-placeness of familiar 'things' – in this case greeting beetles in the bedroom as opposed to the garden (see Hollin & Giraud, 2022). Such violence then is underpinned through encountering the known in the unknown – the familiar in the strange. The presence of certain non-human things can be seen here to embody the violent uncanny. Specifically, the presence of beetles marks the shrinking of space in which these beetles move into the home and, through their creeping presence, can make the tenant feel on-edge, to make their skin crawl. Spatial violence is therefore depicted here as a loss of the spatial, challenging the existential ruination of capitalist ownership, through the spatialised practices of domination that push the human 'out'. While this depiction of austere materialities is theoretically embedded within a restricted conceptualisation of loss, failing to denote the violent excesses of decay, this focus nonetheless underpins austerity as a process of violent expulsion (Ginn, 2013).

The out-of-place presence of the non-human is also experienced through the contamination of the personal. Amanda (a student in her 20's, renting in the private sector) discusses the destruction of her personal items and how this shapes the emotions tied to selling her possessions – here a 'mouldy box': *"I felt so bad because although I wiped everything off, selling that to someone feels like, 'Oh what if the mould grows back' and to think that I sold that to them isn't very nice … I was so worried they'd think I was dirty …".* Amanda's attachments to her contaminated possessions highlights the ways in which austerity's collapsing of space – the bringing together of the near and the far, of her home and that of the 'buyer', brings previous distant bodies into potentially violating relations, with the re-emergence of mould in distant localities re-enforcing the epistemic violence of social categorisation. In this case, being seen to be 'dirty'. Interestingly, we can see the ways in which past trauma creeps back into the present whereby the uncanny emergence of mould in the home is highlighted through its ability to transport the tenant back to past times of insecurity.

Further, the contamination of the personal is also experienced through the warping of austere temporalities. Mould slowly encroaches into the home – denoted by its heterogenous materialities and, by extension, the spectrum of its emergence (creeping, spilling, crawling) – yet this is coupled with the sensation that it appears in *'a click of the fingers' (Alison).* As Amanda discusses in relation to the spread of mould onto her 'things': *"I had wiped it down and probably a few weeks later, I had to do it again. It was really quite fast. I wouldn't keep up with it".* The spread of mould in Amanda's flat is visualised in Fig. 3 and 4.

In Fig. 3 and 4 we can see a clear spatial spread, with water spreading from the outside in, running down the window onto the corners of the wall and onto the outside of the box, denoting a linear deterioration in the decay of the home (Pain, 2018). However, this spreading is described as 'quick' and 'fast' therefore indicating that urbicidal acts of ruination are not solely contextualised by a slow temporality. Greater engagement must therefore be made with the heterogeneous temporalities of the non-human in which violence is not only 'slowed down' but also sped up. This discussion therefore extends Wilkinson and

Fig. 3. Mould and condensation forming around Amanda's windowpane.

Fig. 4. Mould creeping into Amanda's flat, running from the window down the wall with dark circular marks on the wall leftover prints from Amanda's attempts to '[wipe] it down'.

Ortega-Alcázar (2019: p.155) depiction of the housing crisis whereby individuals are "slowly worn down until they no longer have the strength or capacity to resist" instead highlighting austerity's homely manifestations as that felt through heterogeneous time-space rhythms. Within this discussion there is also the mobilisation of the intra-active in which multiple 'things' – bodies, water, everyday objects – are not predisposed to violence before their coming together in the space of the home.

The violent uncanny acts as an explanatory framework for our everyday encounters with familiar phenomena in differing or unusual ways. It is seen here through the encounter of earthly matter – that which belongs 'out there'– within the confines of the home. Such uncanny encounters are indicative of our violent worlding through this out-of-placeness resulting in a shift in our ontological positioning whereby our precarity – as a psychological and spatial on-edgeness (Philo et al., 2019) - brings us into hyper-relations with the non-human actants we had previously been detached from (Ginn, 2013). The violent uncanny then accounts for this spatial constriction – collapsing ecologies of existence – in which everyday encounters and normative relations with the non-human become radically rethought and ever increasingly proximate.

4.2. Affective present-absences: uncanny sensations

Constructing mould's emergent presence within the home as largely out-of-place is similarly felt through the production of new affective and emotive worlds of co-existence. Mould's presence in the home produced feelings of paranoia, of being 'on-edge', of feeling 'dirty', 'unsafe', even abandoned in the site of one's 'own home'. These were differently embodied through participants being in a state of perpetual anticipation – of feeling 'on-edge' by being constantly "on the lookout" for the (re)

emergence of out-of-place 'things' in the home. Charlotte speaks of this in relation to a beetle infestation, *"There's always that sense of unease … Sometimes you find yourself anticipating that they'll be there, just waiting on them, you know … You're always prepared".* Here, the (past) presence(s) of the non-human produce lingering atmospheres of expectation. This coincides with the stretching out of time in which the present 'jumps scale' (Katz, 2001) and is transported 'back' to the past through the production of atmospheric memories which constructs feelings of 'sameness' between 'then' and 'now' (Hitchen, 2019). Through this empirical grounding, Hitchen's (2019) construction of paranoia as a collective experience of austerity is palpable. Hitchen (2019) connects this to Freud's (2003) 'uncanny'[4] which "[describes] the materialist nature of affective atmospheres in that it has shape, an electric empiricity; and whilst this evidence is barely there … we feel its presence" (Hitchen, 2019, p. 11). After attempts to remove mould from the home, washing walls and wiping it down, mould is 'barely there' yet its presence is always felt. The violent presence of the non-human is therefore not only underpinned through its invasion of the spatial, the 'down here' but of the atmosphere 'up there'.

Similarly, the out-of-place presence of the non-human was associated with feelings of dirtiness and the construction of the socially *dirty body*. As Cathy comments, *"[Mould] looks dirty and makes you feel dirty … it really does become part of you"*, as well as in my discussion with Amanda,

> "I've felt like that a lot of my life. Living in a house with mould … cause when I was younger, we always had it, and I always felt like, you know in school there was always that kid that people thought was a bit gross and a bit dirty, the kind of smelly one, I always thought 'Oh is that going to be going to be me? It doesn't feel like you are fully living that human existence if you're having to share you space with these other things. It's like humans are supposed to be the most intelligent. We've put up walls to stop other things from getting in, to keep us dry and warm and to have things encroach on that space then you think that you've failed because these things are still managing to get in".

The affective presence of the non-human - that while the non-human may no longer be there 'in the flesh' or occupy the home in a physical form, the tenant can still feel its presence - is understood here through the construction of an inside/outside and, by extension, insiders/outsiders, with the unmaking of these categories reducing the corporeal to something 'less-than-human' (Philo, 2017). This underpins a relational ontology in which the Other becomes part of the self. The non-human therefore affectively enforces the structurally violent (Galtung, 1969) in which Amanda's fear of being the 'smelly one' marks the difference between the potential, the clean, and the actual, the 'dirty'.

The production of these atmospheric sensations is hinged upon the sensory. As highlighted by the participants above in that while mould may be absent from the home, it is carried with us through the visceralities of the body and our belongings, in turn, demonstrating the ways in which austere violence moves through (non-)human 'stuff'. The non-human's affective capacities are thereby experienced through "forces of encounter that involve sensual and somatic experiences of feeling, touching, smelling … that increase (or decrease) a subject's capacity to act, move and think" (Roelvink & Zolkos, 2015, p. 48). Such an assessment here progresses concerns with the new materialist noted above and its positive affirmation of the agential by foregrounding the ways in which the non-human affectively violates the body. There is a trajectory of psychanalytic thought concerning the abject and the role of dirty corporealities that further explains the way mould's presence in the home makes the participant's feel 'dirty'. Douglas (cited in Campkin,

2013, p. 49) for instance theorises that dirt is matter out-of-place and which thereby disrupts the social order: "reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to nonbeing, form to formlessness, life to death". In this case, feeling dirty is a direct byproduct of a disrupted social order, of something familiar becoming strange. It is produced by the uncanny.

4.3. Negotiating the uncanny presence of 'things': Spatial b/orderings

Kristeva's (1982) abjection acts as an interesting explanatory framework for conceptualising the ways in which the uncanny presence of mould, and other non-humans, is negotiated through acts of expulsion. In this regard, the abject refers not only to the falling away of bodily fluids from the flesh but the removal of 'stuff' from the home. The violence of austerity and its emplacement within the domestic was thereby negotiated through active attempts to hide or remove the non-human and, by extension, producing new borders of division in managing an austere co-existence with the Other. Jennifer discusses her attempts to remove mould from her home, *"I'd find myself trying to clean it off, like 'oh my god, if I clean it off things will be fine' [she half sings]. But obviously they'd come back within a day as big as ever".* The physical act of removing mould from the home for Jennifer is an important way of challenging the emotions its presence brings in which she is able to convince herself that 'things will be fine'. The wiping down of mould shows an active attempt by Jennifer to resist her worlding by confronting expressions of non-human vibrancy and, by extension, the presence of the non-human in the domestic in a way that is illustrative of a 'spatialised warfare' (Grondin, 2011). The concept of worlding is derived from the work of Spivak as a top-down imperial power relation which is inscribed and reshapes the rhythms of colonised lands as a means of legitimising unequal power relations (Manalansan IV, 2015). It is largely seen as a discursive, even messy and imaginative, process that involves the making of new worlds (see Manalansan IV (2015) for greater exploration). In this regard, Jennifer's attempts to remove the non-human is indicative of an active resistance to our austerity's making of violent worlds.

In cases where acts of abjection were not viable, participants sought to learn to co-exist with the non-human by rendering their presence invisible as a means of *"just living with it"* (Cathy). Interestingly here, other non-human entities are used to facilitate our distancing from the toxic materialities of mould. Amanda's placing of a storage box in front of her mould-covered wall similarly reflects this in which the non-human was hidden *"because it looked horrible [we laugh] … And it was starting to spread onto my things, so I was trying to get rid of it so it wouldn't spread …".* While for Amanda hiding the mould is concerned with creating the aesthetic of the home, her decision to do so draws parallel to her previous reflections in which the hiding of matter acts as a corrective mechanism, in turn, distancing one's self from the materialities of the home and, by extension, our worlding as the 'smelly kid'. Amanda, in the case of the abject, draws "in the subject [mould] in order to repel it" (Longhurst, 2001, pp. 1–135, p. 28). To this end, the construction of the home as 'feeling dirty' are emplaced here through not only hiding the presence of the non-human but hiding from it. While this involves distancing or detaching oneself from the Other, it nonetheless reflects a desire to spatially 'push back', a means of regaining ownership over the home and, by extension, reclaiming that which *"did not feel like mine"* (Amanda).

In contrast to the emplacement of violence articulated above, such spatialisations are denoted here as illustrative of the power of the non-human in which we are unable to expel it from our space; instead, it expels us. As a result of individual's avoiding the home, austerity's manifestations can be seen to be felt as a chronic state of placelessness - of not having a space nor belonging in space. A focus on how individuals not only inhabit the home differently but also avoid it contributes to Philo et al's (2019) conceptualisation of precarious urbanisms in which austerity pushes the human body to the socio-spatial margins - of being

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[4] Freud's (2003) 'uncanny' is located within the sphere of the frightening (Hitchen, 2019) in which something unknown emerges from the familiar. In this case, encountering familiar 'things' in new spaces as indicative of an out-of-placeness or that something does not feel quite right.

on-edge and on-the-edge.

Moreover, the participants respond to the uncanny presence of mould by redefining the parameters of the home. This is done by constructing self-imposed 'no-go' areas in which parts of the home occupied by unwanted non-human Others were 'cut off' and the space of 'my home' redefined. Cathy tells me, "*I don't go in the room. I can't bring myself to do it. It smells. It's disgusting to look at. I'm embarrassed by it. Sometimes, I think by just not going in, then it doesn't exist. Then I don't need to think about it. If I can't see it then it's almost as if it's no' there*". It is therefore clear that individual's do not always avoid the home in its entirety, but activity avoid certain spaces. The shutting off of certain parts of the home as a means of self-preservation, illuminates these acts of avoidance as a means of visually and psychologically displacing the presence of the non-human. The digitised map, produced through a combination of Sarah's own map and discussions from her interview, visually shows the 'cutting off' of parts of her home (see Fig. 5).

Sarah's map shows that she responds to the presence of mould by artificially constructing distance and by limiting the ways in which she occupies the home. Such reflections effectively demonstrate the ways in which violence is spatialised in corners, under beds, in pipes and cupboards in a way that progresses geographical engagements with agentic materialities, the micro-spatialities of the home and ultimately the violence of austerity. The implementation of these self-imposed 'no-go areas' requires a process of bordering that seeks to physically separate the home into separate bubbles which are subsequently policed through the co-option of other non-human objects. This 'cutting off' of space coincides with Mezzadra and Neilson's (2013, p. 312) discussion on the production of physical borders as central to enforced exclusions whereby doors are used here to determine who and what gains access to or is excluded from the home. Such acts of bordering act as an attempt to reinforce the previously transgressed distinctions between the 'inside' and 'out' and acts as a means of purifying the self and the home (Campkin, 2013). Evident within this, however, are the contradictions at play in seeing the 'home' as safe/not safe (see Pain, 1991; Tuan, 2004;

Fig. 5. Map denoting the construction of 'no-go' areas and the implementation of new borders of living. Each circle reflects each individual 'feeling' attached to individual rooms (showing how they overlap).

Valentine, 1992; Whitzman, 2007). It is clear that mould encroaches on the domestic space and increasingly alienates people from their homes and routinely undermines their attempts to make a home. The idea of 'no-go areas' has been explored extensively within work on the geographies of fear concerned, for instance, with documenting tactics (avoiding parks or commuting at certain times of the day) deployed by women to avoid public acts of violence (see Pain, 1997) or exploring the imagined geographies of race at play in the partitioning of urban space into areas as safe/not safe for specific communities (Webster, 2003). The making of such borders suggests that mould's presence in the home makes the participants feel unsafe.

5. Conclusion: Violent geographies – Towards the uncanny politics of austere matter

The violence of austerity is diverse in its articulations. On the one hand, austere life is underpinned by the everyday negotiation of the differing spatialities and materialities of the home and, on the other, the immaterial flows and affective charges which press upon our bodies violently. Lived austerity has long been established as indicative of the loss of the material (with the notable exception of Hitchen, 2019) – of carpet-less floors (Stenning, 2020), rumbling stomachs (May et al, 2020) and dying phones (Hall, 2020) – yet a focus on the material politics of the housing crisis, underpins austerity's multiplicities, its excesses, its spillages, its presences. As a result, this article has grounded the wounding and worlding effects of the austere housing crisis in the out-of-placeness of mould, and other non-humans, within the domestic, illustrating the ways in which our everyday materialities – beyond but not isolated from the corporeal – are productive of violent conditions.

In so doing, this paper has made three broader contributions to ongoing geographical enquiry. Firstly, it has mapped a conceptual approach that has engaged with the housing crisis violently. Utilising ongoing geographical work concerned with the intersections between the violent and the temporal (Davies et al., 2017; Nixon, 2011, pp. 1–282), this article has foregrounded the productivity of using the language of violence in getting to the nuances of austere living while simultaneously rethinking the hegemony of the violently slow - the still, the stagnant, the creeping. Moving beyond concerns with the linear deterioration of life – that which underpins matters of austerity as indicative of the loss or absence of matter – calls for a rethinking of our understanding of violence and its warping of time (Hitchen and Raynor, 2020). This article has gone some way in addressing this emergent geographical concern, denoting the multiple articulations of violence and their entanglement with the differently temporal through the fast, slow, intense, and continuous encroachment of space. The recall to the language of violence then is not only theoretically productive in speaking to the existential conditions of capitalist accumulation but through capital's ability to violate our minds and (housing) worlds, the language of violence places greater political emphasis on mediating our present condition and fighting for systemic transformation. The language of violence then not only speaks to the realities and everydayness of austerity's spatio-temporalities but can, and should, be harnessed as a tool for change.

Such a focus on austerity's violations, secondly, has advanced ongoing work into austere materialities (particularly with non- and more-than-human matter). In line with this article's contributions to the theorisation of violence, it has similarly built upon existing focus on material absence within the geographies of austerity and has pressed for an exploration of austerity's (material) presences (see Hitchen, 2019). More specifically, this paper argues for the importance of thinking about the housing crisis and austerity beyond the absence of housing (or lack of resources e.g., 'empty cupboards') and, in turn, looks at what is violently present: in this case, mould. Specifically, this paper has documented mould, and other invasive non-humans, as an agent of austerity that has violently pushed tenants to forge new restrictive register of co-existence which ultimately diminish our attachment to
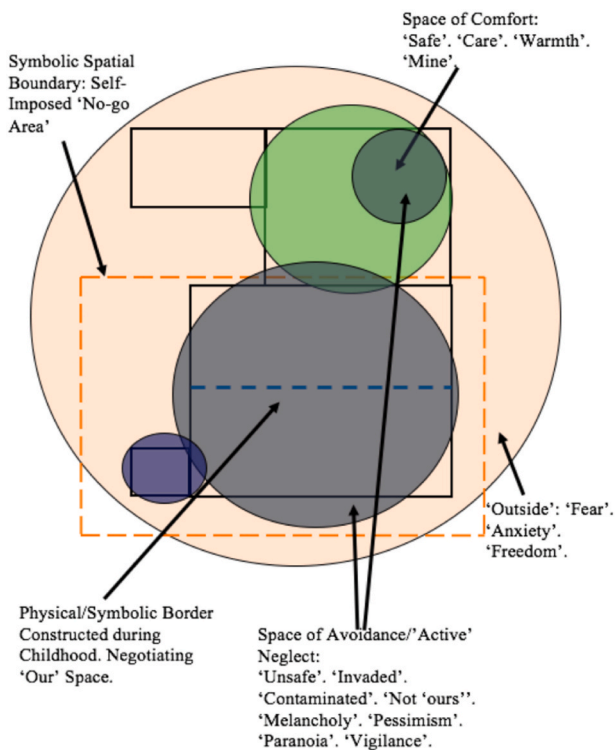
places that once felt like ours: the home. Austerity is undoubtedly marked by a complex and violent entanglement between a variety of bodies: hungry bodies, indebted bodies, hopeful bodies, non-human bodies, mouldy bodies. In so doing, this article calls for a deeper engagement with austerity's entanglements with matter - the ways in which matter becomes the registers in which austerity moves and is felt - and its ability to act on, through and against these bodies, constraining their becoming through a violent spatial and affective relationality. In doing this, the work of Philo (2017) and the theorisation of a less-than-human geography, illuminating the ways in which matter is not only integral to the maintenance of vitality in times of austerity, but is, in itself, violent, requires far greater attention within the discipline in further advancing engagements with matters *of* and *in* austerity. This paper has used Philo's (2017) work to rethink the positive focus on vibrant materialities, noting the ways in which the out-of-place presence of mould, and its vibrant occupation of the home, exudes a violent negativity. This paper's focus on materialisms, however, is not without political concern. Specifically, its micrological focus on matter might, in part, turn attention away from the all-too-human landlords that inflict such violence on tenants for profit maximisation or shutdown attention on the in-human workings of private property. Such engagements with these issues are essential, yet a focus on matter remains crucially important. It roots broader political debates in the flows and experiences of everyday life. It allows for the housing crisis, and the violent politics and relations that underpin it, to become not only visible but also understandable. The focus on matter has therefore allowed this paper to highlight the real effects of austerity on and in our own lives. Power for change lies within this realisation.

Thirdly, and most substantially, bringing into dialogue the above concern with the violent and material has assisted in this paper's conceptualisation of the *violent uncanny*. The violent uncanny speaks to the relations between (non-)human actants that are familiar, relegated to the status of the banal, but are nonetheless volatile and violent. This paper has documented the violent uncanny through the increased presence of mould as a marker of the housing crisis. Its uncanniness is underpinned by mould's out-of-place presence within the home – its creeping spread, its liveliness that results in it being treated as a threatening intruder, an unknown stranger that continually sits over the shoulder, at the corner of the eye. In this regard, austerity's uncanniness is marked by the shrinking of space that brings the distant near in a way that forces us to share our private worlds with a series of unwelcomed Others that occupy a ghostly presence on the periphery, and in the corners, of the home. What renders this violent then is the wounding e/affects of mould's presence(s): feeling embarrassed, dirty, on-edge, constricting one's own space and feeling out-of-place within the domestic. As a result, the study of the violent uncanny is politically salient. It allows us to explore the dimensions of lived austerity that are hidden from view, that are mundane and entrenched at the level of the everyday to the extent in which they evade political acknowledgement and academic attention. It has scope to explore the dimensions of life that are so familiar and common sense that they remain unquestioned - to acknowledge that the everyday is always already imbued with violence, forcing us to move beyond specular acts of violence, to the intimate, the personal and the explicitly material. It highlights the presence of mould as something sinister, its presence eerie. The violent uncanny effectively brings together concerns with austerity's wounding e/affects and its explicitly material manifestations in a way that challenges what has been classified as 'normal' in times of austerity. It seeks to rework and contest neoliberalised ideals of common sense, exposing the raw violence of austere policy, in turn, rethinking the everyday. Taking forward these lines of inquiry - the violent, the material and the uncanny - is of political importance in documenting the lifeworlds of the those most affected by neoliberal policy and opens real and radical scope for systemic change by exposing austerity for what it is: violently uncanny.

Declaration of competing interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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