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I knock at the stone's front door: Performative pedagogies beyond the human story

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Prologue: Performative Posthuman Pedagogies

Thinking posthumanly – from a post-Enlightenment, critical, new materialist perspective – things, including concepts, become more permeable and topological – they leak and stretch. Freed from limiting notions of agency, things behave. Rivers have established the same legal rights as humans in New Zealand¹ and India,² stones have been reported slithering across the desert floor in California,³ an electrical power grid in the USA has revealed a unique agential dexterity⁴ and walls have been spotted walking over mountains in the UK's Lake District.⁵ Thinking with a posthuman partiality, we begin to witness a democracy of objects rather than an anthropocentric dictatorship over inorganic materials. If agency is reworked into an 'enactment' as opposed to something that is 'held',⁶ conceivably humans and other biological organisms are not necessary for agency (or life) to emerge as inorganic material agency erupts from unchoreographed assemblages of spacetime matter(ing). And if cognitive and dermatological boundaries are no longer *organ*-ised by an Enlightenment prescription, how might pedagogies perform differently and more equitably?

This article draws on the empirical materials from two psychogeographic walks that agitate lithic spaces with a posthuman affection. Part One examples a radical mobile classroom that I undertake regularly with university students where the use of it-narratives exposes the distributed agency of buildings. I explore what a posthuman gaze might do to/for performative pedagogies as my students attempt to interview a building. Part Two offers an example from my previous post-qualitative PhD inquiry which – by manipulating the practices of psychogeography and schizocartography – highlights how a shopping centre assemblage called Liverpool ONE diagnosed itself with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), thus reinforcing the notion of inorganic agential distribution. The pedagogic implications of this posthuman diagnosis are discussed.

The purpose of this paper is for facilitators to use as a (permeable) guide to ruminate with and an attempt at a pedagogic diffraction away from positivistic human(ist) practice in higher education, with its transcendent, dualistic, anthropocentric, evidence-based obsessions. It is an attempt to animate higher education pedagogies in a very literal sense – by animating the topics of inquiry as well as the practice of pedagogy itself. In so doing, we might nudge knowledge further towards an ethics of immanence rather than repeating or conserving versions of the same Occidental Enlightenment story, often reflected in positivist paradigms and/or 'social constructionist paradigms [where] the body is considered as representational and subservient to the mind'.⁷ As I am predominantly concerned with socio-environmental equity within my pedagogic diffractions, I find posthumanism a particularly useful and relevant concept to think with due to its focus on a less anthropocentric and more inorganically distributed 'ethical response-ability'.⁸ Of course, there are many varieties and uses of/for posthumanism from feminist philosophical practices⁹ and pedagogical research¹⁰ to 'more than human' geographical ones,¹¹¹² including accusations that many 'tend to

reproduce colonial ways of knowing and being.’¹³ However, I am particularly interested in Deleuzian informed flat ontological posthumanisms that focus on ‘non-anthropocentrism, for recognizing a “vital topology” that extends far beyond us’,¹⁴ especially a Baradian new materialist posthumanism – with a focus on the ethico-onto-epistemological intra-actions of matter¹⁵ – mixed with Rosi Braidotti’s version, where she defines

the critical posthuman subject within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity [...] Posthuman subjectivity expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building.¹⁶

This paper redirects normative debates about higher education pedagogies towards an ethics of immanence, for if we play with a distributed notion of agency – and the body – then a great many things become imbricated within its dermatological implications, from ‘environ(mental) health’¹⁷ to ‘pedagogies as living organisms’.¹⁸

Part One: Interviewing buildings

*To interpret myself and formulate me I need new signs and new articulations in shapes found on this side and beyond my human story.*¹⁹

When I first asked my undergraduate students to interview a building, I received funny looks. It was part of an environmental ethics module that I facilitated for the Outdoor Studies programmes at the University of Cumbria. We were attempting to explore critically, anthropocentric, biocentric and ecocentric versions of environmental ethics, in relation to the students’ own outdoor practice, by walking around a variety of sites that outwardly gave the impression of being environmentally virtuous, such as the National Trust’s straw bale *Footprint* building near Windermere in the Lake District, UK. However, rather than critique or analyse the *Footprint* as if it were a passive and static object that had been concocted and moulded by human minds, I took a leaf out of the it-narratives²⁰ of the 18th and 19th centuries – fictional stories about material circulation that transformed objects into subjects – and asked my students to interview it as if it were alive. I gave them no more instruction than that. After some initial despairing comments (‘*here he goes again*’), they humoured me and got on with the task playfully and inventively. Gradually, the students ventured out of Plato’s inert Cave of passive, two-dimensional shadows and into a world of inorganic life.

If everything is alive, it is not because everything is organic or organized, but, on the contrary, because the organism is a diversion of life. In short the life in question is inorganic, germinal, and intensive, a powerful life without organs, a body that is all the more alive for having no organs, everything that passes *between* organisms.²¹

In my radical mobile classroom – that takes place in café’s, pubs, highstreets, mountainsides, lakes and parks – I regularly utilise psychogeography (discussed in Part Two) and it-narratives, as a pedagogic diffraction away from positivistic human(ist) practice in higher education. And interviewing buildings produces an altogether different type of narrative. Some students investigated the buildings’ backstory – as a journalist might do before interviewing their subject - whilst others simply attempted to listen to what the building had to say through attentive observation as to its uniqueness – as a *haecceity* (a things thisness), as opposed to a *quiddity* (a things whatness). I asked the students to present the resulting data in a collaboratively fashioned magazine. Here are short extracts from their productions:

Interviewing a building seems hard – it can't talk! But this does not mean that the building can't speak to us. A building (and lots of other things) can tell their stories in ways other than words... (Student A)

With 360 straw bales that came from Yorkshire, The Footprint was leaking with a sense of life greater than the day it was finished, or even started. So many more stories could be had with every part of The Footprint before they all came together [...] The place also had a story to tell... (Student B)

You can see the building starting to sound more settled towards the end of the conversation with The Footprint. Also if you looked at the oak shingled roof you saw it was dark in colour, acclimatising [...] The building itself has found its home, looking settled and undisturbed in the ground. (Student B)

It sounded like right from the very beginning The Footprint had found its place amongst friends, it became so accepted and such an inspiration because of the care and time that was put in by the community. It developed an atmosphere that was and still is friendly, welcoming, happy and supposedly deeply connected with its surroundings. (Student B)

In these stories, the personified lilt of the building is evident. The materials of the building merged with the materials of the students to co-produce the pedagogic agential event that emerged. These attempts at writing and thinking from the perspective of a *thing* can offer a glimpse of what a posthuman pedagogy might *do* for student-teacher-object assemblages in order to promote the potential for more equitable thinking/behaviour. Before these initial attempts, the students thought very differently and their writing reflected this. They believed the most obvious of their nature-cultures thoughts: the building is a lifeless, passive, inert object designed by a superior human subject. Thinking posthumanly, things – including concepts – come alive and tell stories if we know how to listen.

Utilising it-narratives – posthumanly – students start to realise that they are not alone in their thoughts as agency begins to reveal its distributed nature. ‘As opposed to a linear telling of a story, the performative event provide[s] an opportunity to use a range of perspectives that relate and depart from each other in multiple ways and directions.’²² This may eventually lead to a more complex understanding of how once securely bound phenomena, such as mental health, agency, cognition or the mind are not as impermeable, unidirectional and human as once imagined. Political rhetoric in London, climate change and Lego become as embodied and influential to ‘agential intraactions’²³ as DNA, childhood memories and evolutionary adaptation. Students start to witness agency and structure intra-mingle.

Of course, I don't usually get students to interview buildings without some further reading to stabilize their occasionally anthropomorphized/Disneyfied flights of fancy. I tend to find a little light reading about *inorganic agency* generally does the trick.

Inorganic agency

The concept ‘agency’ was invented to denote the power and capacity of an actor to act, perform, make or do. A residue of Enlightenment rationality holds that agency is reserved almost exclusively for the human domain, to make our own autonomous choices, frequently associated with organic will and intent. It is often contrasted with linear cause-and-effect deterministic processes that are usually allied to inorganic objects assumed to have no agency of their own. Now a classic humanistic belief, subjectivity coincides with conscious agency;

dominating, controlling²⁴ and ultimately limiting in its scope for equitable development.²⁵ Agency has been epistemologically straightjacketed. Even for post-structuralist thinkers such as Butler and Foucault, ‘agency belongs only to the human domain’.²⁶

Of course, there are other versions of agency, from Eduardo Kohn’s thinking forests (arising from the relations between organic phenomena²⁷) to Karin Murriss’ collective agency (arising from relations between humans and non-human others,²⁸ for example). Yet Kohn suggests ‘life thinks; stones don’t’²⁹ and Murriss states things ‘have no agency on their own’.³⁰ I disagree on both counts, as stones are never lifeless and things are never really on their own.³¹ One Starling is itself already a murmuration, as is a stone. They just act at different speeds, forces and intensities. ‘But the stones upon which I stumble “do things” in the world [...] and many other “lifeless” and “thoughtless” objects.’³² Tim Edensor examined ‘the vital properties of stone and the particular non-human agents that act upon the stony fabric’³³ of a church to reveal that ‘buildings are thus assemblages of heterogenous materialities which (re)produce circulations of matter, labour and knowledge’ and ‘are endlessly co-produced by non-human agencies’.³⁴ He even goes so far as to say that ‘The effects of these non-human agencies generate human agency’.³⁵ I tend to agree. After all, I too am a murmuration of bacteria, water, oxygen, carbon, fungal mycelium, calcium, phosphorus, virus, magnesium, concepts, music, etc. In any case, ‘agency exists beyond the biological world, even in synthetic matter which exhibits astonishing creativity and can be considered emblematic of storied matter.’³⁶

Tim Ingold contests the concept of agency, preferring *life*.³⁷ ‘The very idea of agency [...] is the corollary of a logic of embodiment, of closing things up in themselves’.³⁸ Yet, for Karen Barad and Lambros Malafouris, agency is the flow of activity itself – it is an enactment.^{39,40} Similarly, ‘to become animate and mobile, for Deleuze and Guattari it is clear that materiality needs no animating accessory. It is figured as itself the “active principle.”’⁴¹ And even the concept *life* runs into boundary issues, especially if considered exclusively biological, organic or ‘autopoietic’⁴² – self-maintaining. Deviating from the Western norm, Christopher Alexander suggests that buildings themselves ‘are alive’.⁴³ Alexander doesn’t mean ‘alive’ in the *bio*-logical sense. He renounces the definition of current scientific orthodoxy that considers ‘an organism any carbon-oxygen-hydrogen-nitrogen system capable of reproducing itself, healing itself, and remaining stable for some particular lifetime’⁴⁴ as it runs into boundary issues such as: ‘Is a virus alive? Is a forest alive (as a whole, and over and above the life of the component species taken as individuals)? Are carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen necessary to what we shall define as life?’⁴⁵ Similar to animistic beliefs, Alexander suggests a broader conception of life, ‘in which each thing-regardless of what it is-has some degree of life.’⁴⁶

But agency has its uses as concepts are performative. There is an inorganic life to agency. As such, the concept of a distributed posthuman agency can be very useful as a pedagogic tool to think with. ‘The concept has an important pedagogical quality of shaping and enacting events of life and, thus, reality itself.’⁴⁷ Luke Bennett explains that exploring the agency of a brick ‘will necessarily engage posthuman pedagogy, because it will require us to examine how we learn about, and pass on, the materiality of the world around us’.⁴⁸

Organic life – in reference to ‘bodily organs’, ‘living beings’ or ‘self-replication/maintenance’ – is a product of essentialist thinking. Therefore, ‘the organism is that which life sets against itself in order to limit itself, and there is a life all the more intense, all the more powerful for being inorganic’.⁴⁹ ‘We can no longer *measure* ourselves as if objects of the same genetic species.’⁵⁰ We are geological. Not only are we made of minerals,

we also co-compose them, co-transform them and are a process of transformation – not a keystone species but a stone species.⁵¹ What has intention, meaning or motive to do with it?

Intermède: Conversations with stones

*Agentem: 'any natural force or substance which produces a phenomenon'*⁵² – volcano, sun, crisp packet, shopping centre, pedagogy.

In her poem *Conversation with a Stone*,⁵³ Szyborska begins, “I knock at the stone's front door” and continues to question the nature of Western perception, the impossibility of *knowing*⁵⁴ by asserting that we can never be let inside the stones ‘great empty halls’. However, the lithic agency of a stone is not some abstract, symbolic, spiritual or immaterial essence ‘in’ the stone. The stone is *of* the flow of life itself: ‘things are in life rather than life in things’.⁵⁵ So, ‘how can we know of bricks, blocks and slabs in a posthuman way?’⁵⁶ I believe we can know at least some aspect of the stone’s life. Speeding things up on film usually does the trick to reveal other lives of things. Try it with plants and they walk, sneak and creep around. Do this with glaciers and they become animated bone-saws. Do this with mountains and they flow and ebb. Stones slither across the desert floor, like slugs. The decision ‘to move’ doesn’t begin *within* a thing. Dynamic processes have always already begun and so there are no beginnings, only ever middles. ‘Free will’ is as illusory as the Emperor’s New Clothes (yet still performs in the world, as all concepts do). And anyway, we think *with* stone(s), so we must be able to know at least some semblance of a lithic vitality.

Human behaviour ‘can no longer be localized in individuals [...] but has to be treated [...] as a function of complex material systems which cut across individuals (assemblages) and which transverse [...] organismic boundaries (rhizomes)’ which requires ‘the articulation of a *distributed conception of agency*’.⁵⁷ And if agency is spread, shared or made-together, then things don’t happen *to* things in an isolated linear cause-and-effect trajectory, they happen *with* things in a co-created assembly. Donna Haraway calls this multi-species co-making/becoming-with/making-together, ‘*sym-poiesis*’, after being coined originally by Beth Dempster in the late 1990’s.⁵⁸

My previous PhD research,⁵⁹ combined with the psychogeographic walks I undertake with students, highlights how agency, mental health and the inorganic body are physically, topologically and spatiotemporally distributed and created in *sym-poietic* assemblies. If agency is an embodied physical process at the same time as being intra-relational, extending beyond the confines of the *bio*-logical skin-bound subject, then human agency – as part of what makes up *the body* – must be distributed (not just locally – think ‘internet’), topological and intra-corporeal. This dynamic and specific propensity or arrangement of things (forces, materials and energy) is an ‘incipient form of agency’,⁶⁰ continually emerging, becoming and one that became apparent within the assemblages of my PhD inquiry (and as produced from the inquiry *itself*) where I used a number of methods/tools initially under the umbrella of co-operative/collaborative action inquiry – ‘conducted *with* people rather than *on* people’⁶¹ – to explore varied environments in relation to mental health and wellbeing. We titled our project, ‘Walking in Circles’ (WiC).

The WiC inquiry group used collaborative action research to explore how our perceptions of a variety of environments might alter or influence our moods, stress levels, mental health and wellbeing. Other than myself, the group consisted of six co-

participants/co-researchers, each with a specific diagnosed mental health condition, mostly recruited from a therapeutic community garden. The inquiry consisted of a series of trips to a variety of environments (almost one every month), democratically chosen by the WiC group, followed a couple of weeks later by focus group meetings, giving me enough time to layer and edit the empirical materials (video interviews, photos, journals, notes) so that we could analyse them together.⁶²

However, as the restrictive qualitative procedures embedded in co-operative/collaborative action research began to take hold, we found ourselves pushing back, quite emotively. That's how Elizabeth St Pierre and Patti Lather's post-qualitative⁶³ literature found me – because I wanted something different, something more intuitive, something that challenged a prescriptive methodology informed by an Enlightenment onto-epistemology. As with performative posthuman pedagogies, post-qualitative inquiry promotes a generative epistemology. In order to 'keep meaning on the move'⁶⁴ post-qualitative inquiry seeks to destabilise the oppressive representational trend of knowledge re-production – which Jackson and Mazzei suggest 'do little to critique the complexities of social life' as 'such simplistic approaches preclude dense and multi-layered treatment of data'.⁶⁵ Actually, I found that they merged together rather well, once we decided to throw the methodological, cyclical and reflective co-operative action research rule book out of the window and began to work a little more intuitively, diffractively and rhizomatically, whilst still working *with* rather than *on* people. Initially anxious about not following *the rules*, eventually I found myself letting go of that institutionalized academic tension. I relaxed, limbered up and threw away my humanistic parachute. This was a (non)methodology which encouraged the empirical materials to take me for a walk. And one of the methods that I thought with and that we used to explore all of the environments we visited was psychogeography – a method where a line took us for a walk.

Part Two: Psychogeography⁶⁶ and glowing data

If there is no method, this is also a type of method for carrying out psychogeography⁶⁷

According to Guy Debord, psychogeography is, 'the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals'.⁶⁸ I see contemporary psychogeography as a playful, diffractive protest against notions of impermeable human agency. That's why I employ it as often as I can when out with students and it really has some weighty effects on them, from realisations of how architecture and space can be profoundly political to how we, as humans, are not as skin-bound as so often thought.⁶⁹

Yet, however transgressive psychogeography may be, it continues to explore the effects of the geographical environment → on → the → human → psyche. In this way, it may be branded as being slightly deterministic, linear and unidirectional. Conversely, Schizocartography, Tina Richardson explains,

offers a method of cartography that questions dominant power structures and at the same time enables subjective voices to appear from underlying postmodern topography. Schizocartography is the process and output of a psychogeography of particular spaces that have been co-opted by various capitalist-oriented operations, routines or

procedures. It attempts to reveal the aesthetic and ideological contradictions that appear in urban space while simultaneously reclaiming the subjectivity of individuals by enabling new modes of creative expression. Schizocartography challenges anti-production, the homogenizing character of overriding forms that work towards silencing heterogeneous voices.⁷⁰

In this way, schizocartography offers a less unidirectional approach to topological mapping that includes the potential agency of *a subject* whilst at the same time explores the capitalist production of subjectivity, echoing post-structuralist tendencies beyond Guy Debord's more deterministic version of psychogeography. According to Richardson, Schizocartography utilizes Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'schizoanalysis', which is based on 'neither triadic structures (such as Oedipal relations) nor dyadic ones (such as hierarchical binary oppositions)'; rather 'it is concerned with 'the other' to dominant voices and explores the heterogeneity that is often sidelined in arrangements of hierarchical power'.⁷¹ Schizoanalysis, – 'the study of bodies politic from a materialist, anti-Oedipal perspective' – 'treats the unconscious as an *acentred* system, in other words, as a machinic network of finite automata (a rhizome)'.⁷² However, there is still an obvious anthropocentric strand in Schizocartography – one that differs slightly from Deleuze and Guattari's Schizoanalysis – that neglects a more fruitful exploration of various environments that think with a materialist posthuman approach when applied to the study of the 'modern' city,⁷³ in which a different democracy becomes necessary, 'a democracy extended to things'.⁷⁴ Thus, rather than an agency→determines→structure/structure→determines→agency approach, the WiC assemblage adopted a multidirectional posthuman approach. In this way, we might think of ourselves as a *haecceity*, assemblage or 'line of becoming', rather than, as Richardson suggests, a *quiddity*, to disrupt the anthropocentric notion of linear cause→and→effect relationality between points (such as agential intentionality).

So, we found a map of Liverpool – chosen by the WiC group collectively as one of the many environments we could visit – put a beer glass on it, drew a circle around it and walked as close to the line as we could, recording the urban overspill as we went.

When in Liverpool, I recorded some of the co-participants/co-researchers comments that I thought seemed to stand out at that time – just as the co-participants/co-researchers did with other data. The urge to inscribe these particular comments were always already informed by literature, embodied memory, etc. In turn, the comments inspired an expedition of inquiry that took me along a particular rhizomatic path of exploration, also being constantly informed by myriad influences. Maggie MacLure describes this process more eloquently:

[W]e are obliged to acknowledge that data have their ways of making themselves intelligible to us [...] where something not-yet-articulated seems to take off and take over, effecting a kind of quantum leap that moves the writing/writer to somewhere unpredictable. On those occasions, agency feels distributed and undecidable, as if we have chosen something that has chosen us [...] In a previous article, I described that kind of encounter in terms of the data beginning to 'glow'.⁷⁵

After almost entirely circumnavigating the large open air shopping mall known as 'Liverpool ONE', we finally ended up in its heart as one of the co-researchers/co-participants asked, '*who designs this shite?*' Suddenly, the data began to glow. This signposting enabled me to find out who designed this shite, bearing in mind another co-researchers/co-participants reaction that it was '*clean and safe*'. The glow started to irradiate.

The buildings had spoken. We had listened – differently. Our varying socio-culturally informed aesthetics had co-produced opinions about the buildings (and the spaces in-

between). We each met the buildings halfway, where the agential intra-actions converged and knotted together. The Jamie-Liverpool ONE assemblage was very different to everyone else's because we all brought our unique habitually co-produced agential 'selves' with us which then merged with Liverpool ONE to co-produce other, very different and unique agential 'selves', more stony than before. The haptic quality of the sensory engagement with Liverpool ONE co-produced a variety of events, one of which I shall example here. This is – in part – what the 'research group-me-Liverpool ONE' assemblage produced and this is how the eventual assemblages were written – the empirical materials glowed and I followed. To be honest, I didn't have much of a choice in the matter. Like the line on the map, the inquiry took me for a walk.

This PhD inquiry example relates to posthuman pedagogies directly – due to how research and theory informed practice operates, as research and theory are always already practice – and indirectly – due to the underpinning ontology that *I* (in a distributed sense) thought/think *with*.

Please note: I cannot simply state that the organic 'I' wrote this example assemblage of rhizomatic inquiry – by following a line of (re)search – unless you understand 'I' to mean an extended, distributed and embodied environmental self. It would be like an Amazonian tree frog attempting to elucidate on the Amazon, a starling trying to describe the murmuration or a bacteria explaining what it's like to be human. Therefore, at that time, and *re-membering* that event now, I could just as easily say Liverpool ONE wrote it...and still is.

Ecology of the oppressed and the depression of Liverpool ONE⁷⁶

Liverpool ONE is a privately owned public space built by Grosvenor – *et al* – whose attempts to discourage non-consuming activities are documented in their *Office Service Charge Brochure*, 'leading to the elimination of anti-social elements such as vagrants and beggars',⁷⁷ for example. Oppenheim, complains that in such spaces, 'Non-consumers, such as the homeless, the unemployed, the poor, the young and the old are branded as 'others' to the hegemonic consumer order. In turn, cities are able to demarcate between who is welcome and who is not.'⁷⁸

Gregory Bateson 'considered that ecosystems had to be considered to be communicating and informational systems' and 'emphasised that to properly understand ecosystems, we need to find ways to think ecologically, recognising ourselves as a part of the system being observed or interacted with'.⁷⁹ Liverpool ONE is an immature ecosystem and as such dissipates energy quickly, poorly and inefficiently and is less diverse than mature ecosystems. I don't simply mean this because it is an urban environment lacking flora and fauna as I believe many urban environments are very diverse (not simply 'bio'-diverse) and many (mono-cultural) rural environments are homogenised. It is the spatial dimensions of the capitalist agenda of Liverpool ONE specifically that sets about subjugating *the mind* (the distributed inorganic body) to a form of mass hypnosis that I refer. This giant open air shopping mall – 35 city centre streets – fits the description Auge⁸⁰ would label as a 'non-place', a type of 'purgatory where there's nothing to do except shop'.⁸¹ The homogenisation and monocultural practice of Liverpool ONE's assemblages displays a maximal entropy due to its poor intra-relational capacities for energy efficiency. Capitalism (in this case), far from creating a healthy difference out of competitiveness, seems to create a more homogenous difference and sterility as an ultimate distortion of ecological space. Liverpool ONE has been driven insane.

OCD seems to have enveloped Liverpool ONE, partly co-produced through a specific practice of privatisation. As a collective, highly organised mass of consumers, concrete, trees in concrete, glass, plastic, metal, one inch grass and CCTV cameras, Liverpool ONE is certainly preoccupied with an aesthetics of order, neatness, symmetry and cleanliness. The trees and posts appear (*to humans*) evenly distanced from one another, ordered in symmetrical lines in relation to the vertical and horizontal lines of the architecture (of the buildings and spaces between the buildings). Numeracy is the mediating signifier that predicates the appearance of perfect spatial homogeneity. The grass is cut to promote little resistance for walkers and is of a certain colour green that has been historically conceived (and promoted) as visibly pleasing and picturesque – ‘a greenness unsurpassable’.⁸² There is no mud, mess, weeds, scruffiness, anarchic buddleia (unlike the backstreets encountered outside of Liverpool ONE), out-of-place people, untidy litter, cracks in the pavement, free-floating plastic bags and the grass and concrete know exactly where they are supposed to be...separate from one another. Even moss and lichen are not allowed to blemish the polished stone. It’s ‘*clean and safe*’ and so are our thoughts. Aesthetically, this privately owned public space is what Deleuze may have called ‘striated’. Yes, it’s shite! But it’s also clean and safe...for consumers.

The capitalist production of subjectivity leads many of us to believe we act alone and are individually responsible for our compulsions but as Jane Bennett reminds us, ‘the locus of political responsibility is a human-nonhuman assemblage’⁸³ which ‘presents individuals as simply incapable of bearing full responsibility for their effects’ and so ‘the ethical responsibility of an individual human now resides in one’s response to the assemblage in which one finds oneself participating’.⁸⁴

The fashion, in the West, is to think of OCD as an individual psychological dis-order that is reserved solely for the right of humans to suffer. In order to ‘fix’ it, we must look to the idea of the autonomous genetic and/or socially constructed individual, not the collective concept of a city centre that is the co-production of capitalist economics built upon a palimpsest of historicised rhizomatic growth. Barad claims, ‘Bodies do not simply take their place in the world. They are not simply situated in, or located in particular environments. Rather ‘environments’ and ‘bodies’ are intra-actively constituted’⁸⁵ Following Deleuze and Guattari’s rhetoric in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the boundaries that once defined certain territories, such as urban-rural, culture-nature or mind-body distinctiveness, are shifting and as such are ripe for reterritorialization.⁸⁶

So, if we think posthumanly – with co-produced agential assemblages, for example – the Liverpool ONE assemblage does have the capacity to have OCD and it comes at a price. ‘Vagrants and beggars’ don’t even have the right to sit, sleep or even shit anymore – *it costs 20p* – if they are eradicated for fear of smudging the shiny new furniture and so, in keeping with one of the many ailments of OCD, suicidal thoughts may become commonplace. Cleanliness and sanitisation, taken in this sense, tend to reduce differentiations of diversity (‘bio’ and ‘cultural’). Volcanic action also tends to do this, sometimes resulting in mass extinctions. The physical realms of agency and mental health and wellbeing are not of a different nature to this. They are not of some mystical nonphysical, other earthly space hauntingly residing in the pineal gland within a human brain (as Descartes believed). Nor are they solely skin-bound within the confines of a subjective individual, either genetically or mentally. The physical processes that enable a relatively healthy mental state are bound to the intra-relational capacities and affordances of (ecological) concepts such as capitalism and privatisation. In his re-reading of Lefebvre’s Right to the City, David Harvey points out, ‘The city has to be viewed as a metabolic and ecological system in its own right and therefore as a

vibrant and increasingly dominant part of the natural world we inhabit.’⁸⁷ So, the (inorganic) organism that is a city or a rural space or whatever/wherever we draw our boundaries around, may diagnose *itself* as mentally ill depending on its territorialising intensions. Extend this boundary even wider and we can see an illness on a much larger scale, that of the sixth mass extinction. We have now entered the mental assemblage of the ‘Capitalocene’.⁸⁸ Capital, as a material phenomenon, is as emotive as an inorganic rapture and makes demands. It has ‘*thing-power*’.⁸⁹

The Liverpool ONE PhD inquiry further informed many psychogeographic walks with my students since its conception. It’s altered my pedagogic onto-epistemology which has, in turn, altered the student-me-environment intra-actions. The inorganic agency of a posthuman pedagogy pushes back and merges with your own constantly co-emerging agency, just like every other event. Thinking/performing with posthuman pedagogies diffracts normative pedagogic models and has the potential to encourage an ethics of immanence as opposed to more of the same transcendent human(istic) ideologies.

Epilogue: Inorganic pedagogic intra-corporeality

*To tell a story with stone is intensely to inhabit that preposition with, to move from solitary individuations to ecosystems, environments, shared agencies, and companionate properties.*⁹⁰

In her description of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of *inorganic life*, Dema states, ‘It is not so much that organisms are not alive, but that life can be articulated in all things.’⁹¹ This chimes with Bateson’s example in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, where ‘the eco-mental system called Lake Erie is a part of *your* wider eco-mental system’.⁹² The conception of a mind extended in the environment has also been apparent for many animistic societies for countless years, obvious in Joseph Mastay’s (an elder of the Whapmagoostui Cree Nation in northern Quebec) statement that ‘if the land is not healthy, how can we be’.⁹³ This animistic, intra-relational notion of health – that I call *environ(mental) health*⁹⁴ – was conveyed to Naomi Adelson by Mastay as he highlighted that, ‘health and, more specifically, health ideals are rooted in cultural norms and values that permeate and define – *yet extend beyond* – the state of the physical body’.⁹⁵

This extension of health beyond the state/invention of the organic body doesn’t just incorporate other organisms – if we were to follow Kohn’s biocentric rationale – it also incorporates any relational material process at any time, including the *concepts* of Liverpool ONE and pedagogy. This fully material inclusion into the mind, agency or mental health is properly *ecocentric*. Perhaps a better way of verbalising this idea of an extended agency (or mind) would be to accept that the physical body itself is the thing that is extended into the environment – or/and that the environment is extended into the self. In other words, removing dermatological boundaries promotes an altogether alien concept to humanistic subjectification/objectification: *we are the environment*.

I have a new formula: Topological skin + inorganic dermatology = an Extended Body Hypothesis (EBH).⁹⁶ This EBH extends our skin into pedagogy (and vice versa). This is slightly different to Murriss’ conception of ‘pedagogies as living organisms’.⁹⁷ I’m suggesting that pedagogies are *inorganically* alive. This inorganic agential intra-corporeality implies that we think *with* things such as stone, buildings and phones, as well as concepts like pedagogy. In other words, pedagogies perform in diverse ways when we think with them. If we apply a posthuman lens to that pedagogy, we begin to learn – to think – posthumanly. Pedagogy is

performative, *period*. All pedagogies are performative. All concepts are. They behave ecologically and produce physical effects – and affects – in the world. Pedagogies are agential. They co-promote action. They hold and co-create power. They are inseparable from ontologies, epistemologies and ethics and so ‘we should ask not what a pedagogy is, but rather what a pedagogy does [...] Students and apprentices are the flows that pass through a pedagogical machine, operating on body-minds’.⁹⁸ Therefore, it *matters* which pedagogy you think with.

Performative (inorganic) posthuman pedagogies can lead to rewarding consequences when applied to higher education and *co-create* the potential to support a flatter ethico-onto-epistemological awareness. In my examples, buildings were brought into the fold of shared agential intra(corporeal)-actions which led to a democracy of objects rather than an anthropocentric dictatorship over inorganic materials. This allows ~~learners~~ people a glimpse into a world of immanence. I imagine each attempt at posthuman diffraction will produce very different, yet exciting distributed agencies and assemblages. Try it. Let the line take you for a walk.

*I can't sum myself up because you can't add a chair and two apples.*⁹⁹

Notes

¹ Archer, *Rivers, Rights & Reconciliation*, 1.

² Waters, *India makes Ganges*, para. 1.

³ Reid *et al.*, *Sliding rocks*, 819.

⁴ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 21.

⁵ Nicolson, *Wall*, 52.

⁶ Barad, *New Materialism*, 54-55.

⁷ Perry, *Theatre as place of learning*, 2010.

⁸ Haraway, *Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulhucene*, 260.

⁹ See Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 38-54.

¹⁰ See Taylor and Hughes, *Posthuman Research Practices in Education*.

¹¹ See Panelli, *More-than-human social geographies*, 81-84.

¹² See Castree, Nash, Badminton, Braun, Murdoch and Whatmore, *Mapping posthumanism: an exchange*, 1341-1363.

¹³ Sundberg, *Decolonising posthumanist geographies*, 33.

¹⁴ Braun, *Querying posthumanisms*, 82.

¹⁵ Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity*, 801-831.

¹⁶ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 49.

¹⁷ Mcphie, *Mr Messy and the Ghost*, 1.

¹⁸ Murriss, *The Posthuman Child*, 152.

¹⁹ Lispector, *Agua Viva*, 15.

²⁰ See Mcphie & Clarke, *Walk in the Park*, 244.

²¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 550.

²² Perry and Medina, *Embodiment and Performance in Pedagogy*, 70.

²³ ‘Agential intraactions are specific causal material enactments that may or may not involve humans’ (Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity*, 817).

²⁴ Hayles, *How we became posthuman*, 288.

²⁵ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 1-12.

- ²⁶ Barad, *Meeting the universe halfway*, 145-146.
- ²⁷ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 100.
- ²⁸ Murris, *The Posthuman Child*, 45-76. Also, see Latour, *Reassembling the social*, 80.
- ²⁹ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 100.
- ³⁰ Murris, *The Posthuman Child*, 63.
- ³¹ 'The two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd.' (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3).
- ³² Descola, *All too human (still)*, 271.
- ³³ Edensor, *Entangled agencies*, 238.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 244.
- ³⁶ Oppermann, *Material Ecocriticism*, 58.
- ³⁷ Ingold, *Making*, 100.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 100-101.
- ³⁹ Barad, *New Materialism*, 54-55.
- ⁴⁰ Malafouris, *At the Potter's Wheel*, 35.
- ⁴¹ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 61.
- ⁴² See Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, for their 'systems' version of life as self-replicating.
- ⁴³ Alexander, *The Timeless Way*, 8.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, *The Nature of Order*, 30.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.
- ⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, cited in Taguchi, *The Concept as Method*, 213.
- ⁴⁸ Bennett, *Thinking like a Brick*, 58.
- ⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 503.
- ⁵⁰ Mcphie and Clarke, *Walk in the Park*, 241.
- ⁵¹ See Cohen, *Ecology of the Inhuman*.
- ⁵² Harper, *Agent*, n.p.
- ⁵³ Szymborska, *Conversation with a Stone*, 54.
- ⁵⁴ Mcphie and Clarke, *Walk in the Park*, 243.
- ⁵⁵ Ingold, *Being Alive*, 29.
- ⁵⁶ Bennett, *Thinking like a Brick*, 58.
- ⁵⁷ Ansell-Pearson, cited in Tiessen, *(In)Human Desiring*, 137.
- ⁵⁸ Haraway, *Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulhucene*, 260.
- ⁵⁹ Mcphie, *Death of Mr. Happy*, 143.
- ⁶⁰ Hale, *Found Spaces*, 174.
- ⁶¹ Heron and Reason, *Practice of Co-operative Inquiry*, 179.
- ⁶² Mcphie, *Embodied Walls and Extended Skins*, 244-245.
- ⁶³ See Lather and St. Pierre, *Post-qualitative research*, 629-633.
- ⁶⁴ Jackson and Mazzei, *Thinking with theory*, i.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁶ For a history of psychogeography, see Coverley, *Psychogeography* and Richardson, *Walking Inside Out*, 1-30 & 241-250.
- ⁶⁷ Richardson, *Walking Inside Out*, 3-4.
- ⁶⁸ Andreotti and Costa, *Theory of the Dérive*, 69.
- ⁶⁹ See Mcphie, *Embodied walls and Extended Skins*.
- ⁷⁰ Richardson, *Walking Inside Out*, 182.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 183.
- ⁷² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 19.

- ⁷³ For example, see Duff, *The Ethological City*, 218.
- ⁷⁴ Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 12.
- ⁷⁵ MacLure, *Researching without representation*, 660-661.
- ⁷⁶ Most of this description is taken directly from my original study (see Mcphie, *Death of Mr. Happy*, 30-66).
- ⁷⁷ Office Service Charge Brochure, *Liverpool ONE*, 2.
- ⁷⁸ Oppenheim, *Who Shapes Cities*, paras. 4-6.
- ⁷⁹ Goodbun, *Ecological Aesthetics*, 41.
- ⁸⁰ Augé, *Non-Places*, 78.
- ⁸¹ Rose, *my evil modernist lair*, para. 4.
- ⁸² See Miéville's 'pictureskew' article in *The Guardian*.
- ⁸³ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 36.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ⁸⁵ Barad, *Meeting the universe halfway*, 170.
- ⁸⁶ Schroeder, *Reterritorializing Subjectivity*, 252.
- ⁸⁷ Cited in Goodbun, *Ecological Aesthetics*, 44.
- ⁸⁸ Moore, *The Capitalocene*, para. 1.
- ⁸⁹ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2.
- ⁹⁰ Cohen, *Ecology of the Inhuman*, 11-12.
- ⁹¹ Dema, *Inorganic, Yet Alive*, para. 1.
- ⁹² Bateson, *Ecology of Mind*, 492.
- ⁹³ Adelson, *Being Alive Well*, 3.
- ⁹⁴ Mcphie, *Mr Messy and the Ghost*, 1.
- ⁹⁵ Adelson, *Being Alive Well*, 9, my italics.
- ⁹⁶ Mcphie, *Embodied walls and Extended Skins*, 240-244.
- ⁹⁷ Murriss, *The Posthuman Child*, 152.
- ⁹⁸ Bryant, *For An Apocalyptic Pedagogy*, 50.
- ⁹⁹ Lispector, *Agua Viva*, 67.

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