Social Abstractionism:

Abstract Objects, Abstract Space,

Sociological Potentialities

by

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We human beings always lead a second, abstract life alongside our concrete life

(Arthur Schopenhauer)

Abstract

Arthur Schopenhauer once stated, "we human beings always lead a second, abstract life alongside our concrete life". When we separate life into that which is concrete and that which is abstract, abstract being that which has no concrete existence, we find that most social life is lived out via the abstract. With the intent of making a founding contribution to a new mode of sociological thought based on this notion, this purely theoretical thesis will explore the possibilities of social abstractionism. Social abstractionist principles will be outlined and demonstrated through utilising two concepts loosely based on Platonist philosophy and the work of Henri Lefebvre: abstract objects and abstract space, respectively. Regarding Platonism, I adopt and adjust the concept of abstract objects. In Platonist thinking, abstract objects have no spatiotemporality, are indestructible, and cannot be changed. Social abstractionism demonstrates that *socially produced* abstract objects are, in fact, spatial, temporal, malleable, destructible, and fictional. Furthermore, I refashion Henri Lefebvre's concept of abstract space through a social abstractionist lens to show how abstract objects produced socially dominate abstract spaces. Both concepts, as foundational principles of social abstractionism, are then utilised to demonstrate a hierarchised abstract world through levels of abstract objects which I term the 'Echelons of Abstracta' referring to the notion of each echelon being evermore socially exclusive. As many abstract objects are bureaucratic in nature, I theorise that these abstract objects, whilst not only dominating their own abstract space, also create abstract spaces for the individual which I term interstices. In turn, these interstices create a state of interstitiality through which our lives are imprisoned under a false

consciousness of reified abstract objects; an *objectively abstract fictional reality*. Consequentially, interstitiality induces liminality, our experience of navigating abstract barriers and borders of the interstice. I see social abstractionist principles as contributing towards a mode of thinking capable of both reformulating existing foci of sociology across all areas, and as having significant potential to uncover many new areas of knowledge across the interdisciplinary landscape.

Contents

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The Glossary of Terms

Abstracta	The plural term for abstractum.
Abstractum	An immaterial object which only exists abstractly.
Asynchronous domination	The controlling effect of an abstractum that has transcended its own abstract space to dominate another.
Axiom	An abstractum that is generally regarded as self-evidently true. It is an abstractum that is readily accepted as a starting point in terms of praxis.
Cathexis	A psychoanalytical term denoting the amount of mental and emotional energy dedicated to a given task, issue, problem or any other given foci.
Causal continuity	The way in which a causative effect is perpetuated, but not enacted by, an abstract object.
Echelon of abstracta	A hierarchical level of abstract objects differentiated by its social exclusivity.
Encoding/encoded	The application of an attribute, or set of attributes, to a given abstractum.
Interstice	The abstract space formed by the internal borders of abstract objects in which an individual or group is bound.
Interstitiality	The ontological status of being within an interstice.
Liminality	The experiences of traversing the abstract borders of abstract objects and spaces.
Parallaxic	The encoded attribute of an abstractum that means a given abstractum may be viewed differently depending on an individual's position. (The term parallaxic is sometimes used in art or photography. An example of parallax art can be seen through Elreycatodico (2012)).
Praxis	The practices, routines, rituals, and actions that are guided by abstracta and abstract space.
Synchronous domination	The controlling effect of an abstractum manifesting at a specific and intended location.

The Introduction

Arthur Schopenhauer (2010: 112) once stated that "we human beings always lead a second, abstract life alongside our concrete life". Schopenhauer thus divides life into a life lived in the concrete and a life lived in the abstract; a separation of two differing planes of life. But what is this second life in the abstract that we lead? This very division between the two has informed not only this thesis but also my life leading up to it and likely after it. It forms a part of the way I see the world, and thus this work is not just an academic work but an expression of my own reality collated, organised, and structured by the research. This work then is very much a personal endeavour and can be considered as an enquiry into knowledge for its own sake and as a personal intellectual challenge (Babbie, 2008: 27; Bailey, 2007: 25). However, it is located at the end of a chain of relevant coincidences that have given inspiration as to the mode of thought explored herein.

As a young child, I had an unusual and vivid dream that has stayed with me for nearly forty years. In a grim, dark concrete Lancashire bus station originally built in 1939, I was passing through when I came across a lift in the centre. People were being ushered inside. I too, entered the lift. The doors closed and a person of power appeared at the back. Everybody uniformly stood facing the front of the lift as a light was beamed into the eyes of the people. The people in the lift were transformed into robots *en masse*. I, however, closed my eyes and refused to allow the light to hit my eyes. I subsequently forced the lift doors open and made my escape outside to the light of day. It may seem like the unconscious images of a child's imagination, but it

came to be quite prophetic. In brief, as I continued to grow, I saw friends heavily influenced by external forces, whether those were expectations of school, work, family, or social pressures. They assimilated to the world around them, lost their childhood personality, and began speaking with a new logic of conformity to this external world. They seemed to lose sight of who they were whilst attempting to pressure me into conforming to the same practices and processes that they were assimilating to. Being of an oppositional nature, I felt that what people were conforming to was something I could not. At the same time, I drifted further into social exclusion, connections became broken, and I became trapped outside a society that I could not conform to. For me, the absence of 'whys' could not be overcome and so, without answers, there was no way to reconcile with the social world.

Once you enter the spaces on the outside of society, it becomes exponentially more difficult to 'reintegrate' the longer one is 'absent' for. Over the years, I became more sensitive to external forces which seemed to become ever more apparent and, the more I became attuned to them, the more explicitly aware I became of being bounded and unable to move despite there being no material restriction: bounded by money, bounded by welfare, bounded by conditionality (including welfare and then, later, student loan conditions), bounded by school rules as an extension of my children attending school, bounded by bills and the affordability of life, bounded by other peoples' ideas of what constitutes a suitable employee, bounded by others' beliefs in fictional work expectations, bounded by other peoples' interpretations of disability, bounded by time, and even bounded by the country itself. In each case, not only am I bound outside of society, but I am also barriered in a way that equally prevents my

returning to the 'inside' of society. Thus, I am place-bound without any material binds. For the most part, these abstract binds are placed on me without ever coming into contact with another human being. On the occasions where a human being was visible and present within a bureaucracy, each individual I encountered across the years seemed like an automaton, not making agentic human decision but simply following a prewritten instruction set or script designed not only to induce a certain praxis in the bureaucratic agent themselves, but also a certain praxis in me.

The essence of the dream and the essence of my own life experiences lie in the fact that I sensed external powers outside of our control were conditioning and controlling people, a sense which almost certainly invokes the central sociological 'agency versus structure' debate as outlined by Fine (1993: 69-70) with agency being the ability to produce the world around us and structure being the power of external forces to produce the individual. My experiences mostly align with the latter and these experiences were most often abrasive to my nature. Through studying philosophy briefly, I became acquainted with Plato's (1997: 1132-1137) Allegory of the Cave. In concise terms, Plato's dialogue with Glaucon describes a group of prisoners living in a cave who have never experienced anything other than the cave. They are chained together facing a wall. Behind them is a fire which casts shadows onto the wall in front of the prisoners. These shadows are the shadows of puppets and objects being held by other people behind the prisoners. The shadows on the wall are taken to be reality by the prisoners. Plato considered that, if one prisoner were to escape, they would become aware of the fire and see that the shadows on the wall are not real. On escaping the cave into the light, the prisoner would then come to experience a world

much more real than that of the cave. If he were to return to the cave to tell the others what he had learned, he would not be believed and would possibly be killed. There is undoubtedly a striking similarity between the dream, my experiences, and the Allegory of the Cave. In each scenario, the dream and the Allegory of the Cave, there is a unifying theme: how power and the utilisation of objects dominate the individual's reality. The dream coveys the imposition of both a uniformity and a conformity onto the individual, the Allegory of the Cave conveys a fictionality of the shadows whilst a greater, more truthful reality exists outside of the cave, and my life experiences have come to reflect these.

Philosophers such as Plato (1997) or Gottlieb Frege (1984) posit the notion of an abstract realm, a 'world of ideas' in which abstract objects that are external to us exist. These ideas have been discussed for thousands of years yet seemingly never sociologically. This presents an opportunity to fill this long-overlooked gap. The neo-Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991) presented foundational ideas regarding the concept of abstract space. His ideas have gone on to be highly influential in the fields of critical geography and urban studies. While Lefebvre had his own formulation of abstract space, as we shall see in the literature review, the notion of abstract space suggests some complementarity with abstract objects. For sociology however, these concepts seem far removed from the concerns of sociologists. This is undoubtedly reflected in the fact that sociology has seemingly overlooked the more profound relevance that these concepts have for our social existence and, as such, these concepts have never been examined in any meaningful way from a sociological point of departure. It is imperative then that this oversight be rectified. Having said this, it

does not mean that there is specifically a totalising absence of these concepts. Rather than being an explicit focus of sociology, they are often alluded to, and appealed to, in a seemingly unconscious way, as if writers are attempting to wrestle with an abstract *something* they have yet been unable to isolate. This thesis will unveil some of the extent to which these concepts are implied or appealed to in sociologists' attempts to make sense of abstractness. Through the use of abstract objects and abstract space as a unique point of departure sociologically, I embark on an exploration into the potentialities of social abstractionism. The term 'social abstractionism' becomes the study of what is abstract, the nature of that abstractness, and the manifestations of abstractness, within the 'social world'. By dividing life into the separate planes of the concrete and of the abstract as Schopenhauer and others before him observed, by reconsidering Platonist notions of abstract objects and worlds, and by drawing on Henri Lefebvre's abstract space, the intent is to explore, exemplify, and locate the potentialities of social abstractionism within sociology. It will make explicit the abstract nature of some central sociological and structural concepts such as capital, power, and ideology, as well as countries, nations, and states. It will formulate social abstractionist principles that can facilitate sense-making of the abstractness to which sociologists, or even academics in other fields, often appeal. Therefore, several central research questions demand attention.

Firstly, however, we should consider what exactly is being referred to when discussing the abstract. The Oxford Dictionary defines abstract as "existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence". The plural of abstract objects is 'abstracta' whilst the singular is 'abstractum'. Philosophically, this definition confounds

the various philosophical approaches to the abstract as we shall see. The antonym of abstract is 'concrete' which the Oxford Dictionary defines as "existing in a material or physical form; not abstract" but also has an archaic definition of "form (something) into a mass; solidify". The secondary definition of concrete implicitly denotes that "something" can be *made* concrete, to '*concretise*'. The plural then is 'concreta', and the singular is 'concretum'. This presents us with the abstract/concrete dichotomy which Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2005: 46) argue is a form of categorical distinction but is the single "most fundamental categorical distinction". Given that sociology has deep roots within systems of categorisation, this "most fundamental categorical distinction" seems to be amiss. The term 'space' remains definitionally problematic, especially when differentiating between abstract space and 'concrete' space. Agnew (2011) gives an in-depth analysis of the definitional problems of space. In general, space is considered to be something within which physical matter is located, with lines of latitude, longitude, and elevation. However, these are mathematical abstracta in themselves and suggest that there is an inside and outside of space. Across Agnew's chapter, it is difficult to conclude whether there is any concrete space at all and that it is perhaps the case that *all* space is abstract. Going forward then, I use the phrase 'physical space' to mean the taken-for-granted space which we commonly refer to in everyday life, the empty areas which surround us and that we can walk or pass through concretely but it should be taken along with the cautionary that the idea of 'physical space' is itself contested.

In terms of research questions, a number have been formulated to address this milieu of abstract objects, abstract spaces, and external structures, which I will now ask in

context with the chapter outlines. To begin with, *what basis is there in the existing literature to suggest an opportunity for a social abstractionist mode of thinking?* In answering this, I use the literature review in this thesis to perform three functions rather than one. Firstly, it is presented in the expected way, as a work that reviews the existing literature relative to the research performed. The second function uses the literature review to unveil the themes that implicitly address the abstract, including the existence of an external abstract world, abstract objects, abstract spaces, or appeals to what may be considered constitutive elements of the abstract. This helps to draw out the relevant material that, when combined, makes visible the hidden potential, principles, and opportunities for social abstractionism. It also aids in answering the question, *how are others appealing to the abstract in ways which are not explicit?* The third function is that it is used to help justify and formulate the methodology for the broader thesis. Thus, beginning with a review of the literature on abstract objects and abstract space, I both review existing literature across various academic landscapes, including the very limited sociological considerations, and use this literature as justification and evidence for a social abstractionist affiliation with the existence of abstract objects and spaces whilst also considering attributional factors. It then becomes a logical progression from the literature on abstract objects that, when we consider what constitutes abstract objects socially, there is a dominant, but not wholly exclusive, theme of bureaucracy. Thus, I review the literature on bureaucracy in relation to its abstract nature and try to make visible the abstract nature of bureaucracy appealed to within the literature both through traditional considerations and more contemporary readings. Finally, to conceptualise what kind of effect abstract objects and spaces could have on the individual or group, I consider what this could mean regarding the abstract and concrete consequences. I consider two concepts,

'interstitiality' which is the notion of being within an individualised abstract space that I term the *interstice*, and 'liminality', the experience of crossing or negotiating the borders of an individualised or collectivised interstice. As such, I review the existing literature concerning these two concepts.

The methodology chapter, produced from the literature, answers the question, *what method can we use to interpret the abstract in sociology?* I then use this methodological formulation from the methodology chapter and utilise it in the four chapters: The Abstracta of Capital, The Abstracta of Power, The Abstracta of Ideology, and The Abstracta of Country, Nation, and State. In these four chapters, I attempt to answer the questions: *how might social abstractionism look and how would it approach traditional sociological concepts such as capital, power, or ideology;* and *how might we view the effects of these traditional sociological concepts when viewed through social abstractionism in relation to human beings individually or in groups?* Chapter one, 'The Abstracta of Capital,' takes a unique look at the abstract nature of capital through which money and capital are reframed as abstract objects and abstractly spatial. Consideration is then given to how the abstract nature and the abstract spatiality of money and capital come to imprison the individual or group within an abstract interstice and their liminal experiences of navigating and traversing the borders of the interstice based on money. Chapter two, 'The Abstracta of Power', considers an original approach to the abstract nature of power. I consider power as having access to, creating, altering, or wielding abstract objects. This chapter also exemplifies the manifestation of the exercise of power through abstract objects and further considers power in relation to the interstice and the liminal experiences of the

individual or group relative to power when reframed as abstract. Chapter three, 'The Abstracta of Ideology', uniquely considers ideology in relation to abstract objects and spaces. It examines the role played by ideology in the production and alteration of abstract objects and spaces. This is followed by considering how ideologically driven abstract objects affect the interstice and liminal experiences of those imprisoned within. Chapter four, 'The Abstracta of Country, Nation, and State', attempts to unravel the abstract nature of countries, nations, and states from their typically conflated and interchangeable positions. Further consideration is given to the abstract spatiality of each. Again, these are each considered in relation to the interstice and liminal experiences of those imprisoned within them. The concepts covered in the four chapters, capital, power, ideology, and country, nation, and state, are what I have termed 'Echelons of Abstracta' due to the fact that each 'echelon' is more socially exclusive the further up the hierarchy one goes. In other words, the higher the echelon, the fewer people have access to mechanisms of the abstract.

Research questions continue in Chapter Five as I ask *how can the Echelons of Abstracta be applied?* This chapter utilises what has been covered in the thesis to apply the Echelons of Abstracta to the situations and experiences of benefit claimants. Through considering the interacting forces of each echelon, capital, power, ideology, country, nation, and state, *how do these come to affect the benefit claimant?* Via exemplifying the potentialities of what benefit claimants are exposed to, I can analyse how benefit claimants are held in an abstract space, an interstice, by power exercised through abstract objects and spaces and how the borders of the interstice are navigated. Following this, I look at the implications of what has been considered within

the thesis regarding selected areas. These include brief analyses of implications for schools of thinking which will likely draw comparisons with social abstractionism including symbolic interactionism and social constructionism. As social abstractionism mainly falls on the structure side of the agency versus structure debate, I briefly address some of the implications for agency. Other implications covered include religion and identity, amongst others. In asking these questions, the importance of this research lies in its potentialities. It acts as a foundational exploration into social abstractionism rather than a totalising theory which would be impossible to achieve in such a small space. The potentialities created may activate further interest and considerations towards this possible new mode of sociological thought, which may give rise to new understandings and further developments of new or well-trodden sociological concepts. Perhaps most of all, it is a questioning of reality itself and of the abstract nature of external social entities which have been the quandary of sociology writers since its inception. As social abstractionism is much more aligned with the structure side of the agency/structure debate, it becomes an essential contribution to understanding how these external structures affect us and how we navigate these abstract entities.

This unveils *why* this research is important. As sociologists, we are always negotiating the abstract whether through theory or through processes of abstracting from perceived reality. Yet, despite this absolutely fundamental aspect of the field, the abstract nature of that which we negotiate is mostly navigated as if concrete. Therefore, by making explicit the abstracta of our world, it can aid sociologists in a number of ways. It elevates sociologists towards an awareness of the "most

fundamental categorical distinction" (Hoffman & Rosenkrantz, 2005: 46). This adds a new and extremely powerful tool for greater analytical depth. Rather than accept that which is abstract as axiomatic, a policy in a policy analysis for example, it can serve to "draw back the curtain" revealing the true "apparatus of power" (Lefebvre, 1991: 287). It reminds the sociologist that the object masks the truth that it is a person behind the object where causation lies. As such, it aids an enhanced methodological rigour that urges the sociologist to go further and deeper into their analyses not only in research but in critical reflection.

Given the near total absence of acknowledgment in sociology of the abstract, sociologists' own critical reflection must also be devoid of this fundamental distinction. By failing to critically reflect on the abstract nature of objects, innumerable opportunities are missed to address urgent matters in relation to the exercise of power, social change, social justice, or building a more human-centred society that emphasises concrete human need rather than abstract fictionality. Further, failure to take into account the nature of abstracta allows fictional individualised realities to be produced unabated rather than facilitating a sociology which takes people closer to the realities of human action, to knowledges which are truer and more sincere than that of the individualised fiction. Additionally, this makes the need for social abstractionism meta-disciplinary; it can transcend abstract boundaries between 'fields' of knowledge including politics, sciences, geography, or philosophy. Those who create abstract objects and are able to use them will always be the winners as they have the power to direct the social world, and those who are subject to the diktats of abstracta will always be the losers predominantly due to the reification of these objects. By

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dismantling the illusion, it breaks down the matrices of control, and of domination of the consciousness that maintains the position of the powerful.

The Literature Review

Abstract Space and Abstract Objects

Works on physical space and its utilisation are a staple of sociology (e.g., Simmel, 2009; Massey, 1984, 1994; Harvey, 2001; Löw & Steets, 2014; Löw, 2016). However, the notions of abstract objects and abstract space may be considered bordering on the esoteric and arcane. The literature on abstracta is vast, particularly within the various schools of philosophy such as Philosophy of Language (e.g., Fisher, 2019; Wetzel, 2009; Joseph, 2017; Mill, 2010: 33-34), Philosophy of Mind (e.g., Tieszen, 2005; Robinson, n.d.; Jackson, 2016), and Philosophy of Mathematics (e.g., Burgess & Rosen, 1997; Benacerraf, 1973; Balaguer, 1998; Maddy, 1992). As such, it is essential to limit our breadth of literature to focus on the two most relevant leading schools of thought which form a conflict between the agreement for and disagreement against abstract objects: Platonism and nominalism. As sociology is our focus, it is crucial to present a summary of these main arguments and then acknowledge their presence within sociological literature.

The Platonist view of abstracta is that there are abstract entities which *do* exist independently of the mind and is fundamentally founded upon Plato's (1997) theory of the Forms outlined across several of his works including Phaedo (p. 49-100), Parmenides (p. 359-397), Symposium (p. 457-505), and Republic (p. 971-1223). For Plato, Forms are more real than the concrete; they are atemporal and unchanging and

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are the most fundamental reality (Smits & Fell, 2011: 185). Furthermore, Forms are "…objects not of our sense perception, but of our understanding only" (Plato, 1997: 1254). In a reductionist interpretation, in Plato's 'world of ideas', the Forms are what could be referred to as abstracta (Kraut, 2004). These abstracta are perfect referents to qualities or concreta such as dogs, cats, justice, beauty, or goodness (Kraut, 2004). Qualities or properties in philosophy are also referred to as 'universals', that is, of classes of mind-independent entities (MacLeod & Rubenstein, n.d.). For example, we can view many shapes and types of desks, but we recognise them all as desks thus 'desk*ness'* is a universal which is independent of the mind and applicable to all instances of desks. These Forms or ideas are objective and not related to conscious ideas in the subjective mind (Popper, 1983: 76). The critical point here is that Plato acknowledges both the existence of abstracta but also a 'world of ideas' which implies an abstract spatial existence concurrent with abstracta. Subsequent major Platonist leaning works (e.g., Frege, 1948, 1956, 1968; Frege & Furth, 1964; Gödel, 1947; Russell, 2001) also argue that there are abstract entities which exist independently. Perhaps central to these are numbers (Hale, 1987; Wright, 1983; Divers & Miller, 1999; Kitcher, 1978), novels (Friedell, 2019; Lin, 2017: 5), and music (Dodd, 2002; Kivy, 1983; Norris, 2006). Moving forward, several defining features of abstracta are noted within Platonism.

Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2005: 47-52) present a summation of common Platonist features of the abstract/concrete dichotomy: concreta are spatial, temporal, capable of motion and intrinsic change, and enter into spatial and temporal relations. Accordingly, abstracta are none of these but, rather, are exemplifiable, instantiable,

and intellectually graspable as opposed to concreta which are not. Cowling (2017: 2) and Thomasson (2004: 89) also present a collation of the common but "controversial" features of abstract entities. Causality is absent, as in abstract entities can have no consequential causal effect (see Juvshik, 2017 for a detailed analysis). They cannot be created, altered or destroyed. They have no spatiotemporal location thus being timeless, without shape, and have no spatial position, a view also supported by Dodd (2007: 37) and considered the most popular by Liggins (2010: 67). They are easily accessed cognitively and epistemically as opposed to any concrete reality which, it is to be assumed, is either impossible or very difficult to access. Brock et al. (2013) and Lin (2017) alternatively, and perhaps most importantly, argue that if abstract entities do exist, then causality lies with the people who create them. Szabo (2003: 29-30) frames the absence of causality as 'causal isolation' which indicates that, if abstracta do exist, and are indeed without causation, then they must exist in isolation. At this point there is temptation to fall into cause-and-effect arguments. However, this is ultimately futile as it would require a regressive search back to the very first causal event of which logically there either cannot be one or we are as yet unable to explain one, at least non-theologically. The cause-and-effect debate has been substantially covered elsewhere (e.g., Hume, 1888; Beauchamp & Rosenberg, 1981; Psillos, 2002; Salmon, 1984; Woodward, 2003). As the focus is ultimately sociological, it is reasonable to begin any causal chain with *people* and follow the causal chain forward. People (cause) create laws (effect) and, consequentially, these laws alter the social world. This means that abstracta are socially produced and are not necessarily universals in a Platonist sense. Szabo continues to note that things oft considered abstract such as novels rely upon concreta for their existence thus, if they exist, are 'dependant abstracta' and in this case rely upon an author to create them. This brings

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one to consider that perhaps it would be reasonable to accept that nothing exists in isolation whether concrete or abstract or without relata between both abstract and concrete. Schopenhauer's (2010: 23-24) opening paragraph in *The World as Will and Representation* seems to confer agreement. He reflects that only humans can bring the world to an abstract consciousness and that "no truth is more certain" than the fact that every object, including time and space, is an object in relation to a subject: "Everything…is unavoidably afflicted with this dependence on the subject and exists only for the subject".

There are, of course, objections to Platonist works (e.g., Cheyne, 2001; Liggins, 2010; Pinto, 1998). Perhaps the polar opposite of Platonism is nominalism, a field in which it is argued that abstract entities do *not* exist and that existence is utterly concrete. Considered a founding father of nominalism, William of Ockham (1964: 44), in reference to universals, argued that universals exist neither inside nor outside the mind but are, instead, a mental picture abstracted from the concrete; thus, abstracta are nothing more than a mental picture. In the same sentiment, musical works are considered concreta (Goodman, 1976; Predelli, 1995; Caplan & Matheson, 2006), as too are novels (Hayaki, 2009). Field (1989, 2016) claims that numbers have no existence at all. Goodman & Quine (1947: 105-107) outrightly deny the existence of abstracta yet concede that doing so will create numerous philosophical challenges to overcome. Furthermore, they say that they have no explanation as to why they do not exist other than "philosophical intuition" (p. 105). Szabo (2003) draws much attention to the difficulties of nominalists arguing against the existence of abstracta, although these particular complexities, many of which are intricate micro-level examinations of

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the issue, are beyond the scope of this paper. It does, however, bring to the forefront the difficulties of both sides in coming to any agreement over the issue of abstracta. One particular point that I would address is the opinion Szabo (2003: 12) puts forward that nominalism is such a radical approach that "the ontology it yields may not even be properly described as a desert landscape". This implies that, when one accepts the non-existence of abstracta, then one is left with nought but a bland reality. I would dispute this yet loosely agree at the same time. It is not that the non-existence of abstracta leads to this bland reality, but that when one takes away all that is abstract, or sees beyond abstracta, in what could be described as escaping Plato's cave, one is left with nought but the world of nature. The abstract formulation of all that we are led to believe and the superiority that humanity believes separates us from the animal kingdom all dissipate to reveal a reality in which we are one and the same with the rest of the natural. We live primarily in the abstract, an abstract which is omnipotent, omnipresent, and inescapable; to be human is to live abstractly.

Although seemingly set in stone, the abstract/concrete dichotomy is not the totality of possibility. There are combinatory instantiations known as concrete abstractions which convert the dichotomy to trichotomy. Lefebvre (1991), through a Marxian lens, exemplifies concrete abstractions arguing that exchange value, commodities, money, and capital (p. 306), as well as production and labour (p. 69), are all concrete abstracta which have a social existence. Social relations too are concrete abstractions with no existence in reality (p. 404). Lefebvre (p. 340) strengthens his commitment to the commodity by outlining the dichotomous status commodities have through their concrete existence but backed by what could only be described as a consumerist

spectrum of abstracta where the origins of the commodity are erased and replaced by abstraction through self-exhibition. In today's consumerist society, it would also be fair to add to this the pure abstracta of advertising through which the abstract sells the concrete or, as is often the case, sells the abstract such as music, stories, web space, access, timeshares, subscriptions, and ownership, for examples (Soules, 2015: 88; Fine, 1981: 24-25). It is important to note that Lefebvre makes no claim to Platonism thus even in the most seminal of texts the link has not been made between abstract space and abstracta. Butler (2016) argues that Lefebvre's conception of the concrete abstraction helps understand relationships within juridico-political arenas and this can be seen in Valde-Ugalde (2014: 192) who argues in the context of the geopolitical, that the "defence of liberty against communism" is a concrete abstraction on the basis that the USSR was a concretum and that the concept of a "vague notion of foreign threat" is abstract. I would argue this is incorrect as the USSR, and any nation-state, or unified collection of nation-states (EU or USSR, for example), is abstract, and this will be explored later.

Thompson (2017b: 208) highlights Keiller's (2014) essay on the destruction of Liverpool's *raison d'être* as a maritime port. The relocation of the "abstraction of global capital" has caused irreparable concrete damage to the lives of the former employees and the landscape of Liverpool. This concept could easily be extended to cover any industry which has moved operations overseas to exploit cheap labour or natural resources. However, this somewhat conflicts with Lefebvre's (1991: 306; 2009: xix) notion that capital is concrete as opposed to abstract. O'Kane (2018: 258) reinforces Lefebvre by buttressing the argument that concrete abstractions are not

"epistemological deceptions of false consciousness, but possess a practical power" realised through social praxis. Whilst this is mostly agreeable, social praxis under any given abstractum does not by its nature dissolve the possibility that the abstractum concretised has formed a false consciousness. For example, the abstraction of the disabled as 'scroungers' may have a praxis realised and quantified through hate crime. This praxis is based upon a false consciousness of what it means to be disabled and is often a product of media abstracta surrounding disability, a term which is itself abstract. Biolsi (2007: 400) also exemplified concrete abstraction through race however this is limited to a mere mention and so we now hit the limit of sociological considerations of such a concept. There are other schools which consider the concept but are restricted to that of the urban (Holgersen, 2020; O'Kane, 2018; Schmid, 2018; Larsen & Brandt, 2018; Addie, 2020), planning law (Lambert, 2021), linguistics (Screti, 2018), space-time (Castree, 2009: 53), and organisation studies (Agrizzi et al., 2021). Ultimately, the concept never seems to move beyond the Lefebvrian, Marxian frame. Moving forward, we now turn to abstract spatiality.

Returning once more to philosophy, the idealist notion of universals, and indeed to Plato (1997) himself, the concept of Khôra (a term which has multiple forms across writers: Khora, Khôra, Khõra, chora, chôra, chõra, or χώρα) appears in *Timaeus* (p. 1251) as a "receptacle of all becoming" but an "invisible and characterless sort of thing, one that receives all things and shares in a most perplexing way in what is intelligible, a thing extremely difficult to comprehend" (p. 1254). Bertrand Russell (1986: 146) quotes Benjamin Jowlett's translation of Plato describing Khôra as having:

> …a third nature, which is space, and is eternal, and admits not of
> destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is
> apprehended without the help of sense, by a kind of spurious reason, and
> is hardly real; which we beholding as in a dream, say of all existence that
> it must of necessity be in some place and occupy a space, but that what
> is neither in heaven nor in earth has no existence.

Thus, physical or abstract, spatiality must be inferred as we cannot perceive it directly. Furthermore, the necessity of all existence to reside within the heaven/earth dichotomy poses controversy for abstracta as if we consider earth as physical space then heaven might be considered as abstract space to allow for all existence.

The spatial appeals continue with Derrida and Caputo (1998: 84) arguing that Khôra is the "immense and indeterminate spatial receptacle" reinforcing its implied abstract spatiality. Derrida makes several further descriptions of Khôra. Derrida (1981: 160), in a similar fashion to Plato, argues that Khôra is a "matrix… never offered up in the form of presence, or in the presence of form". Derrida et al. (1997: 3) elaborate further stating Khôra is "the spacing that is the condition for everything to take place, for everything to be inscribed". The final and most essential observations Derrida (1995: 109) makes are firstly his agreement that Khôra does indeed imply spatiality, but secondly that "Khôra means: place occupied by someone, country, inhabited place, marked place, rank, post, assigned position, territory or region". This last claim is particularly relevant as these are all either abstract spaces (e.g., country, territory) or abstracta (e.g., rank, assigned position). Thus, Russell and Derrida respectively make connections, at least implied connections, between abstracta and abstract space

which is further enforced by Casey (1997: 36) who denotes Khôra has "no matter". Ofman (2017: 6), quite illogically, suggests Khôra is impossible to conceive of either through sense or intellect, as either phenomenon nor rational thought. Ofman's suggestion seems to be a complex way of implying that Khôra exists but cannot be known to exist thus leading to an insurmountable paradox. Earlier, both Kristeva (1986: 13) and Haver (1993), concerning Khôra, acknowledged the paradox of the impossibility of theorising the untheorisable in the arguments of others, yet Ofman did not recognise this. Kristeva (1984) fashioned Khôra in a semiotic frame and states that Khôra "lends itself to phenomenological, spatial intuition and gives rise to geometry" and furthermore it can be "designated and regulated" but "never definitively posited" (p. 26). Sallis (1999) dedicates an entire book to the consideration of Khôra, its discourses, and its meaning. He most relevantly denotes the ways in which the term has been translated from Greek to mean 'place' or 'locus' based upon its common linkage to place within Plato's writings (Sallis, 1999: 10). Sallis implies that these are mistranslations yet is unable to conclude the true meaning of Khôra seemingly leaving it as unsolvable. However, Cornford (1997), in his commentaries on Plato, finds that 'space' plays a significant role in the concept of Khôra with the "receptacle" being "ultimately" spatial (Cornford, 1997: 199). Cornford (1976: 6) also presents an interesting observation on the possibility that the 'real' space that we have come to know is, in fact, abstract space which he argues was originally implied in Greek geometry but subsequently endowed with physical existence via atomists (e.g., Pierre Gassendi (see LoLordo, 2007)) who theorised the existence of an unlimited Void ultimately becoming accepted as common sense.

The summation of Khôra thus leaves the concept relatively open in terms of identifying its nature, although Jenkins (2007: 149) associates all enquiry into Khôra with being universally "abstract and immaterial". Nonetheless, the literature surrounding this concept is quite unsteady, but there is at least agreement amongst authors that Khôra is indeed spatial and most of the authors seem to be 'feeling around' in the realms of the abstractness of the concept. However, following from the confused landscape of Khôra, Kitarō Nishida's (2012) fusion of 'Western' with 'Eastern' philosophy focusing on the dialectical universal conceives the notion of *Basho* as a place or temporospatial field and the base of reality, a *shin no mu no basho* (place of true nothing) which surrounds all beings (Davis, 2019: 54; Loughnane, 2019: 22). Krummel (2015: 94) describes this space as an "an-ontological clearing for ontological emergence". Krummel (2015: 3) further links Basho to that of Khôra terming it a 'chiasmatic chorology', chorology being a term borrowed from that of Sallis's (1999) book-length study of Khôra. With Nishida's Basho, we encounter the same paradoxical conundrum as with Khôra. A place of true nothing is still a *something* if it is a place. Despite the evident appeal to the abstract, Krummel (in Nishida, 2012: 6) argues that Basho is more a "concrete situatedness that we all live and experience". Basho, perhaps unsurprisingly, is limited to Eastern and mostly Japanese-focused texts. This means English language texts are hard to come by and those available are near-universally derived from a 'Western' perspective. Sociological texts are almost absent except for limited examples in closely related fields. Some exist in relation to language (e.g., Maynard, 1999; Shimizu, 2016; Soga, 1994), culture, particularly around 'politeness' in Japan (e.g., Botz-Bornstein, 2008; Haugh, 2005, 2007; Kádáar & Haugh, 2013), and policing (Shimizu, 2019) but this is as far as it goes. When taking both Khôra and Basho into account, it seems that all authors involved are actually trying to grasp

between the following: either nothingness in and of *itself* which, I would argue, is beyond the boundaries of human consciousness, of thought or imagination; or, they are trying to formulate an abstract space in and of itself as a source of all beginning, becoming, and being. However, as has been demonstrated, all authors seem to have (in the spirit of this paper) formulated their own interstice between nothing and something (space) which they have not yet been able to reconcile.

Keeping with the Platonist frame, a consideration of the notion of 'the world of ideas' proposed by Plato (1997) should be analysed more closely. As previously noted, the 'world of ideas' implies spatiality, but it is not an isolated concept. The externality of a world of ideas is also considered to exist by several Platonist-leaning authors. Mathematician Charles Hermite (*cited in* Darboux, 1906: 46) takes both a mathematical and theological position arguing that there exists:

> an entire world which is the totality of mathematical truths, to which we
>
> have access only with our mind, just as a world of physical reality exists,
>
> the one like the other independent of ourselves, both of divine creation.

Physicist Roger Penrose (1989: 554) continues the mathematical theme and speaks of Platonic contact, that is, of different minds making contact with the same externally existing world of ideas even if their mental pictures of any given idea may differ. This is in similar vein to that of Nicomachus of Gerasa (1926: 189) who believed that God created the world arithmetically, that numbers were "pre-existent" in the mind of the world-creating God but these numbers were "conceptual only, immaterial in every way". Craig (2017: 48) also adopts a theological position derived from Philo of Alexandria (2001: 50-51) in that, as architectural plans exist only in the architect's

mind, so too does the world of ideas only exist in the mind of God and cannot exist anywhere other than the divine Logos. Jones (1926) and later Rich (1954) take ideas a theological step further arguing that Platonic ideas are literally the thoughts of God. Bennabi (*cited in* Bariun, 1988: 5; also, Wahba, 2007: 168-169; Benlahcene, 2011) links the theological to the sociological through Islam. He argues that there are three worlds upon which civilisation depends: the world of ideas, the world of persons, and the world of things. These interact dialectically in the production of civilisation and culture. Bennabi (2003: 21-22) makes the important point that ideas come before objects, that is, the concrete is a product of the abstract and Wahba (2007: 169) further emphasises the ability of ideas to change the world of persons and the world of things. Bennabi (2003: 4) metaphorises ideas as germs, both good and bad, good germs that spread dialectical progress and bad germs that are contagious intergenerationally and hinder or destroy any given society. He later goes on to highlight the relationship between the world of ideas and the world of objects and that, when the connection between them dies, the individual becomes superficially attached to the object but familiarity with the ideas dissipates and they lose understanding of the idea along with any inquiring mind (p. 32). This last point is particularly interesting as, in terms of ideas that exist only as ideas, especially when those ideas form the basis of a society, and there is no object to which they attach, then Bennabi's logic would imply that the individual has no understanding of the world of ideas.

Lotze (1887: 96-97) takes a more unified position linking the world of ideas to an experiential frame stating:

The only reality given us, the true reality, includes as an inseparable part of itself this varying flow of phenomena in space and time, this course of Things that happen. This ceaselessly advancing melody of event is the metaphysical place in which the connectedness of the world of Ideas, the multiplicity of its harmonious relations, not only is found by us but alone has its reality.

This notion is also followed by Oakeshott (1985: 26-27) in that there is "no experiencing which is not thinking, nothing experienced which is not thought, and consequently no experience which is not a world of ideas". Most relevantly, Oakeshott (1985: 27) claims that an idea is an abstraction, but a world of ideas is an abstract world. Therefore, we can maintain the notion that when a world is a product of ideas, then that world must necessarily be an abstract world. Oakeshott (1985: 29) goes on to say that this world of ideas is not a collection of ideas but a complex and significant whole behind which there is nothing. Oakeshott specifically names history, science, and practice as worlds of ideas. The notion of there being nothing behind the world of ideas begins to draw us further into the sociological and we can turn to Jean Baudrillard's (1994) 'Simulation and Simulacra' to see how this presents itself.

Clarke and Doel (2011: 43) summarise key points from Baudrillard's (1994) seminal work. These mainly surround 'orders of simulacra' which clarify the processual order inherent to explaining how the world is constructed on the representations of representations which hide the notion that there is no real original. The first order is that of the counterfeit image of the real, yet still recognised as the artificial. The second order is the disintegration of the difference between real and representation due to the

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large-scale production of imitations. The third order is that the image, the abstract, determines reality; the simulacrum. Baudrillard's work leans toward symbolism and signification which constitute a social reality. These, however, can be framed as abstracta in themselves. A symbol is, at its root, an idea and an idea which conveys subsequent ideas and meaning, often with intent, and often to obfuscate a reality or to hide its absence. Baudrillard (1994: 1) spans the gap between abstracta and abstract space although, as with many other works that we can associate abstracta and abstract space with, falls back on the idea of the map, that "It is…the map that precedes the territory - *precession of simulacra* - that engenders the territory" (emphasis in original). It is not that maps cannot imply an abstract space; rather, nobody seems to be able to move away from the map as a formulation of abstract space. Baudrillard (1994: 38) does however make important points surrounding abstracta, claiming that:

> …many events (the oil crisis, etc.) never started, ersatz, and as artifacts of history, catastrophes and crises destined to maintain a historical investment under hypnosis. The media and the official news service are only there to maintain the illusion of an actuality, of the reality of the stakes, of the objectivity of facts.

So, here, not only are events presented as abstracta, but the media *re*-abstract the abstracta thus hinting at the political and capitalist opportunity for manipulation via the "illusion of an actuality" which ultimately reinforces an illusion of "objectivity of facts"; a seemingly objective interpretation of the real as opposed to an illusory interpretation of the illusion. Furthermore, Baudrillard's (1994: 1) notion of the 'simulation', "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal", again reinforces

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abstracta as that which has no reality. Jameson (1991: 18) notes that the simulacrum, "an identical copy for which no original has ever existed", refers back to Plato's conceptualisation of simulacrum (see Lecht, 2010: 101-103) as too do Deleuze and Krauss (1983). Deleuze (1993: 40) later criticises Baudrillard's formulation insofar as, quite rightly, suggesting that Baudrillard's simulacra essentially begin from the concrete and are subsequently abstracted to the point where no concreta are recognisable. Deleuze built on his position noting that concreta are often *ex post facto*, products of ideas. At this point, it makes sense to appeal to Karl Popper's (1980) concept of 'Three Worlds'.

Popper (1980) argued that there are three worlds, 1, 2, and 3, and these worlds interact and intersect. World 1 represents the physical world, the concreta, including living and non-living objects. World 2 represents the psychological, of mental processes and subjective experiences but also of human suffering, particularly avoidable suffering. World 3 represents the "products of the human mind" including language, stories, religion, theories, art, and mathematics. In other words, abstracta. These products of the human mind also include concreta such as vehicles and buildings and Wardle (2016: 535) offers up the iPhone as the materialisation of abstract labour. Popper (1980: 144-145) exemplifies world interaction via books insofar as the concrete book exists in world 1, the physical world, but the work itself exists in world 3 as abstractum thus the physical book of world 1 is the embodiment, or instantiation, of the abstractum of world 3. He further exemplifies the American Constitution and its influence as a World 3 object, an abstractum, before acknowledging his own appeal to the abstract/concrete dichotomy (p. 145). Unlike

Plato's world of ideas considered "immutable, divine and inhabited by concepts", Popper's interpretation is that of changeability and human-made with false contemplations of truth (Corvi, 1997: 86). Furthermore, Popper outright rejects nominalist criticism which he accuses of charging him with "hypostatisation" or what Whitehead (1948: 52) or Jessop (2014a: 483) would consider as the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness', a logical fallacy whereby the abstract is fallaciously considered concrete. Popper (1980: 153-159) also addresses the notion of causation of abstract objects stating that scientific theories (abstracta), in turn, have effects on physical objects (concreta). We can add to this by considering that *social* theories can then have effects on physical objects if we consider people to be physical objects; thus, abstracta such as laws or capital must therefore affect the concreta of people. Popper (1980: 164) implies this when he states that abstracta "must always be *grasped* or *understood* by a *mind* before they lead to human action" (emphasis in original). One of Popper's (1980: 40) most important statements is that:

> World 3 is man-made only in its origin, and that once theories exist, they begin to have a life of their own: they produce previously invisible consequences, they produce new problems.

Popper is essentially making several critical claims: that abstract space both exists and is created via human means, and that abstract objects of human creation exist and are subsequently consequential in producing new problems. They both precede the grasper of abstracta yet succeed the conceiver.

Like Popper (1980), Gottlob Frege (1984: 363), in a similar vein, proposed the concept of the 'Third Realm', 'realm' clearly implying space, but follows the mathematical

theme and, in his words, "must be recognised". Frege claims that this realm, as with Khôra, cannot be perceived with the senses and is non-spatiotemporal yet seems to serve as a realm of pre-existing knowledge. Frege argues that the Pythagorean theorem is true independent of the individual's opinion. Furthermore, this theorem needs no owner and existed prior to the thinker. Frege goes on to say that when the individual thinks a particular thought or idea, they do not create the idea but grasp it in relation to its pre-existence in the third realm. It is what Gould and Davis (2014: 58) describe as "a platonic realm of abstract thoughts without owners". This grasping of ideas can only be expressed through language and symbolism, the latter appealing to the Baudrillardian. Notturno (1985: 21) offers a delineation between Frege and Popper highlighting Popper's World 3 as products of the mind versus Frege's pre-existing knowledge. It is arguable, however, that the third realm is, in fact, both. For example, if we take the notion that legal laws exist externally, then legal laws exist as an abstract product of the mind yet simultaneously pre-exist an individual who subsequently comes to knowledge of any given instantiation of law. Thus, the knowledge of said laws both succeed and precede the individual. Perhaps a simplistic way of delineating between Frege and Popper is to state that for Frege, knowledge *pre-exists* in abstract space, but for Popper that knowledge is *put* into abstract space.

Thus far, unlike the previous authors, Frege's Third Realm has stayed within philosophy and even within this field explicit works on the concept are rare (e.g., Noë, 2012; Burge, 1992; Rousse, 2015; Bengson, 2015; Currie, 1980; Maleki, 2018; Mickett, 1988). There are notable exceptions with its appearance in psychologism and anti-psychologism (e.g., Kusch, 1995; Hanzel, 2014; Cohen, 1998), but again these

lean towards the philosophical. Sociologically, notions of the third realm appear in Roberts and Armitage (2020) who frame consumer 'luxury' as both concrete and abstract but with a connecting third realm which sees lived luxury consumer experience as what could be considered an illusory existence. Numerous writers (e.g., Devasoorya & Srinivasa Vallabhan, 2016; Read, 1960; Smith, 1995) make appeals to a 'third realm', but rather than incorporate 'third realm' as an actual concept, they tend to use it in lieu of the word tripartite or trichotomy thus the meaning of a third realm becomes skewed. Through a China-centric lens, Huang (1993) and Gui (2020) argue that a third realm exists between the state and society. The concept is put forward as an alternative to the Habermasian dichotomous public sphere. This third realm influences state and society, yet both, Huang argues, have a kind of wrangling over who dominates the space. This realm has a historicity that has been nebulous across dynastic and political epochs and has become increasingly institutionalised. Although Huang argues this forms a trichotomy, it is still a dichotomy with a third realm seemingly acting as an abstract space within which state versus social conflict occurs. Sakarya (2018) draws upon Huang's (1993) third realm to argue that 'rightful resistance', that is, the use of already given rights to resist the corrupt political system, is a discursive third realm surrounding the wrangling between state and society. Continuing the China-centricity, although more widely applicable, Coase and Wang's (2012) tracking of China's journey into capitalism notes that the state, in addition to maintaining a market abundance of concrete goods, must also cultivate a universe of ideas in similar fashion to Popper's (1980) World 3 otherwise the health of the market will decline. This brings us to the most seminal author on the concept of abstract space.

Lefebvre's (1991) 'The Production of Space' is perhaps the defining work explicitly on abstract space. Here, we arrive at a solid attempt to consider abstract space within society but through a neo-Marxist lens. Lefebvre's text is based around the notion that humans produce their own space and is not simply inherited from nature, nor is it bound by laws of geometry (Molotch, 1993: 887). Lefebvre (1991) gives numerous defining elements to abstract space. He considers it both produced and productive (p. 288), it is the location and source of abstraction (p. 348), a tool of power (p. 50, 391) and of domination (p. 370), and it is inherently violent (p. 388). He further hints at politics and ideology as being abstractly spatial with violence "cloaked in rationality", a rationality which is utilised for justification of violence (p. 282). Abstract space is manipulated by authorities (p. 51) and the bourgeoisie (p. 62-63) whilst containing a milieu of these entities all promoting a false consciousness (p. 392-393), including by way of illusion (p. 411), and perhaps perpetuated through an "ensemble of images, signs, and symbols" (p. 288). Additionally, it is sustained by bureaucracy and supported by non-critical knowledge (p. 52) which, Lefebvre suggests, could be deconstructed via "drawing back the curtain" to reveal the true "apparatus of power" (p. 287). This particular point seems to represent an interpretation of Plato's (1997: 1132-1137) Allegory of the Cave, but it is agreeable that once the individual understands the metaphysical status of abstracta, they will come to realise its mechanisms. Lefebvre (1991) continues stating that abstract space is repressive through the "imposition of hierarchy and segregation" (p. 318) and it stipulates inclusion and exclusion (p. 288). It is also dependent upon consensus (p. 57), can only be grasped abstractly (p. 307) and has concrete restraints (p. 59). The physical space and the abstract space which surrounds us are also inseparable (p. 213).

Lefebvre (1991) bridges the gap between abstract space and what we might consider physical space by arguing that space is both: abstract in that it has no existence except "by virtue of the exchange ability of its component parts" and concrete insofar as being "socially real" (p. 341-342). Furthermore, abstract space carries a duality of abstractness yet is real in the way that concrete abstractions such as money or commodities are real but not concrete as in physical products (p. 26-27). Lefebvre also posits class as an abstract space within which the middle classes are placed between the working class and bourgeoisie in a sort of sanitised, pre-empted designation whereby they will be manipulated unwittingly (p. 309). Yet, for all its worth, the bourgeoisie can achieve nothing but abstractions such as money or commodities (p. 348) whilst these abstractions act as the murderer of nature, an anti-nature whose weapons are signs, images, discourse, labour, and products, all driven by a suicidal humanity (p. 70-71). Only class struggle prevents abstract space from achieving omnipotence (p. 55). Without doubt, Lefebvre's work is firmly rooted in urban planning, mapping, and is more geographically critical than sociologically despite originating from a neo-Marxist position. However, what has been extracted here from the text shows a clear sociological thread.

Merrifield (2013: 108) interprets Lefebvre's abstract space as not being what it seems and that it is not what the term suggests but, instead, it is "deeply material, deeply and troublingly real" and has a "very real social existence". Perhaps this social existence of abstract space is demonstrated by Yi-Fu Tuan (1977: 17) who saw abstract space as geometrical, geometry being abstract in itself, and being created from "primal spatial experiences". Furthermore, Tuan argues, humans create abstract space

mentally derived from the geometry of nature and, from this, embody feelings, images, and thoughts into the material such as architecture or city planning. Tuan also associates space with a sense of freedom. He argues that freedom implies space, having power, and room to act (p. 52). The immobile, he notes, would labour at basic understandings of abstract space due to the lack of experiential movement (p. 52). He follows this by saying that unknown space is abstract space, as in a new town for example is abstract, but over time it becomes concretised as we experience it and find meaning in it (p. 199). This point in particular is objectional. I would argue rather that it is the inverse; a new town that we move to is closer to concrete reality than a town that we have significant experience of as a new town requires one to come to learn the town, that is, the abstracta of the locale such as businesses, values, culture or tradition.

Despite these observations, the concept of abstract space in academia is almost universally Lefebvrian and usually linked to that of the urban such as urban planning (Bradley, 2018; Andrienko et al., 2015; Blomley, 1998; Allen & Pryke, 1994; Thompson, 2017b), cartography (Lambert, 2020; Pandya, 1990; Roth, 2009), housing (Gotham et al., 2001; Thompson, 2017a) and architecture (Zevi & Barry, 1993; Giedion, 2008; Zevi, 1957). These works form part of the broader arena of the conceptualising of abstract space and lean more towards what Lefebvre (1991) would term 'representative space', that is, for example, a map as a representation of physical space. Thus, room exists for reformulating an attested abstract space, that is, abstract space in and of itself, evidenced and not limited to a focus on space which is simply abstracted *from* physical space, but both from physical space and in itself. In fact,

Casey (1997: 191-192) summarises Immanuel Kant's metaphysical interpretation of space, arguing that:

> Not only is [space] abstract as absolute or infinite, capacious or immense, scenographic and volumetric, it is now also abstract as the form of "outer sense," that is, what structures the external world in a way that is "extrinsic to the subject".

Casey (1997: 192) goes on to say that Kant is clear that "human consciousness itself depends on the well-ordered world of outer sense and in particular on its "permanence"". These two points are crucial as they support the externality of that which is abstract but also suggest that human consciousness relies on structure and especially abstract structure.

Thus far, I have dedicated a significant proportion of time to establishing an important overview of the philosophical landscape of abstract objects and abstract space. There is no doubt that acknowledgement of abstracta in sociology is a rare occurrence. Swedberg (2019) presents us with both an agreement that this is the case, but also a brief outline of the isolated references to the abstract within sociology including Mills (2000), Parsons (1949), Weber (2012), and Durkheim (1970) and Merton (1968). Swedberg generally views abstraction as isolating and generalising when asking how abstraction is used in sociology. He argues that levels of abstracting can be used to separate aspects of phenomena but also tie them together as a whole. This reflects the intent of this thesis. Whilst we have already straddled the boundary of sociology and other schools of thought, we should now consider how these aforementioned concepts manifest within broader arenas of sociology beginning with one of the most

prominent contributors. Durkheim (1982) argues that the abstracta of societies, that is, the norms, rules and behaviours, should be conceived of as 'social facts'. These rely upon a minimum of "several individuals" to have interacted, yet synthesis occurs externally to us becoming crystallised and instituted outside of us (p. 45). Furthermore, these social facts become normalised and accepted until the individual attempts to resist, at which point the collective reinforces the social facts onto the individual through coercive measures (p. 51). This certainly reflects personal experiences discussed on pages 6-9**.** The customs of the society derived through social facts become enshrined in the written word which form the origins of legal, moral, religious, and political codes, and can continue to exist without the individual (p. 55). Thus, Durkheim argues, the word institution comes to mean beliefs and behaviours instituted by the collective, and it is these institutions, social facts, that should be the focus of sociology (p. 45).

What is important here, is that Durkheim is appealing to the externality of abstracta within the social world. Durkheim (p. 59) reinforces this through his definition of social facts:

> A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint; or which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations.

Ramp (1998: 137) and Lukes (1982: 4) note that Durkheim has repeatedly been accused of hypostasising society. This is an agreeable charge as Durkheim seems to suggest that these abstracta must be reframed in the concrete for study. Rather,

'society' is a kind of meta-abstractum which denotes the categorisation of populaces. However, if society's existence is limited to that of the abstract, if the abstracta of social facts are conceived and impressed upon us, then the form that abstracta takes is malleable thus abstract structures can be and are applied. Thus, the social fact is what it is, an abstractum that dominates the social consciousness. As Margaret Thatcher (*cited in* Keay, 1987) once said "There is no such thing as society", although a later clarification of the statement was issued which stated "But society as such does not exist except as a concept" and "individuals and families [are] the real sinews of society rather than of society as an abstract concept". In denying the abstraction of society and validating the concreta (individuals), it not only destroys the abstractum, or the existing social facts, but allows for the reabstracting of 'society' into a new form, in Thatcher's case the implementation of the 'neoliberal society'.

Social facts could also be seen as incorporating cultural values. Not all values are universal but it is argued that there are cultural universals (see Murdock, 1945). Cultural universals include things such as family, school, and economies. It is important to note that cultural universals are not considered through a Platonist lens but simply through the notion of what is universally applicable to global cultures. However, Brown's (1991 *cited in* Pinker, 2002: 435-439) list of human universals (which are supposedly culturally universal) includes the concept of 'abstraction in speech and thought' thus abstraction is universally applicable to humans. Although Brown's list of universals are not universally abstract, the majority of entries on the list do constitute abstracta. Basic examples would be 'age statuses', 'beliefs about [X]' and 'identity', amongst many others. If abstraction is applicable to the totality of global

humanity, then the totality of humanity must interact with abstracta. Thus, it is conceivable that abstraction forms the very root of all that is social and perhaps underlies the absolute unifying principle of all people. Moving into social constructionism, this school maintains the position that knowledge is created and not discovered (Schwandt, 2003). However, the creation of social constructs, argue Berger and Luckmann (1991: 70-72), is achieved through continuous interaction and eventually habitualisation, yet also argue that ideas are "not *that* important in society" (p. 26). Furthermore, given their foundational contribution, Berger and Luckmann (1991: 135) deny Platonist possibility. This seems a somewhat illogical position given the focal point of social constructs or, in other words, that which exists only as an idea regardless of praxis. Thus, there is an implied denial of social constructs existing externally to us, an oppositional position to the Durkheimian externality of social facts. Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann treat institutions as objective when, in fact, as institutions are the internality of abstracta, their nature must be both objective *and* subjective. I discuss social constructionism in greater detail in the chapter 'The Dicussion and Implications' on page 255.

Continuing, Butler (2016: 3-4) highlights Hegel's (1966: 463) argument that abstraction is a vice of the uneducated who, through the process of abstracting, isolate individual facets of complex social phenomena. Butler denoted Hegel's example of the murderer whom the masses see through the abstractum of 'murderer' with all other human essences "annulled". Schopenhauer (2010: 86) also claims that "abstraction involves thinking away fine distinctions". A brief trawl of any media can uncover similar abstracta in relation to 'paedophiles', 'sex offenders', 'teenagers', the 'disabled',

'benefit claimants', and any given 'group' as defined by the abstractum allocated to them. Berger and Luckmann (1991: 55) support this notion by positing the use of language to build "semantic zones" around which classification schemes are built. These classification schemes encode abstracta with specific attributes that make them classifiable, such as in the aforementioned 'groups'. This somewhat directs us to the classic *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* by Stan Cohen (2011). Folk devils are abstracta appealed to with the intent of pushing moral panic (Jewell, 2014). However, Cohen does not make explicit this connection to that which is abstract. Similar notions can also be applied to many of the seminal labelling theory authors as well as the abstracta of stigmatisation, all of which can be framed under social abstractionism as abstracta. According to Fraser and Wilde (2011: 118), Marx believed that Hegelianism gave too much autonomy to the world of ideas and was critical of the proposition that by simply thinking about the world differently it could be changed. However, Marx was incorrect. It may be that he was appealing to a lack of attached action subsequent to the idea but, regardless, thinking differently is fundamental to changing ideas and the abstract forms which they can produce. This can be evidenced across wide arenas including ideas of disability, deviance, or norms. For example, the abstractum of 'the disabled' when conceived of as a burden is wildly different to the abstractum of 'the disabled' conceived of as valuable to society; the abstractum and its encoding are changeable. In a spatially abstract world of ideas, thinking differently generates divergent ideas which subsequently subvert the dominance of the status quo ideas which have become embedded. Becker (1973), in leaning towards the social constructionist in his study of deviance, is slightly more forthcoming in his acknowledgement of abstracta arguing that culture (p. 80), groups (p. 122), and outsiders (p.163), are all abstract. However, the social constructionist school is surprisingly absent of any specific

acknowledgement of abstracta. Moving on, perhaps the next area sociologically is sexuality and gender.

Lefebvre (1991: 309) argues that abstract space maintains a "phallic solitude and the self-destruction of desire" with the "representation of sex thus tak[ing] the place of sex itself while the term 'sexuality' serves to cover up this mechanism of devaluation". This is suggestive that 'sexuality' is an abstractum or, rather, as I would have it, a blanket term for the spectrum of abstracta which usurps the natural within sexual praxis. Maintaining the same principle, gender can also be seen as a spectrum of abstracta, but conflict exists in this arena. Within studies of gender, we see Platonism and nominalism in the form of gender realism and gender nominalism. Mikkola (2016: 46) delineates these positions with gender realism maintaining that there is some universal that women share which unifies them all, and gender nominalism holds that this feature does not exist. Mikkola (2006: 78) notes that the debate reflects the same arguments between Platonists and nominalists. Again, we see an implied appeal from the gender realist camp to the notion of universals, that is, a universal of 'woman' applicable to all women. It makes reasonable sense then that the universal of man is applicable to all men. Of course, the separation of sex and gender is a fundamental delineation which allows gender to be the spectrum of abstracta that it is. Without separation, sex itself would be reduced to a spectrum of abstracta insofar as the norms and values associated with the dichotomy. The notion of separation is what gender nominalists use to deny the existence of a universal of 'womanness'. Spelman (1990) and Young (2020) agree that 'woman' is inseparable from that of 'race', ethnicity, or age. Spelman (1990: 175) extends the argument to say that gender is socially

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constructed and joined with the aforementioned concepts. However, if gender is socially constructed, then it exists only as an idea; and if we accept race, ethnicity and age statuses to be socially constructed, then they too exist only as ideas thus each idea *is* separable. Rather than socially constructed, they are encoded abstracta. Hong (2006: 78) brings in abstract space to argue that gender, race, and sexuality are surveilled but this surveillance is dependent on abstract space. Hong views this frame through US imperialism which brings us firmly into the political, but that is where the existing literature seems to end with regards to the sociology of sex and gender.

The final abstract object focused theory is that of the 'social artefact'. In a similar vein to Popper's (1980) 'Three Worlds', social artefacts, or the more categorised cultural artefacts, are considered to be "products of social beings or their behaviour" (Babbie, 2008: 108). Social constructionism sees social artefacts as "products of historically situated interchanges among people" (Gergen, 1985; Leppington, 1991: 71; Wick, 1996: 66). Generally, however, things described as social artefacts account for a broad spectrum: statistics, documents, records, jokes, books, poems, buildings, pottery, scientific discoveries, religious identities, and prisons (Babbie, 2008: 108; Bidwell, 2008: 3; Garland, 1990; Neto, 2017: 11). As we can see, there is little abstract or concrete distinction made. Babbie (2008: 108), however, mistakenly attributes jokes, books, and poems to be concreta. In social abstractionism, books serve as a concrete instantiation of the abstract, a vessel through which the abstract is communicated with jokes, poems, or the content of a book remaining abstract. Thomasson (1999) is much clearer on a philosophical position. Thomasson (1999: xi) sees fictional characters of novels to be similar in nature to "theories, laws, governments and literary works" which

are "tethered by…dependencies on books, readers, and authors". Additionally, she argues that artefacts are imbued with the intentionality of the creator: "Intentionality signals it as an artifact, an object created by the purposeful activity of humans" (p. 35) and thus is indicative of infusing an abstractum with a causal continuity when it is the intent of a creator to elicit an effect. She also likens them to Platonist universals (p. xii) and, rather than 'social artefacts', she refers to them as "abstract artefacts" yet still with a clear understanding that they are socially produced. Thomasson (p. 37) further argues it is a mistake to apply spatiotemporality to abstract artefacts because "as they are not constantly dependent on any particular spatiotemporal entity, there is no reason to associate them with the spatiotemporal location of any of their supporting entities". However, if we take abstract artefacts such as trespassing law which also enforces private property rights, then these are clearly related to spatiotemporally linked entities such as factories. It is important to remember that private property is abstract as 'private' and 'property' are abstracta built through legal abstracta as too is a factory an abstractum and abstract space spatiotemporally linked to an instantiation in the concretum of building. Furthermore, the presence or manifestation of an abstractum through directing behaviour or influencing adherence to a set of intentionally produced abstracta, rules, or laws, for example, within a defined space also communicates a spatiotemporality and creatability.

It is clear from the literature that there is a significant lack of texts surrounding abstract space and abstracta within a sociological frame. Regardless, there is compelling support for abstract objects and spaces that are external to us whether we frame this as the 'world of ideas', 'basho', or 'Khôra'. Although sociology authors clearly appeal

to that which is abstract, the notion of the externality of abstracta, and to the simultaneity of abstracta with abstract space, remains absent, perhaps with the exception of Karl Popper's World 3. As such, what I have considered so far in the literature has been necessarily stretched to the outer boundaries of relevance to demonstrate the conceptualisations of abstracta and abstract space from other schools of thought. In doing so, this has highlighted several opportunities for sociology to extend its breadth of knowledge into new areas. The opportunities identified are to bring the concept of abstracta into the sociological arena whilst simultaneously reconsidering the Platonist view of abstract objects; to bring the concept of abstract space into the sociological arena whilst simultaneously reformulating Lefebvre's concept, defining its relationship with abstracta, and to move away from the seemingly insurmountable link to maps; and to utilise abstracta and abstract space as foundational principles for social abstractionism. Additionally, this literature also highlights an opportunity to bridge a divide between sociology and philosophy and demonstrates interdisciplinary possibility. Moving forward, I now turn to the literature on bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy

According to various accounts (Kamenka & Krygier, 1979: 21; Twiss, 2014: 9; Starbuck, 2003: 439), it was Jacques Claude Marie Vincent de Gournay in 1745 who conceived of and framed bureaucracy as governmental over-regulation which results in the impeding of commerce. Since then, a trend in anti-bureaucracy literature has persisted (Starbuck, 2003: 439). Many of these critiques surround rules and procedures which dominate behaviours and the centralisation of these two components resulting in an authoritarian system of regulation demanding obedience and compliance in pursuit of efficiency (Du Gay, 2005: 147). This literature even extends into the concept of 'bureauphobia' (Del Pino et al., 2016; Molavi et al., 2017). Bureaucracy is usually associated with the features of hierarchy, rules, technical competence, impersonality, administration, paperwork, formality, and predictability (Butler et al., 2008; Diefenbach & Todnem By, 2012; Graeber, 2015; Ima, 1968; Jaques, 1991; Tancred-Sheriff, 1985). Other significant contributions include Ritzer's (1992) notion of 'McDonaldization' and Crozier's (2010) *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon'*. These works should not be dismissed and whilst these are clearly foundational works sociologically, I want to pay closer attention to the literature on bureaucracy in terms of its abstract qualities. As the term 'bureaucracy' is ultimately abstract in itself, it makes it difficult to define. -Ologies, -cracies, -isms, etcetera, are all, by their nature, spectrums of abstracta, yet all maintain common groups of subordinate spectral abstracta applicable to them. For example, neoliberalism, an abstract ideology, has a group of abstract features including, but not limited to, efficiency, managerialism, free-marketism, globalisation, and austerity (Harvey, 2005).

Thus, consolidating bureaucracy as a single entity is problematic due to its spectral nature. Therefore, rather than rely on the definitions of others, I shall simply frame bureaucracy as anywhere there exists 'institutional', 'official' or 'formalised' rules, regulation, policy or record-keeping (including that of photographs and video, not just written records). I use the terms institutional, official, and formalised loosely as these themselves are as abstract as the rules, regulations, policies, and record-keeping.

The sociological landscape of bureaucracy is dominated by Weber's seminal considerations on the rationalisation of society through bureaucracy. Weber (1978) identified bureaucracy as an important phenomenon with its ever-expanding administrative controls reaching into all areas of life. Furthermore, he noted its basis in rationality and the focus on predicting and controlling human behaviour. His famous description of bureaucracy as "the iron cage" was used to envision the consequences of growing bureaucracy as an inescapable prison. Before considering the iron cage in more detail, it is essential to note that Weber saw bureaucracy as inherently abstract. This is important because when we consider Weber's consistent appeals to the abstract nature of bureaucracy, he manages to overlook that the iron cage specifically implies an abstract spatiality. The notion of the iron cage has extended into studies on culture (Bentele & Seiffert, 2012; Medrano, 2013), education (Berends & King, 1994; Hayes & Jandrić, 2021; Humes, 2021; Lozano et al., 2020; Merrero, 2012), gender (Britton, 2003; Hsieh & Boateng, 2020; Moreley, 1994), law (Bora, 2009), organisations (Abrahamson, 2011; Briscoe, 2007; Boiral, 2003; Berthod & Sydow, 2013), politics (Davis, 2010; Choat, 2019; Dagan, 2021), and religion (Balcomb, 2014; Baum, 1977; Kent, 1983). These only constitute a snapshot, but this selection alone

shows the breadth to which academia considers the iron cage to stretch. Thus, when we frame the iron cage as abstractly spatial, we also see the extent to which this spatiality of bureaucracy reaches. In fact, as Weber implied, the iron cage has ultimately become inescapable. Detaching oneself from the outside world makes no difference either as the omnipresent panopticism of bureaucratic abstracta still utterly dominates abstract spaces, including the abstract designation of 'home'. Even those without residence, people experiencing homelessness, or those living 'off the grid' in sustainable lifestyles must still adhere to planning permissions, private property law, anti-begging initiatives, money, work, and all the legality dominating all processes, spaces, and permissions.

The iron cage, in its abstract spatiality, does not cage only on the inside but on the outside. To be outside of the cage is still to be on the inside. The uncontacted tribes of the Amazon, for example, have no bureaucracies and know nothing of such a concept. Yet, they are subject to vast layers of bureaucratic abstracta which threaten or protect them depending on the nature of said abstracta. The drive for capital pursues them towards a clash of the ancient world, the modern world, and most likely their erasure via the pursuit of logging profits in a realm where legality and illegality clash abstractly. The result is concrete destruction from which to derive capital abstracta for the pursuit of abstract lifestyles or perhaps even basic survival within a system which forces one to maintain the capital spectrum of abstracta (Clark, 2019; Huambachano, 2014; Van Solinge, 2010). Thus, when Weber (2001: 124) stated that nobody knows who will live in the cage, the answer is that we all do and that few realise it. Nevertheless, the extent to which our cage imprisons us is more significant for some

and less for others, but it imprisons us all nonetheless, and this ability to imprison us abstractly is indicative of its externality.

Wherever there are rules there is bureaucracy. Even when the rule may be cultural, social, or seemingly interpersonal, these unwritten or unspoken rules take place within the abstract liminal borders of permissibility as prescribed by the relevant bureaucracies. For example, whether or not one considers it rude to eat dinner with elbows on the table or to wear a hat inside the house may on the surface seem exempt from bureaucracy. Yet, within the abstract space of the 'house', furnished with abstract diktats of bureaucratic dominance such as housing rules, planning legislation, noise legislation, energy, wages, food, and family structure, bureaucracy does not deem it of importance to *specifically* dominate culturally minor acts. More likely, the abstracta of capital, or class, the hand-me-downs of old elite high society expectational abstraction, dominate these behaviours without the need for force. As Graeber (2015: 75) states, "bureaucratic procedure invariably means ignoring all the subtleties of real social existence". If the desire so arose, bureaucracy *would* specifically target these behaviours for control. As Farmer (2005: 33) noted, "the iron cage exerts ever greater demands on the people who have no choice but to belong to the system". Page and Jenkins (2005: 182) further draw attention to Weber's conclusion that the iron cage is a system of constraint so extreme that no individual, including the agents of bureaucracy themselves, can have any choices. Reed (2005: 120), however, argues that people were "prepared, if not happy" to trade individual liberty in order to secure the continuing material gains and social progress promised via bureaucracy. It is unlikely that people would *knowingly* make this trade and, even if it were the case, it

is highly unlikely that they would see the possibilities that bureaucracy held, perhaps in a similar fashion to the way that people often do not know what they vote for when voting for any given political party (e.g., Dusso, 2015; Fording & Schram, 2017; Fowler & Margolis, 2014; Janků & Libich, 2019; Wegenast, 2010). However, the 'trade', as Weber (2001: 123) argues, comes at the cost of our "full humanity" in exchange for a universally enforced puritanical way of specialisation without spirit and without heart, a nullity of abstraction disseminating a false consciousness of superior civilisation; an alienation. Waters (2012: 219) also argues that the "narrow specialist" must find other sets of specialists to raise and educate their children, the next generation of specialists. And so, the system recreates itself, educational bureaucracy producing its own offspring who perpetuate the false consciousness and, consequentially, we are enslaved by what we created argues Waters (2012: 218), again reinforcing the externality of bureaucracy.

Weber (2013: 232) further reinforces this externality of bureaucratic abstracta in relation to the individual when he demonstrates that bureaucracy can be in service to different 'masters'. The notion that bureaucracy can "serve" indicates both externality and controllability. In other words, the abstracta of bureaucracy can be manipulated by those with the power to do so and bureaucracy will continue in the absence of the master who manipulated. But this also indicates that bureaucratic abstracta, and consequentially any socially produced abstracta, are changeable and malleable by those with the power to do so. It may be tempting to charge the 'bureaucrat' with such a power, but this itself is an abstract hobgoblin used to appeal to when the temptation arises. Weber is considered to present a 'gloomy' image of bureaucrats as lifeless individuals, devoid of humanity and concerned only with the adherence to rules and

regulations (e.g., Styhre, 2007: 45; Waters, 2012: 218). This is partially correct. It is not that they are this way as a matter of naturality, as inherently lifeless, but that the separate abstract spatial planes of work and personal life command it. The 'world of work' is indicative of abstract space and maintains its own spectra of abstracta, of rules and regulations, regardless of any individual who inhabits this world. The individual, on participating in this 'world of work', comes to adhere to the relevant abstracta, perpetually experiencing the *synchronous domination* of abstracta with the abstract space of the 'world of work'. By synchronous domination, I mean an abstractum maintains synchronicity with an abstract space. This 'world of work' is separate from, yet attempts an *asynchronous domination* threatening to, the 'personal world'. By asynchronous domination, I mean that any given abstractum transcends its own abstract space and inhabits, or is intended to inhabit, or take ownership of, another abstract space. The concepts of synchronous and asynchronous domination will be illuminated further throughout this paper. For now, and to exemplify, this asynchronous domination of abstract space has recently crept forward substantially through the Covid-19 pandemic via the increase of working from home (e.g., Abujarour et al., 2021; Butler & Jaffe, 2021; Derndorfer et al., 2021; Mattern et al., 2021; Zhang & Bowen, 2021) but also prior to the pandemic through a digital nomadism present within online content creation or coding (Bonneau & Aroles, 2021; Frick & Marx, 2021; Orel et al., 2021; Setlak, 2018; Thompson, 2021; Willment, 2020). Thus, the abstract spatial and liminal boundaries of the world of work and the world of the personal become blurred or broken allowing entry to the panoptic gaze of more bureaucracy; the iron cage both grows in its reach and shrinks the private and personal world of the individual. Weber, however, was not the only writer to imply the abstract spatiality of bureaucracy.

Bourdieu's concept of 'bureaucratic field', like the iron cage, also holds an appeal to both abstracta and abstract spatiality. Bourdieu (2000: 158) frames bureaucratic field as ''a relatively autonomous space of relations (of power and struggle) among explicitly constituted and codified positions (defined in terms of rank, authority, etc.)''. Thus, we have an abstract space (bureaucratic field) within which power and struggle between abstracta (ranks and authority) plays out. We can then consider 'bureaucratic field' as a subsisting domain of the abstract objects of bureaucracy. However, Bourdieu (2014: 198) sees the state as a 'meta-field', a bureaucratic field with the "capacity to determine the conversion rate of the various capitals within the field of power, and therefore the ability to condition and structure other social fields" (Loyal, 2017: 92). Furthermore, Bourdieu (2014: 201; 1996: xi) argues that the state constructs all other fields such as the field of the economic, of cultural production, cultural capital, politics, and more. This is problematic as there is no one 'state'. There are many states formed from different spectra of abstracta, whether we call these communist, socialist, or capitalist, which tends to chafe against Bourdieu's (2014: 311) apparent position of the state as the ultimate entity as it raises the question of which one of these entities is the ultimate. As I shall explore later in the chapter 'The Abstracta of Capital', the answer to this is that none of these are the ultimate entity and that it is, rather, the money abstractum. Bourdieu (2014: 309) further considers the meta-field of power within which individual holders of power are both controller and controlled. Bourdieu describes this as "protection against arbitrariness". These reciprocal social relationships within a kind of power matrix facilitate a social circuitry ad infinitum where power relations continually protect and reinforce each other. However, the influence of capital abstracta has gone unnoticed within Bourdieu's power matrix and the infiltration of capital abstracta has entered this social power matrix where there are no

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safeguards, no point of termination, and no individual to break the circuit ultimately facilitating the pursuit of capital abstracta in perpetuity. Bourdieu (2014: 309-310) continues by stating that this network continually extends, along with state power, with people becoming more dependent on "a network of transmission belts of power" thus those who rule paradoxically become the ruled. However, with the introduction of capital into the circuit, this ultimately leads to those with the greatest accumulation of capital wielding significant power, which can affect the global state of the world without actually 'ruling'. There is no protection against arbitrariness because, as I shall demonstrate later, the independence of capital abstracta is such that capital is the highest abstract entity.

Moving forward, sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe (2001) makes perhaps the most significant contribution linking bureaucracy and abstraction. Stinchcombe argues that there is a hierarchised system of abstraction involved in bureaucracy known as 'bureaucratic formalisation'. This system of formalisation, Stinchcombe (1995: 257-285) argues, is the purposeful reinvention of slavery by the British colonial slave owners post-emancipation to maintain the system of slavery without having to own slaves. It was essentially to circumvent the production of new laws which prohibited slave ownership. This system is particularly complex so what is presented here is necessarily reductionist for succinctness. By formal, Stinchcombe is referring to formalised systems such as law or, essentially, institutional officialdom. Formality is "abstraction plus government" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 41), although it seems to indicate that Stinchcombe has overlooked the government as abstract in itself. Perhaps Stinchcombe's (2001: 2) single most important observation is that formality is "an

abstraction [that] can be taken as a fact". Formalisation then, becomes the process via which something becomes part of formal structures. Stinchcombe (2001: 185) states that "formality is the informal abstracted" but "devices for abstracting…must use common sense to pick out the relevant parts of reality and abstract them for the use of the formal system". He also states that the "best intuition to follow is that formality and formalization have to do with abstraction so as to preserve what is essential in the substance" (p. 3). By this, he means that the rational 'common sense' of bureaucracy must take what is relevant from the concrete and abstract it to make it formal. The process must also be proactive in keeping pace with informality, that is, the parts of the social world which are not formal, to maintain its grasp of rapidly changing reality. Formalisation requires a tripartite system of abilities to "pick out the relevant parts of reality and abstract them" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 185). These abilities are "cognitive adequacy," "communicability", and "improvement trajectory". Cognitive adequacy is the requirement that the system can abstract with sufficient accuracy and relevancy so that it is orderly enough to be easily understood. Communicability is the requirement that the abstractum can be communicated efficiently and understandably to the relevant sections of society in order for the abstractum to deal with appropriate reality; it must be transmissible. Improvement trajectory is the requirement that abstracta must be able to adapt to changing realities, they must flex whilst maintaining dominance and applicability. This system comes under criticism from Scott (2002) who denotes the absence of the role of power. This is indeed true and leaves open an opportunity to consider this role of power within a hierarchy of abstracta later in the chapter 'The Abstracta of Power'.

Stinchcombe (2001: 3) writes in terms of abstracting *from* concrete events to create formalities which "preserve what is essential in the substance". This is not being disputed as, for example, legal laws can be abstracted from concrete behaviours with the intent of modifying said behaviours. However, the process is not made up of this single step. A new law is not directly abstracted from the concrete but is an abstract object externalised by an agreement of minds, albeit a small number of minds in key positions, united in the validation of an abstracted interpretation of concrete events. Most importantly, Stinchcombe (2001: 188) states "There is no reality behind abstractions except the same world that is embedded in informal social life". In other words, that which is abstract does not exist concretely, and the existence of the abstract is indeed just that, abstract, but the concrete processes behind the abstraction are real. Furthermore, within the infinite social interactions of populaces, "government by abstractions fails if, in thousands of concrete interactions, it does not dominate those parts of the action it claims to govern" (p. 189). Stinchcombe (2001: 44) adds that formalisation involves an "authorisation process" through which formal validations such as signatures are needed. This is certainly true. In a Gramscian sense, the masses consent to the domination of bureaucracy by providing it with reciprocal validation. Each form completed, each signature signed, every agreement entered into, every fine paid, every licence agreement accepted. Each one in turn both feeds the bureaucracy and sustains it whilst passively accepting its spatial, existential, and metaphysical controls. Therefore, a mass refusal to validate the bureaucracy denies its ontology, its legitimacy; it would be an act of emancipation and, in doing so, reaffirms bureaucracy as abstract. However, to do so would draw out the actual reality the illusion conceals: violence.

Bureaucratic violence, Ludwig Von Mises (2007: 85) argued, is "the ultimate basis of an all-round bureaucratic system". This form of violence is perpetrated through the various concrete processes involved in our relationships with abstracta. However, the use of violence within each type of abstract entity differs. Corporate bureaucratic violence for example has been shown at work in the Bhopal disaster (Rajan, 2001), fossil fuel policies (Eldridge, 2018), migration (Näre, 2020; Heckert, 2020), welfare (Hertzog, 2014), and the use of paramilitary groups (Gill, 2009; Ciafone, 2019). State bureaucratic violence is disseminated via means such as war (Dandeker, 1984; Kaye, 2006), access to rights (Beaugrand, 2011), or genocide (Tyner, 2014). Schools enact bureaucratic violence through extreme pressure (Salili et al., 2004; Lin & Chen, 1995), coercion (Hartkamp, 2016), or involuntary confinement (Gray, 2020). Even religious bureaucracy enacts violence in its own ways (Salter, 2018; Mohamad, 2020). It has also been shown how acts of bureaucratic violence can be carried out by individuals even without pressure à la Stanley Milgram (1974) (e.g., Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1986; Mermillod et al., 2015; Zimbardo, 2007). So, as we can see, bureaucratic violence is commonplace. However, we can split this into two arenas. Firstly, there is the concrete enactment of *physical* violence which is perpetrated as a consequence of the abstract, ideology for example, using direct human-inflicted means as demonstrated in the Khmer Rouge's genocide (Fawthrop & Jarvis, 2005; Kiernan, 2002; Williams & Neilsen, 2019). The second is perpetrated via the realm of the abstract *only* but emits concrete consequences without the need for physical violence. This can be seen in areas such as neoliberal welfare retrenchment where legislation is utilised to reduce incomes, deny payments, or reduce eligibility rules which subsequently induces concrete effects of poverty and its associated ills, especially so when we frame poverty as violence akin to Allen (2018), Rylko-Bauer and Farmer (2016), Gupta (2012),

Hodgetts et al. (2013), or, in the words of Ishak et al. (2011: 2), "a result of the explicit decision of formal institutions such as government or bureaucracies". Ishak et al.'s statement provides an interesting point that inspires a closer consideration.

We sometimes assume that 'governments' or 'bureaucracies' make decisions. Sometimes we assume *people* make decisions. Karl Olivecrona (1939: 56-57) also considers the role of people:

> A law is, of course, always the work of some individual, or individuals, not
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> of the abstract "state". What is required in order to make a law is to have
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> access to the mechanism. It is always ready for use for anyone who has
>
> been born into a key-position or has the courage and skill and tenacity
>
> required to make a way to one. The ways are different in a monarchy and
>
> in a republic, in a democracy and a dictatorship. But the significance of
>
> the key-positions is on principle the same everywhere.

Here, Olivecrona has succinctly delineated between the abstracta of the state, of power, of ideology, as well as the concrete praxis of the person. Bourdieu et al. (1994: 3) also denote that those who produce relevant bureaucracy do so in line with their particular political interests and values; in other words, ideology. When powerful people create rules, laws, and policies, the resulting bureaucratic abstracta come to function externally to those who have made them. For example, Iain Duncan-Smith and his team played a significant role in the form that the welfare state provisions of Universal Credit, a spectrum of abstracta, took (Morris, 2016). This includes rules (e.g., eligibility), policy (e.g., sanction regimes), and legislation (e.g., the Universal Credit Regulations 2013). We could argue that a *person*, a 'work coach' to address

the correct abstract job title within the system of Universal Credit, enacts decisions on a Universal Credit claimant in any given instance. However, the decision they make is an effect of the causative intent of the creators of abstract policies originally externalised by Iain Duncan-Smith and the team which restricts, enforces, and directs decisions within the abstract bounds set by the policy. So, the 'work coach' does not necessarily have any freedom to reject the bounds of the policy, and thus the decisions are preordained through the abstract policy. Iain Duncan-Smith and team now no longer oversee Universal Credit but the abstracta created continue to function as a conduit for the conveyance of causation creating concrete effects, many of which are enactments of violence via the abstract. For example, the sanctions regime on claimants (Adler, 2018), individualised behaviour controls (Dwyer & Wright, 2014), and the consequential food bank reliance (Garthwaite, 2016; Loopstra et al., 2018). These concrete effects will continue until another person or group with the power to alter or erase the abstracta comes along and does so whether for better or for worse (Cheetham et al., 2019). Not only does this demonstrate the externality of the abstracta but, additionally, the unacknowledged acceptance of this spectrum of abstracta across the consciousness of the social world allows this spectrum of abstracta to be reified. This means that which is abstract becomes accepted as real, or, in the words of Stinchcombe (2001: 2), "an abstraction [that] can be taken as a fact". Accordingly, people can and do make decisions, but when we imply 'governments' or 'bureaucracies' make decisions, these implications acknowledge that these abstract entities are indeed functioning as decision-carriers externally to any individual. Furthermore, the illusion of a given abstractum, whether 'Universal Credit' or the 'Department for Work & Pensions', permits a faceless, dehumanised diffusion of responsibility vapourised into the abstract. Thus, the powerful can enact violence

from the metaphorical shadow of abstracta without consequence. Another kind of bureaucratic violence which can be enacted from the shadow is that of surveillance.

Derived from Bentham's (1787) conception of the panopticon, an all-seeing prison, the term panopticism has been closely associated with bureaucracy (e.g., Amit, 2000; Gandy, 2021; Gill, 1995b; Shore & Roberts, 1993; Veeraraghavan, 2013). Foucault (1995: 195-228) however, outlines the panoptic origins of bureaucracy from within the Great Plague and the surveillant attribute of bureaucracy has since been noted in education (Carlile, 2013), government (Cabestan, 2020), technology (Cayford & Pieters, 2020), citizenship (Dalberto & Banégas, 2021; Berda, 2020), and migration (Sahraoui, 2021). Foucault (1995) also noted the panoptic mechanism's visibilising property which facilitates the exposure of the individual. As Foucault (1995: 200) stated, "Visibility is a trap", and indeed much bureaucracy is focused on making the individual visible. For example, national insurance numbers, car registrations, NHS numbers, tax, benefits, and passports create visibility at the individual level, or, the "administrative numeration that indicates…position within a mass" within a disciplinary society (Deleuze, 1992: 5). Lips et al. (2009) debate that some may see this as a 'surveillance state' and some as an 'effective service state'. However, given that these identifiers are regularly used for surveillance purposes, and in addition to these, CCTV (Piza et al., 2019), in-car monitoring (Ahmadi-Assalemi et al., 2021), hospital operating theatres (Dekker, 2017: 66), mass data storage (Ribeiro-Navarrete et al., 2021), DNA records (Hibbert, 1999), biometric data (Neves et al., 2016), mobile phones (Harkin et al., 2020), health records (Johnson, 2018.), vehicle surveillance (Kim et al., 2020), bills and statements (Milaj & Bonnici, 2016), facial recognition (Selinger & Hartzog, 2020),

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walking gait (Goffredo et al., 2009), and employee monitoring (Aloisi & Gramano, 2019), it would be reasonable to suggest that bureaucracy has made significant headway into a panoptic matrix.

Haggerty and Ericson (2000: 609) argue that no individual bureaucracy can be targeted for critique but, rather, the world has moved towards an epoch in which surveillance has become an assemblage, a period of amalgamation of disparate surveillance technologies and methods with the intent to induce exponential growth of surveillance. I would further argue that this amalgamation of surveillance is perpetuated via the pursuit of capital abstracta through power. Pseudo-competitiveness between capital-driven entities within abstract markets strive for domination, and domination occurs through monopolisation, or virtual monopolisation, despite the presence of so-called 'anti-trust laws'. This means that surveillance technologies will increasingly become controlled by fewer and fewer abstract entities ultimately arriving at a small handful of powerful abstract entities overseeing much of the world's global surveillance capabilities. This, of course, translates from abstract entities to a small number of people with the power to surveil at all levels. Furthermore, the surveillant attribute of bureaucracy, especially at the state level, can be abstractly metaspatial transcending both the abstracta of nation and state and their abstract spatial borders with surveillance commonly considered to happen through intelligence departments. Wilson (1989: 101) suggests that 'counterintelligence' is "defending one's agency or nation against the activities of a hostile intelligence service". 'Nation' and 'agency' are abstracta thus Wilson implies a struggle between intelligence and counterintelligence that converts into a conflict of the abstracta of nations and

agencies which is ultimately played out in concrete processes. Put plainly, concrete processes are enacted in defence, or attack, of abstracta with the intent to make visible, or to obscure, concrete processes behind abstracta to maintain positions of power on a global level. Surveillance then, as an attribute of bureaucracy, occurs at all levels of society. There are, however, further powers relevant to our considerations of the abstracta of bureaucracy.

There is an oft alluded to concept of 'bureaucratic validation' by various writers although the meaning of this term generally goes unexplained. It seems to occur primarily within education (e.g., Roseneil & Seymour, 2016: 173; Novo, 2014: 120; Taylor, 1995: 96; Soemarwoto, 2007: 85; Miller, 2017: 49; Franck & Opitz, 2007: 226) but is hinted at in human rights (Nelson, 2015: 53) and migration (Diedrich & Styhre, 2013: 779). Furedi (2013: 136) noted how, during medieval times, increasing claims to law as opposed to traditions led to legal judgment becoming a source of validation whilst religious denominations lost authority from divine validation in the face of secularity (p. 152). More recently, Stinchcombe (2001: 45) argued that 'formal validations' are processes governed by abstracta relating to authority and for creating authority with the purpose of producing valid abstracta "so that others need not go behind them". Most crucially, Stinchcombe (2001: 45) continues:

> authority of abstractions is established by committees, boards of directors, legislatures, trial courts and appellate courts, editorial boards with multiple referees for each submitted paper, and the like. The doctrine of legitimacy is often that such committees or collegia - commonly composed of "peers" (that is, equals of each other) - are supposed to

collect and discuss all the relevant evidence, resolve any disagreements,

and modify the abstractions or vote down the minority. Once that

committee or legislature or court sitting *en banc* validates the abstraction,

it is often then expected to govern further activity without further debate.

So not only do we see the process of validation, but we see an explicit acknowledgement that abstracta are modifiable. The produced abstracta are also intended to prevent further debate but this would be extendable to any individual, group, or populaces to which the bureaucratic abstracta apply.

Continuing, it is therefore implied that one of the purposes of any given bureaucratic abstractum is to be the keeper of truth thus any debate as to the truth value of the abstractum is closed to those without the power to modify the abstractum and so the truth of a given future scenario becomes pre-decided. One interesting experience is noted by Gruß (2017: 12) who perceives validation in relation to documents saying they constitute a personhood through birth certificates, ID cards, passports, and education certificates. Gruß also outlines an associate's unawareness of validation, yet this associate viewed work permits as a provider of emotional comforts, hinting that bureaucratic validation plays a role in one's ontological status. If we consider dictionary definitions, 'validity' is listed as "the state of being legally or officially binding or acceptable" and also "the quality of being logically or factually sound; soundness or cogency". 'Validation' is listed as "the action of making or declaring something legally or officially acceptable". So, the notion of valid and validation essentially dissipates into the bureaucratic abstracta of legality and officiality. However, the "quality of being…factually sound" again implies that bureaucracy has the power to determine

factuality thus, consequentially, experiential reality; the abstract forms what is real and what is true and determines our status and experiences. The extent to which this is the case can be seen at the micro-level through Gillett (2020). Their report on mothers unable to register births during the coronavirus pandemic underlines these powers. In reference to a newborn baby, "people have been saying she doesn't officially belong, and she doesn't" and "It's been a weird feeling to know she technically doesn't exist". In the absence of validation, the child is viewed as non-existent. However, what is happening ontologically is that the concrete baby resides in an abstract interstitial space between Being and the validation of Being, between social acceptance and social rejection, neither totally rejected nor remotely accepted, neither non-existent nor existing. All constitute abstract boundaries of the liminal, an abstract prison with abstract walls, simply awaiting passage to the illusion of the real enacted by the abstract. Even in isolation, this demonstrates that bureaucracy is facilitating a false reality, but this case is no isolated case. Chacar (2020) reports a similar issue on a significant scale. Between May and October 2020, 35,000 babies born in Palestine have been incarcerated within an interstitial prison of bureaucracy at the nation level. Termination of record sharing between Israel and Palestine resulted in the Palestinian Authority ceasing the sharing of population records with Israel subsequently barring these babies from travel due to the fact they are not 'recognised' and therefore cannot be validated by the bureaucratic abstracta of the abstract state of Israel. They "simply do not exist, and therefore cannot travel freely out of the occupied territories". This concept of recognition, a seemingly necessary requirement for validation, should also not be overlooked.

Bureaucratic recognition plays a significant role in any given abstract status. Recognition is a concept referred to in human rights (MacLeod, 2013; Bassiouni, 2006; Hesford, 2013), disability (Shakespeare, 2000), politics (Nyamnjoh, 2004), mental health (Lewis, 2009; Kar & Anirudh, 2018), and culture and ethnicity (Verkuyten, 2006; Noble, 2009; Thatal, 2020). However, these mostly refer to the demand for bureaucracies to recognise these variable statuses in one way or another and do not explain what recognition actually is. For the most part, the appeal is to legal recognition which is dictionary defined as "acknowledgement of the existence, validity, or legality of something" and also, with regards to diplomatic recognition, as "formal acknowledgement by a country that another political entity fulfils the conditions of statehood and is eligible to be dealt with as a member of the international community". Again, we see this concept as being applicable at the micro and macro levels and also a hint of Stinchcombe's (2001) bureaucratic formalisation. Whilst the aforementioned authors consider recognition an important goal, Cacho (2012: 8) argues that legal recognition is an unviable solution for "legally uncertain populations" due to the law tending to punish as opposed to protect, and to discipline as opposed to defend. Thus, various demographics are excluded from the option to be "law-abiding" which is fundamentally required to access rights and resources provided by states. The exclusionary element of non-recognition is exemplified within the now superseded Defense of Marriage Act in the U.S. which refused recognition to same-sex couples and subsequently barred access to 1,138 benefits, rights, and privileges afforded to opposite-sex couples (Wallace, 2015: 252).

Furthermore, Shildrick (2009: 77) argues that legal recognition is not simply the accrual of rights and benefits, nor the subjectivities of governmentality, but the projection onto others of attributes of the self which cannot be legitimated. Similarly, Glover (2016: 145) frames the need for legal recognition as an exposé of the frailty of the human condition facilitating an abnormalizing, and consequential shaming, of what is seen as untypical. Striving for recognition again draws out of the individual or group allowing new abstract bounds of bureaucracy to be placed around the person. A metaphorical prostration to bureaucracy is ultimately needed to achieve recognition regardless of the length or ferocity of the demands. Subsequently, recognition can only end in an increased, and thus further empowered, bureaucracy. The extent to which recognition dominates the consciousness is brought to light by Fingerhut and Maisel (2010) who find an association with greater investment in personal relationships, Balsam et al. (2008) with increased relationship continuity, Bradler et al. (2016) with workplace performance, Ding et al. (2021) with increased organisational performance, and Taylor (2021) with dignity and citizenship.

Honneth (1996: 25), on interpreting Hegel's (1802) arguments on an ethical life, draws out the theme of recognition too. Honneth sees three ways of viewing the recognition of the individual: in the family as concrete creatures of need, legally as "abstract legal persons", and finally by the state as concrete universals (concrete abstracta); these latter two being both bureaucratic and specific acknowledgement that individuals must be abstracted from the naturality and reality of their own humanity to be recognised by bureaucracy. In this light, recognition is reducible to the notion that the power which influences the abstracta of bureaucracy accepts, but not necessarily incorporates, the

existence of any given abstractum through which the individual, group, or nation has been abstracted to. For example, the recognition of LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) rights involves the abstracting of sexual preferences into classifications which, in turn, become abstracta. We can argue that these classifications become abstract objects encoded and instantiated in policy and legal abstracta which bureaucracies use to define the normal or the expected. These abstracta become malleable to the objectives of power which can be used to accept, persecute, frame, or ignore in whichever way is most suitable.

As a consequence, sets of expected sexual behaviours become encoded and through which bureaucracy can exploit for predictability. Thus, what were once concrete acts of human relations have become a spectrum of abstracta separate and distant from the human and, again, it makes the individual visible to the surveillant power of bureaucracy which subsequently facilitates a sexual surveillance. Similarly, for disabled people, the abstractum of the 'normalised body' bears the consequence that further abstracta are birthed from how these classifications are interpreted. These, in turn, are utilised to validate the 'abnormal', the 'ugly', the 'pathological', or the 'disgusting'. Thus, for example, the abstractum of the 'ugly' 'disabled' body is subsequently used by bureaucracies to exclude through abstract association; bureaucracy does not want to recognise this corporeality as, in the words of Hughes (2002: 576), "Bureaucracy is ultra-rational, driven to embrace the abnormally normal. It makes cruelty and barbarism possible because it has no sense of suffering". Consequentially, the abstractum becomes one with the corporeal, a corporeal synchronous domination, and one's own body becomes abstract and viewed not by

the attuning of the mind to the body's reality but attuned to dysmorphia-inducing bureaucratic abstracta. Yet, there is a hidden implication behind bureaucracy as a whole: the creation of boundaries, borders, and barriers. To illuminate these, I now turn to the literature on interstitiality and liminality.

Interstitiality and Liminality

The concept of 'interstitiality' is a rare one within academia. It is occasionally revealed within urban studies (e.g., Brighenti, 2016; Harris, 2015; Lo, 2019; Vass, 2015; Stevens & Adhya, 2014), literature (e.g., Goyal & Singla, 2017; Schanoes, 2004), education (e.g., Lindvig et al., 2017), organisation studies (e.g., Eulau & McCluggage, 1984; Laguerre, 1994), religion (e.g., Niculescu, 2017), and art (e.g., Pilinovsky, 2004; Pilinovsky & Sherman, 2004). It is a concept built upon the notion of the 'interstice', an intervening space or space within a space. However, as yet, interstitiality seems to have no agreed definition nor conceptual clarity. In addition to interstitiality, liminality has a much greater academic footprint, particularly within anthropology where it is most often considered within a transitional processes paradigm. The breadth of work is vast covering literature (e.g., Hout, 2021; Vieco, 2021), sexuality (e.g., Doan, 2007; March, 2020), culture (e.g., Nguyen, 2021; Bigger, 2009; Stenner, 2021), economic status (e.g., Addi-Raccah & Friedman, 2019), work (e.g., Ackesjö et al., 2019; Borg & Söderlund, 2014; Vesala & Tuomivaara, 2018), race (e.g., Motha, 2010; Brunsma et al., 2013; Morgan, 2016), health (e.g., Bezmez et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2017; Jordan et al., 2015; Rees, 2017; Sanders et al., 2019), and religion (e.g., Cilliers, 2010; Van Deventer, 2017; Sonnex et al., 2020). However, much like interstitiality, there seems to be no agreed definition or conceptual clarity and quite often there is a clash between these concepts and a muddied academic landscape of meaning. As such, I will attempt to demonstrate and unravel the complex and often confusing academic landscape surrounding these two concepts. In addition to this, I will also use the literature to help move these concepts into a more relational and appropriate arrangement suitable for

a social abstractionist interpretation. This is not simply to add another interpretation of these concepts but to demonstrate that there is a clear link between them which is as yet unacknowledged, and that the links that can be made are also directly relatable to abstract objects.

Beginning with interstitiality and the interstice, Berdahl (1999), Bhabha (2004), Gupta and Ferguson (1992), Hauser et al. (1993), and Grygar (2006) mostly focus on the cultural flux of borderlands, emphasising the abstractness of such borders, the liminality inherent to such borders, and noting the transitional tension of cultures taking place as opposed to the maintenance of a concrete polarity of human separation via abstract culture. Bhabha (2004: 2) argues that interstices are "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" within which "the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated". In the same sentiment, Berdahl (1999: 205) argues we "remain alert to these tensions and the interstices they produce, for it is in these border zones, both real and imagined, that gender and national distinctions are constructed, negotiated, contested, and experienced in everyday life". The notion of borderlands for Anzaldúa (1987 *cited in* Berdahl, 1999: 3) is that of "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary". Gregorčič (2008: 120) contextualises interstitiality as produced. Framed as a new "political category", Gregorčič posits interstitiality as "undefined structures within a defined system". Potently, it is argued that the undefined structures are purposed to reinforce exclusion and oppression, hinting once more at the unrecognised. In reference to 'the erased' peoples of ex-Yugoslav republics living in Slovenia without legal recognition, Gregorčič talks of interstitiality as a kind of

ontology between life and death cultivated by the state which simultaneously helps capitalism to induce precariousness through the withholding of rights essentially pushing individuals deeper into this ontology. Not dissimilar is Mbembe and Meintjes' (2003: 21-22) description of slaves: "The slave is neither living nor dead but is, rather, deposed of humanity and reduced to a utility in a barren existence devoid of time and place". The underlying sense of life without life, place without place, permeates and is neatly summed by Taylor and Raschke (2001): "The interstitial is neither here nor there; it is not present and yet not absent". Thus, the abstractness of this space comes to the fore, like abstracta, unlocatable to the individual, disembodied, external, yet acts as a conduit for the conveyance of causative effects. The effect, as Asher (2005: 1082) notes, is the individual struggling to locate themselves in a milieu of unreconcilable competing identities, particularly within a multicultural frame. This extends into a racial consideration by Bow (2013) who outlines issues of multi-racial and ethnic identities, a "racial interstitiality" (p. 56), within an 'American' binary of Black and White. Bridwell-Mitchell (2020: 433) also assert a sub-categorisation through 'institutional interstitiality', a cognitive state based upon the principles of social constructionism within which the individual is empowered to conceive new realities from their own doubt of accepted beliefs, in turn facilitating disruption to institutionalised beliefs and practices. Already, within the literature, there is a sense of abstracta, of betweenness, of spatiality, of exclusion, and of destabilisation at work.

The most interesting formulation of interstitiality, and by far the most explicit and comprehensible, originates from Sheth (2014: 75) who illuminates interstitiality as a methodology stating:

interstitiality considers the complex nexus of legal, political, social, and natural circumstances that are involved in the production of identities, and by extension, the (often counterintuitive) political commitments and interests. In particular, an interstitiality approach becomes attuned to legal, political, and historical institutions and geopolitical circumstances that are the often invisible (but crucial) backdrop shaping the self-understandings and interests of vulnerable populations. The approach is marked by a shift in focus from the intersections, or axes, by which a subject is recognized, to the institutions whose presence knits together those intersections in which the hidden or less visible aspects of a subject can be acknowledged. In particular, an interstitial approach becomes attuned to the spaces created by laws concerning land, property, citizenship, migration, anti-miscegenation, and dominant social and cultural institutions (such as marriage and racial categories).

This essentially forms an excellent framing of the notion of interstitiality. What Sheth (2014) has not considered is the fact that when "interstitial approach[es] become attuned to spaces created by…" these spaces are mostly produced abstract spaces from the abstracta of "laws concerning land, property, citizenship, migration, anti-miscegenation…[etc]". Furthermore, Sheth (2014: 76), and also Golombisky (2015), rightfully make the connection to intersectionality which shares similar principles through which ideas such as oppression and gender can be considered via a method of axial analysis. I intend to offer a differentiation between both intersectionality and Sheth's methodological interstitiality by considering interstitiality as an individualised status within abstract space that, when analysed, can give understanding to the abstracta which dominate the individual's Being.

In a way, the analysis of an interstitial status remains axial. For example, the way in which Bow (2013: 57) asks, intersectionally, "What does the intermediate space between white normativity and black abjection look like?" differs from the way in which we can view this question through an interstitial status as a consequence of abstracta. White and Black, in racial terms, are abstracta, as too are instruments of bureaucracy as previously highlighted. What is associated with the abstractum of White, and what is associated with the abstractum of Black, has been previously validated by individuals with access to the mechanisms through which bureaucratic abstracta are produced. Thus, the interpretation of 'White' and the interpretation of 'Black' by those with the power to produce abstracta encodes abstracta with the causal continuity of 'racial' beliefs derived from the abstractum of White or Black. The most obvious result of such abstracta were the Jim Crow laws which created innumerable interstitial statuses not only for 'Black African Americans' but for anybody who fell into the interstices between 'Black' and 'White'. Again, Bow (2013: 60-62) implies this by considering the interstitiality of being 'South-East Asian' within a set binary of Black and White, and we could extend this to considering how this interstitiality applies to a 'South-East Asian' individual who goes bureaucratically unrecognised within such an abstract binary. Noel Carroll (*cited in* Duran, 1990: 457) states that "we initially speculate that an object or being is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, categorically incomplete" which neatly summarises the aforementioned 'South-East Asian' experience within a Black and White bureaucratic false dichotomy such as the Jim Crow laws. In fact, pervasive binaries provide an opportunity to uncover interstitiality. Horncastle (2008) draws on this point to note the interstitiality of bisexuality within a 'hetero-homo' binary. Of course, bisexuality is again a

categorisation of a snapshot of the entire spectrum of human sexual behaviour which bureaucracy, and society at large, have abstracted and accepted to encapsulate specific expected behaviours. Again, this can be extended to class relations, class also being spectra of abstracta produced to separate, empower, disempower, burden, segregate, control, and categorise human beings socially. Aguiar (2015) deftly draws out race, class, interstitiality, and liminality from within Asian American literature seeing liminality in particular as crucial to the working class experience, especially through a social mobility lens. As liminality also forms an essential constituent of this thesis, it is necessary to give it the attention it commands.

Arnold Van Gennep's (1960) *Rites de Passage* is touted as the foundational insight into liminality (e.g., Standing et al., 2017; Szakolczai, 2018). However, Hovath and Szakolczai (2019) trace liminality back to the Greeks through which they argue liminality was 'discovered' by Hermes. They use the word *apeiron* as the Greek equivalent of liminality and draw upon Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as representing the "transformation of a temporary event…into a permanent condition" (p. 50). Returning to Van Gennep (1960: 11), liminality was attributed to rites of passage via a tripartite schema: pre-liminal rites (rites of separation such as funeral), liminal rites (rites of transition such as initiations) and post-liminal rites (rites of incorporation such as marriage). An essential feature of Van Gennep's (1960: 18) formulation is that he saw the transitional nature of the liminal to be "symbolic and spatial" appealing via implication to abstract symbolism and abstract space. Following the Van Gennep paradigm, the concept of liminality was angled towards a state of Being and as identity by Victor Turner (1972: 93-111). Turner's interpretation of liminality is often used as

the second major paradigm across academic disciplines (e.g., Gilead, 1986; Karioris, 2016; Van Heerden, 2011; Thomassen, 2009; Wels et al., 2011). Turner, like the Greeks' *apeiron*, saw liminality as a condition but in a different guise. Turner framed the condition of liminality as one in which people fall between the cracks of classifications creating an ambiguity within established bureaucracies and cultural norms. There is more than a hint of the interstitial at work here. Moving forward, the literature gets significantly more confusing and some other authors have picked up on this. Bristow and Jenkins (2021: 220) decry the expansion of the concept of liminality to function as a filler word for anything transitional where other explanations cannot be elucidated. They attribute this to the differing contexts of meaning given by both Van Gennep and Turner which has laid the groundwork for confusion. Rowe (2008) and Joodaki and Vajdi (2014) reflect this position seeing liminality as a nebulous notion heavily reliant upon social contexts. Downey et al. (2016: 3) denounce the concept's use as a "catch-all expression for an ambiguous, transitional, or interstitial spatio-temporal dimension". Excepting Downey et al. (2016), I would be most compelled to agree with these positions as, whilst perhaps harsh, it does indicate the imprecise defining of the concept and commands a need for proper definitional and contextual clarification with an intent to resolve the issue and then ground it within its applicability to sociology and social abstractionism.

The infancy of the concept of interstitiality means that it is inherently less confused than that of liminality. The two concepts do, however, tend to cross paths. It is therefore important to outline this confusion. Liminality and what is considered liminal varies significantly covering space, place, location, ontology, experience, and even the

interstitial. As mentioned, Van Gennep (1960: 18) saw liminality as "symbolic and spatial". This thread of spatiality runs throughout the literature on liminality as a number of authors see liminality as being spatial or having a spatial element (e.g., Aguiar, 2015; Jellema et al., 2021; Koro et al., 2020; McDowell & Crooke, 2019; Sacramento, 2011; Tesar & Arndt, 2020). Kazharski & Kubová (2021) see the nation-state as a liminal space applying this interpretation to Belarus in the face of Russian securitisation processes. Similarly, Hall (2007) views the postcolonial Caribbean as a liminal space. Burns (2012) states that researchers occupy a liminal space but also, confusingly, a liminal location.

The theme of liminal as spatial extends to airports (Huang et al., 2018), residential care (Nord, 2021), and education (Rose et al., 2018; Land et al., 2014). Montgomery (2010) sees prisons as liminal *places.* Other liminal places are considered within tourism (Light, 2009; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Sharma, 2020), dance events (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010), and work camps (Dorow & Jean, 2021). Space and place can also be conflated. McGuire and Georges (2003) view national borders as liminal *spaces* but Keating et al. (2021), for example, paraphrase McGuire and Georges' liminal spaces as liminal *places*. Regarding the liminal as experiential, Buechner et al. (2020) see liminality as a profound episode that deeply affects one's sense of purpose and identity. Lollar (2009) locates liminality within experiences of trauma, Barros et al. (2020) view private speech and imagination as liminal experiences of consciousness, Boland and Griffin (2015) argue that unemployment and job-searching constitutes a liminal experience, Rose et al. (2018) denote liminal experience through emotions, and Stenner (2017) presents a significant

transdisciplinary monograph focused on the psychosocial perspectives of liminal experience. Ontologically, Victor Turner (1972: 93-111) saw liminality as a state of Being and as identity. Identity as liminal is also appealed to by Simmons et al. (2013), Downey et al. (2016), Ben-Asher and Bokek-Cohen (2019), Ho et al. (2013), and Beech (2010), to name a few. Scully (2019) increases the confusion by considering the nature of a Celtic festival in Cornwall and its relation to identity as a "temporary liminal space within a more permanent liminal place" (p. 148) which essentially combines all the variations of liminality. Perhaps most relevant to this thesis is the confusion between the liminal and the interstitial. Shields (1991: 84) states that liminality has an "interstitial nature". March (2020) draws on the works of Brighenti (2016), Jorgensen and Tylecote (2007), Levesque (2016), and Peyrefitte and Sanders-McDonagh (2018) to argue that liminality is associated with interstitial space and can be used as "subversive urban spaces, spaces of survival to marginalized populations" (p. 459). Thomassen (2014: 8) attempts to clarify stating "that which is interstitial is neither marginal nor on the outside; liminality refers, quite literally, to something placed in an in-between position".

So, whilst liminality provides material for a wealthy horde of academically focused yet confused works, the consideration of its abstract nature is almost absent. Loh and Heiskanen (2020) consider liminality within sovereignty practices from an inside/outside of state dichotomy. In doing so they argue that liminality is abstract in relation to its temporal and spatial thresholds but also concrete as an effect enacted upon any given actor of any given concrete process which induces a liminal condition. Furthermore, they argue for four types of liminality, the most relevant here being

'interstitial liminality' which is framed as "practices of nonstate actors that take place in the context of the inside/outside distinction, in the 'interstices' of the international order". They provide examples of NGOs and multinational corporations that function outside of the established domestic and international realms. As non-state actors, liminality in perpetuity is the norm. Downey et al. (2016: xii) highlight the abstract paradoxical nature of liminality arguing that "liminal phenomena occupy "middle way" positions between two states or locations by being – paradoxically - neither or both of them at the same time".

O'Connor (2017: 18) describes the way in which the processes of globalisation, via the abstracta of markets and bureaucracy for example, enact a kind of suspension of the dialectical progression of social reality holding society and individuals in a permanent state of liminality. Through this suspension of reality, that which is abstract comes to create rationalised structures and mediated relationships seemingly suggesting a covert infiltration of human concrete relations. The result is the dissolution of identity, moral certainty, and community. This is a powerful idea which evokes a Durkheimian sense of *anomie*. Victor Turner (1977: 201) also noted external structures which he viewed as "simulacral only", essentially bringing to attention their abstract nature. Furthermore, he argued that gaps within social positions, interstices, "are necessary to the structure. If there were no intervals, there would be no structure, and it is precisely the gaps that are reaffirmed in this kind of liminality". Additionally, Turner (1977: 125) also noted the "low status" of persons who "fall into the interstices of social structures". These considerations are perhaps the limit of the specific acknowledgements of the abstract nature of the liminal. Such a limited focus on the

abstract nature of liminality could perhaps be related to its aforementioned definitional confusion with a dominant tendency to apply the concept as opposed to considering its theoretical foundations. It does seem that the literature in relation to that which is abstract is as confused and conflated as the rest.

Thus far, I have drawn from across academia to demonstrate the landscape surrounding interstitiality and liminality. Turning towards the specifically sociological literature, liminality regularly appears within the sociology of health. For example, Trusson et al. (2016) treat liminality as the state between being sick and being well, and Bezmez et al. (2021) treat liminality as applicable to the rehabilitation phases of illness. Similarly, care homes are viewed by Buse et al. (2018) as liminal as they represent a waiting area although they do not mention what residents are waiting for. One can only assume that they imply that care homes act as a liminal space within which one waits through a transitional phase from life to death. Lever and Milbourne (2016: 308) draw on Anderson's (2000) insights into care work to argue that migrant workers in the care fields experience a liminal phase as they transition from their old home to a new home. However, this liminal phase, they argue, is "bound up with spatial as well as structural forms of invisibility". This is a crucial point as it implies a relationship between the abstracta of both social structure and recognition but also returns us to Turner's (1977) considerations of social structure. Wrenn (2021) adds a spatiotemporal element to liminality applicable to Skellig Michael, an island off the coast of Ireland, viewing the island as both liminal space and having a historical liminal epoch of religiosity long since abandoned. Ireland appears again under Boland (2010) who frames the 'Celtic Tiger' era of the Irish economy as a liminal economic phase

within the transitional meaning of liminality. In the corporate world, Sturdy et al. (2006:
932) denote the liminal and interstitial position of consultants who "typically work in the
interstices between their employing organization and their client organization". They
also denote the important blurring of lines between the public and private realms of
the corporate world; in other words, the asynchronous domination of abstracta.
Söderlund and Borg (2017) argue that, in the corporate world, "liminal places…have
the capacity to liberate participants from routine activity". These 'places' allow
behaviours to occur within an interstice that would otherwise threaten an
organisation's functioning. Teodorescu and Calin (2015) push the notion of liminality
into having a presence within mass media which encourages behavioural
transformations socially and politically whilst creating new values and norms. They
outline a tripartite continuum over which stages of liminality occur: the ambiguous
state, the adaptation to new norms, rules and values, and the pre-integration, all of
which suggest another transitional approach. They also conclude by arguing that
liminality is an important part of social life.

As demonstrated, despite the confused landscape of these concepts, there are
consistent underlying connections between the interstice, interstitiality and the liminal
within the literature. At this point, I also want to draw upon the dictionary definition of
liminal. According to the Oxford Dictionary, liminal is defined as 'occupying a position
at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold' and this is again clearly reflected in
the literature. In addition to this, despite the lamentations of Downey et al. (2016: 3),
there *is* a clear "interstitial, spatiotemporal dimension" which will be explored
throughout this thesis. Ultimately, there are very close connections between all of

these ideas yet it seems that nobody has yet explicitly reconciled all of them and clearly laid down that which connects them all. Therefore, to briefly satisfy this demand with the intent to build upon it later, and taking into account the total of the literature thus far, I propose the following: the three concepts of the interstice, interstitiality and liminality are each directly interconnected as consequences of abstracta: the interstice as the abstract space which one is led to inhabit as a consequence of the abstract boundaries created through abstracta; interstitiality as the status bounded by abstracta within the abstract space of the interstice; and liminality as the experiential element of having to traverse the abstract spatial borders of the interstice. This tripartite schema will be expanded upon in the next chapter as part of the methodological foundations of this thesis.

The Methodology

Before moving onto the methodology proper, I will first outline the method used for reviewing the literature. The literature review utilised Phelps et al.'s (2007: 130) effective literature searching methodology to scrape literature from across the interdisciplinary landscape. It is a seven-stage literature searching framework comprising planning, reconnaissance, browsing, methodical searching, citation chaining, limiting searches, and monitoring. It was specifically used due its logical mode of progression and non-reliance on any data-driven, statistically-driven, or quality-driven requirements which can be present in other literature reviewing methodologies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). This does not mean quality is not of importance, but rather that it is not required that every piece of literature meet arbitrary guidelines in order to demonstrate the underlying theory. Further, as Thomas and Harden (2008: *no pagination*) observe, unlike systematic reviews, there is no underlying need to locate every conceivable paper for conceptual demonstration as an extensive array of papers will make little difference compared with a small number of papers with regards to exemplifying the concept. Despite being published in 2007, Phelps et al.'s method still holds today defying significant advances in the online cataloguing of academic material and, if anything, these advances reaffirm the method. In light of these advances, I added a further eighth step to the process: granular text analysis.

The planning stage constitutes an initial brainstorming to identify as many applicable keywords as possible. This involved creating a spreadsheet with separate sections

depending on the specific concept to be researched. For example, 'abstract objects', 'abstract space', 'liminality', 'bureaucracy', and 'liminality'. Each section was then populated with appropriate keywords and their synonyms to establish a working set of keywords to follow. These were additionally listed in various combinations to cover a broad range of keyword possibilities. At this point in the methodology, an inherent amount of logic is involved regarding which keywords can be utilised. For example, from a starting point of 'abstract objects' I soon learned of the terms 'abstracta' and 'abstractum'. This keyword expansion generates new keyword combinations alongside synonyms for other terms used. For example, 'abstractum AND bureaucracy' or 'abstract object AND law'. This forms a necessary part of the process and ultimately is an iterative stage which is returned to over time. The reconnaissance stage predominantly focuses on surveying ideas or specific fundamental concepts within the research area. Due to the significant breadth of this theoretical work, there was a wide area of academia to cover. At this point in the methodological process, there is no specific requirement to be overly in-depth. It is simply a way of loosely establishing key aspects across disciplines. Once this reconnaissance stage was finished, it was necessary to return to the planning stage to update the keyword matrix with any new terms or relevant conceptual insights, ultimately highlighting the iterative nature of such a method.

The third stage of 'browsing' is framed as "searching by fairly broad subject or topic" (Phelps et al., 2007: 130). At first, seeing any real difference between reconnaissance and browsing can be difficult. For clarity, the main differentiating feature here is that browsing is a more concentrated utilisation of reconnaissance. Thus, in a continuation

of the reconnaissance process, searching is more focused within subjects and topics. For example, if we take the term 'abstract space,' we can use reconnaissance to search for this across academic landscapes to uncover areas under which this term resides. Moving into the browsing stage, we may apply this same term to purposefully limited searches within critical geography for example. This, in turn, facilitates a more robust image of the availability of literature within subject areas. The methodical searching stage now begins from what could essentially be described as a collection of 'lay-of-the-land' literature. At this point, we must fully utilise the keyword matrix which has been accrued to perform precise, methodical literature searching processes across various repositories.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic at the time of writing, literature searching has been limited to primarily online sources. A small handful of sources were obtained from physical libraries where possible but this was severely restricted. It is unlikely that this has affected the research in any meaningful way due most literature being online. The next stage is citation chaining under which relevant bibliographies are followed from one paper to the next to see what evidence can be unveiled that has not been forthcoming through standard searching. From here, search limiting is utilised to draw out the specifics from any given body of work, perhaps to the areas that would be most fruitful in producing wider bodies of work from which to draw. At this point, much of the literature searching is complete. However, the monitoring stage, whilst not really a stage per se, was incorporated by utilising the keyword matrix to set alerts on various alert services such as Zetoc. This results in emails received to alert of any new publications relative to the keyword matrix. The stage was quite unproductive and

generated little additional literature, perhaps due to the unusual focus on the nature of the abstract. As such, only a few papers on abstract space for example were returned and these were almost universally mathematical in nature. As an additional stage to Phelps et al.'s (2007) method, it was decided to incorporate software which can facilitate textual search at the granular level. To perform such an analysis, the software Qiqqa (pronounced quicker) was employed for the *sole purpose* of granular text searching. This sole use is because the software has fallen into being unmaintained and presents many issues. However, it remains perhaps the most powerful in-text searching facility capable of displaying thousands of directly highlighted text quotes in seconds. Combined with the keyword matrix, it was possible to extract exact information quickly, allowing direct and immediate access to relevance. Phelps et al.'s method is not as linear as it appears and ultimately required continuous revisiting of stages across writing. From the literature review, the methodology for the rest of the thesis was produced.

Moving into the methodology proper, for this thesis, there is no pre-existing methodology from which to draw although it can be considered 'pure', 'basic', or 'fundamental' research into the theoretical foundations and the possibilities of social abstractionism. This type of research method is considered to be the studying of "knowledge for its own sake" (Babbie, 2008: 27) or "deals with questions which are intellectually challenging to the researcher but may or may not have practical applications at the present time or in the future" (Bailey, 2007: 25). Although I write this methodology section to outline the theoretical way in which I approach the research, the thesis as a whole can also additionally be taken as the building of a

'methodology in progress', that is, an exploratory attempt to build a social abstractionist methodology for interpreting the social world. The underlying importance of this lies in the fact that no previous methodological framework takes into account abstract objects and spaces. Thus, in the absence of such methods, one must be formulated in the interests of considering the abstract. This methodology is driven by the existing literature as considered in the literature review. The disagreement between Platonism and nominalism failed to yield an account for socially produced abstract objects such as rules and laws despite the fact that authors from across disciplines, including sociology and legal philosophy (e.g., Weber, 1978; Stinchcombe, 2001; Olivecrona, 1939), all refer to these things as being abstract. In addition, it makes sense that abstract space could be directly related to abstract objects rather than simply be the Lefebvrian 'space-abstracted-from-the-concrete' neo-Marxian paradigm that it is. Thus, in this methodology chapter, I examine and justify the way in which abstract objects and abstract space work methodologically for use within social abstractionism.

As mentioned on page 83, Thomas and Harden (2008: *no pagination*) argue that there is no requirement to locate every conceivable paper on a topic when reviewing literature. This aligns with Snyder's (2019: 335) point that using a semi-systematic review can help unveil themes, issues, and identify components for a theoretical concept as well as knowledge gaps in the literature. They also note that an integrative literature review can use semi-systematic fundamentals to combine perspectives from across disciplines. Together, these reflect the approach taken. One of the dangers of using this method is that it is possible to identify knowledge gaps that are not actually

there and have been missed in the literature review. This possibility was offset by emphasising whether any of the fundamental ingredients of social abstractionism could be found explicitly in sociological works. What was presented in the literature review specifically from sociology demonstrated the non-existence, at least in explicit terms, of any claims to social abstractionist principles. Thus, evidence drawn from the literature review goes towards the social abstractionist methodology covered in this chapter and its use in the main chapters. The value of this new methodology is not only in its use in demonstrating the fundamentals of social abstractionism but also in contextualising concepts that hitherto have resided outside of sociology within sociological potentiality. This methodology will not only advance the unveiling of the explicit abstractness of the social world but also aid in the sense-making of the abstract lives we lead. It enhances the relevance and relationship between what could be seen as the domain of philosophy and clarifies the connection of the philosophical to the social. It may help to make these principles more accessible to the sociological field which has so far not embraced these ideas and in turn may help to challenge existing assumptions about social reality. Further, it develops and builds upon existing literature by taking the various abstract *somethings* that sociologists are grasping at and making them explicit, centralising them to form the potential for a new generation of sociological thought and new ways of seeing and interpreting the social world with the aim of advancing knowledge, improving clarity of thought and interpretation, and inspiring new innovative approaches to social justice.

Abstract Objects

As one of two of the main founding premises for social abstractionism, the concept of abstract objects must be outlined, clarified, exemplified, and defined. As previously highlighted in the literature review, oppositional tension exists between the Platonist view of abstract objects and the nominalist view. A social abstractionist interpretation aligns with neither but is nearer to the Platonist view. To reiterate, the Platonist view of abstract objects is that they are external to us, non-spatial, non-temporal, non-causal, cannot be destroyed, created or changed, and are shapeless and locationless (Cowling, 2017: 2; Dodd, 2007: 37; Hoffman & Rosenkrantz, 2005: 47-52; Juvshik, 2017; Liggins, 2010: 67; Thomasson, 2004: 89). For a social abstractionist consideration, these attributes are problematic and must be challenged. To do so, we must first consider what an abstract object is. First and foremost is that an abstract object is something that the existence of which is limited to that of the abstract; it has no concrete existence yet has an external presence. Examples of such objects are numbers (Hale, 1987; Wright, 1983; Divers & Miller, 1999; Kitcher, 1978), novels (Friedell, 2019; Lin, 2017: 5), and music (Dodd, 2002; Kivy, 1983; Norris, 2006); in general, "products of the human mind" (Popper, 1980: 144) that have an external presence. They do not and cannot exist concretely. By taking this principle, it soon becomes clear that much of what exists in society are abstract objects, including society itself. Things such as laws, rules, policies, licences, permissions, regulations, standards, qualifications, job titles, brands, companies, schools, and contracts, to name a few, all constitute abstract objects and most tend to be bureaucratic, but it is not a universal necessity. Sometimes it can be helpful to ask the question 'where is it?' and if this question cannot be easily answered, one may be dealing with an abstract object. For example, where are the 'Universal Credit Regulations 2013' or the

'Constitution of the United States'? It may seem obvious to answer that they exist on the paper on which they are written, except they do not. The written paper is only a concrete *representation* of the abstractum. As too is cash a concrete representation of the *abstractum* of money. Thus, it is also wise in relation to this to abandon the Lefebvrian and Marxian concept of the concrete abstraction in favour of reification, the treating of the abstract as if it were real. The concrete abstraction is a paradox and also perpetuates the idea that the abstract can be made concrete which is not possible and therefore should be abandoned. Across the course of this thesis, I will outline more abstract objects in detail. However, for now, let us consider what is common between abstracta and how they challenge the Platonist view.

Creation / Alteration

The unifying principle between abstracta is that they are all socially produced "products of the human mind" (Popper, 1980: 144). There is nothing concrete about the 'Universal Credit Regulations 2013'. Thus, if abstracta are socially produced, this challenges the idea that abstract objects cannot be created. Regulations, rules, laws, and the like, abstracta, are produced from the minds of people. However, an abstractum does not simply become an externalised abstractum. To externalise and reify the abstractum, there has to be some kind of social agreement, acceptance, enforcement, or dissemination of the idea. It is here that abstracta "must always be grasped or understood by a mind before they lead to human action" (Popper, 1980: 164). This can be between a small handful of people with significant power through which the abstractum is permeated and 'enforced'. It could be even just one person like in an extreme form of dictatorship such as when Hitler introduced the Enabling Act

of 1933 which handed him the power to enact laws without approval (Davies & Lynch, 2002: 21); historically (or even contemporarily) through 'royal' 'decree' such as Philip III trade regulations (Cobo & Seijas, 2020); or perhaps a 'manager' whereby the abstractum is created and expected to be understood and followed or face repercussions (BBC News, 2020). It could be between a large number of people with lesser power or even no power at all if enough people come together to force the creation (or destruction or alteration) of an abstractum such as with union strike action or mass protest. Synthesis occurs externally to us becoming crystallised and instituted outside of us (Durkheim, 1982: 45). It forms a "relationship between the world of ideas and the world of objects" (Bennabi, 2003: 32) with "which we have access only with our mind" (Hermite *cited in* Darboux, 1906: 46). Unlike social constructionism which sees 'constructs' as *evolving* through a mutually agreed process, abstract objects generally do not, especially bureaucratic abstracta which rely on power to create the abstractum; the abstractum is most often a diktat.

Taken together, these challenge the Platonist notion of the uncreatability and unchangeability of abstracta. In fact, the changeability or malleability of abstracta is often clearly presented through the term 'amendment'. To make an 'amendment' to an abstractum is to change or alter it in some way whilst perpetuating the original abstractum; it is "to modify their effect" (Marshall, 2019). For example, the 'Civil Legal Aid (Remuneration) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 are the alteration of the abstractum's prior form of the 'Civil Legal Aid (Remuneration) Regulations 2013'. The alteration of this abstractum reduced the amount of money to be paid for legal aid for asylum cases meaning that the number of legal professionals willing to take on these

types of cases reduced thus preventing help for those seeking asylum (Grierson, 2018). Other examples include the Corporation Tax Act 2010 which allows the rate of corporation tax to be set by the Government. Malleability here is demonstrated in the continual lowering of corporation tax for the powerful from 28% to 19% in 2022 (Institute for Fiscal Studies, n.d.); and The Education and Adoption Act 2016 forced amendments to the Academies Act 2010 which granted power to the Secretary of State for Education to forcibly convert 'failing' or 'inadequate' schools into 'academies', academies being a semi-privatised system of schooling (National Education Union, 2019: 21-25). Although these are all laws, now that we have established malleability or changeability, we can apply the same principle to other abstract objects such as rules, policies, regulations, countries, and states. What is also implied however is a temporality. Whilst laws have temporality in that they exist for a finite period and are named as such, the same principle can be applied to, say, a driving licence. A driving licence, an abstract object, is given 'validity', an agreement to its temporal and abstract existence through 'valid from' and 'valid to' dates. The licence does not exist prior to issuance and is automatically destroyed at the end of its temporal 'validity'. Again, this object is changeable as it can be both given, revoked, returned, or altered through 'conditionality' by power. Additionally, corruptibility constitutes a form of malleability, particularly for bureaucratic abstracta. Thus, the abstracta of titles of power such as managers or headteachers which, when subjected to corrupting influences such as patronage, demonstrate altered meaning or interpretation of the abstractum particularly under the presented illusion of infallibility. Thus, the non-temporal attribute, in tandem with the non-creatable and non-changeable attributes maintained in Platonism, are rejected under social abstractionism.

Externality

What connects all abstracta is their externality to the individual, aligning with the Platonist view of abstract objects. However, what differs between social abstractionism and Platonism is that socially produced abstracta ultimately rely on *somebody*. In other words, in the event that humanity ceased to exist, so too would socially produced abstracta, records of laws, rules or policies for example. The written statute would become nothing other than an unwitnessable, instantiated referent to nothing in the absence of humanity. Thus, there must remain people who can consciously connect with any given abstractum. Abstract objects rely upon a kind of 'tethering' to the human as argued by Szabo (2003: 29-30) and Thomasson (2004) and was highlighted by Bennabi (2003: 32) describing the relationship between person and abstract object. Although none describe the notion of tethering in detail, it could be conceived of as a reliance on instantiation, the abstractum of money being instantiated in the physical note or coin, for example. Money ceases to exist in the absence of humanity, yet it is external to the individual. Millions of people can have no money and it will continue to exist, but if humanity no longer existed, neither would money beyond its concrete representations. Additionally, much like in the concrete realm of social relations, abstracta cannot be genuinely independent but, instead, maintain independence much like people do. In other words, although we talk of the individual being independent, that independence is not absolute. Any individual ultimately relies on other people in some way, a human interdependence (e.g., Hossain & Ali, 2014; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). The same applies to abstracta. Although abstracta have an independent existence, they still rely on somebody to consciously connect; they are loosely dependent which reflects Szabo's (2013) notion of 'dependant abstracta' which in no way undermines externality. This is important because it betrays a fundamental

possibility: we can just 'let go' of the abstract, like a balloon from a child's hand. Thus, unlike the concrete human interdependence, there is no concrete coupling that binds us to the abstract. Together, these are all reminiscent of Schopenhauer's (2010: 23-24) object/subject dependence.

Furthermore, some abstracta can be encoded with individualising properties relying on just one person for an *instantiated* existence. The driving licence is one such example, as are bank accounts, passports, individual contracts, and debts; they cease to exist without the individual to whom they are attached. However, despite ceasing to exist, only the instantiation ceases to exist and not the dominant abstractum. Thus, the driving licence which ceases to exist on expiration does not equate to all driving licences ceasing to exist. Furthermore, this reveals the possibilities of the encoding of individualisation for abstracta. An individualised abstractum, especially for bureaucracy, can be designed to make visible the individual to further abstract objects and systems – databases for example, or surveillance systems. Externality is further illuminated through the notion *Ignorantia juris non excusat* or 'ignorance of the law excuses not'. In other words, not knowing the law is not a defence. However, given the size and quantity of legal abstracta, it is perfectly reasonable to expect that there are laws that an individual has never heard of. However, the absence of knowledge of the existence of any given law does not mean that said law does not exist. If the law that the individual does not know can still exist (as an abstractum) and be used against them without the individual's knowledge of the existence of this law, then this adds weight to externality.

Causation

To address the Platonist notion that abstracta are non-causal, as we are thinking sociologically, it is reasonable to place causation at the door of the individual or group of people responsible for creating socially produced abstracta, a view also held by Brock et al. (2013) and Lin (2017). Despite attributing causation to people, it is also the case that abstracta created are imbued with an encoded causative attribute but not in a way that gives them causality. In other words, the intent of an abstractum's creator(s) to cause an outcome is externalised into the abstractum, imbuing the abstractum with causative *continuity* which continues independently even in the absence of the creator(s). Additionally, the encoded attribute of *intentionality* is also suggested by Thomasson (2004: 88-92) which implies a causative continuity as intent is translatable to mean 'intend to make something happen'. People (cause) create laws (effect) and, consequentially, these laws have a causal continuity which alter the social world thus the abstracta of laws are imbued with the *intent* to *cause* an *effect*. It can be thought of as the 'paper aeroplane effect'. An individual (cause) throws a paper aeroplane (effect) at another person (intent). The aeroplane cannot causally act of its own volition yet when the aeroplane hits the other person it has an effect. Thus, there is a continuation of cause between the thrower and the target. The aeroplane carries with it the causal continuity of intent from the thrower to hit the other person. This same principle is applicable to abstract objects. The varying abstracta of speed limits, driving licences, prisons, and money, for example, cause us, for the most part, to drive at a certain speed. To transgress against the relevant law may mean a loss of the abstractum of driving licence with the possibility of experiencing incarceration within the abstract space of prison, or the forcible confiscation of money through 'fines'. Thus, we are *caused* to act in a way where this would not happen.

Nevertheless, we can still ignore these abstract entities which shows the abstract/concrete division. The same principle also applies to other incalculable matrices of bureaucratic abstracta, whether they are laws, rules, or regulations. Drawing once more on Stinchcombe (2001: 45), "Once that committee or legislature or court sitting *en banc* validates the abstraction, it is often then expected to govern further activity without further debate". So, the abstractum then 'governs' which again implies causal continuity. This is reflected by Popper (1980: 40) when he stated, "Once theories exist, they begin to have a life of their own: they produce previously invisible consequences, they produce new problems". Of course, theories are abstract, and the word 'theories' is easily replaceable by the word 'abstractum'. Thus, the abstractum is given a life of its own but its ability to produce both "invisible consequences" and "new problems" also demonstrates the causative continuity of abstracta. It is important however to avoid the fallacy of reification. Thus, the abstractum cannot be the source of causation; it simply functions as a conduit for the conveyance of causation.

Objectivity / Subjectivity

Returning to Platonism once more, abstract objects are seen as objective. However, for social abstractionism, they objectively exist but they are *also* subjective on a number of grounds. The first, again, is *intent*. To intend to cause an effect means that an abstractum is created with a specific purpose but that purpose and the effect desired is subjective. In addition to this, intent can be ideological. Thus, a law that seeks to, for example, further privatise the NHS, such as the Health & Social Care Act 2012, can be seen as both ideological and subjective. It is ideological as it follows the

patterns of the neoliberal tenet for prioritising private over public ownership of entities. Therefore, it is also subjective as ideology is a specific worldview of how things should function. Having an ideological position, whether the individual is aware of that ideological position or not, necessarily imbues an abstractum with subjectivity. Like intent, 'purpose' is yet another example of subjectiveness. As abstracta, especially bureaucratic abstracta, are created *for purpose*, the purpose of the abstracta is necessarily subjective. To exemplify again, we could draw upon Graeber's (2019) 'Bullshit Jobs', abstract job titles designed *for purpose* to outline concrete actions to be followed in pursuit of expectations of the abstract; chief compliance officer being one or quality service manager being another. Referring back to the corruptibility of an abstractum, this again reinforces the subjective nature of an abstractum through the fact that an individual enacts the intent to corrupt.

Additionally, abstracta are subjective as they are often *interpretable*. This means that an abstractum may be open to interpretation of meaning by even those with significant power. However, the interpretability of an abstractum may *only* be available to those of power. For example, suppose a school pupil challenged a rule on the grounds of a different interpretation of the abstractum. In that case, it is most probable that the subjective interpretation by power will be the interpretation taken as the 'true' meaning since the abstractum as conceived was intended to carry a truth value "to govern further activity without further debate" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 45). We can find the same principle in legal abstracta. For example, 'legal precedents' are set in legal cases that record how law was interpreted at the time. These interpretations are based on two factors: the abstracta of law and the abstracting of concrete events. Thus, a 'judge'

must subjectively interpret both. However, following any 'legal precedent' case, any subsequent 'judge' must interpret three factors: the abstracta of law, the abstracted events of the current case, and the abstracted events and interpretations of the legal precedent, each step moving further away from concrete reality.

Abstract Space

As yet, there are three more attributes of Platonist abstract objects to be considered as they stand within a social abstractionist frame: non-spatiality, locationlessness and shapelessness of abstract objects. To instantly address the non-spatiality element, abstract space will serve as the spatial container. The social abstractionist view is that abstract space is a parallel, abstract, and co-existing space coterminous to physical space in which abstracta persist. Abstract space is not bound by the concrete rule of physics that no two objects can occupy the same space. Abstract space is often a space of superimposition, layers of abstract space dominated by differing abstracta. Thus, a 'convenience store' can be seen as an abstract space of capital, of bureaucracy, of images, and of legality. As examined across the literature review, there does not seem to be any connection made between abstract space and abstract objects. However, numerous references are made to what can be reasonably considered as abstract spaces, such as the 'world of ideas' (Bennabi, 2003: 4; Wahba, 2007: 168-169; Benlahcene, 2011; Penrose, 1989: 554; Hermite, *cited in* Darboux, 1906: 46; Oakeshott, 1985: 26-27; Plato, 1997; Lotze, 1887: 96-97), Popper's (1980) 'Three Worlds', or Frege's (1984) 'Third Realm'. Lefebvre's (1991) formulation of abstract space is rooted in neo-Marxist thought although many of the attributes of abstract space can be carried over including that it is the "location of abstraction" but

not "the source of abstraction" (p. 348) as the source lies with people themselves. Furthermore, it is a tool of power (p. 52, 391), a tool of domination (p. 370), manipulable by authority (p. 51), sustained by bureaucracy (p. 52), and stipulates inclusion and exclusion (p. 288). Social abstractionism disagrees with Lefebvre on a couple of points. Firstly, it is not the source of abstraction as mentioned but a container for abstract objects nor is it *necessarily* sustained by bureaucracy. Secondly, whilst abstract spaces can be violent (p. 388), repressive (p. 318), segregatory (p. 318), and have concrete restraints (p. 59), it is not inherently so as Lefebvre (p. 388) argued.

Spatiality

It would seemingly make sense to allow the claim that a rule, an abstractum, has no spatial attribute, particularly as the rule is abstract. However, it makes more sense that this abstractum is often, but not always, linked to a particular *place* and thus must also inhabit a particular *space* or multiple *spaces.* Places are also spaces; the two are inseparable. Consider the following example of a rule: 'You must not eat or drink in class'. This is a common rule found within 'British' 'classrooms' at both 'primary' and 'secondary' 'schools'. Before we address the rule itself, let us consider the 'school'. A school is a categorisation of a building, the building being a concretum, based upon its designated and abstract use purpose. School only exists as an abstractum and has no concrete reality. It is a coterminous abstract layer applied to the concrete. Furthermore, 'school' is also formed of spectra of abstracta, innumerable and multi-layered, generally of bureaucratic nature, which together constitute the foundations of a single axiomatic abstractum of school. A school is additionally an abstract space within which these spectra of abstracta inhabit. However, even within a school,

abstract spaces differ depending on which room we refer to. For example, the abstract space of a 'classroom' differs significantly from the abstract space of the 'school canteen'. In the 'school canteen' you are allowed to eat whereas 'you must not eat or drink in class'. Thus, the two different rooms in the same building have differing abstracta which dominate the respective abstract spaces. I term this synchronous domination, which relates to the synchronicity between an abstractum and an abstract space.

In considering another standard rule, 'all homework must be completed', we can see that this rule now extends outside of the abstract space of 'school' and into the abstract space of 'home'. This is what I term *asynchronous domination*, meaning an abstractum that extends outside of its originating abstract space to dominate another differing abstract space. I also employ the term *metaspatial* to refer to abstracta which transcend a significant array of abstract spaces, even to a global scale. To address the locationlessness put forth by Platonist thinking, if abstracta inhabit abstract spaces, and if they maintain synchronous domination, then they must also have location but again this location is equally as abstract. Many asynchronous abstracta can be located abstractly wherever their power or function is enacted. However, once we arrive at the metaspatial level, rather than being locationless, they become almost omnipresent. Finally, with regards to shape, it would be conceivable to make the case that the abstractum of any given country, state, or city for example is shaped by its own abstract spatial borders. They are shapes which are self-referential, non-categorised mathematically, each shape fitting into the totalising shape of humanly divided territories called Earth. Australia is the shape of Australia, Texas is the shape of Texas,

and Tokyo is the shape of Tokyo. However, this shape would also be rooted in temporality and malleability due to the temporal and changing abstracta of borders.

Borders

As with any physical space, abstract spaces also have borders or boundaries. Depending on the given abstract space, the abstract borders encountered may differ. Sociologically speaking, abstract borders are commonly referred to as 'barriers', perhaps barriers to social inclusion (e.g., Davis et al., 2008) or to health (e.g., Dangerfield et al., 2018). Rather than simply being 'barriers', they are borders which form spatial divisions in the abstract. So, the money abstractum, for example, constructs an abstract border between an individual with a health problem and the abstract spaces of healthcare within an abstractly spatialised private healthcare system. Thus, the status of interstitiality, being in an abstract space within an abstract space, an interstice, in this case an abstract space excluded from healthcare within the abstract space of society as a whole, becomes apparent. The border constructed by the money abstractum forces the individual to either traverse this border through the exchange of money or remain trapped in an interstice, an abstract spatial prison, locked out of accessing healthcare and locked into bad health. Thus, liminality becomes our lived experience of traversing this abstract border of the interstice. In this example, our experience may be in the exchange of the money abstractum and how we come to deal with the ramifications, particularly if it involves significant or life-changing amounts of money through which we are permitted to cross the border into the abstract space of private healthcare. Furthermore, in the same spirit, we must also traverse the borders set by bureaucratic abstracta such as 'eligibility' for certain types

of treatment or perhaps just the bureaucratic dystopia of the 'billing system' described by Clarke (2007).

In summation then, abstracta for social abstractionism consist of laws, rules, policies, licences, permissions, regulations, standards, qualifications, job titles, brands, companies, schools, and contracts. Abstracta are objectively existing, temporal, abstractly spatial, creatable, malleable, external, subjective, shaped, and destructible. They are conduits for the conveyance of causation. Abstract space is utilised as a container for abstracta within which abstracta dominate. It is a parallel and co-existing space not limited by the concrete rules of physics. It is a kind of 'world of ideas' and of superimposition which generally, but with some objections, follows the Lefebvrian concept of abstract space insofar as it can be a tool of power, of domination, manipulable, inclusive and exclusive, violent, repressive, and segregatory. Abstracta can be synchronous, asynchronous, or omnipresent with abstract spaces. Abstract spaces and the abstracta that dominate them can construct abstract borders that form a status of interstitiality, of being in an abstract space within an abstract space, an interstice. In turn, this creates experiences of liminality through which we traverse these abstract borders.

Using this methodology, the next chapters will examine what exactly is considered abstract from a sociological and social abstractionist position. Although many things could be considered abstract objects, even down to things such as a food menu, it is important to consider the major ways in which abstract objects dominate our lives. Therefore, I will focus on six core abstracta in the following chapters: capital, power,

ideology, and country, nation, and state. Together, these form a hierarchical structure which I term 'Echelons of Abstracta' based upon the social exclusivity of each echelon. These specific abstracta are not intended to represent the totality of abstracta that order the social world but, rather, a core selection which represent the most significant. I will first consider each in isolation primarily because it is impossible to discuss their relationality without having first done so. I then bring together the Echelons of Abstracta in the chapter 'The Manifesting Echelons: Benefit Claimants' to demonstrate how the echelons come together to order the lives of those who claim Universal Credit thus exemplifying the potential of a social abstractionist approach.

The Abstracta of Capital

There are innumerable theories surrounding capital including the economics and politics of Keynes (2011), Smith (1776) and Hayek (2001); and sociologically through Marx and Engels (2010d, 2010e, 2010f), Simmel (2011), and Weber (1978, 2001). In monetary terms, Ingham (2004: 5) argued that the *functions* of money are often used to explain the existence of money. This is exemplified by Murad (1943: 217) noting the paradigmatic 'medium of exchange', 'store of value', 'standard of value' and 'commodity' functions. Like Murad (1943), Mellor (2019) deconstructs various myths around money, including the origins of money, and other authors (e.g., Ferguson, 2008b; Weatherford, 1997) *describe* the origins of money, yet none have specifically reached the genesis of money nor the very nature of what money is. In terms of the abstract, authors such as Dreiling and Darves (2016: 15), Köhler (2019: 99), Vatter (2017: 70), and Prusik (2020: 155) as examples, all refer to capital as being abstract but without explanation. Further abstract considerations originate from Nishibe (2016: v) who states that money "exists as the "self-fulfilment of ideas"" in tandem with the "self-fulfilment of custom" built on a requirement of "imitating others". To complicate things further, Hodgson (2014) outlines the extended problem of what constitutes capital criticising expanded sociological notions of concepts such as cultural, social, or human capital. In this chapter, given this milieu of theories, deconstructions, and appeals to the abstract, it is necessary to explore capital through a social abstractionist lens by considering the abstract nature of capital, what constitutes capital abstracta, how it relates to abstract space, and what it means for our interstitial and liminal experiences. It is important to remember that any consideration purposely limits the focus to money, capital, and associated bureaucracy.

As Innes (1914: 152) stated, "Every banker and every commercial man knows that there is only one kind of capital, and that is money", a sentiment very much shared by Marx (2010c: 159) who saw capital as money in the first instance. Social abstractionism should also maintain this position based on the following reasons. Money is an abstractum that is self-referential; it begins and ends with itself. It is an axiom. Over time, its axiomatic position has become the emergent origin on which its functions, as outlined by Murad (1943), are based. Its functions, such as acting as a medium of exchange, serve as operations through which the abstractum is cloaked and the illusion of its concreteness become instantiations in capital abstracta. Capital abstracta consist of economies, stocks, shares, bonds, profit, loans, debt, financial instruments, banks, currencies, hedge funds, taxes, savings, markets, investments, insurance, payments, transactions, benefits, pensions, bills, price indexes, wages, cryptocurrency; *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*. As Ferguson (2008b: 30) noted, *anything* can serve as money, and *nothing* can serve as money. All capital abstracta are ultimately reducible to the money abstractum yet reciprocally validate the illusion of money as concrete. It seems that only one other has referred to money as an abstractum and, coincidentally, it was Schopenhauer (2000: 208) stating, "money, as that which represents all the good things of this world, and is their *abstractum* now becomes the withered stem to which his dull and atrophied appetites cling" (emphasis in original). Baudrillard (1993: 22) argued that money has *become* an "autonomous simulacrum", a sign with no referent or concrete object (Smith, 2010: 104). This was also reflected later in Chung (2009: 145-149) who argued that money has *become* a Baudrillardian simulacrum. As money historically could be anything functioning as a

medium of exchange, the end of the gold standard in the 1970s led to money's ascent to simulacrum, or so Chung's argument goes.

Critically, with this logic, money must have once been concrete to *become* a simulacrum and through this logic neither author manages to answer Murad's (1943) questioning of the very nature of money from the 1940's. The problem lies in the fact that Chung and Baudrillard address *mediums* of money becoming ever more abstract which persists in the move towards cashless, digital, and cryptocurrencies, the latter being a decentralised system of cryptographically secured transactions such as Bitcoin or Ethereum (Puertas & Teigland, 2019: 285-286; Borisonik, 2021). The money abstractum *itself* was never isolated. This oversight in isolating the abstractum is also reflected by Weatherford (1997: 248) who also agrees that money has gone through a lineage of transformation towards becoming ever more abstract moving from paper to plastic to electronic. He argues, "Money has become even more like God: totally abstract and without corporeal body". However, the oversight is due to the fact that money has *always* been abstract and, unlike Weatherford, money is gaining greater corporeality through the number of representative concreta in which it can be instantiated. Anything that can be exchanged for money, or anything that becomes a 'store' of monetary value, comes to be an instantiation, and thus synchronous domination, of the money abstractum itself.

If we take currencies as an example, Platonists might view them as having the universal of money*ness* as external to them. Social abstractionism agrees insofar as money is external as the abstractum persists if we have none but disagrees in that it

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is malleable in its instantiations such as currencies, temporal in that it has a finite existence historically, and maintains causal continuity that invokes concrete praxis in pursuit of it. Mäki (2020) also sees money as a "bundle of causal properties". Money is not cash, coins, cards, or any other capital abstracta. These are just representations of the *money abstractum*. Mathematisation also aids the reification of the money abstractum through connecting the money abstractum to numbers, one of the most fundamental knowledges of humanity. However, maths is also an abstract system of logic through which the money abstractum is taken as axiomatic thus the matrices of formulae, taxes, accountancy, incomes, prices, and economies intricately weave an illusion of concreteness. As Coyle (*cited in* Partington, 2019) states with regards to economies, "people have forgotten that it isn't a real thing, it's a construct and a lot of judgments went into how it was put together". Again, we can see here that there is an element of Stinchcombe's (2001: 45) validation noted on page 63. *People* are making decisions about how economies are structured and in turn creating abstract objects of capital which subsequently become externalised and "expected to govern without further debate". Of course, an economy does more than simply govern. It sets the conditions under which we can access and satisfy our needs based on the money abstractum and the way in which it instantiates within an economy. Although it is arguable that people 'contribute' to the economy and, as such, affect the economy, it is still the case that people, rather than simply affect the economy, are actually responding to its exigencies produced from its ideologised structure and the way that *people* structure it. Thus, the abstracta of the economy are causal conduits insofar as commanding particular praxis in response to its exigencies and the intent of the people who have access to the key positions through which these exigencies can be

determined. However, the abstracta of capital are not limited to being instantiated by the money abstractum. Bureaucracy also plays a significant role.

Capital abstracta, abstract objects of instantiations and referents to the money abstractum, are also simultaneously bureaucratic abstracta. Bills, ledgers, contracts, accounts, *ad infinitum* are concurrently capital and bureaucratic abstracta. Mäki (2020: 250) sees the money abstractum as "an institutionally sustained bundle of causal powers". Institutions are not concrete entities but spectra of bureaucratic abstracta which constitute the abstractum of any given whole institution. Thus, in Mäki's logic, the abstractum of money is sustained by the abstracta of bureaucracy which helps to demonstrate the way in which abstracta are interconnected. Additionally, Weber (1978: 1113) notes that bureaucracy "depends on a continuous income, at least *a potiori*"; thus, bureaucracy itself is subservient to the exigencies of money. The duality of capital-bureaucratic abstracta not only reciprocally validates the other but also provides reaffirmation of their formalisation. When we refer to Stinchcombe's (2001: 2) conceptualisations of formalisation, particularly that formality is "an abstraction [that] can be taken as a fact", then we can see the money abstractum's positioning as an axiom on which capital bureaucratic abstracta are based. Furthermore, "formality is the informal abstracted" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 185), thus the *function* of money, as an informal medium of exchange historically, became formalised not from the "common sense" required to "pick relevant parts of reality" but from the already abstract. Therefore, in Stinchcombe's logic, bureaucracy's relationship with money, in formal terms, is faulty as it has been abstracted from the already abstract and not from "relevant parts of reality" ultimately becoming formalised both in having definitive

structure and purpose, but also in legal status. However, as subsequent capital abstracta are validated and "expected to govern further activity without further debate", "others need not go behind them" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 45). Thus, the money abstractum is reified in the consciousness of the global population with its validity being ''factually sound''. The bureaucracy which accompanies the money abstractum does not end there, however.

There are specific bureaucracies dedicated to the maintenance of capital abstracta and the money abstractum. Banks, hedge funds, investment firms, or private equity serve as examples. Two major examples are The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These bureaucracies are inter- and intra-connected spectra of abstracta and abstract spaces purposed for either the direct or indirect production or maintenance of capital but also have the capacity to transcend nations and states. The point here is that capital and bureaucracy are intimately linked, inseparable from each other thus both capital abstracta and the relevant bureaucratic abstracta are unified and subjugated under the single money abstractum. Furthermore, we can see these abstract institutions are not static but, rather, abstracta consistently changing through restructuring towards the exigencies of capital via policies, legality, ideology, or economics (Paus, 1994; Yükseker, 2009; Birch & Mykhnenko, 2009; Brabazon, 2016). In line with Thomasson's (2004) position on 'abstract artefacts', these abstracta are intentional, imbued with intent to produce further capital and, through the directing of praxis, carry with them a causative continuity. For example, we can see this manifest in the underlying abstracta which maintain the abstractum of 'university'. Through altering specific abstract objects, courses or policies for example, the spectra of

abstracta which together maintain the 'university' abstractum can be modified and revalidated for the "needs of capital" as opposed to the intrinsic value of knowledge (Zabel, 2018: 145). This is reflected in the exponential demand for STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) skills to satiate the exigencies of capital (Li et al., 2020). In this way, the university becomes "a tool to train future workers for serving the needs of capital and markets without the ability to critique the established order" (Seis, 2019: 49). Thus, the abstractum of university has changed under the requirement to serve those needs. Furthermore, we can also begin to consider abstract space in relation to the money abstractum.

In terms of abstract space, the money abstractum is abstractly *meta*spatial, both synchronously and asynchronously dominating, ubiquitous (Mellor, 2019: 133). Money, in its metaspatiality, breaks the concrete restraints which Lefebvre (1991: 59) argued restricts abstract space. Capital, including money, has now transcended consciousness; it is nomadic and placeless (Gotham, 2012: 31). Regardless of any given abstract space, the money abstractum intersects it. It is simultaneously synchronous in its instantiations and asynchronous in its global ubiquity. Abstract spaces which can be *specifically* abstract spaces of money or capital are banks, stock markets, exchanges, *bureau de change*, lenders, credit unions, brokerage firms, or anything similar where the primary purpose is for specifically dealing with money or instantiated money. Outside of these specific abstract spaces of finance, capital abstracta still play a ubiquitous role, and it is in these spaces where we can see multiple intersecting abstracta within abstract space. Salient examples are perhaps 'shops' and 'restaurants' where the purpose is ultimately to produce money and

perpetuate capital abstracta. To illustrate, consider a 'convenience store'. In reality, the building is a concretum and could be used for anything; it is the money abstractum, its instantiations in capital abstracta, and bureaucratic abstracta which forms the use-purpose, temporality (opening times, for example), functionality, or even aesthetic of the building. The abstractum of 'convenience store' is further buttressed by various spectra of bureaucratic abstracta such as planning laws, building regulations, or council policies (councils also being abstracta). Except for the concrete item(s) 'purchased' from the 'convenience store', or the concrete physical actions taking place, everything else is an interaction with abstracta: the exchange of money, branding, job titles, legality, image, price, language, time, space, and advertising as examples. Each of these is also mediated by the money abstractum: branding, image, language and advertising are abstract propagandic methods to extract money; time sets the temporal conditions under which money can function within a given abstract space; and the exchange of money, setting of price, and legality set the conditions of 'purchase' and the relationship between 'consumer' and 'seller'. However, time and relationships are not neutral concepts. Time is an ideological abstractum considered later in the chapter 'The Abstracta of Ideology'. For now, I shall consider relationships under the money abstractum.

So far, the aforementioned abstracta have all maintained a duality of money and bureaucracy. Bourdieu (2000: 158) may have termed this 'bureaucratic field' which denotes a "relatively autonomous space of relations" between bureaucratic abstracta. However, each of the aforementioned abstracta *do* represent a relationship conducted through the abstract, a mediating matrix of abstracta between individuals, and all

subservient to the money abstractum. Marx (*cited in* Emery, 2012) knew the extent to which the power of capital reached through the notions of superstructure and economic base. It is organised via abstract institutions, building linkages within the social until it achieves the *nexus rerum et hominum* (that which binds us) (Marx & Engels, 2010c: 548) and by disintegrating all political ties and reconditioning them as subservient "money has a power which no right, no positive norm, can touch" (Bologna, 2009; Sousa, 2013: 118). Marx (in Marx & Engels, 2010c: 430, 548) sees this *nexus rerum et hominum* as the sole relation between individuals. Marx (in Marx & Engles, 2010b: 101) also argues elsewhere that "individuals are now ruled by abstractions whereas previously they were dependent on one another". Ganβmann (1988: 312) argues that sociologists have hitherto failed to recognise the extent to which capital has become the *nexus rerum et hominum*. Capital, or more precisely the money abstractum, replaces the natural bonds between humans and creates an abstract and consequential concrete dependence as opposed to a human interpersonal dependence where values of nature and human relationships are held in higher esteem than material wealth (Viti, 2005: 1039). As Lotz (2014: 113) states, "With the event of capital and value virtually all relations become abstract, as with universal monetization every entity appears as an internal limit of capital itself and appears as a means for accumulation". Thus, capital abstracta, or the production of it, experiences its own abstract spatial counter-prison through the limitations of the human (and of time), yet solidifies the relationship between the human and the abstract to the point where, as Tombazos (2020: 1056) argues, capital has escaped the control of the human consciousness. This is also reflected by Marx (in Marx & Engels, 2010b: 101) and by Davis (2012: 42) who claimed Marx saw the existence of money-as-commodity as signifying that economies were outside of social control. It is

in this loss of control that the money abstractum, and its instantiations in capital abstracta, come to mediate our relationships including with ourselves. Michaels (2018: 15) argues that money can "give a false sense of wellbeing", "soothe psychological problems", "increase self-respect", and "enhance feelings of security, love, and power". Although we remain conscious of money, it is reified to the point where it not only mediates our relationships but directs, controls, orders, commands, and subjects our lives to its exigencies without ever knowing the metaphysical status of money. The world treats money *as if* it is reality.

The idea of treating the abstract *as if* it is real draws towards Hans Vaihinger's (1935) Kantian philosophy of 'as if' which argues that, as humans cannot know reality, our thoughts are abstracted and subsequently assumed to match reality. We then treat these *as if* they are real when, in actuality, they are *fictional;* thus, all that is abstract has at least an encoded fictional attribute and a genesis in fiction. Vaihinger partially equates this with the impossibility of processing the complex matrices of causal relations in reality whereby we have to interpret reality through reductionist processes in a similar fashion to Hegel's (1966: 463) murderer noted on page 42. Vaihinger (1935: 20) utilises Adam Smith's political-economic philosophy as an exemplary in demonstrating the neglecting of many constituent parts of reality during the abstracting process in relation to the 'as if' principle. Vaihinger shows how Smith centralises the concept of egoism *as if* it were the sole primary causal factor of human action yet neglects other "subsidiary causes" such as goodwill or habituality. From egoism, Vaihinger argues, Smith subsequently created an ordered political-economic system. Importantly, Vaihinger also notes that egoism became an axiom from which Smith's

political-economic system was developed. The same principle applies when abstract objects are created. Thus, when economic policies, or policies which address capital in some way, are created, they treat money as axiomatic and neglect alternatives to maintain certain logical or ideological continuity. I cover this ideological aspect later in the chapter 'The Abstracta of Ideology'. Furthermore, like egoism with Smith, Vaihinger failed to note that the money abstractum is also an axiom from which Smith developed his theories. Vaihinger (1935: 160) does however note the "fictional value" of money and the fictionality of currencies. Any economic theory that coalesces around the money abstractum utilises money as an axiom, an abstract object assumed concrete. Vahinger's *magnum opus* also covers many fictional abstract realms including science, maths, law, and personality. The crucial point is that abstracta can never be a concrete reality as, by their very nature, are separate from the real. If abstracta truly aligned with reality then they would either be reality itself, or we would have an abstract layer with a ratio of 1:1, neither of which is the case. Thus, this separation, in the impossibility of it matching the real, is ultimately fictional.

We can extend this idea further. As Ricoeur (1983: 4-5) states, "documents and archives are the "sources" of evidence for historical inquiry". However, these abstracta are objects produced from the abstracting and neglecting of reality or its components to simplify the complex phenomena of reality. Thus, the evidence is a bureaucratic fiction in Vaihingerian terms. In terms of money, its instantiation in any given capital abstractum, a bill, statement, or blockchain, for example, is a fictional history of exchange and the relations between. The gap between a work of fiction and a government economic policy then, or any other policy, law, or rule, is not a leap but a

step. All are conjured from the mind or abstracted from reality and subsequently externalised as abstract objects. The only significant differences are that, what is considered a traditional work of fiction, a novel for example, does not issue diktats, rules, orders, demands, or compel praxis. Vaihinger (1935: 132) also draws on Comte's (1875) sociological 'law of three stages' which argues that the 'material content' of ideas gradually alter from mythical material (theological stage – divine or magical explanations), become metaphysical (metaphysical stage), and then positive (positive stage – scientific explanations). Although these three laws represent developmental stages of both human knowledge as a whole, and of the individual, a similar process is also applicable to money. Thus, the mythical material is money which became metaphysical as an abstract object and eventually positive in that is the subject of various economic sciences (particularly maths and quantification). Yet, as money is a fiction, so too is all science that treats money axiomatically. If we incorporate Vaihingerian fictionalism into social abstractionism, then all that is abstract is fictional. If our lives are lived predominantly through the abstract then our lives are also predominantly fictional. Capital, power, nation, state, bureaucracy, legality, institutions, ideology, work, and so on are fictional with only praxis under the illusions constituting the real. Thus, as will be discussed later on pages 258-259, it is logical to conclude that we are living in an *objectively abstract fictional reality*.

As discussed, the money abstractum mediates our relationships via the abstract and is abstractly metaspatial. This means that, wherever there is a relationship, the money abstractum intersects the abstract space between individuals and in doing so creates abstract boundaries which we must navigate perpetually. It is here that a state of

interstitiality and the experiences of liminality can be seen in relation to the money abstractum in tandem with spectra of bureaucratic abstracta. The 'volume' of money that we 'possess', as recognised and validated by either banks or cash instantiations of the money abstractum, determines the extent to which the abstract borders of the interstice are enforced by the money abstractum. Additionally, we can experience multiple abstract borders of the interstice as a result of the money abstractum simultaneously, especially for those in poverty. In fact, poverty is the most salient example of interstice borders produced by the money abstractum. To exemplify these positions, an individual reliant on 'food banks' living a significant distance away may find both food and travel unaffordable. The money abstractum forms abstract borders between both food and travel insofar as having an absence of instantiations of the money abstractum (cash, cards, etc.) prevents both access to food and access to travel (e.g., Clark, 2023).

These are clear *concrete* effects of abstract objects which must be negotiated. Liminal experiences of border traversal become constrained in the concrete geographical and the limits of the corporeal, how far we can walk to the food bank for example, simply by the abstract fiction of money. We can go to a bus stop and even hail a bus, but we cannot board the bus without traversing the metaphysical border formed by the money abstractum or even the bureaucratic abstracta which 'validates' and 'recognises' travel without 'paying' as a 'criminal offence'. Thus, a bureaucratic violence hides in plain sight, supporting the fiction of money, and which threatens the individual who does not participate in the abstract ritual of the exchange of instantiations of the money abstractum. Bureaucratic violence is a form of violence committed via administrative

means, permeated through the mundane and the routine, and backed by the threat of force (Norberg, 2021: 657; Graeber, 2015: 32; Whyte & Cooper, 2017: 3). As Stiglitz (2015: 6) stated on inequality, it is the result of "a choice we make with the rules we create to structure our economy". These invisible borders keep the individual hungry, constrained, and damages our relationships with food, friends, or family, all of which are basic human needs. For social abstractionism, however, poverty forms only part of an interstitial condition despite some authors seeing poverty as ontological in itself (e.g., Aidelunuoghene, 2014; Lalremsanga, 2021; Nayyar, 2000; Segbefia et al., 2016). This is because poverty is only one aspect of a given relationship with abstracta from within an interstice.

Continuing, the less money we 'possess', the greater the number of abstract borders we liminally experience with each further restricting our freedom and these are myriad including in health (Dhaliwal et al., 2017; Rahimi et al., 2007; Vujicic et al., 2016), education (McCoy & Byrne, 2011; Sahu et al., 2016), or perhaps general participation in society (e.g., Hästbacka et al., 2016; Reece et al., 2020; Kamau & Routman, 2016; O'Malley et al., 2021). Thus, the more abstract borders constructed by the money abstractum, the more restrictive our interstice becomes in relation to money. Liminality becomes our experience of traversing these abstract borders. The individual may, for example, have to use money initially intended for heating to pay to cross the abstract border onto the bus to get to the foodbank. In doing so, their liminal experience becomes one of crossing the invisible border not only onto the bus but between concrete heating and eating, concrete hot and cold, concrete hunger and nourishment, or abstract debt and being abstractly debt free. Our interstice, our personal abstract

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spatial prison, can fluctuate depending upon these dichotomic, liminal crossings. For example, the individual's interstice, if it consists of poverty, can be a space of restriction, fear, worry, concern, anxiety, depression, loneliness, shame, stress, hunger, cold, isolation, hopelessness, exclusion, sickness, or any given combination of such. Experiences of the world become restricted or closed to the individual, mundane and cyclic, where cathexis is both dominated and mediated by the money abstractum in relation to these borders. Similar ideas are reflected in Schilbach et al. (2016) and De Bruijn and Antonides (2021) who use the concept of 'mental bandwidth' to describe the effect of money on the availability of mental resources. Of course, the inverse of this, in an abundance of money, is the freedom and easing of border traversal relative to the money abstractum. In turn, negative liminal experiences are reduced; the abstract border between heating and eating or warmth and cold is easily traversed. This does not equate, however, to an absence of interstice borders. Interstitiality is, by necessity, manifest as a consequence of abstract borders with an imprisoning force. However, in relation to the money abstractum, this force can be mitigated depending on the level of the 'accumulation' of money.

Thus far, I have considered the abstract border of the interstice formed by the money abstractum at an individual level. However, the same conditions can also be applied to groups of people even at the macro level. Like the money abstractum, poverty is also abstractly metaspatial and can transcend the interstice of the individual. This highlights the absence of the concrete restraints of physics insofar as the individual can both have poverty as part of their *own* interstice and simultaneously be part of wider abstract spaces of poverty. Vast swathes of the world live in poverty as a

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consequence of capital and bureaucratic abstracta (Schoch et al., 2022). For instance, many of the poorest countries in the world are in Africa. It is no coincidence that these countries are experiencing poverty in the way they do. Caffentzis (2002) outlined the way in which African countries have been subject to the capital and bureaucratic abstracta of neoliberalised entities such as the World Bank, IMF, and G7. For example, a World Bank 'structural adjustment program' was implemented based on the report 'Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa' (World Bank, 1981). This programme constitutes a spectrum of abstracta. In other words, a collection of abstract objects (rules, policies, and laws for example) designed to both alter the abstract structure of an abstract economy, and subsequently direct concrete praxis in relation to the money abstractum. As part of these abstracta, 'clauses' attached demanded 'charges' be introduced for citizens' healthcare, education, and water services alongside the call to develop communal land for food exports. In the example of healthcare, The World Bank and IMF demanded a government reduction in spending and an introduction of healthcare fees in parallel to an AIDS pandemic and a fall in wages.

Therefore, purposefully formed abstract borders were manufactured between people and health services. The lack of access to money consequentially prevents the liminal traversal of the border separating the individual from healthcare. For those with AIDS, this essentially imprisoned and condemned them within an abstract space outside of healthcare, an interstice in which death was inevitable (Aho, 2016), a necro-interstice formed in the abstract and experienced in the concrete. Not only do death, illness, and fear enter the interstice of the individual, but the individual becomes part of a greater

necro-interstice imposed on the abstract space of a country experiencing an AIDS pandemic. Thus, in this abstract space outside of the metaphysical border between people and healthcare, mass deaths occur. Smaller examples have recently happened in the UK (e.g., Jayanetti, 2023). Other border-forming bureaucratic abstracta can also be stacked up alongside: medicine patent protections, exclusivity rights, import and export rules, or policies built upon self-reliance and empowerment which responsibilise the individual (Manique, 2004: 6), all designed to lock out the individual from human and humane solutions and lock into an abstract spatial prison of bureaucracy structured towards the money abstractum.

Although this may have presented a more extreme example, it is, nonetheless, a demonstrable occurrence at a macro level. There are innumerable possibilities for borders of an interstice created by the money abstractum in tandem with bureaucratic abstracta. The borders of an interstice are often referred to more commonly as 'barriers'. The phrase 'barriers' is regularly used within sociological research surrounding poverty. Although poverty has clear concrete effects such as poor physical health (Murray, 2006; Benzeval et al., 2000), poor mental health (Mills, 2015), cognitive development issues (Lipina, 2016), nutritional deficiencies (Lieb, 2013: 64-65), and homelessness (Johnsen & Watts, 2014), these also have a simultaneous abstract nature. The money abstractum constructs a border between the individual and each of the aforementioned effects of poverty. For example, the person who has to choose between extreme hunger and stealing food not only experiences the liminality of traversing the abstract border between hunger and nourishment set by the money abstractum, but between legality and criminality as 'validated' and 'formalised'

by bureaucracy. Again, we see that bureaucracy, built of abstract objects, decides our abstract status of 'criminal'. Thus, if we steal to eat, to fulfil basic human need, and are 'caught' in the process, we then face even greater restrictions and more borders to the interstice. The abstract spatial prison of our interstice becomes ever more constrictive and liminality commands greater cathexis in relation to border traversal. The hungry individual then becomes a 'criminal' with a 'record' for 'theft' facing more abstract borders such as difficulty getting employment, travelling abroad, or accessing housing (Jacobs & Gottlieb, 2020; Joiner, 2015). The burden of liminal experience then becomes ever greater as the abstract spatial prison constricts our potentialities. Again, in this example, the root was simply the *abstractum* of money. It is the axiom treated *as if* real, the externality of the money abstractum reified on the consciousness, and subsequently the mediating of our relations in the concrete. It is perhaps summarised by Farmer's (2005: 33) Weberian observation: "The iron cage exerts ever larger demands on the people who have no choice but to belong to the system".

More than this, the borders and liminal experiences which constrain the interstice go right to the heart of human expression. Money mediates our relationship with fundamental human creativity such as music, art, and knowledge. Money becomes the abstract boundary which sits between the individual and the creativity externalised by others. Art stored in buildings becomes inaccessible in the concrete, bordered behind doors until the ritual exchange of the money abstractum, the liminal experience of the ritual exchange of money, and finally the traversal of the border is complete (e.g., Ponzini, 2010; Wu, 2003). Art may be privatised through individual ownership, or access to the production processes and materials of art become prohibitive. Music,

digitised and secured, becomes inaccessible without the ritual exchange of money, or further, the abstract contractual agreement to subscribe to an abstract provision of service delivered by individuals hiding behind abstract objects of corporation function as borders between creativity and the experience of creativity. Moreso, and perhaps most relevantly here, knowledge itself becomes 'paywalled', the term itself implying the abstract border which locks out the individual with access available only to the financial power of institutions (e.g., Eaves, 2021; Monge-Nájera, 2018). In each case, the bureaucracy of corporation, museum, or legality locks the individual out of access until the abstract border has been successfully navigated. The inability to traverse the border locks us into a prison bereft of knowledge, without creative expression, and alienated from those fundamental expressions of the human.

For the wealthy, those with significant access to the abstracta of capital, imprisoning forces can be reduced through the money abstractum in tandem with bureaucracy. Where bureaucracy demands taxation, this constitutes an abstract border between the 'possession' and 'dispossession' of money. In these circumstances, 'tax avoidance' becomes a liminal experience. The individual wishing to avoid tax must navigate the borders set not only by the government and legal bureaucracy of the country in which tax is due, but on a global scale. Thus, in this type of circumstance, abstract space, as Lefebvfre (1991: 52) noted, is a "tool of power" for retaining capital abstracta. 'Tax havens' or 'offshore' constitute abstract spaces exempted from the corpora of legal abstracta or have favourable financial conditions for the powerful. Omoniyi and Daniluk (2019: 298) see the offshore as a "liminal space" between nation and locale yet constitutes neither but is "positioned on the margins of reality". Such a space allows

for the 'storage' of capital abstracta within an abstract space away from the encoded surveillatory attributes of other bureaucratic abstracta. This can additionally be supported by creating abstract space within the corpus of legal abstracta where offshore tax havens are essentially validated by omission. In other words, if legal abstracta are *not* created to govern the use of tax havens, then the omission essentially grants it legality, with the omission constituting the necessary abstract space. The liminal experiences of the person who utilises such a space are ones which, rather than experiencing borders around basic needs *and* legality, are experiences of the abstract borders of legality, state, and country. Yet, their interstice could still be one of precariousness in relation to the money abstractum. For example, maintaining and securing such large amounts of money would always come with the concern that it can easily be lost with a simple change of law; a destruction of the abstract space. More specifically, if tax havens were addressed as 'illegal' by the corpus of legal abstracta within a tax haven, or perhaps the application of a legal abstractum retrospectively, large amounts of money would be 'lost'. Thus, fear of this 'loss' can still dominate the interstice; the individual may be burdened by the concern for money (Sullivan, 2018). In similar nature, the abstractum of 'stock' or 'share' is simultaneously abstractly spatial insofar as it can 'store' money, it is intersected by the money abstractum, is bureaucratic, and can be suddenly lost. For the 'wealthy', a term which itself is mediated by the money abstractum, interstitiality may be one comprising of guilt (or not) for their 'wealth', exclusion from certain social groups, secrecy, distrust of others, or perhaps even boredom (Chang et al., 2023; Luthar, 2003; Oswald & Powdthavee, 2007; Ng et al., 2008). Liminal experience would then become the need to traverse these abstract borders. In any case, restrictions are placed on the individual

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to a lesser or greater extent, rich or poor, by the utilisation of the abstractum of money and the bureaucracy that sustains it.

Money then constitutes the highest echelon of abstract objects. Although this may become clearer over the coming chapters, I will pre-emptively explain why this is so in advance of these chapters. The loss of consciousness surrounding money's metaphysical and axiomatic status gives the money abstractum a unique status in the abstract realm. Whilst individuals understand that laws, rules, and regulations can be changed, despite generally being unaware of the abstract status of these objects, the money abstractum remains constant. It is the unquestionable. The money abstractum is the central mediator to all things; even if we do not at the individual level *consciously* desire the coveting of money *itself*, it nevertheless mediates our relationships with everything in the world, the *nexus rerum et hominem*. Life itself is negotiated through its mediating properties. Thus, as Senior (1965: 27) argues nearly 200 years ago in 1836:

> Money seems to be the only object for which the desire is universal; and it is so, because money is abstract wealth. Its possessor may satisfy at will his ambition, or vanity, or indolence, his public spirit or his private benevolence; may multiply the means of obtaining bodily pleasure, or of avoiding bodily evil, or the still more expensive amusements of the mind…as all men would engage in some of them, and many in all, the desire for wealth must be insatiable, though the modes in which different individuals would employ it are infinitely diversified.

This ultimately places the money abstractum at the centre of potentialities. Living can be facilitated only through the mediating properties and the functioning of the money abstractum. It, therefore, makes sense that such an abstractum would come to be attractive to power and ideology.

In this chapter, I have shown the way in which money constitutes an abstract object and is treated as both axiom and concrete. It has been shown to be malleable, changeable, and instantiated within other abstract objects of capital. Furthermore, it has been shown that, for the most part, capital abstracta are simultaneously bureaucratic. The money abstractum has ascended to become the *nexus rerum et hominem* and functions as a mediator between human relationships. It sets some of the borders that constitute our interstice both at the individual and macro levels. It creates borders between ourselves and the fulfilment of basic human needs such as healthcare, food, movement, or even life and death. I have outlined the way in which liminal traversing of these borders can affect our experiences of the world and that these experiences can vary depending on our 'possession' of money. However, it is in its reification that lies the heart of the issue. Its acceptance as a concrete reality, in simultaneity with its escape from the human conscious awareness of its metaphysical status, and alongside its mediating continuity, means that it is the single most dominant abstract object for social abstractionism. It is, therefore, the highest Echelon of Abstracta through its causative continuity to induce subjectivity in everything below it.

In considering why this knowledge is important, it brings to the forefront that even though we already know that money dominates daily life, we must re-establish its abstract nature as a centralised truth in order to induce change in a world that ebbs and flows based upon capital exigencies. Despite the loss of consciousness around the abstractness of capital, capital can still be induced to function in alternative ways. As such, the way in which capital currently functions is not concrete and, thus, can be changed. This may help in illuminating social justice causes around poverty or welfare for example. Awareness of the abstractness of capital, and the policies which attempt to direct its function, may bring the researcher or organisation to new realisations of ways in which they can campaign or pressure for alternative functions of capital. Rather than spending possibly years wrangling with power over the details or effects of a given policy, it can be bypassed in order to target the very function of capital which, in turn, may produce new socially just abstracta which alter capital's function towards human need. Alternatively, it may be useful in behavioural economics in aiding the understanding of the psychological and social factors that contribute to individuals' understanding of value and perceptions around financial decision-making. Further, it may aid in understanding changes to the 'value' of money through placing its abstractness at the core of monetary theory, maybe even by reclaiming consciousness of its abstractness and re-encoding its attributes with humanistic features as opposed to its dominating of the praxis of power and those subject to power. In the next chapter, I shall focus on what power means for social abstractionism.

The Abstracta of Power

In the previous chapter, I considered the abstract nature of capital and its dominance of that which comes under it. Moving forward into considering the abstract nature of power, power will constitute the second Echelon of Abstracta. Analyses of the concept of power sociologically constitute a vast body of knowledge in and of itself. Marxist interpretations of power coalesce around class domination politically and economically (Jessop, 2012). Feminist interpretations of power, Allen (2021) argues, can be categorised into three analyses: as a redistributable resource, as a tool of domination, and as empowerment. Michael Mann (1986, 1993, 21012a, 2012b) refers to 'social power' historically derived from four relational sources of power: ideology, economic, military, and political. Each of these three analyses could, if one wishes, be drawn into abstractionism for consideration: class power as power through abstract categorisations of people; the feminist as power through the abstracta of gender; and Mann's 'social power' through the abstracta of economies, military, ideology, and politics.

More bureaucratically focused notions of power are seen in Weber (1978) who saw bureaucracy as the oligarchic power of unelected individuals. This oligarchic notion was further developed in Robert Michels' (2016) 'iron law of oligarchy' which argued that all organisations ultimately resolve to become oligarchies. For example, Rupert Murdoch can be seen as an oligarch who exercises power not only through wealth but also through his dominant media empire (Kenes, 2021). Alternatively, Foucault (1995) saw power as discursive and diffuse, exercised and not possessed. Foucault (1978)

also considered the concept of 'biopower', the political technology for controlling large groups of humans and subjugation of the human body. Biopower, Foucault (1978: 138) argued, was the replacement of the historical power to "take life or let live" with the power to "foster life or disallow it to the point of death" (perhaps reflected in the ongoing situation of Julian Assange (Murray, 2019; Frost et al., 2020)). These are all solid, well-considered interpretations of power. However, in this chapter, I move away from these considerations on the basis that they do not explicitly account for the abstract. I thus explore power from an abstractionist frame giving specific consideration to the use of power via the abstract.

As opposed to the traditional sociologies of power mentioned above, for social abstractionism, power lies within the ability to create, alter, change, influence, use, or destroy abstract objects; in short, the utilisation of abstracta. As Olivecrona (1939: 56-57) stated, and it is important to repeat this here:

> A law is, of course, always the work of some individual, or individuals, not
> of the abstract "state". What is required in order to make a law is to have
> access to the mechanism. It is always ready for use for anyone who has
> been born into a key-position or has the courage and skill and tenacity
> required to make a way to one. The ways are different in a monarchy and
> in a republic, in a democracy and a dictatorship. But the significance of
> the key-positions is on principle the same everywhere.

This is fundamental to being able to create, alter, destroy, or influence abstract objects and spaces. What Olivecrona argues is that it matters not which system is referred to, having access to "key positions" through which abstract objects are created is

essential. These key positions are almost universally bureaucratic, whether it is the bureaucracy of a state, corporation, institution, or some other similar entity. Furthermore, it implies a widely dispersed form of power as 'key positions' can range from 'Prime Minister' or 'President' to 'traffic warden' or 'bartender'. The 'key position' here really applies to a position through which a person can *utilise* abstracta. Thus, the greatest power is being able to create abstracta which dominate an entire populace through laws as well as policies or regulations which directly derive from those laws. Other lesser key positions, 'headmaster' perhaps, can still create abstracta but the difference lies in that these abstracta are constrained in their scope, expectations, or praxis by other objects produced by power such as legal abstracta; they must function within the internal dimensions of the abstract space of law. The smallest of bureaucratic powers can *wield* abstracta such as 'traffic wardens' who can issue 'fines' or have your vehicle 'confiscated'. At the lower levels, however, the individuals' praxis is generally limited to utilising abstracta whilst being directed by abstracta of higher powers. Thus, the 'traffic warden' issues 'fines' because they are directed to do so and not through exercising their own power. Kanter (1977: *no pagination*) shares similar logic in that: "people who have authority without system power are powerless". Foucault's (1995: 26) notion that people exercise power without possessing it is visible in the fact that power is externalised via the causal continuity of the abstractum and *exercised* by the person *through* the abstract object. If an individual with access to utilising abstracta finds themselves removed from a key position through which such power is enjoyed, they can no longer exercise power through the object. However, the abstractum may persist in its externality, and power continue to be exercised by another who takes up the key position. We can now turn to see this through job titles.

Drawing upon Weber's (1978) 'rational-legal authority', also known as 'bureaucratic authority', 'key positions' are also abstract objects of bureaucracy. In the 'United Kingdom', 'Members of Parliament' (MPs) are abstract objects as too are 'members' and 'parliament' with parliament also representing an abstract space within which power is directed. The individual in the key position of 'Member of Parliament' can exercise power through the antecedent abstractum of 'Member of Parliament' such as wielding bureaucratic processes to make new laws or policies. The abstract job title of MP is external to, and antecedent to, the person. Laws and policies are abstracta based upon effects and outcomes intended by those who can exercise power at the highest levels. These intentions may or may not be abstracted from the concrete. Yet, in the words of Stinchcombe (2001: 45), "authority of abstractions is established by [members of parliament] for each submitted paper", *supposedly* on rational logic. Hibou (2015: xv) explains that abstracta such as job titles, categories of person, and standards constitute a "bureaucratic production of the real and an abstraction becomes the reality thus constructed". Furthermore, Hibou goes on to state that these abstracta are an affront to factuality through reductionism and are pliable to a logic of "bizarre rationality" which, additionally, is wrapped in an "antihistorical, anti-localized, anti-specific language, since it is the product of an abstraction with universal pretensions" suggesting an unspoken goal of ideological universalisation.

These job titles and key positions of the highest powers are also noted by Weber but through a different lens yet can be reframed through social abstractionism. Weber's 'prerational' types of authority address abstract objects. 'Traditional Authority' based upon customs still utilises 'rules' but also 'kings' or 'queens' to signify positions of

power. 'Charismatic Authority' relies upon the 'charisma' of the individual to justify key positions. However, 'charisma' "lies in the eyes of the beholders" (Steyrer, 1998: 808); thus, the individual interprets "an abstraction of features" (Lord & Maher, 1991 *cited in* Steyrer, 1998: 811). Charisma could also constitute an externalised characterisation, a persona, an influential abstractum carefully cultivated such as demonstrated by ex-'British' 'Prime Minister' Boris Johnson which sees him present himself as 'a bit of a clown' or 'a bit funny' (Schwarz, 2019; Dunt, 2019). Ultimately, the individual (MP) becomes directed by the abstractum (MP) and performs the expected praxis of the abstractum. The abstractum synchronously dominates whilst the human and their praxis of exercising power are cloaked behind it. We can apply the same principle to any 'key position'. We see the 'headmaster', the 'boss', the 'bartender', the 'chef', or the 'traffic warden', not the complex relationship between humans, praxis, power, and abstracta.

Significant power at various levels can be exercised through the *influencing* of abstracta. By influencing, I mean being in a 'key position' relative to those with direct access to the highest levels of abstracta creation. The high-level corporate lobbyists such as the 'Bilderberg Group' and 'World Economic Forum' function at the greater levels of power exerting marked influence on governmental policy for example, influencing the creation, alteration or destruction of abstracta which are favourable or unfavourable to their interests (Miller, 2010: 23-41). Sharlet (2008) traces these actions amongst the Christian fundamentalist right who use 'God's will' as a way of influencing and promoting neoliberal agendas. Furthermore, Mitchell (1996: 172) argues that laws are neither neutral nor immutable but are a "source of power" that

"can be captured by particular interests". A prescient example is the pressuring of the UK government's 'Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA) to abandon its 'recycling targets' by 14 industry lobby groups and ten plastics producers. This led to the environmental dumping of tons of plastic "to reduce the burden on business" (Rodionova, 2017). Social influence can also be permeated via abstracta. The 'entrepreneur', Elon Musk, recently acquired the social media platform 'Twitter' subsequently renaming it to 'X'. (Clayton & Hoskins, 2022; Counts & Levine, 2023). Twitter constitutes both abstractum and abstract space. This abstract space is known for its capacity to influence; a well-trodden academic path (e.g., Anger & Kittl, 2011; Bakshy et al., 2011; Cha et al., 2010; Cossu et al., 2015; Riquelme & González-Cantergiani, 2016; Ye & Wu, 2010). Often referred to as the 'town square', this abstract space could be utilised to permeate Musk's own favourable influences, whether politically, ideologically, or financially, to hundreds of millions of users, particularly now that it has been absorbed into the abstract space of the private (Singh et al., 2022). Similar phenomena have been covered by Neff and Benson (2021). This abstractly spatial element delivers us to the next area of power, abstract space.

The next area of power following from the key positions of utilising abstracta is that of creating, altering, influencing or destroying abstract space. Being in a key position which facilitates the control of abstract spaces constitutes a significant form of power. Being in such a key position can, for example, facilitate the building, influencing, or destruction of the way in which society is structured. Castells (2016: 2) states, "Those actors who exercise power do so by establishing institutions, laws, and communication systems that express their interests and values and that shape the patterns of social

conduct, of what is rewarded, punished, or ignored". Institutions, the legal system, and communications systems are all simultaneously abstract objects and abstract spaces. Further, Felluga (n.d.), on addressing the broader writings of Foucault, states that Foucault's writing "gives a sense that power somehow inheres in institutions themselves rather than in the individuals that make those institutions function". Felluga then, interprets through Foucault's writings the externalisation of power away from the individual and into the abstractum and abstract space. This promotes the idea that power is encoded onto the abstractum and exercised by the individual through the abstract.

These abstract spaces in which the abstractum comes to function, in terms of institutions or other structural spaces and objects, are both encoded with power and utilisable for the exercise of power. For example, if one wishes to exercise power to instil 'British values' into the consciousness of children, this can be achieved through exercising the power already encoded onto the abstract objects and spaces of 'schools' or 'colleges'. By adding a policy that commands praxis to promote these values, it becomes enmeshed within the wider matrix that forms the 'school' or 'college'. We can also see the influencing of abstract spaces through the common metaphor 'spheres of influence'. 'Spheres' are a reference to abstract spaces which are used to exercise power through the exertion of asynchronous domination of abstracta with either the intent to synchronise or remain asynchronous. To elaborate, the USA is an abstract space built on the abstracta of bureaucracy. The abstract space of the USA lies concurrent with the concrete geographical lands and seas to which the USA lays claim to. However, it also maintains asynchronous domination through

military bases extending its influence thus the US military base at Okinawa in Japan for example, constitutes an American extension of its abstract space to within the abstract space of Japan with some local cultural ramifications noted by Shirai (2020). Klin (2020) covers this principle of military bases in detail, but the same can also be conceived through markets (Gómez et al., 2018), politics (Jackson, 2020), charity (Evans et al., 2017), and ideology (Suslov, 2018). I shall demonstrate how being able to create or alter abstract space constitutes the exercise of power using a quadripartite example.

Firstly, the 'government' is a spectrum of abstracta. It is constructed out of other abstracta such as laws. It is inherently bureaucratic. Individuals with 'key positions' at the higher levels of government have access to the mechanisms which allow for the creation or alteration of laws, policies, and regulations. They are *stewards* of state abstracta. Government is simultaneously an abstract space within the state through which this power is exercised. Secondly, the 'hospital' is both abstractum and abstract space; it is an axiom. It is an abstractum built from bureaucratic abstracta which designates the use-value of the concretum of the building; in this case, its purpose is for medical treatment. As such, it is also an abstract space within which the concrete praxis of health and medicine is performed. At this basic level, the exercising of power has created an abstract space and a range of abstract objects which facilitates the saving, prolonging, and valuing of life itself. Even in the absence of the exerciser of power who initially constructed the abstractum of 'hospital', hospitals continue to function in their abstract use-value as too does the concrete praxis which is performed within. In the 'UK', 'NHS' 'hospitals' are still generally designated by the 'government'.

Thirdly, let us consider the 'corporation'. Again, the 'corporation' is an abstractum constructed out of bureaucratic abstracta and is subservient to the money abstractum; it exists to make money. Finally, I refer again to the aforementioned lobby groups. The 'lobby group' is an abstractum again constructed from bureaucratic abstracta to promote any given interest of any given group.

To exemplify this quadripartite, each uses key positions (some examples are provided by Oliver (2019)). We can see that the 'corporation' which is subservient to the money abstractum could exercise its power through the money abstractum to utilise lobby groups and place pressure on the government to alter the abstracta which constitute 'hospitals' or 'NHS' or any given health related service. In doing so, the 'hospital', 'NHS', or 'services', as abstract spaces of health and healing, can be altered into spaces of health and healing *in exchange for money*. In doing so, abstract *public* space is converted into abstract *private* space. It is important to remember that when the abstract layer is erased, all we are left with is people trying to exercise power via the abstract. In this example, the people whose interests lie in the accumulation of the money abstractum exercise power in an attempt to create an abstract border between health and ill health which can only be traversed through the exchange of the money abstractum. The concrete effects are easily predictable in terms of concrete health. However, in the abstract, doctor becomes provider, patient becomes customer, caring becomes pandering, and cure becomes profit (Cohen, 2006: 609) or even antithetical to profit (Kim, 2018); concrete life itself becomes exchangeable for the abstract. Ultimately, abstract spaces of health become usurped by those with the power to alter the underlying abstracta.

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Any abstract space is influenceable, creatable, or destructible through abstracta: 'carceral spaces' through prison building and policy (e.g., Moran et al., 2017, 2020;); 'poverty spaces' from economic policies, wage suppression, or erasure of public services (e.g., Grech, 2015; Müller-Mahn, 1998; Hogan, 2002); 'able spaces' which exclude the disabled through hostile environment (e.g., Chouinard, 1999); 'violent spaces' through private security, war, or corruption (e.g., Papastergiadis, 2006; Forde, 2022); 'learning spaces' through schools, universities, or online courses (e.g., Leander et al., 2010; Mulcahy, 2015); or 'legal spaces' where the abstracta of laws are drafted (e.g., Müller-Mall, 2013; Manderson, 2005). The greatest powers, however, are exercised where society can be structured: governments, militaries, corporations, media, and similar institutions. 'Media' is plural for medium. Thus, the media as mediums of communication form abstract spaces of communication. As such, they function as communication lines for the powerful, particularly under the corporate domination of 'Western' media (Watkins, 2021). This allows them to exercise their bureaucratic power through the abstract objects of media including websites, newspapers (which Bourdieu (1984: 21) designated "an abstract experience"), magazines, or any other media publication. They are for the powerful "systems that express their interests and values and that shape the patterns of social conduct, of what is rewarded, punished, or ignored" (Castells, 2016: 2).

The abstractum of a news article can quickly terminate concrete reality replacing it with inverted abstract interpretations of events and, arguably worse, embed these abstracta in historical knowledges (MacLeod, 2019; Higdon et al., 2021). This tends

to align somewhat with Frankfurt School theorists. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002: 99) for example stated in relation to the films, radio, and magazines which make up the 'culture industry' in unanimity:

> The familiar experience of the moviegoer, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception, has become the guideline of production. The more densely and completely its techniques duplicate empirical objects, the more easily it creates the illusion that the world outside is a seamless extension of the one which has been revealed in the cinema.

In other words, reification; the abstract presentation of film (or TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) is interpreted as concrete. This can be further aided by media selectivity, framing, newsworthiness, agenda-setting, and decontextualization, all of which are well-trodden sociological analyses but each is an action and an exercise of power in the process of creating a media abstractum. Selectivity is the actioning of power through choice of what news to serve to the public, which abstractum to create. Framing "organizes everyday reality" (Tuchman, 1978: 193), and, by necessity, and by its very nature, the media abstractum is decontextualised from the concrete leaving only an isolated fictional telling of events. In each case, the media abstractum is not only an abstractum in and of itself, but it is abstractly spatial insofar as the borders of the 'news article' for example are set by what is included and what is excluded; the article is a microcosmic, fictional representation of concrete events. It bears much similarity to Hegel's (1966: 463) murderer noted on page 42.

Horkheimer and Adorno's (2002: 99) statement above again reflects Hegel's (1966: 463) statement on abstraction being a vice insofar as it removes the complexities associated with concrete phenomena. Not only do these media creations also constitute abstract objects but they can be utilised to create more abstracta in the classic sociological form of folk-devils (see Cohen, 2011). The folk-devil is essentially an abstractum, a strawman functioning as a vehicle for the powerful to communicate "patterns of social conduct, of what is rewarded, punished, or ignored" (Castells, 2016: 2). Furthermore, in line with Stinchcombe (2001: 185) "devices for abstracting…must use common sense to pick out the relevant parts of reality and abstract them for the use of the formal system". However, media does not necessarily have to use 'common sense'. It can simply draw upon pre-existing stereotypes, abstracta in themselves, and communicate a truth-value to permeate the folk-devil. Thus, the folk devil becomes true; reified in the consciousness. The refugees who have lost all in a war become the 'economic migrants', the 'boat people', the 'criminal gang'. Media framing erases their origins and causes by creating an abstract border behind which the reader cannot see on the grounds that the knowledge is omitted. Abstracta are created to respond to the 'problem' through these folk-devil 'truths' such as the 'Illegal Migration Bill' which applies the fiction of legality to a desperate human life, a fiction of wrongdoing (Braverman & Jenrick, 2023). Together, these examples constitute a small possibility for social abstractionist abstract spaces and objects in relation to the possession and exercise of power. However, the communication of truth-value should not pass without unpacking.

The attribution of a truth-value to any given abstractum, "an abstraction [that] can be taken as a fact" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 2), also constitutes the exercise of power. Foucault (1977: 13), addressing key positions, notes the importance of "the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" within a given society's 'regime of truth'. In the totality of bureaucratic abstracta, we can witness a Foucauldian 'regime of truth' not necessarily of the scientific regime of Foucault, but certainly of the bureaucratic regime. Every document, rule, regulation, law, licence, decision or media article carries a truth-value whether or not that truth-value is close to concrete reality. Hibou (2015: 33) contributes to this notion: "reality exists only to the extent that it is recorded; ultimately, truth is nothing and the document alone is true". We can again draw upon the money abstractum to illustrate this in action. Only the key exercisers of power get to decide the truth-value of an instantiation of the money abstractum. The 'counterfeit' note, whether an exact replica or not, can never be true. Only the note controlled, printed, recorded, and validated by the appropriate person in the appropriate bureaucracy in the appropriate abstract space through the appropriate processes directed by abstract objects can ever be true. It matters not if an individual accepts a counterfeit note believing it to be true as its truth-value has been pre-decided and externalised by power. It is outlined in the 'Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981' abstractum which states that "It is an offence for a person to make a counterfeit of a currency note or of a protected coin, intending that he or another shall pass or tender it as genuine". This distinguishing between 'counterfeit' and 'genuine' is a distinguishing between true and false. Thus, despite the fact that both the 'genuine' note and the 'counterfeit' note bear a fictional truth (as the money abstractum is an axiomatic fiction), truth is still allocated by power to one of its choosing. This power is also masked in a Foucauldian discursive power whereby truth is draped in the circular

referents of 'formalisation', 'authority', 'legitimacy', 'official', 'genuine' and 'counterfeit'. By circular referents, I mean that each refers to the other *ad infinitum*; the circle has no beginning and no end, but these concepts are presented to us axiomatically and spontaneously reified. The same principle is applicable to any bureaucratic abstractum, whether laws, policies, licences, rules, or regulations; all contain a truth-value assigned by power, based on axioms, masked in the circular referents and finally instantiated. However, the power of the truth-value does not end here.

If we ever do need to "go behind the abstract[um]" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 45), or if the truth-value of an abstractum in relation to its use is called into question, a person in a 'key position' will arbitrate the truth-value. For example, the 'Licensing Act 2003' states that it is an offence to knowingly sell alcohol to a person who is 'drunk'. However, the terms 'knowingly' and 'drunk' cannot be precisely encoded to an abstractum. In a case of law, it is the power exercised by the appointed and validated person in a key position, perhaps a judge in this case, which would decide whether a person 'knowingly' sold alcohol to somebody who was 'drunk'. This agent of bureaucracy decides both what is 'known' and what constitutes 'drunk'. Therefore, power is exercised *ad hoc* through conditioned appointees allocating truth-value both to events they did not witness, and to their own abstracta. Foucault (1995: 19) also notes this through his description of the modality of judgment: "to judge was to establish the truth of a crime" with the 'crime' being "inscrib[ed] offences in the field of objects" (p. 18); a "juridical object" (p. 17). This is reminiscent of Derrida et al.'s (1997: 3) Khôra as "the spacing that is the condition for everything to take place, for everything to be inscribed". Thus, a 'crime' also constitutes an abstract object as a 'crime' is 'inscribed'

in bureaucratic abstracta and then subsequently judged for truth-value in relation to the abstracta which designate any given action as a 'crime'. The main point here is that, for abstract objects, only power gets to decide the truth-value. However, returning to the Vaihingerian fictionality of the axiomatic abstracta we treat *as if* real from the previous chapter, it raises the question of how truth can be applied to a fiction.

Reflecting back to Popper (1980), he draws a delineation between the singular concrete world of materialists (and by extension nominalists) who argue that abstract objects are fictional, not in the Vaihingerian sense, but in terms of non-existence, and the 'World 3' of products of the human mind – abstract objects. This compels a need to consider what is fictional. The answer perhaps lies in literary fiction. As noted, the distance between a work of literary fiction and a government policy is but a step. A fictional novel can still convey a truth-value as highlighted by Bourne and Caddick-Bourne's (2022: 15) example that it is a fictional truth that Harry Potter wears glasses. The stories of Harry Potter are abstract objects (similar to Friedell (2019) and Lin (2017: 5)) as too are government policies. They are created in a similar fashion. It is a fictional truth then that to be 'eligible' for 'Universal Credit' one *must* look for 'work' if they are 'unemployed'. The difference between the Harry Potter novel and the Universal Credit policy is that if one ignores the fictional truths of Harry Potter nobody will enact violence upon them unlike the Universal Credit sanctions that will be enforced if one does not look for work when coerced to do so (Wright & Dwyer, 2020: 27). Similarly, the film '*I, Daniel Blake*' (2016) is a truth-bearing fiction about the welfare state in which the fictional character of 'Daniel' is subjected to a series of events which reflect the reality of experiences inside the English welfare system. The film then can

be seen as an abstract interpretation which aims to "preserve what is essential in the substance" (Stinchcombe, 2011: 3), whereas Universal Credit is a fiction which simply reflects the demands of power. Furthermore, this fictionality attribute allows the truth-value to be manipulated or conjured from the imagination. Essentially, the bureaucratic abstractum is a work of fiction externalised to which an application of truth-value can be encoded. This is particularly the case ideologically. Similarly, Foucault's (1995: 18) 'juridical object' is a work of fiction "inscrib[ed]…in the field of objects" (externalised) and given the truth-value of being a 'crime'. The conveyance of the truth-value however is substantially more powerful than the constraints of these exemplars.

As bureaucratic abstracta maintain a truth-value, so as they are taken for reality. This constitutes significant power for social abstractionism: spontaneous reification. By this, I mean that on the creation or altering of an abstractum, the abstractum is spontaneously treated as real and true by the populace or by the intended receiver of the communication carried within the abstractum. When we strip away the abstract, reality seems overly simplistic, yet is indeed the case that people, or "committees, boards of directors, legislatures, trial courts and appellate courts, editorial boards" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 45), simply sit in rooms creating abstracta which direct the praxis of any given individual, group, or populace. Freire (2000: 46-47) perhaps frames this as 'prescriptions' stating "every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another" which subsequently is inflicted upon the consciousness of the intended person(s). For social abstractionism, this means through reification. Thus, the individual comes to unwittingly accept the expectations prescribed by power through the illusion that any given abstractum is concrete. Hibou

(2015: 108-109) exemplifies using medical certificates: "the certificate is considered to be the concrete proof of the reality of the situation, given by an expert who tells the truth…Once the medical certificate is accepted as a proof and the narrative considered as credible, abstraction and fiction become reality". An individual outside of a key position has no chance to refute this reality; truth has been established, confirmed, encoded, and externalised by the agent of bureaucracy. In other words, power creates its own truth and that truth becomes the individual's truth regardless of how close it mirrors reality.

Furthermore, spontaneous reification functions as a simultaneous process of assimilation, not necessarily in a non-agentic assimilatory acceptance, but in an assimilation to its existence; we assimilate to an object's illusory concrete existence. The spontaneity of reification occurs because "power exercisers…work on pre-existing institutions that reflect previous patterns of domination" (Castells, 2016: 2). That is to say, a new law is spontaneously reified as all other laws are already treated as concrete. The immeasurable matrices of bureaucratic abstracta which already dominate mean that there is no opportunity through which to deny the fallacy of their concreteness; they are sustained by bureaucracy and supported by non-critical knowledge (Lefebvre, 1991: 52). The depths to which this domination of the consciousness reaches is profound. Adolf Eichmann was considered one of the orchestrators of the Holocaust yet Hannah Arendt (2006) coined the phrase "the banality of evil" to describe the mundanity of the bureaucracy involved in the processes of this genocide and the extent to which Eichmann's managerialism reached. Seemingly, Eichmann was more concerned with bureaucratic method than concrete

death; thus the illusion of the abstracta came to dominate the consciousness more than the concrete result. A telling quote on Eichmann from Whitfield (1981: 471) seems to affirm this: "his thoughtlessness and distance from reality helped wreak more devastation than had his motives been malign, because he served dutifully as a bureaucrat in a modern state". A similar example can be seen in Kirby and Greenall (2022). Again, whilst this is an example from the extremities, power and violence are intimately linked through abstract objects.

Power is the fruit derived from a lineage of concrete violence across historical epochs, or at least it is at the highest key positions governmentally and militarily. Although violence in the concrete is still very much an everyday occurrence for these positions, particularly militarily, as violence is its *raison d'etre*, violence permeated via the abstract has become a much more salient form of violence for those who can exercise power. Bureaucratic violence, Ludwig Von Mises (2007: 85) argued, is "the ultimate basis of an all-round bureaucratic system". It is enacted by "smartly dressed people behind desks" (Whyte & Cooper, 2017: 23). Through the communicability of abstracta as so formalised (Stinchcombe, 2001), and through the prescription of these abstracta reified in the consciousness (Freire, 2000: 46-47), a person of power can exercise violence via the abstract. The aforementioned Adolf Eichmann example is one such way. Another, more prescient example, is through austerity policies which equally reveals the mundanity of bureaucratic violence (Whyte & Cooper, 2017: 23). Austerity policies are aimed at reducing government spending. In the UK, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition of 2010 introduced austerity policies after the financial crash of 2008, almost universally created to cut social spending, particularly on

housing, welfare, health, and policing. Each policy created, altered, or utilised in the name of austerity is the exercise of power to enact violence: the closing of libraries and defunding of educational institutions as epistemological violence (e.g., Robinson & Sheldon, 2018; Teo, 2010; Busby, 2019); withdrawing of funding for arts and museums as cultural violence (e.g., Rex & Campbell, 2021); increased eligibility requirements and cutting rates for welfare as well as public sector pay freezes as economic violence (Sparke, 2017: 3); and cuts to health as a violence on the body (Stuckler et al., 2017). The result, however, is thoroughly concrete. Epistemological violence prevents or restricts us from learning or acquiring greater economic security through qualifications, particularly in tandem with the defunding of educational institutions (Teo, 2010). Increasing welfare eligibility and cuts makes us hungry, cold, and unable to participate in society (Sosenko et al., 2019). In each case, the abstract object sits between the exerciser of power enacting violence and the recipient.

Unlike the Eichmann example, people engaged in the praxis of bureaucracy may not necessarily understand the effect that their praxis has. They are simply filling in the forms and utilising abstract objects such as policies and standards to make decisions or gauge conformity. Thus, the bureaucrat cannot see the border constructed between the individual and education, between the individual and access to their cultural heritage, and between the individual and food. One way of viewing these effects is through conformity or obedience, evident in the classic Milgram (1974) study of obedience to authority. Authority is constituted from the abstract, a superficial layer which Milgram notes when he talks of "abstract rank, indicated by an insignia, uniform or title" (p. 137). This superficial layer conceals both the individuals exercising power

such as "armies of civil servants, government departments, and local authorities" (Whyte & Cooper, 2017: 23), and subsequently masks the resulting predictable concrete violence much of which has to be abstracted into academic research and then hidden behind abstract paywalls. The abstract objects in Milgram's experiment, the scientist and the authority, intersected the relationship between the giver and receiver of violence. The abstract spaces of Milgram's experiment were separated into one of authority and obedience, the other of victim and violence; the receiver inhabiting an interstice of inflicted violence and concrete fear whilst the giver inhabits an interstice of conformity and abstract fear of abstract authority simulated in its entirety. The persons in the highest key positions however *do* know or are at least aware or able to predict the impact of their actions. When the highest powers implement austerity measures on the subject, they know that cutting benefits to the individual will increase the likelihood of crime, of suicide, ill health, or even death (Butler, 2022); they know cuts to social care will result in higher mortality rates and poverty, yet they do so anyway in subservience to the reified money abstractum (Whyte & Cooper, 2017: 21). I now turn to consider what power means for the interstice, the abstract spatial prison of bureaucracy, and what it means in terms of liminal experience.

As I have shown, much power is exercised via the utilisation of abstract objects and abstract spaces. There is a dichotomy of the exerciser of power and the subject(s) of the exerciser of power in relation to abstract objects. In each case, the borders that form the interstice differ. It is important to reiterate that the interstice, the abstract spatial prison of bureaucracy, has infinite combinations. The configuration that an individual experiences is unique, stratified, and temporal. For the agent of bureaucracy

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who exercises power, it is crucial to consider their experiences of power. Gwinn et al. (2013) and Lammers and Stapel (2010) see power exercisers as more likely to dehumanise others with Guinote (2010) and Schmid & Amodio (2016) also finding that power increases prejudice against the disadvantaged. Additionally, Hyun and Ku (2020) conclude that power brings greater happiness and fewer mental health issues despite Smith and Hofmann (2016) finding that those exercising high levels of power felt much greater levels of responsibility. In combination with each other, it seems that an interstice of power constitutes an inhuman one, where praxis literally involves building borders for others through prejudice. Yet, on one hand, there is no necessity for this to be the case but on the other, when power resides in an already dehumanised bureaucratic system of objects and spaces, it makes sense that the most assimilated minds make the most useful exercisers of power. Individuals then, those able and willing to, or unknowingly, dehumanise whilst retaining their own happiness and mental health, and further, come to inhabit, to assimilate, or amalgamate with the abstractness, the logic, and the sense of bureaucracy, will be most at home within a power interstice. Isaacson (*cited in* Huddleston jr., 2022) exemplifies this when, in relation to an employer's view of employee mistakes, he states "if I'm feeling empathy for them instead of moving them out, then that's a misplaced empathy. My empathy has to be with the enterprise…, not the person in front of me". This most certainly echoes the aforementioned Adolf Eichmann example and hints at the possibility that the interstice of power through bureaucracy breeds the possibilities of more Eichmann's. However, this further enforces my point that the Echelons of Abstracta as analysed here are limited to a 'Western' frame (although the notion of 'Western' is itself questionable (Appiah, 2017)). Alternatively, Farazmand (1999: 262) notes that indigenous administrative systems still retain "a high degree of personalism,

informalism and humanism" in comparison to the Western dehumanising "commercialisation, commoditisation, and marketisation" of administration which reduces the human to its relationship with the money abstractum.

Continuing, a key position itself can constitute a proportion of the interstice of an individual. The expected role performed within a given bureaucratic position is abstract despite concrete praxis. In a Baudrillardian light, the individual comes to assimilate with the key position as an abstract object. Cuff et al. (1998: 295) summarises Baudrillard's (1998) notion of 'consumer society' as one in which objects have come to dominate and society's response is "to make themselves as much like these objects as possible". This is applicable to the rationality of bureaucracy meaning the 'manager' assimilates to the manager abstractum and to adhere to the praxis of 'manager' in exchange for the money abstractum. Thus, the abstract borders are built around the key position and the exerciser of power must navigate them liminally. For higher power exercisers, this liminality may be delegated to other subjects who perform the liminal traversals on behalf of the power exerciser. A 'manager' may need to 'employ' the use of a 'lawyer' to traverse liminal borders of legality for example. However, this implies an ability to control the interstitial environment. This is of particular interest, especially in relation to abstract objects and especially if we view abstracta and abstract spaces as abstract *environments*. The highest powers in the most powerful key positions then, can somewhat control the abstract environment in which they exercise power (Yang et al., 2015: 1). They can manipulate their own interstice; thus, for example, an individual with significant financial resources can exempt themselves from tax and utilise the metaspatiality of capital. We can see this exemplified in Akshata Murty, the

wife of Rishi Sunak, the UK 'Prime Minister'. Using 'non-domiciled' status, essentially an abstract space constructed from the legal abstracta surrounding tax, and for paying a 'fee' of £30,000, she was able to avoid paying tax on 'overseas income' whilst living in the UK (Jack, 2022). Furthermore, on discovery, she 'chose' to pay tax despite being 'non-domiciled'. This suggests that the powerful get to make choices in relation to their interstice. This is further exemplified by the Queen who 'chose' to pay tax yet is exempt from paying inheritance taxes to protect her wealth despite meeting the requirement that this tax be paid (Moloney, 2017; Swift, 2019). Similar choice is also seen through directors of corporations such as Starbucks (BBC News, 2012) and Google (Rawlinson, 2016). Further, it again shows the subservience to the *nexus rerum et hominem*, the totalising mediation of money. Again, this does not exempt power from the abstract spatial prison, it simply reconfigures the borders of bureaucracy and the power exerciser must still utilise tools such as lawyers and accountants to navigate the liminal experience on their behalf. They remain burdened by the need to do this in simultaneity with greater responsibilities. However, these burdens are likely far outweighed by the freedoms they enjoy. In summary, nobody escapes the interstice.

For those unable to exercise power, people with no access to the mechanisms of abstract objects, we can also consider the role of abstracta. The 'benefit claimant', the 'single mother', the '(ex)offender', the 'unemployed', the 'NEET' (not in education employment or training), or the 'homeless' all constitute bureaucratic abstract objects but are also reminiscent of Charles Murray's (1996) ideas of an 'underclass'. Through these abstracta meaning is communicated, a truth-value reified and violent. Foucault (1982: 781) focuses on the "objectivizing of the subject" and notes the struggle of the

subject in the "refusal of these abstractions, of economic and ideological state violence, which ignore who we are individually, and…administrative inquisition which determines who one is". Unlike the power exercisers, the powerless have no access to the mechanisms to alter the object synchronously dominating them. Their interstice is constructed according to bureaucracy. The 'offender' cannot break parole conditions, the 'benefit claimant' cannot break the claimant commitment, the 'homeless' cannot liminally traverse the boundary to property acquisition. In all three, bureaucratic abstracta, in tandem with the money abstractum, form sections of the interstice and in the centre the individual is synchronously dominated by their assigned abstractum, whether 'offender', 'NEET', or 'homeless'. The interstice of the powerless is inhabited by a "power [which] applies itself to immediate everyday life…categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him" (Foucault, 1982: 781). In which case, like the 'manager' comes to manage, the 'benefit claimant' or the 'NEET' become each respectively. Not as labelling theory would have it, but as the concrete praxis of the abstractum instantiated, concrete praxis pre-determined by the object, synchronous domination. Thus, for example, the 'benefit claimant' claims, looks for work, and traverses their liminal borders with no recourse to anything other than compliance.

There are numerous examples of interstices in which powerlessness manifests sociologically. In education, Ferguson (2008a) considers varying ways in which teaching abroad gives rise to spaces of powerlessness in which discrimination and cultural borders arise. Ferguson (2008a: 140) further argues that despite the validation

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and recognition of bureaucracy in 'teacher status', the reality of praxis goes unforewarned. In this case, the 'teacher' experiences a displacement from an established interstice and is transposed into an entirely new interstice where unfamiliar abstracta configure new and unrecognisable abstract boundaries to their interstice. Further, in such a situation, the individual already conditioned by pre-existing abstracta from their previous interstice, rushes to assimilate quickly to their new configuration of abstracta. This would perhaps involve not only unfamiliar bureaucratic objects and processes, but cultural abstracta expressed in cultural praxis where the unassimilated falters through misunderstandings of the abstract; the correct way to bow in Japan, perhaps. O'Neil (2006: 4), in relation to health, notes how HIV and AIDS spread in "spaces of powerlessness, exclusion, poverty and conflict…because poverty, discrimination and other rights violations constitute the biggest barriers [to] prevention, care and treatment". Set within the context of South Africa, these 'barriers' are primarily abstract with the money abstractum being central to this issue but also abstract policies and conditionality such as through the demand for fiscal liberalisation made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Broome, 2014: 150). Macro-level abstract objects such as these become liminally untraversable for South Africa's poor and the abstract bounds of the interstice become the concrete binds of ill-health.

Furthermore, these policies translate into 'rights', or in this case lack of rights to healthcare, demonstrating the mediating factor of abstract objects of law, fictional documents which outline what somebody can and cannot access. Discrimination is derived from interpretations of abstract objects. Again, we can view this through the stigmatisation of those with AIDS / HIV not just in South Africa but across the world.

The 'gay plague', the 'punishment from 'God'', or even the 'devil' itself are abstract objects from which meaning is derived yet in each strawman lies a new bind to the interstice which must be liminally traversed (Mupenda et al., 2014). Redclift (2013: 52) also highlights the abstractness of certain abstract spaces of poverty including the 'migrant' and 'refugee' 'camps', and the 'ghetto', the latter framed as a stigmatised "institutional encasement". Further, Redclift sees a separation of the 'ghetto' between the fiction of the 'ghetto' and the fact of the 'ghetto' where the "abstract and analytical" become conflated. In other words, the consideration of the concrete reality of living in these bureaucratically assigned spaces becomes invisible in face of the abstract object of ghetto and the truth-value that it conveys, a truth-value racialised, classed, or otherwise stigmatic.

In summary, this chapter considered an abstractionist interpretation of power and placed power as the second Echelon of Abstracta on the basis that power is subservient to the money abstractum. It argued that power lies in the ability to create, alter, destroy, or influence abstract objects and spaces whilst generally agreeing with the Foucauldian notion that power is exercised rather than possessed. This notion was expanded to argue that this exercise of power manifests through the utilisation of abstracta where power is subsequently encoded onto the abstractum. Through spontaneous reification and the immediate acceptance of the abstractum as concrete, power can be exercised through the abstractum whilst the abstractum perpetuates this exercise of power even in the absence of its creator through causal continuity. The permeation of violence through the abstract was briefly considered before giving attention to power in relation to the interstice. It was shown that, despite still being

bound by the interstice, those with significant power can utilise other objects and people to control their interstitial environment. This starkly contrasts those with little or no power who struggle to liminally traverse their interstitial bounds. I reserve one particular analysis of power however for the next chapter 'The Abstracta of Ideology'.

Before this, the importance of the original contribution to knowledge from this chapter lies in a number of factors. It can aid in understanding the social dynamics of power in terms of how power operates beyond the material world through the use of abstract objects and spaces at micro, meso, and macro levels. This makes power *visible* in its movements and actions. Another factor is that It may bridge the divide between sociology and philosophy in relation to epistemology and the control of, and production of, knowledge by power. For example, Adams (2024) reports how the UK Government undermined financial education provisions in schools which, in turn, prevents students from learning existing functions of capital. In social justice terms, this could have been foreseen by understanding the movements of power through abstract objects, particularly in tandem with an understanding of the ideologisation of abstracta covered in the next chapter and an understanding of capital from the previous chapter, which makes visible the intentionality immediately at the exercising or power rather than waiting sometimes decades to see the effect perpetuated by the externalised abstractum. This translates to helping inform social change, or at least preventing further social harms, through making informed predictions based on an understanding of strategic patterns of abstracta usage. Ultimately, it may illuminate new methods of social change by informing original strategies and avenues for challenging existing mechanisms of power.

The Abstracta of Ideology

Having analysed the abstract nature of power in the previous chapter, I now move forward to considering a social abstractionist view of the abstract objects of ideology, the third Echelon of Abstracta. Traditionally, ideology was seen as the 'science of ideas' as framed by A. L. C. Destutt de Tracy but eventually took on the meaning of a 'system of ideas' (Oliver & Johnston, 2000: 5-8). Paradigmatic considerations of ideology within sociology have come from Marx and Engels (2010a) who generally centred ideology around economic relations and ruling class ideals. These Marxian ideas were additionally developed by Lukács (1972), Lenin (2014), Althusser (1971), and Gramsci (1992). Althusser and Gramsci in particular make relevant contributions to the abstractionist view. Althusser's notion of the Ideological State Apparatus, an extension of Marx's 'state apparatus', argued that institutions such as schools or the church disseminate the ideas of the ruling class to which the individual becomes subjected with little agency in rejecting the belief systems permeated through these structures. These apparatuses are, of course, bureaucratic abstract objects and spaces, the vast matrices of which command persistent liminal traversal and form innumerable boundaries for the interstice. Gramsci (1992: 376-377) saw ideology as either a historical necessity or arbitrary. He delineates arguing those that are historically necessary are based on shared meaning and experience and have a validity which is "psychological; they organise human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position". Arbitrary ideologies are imposed from above by a dominant group and "only create individual movements". Michael Mann extends the analysis of ideology into 'ideological power' and I conjoin two quotes from Mann here to amplify his important observation:

Ideological power derives from the human need to find ultimate meaning in life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetic and ritual practices. Control of an ideology that combines ultimate meanings, values, norms, aesthetics, and rituals brings general social power (Mann, 1993: 7). You have ideological power if you 'monopolize a claim to meaning', 'monopolize norms', and monopolize 'aesthetic/ritual practices' (Mann, 1986: 22).

Again, Mann clearly implies a movement from the abstract into the concrete when it comes to ideology. He explicitly links ideology to power as a form of social power alongside three other forms of social power including economic, military, and political. As I go into this extended chapter, I take some of these powerful observations with me and consider them in relation to the abstract objects and spaces through which the ideology of neoliberalism manifests with references to the echelons of capital and power. I do not intend to cover the historicity of neoliberalism but, rather, the various claims to what neoliberalism is and to its relevance within this thesis. A succinct history of neoliberalism can be found through Monbiot (2016), an extended history through Harvey (2005), and further historical analyses through George (1999) and Phillips-Fein (2019).

To begin, the seminal work of David Harvey (2005: 2) sees him argue that neoliberalism is:

in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual

entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework

characterized by strong private property rights, free market and free trade

From there, there are many interpretations of what neoliberalism is. Wilson (2018: 2) sees it as a set of social, cultural, and political economic forces that puts competition at the centre of social life. Zanotto (2020) frames it as a dominating force, set of policies, and ideology, ideology also being a generally accepted framing by Ventura (2012: 2), Sweet (2018), Amable (2011), and Mudge (2008). Brown (2016) argues that it is a conversion of non-economic spheres of life into economic ones which indicates a fundamental restructuring of the social world. Market fundamentalism is used as framing by Giroux (2008a), Peters (2012), and Malin et al. (2022) which also links to Esposito and Perez's (2014) notion that neoliberalism is the presenting of market values and structures as reality with the market acting as the arbiter of human life. Furthermore, Ong (2006) similarly aligns with this view suggesting neoliberalism is a transnationally circulating logic or body of knowledge with Gill (1995a: 399) calling it 'market civilization'. More aggressive criticism comes from Buitelaar (2020: 487) who calls neoliberalism "promiscuous and internally inconsistent", Ackerman (2019) who calls it "corruption", Mooney (2012) says it is bad for our health, and Brady (2016) argues that it is an analytical category used by social scientists to understand social change. Returning again to Harvey (2005), as well as Bakker (2009) and Patnaik et al. (2011), 'accumulation by dispossession' has been used to describe neoliberal methods of extracting from the poor for the benefit of the rich which also aligns with Dumenil and Levy's (2004) argument that neoliberalism is the restoration of class power. Theistic critiques also arise with Raschke (2018: 8) calling neoliberalism "secularized Christianity with a posthuman face". Ramey (2015, 2016) also sees neoliberalism as having its own theistic tendencies and attributes including as a

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"politics of divination". Some authors try to mitigate or temper the critical analysis of neoliberalism by suggesting that neoliberalism is "not a theory of everything" (Rowlands & Rawolle, 2013), that the word is being used as a pejorative term (Genovese, 2018: 3), a political swearword (Hartwich, 2009), leftist political polemic (Castree, 2010), or a "controversial, incoherent and crisis-ridden term" (Venugopal, 2015).

So, we have a large array of definitions. The fact that neoliberalism is so indefinable demonstrates to us the malleability of its abstractness and its relevant abstracta. The consistent complaints of its indefinability or its changes of meaning between papers may tell us that neoliberalism is adaptable and malleable to whichever circumstances it faces. This has been reflected somewhat by authors who have laid claim to the 'death' of neoliberalism at various stages (e.g., Smith, 2008). Aalbers (2013) argues that, despite the death of neoliberalism ideologically, neoliberal practices persist. Kılıç (2021) believes that the Covid-19 pandemic represented the beginning of the end for neoliberalism and expects a return to power by the unions. Couch (2011) and Mirowski (2014) both outline the way in which neoliberalism has essentially survived crises which should have signalled the death of the ideology. Manne (2010) questioned whether neoliberalism was 'finished' and Nakano (2020) more recently considered the 'strange non-death of neoliberalism'. So, despite the expected death of neoliberalism, it lives on through adaptation thus making its abstracta malleable and reminiscent of Stinchcombe's (2001) 'improvement trajectory' whereby abstracta must remain adaptable to changing realities. I would argue that, rather than dying, the crises it experiences, and the social upheaval wrought upon the various countries which have

neoliberalised structures, are precisely the intent and the predictable logical outcomes of neoliberal ideological abstracta. For example, in a competitive structure, there can logically only be one winner thus highly dominant entities begin to emerge whilst 'losers' exit the competition. In a competitive yet austere structure, where purposeful scarcity is cultivated, and all that is social is cut under the cloak of efficiency, desperation and violence are inevitable. These outcomes are completely foreseeable. Whilst considering neoliberalism competitive and austere, we can also outline the numerous 'features' or encoded attributes that neoliberal ideology, through the exercise of power, promotes. There are many, but in naming a few core tenets, these include: anti-intellectualism, austerity, authoritarianism, globalisation, corporatisation, nationalism, managerialism, self-discipline, self-responsibility, privatisation, militarism, bureaucratisation, financialisation, quantification, and marketisation; a conceptual playbook so to speak.

For social abstractionism, ideologies are exactly that, conceptual collections, concepts which individually are simply concepts but together form a playbook from which guiding principles on abstract objects can be drawn and disseminated. Ideologies then are abstracta in themselves, open to the processes of spontaneous reification. It is very much reasonable to suggest that, as far as ideologies go, neoliberalism has become the dominant ideology of the 'Western' world (Newman & McNamara, 2016: 429; Steger & James, 2013: 27). Writers such as Brown (2015) and David Harvey (2005) have traced the ascendence of neoliberal ideology to its current position and Fukuyama (1992) argues that this 'Western' ideology will be the final ideology to cover the world with its universalised system, perhaps due to not predicting the vast

inequality it would produce. However, Huntington (1996: 184) neatly summarises the issue by stating "what is universalism to the West is imperialism to the rest" and so other ideologies persist outside of the neoliberal whether religious, economic, or political. Curran (2020: 83) rightly attacks neoliberalism's "basis in universalism and abstraction" and "meritocratic veneer" which obscures structural issues across class, nationality, and race but does not recognise that 'class', 'nationality', and 'race' are also equally abstract. Neoliberalism is utilised as a framework which allows the exercisers of power to enact, refer to, but ultimately succumb to, a prevailing logic, including a truth-value, through abstract objects of bureaucracy (including morally and discursively). We can therefore claim that the abstract object created or altered by an exerciser of power under a neoliberal logic has been 'neoliberalised', essentially ideologised and ordered in a fashion consistent with the ideological framework and prevailing logic.

For example, Hughes et al. (1997: 57) show the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 introduced internal markets to the NHS thus creating an abstract, ideologised object encoded with the prevailing logic of the neoliberal penchant for marketisation. Furthermore, the neoliberalised object carries a causal continuity, a motion which instantiates the exercise of power synchronously or asynchronously with the intended space or subject. The neoliberalised abstractum is ultimately imbued, in some way or another, whether directly or indirectly, with values that condition, imply, enforce, coerce, or push individuals towards subjectivity to the money abstractum; a market logic with which society must assimilate to where the possibility of a non-economic subject has been erased (Foucault, 2008: 201). In this

NHS case, "DHAs [District Health Authorities] were required to reduce their involvement in provision and concentrate on a service commissioning role" (Hughes et al., 1997: 57). Each individual working in those 'authorities' had their praxis reoriented towards the neoliberal order. In another example, IMF loans to Kenya meant implementing policies to cut public spending and remove fuel and electricity subsidies, in turn creating inflation and causing food insecurity (Oxfam, 2022; Bradlow, 2020). Similarly, in 2008, an IMF 'loan' to Ethiopia led to widespread famine due to the 'loan' conditions that Ethiopia had to implement policies of 'fiscal restraint', a neoliberal codeword for austerity (Whiteside, 2016). Together these are known as 'structural adjustment programmes'. The aim of neoliberalism is power of capital and profit claims Harvey (2005: 7), therefore the neoliberalisation of a given abstractum is required to align with the omnipotence of the money abstractum. The term 'structural adjustment programme' implies that changes are being made to existing structures, the *neoliberalisation* of the existing structure to align with the money abstractum, thus making explicit the malleability of the abstractum. Smith (1990: 219-220) argued that, in turn for accepting IMF, World Bank, and other purveyors of neoliberal logic-based promises of improvements for Africa, the erasure of the non-economic subject has led to an existence where "the daily practice of African peasants [following] the holy texts of progress have wrought nothing less than a swath of satanic geographies across sub-Saharan Africa". Thus, coercive promises of improvements through assimilation to neoliberalised structures has led to, and continues to lead to, subjectivities to the neoliberalised abstractum.

The apostle of capital then, as exerciser of power, particularly those in key positions, and those that buttress the power through "non-critical knowledge" (Lefebvre, 1991: 52), come to enact praxis conditioned by the logic of neoliberalism to perpetuate production of instantiations of the money abstractum. In short, neoliberalism enforces capital abstracta as the *nexus rerum et hominem* to the point which it becomes impossible to imagine an alternative (Fisher, 2009); "where all existence is evaluated in terms of money alone" (Cox et al., 2001: *no pagination*). It is the expression of power's subjectivity to the reified money abstractum and is perhaps frameable with Schopenhauer's (2000: 590) observation that "Money is human happiness *in abstracto;* and so the man who is no longer capable of enjoying such happiness *in concreto,* sets his whole heart on money". Neoliberalism thus can be seen, at least partially, as a form of capitalism (Ehmsen & Scharenberg, 2018: 1), alongside which Toscano (2008: 273) argues "capitalism [is] the culture of abstraction *par excellence*" and Paci (1979) who stated that capitalism has the "tendency to make abstract categories live as though they were concrete" and further "the abstract, in capitalist society, functions concretely". This in itself implies a reification yet there is more to consider on the abstractness of the neoliberal.

In an unacknowledged allusion towards Platonism, Heyman (2016: 187) notes how neoliberalism "often seems to float high in an abstract realm" although Springer (2016: 1) counters this by stating that "neoliberalism does not simply float above the Earth as a disconnected theory". What Springer alludes to, however, is that the abstract has concrete effects through our "participation in [neoliberal] routines and rituals, and importantly, through the performances we enact", in other words, directed praxis.

However, Comaroff (2011: 142) perhaps makes the single most acknowledgeable statement about the abstractness of neoliberalism:

> For all that…I have written about neoliberalism, I am uncomfortable discussing the term in its noun form. Why? Because, thus reified, it takes on the denotation of a concrete abstraction, an accomplished object, a totalizing ideological formation; even, in its temporal dimension, an epoch, one that may be deemed present or past.

Indeed, Comaroff is correct. Neoliberalism *itself* is not a concrete abstraction, nor is it *explicitly* reified into the wider social consciousness due the fact that it is purposefully concealed and unspoken about outside of academia or various political and social movements; the first rule of neoliberalism is do not talk about neoliberalism. Yet, its tenets such as competition and self-discipline are reified individually. The consequential imperceptibility, Baer (2013: 76) argues, leads to an incomprehensible and unrepresentable world. Additionally, by addressing the epochal encoded attribute mentioned above, Comaroff acknowledges temporality of the abstractum.

Comaroff continues:

> For me, the adjective neoliberal is much easier to grasp discursively and politically, since it may be taken to describe a tendency, a more-or-less realized, more-or-less articulated, unevenly distributed ensemble of attributes discernible in the world.

Thus, Comaroff is addressing the instantiation of neoliberal encoded attributes, of which there are many, through discourse and politics. Castree (2006: 2) challenges the very abstract nature of neoliberalism:

> neoliberalism can only exist as a thought-abstraction not a `real entity' because `it' only ever exists in articulation with actors, institutions, and agendas that immediately call into question whether a thing called `neoliberalism', however carefully specified, can be held responsible for anything.

Although Castree claims neoliberalism has to be 'articulated', it is, in fact, articulated via its instantiations in abstract objects created by those with the power to do so. Castree also highlights that neoliberalism cannot be held responsible for anything thus actually calling into question not responsibility but causation. This is correct as objects have causal continuity and causation rests with individual or group who externalised the object. I agree with Comaroff's prior statements that neoliberalism is not reified as a concrete abstraction but on the grounds that concrete abstractions are rejected under abstractionism based on the paradoxical claim that something abstract can be concrete. Neoliberalism is then the abstract ideology which permeates abstracta, including structure and objects, and guides the direction of the abstract towards the demands of power, itself in subservience to capital and so I arrive at the necessity of considering the role of power in terms of ideology.

I reserved for this chapter Kashwan et al.'s (2019: 6) brief analysis of the methods of exercising power which is relevant to the implementation and reification of neoliberalised abstracta (although they do not frame it in this way). At the greater levels

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of power, *overt power* is used to control financial institutions, control agendas, and determine discourse (and consequentially truth-value) to shape minds. Institutions again are abstract objects and spaces. *Lesser powers*, those who operate at a more micro or meso level such as managers, directors, board members, or even councillors are used to incentivise behaviours, popularise agendas, and promote values and discourse which then filter through institutions; "a power in institutions matrix" (p. 3). Thus, the lesser powers can use lower-level abstract objects such as organisational or workplace rules to incentivise allegiance with neoliberal praxis. Although seemingly simplistic, when we peel away the abstract, we cannot help but see that "authority of abstractions is established by committees, boards of directors, legislatures, trial courts and appellate courts" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 45). In other words, people in key positions. When forming an ideological collective such as the Mont Pelerin Society in the case of neoliberalism, and utilising academics, journalists, business leaders, think tanks, and politicians from a global base as outlined by Gray et al. (2018: 472-473), we make a connection between this ideologically aligned group of people, their key positions, and the exercise of power as outlined by Kashwan et al. (2019: 6). Harvey (2007: 151) also describes what could be called a neoliberal assemblage of governments, academics and economists which, through the use of leadership, persuasion and coercion, were utilised to export neoliberal principles through institutions such as the IMF. Utilising a "neoliberal manifesto" also referred to as the 'Washington Consensus' (see Marangos, 2008), we begin to see mechanisms for ideological diffusion. There are various considerations of how ideology is diffused including from Converse (2006), Boudon (1986), and Strodthoff et al. (1985). Again, for social abstractionism, the how occurs through abstract objects, the spontaneous reification of abstracta, and the synchronisation of abstracta to abstract space. We can see this within notions of

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'policy diffusion' across the institutional landscape through which a hegemony manifests through the "actions of policy makers from the biggest financial organizations to the smallest non-governmental agency" (Bush, 2007: xiii).

Every institution is the totality and internality of its abstract objects. Thus, the institution, as an abstractum, can be modified based on its constituent abstracta. In this case, the institution can be neoliberalised. This is usually a top-down ideologising of pre-existing institutions and the abstracta of rules, regulations, and legality which form them. Brinton and Nee's (2001) look at New Institutionalism in sociology coalesces around the notion that institutions are reducible to rules generated between decision making processes of individuals which also reflects somewhat both Olivecrona (1939: 56-57) and Stinchcombe's (2001: 45) positions. Ingram (2001: 258) also makes an astute argument that, if institutions are the rules of the game that structure interaction, we should consider also a "super game", where the rules, or even the laws, regulations, or policies themselves are the object of competition. With competition being a central tenet of neoliberalism, the competition to dominate the rules, bureaucratic abstracta, becomes of primary importance. It constitutes the exercise of power through the altering of abstract objects, including institutions, towards the money abstractum. The most dominant institutions in terms of neoliberalism are the international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Davos, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), all of which are essentially financial or economically focused institutions (Chitenderu & Ncwadi, 2020: 132). This aligns with Kashwan et al.'s (2019: 6) considerations of the exercise of power. The

IMF particularly has leveraged neoliberal implementation through the power of the money abstractum to issue conditional loans to countries in return for neoliberalisation (see Kwon, 2013). People in key positions within these institutions can develop appropriate policies and rules which align with neoliberal tenets. Usually these surround marketisation, competition, and privatisation of state-owned entities (Cahill, 2010: 298).

Again, this shows malleability of the abstractum when a state entity can be converted to a private entity through the abstracta of the legal system. However, they are also sites of policy diffusion. Beyond these, Broome (2010) targets the 'Joint Vienna Institute' as a site of neoliberalised policy diffusion which he describes as a "bootcamp for policymakers" through which neoliberal policy is naturalised. Duke (2014: 11) also implicates the 'open method of coordination' across EU members, a kind of intergovernmental policy-making system which Duke calls a "conduit" for neoliberal policy diffusion. We can also consider 'policy mutation' as outlined by Peck and Theodore (2010). Policy mutations demonstrate the malleability of an abstractum to ideologically adapt to ongoing social processes. Furthermore, Henisz et al. (2005) also note a complex interplay between power and influence, the use of international coercive pressures, and mimetic isomorphism, a phenomenon whereby one organisation mimics another's structure in the belief that it is beneficial. This is reflected by Baldwin et al. (2019) who analyse the inter-entity emulation of policy. The extent to which policy diffusion occurs is beyond the scope of this thesis and constitutes a knowledge field in itself but its transmissional effects can be seen within education (Verger, 2016; Gleason & Howard, 2014), governmentally (Shipan &

Volden, 2012), immigration (Bozovic, 2012), and environment (Gerigk et al., 2015, 2020) as examples. Ultimately, regardless of the specifics, the principle remains that the diffusion of policies, rules, and other abstract objects within and across abstract spaces spread the prevailing logic of neoliberalism contained within those abstract objects themselves. Diffusion does not simply end there, however. It also provides a structuring force.

The diffusion of ideology not only permeates the prevailing logic of neoliberalism, but it also compels a certain structure. Abstracta such as policies and rules not only establish institutions themselves but create the structural form. The structure, and additionally the metaphysical status, of a given institution is the internality of the abstract borders constructed by abstract objects. It is the *inside* of the borders of laws, policies, and rules which create the abstract institution. Thus, the institution is also simultaneously abstractly spatial and this internality creates not only the institutional abstractum itself, but the *abstract space* of the institution in synchronicity. This abstract space is then populated with more abstract objects: job titles, forms, qualifications, metrics, or any other abstract object of similar kind applicable to a given institution. This constitutes the structural form. It is in the ideologising, the neoliberalisation of these abstracta which give structure, that ideology becomes diffused, perpetuated, and embedded. The concept of 'restructuring' betrays this ideologised structuring force. Restructuring is essentially the ideological reconfiguring of the abstracta which structure the institution towards ideological tenets. Howell (2016: 580-585) outlines this in employment relations, Ward (2012) across global education, Chorev (2013) within the World Health Organisation (WHO), Fuller and Geddes (2008) in 'state-

space', and Caselli (2016), Grover and Soldatic (2013), and McKeen and Porter (2003) in welfare.

To illuminate with example, Maisuria (2014: 289) shows how schools in the UK have been placed on a process of conversion into profit-making enterprises through 'academisation', a process also noted by Tan (2022) and Hoctor (2022). Academisation is essentially the ideological alteration of the abstracta which constitute 'schools' away from forming abstract spaces of more humanistic learning and towards abstract spaces of profit-production and of the diffusion of a neoliberal consciousness. Curricula are also abstract objects. Thus, curricula are alterable to assimilate with this same profit production within the same abstract space such as through the narrowing of a curriculum or through weighting emphasis towards STEM subjects (e.g., Chen et al., 2021; Paige et al., 2020; Nawawi, et al., 2021; Sharma & Hudson, 2021). In relation, Keddie et al. (2017: 162) found economisation and quasi-marketisation to be inherent within education policy reflecting the economic logic of neoliberalism. Similarly in health, O'Manique (2004: 58) argues that, in relation to the World Bank:

> The World Bank's health strategy is one instrument for bringing global health policy into line with the neoliberal canon that ascribes health mainly to the private domain, through the introduction of market forces into the health sector.

In this quote, there is explicit acknowledgement of not only the ideologisation of abstract health policy objects, but also the use of the word 'canon' which indicates that abstract health policy objects are being altered to abide by the conceptual playbook of neoliberal ideology from which proponents can draw from. And so, through diffusion,

ideological objects both order the structure and are thus embedded in the structural matrix of ideological bureaucratic objects.

Prior to the era of neoliberalism, there were many analyses on the bureaucratisation of social life including from Weber (1978), Habermas (1986), Winthrop (1964), and Merton (1968). However, under neoliberalism, bureaucracy has expanded exponentially (Fleming, 2020). Hibou (2015), as the foremost author on neoliberal bureaucracy and its abstract nature, makes a number of important points. Firstly, she argues that neoliberal bureaucratisation is the "expression of domination in contemporary societies" through "the intensification of operations of abstraction" (p. 11). Next, the main two features of neoliberal bureaucracy are the "largely "private" character of the norms, rules, and procedures" and that "the process of abstraction and generalization is taken so far, and made so general, that it destroys the meaning of the mental operations that guide it" (p.16). Both features lead Hibou to conclude "bureaucratic abstraction [is] a fiction of reality" (p. 16). Drawing on Herbert Marcuse (1941) with regards to the externalisation of social norms, Hibou (2015: 29) argues that bureaucratic abstractions are produced by the collective institutional system as well as society as a whole but are given form by professionals. Much like Stinchcombe (2001), Hibou (2015: 31-32) suggests that bureaucratic abstractions are simply "codes on which people have agreed at a given moment in order to exchange information, to act, and to guide people's behaviour—in short, to govern". Furthermore, the level of neoliberal bureaucracy is so extreme that nobody has any time to be critical of bureaucratic abstractions and so, again like Stinchcombe (2001: 45), nobody need go behind the abstraction. Hibou (2015: 35) highlights the way in which banking for

example has become so technical and specialised that each individual no longer has the time or the breadth of responsibility to be able to understand the abstract conditions under which they have to perform concrete tasks. These tasks are performed under a logic of efficiency and results, of profit and 'fair' pricing. Thus, the banker performs concrete tasks without any understanding of the abstract nature of what guides them (abstract objects of bureaucracy) other than it is to make profit in the most efficient way possible within manifesting boundaries. Furthermore, Hibou (2015: 90) argues that the extreme, microscopic level to which conformity to abstract objects reaches ultimately individualises technical specialisation thus, we can argue, creating an interstice invisible to those who cannot share in this individualised specialisation allowing shared meaning to become lost. It also reveals some of the processes involved in the structuring of individual praxis.

Firstly, the individual must be converted into an abstract object. Thus, we no longer have the human, we instead have 'student', 'claimant', 'customer', 'consumer', 'prisoner', 'service-user', 'immigrant', and 'refugee' to name a few. This is implicated in studies on genocide. Tatz (2012: 14) and Savage (2012: 24), for example, frame this as a 'de- or non-humanising and de-biologising' language which removes sentience, agency, and any moral order from the human. Secondly, the abstractum is then transmitted back onto the individual to instantiate and synchronise with the individual. What it *means* to be human is erased in favour of what it *means* to be a 'student', 'claimant', 'customer', etc. The dominance of bureaucracy, however, means that these abstracta are forcibly imposed as a frame of reference; synchronous domination. What it means to be 'X' is structured by the *inside* of the rules, policies,

and regulations in similar fashion to the structure of the institution. Consequentially, praxis in relation to the imposed abstractum directs the individual's concrete behaviours and conditions thinking. Therefore, the 'student' performs the tasks and rituals of 'students' as imposed by bureaucratic abstracta, as too does the 'teacher', the 'job coach', the 'decision-maker', the 'driver', the 'programmer', and the 'refuse collector'. Each constitutes an abstract spatial prison in itself. The borders between the inside and outside of the rules of the profession form the abstract boundaries of the prison. Furthermore, internalisation processes including internalisation of policy norms (Toots & Kalev, 2016: 55), narrative internalisation (Fenton, 2020: 1251-1253), and internalisation of ideologised logic (Springer, 2016: 59-63) amalgamate to enact subjectivities onto the concrete individual. Like the abstracta which construct the institution, those that construct the individual can also be equally subject to neoliberalisation both through the abstracta themselves and the internalisation processes.

To illustrate, a 'teacher' is an abstractum. It is constructed from the *inside* of bureaucratic abstracta which synchronously dominate the individual through establishing the conditions and spaces under which the individual must act, behave, comply, or otherwise in some way be subservient and subject to abstracta relevant to teaching. In doing so, abstract borders are constructed which, under the subjectivity to the abstractum, should not be crossed. One example of this can be found within the neoliberal tenet of depoliticisation (e.g., Giroux, 2019; De Nardis, 2017). UK schools, and therefore teachers, are legally obliged to maintain (the illusion of) political impartiality under the Education Act 1996 (s)406 and (s)407. This removes the

freedom to promote political views within school (under the illusion that schools are apolitical), and this law and any derivative school policy must ensure praxis adheres. Consequentially, the 'pupil' is also synchronously dominated by the same ideologised abstracta which removes political awareness; their consciousness is conditioned to be absent of (alternative) politicality. Furthermore, this diffusion of ideologised abstracta amongst *all* schools gives them (the illusion of) a structure of apoliticality and through praxis and process more 'pupils' become depoliticised thus disabling the individual from being able to critique the system which dominates them (e.g., Malmberg & Urbas, 2018; Huckle, 1985: 293). (Alternative) politicality thus sits *outside* of the abstract borders.

Apoliticality becomes the praxis of the 'teacher' as they attempt to navigate the dangers of liminal crossings between apoliticality and politicality and, in the process, reinforcing the erasure of political consciousness. These liminal crossings are betrayed by Zahawi (2022) who suggests transgressive examples against the depoliticising abstracta which dominate. These include presenting "potential solutions for tackling climate change", or, in relation to historical figures, going beyond "teaching about what these figures are most renowned for and factual information about them". Both of these described liminal borders direct how praxis should be conducted but also protect two core neoliberal tenets. The first to protect and perpetuate profit of fossil fuel corporations, and the second to protect abstract nationalist icons particularly in light of recent destabilising of nationalist abstract objects such as Winston Churchill (Gopal, 2021; Mulligan et al., 2021). Through the totality of diffusion of neoliberalised abstracta and praxis directed towards the prevailing logic of the neoliberal, the

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individual consciousness thus becomes attuned. As Harnecker (1980: 32-33) argues, "Human beings live their relations to the world within ideology…which transforms their consciousness, their attitudes, and their conduct in order to adjust them to their duties and conditions of existence". Further support can be found for both the structuring of society and of the individual through a Kantian position. Casey (1997: 192) argues that Kant maintains the notion of an 'outer sense' which refers to being able to sense extrinsic structures. Furthermore, Casey states, "what structures the external world is "extrinsic to the subject"" but also that "human consciousness itself depends on the well-ordered world of outer sense and in particular on its "permanence"". The neoliberalised abstractum, external, and as a frame of reference, becomes a mechanism on which the individual consciousness depends. The totality of neoliberalised abstracta then become the extrinsic structure of a well ordered, commonsensified, synchronously dominating ideology with the individual consciousness becoming dependent on its encoded orienting attributes. Additionally, in relation to diffusional and structural mechanisms we can draw on Bourdieu's (2014: 309) 'meta-field of power' where reciprocal relations across key positions mean exercisers of power are both controller and controlled within the power matrix and the social circuitry. The extent to which this is taken is unveiled within notions of globalisation.

Globalisation can be framed as the greatest possibility for diffusion of neoliberalised abstracta, structuring of praxis, and potential for domination of consciousness. For social abstractionism, globalisation is the metaspatialisation of relevant abstracta which, through metaspatialisation, break the abstract borders which constrain

globalising forces enabling the ideological usurpation of existing systems across abstract spaces. These constraining borders include the borders constructed by individual countries whether through trade rules, financial regulation, or other legal abstracta. Globalising 'forces' are noted to be "governments (of wealthy countries), international institutions (in particular, the WTO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) … transnational corporations…and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)" (House of Lords, 2002). This reveals coordinated exercises of power via "identifiable institutions and social groups" (Colás, 2005: 74), thus once more reflecting the key positions, institutions, and policy diffusion mechanisms. All of these are abstracta through which power is exercised and are what Carpenter and Mojab (2017: 39) refer to as the "financial organs of the imperialist system". This is important because imperialism defines this neoliberalisation process relative to globalisation. Sen and Marcuzzo (2017: 4) argue that neoliberal globalisation is the "new imperialist stage of capitalist development". Globalisation then is the restructuring and ideologising of all abstract objects towards a subjectivity to the money abstractum at the world level. Neoliberalism *is* the ideology of the money abstractum, a totalising subservience, or at least an attempt to create such conditions. Gallina (2006: 126) describes neoliberal globalisation as "the political project of transnational capitalism for world economic and political domination" lending support to such a position. Lee (2012) also traces the way in which the neoliberal financial order is diffused from advanced to developing world countries on the back of a 'rules-based world order' which could constitute Ingram's (2001: 258) aforementioned "super game" through which abstract rules implemented at the world level can be leveraged. The ability to produce capital abstracta through the (re)structured routinisation of human behaviour and consciousness every minute of every day in every area of the world, and the ease

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with which capital can be moved around globally means that the production of capital, and subservience to the money abstractum, is almost inescapable. The underlying theme here seems to be in subjectivities.

Hibou (2015: 87) argues that one of the most doubtless features of neoliberal bureaucratisation is normalisation. This, is in addition to its most insidious characteristics: restrictive power, capacity for control, and increased discipline, all of which are performed under a surveilled society where nobody can escape; an 'iron cage' subjectivity. This reflects Foucault's notion of the panoptic essence of surveillance. Foucault's (1995) consideration of panoptic surveillance sees the individual come to 'self-discipline', a term now readily accepted in daily life (Burr, 2006: 45-46). Furthermore, the panopticon represents the "mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form" (Foucault, 1995: 205). Thus, if this is to be the case, the mechanism of power itself constitutes an abstract space, the abstract space of the panopticon; the "global panopticon" (Gill, 1995b). So, whilst authors (e.g., Kulz, 2017: 38; Gane 2012: 615) claim that Bentham's panopticon was never realised, it was, in fact, realised as an abstract space for the abstract objects of surveillance derived from power and bureaucracy. Of course, bureaucratic surveillance can also be separated into the concrete and the abstract based on Foucault's (1995: 249) notion of the self-regulating effect of surveillance as outlined in *Discipline & Punish*; "a form of the exercise of power". The panopticon, with its invisible surveiller, becomes an abstract surveiller whether it be through the aforementioned abstract objects designed to make the individual visible, or it can just be the belief in an unspecified surveiller watching us; the unspecified being malleable in its abstractness. For surveillance to be concrete

usually requires an individual to act upon the surveilled, even in cases of algorithmic decision. There are exceptions such as speeding tickets whereby the entire process is automated and that, whilst abstract, can have concrete ramifications of violence including poverty outcomes. All these surveillatory methods are essentially normalised in Hibou's (2015) logic. In other areas of surveillant, neoliberalised bureaucracy, Nichols and Malenfant (2018: 208) argue that the neoliberal desire for quantification plays a role through bureaucratic processes of abstraction which affect public services in relation to service delivery and tracking. We can also extend this to other areas including through job performance (Maturo & Shea, 2020), time (Davies & Bansel, 2005; Fleming, 2016; Kenny, 2015), and education (Dougherty & Natow, 2019). In relation to this, Hibou (2015: 136) states "false and unrealistic figures produced by formal procedures construct a reality, the reality of macroeconomic fiction as well as that of the exercise of power". In other words, a fictional reality of economy, power, or even surveillance by numbers (Ruppert, 2012).

Negative subjectivity continues with Perucich (2017: 27) who decries the ceaseless need for the quantifiable which "eliminates the richness and the complexity of urban life" reducing the social to the "bare minimum representation" of the numerical. Whilst this is a sentiment I would much agree with, other authors also go on to consider that which is abstract too. In more superficial approaches, Finn (2006: 232) describes neoliberalism as the "abstract enemy", and Andrews and Silk (2018: 515) as an "abstract machine". Česnulytė (2019: 7) describes neoliberalism as "a model based on abstraction built upon certain values that can help one to interpret practice" and similarly Harrison (2010: 29) argues "neoliberalism is an abstraction, but its value

derives primarily from the way it enables us to interpret practice". This reflects Hibou (2015: x) saying neoliberalism is "namely the process of abstraction and the formal shaping of ways of thinking, seeing, and understanding", both again reinforcing a directed praxis. In fact, Hibou probably represents the foremost author of the abstract nature of neoliberalism. Hibou (2015: 89) argues that neoliberal abstraction, that is, for us, the creation of neoliberalised abstract objects, erases the differences of concrete social phenomena and replaces it with homogeneity. Thus, in a blatant contradiction of neoliberal individualism, the individual is no longer individual but grouped into a categorisation, an abstract object encoded with a power that restricts, reduces, and reproduces throughout an abstract social structure. This "rejection of complexity" (Hibou, 2015: 99) leads to indifference thus we come not to know the world as it is and, additionally, knowledge is treated with the same indifference facilitating, at least partially, the anti-intellectualism noted by other authors, particularly within education (e.g., Banfield et al., 2016; Dominguez, 2017; Gencoglu, 2021; Giroux, 2008b; Saltman, 2014). Springer (2016) consolidates some subjectivities under neoliberalism describing and emphasising it as "cruel", "worthless", "sick", and a "disease" due to its ability to make us ill, dehumanise, and make life meaningless. Perhaps Bahmad (2016: 111) summarises by stating "an abstraction of the market is the model for human subjectivity in neoliberal society". With any subjectivity however, arises the question of consciousness.

Neoliberalism has been documented as having an effect on the consciousness of society, the individual, and the group. We could, in similar vein, also refer to the social

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imaginary or the 'imaginaire' and its relationship to a neoliberal consciousness. Steger and James (2013: 23) firstly argue that ideology, in this case neoliberalism, is:

> Patterned clusters of normatively imbued ideas and concepts, including particular representations of power relations. These conceptual maps help people navigate the complexity of their political universe and carry claims to social truth

They expand into the *imaginaire* by arguing that 'imaginaries' are:

> Patterned convocations of the social whole. These deep-seated modes of understanding provide largely pre-reflexive parameters within which people imagine their social existence—expressed, for example, in conceptions of "the global," "the national," "the moral order of our time."

These are two very important claims and the notion of a neoliberal *imaginaire* has been covered by a number of authors (e.g., Ball, 2012; Fraser, 1993; Pickren, 2018; Yoon, 2016). There is a clear psychological element at play within this *imaginaire* and Ratner (2019: 22), in considering a neoliberal psychology, including the effect of the ideology on the consciousness, argues that the way in which neoliberalism structures society, including activities, resources, knowledge, wealth and power, alters perceptions leading to an unthinking, controlled populace. We can also see these manifest in various encoded attributes of the consciousness including ethics (Muehlebach, 2012), discourse (Shin & Park, 2015), and identity (Archer, 2008; McKnight, 2016; Thoyre, 2015; Varga, 2013). Neoliberal routinisations become reflected in the thinking and communications patterns of the individual, especially discursively where, Massey (2013: 3) argues, the conception of oneself, one's identity, is built from "the vocabulary of customer, consumer, choice, markets and self-interest

mould[ing] both our conception of ourselves and our understanding of and relationship to the world" which is "crucial to the formation of the ideological scaffolding of the [neoliberal] hegemonic common sense" (p. 4). This clearly alludes to a Gramscian consideration of common sense where the ideologically laden discourse of neoliberalism reifies the abstract; an apparatus of reification. Drawing on Gramsci's (1992: 182) notion of the 'universal plane' of hegemony, again a clear implying of abstract space for the operation of abstract objects, we can argue the hegemony of neoliberal ideology through discourse and the subsequent "specific conception of the world" (p. 325) is reified onto the consciousness. Common-sense becomes adapted to fit a "competitive, individualistic, market-driven, entrepreneurial, profit-oriented outlook" (Hall & O'Shea, 2013). Furthermore, Plehwe et al. (2007: 6) argue that neoliberal discourse is hegemonically enabled via the 'neoliberal hegemonic constellation' of state power relations, the transnational capitalist class and private authorities who have worked together and "conscientiously developed the neoliberal identity". Perhaps a logical conclusion given the united and organised dissemination of discourse via the Mont Pèlerin Society and the aforementioned policy diffusion channels (Phelan, 2014: 34-55).

Continuing the theme of the neoliberal consciousness, Foucault's (e.g., Foucault et al., 2008) 'regimes of truth', perfectly exemplified by Ball (2016: 11), gives us an insight into at least *discursive* powers of truth. However, Foucault never considered abstract objects yet his "regimes of truth" can be transposed onto abstract objects, especially bureaucratic abstracta. In Ball's (2016: 11) example of a teacher questioning his subjection to 'performance management', the teacher is admonished and

subsequently expected to adhere primarily to 'performance management' under the guise of improving 'outcomes' for children. In this kind of situation, the abstract objects, whether the 'rules' derived from 'performance' quantified, or the abstract quantification of expectations for children, both ultimately devoid of concreteness, become truth and, simultaneously, a regimented truth. It is the hegemonic vehicle through which "the ruling class authorises discursive ways of framing the Western capitalist political economy that inform the populace and become accepted as truth" (Clay, 2018: 81). Julie Ann Wilson (2018: 52), drawing on Foucault's 'regimes of truth', argues for a "neoliberal social ontology" structured by these very truths through which society is ordered and maintained. Wilson (2018: 52) goes on to state:

> Regimes of truth are so entrenched and powerful that they cannot be readily challenged or questioned. In other words, a regime of truth presents what is, in actuality, a socially constructed set of ideas to be the Truth.

As previously mentioned in the literature on general bureaucracy, I stated that:

> the purpose of any given bureaucratic abstractum is to be the keeper of truth thus any debate as to the truth value of the abstractum is closed to those without the power to modify the abstractum and the truth of a given future scenario becomes pre-decided.

So, we can now conceive of a "regime of truth" being bound to any given bureaucratic abstractum as well as being embedded in the abstract matrix of neoliberalised objects. Truths can also be aligned ethically or morally. According to Bloom (2019), ethics and morality become transposed to the individual whereby the individual is expected to

resolve the moral failings of the neoliberal capitalist class. This is exemplified through neoliberal austerity where, for example, the 'benefit claimant' has a 'moral responsibility' to 'society' to 'work' (Cook, 2012: 508). David Cameron's 'Big Society' campaign embodied such an ethical direction using moral discourse to push people who already exist in a purposefully structured individualised competitive society to draw together on moral grounds to support the community whilst the neoliberal state simultaneously retrenched social provisions (Lavery, 2019: 153-181). The individual, in aligning with this consciousness, ultimately perpetuates the neoliberal system under a false consciousness of moral good. Another example, the morality of self-discipline, becomes entrenched as a prime specimen of neoliberal capitalist contradiction whereby the individual is expected to keep themselves healthy within a free marketplace of food or temptations which encourage and promote the very opposite (e.g., Guthman & DuPuis, 2006). Other notions of consciousness can include, for example, happiness which is expected to be found in entrepreneurialism (Binkley, 2013); or the self which becomes a branded consumer item, an idea ultimately rendering every social media persona the literal embodiment of neoliberalism to which children now aspire in an automedial subjectivity (Pedersen & Aspevig, 2018). Psychological consequences of neoliberal ideology become marketised; shyness becomes social anxiety (Sugarman, 2015), depression becomes the norm (Cosgrove & Karter, 2018), and it is up to the individual to solve it, pay for it, or overcome it, otherwise the individual will be deemed a failed one (Esposito & Perez, 2014: 422). Together these become moral truths within a system of neoliberal morality and its accompanying regime of truth.

Another way the neoliberal structures the consciousness is through time. Time as we know it in our daily lives is a system of measurement. This measurement is an abstract representation of an idea of time. Ways of revealing this include the numerous calendars beyond the Gregorian calendar in use today (Iranian and Islamic calendars are still in the 1400's, Ethiopia's is seven years and eight months behind the Gregorian), or the arbitrariness of the seven-day week; there is no clock which tells the correct time (Zadeh, 2021). Time itself remains unknown with the matter still being a source of contention amongst physicists (see Carroll, 2010). In the absence of explanation as to the concreteness of time, time itself has been manipulated into an abstract object, a measurement arranged for the temporalities of capital production, imbued with a truth-value, and subsequently reified. Dale (2019) describes time as "a system of interlocking temporalities under the dominance of capital" clearly indicating subservience to the money abstractum. This domination is both synchronous to the individual yet asynchronous through metaspatialised 'time zones'. The order of time is organised in relation to the production of capital abstracta and subsequently the phenomenal and ontological become temporal subjectivities. It is a "capitalist time consciousness" according to Thrift (1990). This reification of time onto the consciousness facilitates "accumulation as linear universalization, of the negation of alternity" (Ritzer, 2005: 79). Thus, life becomes a universal routinisation of the production of capital. The negation of other possibilities to the accumulation of capital is becoming more pronounced through the neoliberalisation of time. Traditional capitalist time, structured and organised, is making way for Ritzer's more "linear universalisation" where *all* time is dedicated to producing capital.

Clear abstract segregations of time in the '9-to-5' job are converting to a liminal time, a compelling to traverse ever more metaspatialised time boundaries extending beyond the abstract workplace and into the abstract home. Standing (2011: 119) also argues that the idea of performing activities within definable time divisions is becoming less applicable whilst noting the simultaneous "erosion of the fixed workplace" which has come to manifest in working from home practices post-pandemic (e.g., Watermeyer et al., 2022; Arntz et al., 2022). One is expected to continue capital production without recompense, either under the salary illusion, or via the reframing of the consciousness and identity to that of entrepreneur where every waking minute is dedicated to capital production. This is buttressed in popular media which signals the virtues of the 80 to 100-hour work-week relative to the economic logic of 'success' (Mello, 2022; Lust, 2022). Under neoliberalised time, life itself becomes simply divisible into remunerated and non-remunerated life (Virno, 2004: 104); remunerated and non-remunerated becoming abstract coordinates through which the consciousness orientates itself. It is arguable, similar to Marx (in Marx & Engels, 2010c: 22), that time equates to a freedom. Under the reification of a neoliberalised time consciousness through entrepreneurialism, freedom through time will shrink as the consciousness becomes more coordinated with remunerated and non-remunerated life orientation. This aids "the negation of alternity" (Ritzer, 2005: 79) with alternity being that of freedom. Thus, time which could once have been 'free' is now a source of contention for the consciousness. One must decide whether to dedicate time to producing capital or not. The only key to this time-freedom is more capital to pay for the time that one does not commit to the production of capital abstracta.

Within this seemingly totalising matrix of neoliberalised abstracta, the interstice and our relationship with these objects needs to be evaluated. To do so, we must consider the abstract spatial nature of the neoliberal. Gillan and Lambert (2016: 241), emphasising the concept of 'militant particularism', a kind of oppositional approach to enacting ideological goals (Castree et al., 2013), argue that this type of oppositional methodology towards change highlights the dichotomy of place and the "abstract space of global capitalism". This relates to the same concept which Harvey (1995), originally Williams (1989), used to describe the way in which capitalist-oppositional groups were place-bound leaving social groups unable to enact change due to a lack of universality. This is something I would agree with and would add that groups oppositional to neoliberalism have essentially, and inadvertently, adopted neoliberal structure by breaking down movements into separate constituent parts (e.g., women's equality movements and disability equality movements) instead of unifying. Thus, instead of utilising the abstract space of the global, they instead remain place bound, barriered in to an abstract space where resistance to the neoliberal order struggles to meet the spatial requirements needed. Butler (2019: *no pagination*) also sees 'contemporary capitalism' as an abstract space. Utilising Brenner (2019: 66,68), Butler states this space is "marked by 'volatile, fractured…chaotic…interscalar configurations' which must be constantly managed and controlled by state intervention in order to avoid the possibility of a systematic rupture—or the 'space of catastrophe'".

Abstract space also makes an appearance within education. Cervone (2018: 154) argues that the standardisation inherent to neoliberalised education allows for students to be removed from their unprofitable realities and placed into a

decontextualised abstract space. This suggests a domination of the individual via the abstracta of standards within which truth and context are preordained by power and bureaucracy rather than reality. Taylor (2018: 50) builds on this by arguing that neoliberal education policies (abstracta) act as a mechanism of production through which inclusion and exclusion are exercised. Thus, abstract objects come to determine whether or not an individual will have an inclusive experience or exclusive experience within neoliberal standardised education. Bonanno (2017: 222) draws upon the corporatisation of technology to suggest that our communications take place within an isolated abstract space, such as through texting or the internet, and these technologies move individualism to an advanced level. There is also some implied opposition to abstract space. For example, Young (2000: 79), building on Sassen (1997), argues that "global economic processes do not occur in an abstract space" but "materialise in particular places". However, what is really happening here is that global economic processes *are* happening in abstract space but, at various points, depending on the given process, are not *materialising* but *reifying* the abstract and directing concrete actions to fulfil demands of both abstracta and power. A basic example would be the moving of money internationally. At some point, somebody has to perform a concrete action to enact the abstract. Simply clicking a mouse button facilitating the transfer of money would constitute a concrete action (mouse click) in relation to an abstractum (money) to move money through capitalist abstract space.

What seems to be most commanding of attention here, within the interstice, is the role of agency. One way of considering agency is through Albert Bandura. Drawing on Bandura, Code (2020: 2) summarises Bandura's concept of agency including:

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intentionality, the will to act on rational planning and actualising goals; *forethought*, the ability to guide oneself in anticipation of future events; *self-regulation*, the maintenance of the self through cognition, motivation and behaviour guided by contextual features in the environment; and *self-efficacy*, the ability to reflect and correct ones self and to believe in ones own capabilities and motivations. Code (2020: 2) also adds that the regulation of the self does not happen in isolation but through aspects of the sociocultural environment. What is common between these constituent elements of agency is that they are demonstrably commandeered through the neoliberalised consciousness. To reiterate, neoliberalism is an internationally disseminated ideology which Bourdieu (2003: 11-12) terms a "vulgate" that is "so universally imposed and unanimously accepted that it seems beyond the reach of discussion" and is a result of prolonged and continuous effort by an immense collective involved in "enterprises of production, dissemination, and intervention". It is within this landscape of the neoliberal that agency is enacted. Thus, *intentionality* becomes directed to praxis which aligns with the intent of the neoliberalised abstractum. Action plans and strategies of intention are arranged by the commonsensification of neoliberal logic. *Forethought* is predicated on tenets of risk management and the possibilities of the money abstractum; economic logic. Furthermore, if *self-regulation* is guided by environmental contextuality, then if the environment is neoliberalised then so too will the individual be guided by these abstract reference points. We can also locate *self-regulation* through what it *means* to be the neoliberalised abstractum of 'student' for example, through what Sugarman (2015: 112) argues are three key features to a successful student: acting in ways that express individualistic psychologies, enterprising in pursuit of self-defined goals, and that self-expression and enterprise are rights to be demanded from teachers and others. Thus, these are the regulations the individual must self-impose from

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environmental contexts. Finally, *self-efficacy* is then reflecting upon and correcting oneself to assimilate and align with the neoliberal norms; a "self-reliant market participant" (Penz & Sauer, 2020: 4). Agency then, *for the majority*, is not an agency at all but a preauthorised actorhood, a template of acceptable behaviour legitimately pursuable within a social context (Meyer, 2010).

In continuing with agency, and returning somewhat to consciousness, reification, Chari (2015: 5) argues, is an important aspect of neoliberalism. Reification of the neoliberalised abstractum is a usurpation of cognitive and behavioural agency. This is certainly connectable to Esposito and Perez's (2014) argument that market values are presented as reality and that markets are arbiters of life itself; a "market civilisation" (Gill, 1995a: 399). Routinisations of neoliberal patterns and discourse inflicts identities of consumer, choice, markets, and self-interest which form both the self and the ideological scaffolding of common-sense (Massey, 2013: 3). In turn, this enacts a "competitive, individualistic, market-driven, entrepreneurial, profit-oriented outlook" (Hall & O'Shea, 2013). The abstract space of the interstice then becomes one for production of the "essentialised…undifferentiated subject" (Feldman, 2008: 312). Both the totality and totalising effect of these make it difficult to reject the reification of both the abstract and the neoliberalised abstract, particularly due to the fact that neoliberalism is the "unspoken architecture of neoliberal capitalism" which "requires continuous exploration in order to bring visibility to [its] ideological nature" (Andrew & Cortese, 2013: 406), at least in the 'Western' 'nations'. Therefore, whether the individual knows of neoliberalism or not, the individual is still placed in an abstract space in which they must contend with it regardless (Feldman, 2008: 312). The

neoliberalised consciousness has been noted within social work by Carey (2008) who argues praxis is conditioned by the "application of neoliberal inspired market reforms…codified into, and applied, as a series of compulsory legal and organizational procedures that practitioners must follow". Similarly, a neoliberalised consciousness has also been noted in studies on China (e.g., Jefferys, 2011; Sigley, 2006; Zhang, 2008). The question of liminality remains though here in relation to agency. It is only in Andrew and Cortese's (2013: 406) continuous exploration of the unspoken architecture of neoliberalism in combination with reflective actions that the borders can be unveiled in an *agentic* manner. Exploration requires learning to recognise the neoliberal whilst the reflexive reveals "our location within the social order" (Heron, 2005: 343). This location can almost certainly be framed as the interstice. Again, however, an ongoing dialectical consciousness between the abstract nature and concrete ramifications of a neoliberalised abstract requires a significant cathexic investment in perpetuity. This in itself reveals the intensity of force enacted on the individual consciousness and the power instantiated in the abstract liminal border. The usurpation of the consciousness can be evidenced within the *effects* of neoliberalisation. Therefore, it is important to outline at least some of the effects of neoliberalisation in order to see the usurpation of the consciousness.

The effects of neoliberal tenets are of a magnitude beyond the scope of this work. I will use a select few here to outline relations between the neoliberal, the effects of the neoliberal, and the configuring of the interstice alongside experiences of liminal traversal. Austerity for example can be considered a neoliberal tenet (see Whiteside, 2016) and is driven by bureaucratic policy abstracta in relation to the money

abstractum. Giannacopoulos (2015: 182) also describes austerity as a vehicle for assimilation to the neoliberal order. The effects of austerity are pronounced including stigma, dehumanisation, decreased eligibility for welfare, reduced welfare payments, and loss of services across the social landscape (BASW, 2018: 8). Furthermore, it aids concentration of wealth amongst the existing wealthy (Cupples & Glynn, 2016: 184-185). Austerity can also be seen as a tenet which facilitates and directs the alteration of, or ideologising of, pre-existing abstracta towards neoliberalised ends. It commands altering bureaucratic policy abstracta addressing the redistribution of abstract money through various welfare or public service bureaucracies, particularly as neoliberals are opposed to socialist or redistributive policies (Springer et al., 2016: 3). These policies cut off or reduce the supply of money to the given target via implementing abstract borders. For example, increased welfare conditionality makes it more difficult to access money in times of need due to the building of additional abstract rules which exclude the individual and configure their interstice. Neoliberalised legal abstracta such as the Housing Act 1980 facilitated the disposal of social housing through 'Right to Buy' schemes thus destroying abstract socialist laws and replacing them with laws which respond to the abstract market and the money abstractum (Eardley, 2022). Between 1980 and 2014, 3.4 million social properties were sold to private buyers with a significant proportion then becoming rental properties (Cole et al., 2015: *no pagination*). In simultaneity with policies which restricted the building of new social housing to replace lost stock, "these two policies planted the seeds for the present [housing] crisis" (Robertson, 2016: 198). Crisis of course leads to profit, the *raison d'etre* of neoliberalism, as can be seen through significant rent rises (Jones, 2022) or even the current record profits of energy companies from the 'energy crisis' (Wickham & Gillespie, 2022). However, the borders which configure the interstice can be

homelessness, unaffordable mortgages, or being trapped in a rental cycle. Each one an abstract border which must be liminally traversed, sometimes in perpetuity. Further fictional abstract borders occur through reduced service loss such as induced shortage of medical treatments or access to medications (Whitaker, 2018). Thus, defunding a health service may compel an individual to have to pay for the medication yet increased conditionality for welfare and the reduced payments could prevent them from doing so. Consequentially, the individual must either liminally traverse these borders or live without medical resolutions.

The consequence of wielding fictional neoliberalised abstract objects by power then, prevents access to medication. In such a case, the abstract spatial prison becomes one which restricts freedom to access medicines. In much the same way, stigma acts as an imprisoning force via abstract objects. Thus, 'scrounger' narratives linked to the sick or disabled appeal to the abstract object of 'scrounger', a parallaxic abstractum more commonly known in sociology as a 'folk devil' (Cohen, 2011; Briant et al., 2013), which conveys images of moral failings subsequently becoming internalised as shame within those so labelled (Patrick, 2016). This can lead to social isolation with liminal experience becoming one of traversing the border between employment and unemployment as well as the established fictional borders of poverty. The effects of competition, another neoliberal tenet, on the individual are varied, again driven by bureaucratic abstracta of policy and market, but include demotivation (Vallerand et al., 1986), poor self-evaluation (Lam et al., 2004), declines in openness (Anderson et al., 2007), higher levels of stress (Eisenberg & Thompson, 2011), anxiety (Berg et al., 2016), and even hormonal changes (Geniole et al., 2017; Warnke, 2007: 147). Each,

either singularly or in unison, form and configure borders of the interstice. Demotivation imprisons us within ourselves or perhaps our willingness to go somewhere or act in some way; declines in openness build abstract borders between human relations; and anxiety creates fear of the liminal experience and prevents us from navigating the abstract borders.

One significantly under researched concept is the relationship between the neoliberal and gaslighting (see Chihara, 2020; Graybow, 2019). Almost certainly visible within responses to the current mental health 'crisis', the toxicity of the personal responsibility, resilience, individualism, and retrenchment of public mental health services combination locate both mental health issues and solution firmly within the individual (e.g., O'Donnell & Shaw, 2016). Graybow (2019) notes the role of evidence-based therapies in neoliberal gaslighting arguing that it also helps to rationalise austerity. This gaslighting aids the usurpation of agency and consciousness through internalising blame and personal failure. Again, the borders of the interstice are configured by imprisoning the individual within borders of shame and emotional responses to the abstract. Furthermore, I defer somewhat to Beck (2018) who draws on a number of authors in relation to hunger as a result of neoliberalism: Riches (1997: 54) who argues hunger is rooted in the severe inequality of incomes rather than a lack of food; Riches (1986: 59) through welfare retrenchment; Poppendieck (1997, 138) through the depoliticization of food; and Lambie-Mumford (2015) through austerity policies. De Souza (2019: 32) notes how in foodbanks "poor bodies" are tied with "food, discourses, papers, files, ID cards, badges, numbers, and clips" directly implicating the bureaucratic abstracta bordering the interstice. Each of these is indicative of

multiple intersecting abstract borders which must be traversed in order to secure food through navigating the spatial prison created by bureaucracy. Failure to do so becomes a failure of personal responsibility, a tenet used to enforce neoliberal gaslighting.

Globalisation too has its effects, including the aforementioned effects of neoliberalised abstracta such as austerity (see Walton & Seddon, 1994: 43). Webster (2003: 98) sees the effects of globalisation as a poisonous milieu of inequalities and rapid change where the existing marginalised become threatened. Globalisation pressures people to abandon their cultures and reconfigure the self towards cosmopolitanisation. This implicates those metaspatialising and synchronising properties of the ideologised abstractum in action. The cultural interstice is usurped by the neoliberal where routine and praxis are redirected towards the money abstractum. Furthermore, globalisation through its metaspatialising properties can lead to abrasive cultural interstices. This is implicated in Ogihara and Uchida (2014) who find that individualism had negative effects on Japanese individuals in terms of friendship groups and well-being even when individualism was a valued aspect of the workplace. In considering the advancement towards Japanese individualism, as opposed to existing collectivism, Ogihara and Uchida posit a greater prevalence of maladaptive responses including increases in Hikikomori (see Katsumata, 2011; Rubinstein, 2016; Yong & Kaneko, 2016) and "dampening" of interpersonal relationships. This can be viewed as a destabilisation of existing interstices and, in the process, a dislocating of the individual from their existing interstice; a perpetual, internalised displacement (Pyles et al., 2017: 586). Existing abstract objects, as points of reference, become destabilised producing

profound anxieties and individuals either assimilate to new exigencies, or try to relocate themselves back to the previous interstice, the latter indicating a limited form of agency (Curtis, 2013: 77-78). The notion of destabilisation is a precept to neoliberalisation manifesting in destabilisation of the public sector (Whitfield, 2012: 14), of pre-existing social orders (Guarneros-Meza & Geddes, 2010: 118), and economically (Hudson, 2016: 561-563). Other, wider effects of globalisation include poor countries finding little benefit in globalisation outcomes (Heinze, 2020: *no pagination*), and declines in social democracy and rises in right wing nationalism (Raza, 2017). In more philosophical notions of globalisation, O'Connor (2017: 18) argues globalisation constitutes a suspension of dialectical progression of social reality which then induces a more temporal permanence to liminal experiences. The individual is doomed to repeat the same liminal traversals in a cyclic mundanity. Each and every effect is indicative of the metaphysical matrix between the individual, the ideologised abstractum, and abstract space.

Together, the interstice bordered by this monolithic ideological scaffolding seems to mask an underlying violence. Violence, specifically in relation to neoliberal tenets, seems to be anywhere neoliberal ideology dominates or attempts to dominate. The first known implementation of neoliberalism was under General Pinochet, the Chilean dictator (Dinges, 2004; Lazzara, 2011). Since then, neoliberal violence has spread across India (Chatterjee, 2009; Purewal, 2018; Wilson et al., 2018), Bolivia (Goldstein, 2005), Colombia (Gill, 2007), Israel (Plasse-Couture, 2013), Argentina (Adelman, 2011), South-Korea (Park, 2016), USA (Mirpuri, 2016), Cambodia (Springer, 2010), Italy (Valent, 2019), and Ecuador (Krupa, 2013) to name a few. Some neoliberal

violence is more overt than others but the violence and its relationship with neoliberalism is always masked by the unmentionable term of neoliberalism for most people. For a social abstractionist consideration of neoliberal violence, we can again split the violence into that which is concrete and that which is abstract and we can see that it is the abstract which reveals the link between neoliberal ideology and both abstract and concrete violence. Neoliberal violence manifests in many ways both abstractly such as structural (e.g., Leech, 2012; Lyons, 2018), through concrete violence as exemplified by General Pinochet's dictatorship (e.g., Drake & Frank, 2004), or the prison-industrial complex (e.g., Jinkings & Guimarães, 2011; Michelson, 2013). Of course, abstract violence, for the most part, has concrete effects. To further exemplify, neoliberal privatisation of health services, abstract bureaucratic entities gatekeeping concrete treatments for concrete corporeal issues, create abstract barriers to treatment, ability to pay for example, thus, bluntly, purposefully killing people unnecessarily (Hunter, 2013; Mishtal, 2010; Witters, 2019; Tanne, 2008; Waldock, 2023). Each type of violence can occur either on a large scale such as debt (abstract) or at the individual level such as failure of bureaucracy to account for a specific personal circumstance thus leading to severe consequences for the individual (abstract or concrete). We can also draw on the neoliberal tendency towards militarisation to consider violence within class warfare (Gabbard, 2007), welfare (Baylouny, 2008), education (Giroux, 2008b), and territory (Wiegratz et al., 2018); or perhaps the epistemic violence of financialisaton (Carter & Warren, 2021), carceralism (Pollack, 2012), or of markets (Varman, 2018). Kabir and Greenwood (2017: 75) note the violence of economic restructuring towards the neoliberal model and Davies and Chisholm (2018: 6) make a powerful statement:

subjectivity is an ideal form, an abstraction to which individuals (more or less successfully) conform. Neoliberals are able to dispense with nonconforming subjects by making them—theoretically, violently, and through policy— responsible for their failure to conform: if you fail as a subject in neoliberalism, it is your responsibility, and you must accept the consequences of your failure.

This clearly resonates with the neoliberal insistence on personal responsibility and extreme individualism. Of course, said failures coincide with the violence of inequalities which Giroux (2015: 550) argues is due to retrenchment of education and welfare, financialisaton, and the movement of wealth to the top 1%. Such inequalities and violence will inevitably affect consciousness.

Ideology thus forms the third Echelon of Abstracta. The ability to wield neoliberal tenets via the ideologising, or reideologising, of abstracta, makes it a tool for the exercise of power. Yet, as neoliberalism is the ideology of the money abstractum, it betrays the subservience of power to the reified and axiomatic money abstractum insofar as the creation of, or alteration of, abstracta which align with neoliberalism constitute a kind of enforced proselytism on those subjected to them. The dominance of neoliberal ideology in providing society with a structure and a logic which comes to dominate the consciousness and praxis, in tandem with its top-down implementation, shows that it sits between power and what comes below. Even in despite of the fact that those who move into positions as stewards of abstracta are entering the role as pre-conditioned to neoliberal tenets, it still remains that it was power who implemented the conceptual playbook which has come to be an externalised system of control

persisting in its causal continuity to subsequent generations. This chapter's exploration of an abstractionist interpretation of the abstract nature of ideology views it as a pre-built abstract playbook of ideas both created by power and from which power can draw. Ideology is diffused by those in key positions across the social landscape. Through the reideologising of pre-existing abstract objects including laws, policies, regulations, or even institutions, and through the creation or destruction of old abstract objects, this diffusion allows for the ideological conditioning and directing of praxis through the spontaneous reification of the ideologised abstractum. Weber's (1978) 'iron cage' of bureaucracy has become an ideologised 'iron cage' in the form of neoliberalism where time itself has become reconfigured into only two periods: monetised and non-monetised. The totality of ideologised abstracta presents us with an intentional organisation of the abstract into a simulated structure which exerts extrinsic force over consciousness and praxis demanding ever greater cathexis in pursuit of the money abstractum. Our metaphysical relationship with the abstract interstice becomes destabilised through the ideologising (or *re*ideologising) of abstracta. Anxieties, mental health issues, social dislocation, and usurpation of the consciousness becomes apparent. This ideologised system of objects is perhaps best concluded by Victor Turner (1977: 201) who viewed structures as "simulacral only" reinforcing the fictional attribute of the encoded ideologised abstractum.

The whys and import of this chapter coalesce around unveiling the mechanisms through which power is exercised. The use of ideologised abstracta add to the previous chapter's contribution to the knowledge of power dynamics insofar as we can see how sociologists, interdisciplinary academics, organisations, or individuals can

trace and predict the actions and effects of power across the abstracta they create as well as the abstracta created at lower levels of power by those assimilated to the forms of praxis and consciousness directed by ideologised abstracta. It also adds to the body of critical theory, perhaps in line with the Left Hegelian tradition which maintains a position of ideology as a pejorative term for distorted worldviews whereby ideas are presented as universal truths when in actual fact they represent "particularistic interests of dominant social groups" (Arnold, 2015: 293). Similarly, in cultural analyses such as art, media, or language, the encoded logic of abstract objects can be made explicit. Further, it contributes to interdisciplinary research on behaviour through drawing the researcher's attention to both the behaviours of power in ordering the abstracta they create and alter, as well as the behaviours of induced praxis under abstract objects and spaces. Additionally, social changes can be induced by identifying the ideological structure of objects and using these either to dissolve the existing ideological encoding, replace it, or use them as sites of dereification by drawing attention to the behaviours of the individuals who encoded them in the first place. For now, I move into considering the roles of countries, nations, and states in the next chapter.

The Abstracta of Country, Nation and State

The previous chapter analysed the abstracta of ideology and the way in which ideologised abstracta function. In this chapter, I consider the fourth, fifth, and sixth Echelons of Abstracta and build upon the previous chapters. Nation, state, and countries are standard conceptual categorical divisions across the sociological landscape. Again, it is of course impossible to cover all interpretations, definitions and possibilities of each concept in this work. Therefore, I will incorporate any relevant material from across the academic landscape to illuminate the fundamental abstract aspects of each concept. The terms nation, state, country, or nation-state are often used interchangeably and can make for a confused landscape (Gilmartin, 2009: 22). Nevertheless, these can each be reframed through social abstractionism to demonstrate the constitution of abstract objects and spaces. I draw upon the bureaucratic 'ingredients' of a country to demonstrate how the bureaucratically formed country acts as both an abstract object and an abstract spatial container for both nation and state abstracta. I also show the abstract nature of internal spatial divisions of the country as an abstract spatial container, and to the malleability and changeability of a country abstractum. Nation is considered as both abstractly spatial and abstractly metaspatial constituting an object via which people are drawn together through a combination of other abstract objects in which the nation abstractum is instantiated. I give consideration to Anderson's (2006) 'imagined community' and demonstrate how the nation abstractum is a mediating object through which fictional and reified identity is drawn. The state is then considered as an object through which power is exercised and externalised through utilising objects in which the state abstractum is instantiated.

I outline the abstract nature and abstract space of state as an object. I then highlight the interstitial and liminal aspects of this tripartite through the fiction of citizenship showing how citizenship assists in reifying the country, nation, and state echelons.

In social abstractionist terms, a country is both abstractum and abstract space. By country, I mean any named country such as Japan, Australia, or Sweden. In relation to the abstractum of a country, it is an external entity, axiomatic, temporal in its existence, altered and honed to its current form. Richards (2017) provides a brief overview of how a country becomes a country but what we can immediately conclude is that it is reliant on an immense web of bureaucratic abstracta throughout the process. These include: the right to self-determination, UN charters, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, independence, recognition, and sovereignty. Many of these are implied rather than explicitly outlined in legal fictions. It is an abstract bureaucratic matrix with no tangible genesis. Australia for example was once named New Holland in the 17th century. Later, James Cook 'claimed' the 'Eastern Coast of New Holland' in the late 18th century and renamed it to 'New Wales' and then subsequently 'New South Wales'. Soon after, the British arrived and "spread out over the continent, explored and settled, possessed and subdued it" (Macintyre, 2009: 1). The concept of *terra nullius* was manufactured and had its origins in instructions given to Cook when he set sail to search for this land mass (Macintyre, 2009: 33). It was the idea that Australia "until its settlement in 1788 lacked human habitation, law, government or history". This fiction was maintained up until the late 20th century (Macintyre, 2009: 4). It was only at the turn of the 19th Century when the whole land mass was renamed 'Australia' by colonial authorities (National Library of Australia,

n.d.). This, of course, omits the considerable variety of names utilised by the complex indigenous language groups who preceded colonisation and still experience the ramifications today. A geographical land mass is then simply 'claimed', given a name, bureaucratically formalised, "an abstract[um] that can be taken as fact" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 2), and then treated 'as if' it is reality. Australia then, becomes axiomatic, an unquestionable truth. It is subsequently fortified by its instantiations and consequential reifications through bureaucratic abstracta, particularly legal abstracta such as the aforementioned examples. Writers across academic fields such as geography (e.g., Disalvio, 1994: 38), economics (e.g., Salin, 2016: 64), technology (e.g., Coeckelbergh & Reijers, 2016: 174), social policy (e.g., Gross & Stevick, 2015: 499), mathematics (e.g., Persson, 2019: 23), and philosophy (e.g., Antony, 2003: 382) all refer to countries as being abstract. Antony (2003: 382) in particular implies the abstract status of 'country' stating that "a country is an abstract entity, or at least a complicated conglomerate of various kinds of entities" again implicating that abstract bureaucratic matrix. Countries are often hewn in the abstract from epochs or events of concrete violence, war, and conflict, some of which still continue today of which Israel-Palestine is perhaps the most explicit and prescient example. In contemporary times, we find that this violent milieu ultimately resolves to legal bureaucratic abstracta to isolate the abstract form of a country as outlined by Richards (2017). This also suggests that there is a dependence on abstract objects through which to mediate peace between various claims to the space of country.

In terms of abstract space, a country is abstractly spatially determined through abstract borders instantiated within bureaucracy such as boundary delimitation laws. Within the

abstract space of country, further abstract spatial divisions and borders are set, for example, by counties, towns, cities, regions, prefectures, parishes, or constituencies. Each may even have a specific abstract bureaucracy attached such as councils, legal jurisdictions, regional development, or police. The abstract borders of a country denote the internal dimensions of the abstract space and these internal dimensions define what is to be *included*, and the border what is to be *excluded*. The internal contents of a country are synchronously dominated by the abstractum of country. For example, 'citizens' of 'Britain' are classed as 'British' through the instantiation of 'Britain' within the bureaucracy surrounding citizenship which ultimately synchronously dominate the individual including consciousness. The abstract borders of a country, however, expose the externality of its abstract status and the internality of both the abstract contents, or the concrete, whether geographic or human. In other words, a country's borders are external from all of us whilst simultaneously being abstract. Furthermore, a country's abstract spatial borders also reflect a claim to concrete geographical territory. According to Paasi (2003: 111), all territories are power relations manifested whether at local gang level or at the supranational level. Furthermore, Knight (1982: 517 *cited in* Paasi, 2003: 110) notes that territory is "passive" and that it is "human beliefs and actions which give territory meaning". Again here, we see that not only is a named country an axiomatic abstractum, but so too is territory. The notion of territory implies that a certain concrete geographical configuration is 'owned' yet ownership is also something that is limited to the abstract and instantiated in legal bureaucratic abstracta such as land and house deeds. Together, these simply reflect the position that a country is also reliant on its instantiation within bureaucratic abstracta to validate and recognise its existence; a circular, mutual validation of the axiom. What both Knight and Paasi suggest is that it is power, concrete praxis, and in the abstract where

territory is claimed and instantiated. Concrete praxis at the micro-level often reflects that of power at the macro-level insofar as manifesting in low-level petty boundary disputes (e.g., Mcdonald, 2019; Ayling & Dresch, 2020; Jaffa, 2023; Beever, 2023), whereas macro-level praxis manifests in war, conflict, or political aggrievance such as in the cases of the Kashmir conflict (Mohan, 1992), the Arab-Israeli conflict (Fraser, 2004), and arguably World War I and II (Compagnon & Purseigle, 2016).

A country then is external to us, it is malleable and changeable in its form. All countries can and have been created. Some have been destroyed, Czechoslovakia (Innes, 2001) or Gran Colombia (Hristov, 2014: 64) for example, not destruction of concrete land, but in the abstract. Some have simply altered such as the State of Texas in the US, once an 'independent country' but now an 'annexed state' (Calvert et al., 2014: 85); or Lancaster Castle which has been located in various spaces such as the Honour of Lancaster, which included parts of southern Scotland, despite the physical entity having never moved an inch (Champness, 1993:3). Each demonstrates the temporal movement and change of abstracta and their coterminosity with the concrete. The separation of the borders of countries from the concrete are exposed in the abstract by the fact they can be redrawn whether through politics or violence. The same is applicable to towns, cities, or other internal abstract division such as constituencies as demonstrated by recent attempts by the UK Conservative Party to redraw these boundaries (Walker, 2020; Walker, 2021a; Walker, 2021b; Pickard, 2020). This notion reaches the micro level with street names or even post codes constituting abstract spaces. We can understand how postcodes constitute an abstract space through the concept of 'mortgage redlining'. Mortgage redlining is the identification of a

neighbourhood, an abstract space posited from abstract data points within a given postcode including race, religion, or politics, where no mortgage loans are granted (Aalbers, 2011). Furthermore, this demonstrates that, like the way abstract borders of a country designate inclusion and exclusion, so too can the abstract space of a postcode area. Of course, the destructibility of this abstract space can take place. Aalbers (2011: 8-9) cites a change in bureaucratic abstracta, in this case a 'code of conduct' being implemented which essentially terminated the existence of these abstract 'mortgage redlining' spaces by simply 'forbidding' them. This shows the exercise of power in action through abstract objects. Beyond these abstractly spatial sub-divisions, countries act as an abstract spatial container for nation and state.

For social abstractionism, nation is subordinate to the country abstractum and its abstract space. Nation may or may not be coterminous in spatial terms with country. Anderson (2006) refers to nation as an imagined community. This is built on by Kanno and Norton (2003: 241) arguing that we connect with others via the power of imagination and that these imagined ties are spatial. This perceived spatiality can be attributed to both the abstract space formed from the country abstractum, as well as the nation abstractum. Furthermore, this imagined community could be linked to the wider notion of the *imaginaire* which Steger and James (2013: 23) view as "patterned convocations of the social whole". In turn, "pre-reflexive parameters" produce the social imagination through which concepts such as nation are expressed. However, rather than being a connection via the imagination, it is a connection via the encoded mediating properties assigned to the axiomatic abstractum of 'nation' reified and we can find support for this notion in Jaques' (1955: 281 *cited in* Diamond, 1993:

227) notion of "fantasy social relationships". Jaques argues "when external objects are shared with others... phantasy social relationships may be established through projective identification with the common object". Additionally, "these fantasy social relationships are further elaborated by introjection", introjection being a Freudian notion whereby the individual internalises the externalised ideas of concepts. In short, an externalised abstractum becomes an internalised one, instantiated in the individuals' consciousness; it becomes synchronously dominating. The extent to which this manifests can be seen in Zhu and Ilsinger (2023) who draw powerfully on various authors surrounding 'collective memory', a phenomenon whereby individuals believe they are part of a wider collective (nation) based upon "historical facts, cultural myths, unconscious absorption and conscious manipulation". Furthermore, this collective memory is changeable and adaptable to new generations of people and changing narratives. Malešević (2019: 39) denies the 'Marxist' notion of nation equating to a false consciousness on the basis that billions of people around the world are sincere in their perception of national identity as real, tangible, and meaningful. However, this appeal to popularity is fallacious both in logic and in fact but is also contradictory insofar as Malešević had already argued that people had no perception of these things historically thus indicating an encoded temporal attribute to the nation abstractum. If people are 'perceiving' nation and national identity as real and tangible then this equates to a reification of the abstract. In Vaihingerian terms, incorporating, whether through choice or coercion, an abstractum of fictionality into one's identity equates to that identity itself being fictional and is ultimately a false consciousness. This false consciousness does not by necessity invoke any Marxist affiliation; it is simply the logical conclusion.

The nation abstractum is instantiated in other abstracta including that of the bureaucratic such as political rhetoric or the welfare state (Keskinen, 2016); in consumption such as 'British-made' products; or in sanitised nationalist symbolism such as flags, the 'Three Lions' emblem, the Oak tree, or the Royal Family. Furthermore, it is instantiated in 'British', 'Japanese', 'Indian', or 'American'; a kind of 'nation-branding' (e.g., Castelló & Mihelj, 2018; Hao et al., 2019). Wiltgren's (2013: 10) qualitative study shows how individuals internalise and reproduce nation through maps and flag symbols in combination with a consumer mindset in what is essentially a combination of an abstract representation of an abstract space (map) and an abstract parallaxic and axiomatic symbol (flag); a simulacrum even, in Baudrillardian terms, and mediated by the money abstractum. Here, we see how the everyday is exposed to a metaspatialised, ubiquitous, and mediating nation abstractum. It builds a unifying fictional identity linked directly to that of the country abstractum that can be appealed towards to sell, convince, persuade, alter, or collectivise individuals (e.g., Phillips, 2022; Rovelli, 2018; Castelló & Mihelj, 2018). History can also be invoked to instantiate the nation abstractum. Historicity is a common encoded attribute for nation. Renan (2013) and Mostov (2014) for example, link nation to historical linkages between people. However, as Oakeshott (1985: 29) points out, history itself is a 'world of ideas' behind which lies nothing. History is simply a series of malleable abstract objects which are created and persist after concrete or abstract events; fossils of the world of ideas (Bennabi, 2003: 32). History outside of what remains of the concrete is the externalised abstract, reordered and altered to fit abstract ideologised time narratives or subjective interpretation, interpretations externalised into the abstract through history books or educational curricula (English, 2022). Malešević (2019: 24) claims that national identities do not exist although social abstractionism would hold that their

existence is objectively abstract and fictional with encoded attributes of being parallaxic, multivalent, axiomatic, and instantiable. The interpreter of the abstractum interprets subjectively either individually or as part of a collective subjectivity ultimately experiencing an introjection, a synchronous domination. This is somewhat reflected by Anderson's (2006) 'imagined community' of people you will never meet. Something imagined however, is subjective to the individual hence the encoded parallaxic attribute of the nation abstractum. The parallaxic encoding can be seen as a manifestation of Roger Penrose's (1989: 554) 'platonic contact' whereby different minds connect to the external object. However, each connection may see the abstractum differently although the intent of power is to make the abstractum uniform in nature thus illuminating Lefebvre's (1991: 52) implication that a critical mind in required to prevent the buttressing of the abstract.

As far back as 1912, Brown (1912: 500) noted that constituent segments of nation had become axiomatic passing into common language yet "the whole structure is little better than a vast cloud-castle - a veritable Nephelococcygia - built by scientific imagination on thin air". However, this 'scientific imagination' and 'thin air' can be seen as the producing of objects and their externalisation into the abstract. One of these ways is through the use of symbols. Zhu and Ilsinger (2023: 196-197) for example, argues that symbols make national identity tangible but weakens one's own individual identity. Similar phenomena can also be seen, for example, in schools whereby the school identity is utilised to usurp the identity of the individual through coercive conditioning via fictional 'community' or symbolic school uniforms (Gill & Howard, 2009: 170-171), or perhaps in 'ban the burqa' campaigns in France which frame the

religious dress as un-French (Fredette, 2015: 56). Thus, we begin to locate ourselves as part of a wider fiction or what Newman (2003: 125) sees as a process of artificial socialisation, an artificial socialisation that occurs within an "abstract domain of collective coherence and attachment" (Shapiro, 2003: 272). Thus, the illusions and fictions woven by nation become unifying, coherent, induce attachment, and instantiate within our identities. In terms of the exercise of power, this could be seen as the usurpation of the individual identity and the imposition of a fictional collective identity by the abstractum of nation. Thus, on the wielding of the abstracta of nation, the collective can be manipulated into certain kinds of action particularly around the country abstractum. The nation abstractum assists in the configuring of what is to be included and what is to be excluded. I consider this later in this chapter with regards to citizenship. In each instantiation of nation, its encoded attributes differ depending on the country to which it is subservient. This indicates the encoded parallaxic attribute of nation; it appears different depending on how it is viewed. Japan for example may include the symbolism of the Sakura (Cherry Blossom), bowing, Hachimaki (headband), or the architecture of Shinto shrines. Each a concrete reality with an abstract instantiation of the nation abstractum. For England, this may be the Three Lions symbol, fish and chips, or even the Royal Family. Again, each a concrete object where the nation abstractum (as well as other abstracta) instantiates.

The abstract spatial nature of nation is similar to that of the country and of the state. In a stable tripartite, country, nation, and state all maintain coterminous abstract spaces; three layers within the same abstractly designated concrete topography. However, unlike country, nation can be abstractly metaspatial. We can evidence this

through the concept of diasporas. The conceptualisation of diasporas varies amongst authors yet a deeply mediating property of the nation abstractum is evident. Cohen (2008) notes varying incarnations of diasporas including the 'victim diaspora' whereby a 'nation' is displaced from its homeland; 'labour and imperial diasporas' whereby those migrating for work retain group ties to their collectivities and homelands; and 'trade and business diasporas' which, in similar fashion to labour and imperial diasporas, are related to those who relocate for trade or business. Safran (1991: 83) also applies the concept of diaspora to 'ex-pat' minority communities using a set of characteristics: that they or their ancestors have been dispersed from a specific 'centre' to two or more countries; they maintain collective memories, myths, and histories of their 'homeland'; they feel alienated or separate from their current country of residence; they idealise their ancestral homeland as their true home and commit to the restoration or maintenance of that homeland; and that they relate to one and other through an ethnocommunal consciousness. It is in these dispersals and dislocation of groups that enables the metaspatialising of the nation abstractum. Localised communities of diasporic or 'ex-pat' groups form an asynchronous abstract space of nation outside of the country bounds of origin. Andrews (2005, 2008, 2010 *cited in* Bennett-Cook, 2023: 41) for example, observes the overt 'British' nationalism on display in Spanish resorts where little integration with locals occurs. These abstract spaces could also be framed as enclaves which Hall (2012) argues are a common occurrence for ethnic groups to congregate.

The mediating magnetism of the nation abstractum's fictionality remains instantiated in the individual's consciousness wherever they go but at the same time the

abstractum is continually exerting a compelling towards reunification. The nation abstractum's *causative continuity* communicates a force on the individual to regroup under the abstractum, to return to the designated abstract space or, in the absence of its space of origin, to reunify as a collective. It perhaps also suggests a hidden encoded motivational attribute to the nation abstractum which compels a unification of the imagined community. Cohen (2008: 103) notes that most collective myths around nation include references to 'homelands', 'motherlands', fatherlands', or 'ancestral land'. Again, these constitute abstract objects and spaces to which the nation abstractum pulls the individual towards but also implies a moral claim to ownership of a given concrete geographical configuration. This reveals an underlying implication that country structures nation, and the abstracta of nation, within the internality of its abstract borders. Additionally, it is in the modern absence of "confederations of local republics", "centers of admirable patriotism", and "assemblages" which Renan (2013: 9) claims to have preceded 'nation' that also demonstrates the structuring power of the abstractum of nation. Metaspatialisation of nation can also be seen in Okinawan life expectancy for example. Once the place of one of the highest life expectancies in the world, Okinawan men in particular are now dying significantly younger than previously. The cause has been attributed to the US military bases currently in place in Okinawa (Jiji, 2022). The influx of the national foods and diets from America, typically hamburgers and pizza, has resulted in traditional Japanese diets being replaced by these unhealthy imports (Ames, 2016: 43). Thus, the concrete consequences of the nation abstractum being instantiated in food comes to produce negative outcomes outside of its abstract spatial origins. The exercise of power is also evident here. Williams (2006: 26), drawing on Mills' (1999) theory of the power elite, argues power exercises the notion of 'national interest', an instantiation of the nation

abstractum, to validate their own power and systems. This is certainly visible in the abstract space of the US military bases in Okinawa but further, as Damayanti et al. (2022: 361) argue, power can also be economic, militaristic, and cultural therefore the exercise of power is realised through both the abstract space of the military base and the cultural, nationalistic abstracta which accompanies it.

Moving on to the state, conceptualisations of the state are notorious for definitional difficulties. In general, definitions tend to view the state as either a political entity (e.g., Carneiro, 1970: 733; Weber, 1978: 54; Claessen, 2008: 13), as institutional (e.g., Mann, 1993: 56; Jessop, 2014b: 9; Rothbard, 1978: 191), or as class based (e.g., Olivecrona, 1939: 183; Ward & Green, 2000: 89). Mitchell (1991: 49) and Pierson (2004: 2) both argue that definitions of state are difficult to maintain. For a social abstractionist perspective, the reason the state is so difficult to define is inherently due to its omnipresent, parallaxic, and metaspatial encoding as an abstract object. Meehan et al. (2014: 1-2) define the state as a 'resonance object', that there is "no single 'state', because there is no 'final' object because objects are both objects and worlds". This Deleuzian notion sees the state not as a single object but as an object which draws together other objects via a, assumably abstract, gravitational pull to form the whole. I disagree with this and would argue that the state *is* a single abstract object, but it is reified, axiomatic, and fortified by the abstract objects of bureaucracy created in its name. The state is an abstractum utilised as a mechanism of power through which power is then exercised. Steinberger (2004: 15) further sees the state's existence as limited to that of an idea and that this applies to all institutions. Meehan et al. (2013: 2) continue by arguing that it is when we come to examine the state "as a plurality of

states, a multiplicity of localized orders of appearance", which suggests the state is metaphysically parallaxic, that "we begin to see the very chemistry of order and power, as the space between objects explodes into a universe". This is a very important observation. Meehan et al. are addressing a multitude of social abstractionist possibilities: a state as an abstract object, the malleability of a state as an abstract object, that an abstractum of state is interpretable and instantiable, that a state is abstractly spatial, and that a state is abstractly metaspatial. The notion of 'resonance' is also noted by Pike (2020) within institutional contexts. Hay (2014) argues that the state is neither real nor fictitious but, rather, treated *as if* it were real. This invokes a denial of Vaihingerian fictionalism by rejecting the fictional aspect of the abstract whilst retaining agreement that a state is still abstract. Mann (1984: 185) claims that most *theories* of state are reductionist but in Vaihingerian terms this is necessitated by the abstracting process as it is impossible to process all instantiations of the state at a single moment. The complexity of state processes, as well as the objects which instantiate the state, is so vast that it is impossible to interpret the state through any traditional sociological definition. A social abstractionist definition would see the state as an abstract object, reified and axiomatic, through which power is exercised utilising instantiations of the abstractum within subsequent bureaucratic abstracta.

Continuing, we can analyse both the concept of resonance and the Vaihingerian 'as if' principle in relation to a state. If we apply the notion of resonance, resonance implies the rebounding or reverberation of the state as axiomatic both within abstract objects and abstract spatial boundaries. The more abstracta created under the reified state, the more the state is reproduced and spontaneously and repeatedly reified in its

instantiations. Thus, the state grows and extends further into everyday life *as if* it is concrete. Power exercisers in key positions utilise the reified axiomatic state abstractum to manifest wherever the exercise of power requires it to manifest. This is one reason why the state is so hard to define as it is abstractly parallaxic and malleable. As Stinchcombe (2001: 21) argued, the abstract must be able to adapt to changing realities and remain flexible whilst maintaining dominance. The growth and flexibility of a state, in tandem with the notion of resonance, sees the boundaries of the axiomatic state become metaspatialised with this metaspatialisation only being curtailed by the externality of another metaspatialised state. One state ends where another begins, not in a perfect abstract boundary, but in a milieu of conflicting abstracta and negotiable processes which form unstable bounds some of which may spill into the concrete such as the abrasion between Russia, Ukraine, and NATO aligned countries (Begum & Khan, 2023). This, however, shows that the state is abstractly bound to the equally abstract territorial claims of country. Land is concrete reality, ownership of land, or claims to land, are abstractly coterminous yet can spill into concrete conflict. These unstable borders for Anzaldúa (1987 *cited in* Berdahl, 1999: 3), constitute "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary". This observation conveys the concrete instability and uncertainties consequentially produced from the abstract when two differing abstract layers wielded by powers abrasive to each other collide.

Balibar (2007: 49) argues the state "is a manufacturer of abstractions precisely by virtue of the unitary fiction which it has to impose on society". This frames the state as a single fictional abstractum. However, whilst the state can be viewed as a single

fictional abstractum, the state cannot manufacture abstract objects as this positions the state as causal. Social abstractionist causation rests with individuals wielding, altering, creating, or destroying abstract objects, in this case people in key positions. Government actors are *stewards* of the state abstractum. They exercise power by creating or wielding abstract objects particularly in the name of, and through the instantiation of, the state. When a government actor creates a new abstractum such as a housing policy, it may be imbued with a causal *continuity* of the actor's intent. Thus, when a government actor creates a housing policy, those who must implement that policy experience the causal continuity of the abstractum as it comes to direct praxis. McConville (1987: 221 *cited in* Volokh, 2017: 140) sees the abstract state as assigning duties to individuals whereby the "symbol becomes flesh" and policy becomes praxis regardless of which bureaucracy it originates from; synchronous domination. Volokh (2017: 138), who also regards the state as abstract, argues that the state requires a "corporeal manifestation" to function which relates both to Thomasson's (2004) notion of 'tethering' (as discussed on page 93) and again unveils its synchronous domination. This is very much the case when policy becomes praxis. Ironically, government actors are subject to the same causal continuity of the externalised abstractum. Government is made up of key positions that facilitate access to the abstract mechanisms of a state such as 'Secretary of State' positions for education or defence, 'Prime Minister', or 'Minister of State' positions for security and borders, crime and policing, or housing. Each position is an abstractum and conveys and compels certain praxis in its name. Thus, when an individual takes up a given position, they enact the praxis originally intended for that position. This invokes the *ad infinitum* social circuitry around power appealed to by Bourdieu (2014: 309) whereby actors become dependent on "a network of transmission belts of power" through which

those who rule paradoxically become the ruled. In this case, the individuals as government actors who can exercise power through a state come to be subordinate to the objects that they themselves, or their earlier peers, externalised into an abstractum unless they have the foresight to exempt themselves in order to control their interstitial environment.

With regards to the abstract space of state, it is formed of the singular abstractum of state and is coterminous to that of the abstract space of country and nation. The abstracta in which the state is instantiated form further abstract state spaces. These objects of state manifest in given interstices at given junctures. Abstract spaces of state could perhaps be filtered through Lefebvre's (1991: 84) notion of abstract space being "a strategic space [which] seeks to impose itself on reality despite the fact that it is an abstraction". Rather than impose 'itself', it is imposed via the abstracta of state through the exercise of power. Deleuze and Guattari (1987 *cited in* Wang, 2020: 16) argue that state spaces are "striated" or "gridded" where "movement in it is confined…and limited by the order of that plane to pre-set paths between fixed and identifiable points". Firstly, the denoting of 'plane' suggests its abstractness and its externality, but also this statement suggests a linearity to state spaces. The state, being supremely bureaucratic, and coterminous with the abstract space of country, makes linearity seem impossible when considered through the perpetual flux of state abstracta. Yet, its linearity becomes apparent through ideologised ordering which assimilates to neoliberal tenets but also through the dialectical production of state abstracta by given stewards. As new laws and regulations are abstracted from reality, and also set against pre-existing laws and regulations as well as ideological tenets,

newly created abstracta produce ever more constrictive linearity which almost certainly aligns with Weber's (1978) notion that bureaucracy is an attempt to predict and control all human behaviour; the 'iron cage' thus is abstractly spatial. Based on this, abstract spaces of state, or indeed any abstract space produced by bureaucracy, is relatively linear and processual. This is certainly betrayed by policies which encourage efficiency as the most efficient processes are those that go straight from point A to point B with nothing interrupting the process. Thus, the most efficient learner for example, in an abstract space of education created by state abstracta, is the one that can hit fictional targets conjured by state actors with as little teaching time as possible and, in turn, save money in that same process. Where inefficiency of learning creeps in, perhaps through school absence, profit-producing interventions by the private sector, especially data-driven technology companies, are utilised to efficiently produce profit such as through the use of School Information Management System (SIMS) software. This profit however, is in fact, the malleability of the money abstractum whereby 'public money' is converted to 'private' money within this abstract state space of education (Johnston, 1999). Money itself thus passes through a linear and efficient process of alteration from a source of inefficiency.

Continuing on abstract space of state, Brenner (2004 *cited in* Shields, 2011: 99) argues that a state being neoliberalised is a "dynamically changing matrix of sociospatial interaction" and "is actively produced and transformed through regulatory projects…articulated in diverse institutional sites and at a range of geographical scales". The notions of 'dynamically changing' and 'actively produced' reflects the dialectical process occurring through "regulatory projects". Neoliberalism's penchant

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for deregulation invokes a paradoxical *increase* of regulation to regulate the deregulation (Aalbers, 2016: 570-571). As this dialectical process occurs, regulatory projects induce greater linearity towards profit whilst simultaneously inducing praxis that is also linear in trajectory towards producing profit. In other words, it becomes ever more streamlined. In such case, abstract spaces of state become ever more restrictive relative to the number of abstract objects, in this case growing numbers of regulations, which together form the internal dimensions of the abstract space. One way to exemplify this is through the use of abstracta such as non-legislative principles, regulations, or objectives. Again, in schools, a cacophony of non-legislative objects come to form additional boundaries of internality for the school abstractum: mental health initiatives which promote self-regulatory behaviour, a reduction in emotive expression, or neoliberal tenets such as resilience (e.g., O'Donnell & Shaw, 2016); military values through cadet initiatives or training days (e.g., Rech, 2017); and British values such as promoting the illusion of democracy and rule of law (e.g., Eaude, 2017). Thus, an individual, especially a child in this example, who enters this abstract space will be encapsulated by considerable and extensive invisible borders, the majority of which they will never come to consciously know. Together, these create the illusion of variety in learning but in actuality function to create a linear and processual space in which the process of 'educating' becomes as linear and efficient as possible. Additionally, these initiatives are borders of the interstice which are formed to prevent an individual from drifting outside of the designated state space; a preventative measure to inefficiency. Further, Brenner's quote above also suggests that instantiations of state abstracta manifest at given junctures across institutions and geography hinting at the abstract and asynchronous spaces being situated in persistent flux based upon abstract objects. Thus, the non-legislative principles

manifest across not only schools, but universities, hospitals, or any given workplace in any concrete geographical location. The 'teambuilding' exercise, press self-regulation, constitutional values, or guiding principles all border a given abstract space to form linear corridors of process for enablement of efficient trajectories from point A to point B; all are state instantiations.

Thus far, I have attempted to consider, although brief, the abstract nature of country, nation, and state in isolation. However, when we turn towards how these apply to interstitiality and liminal experiences, they become almost impossible to separate and often function in a tripartite, or at least in a bipartite. A country is an abstract spatial prison of bureaucracy. As a country is created in the abstract from bureaucratic abstracta, the borders simultaneously created by the demarcation of the territory of a country bind us within this given abstract space. Although there are numerous ways in which this happens, I will exemplify through the use of 'citizenship'. As I noted, country is an abstract container for everything internal and with internality usually comes some form of 'citizenship'. Citizenship is generally associated with privileges afforded to an individual such as various rights conveyed to the individual in relation to the given laws of a state. However, citizenship is also a complex interplay between various other bureaucratically designated abstracta, including nationality, which gives rise to various abstract borders of an interstice. Nationality for example, according to Ofuji (2017: 54), is a "legal tie that binds a person to a state" so that a "person belongs to a specific state and holds its nationality". So Ofuji is saying that state holds and confers a nationality onto the individual; a synchronous domination of nation, state, and country. This highlights two things.

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Firstly, it demonstrates the causal continuity of the exercise of power externalised through the abstractum. To exemplify further, when we register a birth, which we are compelled to do so either under the reification of the 'duty' to do as such, or through the threat of abstract violence such as a fine (Bukhari, 2011), we are compelled to accept the nationality conferred at the time. This process occurs entirely through the abstract with the only concrete manifestations being the praxis involved. Coincidentally, in 'London Borough of Tower Hamlets v. Mother and Father and Child' (2019), also reported by Weaver (2019), a father refused to register the birth of a child on grounds that "registration will cause his son to become controlled by a state". Of course, this was rejected in favour of forcible assimilation to legal 'duty' through the installing of an 'institutional parent' to manage the registration; an act of violence via the abstract and an act of praxis under the reified legal abstractum. Secondly, it shows that, if an abstract state can have a nationality, then it is subservient to the nation abstractum as the nation abstractum is instantiated within the state. Relatedly, Soysal (2012: 383) argues that dominant interpretations of citizenship see it as national and incorporating a territorially bounded people. The abstract spatial prison of bureaucracy is demonstrated through the fact that, as a citizen, we are imprisoned within the abstract spatial container of country, conferred a nationality by the state, and are only granted leave temporarily through the use of passports, itself a bureaucratic abstractum, or through 'relinquishing' our citizenship on the basis that a new one can be negotiated within another abstract spatial prison of another country, nation, or state. It is essentially a kind of prison transfer mechanism that is enacted via the abstract. Thus, if we want severance with this ownership, we must find a new owner by crossing many liminality-inducing abstract borders including: emigration forms, immigration

forms, points systems, visa systems, eligibility criteria, all in addition to the concrete traversal of geographical configurations. We may also have temporary access to another country via a visa, essentially a kind of visitation rights to another prison. Each of these items has no concrete reality, they are abstracta reified and backed by violence whether concrete through border patrols and immigration detention centres (e.g., Slack et al., 2016) or via the abstract such as the categorisation of individuals as tourist, refugee, stateless, or economic migrant (e.g., Zetter, 2007).

Our own identities, infiltrated and synchronously dominated by the nation abstractum, contribute to the spatial prison. Identity becomes bound to the symbolism, history, and shared meanings unified under the nation abstractum and spread across the imagined community. Our memories are tied to the nation, as well as the country, within which we have experienced the most or feel the greatest belonging to. As nation constitutes the 'content' of a country, so too the abstract objects of nation become boundaries which we must navigate and this effect is particularly pronounced for those seen as being 'non-British' yet simultaneously having 'British' 'citizenship'. Jacobson's (1997: 188) qualitative study on 'British' 'Pakistanis' reveals what she terms 'boundaries of Britishness'. These boundaries are the result of abstract objects. Firstly the 'civic boundary' is a formalised, bureaucratically validated citizenship. Thus, the abstracta of bureaucracy, in the form of citizenship laws, maintain a causal continuity of externalised validatory power over the designation of Britishness. Secondly, the 'racial boundary' is based on whether the individual is believed to have a 'British ancestry' or 'British blood'. Thirdly is the 'cultural boundary' whereby values, attitudes, and lifestyle determine Britishness. Each boundary is a border of the interstice which must be

navigated through liminal experience of the fictional. This often leads to divisions between those perceived to be non-British and those perceived as British. We can apply Jacobson's tripartite boundaries to a theoretical 'African' 'migrant' as example for analysis. In bureaucratic terms, the 'African' 'migrant' must navigate the borders constructed by the encoded exclusionary attributes of citizenship abstracta as well as fictional geographic boundaries in order to become 'British'. The 'African' 'migrant' with 'African' 'ancestry' must traverse the 'racial' borders of the nonsensical notion of 'Britishness' being in the blood through 'ancestry'. Further, the notion of British 'ancestry' is equally nonsensical given that there are no indigenous British comparable to say Aboriginal, Maori, or Ainu (Marshall, 2001: 45). Additionally, it is important to remember that 'British' is an instantiation of the nation abstractum subservient to the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain', itself a created temporal abstractum which usurps the individual 'countries' which make up Britain, themselves abstract objects and spaces. This gets more confusing with Great Britain being considered a geographical designation, and United Kingdom being a political designation (Cunningham, 2019). However, this simply reasserts the principle that they are abstract objects. Finally, the 'cultural boundary' constitutes an abstract divider between 'British' culture and cultural otherness or what Herzfeld (1993: 72) terms, "the abstraction of otherness". This can perhaps be illuminated in food for example whereby the nation abstractum becomes instantiated in fictional 'African' and 'British' cuisines. The underlying point is that every person is a human being but it is the borders of the interstice established in the abstract that break down human relations through the reification of fictional abstract objects. We become separated in the abstract and not the concrete. Thus the 'African' human in 'Manchester', standing next to the 'British' human in 'Manchester', is divided only by

the abstract and the reification of the abstract, in this case the nation abstractum and its instantiations and reification in bureaucracy, symbol, and consciousness.

Within the abstract borders of country and within the nation space, state abstracta form vast matrices of indeterminate spatial bounds of the interstice. In terms of the exercise of power, the externalised state abstractum, and abstracta produced in its name, is one of the most powerful mechanisms relative to the interstice. This is primarily due to the fact that the stewards of the state abstractum have the greatest access to the mechanisms for the production of bureaucratic abstract objects capable of constructing borders. The most dominant interstice is perhaps the one created by the abstract legal system which at a macrolevel is a dividing boundary of the interstice between legality and illegality. Every legal abstractum, every bureaucratic object embedded with the state abstractum, every rule, policy, principle, standard, or obligation functions as a border for liminal considerations. The ubiquity of state abstracta commands the establishment of the order and processes in society. The neoliberalised state comes to establish the order and processes of profit which in turn translate into everyday borders of the interstice. The state implements abstracta which enforce the 'free-market' and establish 'choice' for the 'consumer' (Harvey, 2005: 64). Thus, we have a market from which we choose our energy supplier for example. The liminal experience then is one of not which supplier to choose, but which one we are *forced* to choose as profit must be assured for the private suppliers by the state. Whilst the state functions to enable efficient and linear trajectories of profit such as the free mobility of the money abstractum and commodities, labour, despite its commodification is not afforded such free mobility (Harvey, 2005: 65). This invokes

the previously discussed 'prison transfer system' of citizenship or the 'prison visitation rights' of a working visa, each a liminal experience of traversing the abstract interstice borders on the assumption that one meets the eligibility for transfer. Those ineligible remain in their existing bureaucratic imprisonment.

When power is externalised into state abstracta badly, or through failure to "pick out the relevant parts of reality and abstract them for the use of the formal system" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 185), then new phenomena will take their place. In Haiti for example, where externalised power through the state is weak, Niño and González (2022: *no pagination*) describe how "structure factors…have undermined its territorial reach" including "archaic administration structures that prevented the state's reach across the territory". In relation to this, militia and organised gangs control abstract spaces which would otherwise be controlled by state abstracta and praxis. The failure of 'administration' is a failure to create and enforce the abstracta "required to govern without further debate" (Stinchcombe, 2001: 45) and, as such, the state fails to achieve coterminosity with the abstract space of country. In this absence of coterminosity, other abstract entities seek to dominate this abstract space. In Haiti, gangs and militias vie for control of these spaces resulting in abstract spaces being created, altered, and destroyed at speed and with these destabilised spaces comes chaos, violence, and death. Abstract spaces become *re*abstracted depending on the objects dominating the space. In this example, gangs then constitute the abstract object under which praxis is enacted within the given abstract space that the state has been unable to synchronously dominate. This praxis is one of concrete violence and enforcement of claims to territory.

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Country, nation, and state then, constitute the 4th, 5th, and 6th Echelons of Abstracta after capital, power and ideology. Country constitutes its aforementioned abstract objects, its bureaucratic origins. Country sets the abstract borders within which nation and state are active. Only the highest levels of power can be exercised in relation to the country abstractum such as through the choice of whether to 'recognise' a country as in the case of Somaliland for example (e.g., Alin, 2023; Njeri, 2020; Pegg, 2019), or through the decisions involved in war or conflict relative to geographical territory. The abstractum of nation, at the highest levels of power can be ideologised, encoded with attributes conveyed to the imagined community which are desirable for power. Hard-working, stiff upper lip, British resilience is one such example (Kelsey, 2015: 122-123). However, the abstracta of nation are also utilised by other intermediate powers such as corporations which can utilise nation abstracta through nation-branding. This can aid influence through the metaspatialisation of nation. state abstracta are creatable through the externalisation of power, can be done in the name of the nation by power, can be ideologised by power, but are also available to lower powers with access to the mechanisms of utilisation of state abstracta. Job Centre employees for example can wield the externalised power of state instantiated abstracta without access to the mechanisms of creation such as wielding sanctions against benefit claimants. In all cases, these are subservient to the money abstractum: the country which demarcates the internality and structure of activity; nation which promotes British business, products, or investment; state which orders the conditions for the free-market and the linearity with which profit is produced.

In summary, I have considered the abstract natures of country, nation, and state, although with necessary brevity. Country is framed being a product of the abstracta of bureaucracy which in turn gives rise to an abstract space. The internality of this abstract space constrains and restricts us to within its abstract spatial prison of bureaucracy but with the option of a kind of metaphorical prison transfer system if one is eligible for transfer. Further, it acts as a spatial container for internal activity of nation and state. Nation was considered as an abstractum which is instantiated in various places, including the consciousness, through which we are linked to a fictional community of others by abstract objects of history, symbolism, and cultural myth. Furthermore, it was exemplified through the concept of diasporas the encoded metaspatial attribute of the nation abstractum and its causative continuity in enacting a gravitational pull to unify under the country abstractum. The varying claims as to what nation is laid bare the encoded parallaxic attribute of nation. Thus, nation is the central abstract object which draws together further abstracta such as historical figures, national symbols, imagined community, or exceptionalist beliefs. These essentially constitute the abstract 'content' of the internality of country. Finally, the state was given a brief social abstractionist reconsideration which saw it reframed as the central abstractum within a subordinate spectrum of abstracta in which the state is instantiated as well as an abstract space. Government act as stewards of the abstracta of state through which power can be wielded by creating, altering, or destroying abstract objects which instantiate the state. Individuals acting in government positions come and go, abstract government positions are created and destroyed, but a state endures although its specific form or supporting structure does not necessarily persist and is open to ideologising. Together, these vast matrices of abstracta work together, although not necessarily fluidly, to maintain a system of

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bureaucratic objects which keeps us imprisoned within the interstice. Liminal experience was shown to be the crossing of borders constructed by each abstractum although given the size, complexity, and infinite possibilities of the state alone, was necessarily restricted to brief exemplifications.

In making explicit the importance of this chapter, it can be seen as an original contribution to a number of areas. Firstly, as noted in previous chapters, the movement and social dynamics of power can be analysed through this new social abstractionist lens. This is extendable to conflict resolution for example as it foregrounds the fictionality of the abstracta and spaces over which we continue to kill, maim, dehumanise, or hate. Through the dereification of these, and making explicit their abstract and non-material nature for sociologists, it may contribute towards new understandings of negotiating resolutions between any given groups. Further, as the abstract borders of countries can also be sites of ideological abrasion, the ideologisation of the abstracta which synchronously dominate the abstract space can also be negotiated. An importance for migration studies, including in tandem with cultural studies, may benefit from a social abstractionist analysis by helping to understand the effects of abstract objects and spaces on the reasoning and perspectives of individuals engaged in any given form of migration. It may be particularly pertinent for research on those who are categorised as stateless. Additional areas could include social integration analyses, critical geography, globalisation studies, state institution analyses, or theoretical development in any area where country, nation, and state are a core feature.

The Manifesting Echelons: Benefit Claimants

Up to this chapter, I have focused on the Echelons of Abstracta consisting of capital, power, ideology, and country, nation, and state. I have isolated each as far as would allow and considered some of their manifestation potentialities with regards to the abstract borders of the interstice and the liminal experiences of individuals trying to navigate them. In this chapter, I will utilise the Echelons of Abstracta to exemplify the manifestation of each echelon and how they instantiate within and around the 'benefit claimant'. I firstly consider the abstract nature of the welfare state along with the abstract objects and abstract spaces which constitute the welfare state. I do not offer an in-depth exploration as to the various sociological interpretations or history of welfare states as these are extensively covered elsewhere (e.g., Harris, 2004; Pierson, 2021; Svallfors, 2007; Castles et al., 2012). I generally restrict the focus of welfare to starting from the 2008 financial crash, through the 2010 UK coalition government, and up to the current day as the temporal frame for analysis due to the period of change that it represents. Further, much of the following focuses on Universal Credit due to (abstract) spatial constraints but also on the basis that, like temporal considerations, Universal Credit is the result of the period of change after the 2010 UK general election. This chapter is not intended to constitute a rigorous examination of the intricacies of Universal Credit relative to abstract objects and spaces but to give a generalised account of how abstract objects and abstract spaces might manifest within the context of the welfare state and Universal Credit. Insofar as this is the case I illuminate how, under the dominance of capital, power utilises ideologised abstract objects and spaces through the fictional welfare state to enforce abstract borders

around benefit claimants. I also consider the potentialities of how this converts into the liminal experiences of the interstice, the abstract spatial prison of bureaucracy within which the benefit claimant is held. Like all interstitial configurations however, the possibilities are limitless and unique to the individual. Therefore, what I present here are but a few threads of potential.

Although Titmuss (1968: 124 *cited in* Levi-Faur, 2014: 5) referred to the welfare state as an "indefinable abstraction", the 'welfare state', in social abstractionist terms, is an axiomatic and parallaxic abstractum of bureaucracy. It is an external object which is appealed to in relation to the bureaucratic abstracta which constitute objects in which the 'welfare state', and by necessity the state abstractum, are instantiated. These can include, unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, pensions, housing benefits, and social services (Office for National Statistics, 2016). In addition to these are the laws, regulations, and other bureaucratic matrices of abstracta which together form the totality of the welfare state. These may include, but are not limited to, Universal Credit Regulations 2013, Fraud Act 2006, Social Security Administration Act 1992, or Tax Credits Act 2002. These objects are external, they have a similar abstract nature to fictional novels as considered by Friedell (2019), Lin (2017: 5), and Thomasson (1999: xi), and tell the story of the will of power over the individual; they are authored fictions. In this case, I am focusing solely on the benefits system but similar principles are applicable across the board. The welfare state and the objects in which the welfare state are instantiated are also abstractly spatial in a number of ways.

Firstly, the welfare state is a constitutive space within the totality of the abstract space of the state. Secondly, the welfare state and its spectra of abstracta form their own abstract spaces wherever the welfare state is instantiated. Specific examples of these spaces can include job centres, training centres, or assessment centres. Again, these take place within concreta such as buildings, or perhaps just a room in a building which has multiple abstract use values. It is in other bureaucracy, perhaps local planning authorities, through which the use-value of the building is decided and thus the truth-value of 'job centre' or 'assessment centre' is validated, recognised, and subsequently reified. The 'job centre' is an external abstract layer applicated to function conterminously with its concrete counterpart of the building or physical space around which it is intended to operate. Thirdly, welfare state abstracta also form the abstract space of the interstice as a product of the inside of boundaries designated by abstracta. For example, if a 'claimant' meets a new partner and they wish to live together, this can result in having to report changes in circumstances to the 'Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)'. As such, this may create an abstract barrier to living together if the result was to be a loss of income. To liminally traverse this abstract boundary, experiences could be of having to remain living separately, accepting a reduction of income, or possibly even 'fraud' with a subsequent likelihood of violence enacted via the abstract including 'sanctions', 'financial penalties', or possibly the concrete violence of prison. Of course, at the core of the welfare state is the money abstractum. The *raison d'etre* for the welfare state is to command the distribution of, and determine the functioning of, the mediating properties of the money abstractum amongst given (and abstract) demographics, or as Weir (2001: 16432) argues, to give economic security to citizens. It is a form of abstract guardianship to the money abstractum which only admits access to those 'eligible' depending on the

ideological status of welfare state abstracta. Thus, objects of the welfare state essentially orbit the money abstractum and are susceptible to ideologising.

In 2010, during the fallout of the financial crash from 2008, the newly elected Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government became stewards of the abstracta of state including those of the welfare state. As Hall (2011) argues, this coalition was a continuation of the "long march of the neoliberal revolution". In other words, these newly elected stewards of abstracta, were already conditioned by the abstract tenets of neoliberal ideology. As such, any praxis enacted under their abstract and reified positions would involve a praxis guided by externalised and reified neoliberal tenets. These new, ideologised stewards of abstracta essentially gained access to the mechanisms via which power is exercised through abstract objects. Therefore, it is a logical progression that abstracta altered, created, or destroyed, would align with neoliberal tenets demonstrating the susceptibility of abstracta, in this case welfare state abstracta, to ideologising. Furthermore, the malleability of these abstracta means the form that the welfare state takes could be disciplinary (e.g., Wacquant, 2009), or, alternatively, as Taylor-Gooby (2013: 98-118) has shown, inclusive, humane, and generous which is not the case under the neoliberal order but could be under, say, a democratic socialist ideology. With regards to objects of the welfare state, the coalition set about a programme of retrenchment under the guise of austerity, retrenchment and austerity both being tenets of neoliberalism (Wacquant, 2010: 214).

I draw heavily on Lavery (2019) here who dissects this process through what he calls the 'Two-Nations Hegemonic Project' thus revealing the role that the nation abstractum plays within this scenario. As part of this project, the coalition set about a 'deficit reduction programme' through austerity measures which would represent the "national interest" (nation abstractum) and "we would all be in it together" (imagined community) (p. 157). However, the Coalition simultaneously split this 'imagined community' into two by manipulating the 'privileged' nation's consent to retrench the welfare state through antagonisms between 'strivers' and 'skivers' (p. 165). 'Strivers' and 'skivers' are abstract fictional characters with 'striver' given the encoded attributes of 'hard-working', 'tax paying', and 'contributing' whilst 'skiver' is given the encoded attributes of 'fecklessness', 'single-parent', 'drug addict', 'benefit scrounger', 'faker', or other ideologically immoralised attribute (Awford, 2016; Corcoran, 2015; Sembhy & Boles, 2011; Sheldrick, 2014). Historically, terms such as 'guttersnipes' or 'ragamuffins' shared similar encoded attributes. Furthermore, the 'striver' as abstract object synchronously dominates the working individual who comes to see themselves as the 'striver' whereas the 'skiver' abstractum gives rise to distorted perceptions of, and thus revealing the parallaxic nature of, the abstractum 'benefit claimant' (e.g., Geiger, 2017, 2021; Geiger & Meueleman, 2016; Dunn, 2013; De Vries, 2017). Furthermore, laziness is attached to Britishness in ways that moralise hard-work through the nation abstractum with negativity attached to *perceived* or invented laziness (e.g., Lynn, 2022; Jones, 2013; Crerar, 2022) whilst hard-work is lauded (e.g., Jones, 2018; Thomas, 2022). Together, these objects were utilised to justify welfare retrenchment through gaining support from the 'privileged nation' by showing the 'marginalised nation' to be parasitic (Lavery, 2019: 161).

Continuing, these new stewards of abstracta set about creating, destroying, or altering abstract objects to align with neoliberalised praxis. A number of these are outlined in Summers et al. (2021: 51-54). For example, 'Universal Credit' replaced 'Working Tax Credit', 'Jobseekers Allowance', 'Income Support', 'Housing Benefit', and 'Employment & Support Allowance'. 'Universal Credit' also introduced a two-child limit on claimants, a 'benefit cap', the colloquially known 'bedroom tax' (under-occupancy charge), and the 'claimant commitment'. Furthermore, 'Disability Living Allowance' was replaced by 'Personal Independence Payment'. Additionally, new laws and regulations were introduced such as the 'Universal Credit Regulations 2013' and 'Welfare Reform Act 2012'. All of these objects however constitute a matrix of fiction, externalised, and embellished with fictional truths relative to the intent of the creator(s). The objects replaced are no longer recognised nor validated by bureaucracy or power and, although being 'phased out', will soon cease to exist other than as historical interpretations of the objects and their effects. This demonstrates the abstract temporal existence of these abstracta. However, the primary intent of these objects is to control the way in which the equally fictional money abstractum functions relative to ideological truth values. Thus, there is an exigency under which money must be directed away from the undeserving poor, the abstract 'skiver' object (or folk-devil even (see Briant et al., 2013)). Thus, the 'handout', the derogatory term used by certain media and government actors, must no longer function as a 'handout'. 'Handout' is an ideologically relative truth-value insofar as, rather than functioning as a 'safety net' as socialist ideals may frame it, it functions as a means to encode lazy and undeserving attributes to claimants. Thus, ideologically, the function of money must be laden with the truth-value that money is earned through 'rewarding' hard work and only through

hard work by 'deserving' actors. This function was realised through the 'Work Programme', a bureaucratic spectrum of abstract objects.

The Work Programme, 'introduced' in 2011 and ending in 2017, reflected ideological truth values and praxis. As more abstract rules were put into place by the Coalition to aid retrenchment such as increased conditionality and sanctions (Dwyer & Wright, 2014; Weston, 2012), the latter representing one of the harshest systems in the history of British welfare (Reeve, 2017: 66), work became the primary focus as a solution for the increased poverty that retrenchment inevitably creates (Alm et al., 2019: 213). Thus, it became 'true' that 'skivers' "languished on benefits" and that it was an ideologised moral imperative to solve this 'problem' (Jun, 2019: 2). Relatedly, it became 'true' through the common-sensification of neoliberalised economic logic, that the *only* solution is hard-work (Jun, 2019: 3). A new complex matrix of abstract objects was created to achieve this intent and at the centre was the money abstractum. For example, 'sickness benefits' claimants were to be 'reassessed' against new 'eligibility criteria' with the intent to make a 20% saving on the 'benefits bill' (McCartney, 2012: 1). To do this, the sick were bundled into an abstractum, a commodity, and moved into a privatised abstract space away from public spaces through being sold to private multi-national health corporations to perform 'assessments' against more punitive criteria. Assessments are tests whereby fictional criteria are conjured up, externalised into the abstract, and then used as an abstract border which separates two differing abstract spaces: a space where the individual will receive support, and a space locked out of support. Liminal experiences are lived through trying to navigate crossing this abstract border.

Continuing, these assessments were also performed within the abstract bounds of contractual agreements with the DWP which maintained a 'payment by results' model incentivising cuts towards that 20% saving (Goldie, 2017; Morse, 2015). The predictable increase in those failing to meet the stringent eligibility criteria was met with a new encoded attribute for the 'skiver', that of 'faker', therefore revalidating the 'skiver' abstractum as 'true'. Thus, this additional truth-value encoded onto the abstractum became not the truth-value that rules had changed, but that claimants were faking illness at a rate of 75% (Little, 2011). This, in itself, is an act of abstract violence which spilled into the concrete through loss of support, bureaucratic gaslighting, and concrete physical violence (Walker, 2012). The loss of support functions as an 'activating' mechanism which is found in policies derived from the 'skiver' abstractum and the truth-values encoded to it (Garrett, 2015: 396; Clayton et al., 2015). Through loss of support, claimants found their way onto other benefits making them 'eligible' for the 'Work Programme'. Again, claimants were abstracted into a commodity, marketed, and sold to privatised 'welfare-to-work' providers who are incentivised to enforce work (Piggott & Grover, 2009: 167; Deeming, 2014: 863); not sold as people, but as an abstract package that masks any connotation of slavery through the selling of human beings for profit. In each case, the function of the money abstractum is being configured towards private profit as opposed to supporting those in need and this is made explicit by the stewards of abstracta of welfare state at the time who stated that these private providers would "be paid…out of the benefit savings they help to realise" (Department for Work & Pensions, 2012: 62).

As individuals or families begin to enter the benefits system through Universal Credit, one of the first things they are faced with is the 'claimant commitment'. The claimant commitment acts as a ritualistic acceptance of ideologised conditionality and responsibilisation (Negus, 2021: 19). As Harvey (2005: 64) states in relation to the neoliberalised legal system: "the legal framework is that of freely negotiated contractual obligations between juridical individuals in the marketplace. The sanctity of contracts and the individual right to freedom of action, expression, and choice must be protected". The 'contract', in this case the claimant commitment, is an abstractum that contains bureaucratically recognised and validated conditions that must be met to be given access to money; it is a "condition of entitlement" to benefits (Summers et al., 2021: 51). Therefore, when faced with ritualised acceptance of the abstract or the experiences of extreme poverty, there is no freedom to choose the contractual obligations demanded in the claimant commitment. Behind this lies an act of abstract violence in the form of 'agree to our conditions or suffer the consequences'. Through this coercion, the ritualised process of 'signing' and 'agreeing' to the commitment helps to reify the abstractum onto the consciousness. From this point, the commitment forms part of the interstice with the attached conditions constituting the boundaries of this abstract spatial prison. Liminal traversal of this boundary becomes the experience of navigating and traversing the boundaries of the commitment under threat of further abstract violence. Yet, hidden within this bureaucratic abstractum is an encoded activating attribute, an exercise of power ideologically imbued into the commitment abstractum, the causal continuity of which forces pre-ordained actions from the claimant. In the context of benefits, activation is the stimulus of 'languishing' claimants (Garrett, 2015: 396). This 'stimulus', or activation, inhabits the claimants interstice manifesting as a pressure to traverse the liminal borders set by the commitment. In

other words, they are forced to comply with capital exigencies even if the claimant is already in paid work (Westwater, 2022). Further ideologising can be seen in the use of the term 'commitment' itself. It conveys that an individual committed themselves to a reified schematic of contractual obligations as opposed to the obligations being imposed on the individual. Again, this highlights not only application of ideological responsibilisation, but the insidious gaslighting of the bureaucratic regime. In turn, personal commitment failures are punished through the violence of the sanctions regime.

As Hobhouse (1999: 13) notes, the "happiness of the individual must be judged by the goodness of the state". The totality of state abstracta, as a matrix of neoliberalised abstracta further instantiated within welfare state abstracta, and wielded by the stewards of state abstracta as enforcers of the neoliberal, aid 'accumulation by dispossession' via the alteration of welfare state abstracta towards privatisation, conditionality, and retrenchment. This sees the abolition of 'goodness' within state abstracta which once acted as a redistributive mechanism of protection. In its place, the abstracta of the welfare state as configured and wielded by the stewards comes to torment, deprive, starve, and destabilise the human condition, a flagellation of the poor to induce neoliberal productivity, self-discipline, and make available the individual to exploitation via abstracting of the individual to an economic unit ripe for extracting profit through workfare or training providers. Those who are vulnerable, the sick, the disabled, or the impoverished are purposefully activated against personal limitations into a prostrate servitude for private capital through excessive sanctions. The duality of the claimant commitment and the sanctions regime functions not only to dispossess

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the individual of what pittance they have access to, but to dispossess them of alternity. Further, the fictional obligations of the claimant commitment demand the removal of choice thus enforcing a neoliberal moralism which says that choice, a cherished tenet of the neoliberal, should be unavailable to the immoral and any work potentialities must be readily accepted. The whole claimant commitment becomes a bureaucratic truth-value with any praxis relative to the commitment obligations being recorded. Subsequently in relation to this record, "reality exists only to the extent that it is recorded; ultimately, truth is nothing and the document alone is true" (Hibou, 2015: 33). A missed appointment becomes a failed obligation and is subsequently recorded. It matters not that one could not afford to travel to the appointment, it simply becomes a reductionist abstracted truth that the appointment was missed and the individual an undisciplined and irresponsible one. Every subsequent agent of bureaucracy comes to accept the abstract document as a reified truth regardless of the quality of its abstraction thus becoming a persistent torment mechanism for the individual who knows its untruth. Ultimately, behind the bureaucratic fictions of the claimant commitment lies nothing but the demands from individuals exercising power via the abstract under threat of violence.

What is further revealed here is power, money, and ideology functioning in continuity. Power is directing abstracta to face ideological exigencies commanded by money. The stewards of abstracta, those who exercise power, are altering the functioning of the money abstractum towards the private gain of 'Work Programme' 'providers'. This is an ideologically driven action. Although this suggests that ideology is of a higher echelon than power, it is power in the first instance that can disseminate ideological

tenets to those who draw from them or are conditioned by the reified objects. Further, it reveals the ideological 'accumulation by dispossession' argued by Harvey (2005: 160-165). Money is reconfigured from a supporting function to a dispossessive profit function; money is taken from the poor to give to the wealthy under the fictional truth-value that money is a limited resource. Greer et al. (2018: 32-35) also describe the relationship between the private corporate world of 'Work Programme' 'providers' and the 'DWP' through lobbying and research groups. This unveils power through the influencing of abstracta, again around the functioning of the money abstractum. All the while, it reveals the process of creating, altering, destroying, and influencing the form of abstract objects, reflecting Olivecrona's (1939: 56-57) key positions of power. Further, it validates Stinchcombe's (2001: 2) formalisation process where formality is "an abstraction [that] can be taken as a fact" and is "abstraction plus government" (p. 41) with the subsequent products of these alterations resulting in concrete praxis. To illuminate this, we can again consider the fact that Work Programme providers were to profit from welfare money by getting people into work (Department for Work & Pensions, 2012: 62). This induces a concrete praxis that aligns with the exigencies of privatising this money. Thus, bureaucratic abstracta in the form of rules within the spectrum of the 'Work Programme', themselves exigent, compel individuals to perform actions such as prioritising the claimants who will make the greatest profit in the shortest time, or sidelining claimants who require greater help and more investment (Jordon, 2016: 87; Dar, 2016: 27). This, in turn, unveils the neoliberal tenet of efficiency within the welfare state (McClusky, 2003). At every juncture, the reified and synchronously dominating money abstractum, the *nexus rerum et hominem*, mediates relationships but power is influencing those relationships in the belief that money is real through altering the abstract function of money in line with ideological tenets. In

turn, those already impoverished are having the function of money used against them rather than for them. Although the 'Work Programme' ended in 2017, it was replaced by a similar programme, the 'Work and Health Programme', which was essentially an abstract reshaping of the objects from the Work Programme. Similar sanctions system, similar activating properties, same abstract violence, and similar target groups such as the disabled but yet already predicted to fail in the same way the Work Programme failed (Benstead, 2018: 14-15). The centrality of the *nexus rerum et hominem*, the money abstractum, in synchronicity with ideology and power maintains a casual continuity and temporality which is visible in the next example.

The benefit cap is an abstractum of the welfare state. It sets controls on the function of money and creates an abstract boundary which limits how much money an individual or family can access in support. Originally created as part of the fictional Welfare Reform Act 2012 it was introduced in 2013 with a boundary of £26,000 per annum (£18,200 for singles without children). It was subsequently reduced significantly in 2015 to £20,000 per annum (£13,400 for singles without children) nationally, and £23,000 (£15,410 for single without children) in Greater London. This reduction came into 'effect' in November 2016 (Department for Work & Pensions, 2022). We can analyse this externalised abstractum through five of its encoded attributes: temporality, causal continuity, ideologised retrenchment, spatiality, and a money modifier. The creator of the abstractum, through the externalisation of the exercise of power, set the encoded attributes of the abstractum that would continue to affect individuals across time even in the absence of the creator. This means that people will continue to hit this abstract border of the 'cap' and lose financial support.

This causal continuity is also reflected in this abstract border through the increasing scarcification of money destined for supportive functions over time whereby, as money 'devalues' and living costs rise, the abstract border, the amount of money somebody can receive, remains externally constant until somebody in a key position chooses to alter it.

The more people come into contact with this border across time, the more welfare becomes retrenched thus adhering to the neoliberalisation of the abstractum. This is reflected quantitatively in the DWP's own figures which show that in November 2016, the number of households affected by the 'cap' was circa 20,000 and by May 2022 it was circa 130,000 (Department for Work & Pensions, 2017, 2022). This supports the notion that more people are being constrained by the interstitial border across time. As the causal continuity of the border intensifies, the abstract space of the welfare state begins to conterminously retrench as the supporting mechanism of the money abstractum comes to be removed. More people, despite being in the abstract space of the welfare state, begin to also move outside of it as coterminous retrenchment takes place; they become 'nudged' into spaces of intensifying poverty. This same principle can also be seen in fictional eligibility conditions. When an individual has £6,000 in 'capital', the amount of support received from Universal Credit becomes reduced on a sliding scale up to £16,000 where there is no longer eligibility for Universal Credit (Brewer et al., 2012: 49). Again, as the fictional value of money reduces, the border stays constant and retrenchment occurs over time with this border being in place since the creation of Universal Credit in 2012 up until the present day. This also demonstrates the destruction of abstract space as a logical conclusion to

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neoliberal retrenchment of the welfare state. As a side note, the same principle is also known as 'fiscal drag' (e.g., Paulus et al., 2020). Temporality however, still yet plays a central role for the 'benefit claimant'.

Individuals acting under the abstractum of the 'Department for Work & Pensions', in tandem with the 'Universal Credit Regulations 2013', abide by a praxis within these boundaries to maintain the illusion that a 5-week wait is required to receive a 'payment' into an 'account'. The 5-week wait to receive any money is an arbitrary abstract border without justification (Klair, 2020: 6). Rather than enable an individual or family to function at a human level by assisting in maintaining their affairs, it instead instigates a financial faltering positioning them at immediate risk of debt and succumbing to a new installation of borders to their interstice. Essentially, it undermines their ability to conform to the abstract. Universal Credit advances, hardship loans, and budgeting advances become available to those in such a position (Kennedy, 2013 *cited in* Stinson, 2019: 19). As previously considered on page 160 in relation to the IMF and World Bank, debt within neoliberalism is a mechanism of control. For our claimant, this mechanism is triggered by the purposeful offering of a loan to the claimant whereby they are able to borrow against their future benefit payments. These offerings constitute a form of 'Hobson's choice', an illusion of choice when there is only one option, in this case to accept debt to avoid extreme hardship. The lack of justification for the 5-week wait, in tandem with the pre-prepared debt offering, is a coercing of the claimant into an abstract space of debt. This coercion is also demonstrated both within 'sanctions' and 'recoverable hardship payments', the first being a reduction in the claimant's money, and the second being another loan (thus a debt) to be later repaid

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when the sanction's temporal presence ends (Department for Work & Pensions, 2020). The debt burden is therefore perpetuated. The combination of coercion and debt is an example of violence through abstract objects. However, there is no *actual* debt. The debt is a Vaihingerian fiction, an idea externalised, an abstract object reverberating from the axiomatic money abstractum and utilised as justification for violence through containment of the individual; it is the instantiation of the money abstractum, power, ideology, and bureaucracy in synchronous domination through borders of the interstice. The consciousness, in the absence of the knowledge that money is an abstractum, accepts the debt through its reified state and with it all that accompanies it. Debt stifles political action and pushes individuals to take on low paid work to avoid the perpetuation of debt (Inderbitzin et al., 2017: 106). Temporal manifestations do not end here however.

The claiming of Universal Credit reinforces the sequential and linear capitalist time consciousness. The claimant commitment, whilst being temporal itself, also dictates a time conformity to the exigencies of capital. The diktat that an individual must look for work for 'x' 'hours' per 'week' (often 35 hours) perpetuates not only the illusion of fictional time sequences, but reinforces these sequences as power and ideology would have them arranged. Thus, the claimant must seek to synchronise with this time sequence to maximise their time spent looking for, preparing for, or engaged in work otherwise violence perpetrated via the abstract 'sanction' will occur (Wright & Dwyer, 2020: 27). Again, the money abstractum is drawn upon as a tool of violence to set an abstract boundary between basic subsisting and falling into destitution, both of which constitute abstract spaces bordered by the money abstractum. Ideologised time can

be viewed through the adage of 'time is money', an interlinking of two fictions which induce an urgency towards the money abstractum. As Moshe (2019: 119-135) argues, neoliberalised time maintains specific encoded attributes compelled by the tenets of market logic and efficiency which reconfigure time-perceptions of both individuals and bureaucracies. For the claimant, unemployment is ideologically inefficient for a marketised life-world and, through the reification of time, time becomes a tool for economic discipline for the individual consciousness (Marian-Arna, 2021: 29). Furthermore, neoliberalised time configurations can become localised sites of power over the abstract. Moshe (2019: 124) notes how neoliberal bureaucratic regimes attempt to control time configurations in everyday events such as making an appointment, each party negotiating to synchronise with their own configuration. For the claimant, this means a forced subjectivity to the DWP's time-configuration, itself subject to capital exigencies relative to time. This forced subjectivity occurs through the fiction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 which commands sanctions for late or missed appointments (Cain, 2016: *no pagination*). Even the DWP's own IT system is built on these temporal exigencies around the mediating properties of the money abstractum (Harwood, 2018: 2). Time, money, law, and even computerised algorithms function in tandem, abstracta wielded through the reified belief in their realness to build borders around the claimant. Daily exigencies become synchronised to these abstracta for the claimant whose liminal experiences manifest through negotiating these borders. The traversal of the fictional 35-hour border involves offering proof of looking for work to cross the conditionality border with "cruel and constant pressure to take on more work" (Wright & Dwyer, 2020: 29, 32).

It is argued that, under the conditions described here, the welfare state is not a welfare state but a 'workfare state'. This at first instance suggests an inherent malleability to the welfare state abstractum and its constituent abstracta. 'Workfare' is considered a "social project of neoliberal *global* restructuring" (emphasis added) (Peck, 2001: 9) thus hinting at the ideologising of the required abstracta for diffusion. Workfare manifests through ideologised policy fictions disseminated across various countries. These policy fictions subsequently become modified through localisation so that they are applicable and interpretable for those within the internality of the abstract space of a given country, nation, and state configuration. This would align with Stinchcombe's (2001: 20-21) notion that an abstractum must be communicable and transmissible in an efficient manner to the relevant parts of society. Workfare-style implementations have manifested in the U.S. (e.g., Wacquant, 2010, 2012), Australia (e.g., Soldatic & Chapman, 2010), and UK (e.g., Sunley et al., 2011). Vis (2007) also notes implementation of workfare-leaning systems in many neoliberalised European countries such as Ireland, Switzerland, and even the hitherto social democratic Sweden. Within these country, nation, and state configurations, a neoliberalised citizenship manifests. The ideological modifying of citizenship abstracta is one of rights and entitlements but only in exchange for responsibilities and obligations; "no rights without responsibilities" (Fiske & Briskman, 2007: 50). Thus, within the internality of the coterminous abstract spaces of the three spectrums, the individual is bordered by a monolithic set of incalculable borders of the interstice. In relation to welfare however, workfare is one of enforced work or work activity, an enforcement which is so prevalent across these configurations that even the Lødemel and Trickey (2001) edited book was called '*An Offer You Can't Refuse*'. They argue that compulsion is a key feature of workfare policies which betrays an assumption by policy disseminators that coercion

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is required to activate claimants. Coercion is itself a form of violence, in this case an abstract violence through both policy compulsion and the imagined citizenship contract of rights for responsibilities (Department for Work & Pensions, 2013: 1). Interestingly, coercive violence in workfare mirrors coercive violence in domestic violence situations. Crossman and Hardesty (2018) uncovers two central themes to coercive control in domestic violence: constraint through commitment and constraint through force. In workfare, constraint through commitment is reflected in the 'social contract' (in the UK the claimant commitment) (Lødemel & Trickey, 2001: 1-40), and constraint through force is reflected through the fictional requirements that must be met to keep receiving money or through the sanctions system. Power then, is utilising ideologised abstracta, in tandem with the money abstractum and abstract violence, and across country, nation, and state configurations to enforce a neoliberal welfare structure. Thus, the metaspatialisation of this ideological configuration demonstrates again that power and ideology both usurp the echelons of country, nation, and state, but are subservient to the functioning of money.

Moving on, as part of claiming Universal Credit, individuals must use an online-only 'journal' to record their activities relative to their claimant commitment. Through this, the individual must expend cathexis towards managing a self-surveillatory regime. This self-surveillant process is a mundane futility designed to engage an individual in meaningless work in order to fill an abstract temporal space which is compliant with the fictional temporal demands of the claimant commitment and of power. This underlying status is betrayed by the fact that journal entries are often ignored, invoke slow responses from staff, or staff failing to understand an individual's situation

(Harwood, 2018: 17). Thus, it functions simultaneously as firstly an extension of the Foucauldian panopticon to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1995: 201), and secondly, as a Foucauldian confessional whereby what is entered in the journal functions as a signed confession to what has been done, and, by implication, what has not. Therefore, a non-confessed occurrence becomes evidence for the sanction. Foucault (in Foucault & Winters, 1978: 6) asks us to "consider the enormous obligation to confess…the relations between parents and children, between doctors and the sick, between psychiatrists and hysterics, between psychoanalysts and patients" and by addendum we can add between DWP and claimant.

The unilateral *surveillance* relationship occurs within an abstract space of the welfare (or workfare) state; a *virtual* reality of abstract online spaces. To access these spaces requires engaging with another set of abstract boundaries of the interstice. As some claimants cannot afford to pay for their own internet (Pybus et al., 2021: 7), again highlighting that abstract border set by the money abstractum, accessing libraries, job centres, or other unstable providers of technology becomes a major border to even have a chance of fulfilling fictional claimant commitments. Further, this reinforces abstract fictional time sequences as the individual comes to align themselves with accessing these places during 'opening hours' for nothing other than to demonstrate that self-surveillance is taking place. Difficulty accessing these spaces is further exacerbated not only by the requirement to travel to them, but that these abstract spaces and places have been consistently destroyed through library closures and job centre closures for example (Flood, 2019; Gov.uk, 2017). Thus, across the temporal

frames of abstract commitments, the ever-shrinking number of abstract spaces through which an individual can demonstrate conformity means that the borders of the interstice relative to Universal Credit are becoming ever more constrictive consequentially enforcing an ever-greater cathexis. Nevertheless, the authoritarian violence of the sanction regime continues unabated. This delivers us to what is perhaps the defining consequence for the individual within the borders of neoliberalised welfare state abstracta: precarity.

Bordered by the interacting causal continuities of various abstracta from welfare law, conditionality, eligibility, claimant commitments, debt, sanctions, self-surveillance, and time configurations, liminal traversal of these borders becomes unmanageable. Cathexic expenditure becomes a totalising experience where the abstracta of welfare become sojourners within the consciousness. This manifests in an ever-present fear: fear of sanctions, financial hardship, surveillance, and social isolation (Wright et al., 2022: 3), of being unable to pay childcare costs (Wood, 2021: 215), waiting for payments (Pybus et al., 2021: 6), or of stigmatisation (Martin, 2016: 115). As Standing (2011: 20) notes, the 'precariat', those who live in a perpetual state of precariousness, also live in a state of anxiety and chronic insecurity with a fear of losing what they have. Drawing on Wright and Dwyer's (2020: 26) paper highlighting the voices of Universal Credit claimants, the abstract 'sanction' weapon, at the minimum, it is an abstract tool which induces significant fear in the individual whether unemployed or in work. This fear is built around the money abstractum or 'loss of income' and the concrete realities that occur through this loss including places to live. Similarly,

unpredictable fluctuations in income would have the same effect (Griffiths et al., 2022: 101).

One steward of abstracta initially involved in the creation of the Universal Credit fiction, the equally fictionally titled 'Lord' Freud (*cited in* Sainsbury, 2014: 42), argued that Universal Credit would, in fact, create a "lack of fear". Fear however, moves outside of abstract welfare state spaces and makes visible the welfare state as a space that others should fear to enter. Martin (2016: 115) notes that "neoliberalism demands a bottom 20–30% of society to incentivise people to maintain employment in fear of claiming stigmatised Universal Credit and using food banks". Thus, fear comes to inhabit the interstice of others outside of these borders demonstrating a metaspatialisation of a fear of the abstract. Fear additionally functions as a reification of the abstract borders, a very real fear to liminally traverse the fictional contents of the abstract borders. This fear is ideologically compliant insofar as the causal continuity of intent is to perpetuate fear through neoliberalised abstract objects. As Tyler (2013) argues throughout, neoliberalised 'democracies' function through generating fear and anxiety which in turn manufacture consent to punitivity. By using 'national abjects', folk-devil-like objects including benefit claimants, these fictional 'parasitic' objects (which also include migrants, single mothers, asylum seekers, and Gypsies) are wielded to remind those outside of welfare state spaces of their own precarity, that they are only a payment away from the same punitivity. Each liminal experience that the claimant experiences is not only the traversal of abstract borders of the configured interstice, but the foreseeable concrete consequences of the creator's original intent.

Precarity can be also viewed as a destabilisation of the interstice so that not only is the individual bordered by abstracta, but that those abstracta prevent any comfort from taking residence within. Destabilisation of the interstice can occur in relation to housing. Preece and Bimpson (2019) posit a tripartitioned system of housing insecurity which includes the following three factors: *financial insecurity* which considers affordability of housing, fixed housing costs, and incomes; *spatial insecurity* is the extent to which an individual or family can access a home relative to factors such as housing availability, the dominance of the private rental sector, refusal to allow claimants to rent, or 'no fault evictions'; and *relational insecurity* which considers the stability of relationships to others within the same household. In each case however, money, as an abstract object, is being leveraged ideologically by power to invoke a destabilisation of the abstract space of home. Under Universal Credit, money for rent is paid directly to the claimant instead of the landlord as was the case previously under housing benefit. Thus, the individual is responsibilised for the payment of rent. However, failures in the system (or failures by design) such as instability of expected payments, the five-week wait, or other financial difficulty forces claimants to 'dip into' rent money or otherwise find that delays to payments destabilise their home life including higher evictions, homelessness, and rent arrears (Cheetham et al., 2019: 7; Hardie, 2022; Rahim et al., 2017: 77; Griffiths et al., 2022: 52). Accessing a home from a starting point of being a Universal Credit 'claimant' means liminal traversal of the abstract Cohenesque folk-devil or the Tyleresque 'national abjection' ingrained into the consciousness of the private rental sector. Thus, even getting access to a home is fraught with abstract navigational difficulties (Bradshaw & Homer, 2020). Within the abstractly designated home, spatial insecurity is also mediated by the money

abstractum insofar as rent arrears can lead to evictions and homelessness. Thus, home, as an abstract space, is mediated by not only the money abstractum, but by the precariousness introduced into the interstice. This invokes a continual cathexis towards traversing liminal borders between stability and instability, relationship success and relationship breakdown, and home and homelessness, therefore indicating that relational insecurity is directly affected by the ideologised functioning of the *nexus rerum et hominem*. The failure to bind together in relation to the mediating properties of money can lead to relationship breakdown and in turn housing insecurity for all involved (Papp et al., 2009). So, through the use of power directing abstract objects, peoples' fundamental human relationships, their homes, and the experiences of the world become a broken, unstable, or transient continual praxis of liminal traversal.

Continuing, Negus (2021: 69) notes that shame, self-doubt, and money can contribute to unemployed individuals becoming socially isolated. As already considered, the money abstractum mediates our relationships with everything and everyone. Shame and self-doubt are human expressions which can be induced by certain abstracta. For example, shame is consistently correlated with unemployment or claiming benefits (Baumberg, 2016; Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; Chase & Walker, 2013). However, this shame can be induced by the abstractum of 'unemployed'. Unemployed is a bureaucratic, parallaxic abstractum which appears differently depending on how its viewed. Although the individual is synchronously dominated by this external object, for some its attachment to the individual conveys encoded attributes of 'fecklessness' or 'laziness'. In turn, these encoded attributes are seen as part of the personal failure of

the individual against the ideologised morality between the hard work expected from a 'nation' of hard-working families as opposed to benefits as "morally corrosive" (Wiggan, 2012: 390). Morrison (2021) also aligns with this view through 'scrounger-bashing' which he argues is a 'national pastime' therefore linking encoded nation attributes to the belittling of human claimants. Thus, shame does not originate from within us, it is grafted onto the consciousness as an emotional sojourner until the day, if that day comes, when we return to a morally acceptable, fictional status of employment. For the claimant, shame is ubiquitous and forms borders of the interstice at every juncture. Food bank shame (e.g., Garthwaite, 2016; Fang et al, 2021; Williams et al., 2016; Bernal et al., 2016) or consumption shame such as the persistent claims of undeserving indulgences in 'Sky TV', 'big TV's', 'iPhones', 'booze and cigs', or 'fancy holidays' (e.g., Paterson et al., 2019; Garrett, 2015; Lyndon, 2019) are such examples. Further, it can be argued that shame is encoded into the matrices of abstracta which dominate the individual. For example, the Foucauldian confessional nature commanded by the claimant journal conveys a shame for 'failing' to adhere to both the requirement to confess and the diktats of the claimant commitment. With the result being a 'sanction', this itself conveys an encoded attribute of shame. But at every juncture, an abstract boundary is placed around the individual, or even 'claimants' as a group. Thus, the perpetuation of abstracta which convey shame ultimately invokes a concrete social isolation effect. Social isolation relative to claiming benefits, or from the effects of claiming benefits, is generally well covered (e.g., Wright, 2016; Garthwaite et al., 2015; Patrick, 2017; Loopstra et al., 2015). This concrete effect however, is only there as a consequence of the interaction with the abstract configuration of the interstice whereby the sheer dominance of this enforced matrix comes to mediate the claimant's relationship with the social world to an extent that

goes incalculably beyond simply being mediated by the money abstractum. For power and their ideology, people being poor is not enough to satiate, the poor must be abstractly bordered off in totality until they conform whether or not they have the tools to do so.

Since the restructuring of the welfare system towards the centrality of Universal Credit, its abstract configuration has led to increases in poor mental health (Cheetham et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2020; Wickham et al., 2020; Griffiths et al., 2022; Pybus et al., 2021). Cheetham et al.'s (2019) study on experiences of claiming Universal Credit for example shows that individuals are confronted with negative impacts on wellbeing, physical, and mental health; a totalising impact. Griffiths et al. (2022) in particular outline a number of examples through which Universal Credit creates mental health issues particularly around the functioning of money. Of particular interest is Wright et al. (2022: 2) who quote a Universal Credit claimant to show how individuals have their mental health issues invalidated: "[My work coach said], 'But I can't treat you like… I need to treat… You're fit for work.'" (Wright et al., 2022: 2). Here, the praxis of the 'work coach' is being directed by a prior bureaucratically originating truth-value manifested from the fictional 'Work Capability Assessment'. Based on fictional eligibility rules against which an individual is measured through an equally fictional 'Work Capability Assessment', itself complete with circumscribed 'descriptors' as to what is determined as capability, the determining of the mental health capabilities of an individual is placed into a category, in this case 'fit for work'. This categorisation itself becomes an abstractum imbued with the truth-value that *all* individuals synchronously dominated by it are 'fit for work' and have no extenuating circumstance

which may preclude them from work. Whether the individual is *actually* fit for work bears no relation to the truth-value imbued in the abstractum which is pre-configured by imagined possibilities from a workist utopia so that any assessment outcome is based on what a claimant *can* do as opposed to what they *cannot* (Department for Work & Pensions, 2021). This is in despite of the fact that diagnosed depression and anxiety for example is validated by a medical truth-value which confirms depression and anxiety is present. The DWP, and by extension the Work Capability Assessment outcome, is configured so that medical truth-value is to be disregarded in favour of conformity to work and the exigencies of the money abstractum's functioning. This is supported by Wright et al. (2022: 18) stating "we must conclude that its primary purpose is to disqualify those with common mental health problems from state support". Now, even greater conformity is to be forced upon those with disability issues through the use of fictional constricting eligibility rules within the Work Capability Assessment (Topping, 2023; Bentley, 2023). Thus, in turn, both human individuals in the example quote have come to be synchronously dominated by the fictional 'fit for work' abstractum: the 'work coach' whose truth is that the individual is 'fit for work', and the 'claimant' who has to comply with this fictional truth. This suggests that, rather than following Stinchcombe's (2001: 3) notion that "formality and formalization have to do with abstraction so as to preserve what is essential in the substance", what is actually being formalised, is an abstract and subsequently reified fictional reality.

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how the different Echelons of Abstracta come to surround and dominate the individual through being a Universal Credit 'claimant'. I have explored briefly the abstract nature of the welfare state and

the abstract spaces of the welfare state. I argued that the welfare state is not only an abstract object in and of itself in which the state abstractum is also instantiated, but that it also buttressed by a spectrum of abstracta which support the axiom of the welfare state. I also identified some of the abstract spaces within which welfare state abstracta function such as job or assessment centres. Beyond this, I showed how power externalised by the stewards of abstracta is exercised via the alteration, creation, or destruction of abstract objects of the welfare state and the spaces within which these objects manifest. Through ideological drivers, the functioning of the ubiquitous and reified money abstractum can be altered to prioritise private profit over individual support with the individual being the mechanism through which to do it. The wielding of abstract objects ideologically sets a matrix of bureaucratically originating abstract borders around the individual which induces a range of liminal experiences. These borders are set around the individual relative to the functioning of money and the way in which power expects that function to align ideologically. In turn, it was shown that what is experienced is a range of negative effects and strains on the individual including a dominance of cathexis, poverty, isolation, mental health issues, and above all a futility in the praxis required to adhere to a set of fictional requirements at the behest of power; all for nothing other than being granted the means to basic subsistence.

In terms of original contributions and the value of viewing the welfare state and experiences of benefit claimants through this social abstractionist frame, it aids in making visible the intangible tools which are utilised by power to order the realities of claimants in line with the demands of power and the exigencies of capital. It provides

a method through which we see the actual abstract structuring of the lives of a set of people who are navigating life through the specific bureaucracies of the welfare state. This means that the same principles can also be extended into other areas for sociologists to analyse. It makes visible the ordering, routinisations, and control of a demographic who themselves are unaware of the abstractness and fictionality to which they are violently held. It may contribute to sociological understandings of how individuals make sense of their realities through new quantitative approaches. It may even contribute to new predictive models which could foresee the effect of any given abstractum and produce more immediate opposition to abstract violence. It could also be used to aid sociological understandings of historicity of the welfare state by examining movements and changes in the abstracta over temporal variations or across abstract geographical configurations. Regardless, the formulation of the welfare state and the experiences of benefit claimants as the navigating of a fictional reality created through abstract objects is a unique frame of reference. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications for existing sociological areas.

The Discussion and Implications

Like all prior considerations within this thesis, the possibilities and potentialities are difficult to constrain. Again, with regards to the implications of, and the potentialities of, social abstractionist interpretations of traditional sociological arenas, this scope must too be necessarily constrained. In this chapter on the implications of social abstractionist interpretations, I have selected a number of areas through which to consider these implications. The first area is social constructionism on the basis that it is likely that social constructionism will be the school of thought most likely to draw comparison. The second is agency which I consider in direct relation to this thesis and also to the third area of implication which is symbolic interactionism in which one of the central concerns is the structure / agency debate. A brief consideration of ideology, Identity, power, religion, and space are also considered. Although brief, I intend to show not only the implications of an abstractionist frame relative to these sociological staples, but to show that these implications are also possible future research trajectories. Each implication, although there are many beyond the thesis scope, all constitute grounds on which a social abstractionist analysis can be applied.

There are some similarities between social abstractionism and social constructionism and I predict that social abstractionism will inspire comparison between itself and social constructionism. Therefore, I address some implications for social constructionism whilst simultaneously addressing some of the ways social abstractionism diverges from social constructionist staples. The most prominent points of divergence are what has already been considered in this paper. Therefore, for social

abstractionism, the focus is categorically on the abstract object, the abstract space, the abstract boundaries set by these objects and spaces, and our experiences of these aforementioned concepts. Little, if anything, has been considered within social constructionism with regards to these concepts. Yet, they are certainly visible within some constructionist arguments. For example, Searle (1995: 57) argues that 'social objects' include "governments, money, and universities" but also claims these are "just placeholders for patterns of activities". Searle (*cited in* Robinson, 2011: 65) further argues "when I am alone in my room, that room contains at least the following "social objects": a citizen of the United States, an employee of the State of California, a licensed driver, and a taxpayer. So how many objects are in the room? There is exactly one: me". Each argument can be viewed through social abstractionist terms. The 'social objects' referred to are abstract objects but Searle also refers to them as "placeholders for patterns of activities" which suggests an internality, an abstract space in which praxis occurs. The 'university', to follow Searles example, is an abstract space built from the inside of, and synchronously dominated by, relevant abstract objects. In Searle's second argument, he again refers to abstract objects such as driving licences but claims there is only one object in the room. This is a division between abstract objects and concrete objects, Searle himself being the concrete object. However, the objects he refers to, citizen or employee for example, are synchronously dominating bureaucratic abstracta. Each abstractum exists external to Searle, is temporal, and maintains a causal continuity of intent. 'Citizen' and 'employee' are abstractly parallaxic and can appear different depending on how they are viewed, but also are malleable and one 'citizen's' 'citizen' encoded attributes are not necessarily the same as the next 'citizen's' encoded 'citizen' attributes.

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Continuing, Searle (in Smith & Searle, 2003: 302) in reference to money, argues that a 'dollar bill' is both piece of paper and a dollar bill; a non-social object and social object respectively: "there is only one object that is both a piece of paper and a dollar bill, but the fact that it is a piece of paper is not the same fact as that it is a dollar bill". Searle (2008: 21) later claims that a ten-dollar bill is an objective fact and not a matter of subjective personal opinion. Further, Searle (1995: 2) differentiates between brute facts and institutional facts, the former referring to 'facts' that exist independently of human institutions and the latter referring to 'facts' that require human institutionalisation to exist. The 'brute fact', however, can be seen as concrete reality. The institutional fact is more in line with the facts-about-fiction noted by Bourne and Caddick-Bourne (2022). Thus, when Searle refers to the two different 'facts' about the paper being paper *and* a dollar bill, the paper is the brute fact (concrete reality) and the dollar bill is the institutional fact (fact-about-fiction). Much of this is framed as objectivation in constructionist terms meaning the conversion of a concept or abstraction into an object. Berger and Luckmann (1991: 149), Burr (2006: 7), and Mouzelis (2016: 72) argue in favour of a dialectical tripartite process of: externalisation, whereby we externalise 'artefacts' through social actions; objectivation, where those artefacts become objects and features of the world; and internalisation whereby those externalisations by others subsequently become internalised in the consciousness of the individual. What they are really grasping at is the externalisation of, and subsequent reification of, abstract objects. Further, in direct relation to this, the concepts of objective and subjective reality are added to the argument.

The aforementioned constructionist claim then can be summed as thus: produced objects (objectivations) objectively exist thus are objective reality even if objects are subjectively externalised and subsequently subjectively internalised. The object is objective irrespective of subjectivity. Berger and Luckmann (1991: 50-51) reflect this in their exemplification through signs arguing that the sign objectively exists independent of its intended meaning and subjective interpretation. However, if we accept the object as objective reality, and if it is an abstract object produced through the necessarily reductionist processes required to interpret concrete reality, and if it is as Vaihingerian logic would have it, an object of fictionality, then we must experience an *objectively abstract fictional reality*. This significantly deviates at a critical juncture between constructionism and abstractionism in what constitutes reality. Additionally, this addresses Andrews' (2012: 41) amalgamated critique from Bury (1986), Burr (2006), Craib (1997), Schwandt (2003), and Sismondo (1993), that constructionism fails to recognise objective reality.

Following from this, we can again draw upon the instance of the fictional novel noted by Thomasson (1999: xi). There is little difference between a legal statute and a fictional novel. If the content of an abstract object is fictional, or imagined, or parallaxic, or interpretable, then the notion of a subjective 'reality' is really one of a subjective fictional facticity. It is a fact that the Equality Act 2010, section 1(1) states:

> An authority to which this section applies must, when making decisions
> of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard
> to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce

the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.

This is a fact about a bureaucratic fiction which exists as an objective object external from us. Further, it also aids the reification of other fictions such as the economy; and ideologised truths-about-fiction are also implicit in the form of the morally relativistic notion that economic disadvantage is an inevitable fact of life. Constructionist, Mouzelis (2016: 39), adamantly states in relation to social structures that "there can be absolutely no objection to the notion of externality" therefore finding harmony with abstractionism on externality. Further, it is important to consider that the constructionist notion of objectivations constituting an objective reality seems to imply that objectivations are the sum total of reality when it would make more sense to consider objectivations as only part of a reality. Berger and Luckmann (1991: 34-35) assert that everyday life, in the awakened state, is the reality *par excellence* due to its imposition and urgency from its privileged position entitling it to "the designation of paramount reality". Perhaps this is reflective of Plato's remarks on the forms being more real than the real (Smits & Fell, 2011: 185). This implies a multiplicity of realties which they affirm stating "I am conscious of the world as consisting of multiple realities". This suggests that, rather than a single, universal concrete reality, there are multiple realties. However, these multiple realities, for abstractionism, must then be *abstract* realities independent of the concrete and, further, objectively abstract fictional realities.

Thus, there is objective concrete reality (singular) and objectively abstract fictional realities (multiple and individualised). As such, all abstract realities then are malleable,

changeable, creatable, and destructible *in the abstract*. Again, we can draw upon bureaucratic objects to demonstrate this. If an individual has debt held against them, and they claim benefits, then the debt and the objects of the welfare state are all objectively abstract fictional realities that are individualised. The next individual might share similar status but have a differing abstract reality created by those objects – differing amounts of debts, differing origins of debt, or differing conditions for claiming Universal Credit. However, their concrete reality may be exactly the same or at least susceptible to the exact same outcomes associated with poverty. Further, if the content of the abstract object (claimant commitment for example) is fictional, or imagined, or parallaxic, or interpretable, then its objective reality is ultimately an objectively abstract fictional reality open to subjective facticity. As such, social truths become truths about fiction, abstract realities become individualised, and as a consequence so too do interstices.

Though divergent from constructionism, abstractionism draws particular agreement with constructionism around reification. Berger and Luckmann (1991: 108) illuminate reification stating: "Through reification, the world of institutions appears to merge with the world of nature. It becomes necessity and fate, and is lived through as such, happily or un-happily as the case may be". This implies through happiness that reality is individualised, and the merging of institutions with nature implies the abstract realm reified onto the consciousness and synchronous domination. They further demonstrate the blending of the abstract with the consciousness by extending the same principles to job roles saying: "the paradigmatic formula for this kind of reification is the statement 'I have no choice in the matter, I have to act this way because of my

position' - as husband, father, general, archbishop, chairman of the board, gangster or hangman". In social abstractionist terms, this is praxis enacted under the reified abstractum of a given job title or position. Further, it can be argued that this concept, the reification of the abstract, is essentially the *modus operandi* of bureaucratic method. Bureaucratic objects can only function from either the violence which they mask, or from the reification of the object. As such, I draw agreement with Berger and Luckmann's (1991: 109) argument that sociology "must take special note of the social circumstances that favour de-reification". A turn towards dereifying abstract objects, especially those objects which have been ideologised through neoliberal assiduousness, may "draw back the curtain" and reveal the true "apparatus of power" (Lefebvre, 1991: 287). Similarly, Haslanger (2012: 5) also raises the question "What is the illusion (if any), and what is the reality (if any) in social constructions"? Although Haslanger ultimately argues for social constructions being 'real', by categorising constructions as 'real' it perpetuates the reification of abstracta and undermines her quest for social constructionism to "locate the levers for social change" (p. 30). Rather, by focusing on what is concrete, and by focusing on abstract objects as objectively abstract fictions, we uncover the nature of abstract objects and also the effects of abstract objects which become much more examinable in the quest for locating the levers of social change. For example, the 'economy' reified appears as a concrete entity. By dereifying this entity and revealing its true nature as abstract fiction, it unveils the fact that economic effects in the concrete are not inevitable and are in fact consequences of choices made by power and perpetuated through abstract objects. Moreso, the dereification of the money abstractum reveals that the function of money as abstract object is also not concrete. Its mediating properties are malleable to

properties which facilitate functions to better lives for everybody as opposed to a minority.

The fact that abstract objects exist in an abstract layer, can be fictional, temporal, abstractly spatial, or changeable, shows the very location of social change potentialities. Mallon (2004) infers similar necessities through questioning social constructionist notions of race. As race(s) are abstract objects, we can actually favour Berger and Luckmann's position which argues to elevate the need for sociology to note targets for dereification. Race is one such target. When we view the externalised, axiomatic abstractum of a given race as being encoded with attributes, we inherently desynchronise race from the person and can begin to analyse the object itself. In doing so, we acknowledge its abstract nature. Even this step alone can trigger a chain of dereification. Further, Mallon (2004: 668) ponders which "conceptual apparatus do we need to discuss racial classification and racially associated phenomena in historical and contemporary life" and the answer here is again through abstract objects and spaces. By discussing it as an abstract object, it reveals the illusory nature of race by demonstrating that, in fact, race is and has an external, temporal existence; it came into being at a certain time and was designated encoded attributes of race intended to synchronously dominate the individual. Further, by dereifying the abstractum, it can be attributed with historicity and its fictionality made explicit. Gender too could be approached on these same principles. Some preliminary considerations for methods of dereification could include being aware of the limitations and assumptions of any abstractum and not confusing it with the actual complexity and diversity of reality. For example, one might acknowledge in a Baudrillardian sense that a map is not the

territory, or in ways such as race is not the person, that rules are not concrete, that policies, laws, and regulations share the same principles as fictional novels. Further, being sensitive to the aesthetic, emotional, and ethical dimensions of experience that might be lost or distorted by excessive abstraction or rationalisation could lead to an appreciation of the beauty, value, and uniqueness of the concrete in isolation from the abstract attributions of others. This itself could help develop the techniques in order to help interpret the wider complexities of the concrete instead of the ever-increasing complexities of the abstract. In doing so, it also unveils potentialities for agency which, thus far, I have not been able to consider in any great depth.

There is no doubt that this thesis presents the image of the absence of agency, but this is not my intent. The ramifications for agency are visible in many ways. Agency is a form of power, "a power to originate action" (Bandura, 2001: 6) and this power can be enacted through various oppositions to abstract objects. This already occurs quite explicitly, although without reference to abstract objects, within various movements of taxonomic reclamations. Campaigns or movements that on the surface seek to reclaim words such as queer (e.g., Rand, 2014; Brontsema, 2004; Birch-Bayley, 2019), fat (e.g., Lee & McAvan, 2021: Cook et al., 2019; Wann, 2009), or slut (Borah & Nandi, 2012; Hill, 2015; Nguyen, 2013), are also projects for the dereification of abstract objects. They seek to manipulate and alter the abstractum in each case which skews the parallaxic nature of these abstracta towards more positive encoded attributes or by undermining them altogether. By promoting one possible view of the object and obscuring the other, a dominant incarnation of the abstractum is formed. Looking closer, the 'fat acceptance movement' for example is described by Arteaga (2013: 2)

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as being the academic and social movement to end the social, legal, and economic discrimination of fat people and their position as "abject, excessive, and undesirable". In this example, "abject, excessive, and undesirable" are attributes encoded in the abstractum of 'fat person'. Historically, the 'fat person' abstractum had the encoded attributes of wealth and beauty as opposed to contemporary encoded attributes which see it as 'unhealthy', 'disgusting', and associated with poverty (Forth, 2013: 135-136). These encoded attributes are linked to the ideologisation of 'fat' which sees the neoliberal manipulate the abstractum's encoded attributes in relation to responsibility, self-discipline, self-surveillance, and resilience. In rejecting these encoded attributes and by manipulating the abstractum once more to convey new meanings, the gargantuan task of altering legal, social, and economic abstracta individually can be circumvented at root by altering the abstractum of 'fat person' and directing the new abstractum until it takes hold in the social consciousness. Through the subsequent reification on the consciousness, *if* change can be realised, then the altered abstractum of 'fat person' can then come to be diffused within legal, social, and economic abstracta. However, alternatively, it highlights the powerlessness to actually create abstract objects as, if it requires an entire movement to simply force a change of a pre-existing abstractum, then it also reveals the near impossibility of the powerless to create an abstractum imbued with casual continuity. In other words, the powerless cannot create abstracta which convey an empowerment to the individual (a human right for example) without the power of money or bureaucratic force. They are locked out of the mechanisms and key positions which facilitate the creation of abstract objects. However, it does both evidence that agency is at work and yet also the restrictive forces on that agency.

It is in the restrictive forces enacted upon the consciousness through which can be seen the dispossession of agency not only in the moment, but across the life-course. From the moment we are subjected to rules, exposed to institutions such as school, and dominated by laws, agency is stripped through the conversion of concrete reality to an objectively abstract fictional reality. Across the life-course, fatalism can set in at any given point, a point at which the individual consigns themselves to what is seemingly inevitable through processes inherent to the abstract. Carroll and Greeno (2013: 128), for example, locate a fatalism within activism which is driven by the disciplinarian nature of the 'free market'. The breadth at which the free-market operates gives a perception of being insurmountable due to the fallacious nature of its reification. This itself links to Paulo Freire's (2000: 64, 163-164) observation of the reflection of ideological power in the fatalistic statements of peasants: "the oppressed are reluctant to resist, and totally lack confidence in themselves. They have a diffuse, magical belief in the invulnerability and power of the oppressor" but further "it is extremely unlikely that these self-mistrustful, downtrodden, hopeless people will seek their own liberation—an act of rebellion which they may view as a disobedient violation of the will of God, as an unwarranted confrontation with destiny". Rather than God, the confrontation under a neoliberalised abstract is a confrontation with the exigencies of the money abstractum and the demands of its apostles yet it carries the same fictional constitution to which fatalism and its de-agentic continuities function. Other de-agentic forces may include the oversimplification of complex phenomena such as racialisation or gender which become simplified to the point of basic stereotypes through which encoded attributes are attached, complexity is stripped, and meaning becomes ingrained. This in itself can and does lead to essentialist or discriminatory thinking which becomes ingrained into the social consciousness. Through this process, the

loss of knowledge surrounding underlying meanings, complexities, and values becomes lost thus stripping access to the wider breadth of knowledge that facilitates agency. In these ways, structure is able to usurp agency much of the time, yet, if one were to strip away all that is abstract, then only agency remains as structure itself is abstract whilst agency is a concrete process of being human.

Another area for consideration, and which may also draw comparison for abstractionism, is symbolic interactionism. The traditional explanations of symbolic interactionism such as from Blumer (1969) maintain an essence of primitivity to them. Blumer's (1969: 80) initial stage in the process of symbolic interactionism is "first, to indicate something is to extricate it from its setting, to hold it apart, to give it a meaning or, in Mead's language, to make it into an object". This is, in fact, the abstracting process, the point at which the complexities of the concrete are abstracted into a simplified object - the abstractum. From there, according to Blumer (1969: 82), the individual, assumingly through an expression of agency, performs actions "built up by the individual through noting and interpreting features of the situations in which he acts" and consequentially "group or collective action consists of the aligning of individual actions, brought about by the individuals' interpreting or taking into account each other's actions". It is not that this is specifically wrong, but rather it remains a primitive interpretation. It seems to presume an innocent negotiating of meaning between individual and party as it would happen at the root of human communication without outside influence. This way of thinking does not do enough to address the monolithic scale of already existing abstracta and the role that power plays in overseeing them, including at the time of both Blumer and Mead. Although this directs

us towards the agency vs. structure argument outlined by Fine (1993: 69-70) regarding whether it is the individual who influences society or society that influences the individual, there has been enough advancement in the field of power relative to the functioning of abstract objects to argue that what the individual actually does is act in accordance with the collective actions of *power* through the echelons and matrices of already existing abstracta; a kind of agentic freedom within abstract bounds. However, in stating that, we return once again to the boundaries of the interstice and the ability of power to constrict that agentic-freedom-within-bounds to whatever extent it wishes. This then sits somewhat in opposition to Blumer's (1969: 80) statement "the object [symbol] is a product of the individual's disposition to act instead of being an antecedent stimulus which evokes the act". Rather than simply being a product of the "disposition to act", the abstractum is a result of the individual's power to create and enforce the abstract. This is why it is considered so important that power is able to rule without overt concrete violence as concrete violence simply reveals that the truth behind power is that very concrete violence.

Ideologically, although the focus was purely on neoliberalism, I do not intend to ignore the fact there are other ideologies present even within a neoliberalised system. However, given the dominance of the neoliberal ideological matrices and their level of flexibility, the neoliberal system can allow those other ideologies to maintain an existence without any overt threat to its dominance. It presents the illusion of freedom for religions or competing economic narratives because the dominance of neoliberalism allows it to control the discourse (abstract media articles imbued with neoliberalised truth-values for example). However, in an alternative hierarchy of

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echelonic abstracta, where the ideology takes a differing form from neoliberalism, social democracy for example, then we can apply abstractionist principles to that too. In this example, there remains similar bureaucracy, similar praxis, similar reification, and the money abstractum still functions as the *nexus rerum et hominem*. However, rather than being encoded with a disciplinary, authoritarian function, and being accumulated by power to the point where it becomes fallaciously scarcified, it instead functions in a manner which is more fulfilling of people's needs. Further, within abstractionism, there is not a significant difference between neoliberalism and social democracy in terms of the echelonic structure. All that needs to change are the *functions* of each echelon thus money remains the *nexus rerum et hominem* but its functions change to being redistributive; power functions in the same way but diffuses bureaucratic objects in a manner which benefits the needs of people rather than profit; country and nation can function in a manner which includes rather than excludes, but also in a manner which restricts and prevents metaspatialisation insofar as, for example, preventing imperialism, colonialism, or the spread of other ideological impositions; and the state can function in a manner which aids and promotes through bureaucratic abstracta the tenets required to realise these goals. Thus, under the reification of ideologised bureaucratic abstracta, praxis comes to liberate or at least remove the extreme restrictive capacities from the interstice, to widen its abstract borders rather than persist in restricting every individual. In turn, fewer liminal border crossings are required allowing for cathexic expenditure to lessen and ultimately allow for a more peaceful, more participatory, and better experience of life.

Similar principles discussed in agency also extend to identity. Identity too can be seen as an abstract object. For example, Becker's (1973) interactionist concept of identity is one through which identity is 'formed' through labelling by others, a concept also shared by Paternoster and Iovanni (1989) and Braithwaite (1989). In the case of 'labelling', the 'label' can be seen as either the abstractum itself, or an encoded attribute of an abstractum. This becomes much clearer when also drawing upon interactionist concepts of stigma such as those of Goffman (1986), and instances of stigma exemplified by Link and Phelan (2001: 363) including the 'exotic dancer' (Lewis, 1998), the 'leper' (Opala & Boillot, 1996), or the 'unemployed' (Walsgrove, 1987). The 'leper' in Opala and Boillot's (1996) study for example, is both identity and stigmatic. They describe the 'leper' as it is seen through the eyes of Limbas in Sierra Leone who frame leprosy as a result of witchcraft. In abstractionist terms, the 'leper' is an abstract object external to the individual experiencing a concrete illness. In this case, the origins of leprosy in witchcraft imply a moral defect, an encoded attribute of evil given to the externalised identity abstractum. Similarly, the 'unemployed' abstractum is given the same treatment. Beveridge (1960: 15) himself stated the "greatest evil of unemployment is not physical but moral…the hatred and fear which it breeds". Thus, the 'evil' and 'immoral' 'leper' and the 'evil' and 'immoral' 'unemployed' share the same encoded attributes between external identity objects. In each case, these encoded attributes are fictional. There is nothing directly evil about the individual who is sick or unemployed in relation to sickness or unemployment. In both cases, the abstractum and its encoded attributes come to synchronously dominate the individual. In labelling theory, this can be seen as internalisation or the self-fulfilling prophecy but in abstractionism this is essentially reification of the external abstractum. The consequences for the 'leper' can be expulsion from the 'village' or painful practices to

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combat witchcraft including the use of hot knives to burn the red patches of skin caused by leprosy and turn the red skin black; for the 'unemployed', ridicule, shame, poverty, and exclusion become the norm (Negus, 2021).

Further, we can also incorporate the concept of multiple identities put forward by Goffman. Goffman (1986) identifies three types of identity, the 'social identity', the 'personal identity', and the 'ego identity', but what he really identifies are three differing, encoded abstracta synchronously dominating the concrete person. To illuminate, 'Gary' is an externalised abstractum of a concrete person imbued with encoded attributes. At 'work', the attributes of 'Gary' may differ from the attributes of 'Gary' at 'home'. Thus, the 'work' 'Gary' may have the attributes of 'hard-working' or 'efficient'. At 'home', 'Gary' may have the attributes of 'lazy' or 'loud'. In each case, 'Gary' is a parallaxic abstractum which, when viewed from different positions, appears different. Goffman's (2021) presentation of self then, could be seen as an individual's attempt to control what is attributable to them. This is a similar principle to the 'image is everything' used in brand management or even nation branding. The careful cultivation of image is of paramount importance as it is from this abstract image matrix which reification becomes a consequence. For 'Gary', the extent to which 'Gary' controls this image, and therefore the encoded attributes of 'Gary', could be seen as a form of agency. The external object of identity in such a case illuminates its parallaxic nature rather than there being multiple identities. Similarly, Goffman's (1986: 10) definition of stigma described it as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" again essentially encoding an abstractum with a set of attributes. However, stigmatisation in abstractionist terms bears ramifications for other sociological concepts such as the

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folk-devil (Cohen, 2011) or the 'social abjection' (Tyler, 2013). There is some support for this from the social constructionist camp with Berger and Luckmann (1991: 108) stating that:

> Finally, identity itself (the total self, if one prefers) may be reified, both one's own and that of others. There is then a total identification of the individual with his socially assigned typifications. He is apprehended as nothing but that type.

Again, this reflects Hegel's (1966: 463) argument that abstraction is a vice through which complex social phenomena are erased in favour of individual facets of said phenomena. Butler (2016: 3-4) interpreted this as an annulment of human essence thus favours what could be seen as the simplified and encoded abstractum.

Power has already been reconsidered via the notion that power is exercised through the creating, destructing, and altering of abstract objects, spontaneous reification, and violence through the abstract. Additionally, Weber's (1978) rational-legal authority was reframed to demonstrate each in relation to abstracta. However, the implications go further than this when we reconsider the classic sociological interpretations of power. Steven Lukes' (2004) 'three faces of power' position is built from a tripartite schematic whereby power is exercised through one of three methods: *decision making power* where individuals exercise power specifically from being in the position to, and having access to the mechanisms for, making decisions such as policy decisions; *non-decision-making power* is a power wielded to prevent issues or interests from being discussed or through the prevention of access to knowledge which itself could be wielded to prevent informed decision-making; and *ideological power* shapes desires

and encourages social groups to be manipulated into accepting conditions unfavourable or harmful to them. In each case, these 'three faces' can be reconciled with abstracta. Decision-making is generally exercised by those enacting praxis under a given abstract position. It is a mechanism through which an exercise of choice is enjoyed by power; a choice over the way in which abstracta are directed. Non-decision-making power can also manifest in abstract objects and spaces. Where access to the creation of abstracta is limited or restricted, the utilisation of abstracta as handed down by power can be exercised by the individual authorised to exercise non-decision-making power in continuity with the object and space. Thus, a teacher has power to convey pre-authorised knowledge and values onto a child without having any access to the decision-making mechanism. Ideological power in Lukes' consideration can be seen as a power over the beliefs, values, norms, and shaping the opinions of individuals. Thus, again, at the root is power over the ideologisation of abstract objects which may manifest for example, in line with Lukes' considerations that ideological power results in people accepting conditions harmful to them, voting for a political party who aligns ideologically with privatisation of public services. This is often through appeals to money and the inherent ideologised economic logic of neoliberalism such as the tenets of freedom of choice, free-markets, efficiency, and individual consumption which makes privatisation appear commonsensical as opposed to detrimental for the voter.

C. Wright Mills' (1999) theory of the 'Power Elite' also falls under the radar of abstractionism. Mills argued that there exists a small group of people across institutions such as military, corporate, and political institutions, with access to the

mechanisms of power. Mills further argues that those in these positions may not necessarily be conscious of their control over the exercising of power. Furthermore, they tend to share a similar worldview or background with each other. Again, what Mills is referring to are the abstracta of power. Via abstract positions under which praxis is enacted and directed through the reified belief of the position as a concrete reality, the individual performs their role of power. Further, the institutions through which these channel are abstract objects, their shared beliefs become imbued in the abstracta of ideology, and the dissemination of ideologised abstracta occurs through diffusion of abstract objects such as policies. Mills (1999: 14) hints at reification when he states of the power-elite:

> They come readily to define themselves as inherently worthy of what they possess; they come to believe themselves 'naturally' elite; and, in fact, to imagine their possessions and their privileges as natural extensions of their own elite selves. In this sense, the idea of the elite as composed of men and women having a finer moral character is an ideology of the elite as a privileged ruling stratum.

This may be seen as particularly relevant to the British class system, itself an abstract matrix. Mills' quote also seems to further imply that their social position is reified, itself a reification of the class system and, as a consequence, those who are not of an elite social position will see themselves accordingly. Thus, power continues to manifest through this reification of social position. The dismantling of class through its dereification then, would signify agentic response in what Marxism would categorise as a site of class struggle. This implies a consequence for Marxism too in the form of dereification of social class and, as a side note, the role of capital in that class system.

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The sociology of religion could also, although undoubtedly controversial, reframe religion through abstract objects and spaces. Whichever God, or Gods, are central to a given religion can be framed as axiomatic, parallaxic abstracta which are utilised in similar fashion to the nation abstractum. Through the abstractum of God (or other deity), the instantiations of God within various concrete representations of religious abstracta such as Bibles or statues come to denote a relationship between that which is abstract and that which is concrete. There are matrices of religious abstracta which together form a totality of any given religion. As far back as Durkheim's (2002: 277) study into suicide, itself performed within a religious frame, Durkheim refers to the religion surrounding the deity called Jahwe as being abstract. Durkheim (2002: 300-301) later states:

> It is true that, both intrinsically and abstractly, the religious symbols by means of which we explain the respect inspired in us by human personality are not adequate to reality, and this is easily proveable.

But also:

> Such is the source of all the ideas of transcendency which form the bases of religions and morals…whether we ascribe them to a personal being of a special nature or to some abstract force which we vaguely hypostasize.

Hypostasize is synonymic to the term 'reify'. Durkheim then, determined religion to be resident within the abstract ultimately coming to be reified. Further, he noted that religion was very much within the symbols (abstract objects) and rituals (praxis) which formed, in similar fashion to the nation abstractum, the imagined community. This itself paves the way for a social abstractionist approach which could analyse religion

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through abstract objects and abstract spaces, particularly around existing 'sacred spaces' literature (e.g., O'Brien, 2016; Nelson, 2006; Dodson & Batista, 2008). It also has a demonstrative power insofar as it shows that the Echelons of Abstracta as covered in this thesis do indeed vary depending on a given culture and epoch. For example, in the UK, religion, although still a pervasive concept, has lost much of its hold over society in the move towards a greater secularism (Voas & Bruce, 2019: 8), at least as compared to historical periods. In the US, religion still maintains a greater influence although this too is in decline (Pew Research Center, 2022: 20). However, in both the UK and US, religion could be seen as being below the state on the basis that it is still subject to legal abstracta created under the instantiation of the state abstractum. Relatedly, the intersecting concept of 'separation of church and state' as seen in the US would also be ripe for analysis.

Social abstractionism makes a significant contribution towards the sociology of space or what authors such as O'Guinn et al. (2015) refer to as the 'topological turn', the point at which sociology began to consider space specifically around the late 1980's. As such, the sociology of space as a categorisation is relatively young. Foucault (1986: 23) for example argues:

> "We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another"

From here, Foucault outlines his ideas of utopias and heterotopias. Utopias are "sites with no real place…that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the

real space of Society…present society itself in a perfected form…but…are fundamentally unreal spaces" and heterotopias are "outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality". It is correct that space constitutes a set of complex relations and that we live inside of them but we predominantly live them abstractly with only minimal concrete relations. Utopias, from Foucault's description, are framed as placeless in a traditionally Platonist meaning as too are heterotopias. The utopian aspect could be viewed as the created abstract object, an object which is perceived to, as Stinchcombe (2001: 3) would argue, "preserve what is essential in the substance"; a perfect abstractum. Unlike Foucault's position, abstract space, as well as abstract objects, are indeed superimposable as argued by Lefebvre (1991) throughout his *magnum opus*. There is no concrete space of education for example, only the superimposition of the external layer reified under which abstractly spatialised praxis occurs. This matters as there are multiple superimpositions on the same concrete geographical reality. The superimposition of education space is, in simultaneity, superimposed by the legal abstracta which designate it as such in addition to the customs, curricula, or standards. Each creates a superimposed space and consequentially the borders of the interstice to which those within those spaces are bounded.

In the final, and perhaps most profound, considerations of the implications of social abstractionist thinking, the notion that we live in an objectively abstract fictional reality could have severe ramifications. It brings to the forefront the idea that much of what we experience in modern society is unnecessary and is controlled and ordered by power, not just the result of nature's coincidences. When we draw together the totality

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of the abstract matrices of objects, the reification of these matrices constitutes each individual's reality, but it is an abstract fictional reality based on abstract objects. Thus, our perception of reality is not a perception of reality at all but a fictional perception of a personalised abstract configuration. As a consequence, such a profound realisation that our entire mental schema of reality is false could result in mental health issues such as anxiety, identity crisis, depersonalisation, or even existential angst. This might be particularly the case on the realisation that when the matrices of the abstract are withdrawn, all that is left is the exposed violence of power which, in itself, may give rise to widespread anger or resentment. Given that each society is built on the abstract, the realisation that nothing needs to be the way it is may give rise to many chaotic reactions such as mass refusal to adhere to laws, customs, or other social expectation. This may be met with extreme violence by the stewards of abstracta who seek to maintain their position through concrete violence to maintain power over the abstract. Further, it raises the question of whether society can function at all without the abstract matrices on which it is built.

In summary, I have attempted to show some insight into the implications and potentialities for social abstractionist thinking. I have shown the divergence between social constructionism and symbolic interactionism, at least on some core divergences. I have further utilised some implications and possibilities for other areas including identity, religion, and agency and possible sites of future research. I finished by considering a selection of more profound scenarios for social abstractionist thinking including the exposure of a fundamental violence. These implications should be treated as an initial set of indicative implications for sociological potential rather than

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a rigorous and complete analysis. They should serve as an initial point of departure in helping to give inspiration for abstractionist direction in terms of further intellectual enquiry.

The Conclusion

Drawing together what has been discovered and outlined in this exploratory work I can begin to draw together initial conclusions and potential for social abstractionism. The starting point for this exploration was based on Schopenhauer's observation that we live a second life in the abstract and I asked what this second abstract life that we live actually is. Additionally, drawing on personal experience, inspiration from Plato's (1997) Allegory of the Cave, and perhaps a Kantian 'outer sense' (Casey, 1997: 192), I set about investigating abstract objects and abstract spaces as they might pertain to sociology. I embarked on a literature review with intent to utilise it to perform three functions. The first two were as a typical review of the literature relative to the research topic and to also draw out implicit and explicit themes across sociology and other fields which implicate abstract objects and spaces. Further, these first two functions sought to answer the questions: *what basis is there in the existing literature to suggest an opportunity for a social abstractionist mode of thinking* and *how are others appealing to the abstract in ways which are not explicit?* Across many concepts such as the 'world of ideas' posited by Plato (1997), Hermite (cited in Darboux, 1906: 46), and Popper (1980), the 'Forms' of Plato (1997), Khôra of Kristeva (1984) and Derrida et al. (1997), and 'Basho' of Nishida (2012), I demonstrated that there is much support for an externally abstract 'layer'. In further relation to this 'layer' I also consolidated some of the literature on abstract objects as well as the detractors of this external existence from the nominalist perspective.

Although there is unlikely to be any resolution to the Platonist/Nominalist division, there remains significant support for abstract objects in the form of numbers, music, and novels. However, none of the literature explicitly addressed other socially produced objects such as laws, rules, and regulations, as being of the same nature. As such, grounds were established on which these commanded addressing. I concluded that there are grounds on which abstract objects, when considered socially produced, did not align with traditional Platonist attributes such as non-temporality and non-spatiality. Social abstractionism thus contributes to a rethinking of these encoded attributes sociologically by arguing that abstract objects are indeed spatial and temporal when viewed through the notion of socially produced abstracta and abstract space. I also outlined sociological threads in the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) in relation to the concept of abstract space but came to utilise the notion of abstract space as a much more present factor relative to abstract objects and reflecting that abstract 'layer' and the 'world of ideas'. At the same time, I highlighted the absence of these concepts of abstract objects and abstract spaces in sociology whilst simultaneously examining how authors are implicitly appealing to the abstract in ways which are not made explicit. Notions such as Weber's (1978) 'iron cage', Nishida's (2012) 'Basho', Derrida et al.'s (1997) Khora, Plato's (1997) 'world of ideas', and Bourdieu's (2000) 'bureaucratic field' all imply abstract space. Durkheim's (1982: 59) 'social facts', Babbie (2008: 108) on social artefacts, and Thomasson (1999: xi) on fictional characters all suggest socially produced abstracta. Olivecrona (1939: 56-57) and Stinchcombe (2001: 45) further implied that abstracta can be created. The lack of sociological insight into the uses for these ideas paves the way for an original method of thought sociologically. The combination of these two fundamental concepts, abstract objects and abstract space, gives rise to the essential frame and lens of social

abstractionism. By viewing the social through these two concepts, we gain original insight into the workings of external structures and objects.

The third function of the literature review was used to help justify and formulate an initial methodology for the wider thesis and for social abstractionism in general. The methodology, produced from the literature on abstract objects and abstract spaces, goes towards answering the question, *what method can we use for interpreting the abstract in sociology?* Again, I looked at traditional Platonist formulations of abstract objects to show that they cannot account for socially produced abstract objects. Platonists view abstracta as external, non-spatial, non-temporal, non-causal, indestructible, uncreatable, unchangeable, and shapeless and locationless. With the exception of externality, I argued the inverse and that these attributes are actually abstractly encoded. What the literature review showed was that there was evidence that abstract objects were not limited to the traditional Platonist attributes. By considering bureaucracy and its abstract nature within the literature review, laws, regulations, licences, or standards as well as ranks, job positions, and authority, were shown to have an abstract existence. This reinforced the idea that socially produced abstracta, with the exception of externality, can indeed be the inverse of traditional Platonist thinking. Further, although Platonists argue that abstract objects cannot have attributes, it can still be argued that abstracta can have at least three attributes: the attribute of being parallaxic, that is, as appearing differently depending on how the object is viewed abstractly; the attribute of being axiomatic, that is, as something assumed pre-existing and true; and the attribute of being fictional, as in it is a work of fiction made external. Whilst some may claim this invokes the fallacy of reification, by

framing the attributes as being encoded rather than an inherent property of the abstractum, this fallacy is avoided.

In the four chapters of The Abstracta of Capital, The Abstracta of Power, The Abstracta of Ideology, and The Abstracta of Country, Nation, and State, together the 'Echelons of Abstracta', I explored the questions: *how might social abstractionism look and how would it approach traditional sociological concepts such as capital, power, or ideology*; and *how might we view the effects of these traditional sociological concepts when viewed through social abstractionism in relation to human beings individually or in groups?* The abstract nature of money was considered as well as its status as the *nexus rerum et hominem*, that which binds us. In its totalised reification together with its axiomatic and intangible origins, the social consciousness has lost awareness of its abstractness. As such, power and bureaucracy have come to be not only subservient to its exigencies, but also its advocate to the point that neoliberal ideology has been conceived to reshape existing abstracta towards its profit exigencies. The mediating encoding of money has come to be the abstract middleman in all relationships, including with the concrete world and every social relationship possibility, and its global metaspatialisation dominates cathexis through its formation of incalculable borders of the interstice. This perhaps addresses Ganβmann's (1988: 312) argument that sociologists have failed to grasp the extent to which money has formed a mediating presence. By reframing money as abstract and instantiated within other capital abstracta, I outlined the various types of abstract objects that money resides in and argued that these each create their own abstract spaces such as the debt interstice. The money abstractum, and its objects of instantiation, sets abstract

borders which can imprison us within interstices of poverty and these borders are creatable and controllable as demonstrated later by the focus on benefit claimants. Many borders can be abstractly designated such as between heating or cold, food or hunger, health or ill health.

Abstractionism thus makes headway into a reconciling a number of problems. The various considerations of the functions of money such as those noted by Murad (1943), Marx and Engels (2010d, 2010e, 2010f), or Wang (2019) are perhaps *all* correct. It can function however it is directed to function by the stewards of abstracta or any person(s) with access to the mechanisms which set the functioning of money. By giving reason for money's abstractness, some of the claims made by those who designate money as abstract but could not explain why such as Dreiling and Darves (2016: 15), Köhler (2019: 99), Vatter (2017: 70), and Prusik (2020: 155) may be resolved. The act of acknowledging the abstractness of money, and all of its subsequent functions, may act as a dereifying mechanism to "draw back the curtain" and reveal the true "apparatus of power" (Lefebvre, 1991: 287). If money functions as the *nexus rerum et hominem*, then the dereifying of the *nexus rerum et hominem* may allow the reconnecting of human binds as opposed to the abstract and controllable binds of the money abstractum. This does not necessarily imply that in order to have a good human experience we have to outrightly abandon money or even capitalism itself, but that it shows that money can be, at a minimum, exploited for the actual good it can do rather than its harbouring under neoliberal ideology. In other words, it can be reideologised once more, reconfigured positively.

Power, exercised under the reified *nexus rerum et hominem*, was shown to function through the creation, alteration, and control over the abstract realm. Its functioning through abstract objects of bureaucracy allows power to perpetually create and recreate abstract matrices of dominating objects which, in general, activate or otherwise control various guises of praxis in order to direct towards the exigencies of the money abstractum. Under the guise of key positions, stewards of abstracta involved in the creating of abstracta encode them with truth values which are subsequently spontaneously reified and mask the fictionality, and often the violence, of the abstractum. Although those who exercise power are ultimately subject to various interstitial manifestations, power exercisers have much more flexibility in how that interstice affects them. It was shown that the highest powers can manipulate and exempt themselves from their own abstract creations such as through tax havens and that, through the creation of abstract spaces unavailable to those subject to power, power exercisers can maintain a greater level of freedom. This was in opposition to the powerless who have scant agency in resisting the top-down synchronous domination of the abstractum and have little choice but to accept their interstitial conditions. Additionally, attempts to influence abstracta via lobbying was considered as well as the metaspatialisation of influences of power exemplified thorough US military bases. At the lower end of the power spectrum, lesser powers were shown as being restricted to *utilising* abstracta within the course of praxis whilst lacking access to the mechanisms through which abstracta can be created except for some limited breadth allowed for their creation within the borders set by greater abstracta such as legal frameworks, usually by meso-level power.

In terms of ideology, I focused on neoliberalism considering its existing formulations before moving on to show its function as an abstract playbook utilised to structure the abstract 'realm'. This was shown to be exposed by the notion of restructuring which makes visible the changes or alterations being made to abstract objects. Ideology is a set of external conceptual collections which disseminate truth-bearing fictions of a given logic. Through the bureaucratic method of policy diffusion, it was shown that both newly created and pre-existing abstract objects can be ideologised to conform to the tenets of the playbook and can metaspatialise beyond expected abstract spaces. The fact that these manifest predominantly within the incalculable matrices of bureaucracy such as laws, documents, licences, and regulations but also at a much higher level through capital, power, ideology, countries, nations, and states, all of which are bureaucratic, shows that the structure of society under ideologised truth-bearing fictions equates to significant fictional experiences of the world and life itself.

Further, this bridges a gap between sociology and social policy and unveils the fact that policies are simply abstract fictions that we come to accept as concrete where no concreteness exists. In turn, the reification of policies, and the 'hidden hand' of ideology, work in tandem to instruct, direct, dehumanise, categorise, stereotype, and otherwise disseminate fictions which are ultimately reified onto the conscious and performed in praxis across the whole of society at all levels. Although neoliberalism was the focus, the same principles could be applied to any ideology, even those that have not always taken root within bureaucratic methods such as some religious ideologies. Additionally, time was shown also to be an ideologised concept through which life becomes bound to fictional time sequencing with an ideologised division

between monetised and non-monetised time frames being manifest within the neoliberal. I further briefly considered how agency is undermined by neoliberalism and how the interstice is configured through tenets of ideology such as austerity and the violence they inflict via the abstract. Together this shows us how power uses abstract objects in a systematic fashion to condition both consciousness and praxis towards the money abstractum.

Using the social abstractionist frame, country, nation, and state were reconceptualised as abstract objects and spaces. The borders of a country were argued to be hewn from violence but ultimately become abstract objects and spaces of bureaucracy. Examples were given to show how the abstracta of country could be created and destroyed in opposition to traditional Platonist attributes. Further, the internality of country was also shown to be divisible into further abstractly designated spaces. The nation abstractum was shown to be subservient to country as well as power through the imagined community and fantasy social relationships conducted through fictions attributed to the nation abstractum such as collective memory, historical 'facts', cultural myth, and conscious manipulation. It was shown that the nation abstractum became instantiated within other objects as a kind of nation branding to help mediate people via the fictional community. Nation was further demonstrated as metaspatial through the example of diasporas. The state was also considered as an abstract object both buttressed by, and instantiated in, innumerable abstracta including the welfare state. Together, the three echelons form a stable tripartite coterminously. Yet, on the borders of the state, where one state ends and another begins, both in the realm of the abstract, concrete violence can and does occur. Failure to maintain coterminosity may

result in the rise of gangs who themselves maintain their own abstract spaces through gang demarcated territory. Ultimately, in the imagined and thus fictitious community, the individual is mediated by abstract objects again rather than concrete human relations. Fictional identities are internalised aiding in detaching the individual from actualities and go towards separating human connections through fictional attributes of Britishness for example.

The Echelons of Abstracta then, show that there is a hierarchy of externalised abstract structure. The money abstractum sits at the top as the *nexus rerum et hominem*, that which binds us. Under this reified abstractum, those in high positions of power, the stewards of abstracta, are able to create, alter, or destroy objects which conform to the exigencies of the reified money abstractum. Through utilising the abstract playbook of neoliberalism, they diffuse ideologised objects in order to achieve this. Further, occurring within the abstract bounds of country, power also utilises the imagined community of nation to draw people together whilst using the state as an object through which power and control is conveyed via causal continuity and spontaneous reification of ideologised abstracta. Together, these all form abstract bounds for individuals which, in totality, constitutes the interstice which they must traverse liminally on many fronts. It is important to reiterate that no echelon is specifically independent of the next. Thus, I drew the hierarchy together in the chapter 'The Manifesting Echelons: Benefit Claimants' to show how the echelons come together to establish the interstitial and liminal experience for claimants.

In this chapter, I set about answering the questions: *how can the Echelons of Abstracta be applied* and *how do these come to affect the benefit claimant*? I demonstrated how the Echelons of Abstracta could be applied in a theoretical scenario, in this case benefit claimants and Universal Credit. By reframing the welfare state as a system of bureaucratic abstracta, it was shown how these abstracta come to contribute to the creation of, and affect, the interstice of those claiming Universal Credit. It was shown how the money abstractum was the abstractum at the heart of the welfare state and that power used ideology in the creation of Universal Credit abstracta to enforce praxis towards the money abstractum. Occurring with the abstract bounds of country, the nation abstractum was wielded by the state through the stewards of abstracta, the government, to moralise work and convert claimants into an abstractum with encoded attributes of fecklessness and laziness. Although occurring within the abstract space of country, Universal Credit was shown to be part of a metaspatialised, ideologised system of 'workfare', a diffusion of neoliberal policy which occurs internationally.

Through Universal Credit, it was demonstrated how individuals who claim Universal Credit are bounded by its abstract borders and forced to liminally traverse the many borders of the interstice such as through eligibility rules, job search requirements, and temporal assimilation through fictional and ideologised time sequences. In particular, the claimant commitment received attention due to it being an individualised site for the manifestation of the abstract, the enforcing of abstract boundaries, the production of abstract space, and the spontaneous reification of the totality of the abstracta surrounding it. Further attention was given to the benefit cap as an example of the effect that abstract temporality can have through the causal continuity of the

abstractum. Together, the exemplification of the Echelons of Abstracta through benefit claimants shows a generalised picture of how abstracta function complimentarily as a matrix of objects externalised by power in order to control the praxis and lives of individuals.

As part of a conclusion, it is important to draw attention to, and draw together, the original contributions to knowledge that were made. In terms of originality then, this work has addressed and introduced a number of key areas. It addresses the absence of abstract objects and abstract spaces from the field of sociology and, in turn, introduces them through a social abstractionist potentiality. In doing so, it has opened the potential for a social abstractionist mode of thought around the sociological manifestations of abstract objects and spaces. Further, in locating social abstractionism in a gap between nominalism and Platonism, it forges knowledge between the dichotomous nature of the nominalist / Platonist divide. Additionally, it reformulated Henri Lefebvre's (1991) concept of abstract space to mean a space produced by, and location for, abstract objects but also addresses Lefebvre's hitherto unacknowledged contribution to sociology through the attributes of abstract space. For both abstract objects and abstract spaces, original examples were given throughout via the concept of the 'Echelons of Abstracta' which gave rise to a hierarchical understanding of the interlinking matrices of abstracta. It introduced the notion of causal continuity, the idea that an abstract object carries its causal origin from its creator(s) along with it rather than it being causal in and of itself thus avoiding the fallacy of causation. The concept of synchronous and asynchronous domination was introduced and exemplified by showing how abstract objects and spaces can

synchronise with a subject or metaspatialise beyond their expected domain. The relatively unheard of interstitiality was reconceived of as the status of being within an interstice, an abstract space built from the borders of abstract objects such as the inside of rules, laws, and regulations. And finally, liminality was reconceived of as being the lived experience of navigating the abstract borders of the interstice. Together, these form a wide array of original contributions throughout the course of this thesis.

To conclude the 'whys' of this thesis, we can see that, through the focus of social abstractionism, we reach the most fundamental distinction between what is concrete and what is abstract. If we do not make this distinction, we will be perpetually trapped in the reification of the abstract leaving sociology, and society at large, bound to the demands of power and their ideological praxis. By centring this at the heart of sociological thinking, the researcher may be empowered to uncover new methods and understandings of achieving social justice whether that be through existing abstracta or through dereification of these. For myself, I do not wish to be place-bound by fictions and those who have succumbed to their reification. And, if I do not, there will be others who do not, and so it is important to the freedoms of countless people that an understanding of our world as being predominantly abstract, immaterial, and unable to actually keep us place-bound in the material world is of significant import. Social abstractionism makes power visible, it makes its logic visible, and it illuminates its trajectories. This makes social abstractionism an invaluable source to draw from in analysing these movements. But perhaps the most important 'why' of all is that it is a fundamental reminder that nothing that is the way it is in society is set in stone, it can

be changed and it is people, and only people, and only through the violence of the abstract or the violence of the concrete, that prevent changes from occurring.

In terms of limitations and trajectories for further research, these were dominated simply by the abstract border of word restrictions. There were a number of areas which would have been contributory but despite going unincluded can still be identified for further research analysis. One of these was considering alternative Echelons of Abstracta, perhaps through historical analysis or from a non-western perspective. Within an alternative analysis, religion would certainly play a role and, by my own admission, it certainly does within the hierarchical structure of this thesis but it would have constituted another chapter. Within the current frame of reference, religion would perhaps sit between power and ideology although it would depend on *which* religion was under analysis as not all religions share the same social standing. Another area omitted was a greater consideration of abstract violence, particularly around corporate violence and how corporations can enact concrete physical violence and exempt themselves from the ramifications via the utilisation of abstract objects. Education itself is a self-contained system of hierarchical abstract echelons stretching from nursery to PhD and beyond. The notion of abstract space could also be applied to concepts such as statelessness, safe spaces, carceral space, cyberspace and online communities, or even sacred space. By considering the objects that synchronously dominate these abstract spaces, we can analyse not only the production of the space itself, but how liminal experience manifests at both the macro and micro levels. By considering any policy, legal, or social tenet as a potential or actual abstract boundary, it makes visible the boundary itself from which we can view the liminal experiences of the individual. It

may then be helpful in understanding the interstitial status of hikkikomori (Japanese individuals exhibiting extreme social withdrawal), refugees, or perhaps domestic violence victims. Wherever a barrier is described, that barrier is very often a barrier which has no concrete origin. Barriers are predominantly abstract. By examining the abstract objects which form the barrier, and the spaces within that barrier, the interstice, then we may derive greater understanding of the ways in which the abstract induces praxis and liminal experiences which could otherwise be forgone in favour of a better human experience.

As a final key takeaway, I would argue that the real revelation at the heart of this thesis was something that I did not foresee and came most unexpectedly. This key finding perhaps comes to resolve many of my life's experiences which originally invoked the desire to explore this topic and has already come to define the way in which I now view the world. But it also again constitutes an original contribution. This key finding is likely summed by four words: *objectively abstract fictional reality*. Objective refers to both the Platonist sense as *objectively existing*, but also to being *objectively existing in abstract form*. Fictional refers to the Vaihingerian sense but also in relative Platonist sense that, like the written novel, the fundamental bureaucratic nature of the majority of abstract objects which are created mean that these objects are *objectively fictional*. Not fictional as in they do not exist, but fictional as in they were created in the same way as the fictional novel; they are a story of the will of power but one that attempts to relate to concrete reality through the reification process. Finally, as a consequence to these, they form the *reality* that we live through our everyday experiences of near-universalised bureaucracy, of rules, regulations, laws, policies, documents, and

licences, of what we can and cannot do. And, in the spontaneously reified object, they come to form the *objectively abstract fictional reality* that we must perpetually navigate liminally as if it were concrete. This places social abstractionism on the precipice of profound possibilities in relation to our perceptions of reality, our agency, identity, and sense of self. As such, despite this thesis being an exploratory investigation into the possibility of social abstractionism as a mode of sociological thought, the culmination of what has been explored as being suggestive of a conclusive *objectively abstract fictional reality* should be enough to cement this mode of thought for future expansion towards a more complete theory and for application in other sociological areas.

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