

## Assembling, disassembling and reassembling 'youth services' in Austerity Britain

Youdell, Deborah; McGimpsey, Ian

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## **Assembling, disassembling and reassembling 'youth services' in Austerity Britain**

### **Abstract**

This paper moves from a reading of processes that are transforming public services in ways that amount to a dismantling of the welfare state in the UK. In order to interrogate these processes, the paper focuses on 'youth' and 'youth services'. Framed by an analysis of the aggressive disinvestment of 'austerity', we take up Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the assemblage as a tool to map and understand the apparently disparate factors or components that come together to produce a 'youth service assemblage' (McGimpsey 2013) and its dis-assembly and re-assembly. As we do this we demonstrate the usefulness of assemblage as way of encountering the productivity of relations across components and avoiding an account that over-states the force or scope of 'policy'. The paper concludes that by analysing in terms of assemblage, new challenges for thinking about politics emerge, in particular the limits of thinking in terms of a resistant political subject and the need to engage ambiguity.

### **Introduction**

This paper is motivated by our sense of the pressing need to comprehend and respond to the current political and economic moment. In the UK we are witnessing, and embroiled in, an acceleration of processes that are transforming public services in ways that, taken together, amount to a dismantling of the welfare state. Since its inception the welfare state provided a 'safety net' that ensured minimum services and resources were available to all members of society. That is, it arguably protected the least well off from the worst effects of capitalist exploitation. We might also suggest that the welfare state rendered capitalist exploitation tolerable and, thereby, held off demands for more radical social, political or economic change. Yet as the protections afforded by the state are retracted and citizens' relations to public services and the state reconfigured, there seems little likelihood of mass popular protest, let alone effective organised resistance. Indeed, in some ways these moves seem to work to bolster the state and advanced capitalism.

In this paper we focus in on the instance of 'youth' and 'youth services' to begin to understand some of the factors in play in this dismantling of the welfare state and reconfiguration of its services and subjects. We map the contraction of open access services for young people, and the forces that are shaping the ways in which 'youth', the issues facing them, their needs and the services required to respond to them are being simultaneously constituted and understood. As we do this we move across a range of issues from monetary flows, expert knowledge, organisational forms, specialist interventions, and subjects that crosscut this field. We understand these apparently disparate factors as components that come together to produce a 'youth service assemblage' (McGimpsey 2013), components that are connected into further assemblages and whose orders, and productive relationships and components are mapped through 'assemblage ethnography'.

## **Austerity Britain / a disassembling ensemble**

'Austerity Britain' represents a massive financial disinvestment in public services by national government. National government is enacting the programmatic and sustained withdrawal of centrally controlled resources from local government while demanding as much, or more, be provided. The scale of central government disinvestment in locally delivered public services has led the elected leader of one city council to predict the imminent end of local government and to describe these massive cuts in funding at a time when there is significant growth in demand for services as 'the jaws of doom' (Bore, 2013). The political rhetoric surrounding the withdrawal of the state in Britain might be seen as a hyper-example of those political accounts found across post-industrial nations in decline that insist on the inevitability and absolute necessity of the downsizing of the state; the cessation of universal services; and the move away from provision (or even commissioning) of remaining public services by the state. The continuities with long standing political goals of neoliberalism are, in many ways, clear. In 'Austerity', however, the presentation of these moves shifts from a framing of quality, effectiveness and choice, to one of economic necessity.

Central government policy activity in 'Austerity Britain'<sup>1</sup> is vigorous, with a series of mutually implicated policies affecting education, children's and young people's services, health, criminal justice, and local governance. This policy ensemble extends a number of familiar moves: decentralization tied to deregulation and the remaking of the state as a securer of services; the expansion of the 'public' service marketplace; transfer of the delivery of services to a competitive marketplace of non-state players. More unfamiliar after a decade of New Labour is the vigor with which policy is transforming 'public' services and their delivery as the continued roll-out of short-term contracting, competitive tendering and payment by results (Cabinet Office, 2010b; CLG, 2012; DfE, 2012; HM Government, 2011b; 2011c, pp. 79-82; House of Commons Education Committee, 2011, pp. 41-43; Le Grand, 2011), transforms the roles, form, size, and even existence of public and voluntary sector agencies and incites the entry of new for-profit organisations into the field.

In this context of aggressive disinvestment and reform, 'open public services' and 'localism' have emerged as policy framings for the transformation of the state posited as an 'inherently monopolistic entity' (Maude, 2012). This characteristically neoliberal logic is articulated, however, with a series of other terms that disrupt existing symbolic territorialities through a 'disaggregation of [established public] services into specialist functions' (HM Government, 2011b, p. 29). Key moves include: a blurring of the distinction between the

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<sup>1</sup> Following the financial crisis of 2007, and the election of the Coalition Government on a policy platform that emphasised fiscal conservatism and public spending controls, the term 'austerity' has become a nodal point in the articulation of UK policy discourses produced by institutions with a range of mainstream political affiliations (for examples drawn from journalism and policy think tanks, see BBC News, 2013; Butler, 2012; Harding & Politi, 2013; Massey, 2010; Wren-Lewis, 2011).

voluntary and community sectors and private profit-making bodies (Cabinet Office, 2010b, pp. 5-9); the promotion of employee-owned organizational models ('mutuals') as a vehicle for privatizing existing public service provision capacity (Cabinet Office, 2010b); reconstituting local public service problems as a market of 'social investment' (Cabinet Office, 2010b, p. 16) notably through outcomes-based commissioning and payment-by-results (Cabinet Office, 2010b, p. 18; HM Government, 2011b, pp. 29,32); a definition of 'rights' as not to particular types, levels or standards of provision, or to legal protections, but to competition to run local public services or take on local public assets currently 'monopolized' by the state (CLG, 2011, pp. 8-9).

Localism emphasizes the transformation of local government such that citizens, in a range of configurations, might exercise this 'power' to supply. Localism policy texts foreground 'scale', specifically the reconstitution of the local and the capacity of commissioners to work with these changed (market) relations 'at the lowest practical level' (CLG, 2011, p. 7). Yet, arguably the emblematic move of localism in the context of huge-scale funding cuts is the reconfiguration of local government into a 'smarter', independent machine – or go bust. No longer proscribed from operating outside its directly mandated duties (CLG, 2011, p. 7), the Localism Act (HM Government, 2011a) rearticulates local government through a global economic logic (Collier, 2006; Ong & Collier, 2005) as an entrepreneurial entity. With powerful echoes of the legal constitution of private companies as individuals within the law, the Localism Act confers on a '...local authority [the] power to do anything that individuals generally may do...in the United Kingdom or elsewhere...for a commercial purpose or otherwise..' (HM Government, 2011a). Yet these 'freedoms' come without swathes of central government funding or the power to raise revenue through local taxation.

These movements of financial disinvestment and structural, practical and cultural transformation of the local state coalesce in what UK Government called the 'Big Society' (Cabinet Office, 2010a). The language of the 'Big Society' has already been dropped by government, but its political goal persists - to transform the relationship between public services and the state, private companies and third sector agencies at the same time as local people and groups take responsibility for these services. This encodes two contrasting portraits of contemporary Britain's neighbourhoods, communities and citizens. On the one hand we are offered accounts of longstanding problem estates and problem families, while on the other we are promised almost unlimited potential for active citizen-subjects to come together in/as communities to identify and solve local problems and meet local needs.

The ensemble 'Austerity Britain', then, reflects and advances global economic, political, legislative and policy tendencies that embed the national, and more tenuously the local, state as an investor in service supply, and as securer of a market for investment. As flows of monetary capital are reconstituted and an array of new and existing organisations take over delivery of those welfare services that will remain, the public and voluntary (or 'third') sectors are remade and, perhaps, rendered unrecognisable. The primacy and responsibility of the citizen-subject is foregrounded, addressed

(subjectivated) in addition or even as an alternative to the (indebted) state or the consumer-subject. Such a subjectivating move shifts the social and economic, and ultimately governmental, focus from sites of consumption (public service supply) to life in local neighbourhoods and communities.

It is evident, then, that an analysis of 'Austerity Britain' (or in the more limited analysis of this article, one of its elements) involves accounting for difference from prior social and economic formations, and for the complex array of interrelated elements and processes that come together in its production. It seems to us that to operate within the terms of policy-making, -networks, -enactment and -effects is at once to potentially totalise that formation in terms of what is addressed by 'policy' and the work that policy does, and to miss opportunities to consider the nuances of a range of significant elements and processes irreducible to 'policy'. Policy is a part of this formation, but policy is situated and connected within wider productive relations. In an attempt to open up the potential for analyses that are at once sensitive to what is and is not a policy problem or effect, and open to the possibility that the fields of governance and policy might themselves be shifting, we take up the Deleuzo-Guttarian notion of the assemblage.

### **Assemblages and assemblage ethnography**

The Deleuzian notion of the assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 2008) provides the central conceptual resource for this work. Deleuze and Guattari use the idea of 'ensembles', 'arrangements' and 'assemblages' to think about how diverse elements come together in productive relations to form apparently whole but mobile social entities. Of particular note in this thinking is the idea that these elements, and the assemblages they come together to produce, are trans-scalar and multi-order, reaching from the economy and state through culture and representation to subjectivity and affectivity. Deleuze and Guattari note:

'An arrangement in its multiplicity necessarily works at once on semiotic, material and social flows [...] There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world), a field of representation (a book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather an arrangement connects together certain multiplicities caught up in each of these orders (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 52).

Deleuze's assemblage theory, then, invites us to think about complex social formations as made up of a whole array of trans-scalar and temporally multiple orders/levels/components and flows. These might include economy, monetary flows, state, legislation, policy, institutions, organizations, social and cultural forms, discourse, representation, subjectivities and affectivities. Furthermore, these are to be read as both mobile and in productive relationship rather than as static or independent elements. That is, we endeavor to avoid an account of assemblages produced as a 'list' of apparently separate, static elements arranged to collectively produce a whole formation or type of formation. Our emphasis in analyzing assemblages is

rather on movements and flows and productive relationships and the multiple significances, potentialities, and realizations of these – emphases that suggest assemblage as on-going movement and enable us to encounter disassembly and reassembly.

The complexity of assemblage creates a problem of representation. On the one hand, there is the difficulty of the multiplicity of ‘components’, that are components in the sense of machinic production (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004); that is, i) not a component of or for a grand design, but parts without wholes, or more accurately parts in the specific relation to Wholes whereby ‘Wholes’ are only themselves parts in and produced by the assemblage; and ii) components that are not fixed in purpose or singular in their connections and productive potential, but variables in the actualisation of productive possibility in multiple and temporally non-linear relations. How to interpret and discuss the social amidst these folds? How to do a useful interpretive job given the curious sense of the assemblage as simultaneously what we have already left behind and what we are not yet (Deleuze, 1992)? On the other hand, how to resist a reductive representation of the assemblage as a list of components? Such a list could give a compelling sense of an arrangement that might be unexpected or jarring. For example, one might not expect the appearance of the terms of financial investment markets in the funding of youth services, and yet with the appearance of the Social Stock Exchange (Social Stock Exchange, 2014), we see just that in the UK. There is a use to such representation. Yet to the extent that a list conveys singular components in an arrangement, however striking its juxtapositions may be, it misrepresents assemblage as structure.

Our response to this difficulty is to use a language of ‘lines’. Immediately, of course, there is a danger that lines might be understood as straight, hierarchized, moving up and down, connecting point A to point B and fixing both points and the shape of the whole. Our sense of ‘lines’ is as trajectories of components as they change in state, the curve of a variable rather than the outline of a shape (Deleuze, 1992), the frequency of a wave rather than the path of a particle (Žižek, 2012, loc. 435); of a force that extends and in doing so encounters multiple other forces and so actualizes multiple potentialities (Patton, 2006, pp. 51-52). We follow named ‘lines’ as ‘ways in’ to the map of the assemblage, to see what happens, what changes, what hits a dead end, and what sense of the assemblage emerges not from a centre but from multiple positions. Some lines are explored in detail, while others are only sketched. We label our lines multi/non-sequentially, to convey their non-linear and non-hierarchical relations and hold open their incompleteness.

Policy and discourse are each understood as potential and likely components of assemblages in this sense, but thinking through assemblages avoids privileging policy or discourse (analytically or as actants) and thereby offering totalizing accounts of what policy (or discourse) ‘does’. In other words, in doing policy sociology we try to be aware of the danger of ‘policy’ as the ‘deep structure’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2008, pp. 13-15), of tracing phenomena back to policy discourse to ‘reveal’ them (totalize them) as effects. Our alternative is to attempt to treat these as multiplicities in productive relations

with a range of potentialities and realisations (McGimpsey 2013). While this may appear to be a significant break with some Foucauldian work that takes discourse and governance as its focus, it is closely related to Foucault's thinking about the concurrence and mobility of multiple forms of power, technologies of control, knowledges, and subjects (Youdell, 2011).

There exists a growing body of work that makes use of the notion of the assemblage in interrogating a range of substantive contemporary social phenomena, and we have both contributed to this (McGimpsey 2013, Youdell 2011). Assemblage theory has been used to conceptualise and research areas of education practice and curriculum, notably Maria Tamboukou's (2008, 2010) 'art education assemblage' and Deana Leahy's (2009) 'pedagogical assemblage', as well as the 'teacher assemblage' (Webb, 2009). Elizabeth Bennett (2010) has mapped an 'electricity assemblage' in order to demonstrate the way that assemblage theory shifts our understandings of what might count as an 'actant', what sorts of 'things' might be 'agentic' and how agency might be better understood as distributed across components of assemblages.

As a methodology, 'assemblage ethnography' seeks to investigate together economic, structural, spatial, temporal, representational, discursive, relational, subjective and affective orders as these play out at macro, meso, and micro scales. Our understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's work is that they argue against a relegation of the material to semiotic mediations. However, rather than adopt the opposite position of a simple assertion of the *primacy* of the positivity of the material, they are concerned with the material, enunciative and subjective as lines of force, as variables, in productive interaction. 'Ethnography' is, for us, a term and method with an orientation to the social that anticipates following these lines of force as an exercise of mapping. Further, it is a term that anticipates research and researcher as plugging into the assemblage, in intersubjective processes of being and becoming.

This assemblage ethnography, then, aims to reach across government and policy networks; institutional and professional forms, practices and subjectivities; and the civic and social practice of people engaged in their everyday lives. As it does this it aims to account for the fine-grained detail of the components of assemblages, the nuances of the productive relations between these components, and the far-reaching assemblages that these relations produce. In terms of method it builds on existing assemblage mapping (DeLanda, 2006; Tamboukou, 2009) as well as developments in social science research that work across orders and scales (Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008; Sheppard, 2002) and the material and representational (MacLure, 2010) and that ethnographically map policy networks (Stephen J. Ball & Junemann, 2012; Howard, 2002) and civil society organizations (Soteri-Proctor, 2011). In a sense, then, it is incorrect to describe assemblage ethnography as 'a methodology'. It is rather a kind of pragmatism, being a multiplicity according to the multiplicitous formation it engages in.

As such, specific to *assemblage* ethnography is the 'trans' nature of many of those productive relations; of the 'map' as charting movements across orders

and scales, with a different spatial or temporal sense than ethnography might do otherwise. The assemblage requires the methodology to move, us to move, to make hopefully creative use of the range of qualitative and quantitative methods to account for the detail of assemblage components, the nuances of their productive relations and the far-reaching assemblages produced. This produces shifts in representational tactics, in tone and style and analytic level, that we worry might be jarring or seem inconsistent. Our point is that we would acknowledge the inconsistency, foreground it even, as a necessity for the representation of the differing productive movements (which we refer to as lines) of the formation in question. Further, we want to suggest such a pragmatism as in part a response to the rapidity of differentiation in the public service (youth service) assemblages at this time. It is a politicised methodology.

The lines we follow are based on research and thinking that has emerged from the on-going collaborative work of the University of Birmingham's *Public Service Academy*, in particular the *Mapping Public Services Project* and research concerning youth employment that we are undertaking in partnership with the city, and a 2012 pilot project concerned with the relationships between schools and youth services in the context of current policy frameworks funded by the University of Birmingham's School of Education. Across these projects, in various ways, we are using assemblage theory to develop a 'methodology' (or perhaps a pragmatic relation to methodology) that can span traditional service area domains, sectoral boundaries, and time scales in order to map and understand rapidly changing public services. In our youth services research we developed interconnected case studies of monetary flows; legislation and central government policy; political, expert and popular knowledges; public and ancillary institutions, networks and services; and organizational and professional forms, practices and subjects. This involved attempts to identify and map the education, youth and related service offer for young people in the city; interviews with workers concerning their engagements with these young people; and the collation and interrogation of policy documentation, political speeches and media coverage, official statistics and service-level representations.

This work is being undertaken in a major UK city which is one of the country's most ethnically diverse and which has some of the highest levels of poverty and youth unemployment in the country. The city has been identified by central government as a priority area for ameliorative action and the city council, the local government authority, has been charged by central government to produce substantial improvements in education, employment and crime statistics. Simultaneously, the city is facing a funding shortfall over the next three years that is equivalent to two thirds of its controllable income derived from core central government grants. The electoral ward that is the location for the case study material focused on in this paper was reported as being one of the five areas with the highest levels of unemployment in the city. This easy characterization of the city and the ward can be readily understood as constitutive of the very 'problem' of disadvantaged and under-educated and unemployed young people whom neoliberal reflexive individualism has failed to properly subjectivate and that neoliberal policy aims to 'solve'. We



might anticipate a neoliberal policy framework of centralizing decentralization, marketization and accountability undergirding the deployment of a raft of resources, interventions and performance indicators (Stephen J. Ball, 2007). While continuities with such policy responses exist, 'Austerity Britain' produces significant discontinuities with the neoliberal public service assemblage that are implicated in processes of *disassembly*.

## **Youth service disassembly and the void**

In the remainder of this paper we begin to set out 'youth service assemblage', working from the idea that the phenomena is itself a 'making up' of 'youth services' always in process, such that 'youth service' is in a constant state of being assembled and, perhaps, disassembled and reassembled. Assemblage, then, is at once a 'thing' assembled and the processes of assemblage.

Our mapping of youth service assemblage seeks to follow a number of its components as they actualize multiplicitous productive potentials in movements in and out of interrelation. In our effort to think beyond the common sense of policy sociology, we purposely do not start from policy. Instead, reflecting our desire to foreground the forces of monetary flows and draw out a distinction between a neoliberal state and capitalism (McGimpsey 2013), our starting point is money. This is, of course, not to say that budgets, contracts or other technologies for the control of distributions, recordings and allocations of money have not been legitimately regarded as 'policy' in policy analyses. However, it is to say that here we regard monetary flows not as an aspect of 'policy', whereby policy at the same time would assume the position of the terrain of analysis (monetary distributions recorded as policy, or always on the surface of policy), but rather as productively interacting with a range of components which in different movements may or may not include policy as a part.

### *Line a. money*

Youth service provision, which is the responsibility of the local state, has seen massive reduction in available central government funding since the financial crisis of 2007. This has not (for the most part) been effected by a direct central government cut to youth service funding, but rather through a reconfiguration of the way in which central government funding flows to particular areas of local government activity.

Flows of central government funding for children's and youth services have been reconstituted in the establishment of the 'Early Intervention Grant' (EIG). Briefly summarized, this new fund removes 'ring-fencing', bringing together a number of previously separate funds into one 'pot', and allowing flows of funding out of that central pot to be redirected according to local decision making (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011, p. 29). This effectively sets previously discreetly funded youth services in competition for prioritization with services for younger children. The result has been rapid reductions in levels of spending on youth services across the country, with

wide variation between local government jurisdictions and widespread disruption (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011, pp. 28-29). It is notable that, in the context of broader 'austerity', youth services have seen larger reductions in levels of funding than has been typical of public services in general.

A whole range of further monetary flows are also productive in youth service assemblage. These include monetary flows from central government and its peripheral agencies, such as the Big Lottery, as well as pan-governmental agencies, notably the European Union, and a range of non-government agencies into areas of activity that are more or less self-evidently proximate to youth service. As money flows into some areas of activity and not into others, youth services are disassembled and reassembled: community-based education and cultural and leisure provision for young people have seen particularly extreme funding reductions (Hillier, 2011; House of Commons Education Committee, 2011, pp. 32-33); short-term specialist employment and 'pre-employment' programmes, as well as youth offending programmes, have seen new specialist streams of funding from a range of sources. As money flows in these particular ways, it is a component that contributes to the reassembling of youth services.

*Line b. expert knowledge*

Bradbury *et al* (forthcoming) examine the influence of new forms of knowledge on policy and the broad field of education, detailing in particular the effects of well-being, networks and neuroscience. In the assemblage of youth services a series of expert knowledges have significant productive force, influencing how money flows, how professionals practice, how organisations work, and even whether organisations exist. In this sense, these expert knowledges are also components in the assemblage, bringing particular possibilities to life and striking through others.

In the case of children and young people's services, expert knowledge of 'early intervention' produces parameters of meaning, practice and recognizable subjects. And early intervention is itself predicated on a borrowed concoction of neuroscience and epigenetics. As they assemble and reassemble children's and youth services, these expert knowledges are unmoored from the 'experts' and careful science that collectively creates them (Rose 2013). Knowledges are mobile and malleable, and these are 'translated' (Bradbury *et al*, forthcoming), arguably transmuted into caricatures of themselves, as they are rearticulated in genres and forums for which they were not intended, and entered into political strategies. Wastell and White (Tuck, 2014) demonstrates this powerfully in their dissection of the use of popularized forms of neuroscience to frame government accounts of children, parenting and well-being in which parenting judged to be inadequate is identified as the cause of structural brain malformations in young children and in turn demands early intervention.

Roberts' (Rose, 2013) engagement with epigenetics<sup>2</sup> looks at the work of Belsky *et al* (1991 cited in Roberts 2013) which, entangled in threads of infant brain structures, parenting and attachment, suggests that early patterns of attachment influence youthful sexual behavior, relationship making, early parenthood and age of onset of periods and that these influences are not simply environmental but are epigenetic. This ties together two key moments of state sponsored 'early intervention' – the parenting of the infant/young child and the movement of the young person towards adult forms of life, if not 'adulthood'.

The expert knowledge of 'early intervention' legitimizes a whole range of agencies in a whole series of relationships to the state, reaching into lives before anything has 'gone wrong'. And, as line a. shows, money flows with it. Money flows to early intervention<sup>3</sup>, an interaction that is (in part) constitutive of a field of understanding and practice distinct from neuroscience and epigenetics as academic fields, which in turn is a productive force as early intervention's status participates in further financial allocations which flows anew to early intervention.

#### *Line c. youth*

The (perhaps no longer-) expert knowledges that circulate in and produce youth service assemblage also produce 'youth' as concept and as site of (mis-)recognition and (dis-)identification and of intervention. Early intervention's delineating of those brain structures; genetic codes; modalities of attachment; and menstruating, sexing, reproducing, choosing and consuming bodies subjectivates sorts of children and young people and identifies the forms of intervention that these are in need of. In relation to children identified and diagnosed as having 'behavioural disorders' Allan and Harwood (Tomlinson, 2013) demonstrate that the early years and primary schooling are understood as sites of intervention for change/rescue, while secondary schooling and the agencies beyond it are sites of management and containment of young people in relation to whom to the (possible) hopefulness of before has slipped away.

#### *Line d. time*

How early is early and when has the moment for intervention slipped away? The same imagined child who was the recipient of early intervention at age 3 may well become the young person at risk of becoming disaffected, 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training), or offending at age 14 or 16. Time takes on strange mutations. The 'young person' is outside time and already out of time: out of time as the past, present and future tenses are folded

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<sup>2</sup> Epigenetics refers to the interaction between and mutual transformation of environment and genetics

<sup>3</sup> '...money flows with' and 'money flows to'; the difference in repetition here is indicative of the unsatisfactory nature of such spatial representations of productive movements of the assemblage. The productivity is in the relation of the two – money does not flow 'to' early intervention' so much as this field and the Early Intervention Grant are mutually produced and producing in the interrelation of monetary flows and a series of contingent knowledges.

together, brought into connection through 'early years' in the production of the infant whose brain development is at a 'critical' stage (CSJ, 2011, pp. 14-15), as parenting has already determined future outcomes, producing the child as the location of urgent moral and fiscal anxiety and further connecting its body to the contemporaneous components of services, contracts, and monetary flows.

In our empirical work neither the agencies or workers we engaged with or our research can do much more than keep pace with the transformations, movements and erasures of youth service disassembly and reassembly. Time is multiplied and moves at multiple speeds: the relatively slow speeds of modernist public institutions such as schools and police services; the rapid turnover of the voluntary and statutory youth services; as well as the multi-speed of public service institutions at their margins of interaction with youth services (or the recently deterritorialized non-space of youth services). The University, the School, the Local Authority and the Police at once continue to move as slow modern institutions at the same time as their increasingly core operations – research grant capture, special projects and interventions, tendering and contracts, new partnerships, extramural activities – move at the accelerated pace of tendering and procurement, short-term contracts, time-limited grants, payment by results and so on. And voluntary organizations, in particular small local groups, appear to function almost wholly in this state of high-speed precarity.

*Line q.<sup>4</sup> strange organisations*

The loss of staff from statutory services and closure of local not-for-profit community youth service infrastructure constitutes a 'void', a space of disassemblage. Of particular note here is what youth services become in these disassembling movements. Turning our attention to qualitative data generated in the summer of 2012, where teachers and ancillary staff in schools direct us toward their partners and wider youth services, the dis-assembling effects of this policy ensemble on youth services as we have known them becomes clearer, even as institutions, agencies, workers, 'citizens' reassemble something in their place. And these reassemblies are undertaken in the folded time of youth in the youth service assemblage, whereby youth appears as the determined future of the 'troubled' (family's) past, and as a risk of further future outcomes now to be targeted and contained in the present.

The process of undertaking research into the relationship between schools and youth services moved our gaze from school, youth service and other modern institutions to activities on their peripheries and the voids where recognizable provision might have previously been. The Early Intervention Grant, changing contracting technologies, the rewording of the statutory duty to provide youth services, appear here as parts not of an assemblage, of a

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<sup>4</sup> The reference to lines through a discontinuous series of characters is our attempt to undermine the sense of completeness and heirarchical (and thereby in some sense perhaps causal) relations to the lines, and the choice of their ordering. Such a closed, ordered series of super and sub ordinate relationships would risk signifying youth service assemblage as arborecent.

formation produced as a policy terrain (an act of territorialization), but as parts in a movement of the disassembly of assemblages of this sort.

In the Summer of 2012, as we seek out ‘youth services’ and ‘youth workers’, we find them strangely elusive. Requests to schools for introductions to youth workers or staff with a youth work remit lead us to staff with behaviour management and exclusion prevention roles. Requests to teachers and specialist ancillary school staff to identify youth services lead to referrals to services not initially recognizable as such: sexual health advisory clinics, bereavement counseling services; criminal justice services and diversion from criminal justice projects; child protection and children and families safeguarding services; prevention of exclusion from schools projects. The people working here are not qualified youth workers, and the buildings they work from are typically not called ‘youth centres’.

Our engagement with the local components of these assemblages, then, begins with the local school but rapidly follows the institution’s own movement to its margins and its development of a provision for students deemed to be ‘at risk’ of exclusion from school. Similarly, while our engagement with the area youth service begins with the intention to work with youth workers delivering youth services, either independently or in partnership with the local school or other services, our research focus is on the voids left by the disassembling of such youth work as well as the unexpected and unrecognizable work done by other agencies in their own margins. We map the work of the area’s community police force as it improvises youth work as an extension of community policing, acts as a stimulus and partner for other agencies in relation to both securing funding and service delivery, and temporarily filling voids left by this disassembly and in so doing reassembles and reinvents youth work.

Processes of disassembly and reassembly became clear as the research gaze transitioned from the ‘neoliberal’ institution of the school as a bounded space of confinement in which a play of market incentives operate and neoliberal discourses circulate *to* not so much a space but a *void*, or a disassembling movement that is local youth services. We saw the loss of a local service – the youth service – which we might characterize in terms of an effect of the disassembling movement of localism policy, which subjects – senior teachers, police officers – in other local, better established, modernist institutions had to work with/in to solve local problems.

This ‘working with’ was the array of local re-assembling movements (embodied by the police man) required to offer/hold together a service in some way, and these movements required the simultaneous occupation of/fluid movement across a series of symbolic territorialities: youth worker, policeman, social worker, voluntary sector entrepreneur, local partnership broker. As such, a notion of a universal, monolithic, or inescapable neoliberal subjectivity seems inappropriate – we suggest careful thought is needed about the constitutive consequences of educators’ interpellations of this subject.

*Line r. specialist interventions*

While services that we might readily recognize as 'youth services' are in rapid decline, short-term specialist funding streams supporting employment and 'pre-employment' programmes for young people have proliferated across central government departments as well as European Union bureaucracies. Regularly mandating partnership working and third sector lead institutions and payment by results narrowly defined, these programmes are reassembling local government at the same time as they reassemble legitimate and valuable work with specified young people. Alongside these employment services, a further array of specialist provision is identified by professionals engaged with young people as 'youth services'. These specialist interventions are often supported by short-term or soft flows of money, are enacted at the periphery of the 'core' business of public institutions, and/or are given over as the domain of non-government organisations. The voids left by youth service disassembly are re-occupied, more or less temporarily, by spaces like *The Harbour and Springboard*.

#### *'The Harbour'*

Launched after the financial crisis of 2007 but prior to the election of the Coalition Government, *The Harbour* is a 'safer neighbourhoods' local community policing initiative targeted at older children and young people identified as at risk of engaging in offending behavior. Working on a neighborhood basis, it aims to prevent crime through relationship building and the targeted engagement of young people, their peers and their families. The programme involves a small number of officers, and operates from a non-descript, repurposed home located on the outskirts of the estate.

#### *'Springboard'*

*Springboard* is a specialist provision in a secondary school that takes the form of alternative education classes, separated for students in Key Stage 3 (aged 11 to 13) and students in Key Stage 4 (aged 14 – 16). At Key Stage 4 the provision is described as focussed on achieving 5 A-C GCSE. It involves a mix of mainstream curriculum, ALAN testing (adults literacy and numeracy tests, provided by a major education corporation), personal finance curriculum, work skills and health and safety. It was this alternative provision that we were directed to when we asked the school about its involvement in or partnerships with youth services. The provision appears to have emerged over time, beginning with the school's participation in processes of 'managed moves' into different provision for students on the verge of formal school exclusion. Situated in one of the UK's most deprived neighbourhoods, the school's location means that it has little realistic chance of attracting the high-attaining cohort that would push the school up the league tables that act as indicators and drivers in the education market place. But in this local marketplace (Taylor, 2002) the school has developed a different niche market – students who are understood as disengaged from schooling and therefore unwanted by other schools. The school's success with this group of students, and particularly its willingness to accept students into the school through Local Authority requests but reluctance to move students *out* of the school, has resulted in it coming to be understood and act as a local specialist alternative education provider.

*Line 10. 'youth workers' and other 'public servants'*

There is ongoing discussion of the implications of cuts in public service funding and shifts in organizational forms for the services these deliver, for professionals, and specifically for what it means to be and practice as 'public servants' (Noel, 2014). These are pragmatic – concerned with the impacts of redeployment, redundancy and changing work roles – as well as conceptual – concerned with the subjectivation of professionals (Stephen J. Ball, 2003) ,and in particular the constitution of neoliberal subjectivity(CSJ, 2011).

The '*Harbour*' Police Officer, a member of the 'Safer Neighbourhoods Team' and engaged in delivering *the Harbour*, points to the limits of neoliberal subjectivity, and, indeed, the assertion of professional subjectivities. He is Police Officer, and Youth Worker, and community football coach, and events organizer, and broker, and bid writer, and matchmaker. This seems to undercut suggestions of professional subjectivities that have the sort of resonance and endurance, *and that subjectivate*, in the way that gender, race or sexuality might be said to do. The 'Police Officer' or 'Youth Worker' are inculcated into professional communities and practices, but they may not (ought not?) be inaugurated into and psychically invested in these – our recognizability as subjects, our viability, may not be tied up with professional identity and so these move.

*Line z. riots*

The riots in English urban centres in Summer 2011 is a moment of temporal acceleration and intensification takes place. The affect and bodies of young people, spatially concentrated, accelerate and change quality. They force a reversal of hierarchical directionality, at least as we typically represent it. These bodies pull criminal justice, social care, and monetary flows with them. The police and justice response is sped up to contain young bodies. The establishment of the 'Troubled Families programme' is brought forward, to identify and intervene in families of children that are the source of past and future disturbance (A4e Insight, 2012). The flows of money accelerate, but only take place through payment by results.

## **Reassembling in/from the void?**

This discontinuous series of accounts of youth service assemblage are simultaneously disassembling movements within public and voluntary sectors in this political moment. Public and voluntary sector institutions at once disassemble and move to reassemble, sometimes functioning in new ways while retaining old forms, sometimes to undertake old functions within new forms.

These simultaneous moves of assembly, disassembly, reassembly that characterize the youth service assemblage (and, we suggest, are thematic to public service reform amidst the politics of 'austerity') demonstrate the limit and unhelpfulness of imagining a monolithic neoliberal regime with its attendant subjectivations. This productive multiplicity incorporating diverse policy components becomes a stimulus to consider the potential for new

forms of sociological education research – forms that we have attempted to develop in this research, and that we are calling assemblage ethnography.

We argue for research with a clear continuity and impetus drawn from the ethics and politics of the field, requiring it to be useful for investigating educational disadvantage, marginality, and both professional subjectivity and, crucially, collectivity. However, to attend to this political moment entails a certain displacement of ‘policy’, and perhaps more importantly of ‘neoliberalism’. The notion of a relatively unified neoliberal policy regime has, in a sense, been produced so as to appear as a whole terrain of public services. ‘Neoliberal policy discourse’ falls back on multiplicitous productive movements, organizing public service assemblages including the representations of those assemblages. However, as we examine the production of public services at this time, we increasingly recognize the multiplicity of policy itself, the deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guatari, 2004) taking place that is disrupting unities including ‘neoliberalism’. Assemblage ethnography is our attempt to confront the extent to which part of the productivity of neoliberal policy regime has been of our critical imaginations.

In this shift of imagination associated with the displacement of neoliberal policy within analysis, ‘disassembly’ comes not to be understood as a radical or resistant move to UK government policy as a neoliberal regime, at least not in any straightforward way. We show a state and the policy networks it is embedded in *disassembling* the public and voluntary sectors and establishing conditions in which public and voluntary sector institutions, agencies and workers at once disassemble themselves *and* move to reassemble.

The reassemblies which workers undertake are not radical acts. Rather, they are quietly conservative, attempting to keep services, *something*, in place. They are also often intrinsically neoliberal in that they are accepting of (or know they have to work in) mandated funding, accountability and performance frames. This raises the question of the possibility of political thinking and action when tactical responses to immediate exigencies are the focus of people’s daily practice that both constrain agents’ orientations to political intent and accelerate the movements of concepts, policies, institutions, agencies, work, responsibilities, identifications and money in and across assemblages. Our analysis suggests that the mobility and multiplicity of reassembly is politically ambiguous. They may well prove *not* a radical departure or moment of political possibility. Instead this multiplicity and mobility might be a threatening dissolution, Deleuze’s black-hole (Deleuze and Parnet 1983). This demonstrates the need for forms of analysis that can engage the ambiguity of what is produced in these moves on unfamiliar, shifting terrain.

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