



# Performative, Non-Representational, and Affect-Based Research: Seven Injunctions

J.D. Dewsbury

All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed.  
No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.  
(Beckett, 1987: 7)

## INTRODUCTION

All of old: interview and record voices, transcribe and represent 'authentic' opinions of those whose everyday life we want to capture; or locate an event, time and space specific, and with video camera and an ethnographic eye, ear and turn of phrase, report back in prose and supporting image that which has just happened as something that is so ritually at the heart of the social formation that is our study. Performative, non-representational, and affect-based research pauses on the frightening thought: nothing else ever. Of course all methodological endeavour is creative in that we never quite get at what is going on in the interviewee's head, nor are we ever so prepared not to be surprised by some revelatory event; so

without a perfect representation at the end of it all there has always been some improvisation at the edges. Researching then, whatever the methodology, has always been and is always about ever trying and ever failing: the difference of a performative approach is that it relishes this failure, 'no matter', and uses it to mount a serious political critique of the restrictions that methodological protocols might impose on what can count as knowledge. It therefore advocates resolute experimentalism – 'try again, fail again, fail better'. Whether to fail better is to fail ever more spectacularly or to fail less worse than last time is something we return to at the end of the chapter. For now, the point is that performative, non-representational and affect-based research, is all about cutting into the 'dogmatic image of what counts as thought' (Thrift, 2004: 81) and destabilizing the 'know-and-tell' politics of much sociological methodology. There are going to be a series of injunctions in this paper, so here is the first: (1) don't fret about the risks of

experimenting, it is a justifiable way of proceeding that works better if you really embrace it.

To create or to represent: in the Deleuzian universe this is a stark alternative. (Hallward, 2006: 69)

In part I strive to make this chapter a performative enactment itself and therefore in setting this up a number of caveats need to be aired. Firstly, whilst in this chapter I lean on the many insights, successes, failures and frustrations of qualitative research carried out by scholars in geography and beyond, I reference these sparingly. I do this because across these legacies I try to enact the push of a non-representational and performative critique in order to emphasize that performative research methodology more often than not works best as a singular disposition to disrupt research habits and pare things down to the immediate and the embodied. However, at the start of each section I provide a referential coda to give some indication of the necessary context. Secondly, I accept that this pared down stance, or way of doing research, is also 'impossible'. However, whilst it is impossible to escape such legacies and ways of thinking, I also believe that in this failure a particular creativity is achieved, which is crucially creative of problems not solutions. The performative act of this chapter is therefore to 'strongly' advocate the argument that problems over solutions or accounts count. A lot of what I argue is then by no means new, but something about the emphasis perhaps is. And that is that this ethos of disrupting by striving to think the unthought has to take place at every step of the research – at the moment of thinking, then sensing, then presenting (although of course these overlap at times, they do have their distinct place in the overall process to make the chronology stand for the argument's sake here).

Thirdly, the argument is staged around the double-bind of representational and non-representational modes of thought, and whilst both need each other, the stress here is placed on the non-representational. In this it addresses the practice-based thinking,

embodiment, present-moment focus, and distributed agency that conceptually underpins the wider non-representational project (for full definitions see Thrift, 2008). This set of concepts, dispositions, and dissemination tactics, which encompass but are not exhausted by non-representational theory and affect-based understandings, will be referred to as performative research. So whilst this will not include all performative methodological approaches, many of which use the representational, it should not preclude them. The representational is not the enemy. Fourth, part of my performative act in the chapter is also to starkly stage the danger of scientism. Qualitative methodologies have long exercised and exorcised this threat – that in answering to the demand for validity and rigour towards reasonably transparent means of evaluating the standing and efficacy of research done, the research (not just the findings but the modes of engagement) inevitably becomes reductive of the world (for clear expositions see Baxter and Eyles, 1997 and Bailey *et al.*, 1999, and for a performative and personal staging of an incident of this threat see Rose, 1997).

For this reason I stylized the chapter both in tone and proscription. The tone is set in an attempt to convey the consistent demand to rethink the frames of thought by which we stage our research. The injunctions that are made in this chapter act as proscriptions (as opposed to prescriptions which would suggest a formula or a known or better way to proceed in performative methodological endeavour). The point is that procedure is not known. The point is rather, that something performative in research itself, something experimental and creative, and above all problematic, will occur if certain proscriptions are raised instead. These proscriptions then take place as a series of injunctions as temporary antidotes to the inevitable scientism in which our research is staged (we too often, but not always, have to affirm certain outcomes in advance, acknowledge certain literatures to found and contextualize our own research, we have to encounter the

world through familiar modes of conduct and communication, we have to confirm existing representations as we attempt to express others we have encountered, and we have to be certain especially when we conclude). Whilst we all know and face this, and as already intimated we do have to proceed intelligently and effectively, my beef here is with the 'too often'; let this be a moment of 'not always' to ensure that the spark of those 'unthought' moments have as long a duration and affect as possible. *And* they will inevitably fail, but that is not as bad as we think. Fail again. Fail better.

Justification is often the name of the game in setting out methodological choices for research, and in the last ten years performative research has increasingly got aired in journal interventions that act like case law. These open doors enabling future research to justify experimentalism, but cracks need to be made wider. Let us consider one key area, that of the progress report on qualitative methods made by Hayden Lorimer in 2005 in which he skilfully gestures support and critique towards the non-representational in equal measure:

The focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions. Attentions to these kinds of expression, it is contended, offers an escape from the established academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation. (Lorimer, 2005: 84)

Let us proceed with crow bar in hand by pivoting off the central nub of the quote above: 'it is contended'. Not to read the 'contended' as a striving against nor as in competing as if there were a better way for doing research (and certainly not as some race to find the 'best way' of doing things as if there were ever a way of capturing all that we want to get at). Difficulties are rife and often the focusing point of research which tries to capture 'fleeting encounters, embodied

movements, precognitive triggers', and these get ever more difficult when brought into confrontation with 'established academic habit'. Rather let us see this 'contended' as a result of an open community, a metaphorical laboratory testing out theories or a studio for flexing embodied modes of empirical apprehension that exist by the ethos of *stretching* the means by which research is done and *striving* to continue as experiments fail or always fall short in the attempt. This latter striving is not against difficulties; rather it embraces the difficulties as the constitutive point of its mode of engagement in the first place – i.e. it is akin to artistic *experiment*. Here a warning: as we know, we need a passion for art for it often leaves the artist poor, gets valued in an untimely way after the artist is dead, is often thought to be easy to achieve until attempts are made to do so, and when it fails, it really fails. Injunction (2): make sure you have conviction to stretch and strive to the full.

Setting forth on actually conducting a piece of research, be that interviewing a lay practitioner, conducting an ethnographic study of specific place or practice, or being a participant observer with our own eyes and body or through some form of digital capturing technology, it should be immediately apparent that one has always already begun researching by implicitly setting up research questions in relation to an economy of knowledge. By such economies, which exist as ways of making knowledge function, specific sets of relation between modes of speech, forms of visibility, and protocols of intelligibility get produced (see Rancière, 2007: 73). So quite a lot is at stake when staking out a performative methodology because implicitly we accept and enact the fact that our choice of mode of speech, what we deem to be worthy of visibility, maintains existing, or produces alternative, intelligibilities (see particularly in relation to politics Butler, 1997, and in relation to performative art, Phelan, 1997, and in philosophy, Deleuze, 1988). Methodology is far from dull: it is extremely political. As such, a performative methodology

explicitly follows Michel Foucault (1966; 1972) in neither determining transcendental a priori conditions of knowledge, nor in striving towards a social science as something which is ever more objective and pure, but instead studies *and enacts* the very condition of possibility for social-scientific knowledge. In its non-representational aspect, performative methodology is so much more than choice of method (video camera, interview, ethnography etc) and the standard of carrying out these methods, and much more about questioning how we are going to configure the world, and how we question in practice to what extent we are able to configure different worlds. In being affect-based, this methodological questioning is further complicated by no longer being scripted by disembodied contemplation but rather being apprehended by the very open sensations and connections of the body itself. Taken together, the object of study for performative research literally comes into being through being enacted in the practice of the research itself.

This challenges us to consistently and vigilantly align our perspective or mode of research with awareness that every methodological choice we make has an implication for the management of meaning that we are making. In other words, to be acutely aware that making meaning is precisely what we are doing, and that this takes place through a whole number of interconnected empirical encounters (readings of philosophy, a material site, a research problematic) which develop (maintaining or critiquing) academic networks at conferences, seminars, in teaching and in text, in ways that destabilize or do away with territorial disciplinary anchorage (whether that be adherence to a particular 'name' or movement in the discipline). Nobody need do qualitative or quantitative methods as such. Part of the ethos of this type of research then is to keep the researcher alive to change and chance, to prevent the researcher from stopping their travels and forging a safe methodological territory to re-use again and again impervious to new twists and turns of direction and focus.

Above all the performative research advocated here emphasizes, and it is simply this emphasis that is key, a methodological stance that is rigorously experimental in singularizing the abilities and capacities of thought, locution, and action in the location where they take place. This chapter thus proceeds by arguing that the underlying principle of performative research is to put theorizing first at each step of the research process: at the point of the conceptualization of the research, at the juncture of doing the actual empirical research, and as the research culminates as thought and data become written text or conference exposition. Performative research can thus be thought through three key agendas – thinking, sensing, and presenting; and it is these agendas that structure the chapter.

## THINKING

Perhaps the world resists being reduced to a mere resource because it is but coyote, a figure for the always problematic, always potent tie of meaning and bodies. (Haraway, 1995: 201)

In many ways performative research thinks its way towards a form of expressionism – problematic new folds of meaning and body – that is often accused of being productive of uncritical subjectivism. Respectful of the struggles of qualitative methodologies since their conception, performative research likewise sits at the site of these struggles, namely that space between essentialism and constructionism (see Taussig's 'Report to the Academy' (1993)). As such it rejects the idea of the interiority and purity of the individual subject, the rationality and economy of reason dominating notions of shared knowability, and the idea that communication re-presenting the field research as knowledge, whether written or spoken, is merely the transmission of information. In this it rests on the legacy of the ground broken by feminist theory in the 1970s and 1980s (see as indicative example, Irigaray, 1985 and

Haraway, 1995, and as overview into the text of the performative Elam, 1994), and specifically the critiques therein made of disembodied, objectivist, and universalizing representations (see for critical augmentation within geography Rose (1993) and Moss (2007), and with performance studies Phelan (1993)).

What this means for us now is that we have more open space to think about what kinds of knowledge we are trying to produce. This immediately raises the theoretical question of what knowledge is in the first place. Given that the overall injunction of this chapter is to push research into resolute experimentalism, we need to address straight away that fear which holds us back and thus pull the carpet from under our feet: knowledge is not science. Injunction (3): don't fear the judgement that tethers social science, especially that which is in close proximity to the humanities, to scientific values of efficacy and rigour.

A particular guide for this is the work of Gilles Deleuze who reminds us that: 'Knowledge is not science and cannot be separated from the various thresholds in which it is caught up, including even the experience of perception, the values of imagination, the prevailing ideas or commonly held beliefs. (Deleuze, 1988: 51)

Our task, if we wish to follow Deleuze, is to push

the experience or experimentalism of thought into a zone before the establishment of a stable, intersubjective 'we' ... making it a matter of not recognizing ourselves or the things in our world, but rather of encounter with what we can't yet determine – to what we can't yet describe or agree upon, since we don't yet have the words. (Rajchman, 2000: 20)

In short, begin, even before thoughts have been put down onto paper and moulded into those first tentative research questions, by pausing and thinking upon the empirical metaphysics we are working on. Often when confronted with the desire to do performative research the knee-jerk reaction is to speed fast into devising a research project that

involves animating knowledge by using video capture of one form or another: the 'only way' to get at practice and performance, and any other present tense action. This is ill-thought out, and I will use this stereotypical example to illustrate how important the precursive set-up of thought and conceptualization is to research: and to argue rhetorically that this is doubly so with performative research precisely because of this misconceived trend to turn to moving images. Remember resources for research can only go so far: it is a video camera, it records moving images with different effects for sure which can then be edited and superimposed in imaginative ways but still. Think instead, at least for a moment before proceeding along this route, upon a productive empiricism in order to rediscover the vitality of empirical methods not reduced by or to a pre-given theoretical schema. A well conceived set of interview questions might well be far more effective at capturing the tension of the performing body as witnessed by the body of the interviewee.

To this end, and to end this first section, Richard Shusterman's book (2000), 'Performing Live', is an excellent starting point for thinking through the implications of dismantling our propensity for already framing in thought our research questions and design, and ultimately the means by which we make what we research, and what we find through research, meaningful. In part the book pivots on a simple question: do we ever refrain from interpreting, and if we do, do we do so without thereby refraining from intelligent activity altogether? Is this just another philosophical quagmire that gets us nowhere? No, for whilst we might never be able to 'talk (or explicitly think) about things existing without their being somehow linguistically mediated, it does not mean that we can never experience them nonlinguistically' (Shusterman, 2000: 129). In other words, experience doesn't need to be coded to be appreciated and understood, it needs to be presented and treated as being just what it is. This doesn't need video capture, although

that might work; nor do words fail us in presenting the 'what-it-is-ness' of experience, although they might steer us more forcibly to the habitual, and specifically reductive, means of rendering meaningful especially given that we academics are far more proficient in articulating our point in words than in images. But this is all missing the point: by breaking down the processes of research and being explicit about the conceptualizations used by the research to make meaning, we might allow some capture of the experience in itself to edge into view. After all, any method operates by way of a trained blindness: how aware are we of what our particular vision overlooks or brings into view? The video camera might well be perfect not least because it brings in view literally as well as metaphorically the frames we use to capture our research. The point to be made here is to think this awareness at every step of the way, treating the research as an ongoing process which 'means the materials' – the feelings, the codes, the awkward intensities, the architected space, the architecture of time, to name but a few – 'are understood and allowed to develop with intelligence and intuition in every direction' (Knowles, 2006: 105).

Remember, 'something in the world forces us to think' (Deleuze, 1994: 154) but also, and this is injunction (4), remember we are producing an understanding of the world because the world is not already out there as such (if it were why would we be in such a bother about the methods we chose to capture some aspect of it – it would just be transparently obvious and everyone would see it and get it, and there would be no need for books like this!)

## SENSING

If bodies are objects or things, they are like no others, for they are the centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency. They require quite different intellectual models than those that have been used thus far to represent and understand them. (Grosz, 1994: xi)

This is perhaps the most expansive and important aspect of performative research: that it takes the body seriously. A vast array of papers within geography have emerged over the last decade and a half that all go some way in taking the body more seriously as a key locus and thus focus of research (see Longhurst, 1995, Nast and Pile, 1998). Further, the body features prominently in work advocating a turn to emotional and affect-based geographies (see McCormack, 2003, Davidson and Milligan, 2005) and in the recent return to more explicitly phenomenological accounts of geography (Wylie, 2005, Simonsen, 2007). However, the connective potential of the body taken as a volatile subject as opposed to an object of knowledge, and as an experience achieved through the sensation of a spacing that is both material and immaterial, human and animal, organic and non-organic, is still rarely synthesized or risked in the setting up process of research questions or as the key author of the research findings in their 'final' presentation (see the untapped theoretical concerns of Grosz, 1994).

The directive here is to move into the empirical site with an allegiance towards exposing ourselves towards:

A kind of energetics, an interest in moments of indeterminacy, undecideability and ambivalence, the abandonment of subject-predicate forms of thought, an orientation to thought as inclusive of affect, and, in general, a sense of the 'tone' of any situation, the play of singularity, which *might* (and only might) produce new virtualizations. (Thrift, 2004: 85)

The idea is to get embroiled in the site and allow ourselves to be infected by the effort, investment, and craze of the particular practice or experience being investigated. Some might call this participation, but it is a mode of participation that is more artistic and, as with most artistic practices, it comes with the side-effect of making us more vulnerable and self-reflexive. It is not however an argument for losing ourselves in the activity and deterritorializing ourselves completely from our academic remit, but nor does it mean sitting

on the sidelines and judging. Rather the move, in immersing ourselves in the space, is to gather a portfolio of ethnographic ‘exposures’ that can act as lightning rods for thought. It is then in those key ‘times out’ as we set upon generating inventive ways of addressing and intervening in that which is happening, and has happened, as an academic, that such a method produces its data: a series of testimonies to practice. This is of course the flipping over of ‘participant observation’ to ‘observant participation’ that Nigel Thrift made (2000) to emphasize the serious empirical involvement involved in non-representational theory’s engagement with practices, embodiment and materiality. This was made in part to caution against the ease with which non-representational theory’s conceptual bent could become dismissed as engineering a distance from actual hand-to-mouth, flesh and blood, living matters (see also Laurier and Philo, 2003: 91). Not so – it is more a question of a localized tactics for research that operates a close proximity to its object either by tracking and questioning intently the role of object-to-body relations themselves and/or more precisely because it is achieved through the body itself. One difficulty is that this methodological engagement really does expose the body to, or in, us. Not only does it really take the body seriously, it does so with a microscopic intensity and attention to its borderless and controlling fluidity that unfolds it and continually places it within the ecology of its material surroundings. This is disarming and alarming in suggesting further that the body does not choose to think but is rather forced to think in its ‘serially self-organizing generative movement’ (Massumi, 2002: xxxi).

One consistent feature of this method is then its address of the minutiae of import enacting, moving through, and being dispersed by the body itself. Mike Crang ends the last of his progress reports on qualitative methods with this exact provocation: that whilst the body has become ‘an important topic of work’ it is ‘not yet something *through* which the research is often done’

(2005: 232). So whilst there are many aspects that get played up, a key and consistent feature of performative research is a concentrated interest in the somatic and the quality of immediate experience. Untethered from the corset of interpretation, the focus and the sense making of this research comes from thinking through explicit bodily dispositions – feelings and movements or ‘intelligence-as-act’ (Melrose, 1994) – such as ‘the endorphin-enhanced glow of high-level cardiovascular functioning, the slow savouring awareness of improved, deeper breathing, the tingling thrill of feeling into new parts of one’s spine’ (Shusterman, 2000: 137). The body is then definitively thought through and presented in the research itself as the locus of sensory appreciation prior to the resulting sensation’s interpretation via existing knowledge, discourse, practice, and bodily discipline that structure the somatic experience (Shusterman, 2000). Deleuze’s book on the paintings of Francis Bacon, *The Logic of Sensation*, exhibits one way of presenting such body thought. Of particular note is how Deleuze writes sensation in its ‘excessive and spasmodic appearance’ as something ‘immediately conveyed in the flesh through the nervous wave or vital emotions’ (2003: 44). Armed with this mode of expression, and its expressive vocabulary, the researcher can have the confidence of using her or his body directly in the field as a recording machine itself, knowing that writing these nervous energies, amplitudes, and thresholds down, is feasible as such jottings become legitimate data for dissemination and analysis.

Such a methodological approach is not without critical tensions but it does not try and smooth these out; rather it embraces the cut of these tensions as the very constitutive heart of what performative research is about. Perhaps the key tension, and let’s face it the unique tensions are not that extensive, is how to deal with any performance’s flawed materiality: in other words, its present tenseness or its presence and movement as formal disappearance. The problem has its solution, and that is to stage aggressively and with

confidence this appearance and disappearance, and not to worry about maintaining coherence outside that which is in evidence in the very act of appearing and disappearing. The point is now to engage in the research and move towards creating presentations of the experience that we encounter and create. Significantly, these presentations can, and should, be bookended: 'prologued' by the explicit thinking and intentions that lead us into the enterprise in the first place, and 'epilogued' by an explicit accounting of what we hope our mode of dissemination is trying to show as a trace of the empirical experience itself.

Further, performative research asks what practical engagement we as a researcher have with the world. Whilst this is not always so directly involved with political intervention with policy outcomes, it is practical as it engages precisely with thinking and experiencing thought itself, and as such can make important interventions in the world. Derek McCormack's work, in particular his 2002 'A paper with an interest in rhythm', is exemplary of this stance towards research. Here he shapes, within the black-and-white parameters of the classic journal page, movement 'with and through the expressive and theoretical spaces of an interest in rhythm' (2002: 469). McCormack simply presents, albeit in a theoretically nuanced way, the space-time, spacing-timing, experiences of a body-environment assemblage (in his case, a dance workshop). What is important to note is that it is purposefully expressive and experimental, that it considers the practical spaces of the empirical encounters on show to be equally and simultaneously theoretical, and that what is being researched as such is not a body, dance or a dance, nor a particular practice or an individual expertise or historical biography, but 'an interest in rhythm' itself. This 'interest in rhythm' is just that; it is not mine, nor McCormack's, nor a definitive accounting of or for rhythm itself, but rather an immediate and emergent and real practical-theoretical engagement that produces particular space-time connections and

thus particular modes for manifesting such connections, for manifesting 'an interest in rhythm'. The injunction here is that the arguments and diagrams of such space-time connections that McCormack presents are a quite legitimate space to justify a research agenda: use it to experiment ourselves. In that paper, McCormack offers up his own criteria for judgement, that all he is trying to do is 'enliven the repertoire of ways in which geographies are creatively enacted' (2002: 483). Why not? If we want to dispute this, we might as well start arguing against going to the theatre, or engaging with, and hence validating, any work of art. Injunction (5): diagram quite straightforwardly the space-time connections you experience with a palette and sensibility akin to the artistic. The arts matter: that we don't know for sure how or why they matter is the point behind their creative mattering.

Works of art – yes, this whole project is productive of something, and is of course contextualized by the historical, political context of that production. But 'The play's the thing/Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King' (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, c1600; Act II, Scene II, 600–1). It is all about being productive of apprehension, of catching the overlooked conscience behind what is going on; and being herein productive of thought, of manifesting differently conscious beings. Human beings, let us argue, do so much in the doing, far more than in the sense making they have of what they think they were doing or thought they did: 'There is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming ... the deed is everything' (Nietzsche, 1967: 45). Whilst that much may be true, and whilst that might be a stance for considering research that can be labelled non-representational, work done in performance studies places the singularity and purity of this standpoint – the attention to the immediacy of the somatic, the physiological and the images of those body-brain-culture relays (Connolly, 2002) – with the sociological, the political and the imaginary in order to make apparent the 'performative interfaces occurring between

history, corporeality, power, language, and the sensorial' and thereby 'investigate processes where history and body create unsuspected sensorial-perceptual realms' and 'alternative modes for life to be lived' (Lepecki and Banes, 2006: 1).

So whilst the somatic experience should be prioritized, it is not left hanging as something incongruous and ephemeral. Andre Lepecki and Sally Banes implicitly indicate four ways of focusing research into the sensing post the sensation itself. Modifying these for our purposes, and signalling them as spaces for micro attention in research, they are as follows: where the corporeal meets the social, the somatic meets the historical, the cultural meets the biological, and the imagination meets the flesh. When witnessing such performances, whether in being a member of a theatre audience or as a passerby in the street just literally encountering another body, we intuit more or less localized, more or less momentary, more or less material, constructions of body and sense, such that we have either a fairly clear socially defined response with a sense of its meaning-making or a more affective and felt response that whilst not so tangibly clear still disposes us to a course of action. Performative research addresses this meaning-making precisely in its localized, momentary and materially constituted existence, researching and valorizing the need to research the politics of appearing it facilitates such that:

Whether this appearing, this stepping of the sensed object or subject into the fore of perception, happens visually, or happens rather as an olfactory, or tactile, or proprioceptive, or gustatory, or aural experience (or as a combination of, or synthesis between, different sensory organs), the imbrication of sensory perception with language and memory makes the senses a matter of urgency for understanding the conditions under which the body interfaces with and assigns privileges to certain modes of the perceptible while condemning other modes to the shadows of the imperceptible and the valueless. (Lepecki and Banes, 2006: 2)

Ultimately the recording project of the empirical data is one which operates by allowing the research to grow and acquire a

coherence of its own. As it grows, the research doesn't become more 'whole' but more complex and multiple in its implications (after Rajchman, 2000: 24). Thus it is rhizomatic: it is connective, and therefore not merely happenstance, but in these connections, and the implications of its findings, it is not hierarchical and overwrought in asserting definite results. The implications are in effect an encounter for their next user. Performative research, perhaps more than other methodologies, demands that we generate the 'next users' of our research: in many ways our body has been used as the witness of the empirical experience and now we have to convince, or at least make problematic easy judgement (dismissal), by the nature of our testimony – and it is to that that the chapter turns in its final section.

## PRESENTING

The critic in me could read this text, elaborate its essentialisms, mediate its mystifications ... but the rest of me prefers to give it to you unprotected. Another fragile dream of a not-yet built body still beckoning for image. (Phelan, 1997: 22)

How to present performance when it is not a performance any longer, and then, as so often, in another medium altogether – (you cannot write dance)? As academics we mediate most things in text, and there have been many examples of performative research being disseminated in performatively tuned accounts whether that be as ethnographies of self-in-performance as performer (see Smith, 2000; Morton, 2005), within the politics of performing research (Pratt, 2000), in other ethnographies akin to our anthropological inheritance (see Crang, 1994), or within the frames of video ethnographic investigation (Jacobs *et al.*, 2008). And we have *Cultural Geographies in Practice* as journal space for more experimental exhibitions in text. But perhaps it is not to art per se, and its other modes of presenting (dancing a research paper for example (see Conquergood, 1998)),

but rather the thinking behind the artistic that matters most here: fragile unprotected not-yet fully discernible images have cause.

To begin with, whilst it has long been accepted that the author is not a neutral vector for the conveying of information, the performative method utilizes this fact up front exposing it to open up the possibility of experimenting with the manner and mode of the statements through which the research can be made 'known'. Any methodology is troubled by the imperative to capture and then evidence the empirical sites of research. In this the form of showing chosen, be that an interview transcript or a photograph, is often selected on the basis of being better able to reflect back the world – but, contra an overwrought essentialism, we now take for granted that there is no one world out there. Therefore we all try to do as best we can in the time we have whatever method and research design we have chosen. But here, in relation to doing performative research, we want to be explicit about the creative possibilities in this move from capturing to evidencing research. We want to prise it open and indulge it a little in order: 'To tend to the stretch of expression, to foster and inflect it rather than trying to own it ... to enter the stream, contributing to its probings: this is co-creative, an aesthetic endeavour' (Massumi, 2002: xxii). What part of this 'stretch' entails, and it is not easy to swallow, is, as Stephen Zagala notes in commenting on 'Deleuze and Guattari's frequent attention to modernists such as Paul Klee, Jackson Pollock, Claude Debussy and Samuel Beckett', a move towards the creation of 'abstract languages that have a certain autonomy from representational systems of reference' which are then seen as an 'engagement with the 'new' as something which is essentially disruptive, rather than a desire for transcendence and aesthetic idealism' (2002: 22).

So what does this mean for us? The social-science mode might be to use video or Powerpoint or sound playback as a tool for straightforwardly presenting ideas or 'evidence'; there is nothing wrong with that as

long as no greater claim is made for what is on show. In the humanities, often having had training towards gaining an eye for productive creative arts, such technologies of presentation are used for precisely that, presentation, to hold attention, entertain or to offer up as a means of communication an embodied experience there and then in the time of the presentation itself. Here we would be making rather than using video, manipulating words and sentences rather than taking a word or image merely as a fixed container of an accepted idea. Now expression is rather more tortured and unbound, and its content is no longer viewed 'as having an objective existence prior and exterior to the form of its expression' (Massumi, 2002: xv). In other words, the mode and/or form of expression conveys as much of the message or point being conveyed as the so-called content of that which is expressed. An excellent example of this open dialogue between expression and meaning (or art and inquiry) is the work of Inkeri Sava and Kari Nuutinen (2003) where they stage explicitly between themselves, one a writer/academic the other a painter/artist, how word and picture meet each other, and do so towards a performance to an audience as the mode of dissemination. So in effect we can solicit and co-opt the audience to make the presentation meaningful. In other words, the audience can be used far more effectively, productively, and explicitly, to help us script the meaning and findings of the research (which will probably be a series of further questions for research based upon the problematics raised and staged). But crucially this is not just participation for it is far more disruptive for what is staged is the fact that modes of expression are also modes of registration: therefore it is the mode of registration that makes something visible and shared.

However a further step is still to be made, for the modes of expression that most rely upon immediate presentation can of course be the only means for making and sharing some phenomena. What this means is that the mode of expression also constructs quite

explicitly the audience that is being 'expressed' to. Thus: 'How we think of an audience is a function of how we think about ourselves, social institutions, epistemological processes, what is knowable, what not, and how, if at all, we may accommodate the urge for collective experience' (Blau, 1990: 28). In no small part, what is being signalled here is how what we audience as our research, and when we do so, contributes to the making of the relationship between the individual and the collective; or rather the researcher and the wider research community that validates the efforts of the research. We thus constitute what makes up that relationship by our choice of means of expression; and we valorise those things that do make up that relationship even if that means confronting the difficulty of giving account of ephemeral and intangible experiences. But isn't it often the case that such intangible experiences are precisely the bridges between individuality and communicability in the face of a shared experience? Instead of representing some fact about a given event or phenomena, the issue is to point to the co-presencing that comes about in sharing the same physical space and the same temporal frame in a direct and immediate relationship through a broadly similar physicality (i.e. we are human animals who communicate in all manner of ways through our body). This acceptance composes the cultural habitus through which we construct the meaning-making of our lives; it means we give credence to, and wish to track as research, those moments when something 'happens' that glues us together – moments like 'the buzz of anticipation' in a large gathering, or 'the heightened attention' resulting from a mutually directed gaze, or 'the sense of shared tension and subsequent relief'. We are of course active interpreters of experience and not passive recipients – so on this methodological path we must acknowledge that we confront a classic chicken-and-egg dilemma: which comes first, sensation or representation? Perhaps the single point to take home from this chapter, and from the conduct of

performative methods, is that we can as easily emphasize sensation over representation in the first instance, whereas it is perhaps the habitual status quo to start with representation which thus avoidably but unwittingly relegates the import of sensation itself. Injunction (6): instead of concentrating on the cultural product, concentrate on the cultural experience.

There is though no prescription as to how to carry out the presentation of performative research. We can do it as usual as is more often the case. But we can, and this is crucial, we can experiment as if it were a performance, by asking much more explicitly a series of performative questions. So for example, if we are using video playback in our presentation, what are we using the technology to say? And who are our audience? Will they get it? Do we want them to immediately get it? Perhaps we want them to go away discussing, dissenting, and probing, thereby animating further the talk or paper in a space of perplexion. Challenge an audience to take the research presented to task, but challenge knowingly. So who do we want our audience to be – on side, bored, agitated, enthused? What demands do we want to make of our audience and to what ends? We thus have to be extremely vigilant as we frame our research and select our findings and mode of dissemination. In all of this, it is not a question of 'why not' to every which way we can manipulate rhetorically the presentation of our research, but an explicit attention, and freedom, to be much more artistic in that attention. So it is to question 'why so', and even to question our own means of presenting the research as a live performance; thus the dissemination of research becomes a further part of the research itself. 'Why so' then: 'why do the research in this way, and why present in the manner that we are doing'?

If we are explicit in our attentions we can of course be judged to fail more easily. Again that is the point: expose our presuppositions to be tasked to that disruptive rethinking again. The point is that the presentation of

research for performative methods is also research in itself, if not even a continuation of the research. So fail again, and fail better: that is research. Research here then means questioning 'how information and interaction are 'framed' so as to allow for common sense' (Rajchman, 2000: 11); and to continue this questioning as we frame our own research in the mode of presentation we use. So these caveats and uncertainties said, what purpose and purchase is there for performative presentations of our research findings, be they in writing, video playback or theatrical presentation of one form or another including jazzed up powerpoints? If in such presentations the aim is to 'enact the affective force of the performance event again', following Peggy Phelan (1997: 8) we must be acutely aware at all times that these re-presented events will 'sound differently' in the new presentations of them than in the 'experiencing' of them. Therefore, like Phelan, 'it is the urgent call of that difference that' we need 'to amplify here' (1997: 12), and not some nervous sense of being inferior to science in seeking to understand the social by covering up the difference that does so much to make the social alive, political, invigorating, dangerous and wonderful: that difference of not knowing what the other is thinking, of not knowing whether it is a feeling rather than a thought that is moving us, because in micro what is at stake here is the cosmological difference between now and then, ever on.

Or the difference in the heartbeat of the next moment, and the question of whether we can plan for the next encounter, or whether we find our body forced into some new unforeseen connection that we will shortly give some sense to (albeit that there are many sense-making possibilities). And then the difference of what sense we chose to make of it, and how that in turn frames how we make sense of it; it then 'sounds differently' and bifurcates life's path. In achieving this amplification as legitimate knowledge, one needs above all to be confident in presenting this difference with a faith of being 'solicitous of affect' whilst 'nervous and tentative about

the consequences of that solicitation' (Phelan, 1997: 12). It is worth remembering as we set about this task that it is not a transparent representation that we are after, nor is it about the representation being a true reflection of the empirical experience or event being investigated (given that we are playing up the difference of that impossibility, that being the more 'truthful' aspect here), rather it is a stance that 'wishes all the same to say' in that it is the attempt at articulation rather than its success that counts, and where the articulation made will always be performative in itself. As such our presentations after non-representational and affect-based research are 'alternately bold and coy, manipulative and unconscious' pointing both to themselves 'and to the 'scenes' that motivate' them (Phelan, 1997: 12). The injunction here is (7): remember you cannot directly signify that which is past, so be more acute and cute in the research stories that you tell.

## CONCLUSIONS: THERE IS A RUB

It is not a question of anything going, for when conducting performative methods with a non-representational theoretical, practice, and affect-based bent, the thinking, sensing, presenting aspects should be all specific interferences – interferences in problematizing how we think the world and how the world forces us to think, in attending intensely to the fluid, nervous, fleshy dispositions of our body's agency, and in how the world records itself on its surfaces both on the skin and in the cell, and in experimenting with the images we produce in disseminating our research across an open and mutually transforming nexus of expression, content, form and audience effect.

The new normative question therefore becomes which of these interferences are good ones. And when, where, in which context, and for whom they are good. Good knowledge, then, does not draw its worth from *living up* to reality. What we should seek, instead, are worthwhile ways of *living with* the real. (Mol, 2006: 121)

As such there is a political and strategic weight to the methodological pointers outlined here. This is important, for all along it has been the case that the way research is framed matters more than any other aspect, and perhaps nowhere is this framing more sharply felt and orientated than in the end-game point of the research's application. And let us be clear about that here: conducting performative research aims and justifies its endeavours by being about trying to manifest 'the not-yet-captured ontological condition of limit-attractions' (Caspao, 2007: 136). Now whilst this advocates embracing uncertainty through experimentation in a way that might seem frivolous and self-indulgent to some, the point is precisely about 'giving way to the eruption of singular-sense combinations that don't necessarily fit in with the consensually established ones' (2007: 139). We can miss a trick if we solely task ourselves in our research to live up to reality, when it is precisely about finding alternative methodological strategies for living with reality. Our: 'Task is then not only to reconfigure the limits of each of our senses and their relations to one another, but also to constantly push those limits to tensional thresholds of dis-sensus, to produce a crisis in consensus' (Caspao, 2007: 139).

So think then upon what we produce in the name of research as tableaux which offer up operative openings through specific bodily engagement for particular spheres of concern. If artistic expression matters, then so does proximity to their methods matter in social science. This politically affirms another way of going on, another way of going about the business of making research interferences that matter, that create, that affirm full stop. This is the endgame this chapter has been working towards – a resolute experimentalism that is productive, that proliferates, and creates such interferences, for:

Yes, I believe that there is a multiple people, a people of mutants, a people of potentialities that appears and disappears, that is embodied in social events, literary events, and musical events. I'm often accused of being exaggeratedly, stupidly,

stubbornly optimistic, and of not seeing people's wretchedness. I can see it, but ... I don't know, perhaps I'm raving, but I think that we're in a period of productivity, proliferation, creation, utterly fabulous revolutions from the viewpoint of this emergence of a people. (Guattari, 2008: 9)

## REFERENCES

- Bailey, C., White, C. and Pain, R. (1999) 'Evaluating qualitative research, dealing with the tensions between "science" and "creativity"', *Area* 31 (2): 169–83.
- Baxter, J. and Eyles, J. (1997) 'Evaluating qualitative research in social geography: Establishing 'rigour' in interview analysis', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 22 (4): 505–25.
- Beckett, S. (1987) *Westward Ho!*, London, UK: John Calder Publishers.
- Blau, H. (1990) *The Audience*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Butler, J. (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, London, UK: Routledge.
- Caspao, P. (2007) 'Stroboscopic stutter: The not-yet-captured ontological condition of limit-attractions', *TDR: The Drama Review* 51 (2): 136–56.
- Connolly, W. (2002) *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Conquergood, D. (1998) 'Beyond the text: toward a performative cultural politics', in S.J. Dailey (ed.) *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions*, Annadale, VA: National Communication Association. pp. 25–36.
- Crang, P. (1994) "'It's showtime!'" On the workplace geographies of display in a restaurant in South East England', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12 (6): 675–704.
- Crang, M. (2005) 'Qualitative methods: there is nothing outside the text?', *Progress in Human Geography* 29 (2): 225–33.
- Davidson, J. and Milligan, C. (2005) 'Editorial – Embodying Emotion Sensing Space: introducing emotional geographies', *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (4): 523–32.
- Deleuze, G. (1988) *Foucault*, London, UK: The Athlone Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1994) *Difference and Repetition*, London, UK: The Athlone Press.
- Deleuze, G. (2004) *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, London, UK: Continuum Press.

- Elam, D. (1994) *Feminism and Deconstruction*, London, UK: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1966) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London, UK: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London, UK: Tavistock Publications.
- Grosz, E. (1994) *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Guattari, F. (2008) *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e).
- Hallward, P. (2006) *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, London, UK: Verso.
- Haraway, D. (1995) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London, UK: Free Association Books.
- Irigaray, L. (1985) *The Sex which is Not One*, New York, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Jacobs, J.M., Cairns, S.R., and Strelbel, I. (2008) 'Windows: re-viewing Red Road', *Scottish Geographical Journal* 124 (2): 165–84.
- Knowles, A. (2006) '"Process" in "A lexicon"', *Performance Research* 11 (3): 105.
- Lepecki, A. and Banes, S. (2006) 'Introduction: the performance of the senses', in A. Lepecki and S. Banes (eds) *The Senses in Performance: 1 (Worlds of Performance)*, London, UK: Routledge. pp. 1–7.
- Laurier, E. and Philo, C. (2003) 'The region in the boot: Mobilising lone subjects and multiple objects' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (1): 85–106.
- Longhurst, R. (1995) 'The body and geography', *Gender, Place and Culture* 2 (1): 97–105.
- Lorimer, H. (2005) 'Cultural geography: The busyness of being "more-than-representational"', *Progress in Human Geography* 29 (1): 83–94.
- Massumi, B. (2002) 'Introduction: like a thought' in B. Massumi (ed.) *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, London, UK: Routledge. pp. xiii–xxxix.
- McCormack, D.P. (2003) 'An event of geographical ethics in spaces of affect', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28 (4): 488–507.
- McCormack, D. (2002) 'A paper with an interest in rhythm', *Geoforum* 33 (4): 469–85.
- Melrose, S. (1994) *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text*, London, UK: Saint Martin's Press Inc.
- Mol, A. (2002) *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Morton, F. (2005) 'Performing ethnography: Irish traditional music sessions and new musical spaces', *Social and Cultural Geography* 6 (5): 661–76.
- Moss, P. (2007) *Feminisms in Geography: Rethinking Space, Place, and Knowledges*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nast, H. and Pile, S. (1998) *Places through the Body*, London, UK: Routledge.
- Nietzsche, F. (1967) *On the Genealogy of Morals*, New York, NY: Vintage.
- Phelan, P. (1993) *Unmarked: The politics of Performance*, London, UK: Routledge.
- Phelan, P. (1997) *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*, London, UK: Routledge.
- Pratt, G. (2000) 'Research performances', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (5): 639–51.
- Rajchman, J. (2000) *The Deleuze Connections*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Rancière, J. (2007) *The Future of the Image*, London, UK: Verso.
- Rose, G. (1993) *Feminism and Geography*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Rose, G. (1997) 'Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics', *Progress in Human Geography* 21 (3): 305–20.
- Sava, I. and Nuutinen, K. (2003) 'At the meeting place of word and picture: Between art and inquiry', *Qualitative Inquiry* 9 (4): 515–34.
- Simonsen, K. (2007) 'Practice, spatiality and embodied emotions: An outline of a geography of practice', *Human Affairs* 17 (2): 168–81.
- Shusterman, R. (2000) *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art*, New York, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Smith, S.J. (2000) 'Performing the (sound)world', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (5): 615–37.
- Taussig, M. (1993) *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, London, UK: Routledge.
- Thrift, N. (2000) 'Afterwords', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (3): 213–55.
- Thrift, N. (2004) 'Summoning Life' in P. Cloke, P. Crang and M. Goodwin (eds) *Envisioning Human Geographies*, London, UK: Arnold. pp. 81–103.
- Thrift, N. (2008) *Non-Representational Theory: Space/Politics/Affect*, London, UK: Routledge.
- Wylie, J. (2005) 'A single day's walking: Narrating self and landscape on the SouthWest Coast Path', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30 (2): 234–47.
- Zagala, S. (2002) 'Aesthetics: a place I've never seen', in B. Massumi (ed.) *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, London, UK: Routledge. pp. 20–43.