



Introduction

Enacting geographies

Prologue

Another conference session, Brighton, January 2000. Eyebright. A bald cube of a building. A room shaped like the cabin of an aircraft, in lurid grey, like the interior of a Soviet spaceship, refitted for one final, forlorn mission. Tubular, tubercular. Sounds, and the lack of them. The swelling background buzz of the mike system. Speaker's voices failing to carry the length of the tunnel, heavy headaches.

All that can be remembered are materials, movements, shapes, gestures. Such as Room North 8, Pittsburgh, March 2000. Very early in the morning, wide awake. Bracing spring, gusting wind. Moving slowly, steadily, horizontally between verticals along sidewalks across traffic into the conference centre. Into a space bigger than the outdoors, a gymnasium for giants, or the open vacant jaws of a cyclops, voids of stone and metal, and, arching over them, a walkway like a pole-vaulter's run-up, flat but seeming to tilt upward, up into a nest of corridors, footfalls, faces, turnings, crossroads, blank doorways, and opening one of them, heavily hinged, with hands and shoulders, into a large but dimly-lit, windowless seminar room. With no slide projector.

One thing we feel is odd in recollection, in thinking back to the two 'Enacting Geographies' conference sessions we convened at RGS-IBG 2000 and AAG 2000, the sessions from which this special issue of *Geoforum* developed, is how little we can remember about what the various speakers actually *said*. This is not a reflection on the speakers themselves; of course we can remember the subject-matter of their presentations, the points and themes they sought to pursue, even the timbre of their voices. What has slipped away are sentences, phrases, what remains are materials, movements, shapes, gestures.

We want to suggest that such things may be considered enactments, neither subjects nor objects, signs or referents, but processual registers of experience. The papers in this special issue may, equally, be analogised as materials, movements, shapes, voices; in other words, they are not papers *about* 'enacting geographies', they are themselves enactments. In this brief editorial we want to try to outline the gradients and trajectories of

enactment, via three themes: opening, presenting, witnessing.

Opening

We want to make a point precisely about the unfolding nature of the world. *The world is more excessive than we can theorise*. This, of course, has been said before, yet in many ways social analysis has tried to avoid confronting the implications. In many ways we have failed to trust the promise of this open-ended world. All the papers in this special issue seek, in different ways, to accept, affirm and respond to this promise.

Firstly they seek to recognise **excess**: *the world does not add-up*. The world does not resolve or come to rest: 'the creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place everyday' (Beckett, 1987, p. 19). It is important to consider how we may learn to welcome this situation; how we may learn to write and research within it. There are considerable impediments to making this acknowledgement. Perhaps foremost amongst them is what we may characterise as a pervasive neo-Kantianism, manifest across the social sciences, sustained in both theoretical and, importantly, epistemo-methodological operations. How does this neo-Kantianism proceed? In various ways to be sure, however we may say that it persists in the playing out of an assumption that the task of analysis "is to explain that which is apparent, observable, or known, by identifying an underlying (transcendental) causally-generative order of powers, mechanisms, structures, processes", the ultimate aim or claim being "to show us 'the way things really are'" (Pleasant, 1999, p. 22). Herein we may observe a curious vampirism, in which events are drained for the sake of the 'orders, mechanisms, structures and processes' posited by the analyst; an ontological freezing in which the excessive is recuperated for the sake of theoretical certainty, the flourish of generalisation, a well formed opinion and a resounding conclusion. "[T]he flash has been domesticated to serve the functioning of a system operating according to its own rules" (Massumi, 2002, p. xxvi). And yet even now, even with the insistence of such a system, the world does not

add-up, there is always something exceptional, somebody else; an accursed share, a dangerous supplement, a restless spirit, another example to be given. Rather than a logic which would seek to contain and deny this movement with its calculus of the normative, finite and distinct and an embalming obsession with form and meaning, we propose a serial logic of the unfinished. A refrain from straining to see and write the ‘form of forms’, the ‘principle of’, the ‘in the last instance’, for the sake of an attentiveness to things taking-place.

Secondly these papers advocate **pluralism**, and a consequent attentiveness to “how one performatively contributes to the stretch of expressions in the world” (Massumi, 2002, p. xxii). Without the safety net of a transcendental logic, a dialectic, a realism, or even a belief in culture, pluralism seems to be the most hospitable option. It is all too easy for the analyst to turn aside “from the object that cannot be made to correspond with one or other of his [*sic*] intellectual prejudices, that resists the propositions of his term of synthesis” (Beckett, 1987, p. 23), as if theory were based on a labour-saving principle, or was a syringe for extracting the essence of things. To be hospitable then, is crucial; but to whom, or what? For whom or what are we making space?

The ‘big picture’, the one that is provided by that typical gesture of sociologists—drawing with their hands in the air a shape no bigger than a pumpkin—is always simpler and more localised than the myriad monads it expresses only in part: it could not be without them, but without it, they would still be something. Far from being the milieu in which humans grow and live, the social is only a tiny set of narrow, standardised connections which occupies only some of the monads some of the time [...]. As soon as you leave those tiny networks, you are no longer in the social, but down in a confusing ‘plasma’ composed of countless monads, a chaos, a brew, one, one that social scientists will do anything to avoid looking in the eye (Latour, 2002, pp. 124–125)

Hospitable then to whatever happens; to whosoever or whatever arrives. And importantly, in the meantime, hospitable to the potential for such encounters, even now a space left empty for encounters which may contain the potential to unfold things otherwise, each with its varied accounts and styles of expression for speaking and writing; each enacting a world, again and again.

Presenting

We want to work on presenting the world, not on representing it, or explaining it. Our understanding of

non-representational theory is that it is characterised by a firm belief in the actuality of representation. It does not approach representations as masks, gazes, reflections, veils, dreams, ideologies, as anything, in short, that is a covering which is laid over the ontic. Non-representational theory takes representation seriously; representation not as a code to be broken or as an illusion to be dispelled rather representations are apprehended as performative in themselves; as doings. The point here is to redirect attention from the *posited meaning* towards the *material compositions and conduct* of representations.

If resemblance haunts the work of art it is because sensation refers only to its material: it is the percept or affect of the material itself, the smile of oil, the gesture of fired clay, the thrust of metal, the crouch of Romanesque stone, and the ascent of Gothic stone (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 166)

Representations thus do not have a message; rather they are transformers, not causes or outcomes of action but actions themselves. Not examples, but exemplary. In this sense representation is perhaps more usefully thought of as incessant presentation, continually assembling and disassembling, timing and spacing; worlding.

If non-representational theory takes the work of representation seriously, what it does not take seriously is representationalism, or, discursive idealism. The notion that meaning is first and foremost a picture that is formed in the mind, a cause of action; the precondition of understanding of social action or identity is fundamentally misleading. Equally, the idea that the concept of culture is, somehow, immune from this critique is misplaced. When culture is conceptualised as a set of rules, as ‘a resource and a constraint’, as a frame and a necessary mediation, as a store house of archetypes, a collection of habits that are malleable but yet mediate in a strangely consistent, aspatial and unchanging way between eye and world, hand and thing, thought and matter, body and text, it becomes numbed to the event of life. The issue here is that from such understandings culture is always apprehended as pre-formed. But there is no time-out from the happening of the world, no moment of unity in which something like a culture, envisioned thus, could cohere. Our pluralism is not a simple relativism. Rather there are events of enunciation, invocations, iterations; empirical callings up of the concept of culture to do work; it is perhaps in these speech acts that culture exists and these may be considered in all their contestation, but never ‘culture’ in itself.

A number of the papers in this special issue contain what are recognisably empirical moments. On the one hand these papers certainly fit into and operate as de-

velopments of an ongoing exposition of the social and material world. However, on the other hand, and this is what we would seek to underline, they operate as singularities. And thus as *presentations*, they touch upon the ‘event of events’; the taking-place of the empirical, and partake of the ‘stretch of expressions in the world’. Thus in mobilising the term presentation our aim is not to promote a naïve realism (and thus a surreptitious return to representationalism), but rather to suggest that each text is a moment in iterative and disseminative chains and processes; exemplary and differential, creative relays which may or may not resonate, which may or may not find a hospitable destination. To fold with the world in this way is not a method in the traditional sense, but a matter of finding a way of going-on, a way of getting somewhere. There is no set of instructions for this method, no programme to unroll, not even a handy Baedeker or Lonely Planet guide within which to confirm identification. Rather than attempt to lay out a prescription for encounters, perhaps it is better to offer some tactical suggestions. They need not be anything more than disposable maxims, or opening words for a dialogue:

- Theory is always already practical.
- Reading theory and doing fieldwork should not be differentiated as practices.
- Certain empirical encounters should not be resolved.
- “It is the reduction of the social to fixed forms that remains the basic error” (Williams, 1977, p. 129).
- Politics is not limited to the Social.
- I do not have experiences, they are not mine. Experience is trans-subjective.
- The goal of reflexivity should not be transparency.
- The definition of the problem is something that remains problematic.
- “Method in general is a means by which we avoid going to a particular place, or by which we maintain the means of escaping from it” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 110).
- Discourse is not a closed system, a discourse is a field of potential.
- The notion of a hegemonic discourse is an oxymoron.
- An example is only an example of itself.
- Materiality is agency.
- Space is a verb not a noun.

Witnessing

The papers in this issue attempt to effect particular accounts that embrace the openness of the world, accounts that leave a space for something else to happen. In this sense we want to pay particular attention to different modalities of accounting for and witnessing the

world, where to witness is both the moment of experience and a stance thereafter towards the world that acknowledges and attends to the gap between what we have seen and are seeing, with what we have written and could write, and with what we have said and can ‘say’ (can gesture towards). This process operates in two directions that come together in the act of doing, in “intelligence-as-action” (Melrose, 1994).

First, the world calls us to witness it into being. We are “caught in the fabric of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, p. 256), cast in its materiality, in a world of transsubjective modalities of experience, an in-between world of imperatives instigating our activities. We are thinking here of affect, for example, the push of the terrain upon the ‘muscular consciousness’ of the body (Bachelard, 1986), the spiritualized pull or uplift of a chord of music, and the stillness struck by the colour of paint. Affects are not about *you* or *it*, subject or object. They are relations that inspire the world. Such affects and percepts (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 163–199) extract from representation another way of judging, another way of reacting to the world about us. There is a need to move away from speaking of affections and perceptions (which would overemphasise a too subjective, too human, account), to move towards an account that takes seriously the world’s own forces. This is a world between potential and determination, between what has happened and what could, a world captured in the tension of its present tense of becoming, a not yet enacted moment where we meet and greet ourselves in the affect that inspires action. In sum, affects and percepts are that through which subject and object emerge and become possible, they speak to the emergent eventuality of the world.

Second, in the performances that make us, the world comes about. This is about giving space to the event of the world, to make primary its emergent nature, and to the active role we too play in actualizing that which happens—we are thinking here specifically of what we make visible by what we cite as significant. In particular, an awareness of the coming-to-be, the badly formed, the seemingly inconsequential, the ephemerally felt; the desire that lights up a room, the turning you didn’t take (but which still haunts you), the anxiety of completing the next task. This is not to rely solely on past forms of expression; it call upon us to open up the spaces between words, towards an awareness of a distributed agency, to an academic stance that embraces the unseen, perhaps intolerable ways, the world affects us.

These are not arcane concerns; they speak directly to our practices as social scientists, to the way our techniques are attentive to aspects of the world’s unfolding. We are thinking of an expanded socio-logic, of mobilising other sources of expression (literature, art, performance), and above all of rearticulating what counts

as significant. This would be a commitment to a resolute experimentalism.

Summary

We conclude the editorial by glancing ahead to the individual papers. This overview seeks only to highlight motifs, themes, arcs and trajectories (since the papers will obviously exceed anything we might say about them).

John Wylie's paper, *An essay on ascending Glastonbury Tor*, draws upon the work of Merleau Ponty and Heidegger to illustrate how the act of visualizing itself is always a making of seer and seen. The paper thus seeks to speak of a subjectivity produced and performed via practices of ascension and elevation, and, in doing so, to move towards a new understanding of visible landscape in terms of sensuous practices. Cataloguing his own ascent of Glastonbury Tor, Wylie seeks to enact the Tor for the reader, engendering its visibility, its cultural histories, and thus its sensuous reality through his narrative.

Motifs of landscape and practice recur in Mitch Rose's paper, *Landscape and Labyrinths*, which seeks to sketch out a conceptual and methodological approach to cultural landscape beyond the structuralism of cultural geography, which, Rose argues, skewers landscape through stabilisations of meaning. An ontology of overdetermination and surplus, as elaborated by Althusser and Bataille, is offered by Rose as a possible means of becoming attentive to the excessiveness of landscape.

Derek McCormack's *A paper with an interest in rhythm* moves from the false problematic of representing movement to become an exposition of movement within the folds of writing. In a virtuosic exploration of rhythm McCormack produces an animated space that moves, folds and achieves consistency via both non-subjectifying and subjectifying forces. Theoretical considerations are not side-stepped by this performance; rather, the particular rhythms of Deleuze, Guattari and Lefebvre are engaged and enfolded by the paper.

Paul Harrison's paper *The Caesura: Remarks on Wittgenstein's interruption of theory, or, why practices elude explanation*, presents a precise and exacting philosophical exposition of the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Harrison uses the work of Wittgenstein to offer a diagnosis of idealism within much contemporary social analysis. Linking up with the special issue's concerns, Harrison suggests that it is the performative which occupies the space vacated by Idealism; a replacement of the Cartesian Ideals of certainty for 'infinitive', and distinctly geographic, understandings—taking -place, making -sense—which speak of the time of the present, not of all Time.

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