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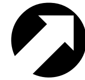

Obituaries, war, 'corporeal remains', and life: history and philosophy of geography, 2007–2008

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Abstract: This progress report reviews contributions made to the history and philosophy of geography for the period 2007–2008. The review is divided into four topical areas: obituaries of geographers; the relation of geography to the Second World War and the Cold War; scientific and social experimentation; and non-representational theory.

Key words: experimentation, non-representational theory, obituaries, war.

> It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,
> Have always known, know that we can't escape,
> Yet can't accept. One side will have to go.
> (Philip Larkin, *Aubade*, 1988 [1977])

I Introduction

The best obituary I ever read was by Raphael Samuel on the British Marxist historian of Nazi Germany, Tim Mason, and appeared in the *Independent* in March 1990 (reprinted as Samuel, 1990a). The writing was luminous: 'Tim Mason was a stormy petrel of historical scholarship' it began (Samuel, 1990a: 180). The obituary lured you in with stories of glittering prizes, protean scholarship that seized the day, and a life animated by big questions. Tim Mason was on the cusp of greatness. But then something went gravely wrong. 'Tim Mason killed himself. He did so with his usual care for others, going away to a hotel for the weekend … [leaving] in a bold hand … instruction, even advising his wife on how she should draw his pension' (Samuel, 1990a: 183). Those details make it sadder, more tragic: the weekend hotel, the instruction 'in a bold hand', the pension advice. They make you realize just how unhappy Tim Mason must have been. This was no spur-of-the-moment decision but required mortal deliberation and planning.

I am afraid it is another downbeat introduction to my Progress Report on the history and philosophy of geography (T.J. Barnes, 2008a). I can't seem to get away from the Grim Reaper. Even my bedside book this week is *Nothing to be frightened of* by Julian Barnes (2008), his musings on death. For Julian Barnes, though, there is everything to

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be frightened of. He routinely wakes at two in the morning screaming with fear about the fate he 'can't escape/Yet can't accept'. He even recanted his youthful atheism for a late-middle-aged agnosticism (for which he was subsequently excoriated by the British literati for weak-kneed capitulation).

Yet there does seem a lot of death around these days, with a frighteningly high number of obituaries, tributes and memorials for deceased geographers appearing over the last 12 months. While hardly a substitute for biography (Quentin Crisp, 1978: 212, said 'an autobiography is an obituary … with the last instalment missing'), I often learnt something about the history of geography from these writings, and certainly something about the lives led, even when, in several cases, they dealt with the lives of people I previously interviewed for a project on the history of geography, or thought I knew relatively well.

II Death and obituaries

Les Hepple, whom I used to think of as a quantitative and political geographer, was one of them (Haggett, 2007; Harris *et al*., 2007; Atkinson, 2008; Dodds, 2008; Megoran, 2008; Sidaway, 2008; and a hitherto unpublished paper by Hepple, 2008). I knew he 'tackled difficult topics with … a minimum of fuss and flannel' (Haggett, 2007: 1), but I thought that meant spatial autocorrelation equations, Bayesian inference, and maximum likelihood models but not the Chilterns. But his *The Chilterns* (Hepple and Doggett, 1992) was described by Oliver Rackham 'as the best of its kind since W. G. Hoskins' (quoted in Haggett, 2007: 2). Hand-in-hand with his range of research interests went Hepple's remarkable autodidacticism. With no formal training in mathematics (not even an 'A' level) he could pass muster with professional statisticians and econometricians, and his capacious ability to 'get by' in several European languages stemmed in part from a dedicated reading of foreign-language dictionaries (Harris *et al*., 2007: 1279).

Allan Pred was almost as much a polymath as Hepple (Gregory, 2007; Krupar, 2007; Olsson, 2007; Paglan, 2007; Thrift, 2007; Walker and Watts, 2007; Watts and Walker, 2007; 2008). He enrolled at Antioch College at age 16, attended the University of Chicago Geography Department at the apogee of its disciplinary power and influence (working for the newly hired Brian Berry), and was appointed at Berkeley without even applying for the job. Nice work if you can get it. As Pred himself said, 'not bad for a kid from the Bronx' (quoted in Walker and Watts, 2007: 391). Striking about Pred's obituaries are the tone of warmth and affection – it makes you feel that you lost out by not being Pred's friend – and their emphasis on his restless, creative, committed, and passionate intellect. The latter took him from the formal intricacies of central place theory learnt with Berry (Berkeley was told 'to swallow the pill … of the new economic geography', and Pred was the pill; Pred, 1998) to montage, experimental writing and performance, to steel mills in Pennsylvania and street names in Stockholm. A compelling tribute by Nigel Thrift ends:

> it may be that all things summon us to death; but we can do many good and remarkable things with the scrap of matter we are lent and Allan did a lot more than most. Allan Pred. Good neighbour to the world. (Thrift, 2007: 1530)

Denis Cosgrove is a third, a footnote in his recent paper registering simply 'Deceased' (Cosgrove, 2008: 1862). Obituaries for Cosgrove are still being written, although some have appeared (della Dora, 2008; Driver, 2008). della Dora (2008) believes Cosgrove was not just a polymath, but a 'universal man'. His CV included computer modeller (albeit practiced as 'cultural performance'; Driver, 2008: 1780), art critic and curator, landscape interpreter, critical social theorist, historian, and radical humanist. Goodness, he even taught physical geography. I remember seeing him at a conference as a commentator, giving

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a brilliant disquisition about refrigerators. It was impromptu, without notes, and jaw-droppingly compelling. No one should be able to do that. But Denis Cosgrove did – a Renaissance man for the Renaissance (and refrigerated) landscapes he brilliantly interpreted.

Obituaries, though, raise a series of sociological questions about hierarchy, status and audience within a discipline. Even after death the discipline continues to discipline. So, who gets to have an obituary? To receive the honour in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* requires that you have been President of the Association or an 'exceptionally distinguished geographer' (D. Richardson, in an email to Trevor Barnes, 2008). But who determines who is exceptionally distinguished? In the case of the *Annals*, it is a vote by the Council of the Association of American Geographers. Then there is the role of the obituary. While it is part of public and private grieving, it also per forms sociological service: reaffirming the community of which the deceased was part; confirming common intellectual 'belongings and common lines of descent' (Samuel, 1990b: 130); making claims about what is important work in the discipline; and 'defy[ing] extinction' by asserting future continuation (Samuel, 1990b: 130). Or, yet again, what makes an obituary an obituary? Can it be mean and spiteful (someone I knew in graduate school dedicated their thesis 'in hate')? Can it be written in Allan Pred's experimental prose? How many years can it appear after the person written about has died and still count as an obituary? In the *Annals* John Borchert's obituary appeared six years after his death (Adams, 2007), and Bill Warntz's nine years (Janelle, 1997). And what is the line, if any, between biography and obituary? For example, many entries written for *Geographers: Biobibliographical Studies* (see the introduction by the new editors, Hayden Lorimer and Charles Withers, 2007) read as academic obituaries. The 2007 issue includes, among others, Hugh Clout's and Anne Buttimer's well-crafted accounts of the lives of H. Clifford Darby and Torsten Hägerstrand, respectively.

There is one other sociological issue: whose obituaries are read and cited? My biases are evident, the consequence of personally knowing the three men I discussed, of each of them dying before their time, of knowing well and admiring the work of each, and thinking of the three as 'my generation'. Not my generation were other geographers whose obituaries were also written over the last year: John Borchert (Adams, 2007); Emrys Jones (Johnston, 2008); Gilbert White (Burton, 2008; Kates and Burton, 2008; J.K. Mitchell, 2008; Murphy, 2008; Palm, 2008); and Arthur Robinson (Morrison, 2008). Instead, theirs was the generation of the War (although both Jones and White were conscientious objectors; see White, 2002, for his remarkable wartime story).

III Wars and geographers

The War generation is not a lost generation, though, given the recent flurry of interest in war and geographers. This includes both the Second World War, and later the Cold War. Arthur Robinson was one of the last geographers alive to serve in the Research and Analysis (R&A) Branch of the US Office of Strategic Services during the Second World War (Morrison, 2008: 232–33). Recruited by Richard Hartshorne in October 1941, Robinson became Chief of the Map Division, responsible for producing over 8000 new maps including those used at four Churchill-Roosevelt summits. After the war, Robinson pioneered analytical cartography (Morrison, 2008: 234), conforming to a larger 'new rigorism' that swept across 1950s US social sciences and humanities (Schorske, 1997). Behind it lay Cold War military concerns. If scientific rigour could win the Second World War, it could also win the Cold War, especially when greased by large dollops of US military money.

Barnes (2008b) makes precisely this argument for 1950s' American geography,

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suggesting that three of the individuals – Waldo Tobler, William Garrison, and Arthur Strahler – who significantly shaped the discipline's 'new rigorism', its 'Quantitative Revolution', were each indebted to Cold War military funds. Already this thesis is disputed. From one of the hearths of that Revolution across the Atlantic, the Bristol collective (Johnston *et al.*, 2008) contend that Barnes' Cold War theory is too conspiratorial, reductionist, and geographically limited. Drawing on British history of the 'new geography', they argue that the quantitative revolution had multiple geographical origins, and produced by multiple causes (Johnston *et al.*, 2008). In contrast, one of the central players in that British Revolution, and in many ways founder of the very hearth from which Johnston *et al*. write, Peter Haggett (2008), limits 'the local shape of revolution' in the UK to only the Cambridge–Bristol axis.

There was no direct equivalent to the R&A Branch in Britain, but there was an Intelligence Corps, and in 1941 the Cambridge geographer H. Clifford Darby was commissioned to serve in it. Seconded to the Admiralty, he 'work[ed] on, and subsequently coordinate[d] a share of, the Naval Intelligence Handbooks' (Clout, 2007: 82). Unlike the rationale for R&A projects that were geared towards immediate military operations, the Handbooks were conceived more as background knowledge, 'wide-ranging compendia of information on countries' (Clout, 2007: 82). Their writing and production, in turn, pulled in a large number of British geographers including, as Avril Maddrell (2008: 127) calls them, 'map girls'. While still subaltern to the military command of men, such as Darby, and frequently consigned to mundane duties well below their First Class intellectual abilities (the meteorologist Cuchlaine King says her wartime work 'could have been done by anyone'; quoted in Maddrell, 2008: 142), there were also wartime benefits for women such as access to permanent academic posts because of the conscription of male geographers to military service. It reminded me of Sarah Waters' (2006) brilliant novel *The night watch* set mainly in the London Blitz, in which women civil rescue workers create from horrific urban wartime chaos new and fulfilling spaces in which to act but which are denied them during peacetime. Like the novel, Maddrell's (2008: 142) paper also reveals a 'hidden history' of women in wartime service, thus 'feminizing and democratizing the history of geography'.

Hidden, maybe even top-secret, histories are given up in David Matless *et al.*'s (2008) discussion of the travels of British geographers who undertook research in Eastern Bloc countries during the Cold War. Their argument is that geographical intelligence comes in all shapes and sizes: sometimes as RAND Corp. reports, sometimes as spies at Checkpoint Charlie coming in from the Cold, and just sometimes as Inturist-organized field trips for western geographers to ball-bearing factories in Romania ('shambolic' though they may have been; Matless *et al.*, 2008: 363). In Richard Powell's (2007) paper, geographical intelligence is found literally at the end of the earth, in Canada's High Arctic. To assert Cold War sovereignty, the Canadian government sponsored Arctic experimental research, particularly the Polar Continental Shelf Project. Powell (2007: 1807) contends that once Arctic scientists, including several geographers, left the controlled setting of the laboratory to work in the field, a frigid and unpredictable Canadian far north, they were unable to adhere to 'Popperian' ideals of experimental practice. The High Arctic was too hostile an environment. Wristwatches and fountain pens stopped working, and so did paradigmatic scientific conceptual frameworks. Arctic scientists were on their own, making it up as they went along.

IV Experiments and geography

The geography of scientific experiments is explored systematically by Powell and Vasudevan (2007). Using a phrase coined

by the historian of science Peter Galison, they urge 'sited histories' of scientific experiments, that is, geographical accounts that 'acknowledge the rich, varied, and often irremediably local circumstances through which experimental matters of fact are produced, contested, and institutionalized' (Powell and Vasudevan, 2007: 1792). Vasudevan (2007) does precisely that in his richly illustrated paper about psychological experimentation in interwar Germany. Clout's (2008) 'sited history' of the *Société Normande de Géographie* in Rouen (1879–1937) is not about experiments as such, but is a paragon study of the production, institutionalization and occasional contestation of geographical facts as they are reported and circulate to a wider Normandy public. Heike Jöns (2008) adds an important element, travel, as revealed in a set of compelling maps of research trips by Cambridge University academics to various sites of experiment and knowledge production (1889–1954). Globe-trotting professors clearly pre-date David Lodge's Morris Zapp by a century. Finally, Charlie Withers (2007: xi) discusses geographies of scientific experimentation, albeit briefly, in his wide-ranging volume on the 'Enlightenment as a geographical phenomenon'.

Experiments, of course, do not happen only in science. 'All life is an experiment', Oliver Wendell Holmes said (quoted in Menand, 2001: 430). Bill Bunge's life certainly is, as is illustrated in Heyman's (2007) excellent but oddly entitled paper. An acolyte of geography's quantitative revolution, acutely political from the beginning (he owned a special suit as a graduate student at the University of Washington to wear at protests and demonstrations), Bunge began experiments in geographical pedagogy from the mid-1960s, in his case, as field trips into Detroit's black inner-city districts. They were experimental opportunities for geographers not only to learn from neighbourhood residents ('folk geographers' as he called them), but also to teach and to advocate on their behalf so that residents could become 'problematizers of their situations and … active creators of their environment' (Heyman, 2007: 105).

In the same vein, there was a great deal of discussion during this past year of how intellectuals in general, and human geographers in particular, might contribute to social experiments of the kind Bunge enacted, as well as how to be a public intellectual (Ward, 2007; *Antipode* 40(3), 2008). As a theme it also emerges in several of the commentaries around Matt Sparke's 2005 book *In the space of theory*, in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, 169–88 (2008). I especially enjoyed the contribution by Doreen Massey (2008), named by Nigel Thrift (2002) as one of the discipline's few public intellectuals (although she was overlooked by *Prospect* and *The Guardian*, neither of which identified a single geographer in their respective top 100 lists; Ward, 2007: 1059). Massey, in many ways like Powell, thinks that when engaging in experiment you must be alive to the possibilities of the geographical moment. She says there is no 'linear model: first you do the theory, have the ideas, then you go out and inflict them upon the world. No way' (Massey, 2008: 495). Instead, on-the-ground 'engagement' comes first and matters most (Massey's engagements are discussed in Barnes *et al*., 2007, and Massey and Meegan, 2007). The contrast is with Don Mitchell (2008) who guiltily confesses to being a desk-bound radical. There is 'nothing more important than study, nothing more important than the hard work of thinking through tough concepts', Mitchell (2008: 449) says, justifying himself by quoting an activist.

V Philosophy and life

'Thinking through tough concepts' preoccupied a number of geographers this year as they attempted to understand, as Nigel Thrift (2008: 1) nicely puts it, 'Life, but not as we know it'. Central have been Thrift's own works on non-representational theory (compiled in Thrift, 2008). Thrift's opening definitional gambit could do with more

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explication, however: 'non-representational theory takes the leitmotif of movement and works with it as a means of going beyond constructionism' (Thrift, 2008: 5). Hayden Lorimer (2005: 84) offers a more useful definition when he substitutes for non-representational theory 'more-than-representational theory'. What is being sought is the means 'to cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds' (Lorimer, 2005: 83). Conventional representation gets you only so far, which is not very far at all. Non-representation theory takes you to spaces and places unreachable by other means.

If you think that this sounds like something that Timothy Leary might have said, you would be partially right, at least according to Simon Rycroft (2007). He argues 'that aspects of nonrepresentational thought emerged from 1960s innovations in performance and practice' especially in the underground film and music scene in Venice and the Sunset Strip, Los Angeles (Rycroft, 2007: 616). But now it can be appreciated everywhere, even in places that seem about as remote from beat-artist 1960s LA as you can get, such as Nant-y-Cwm Steiner kindergarten School in rural Pembrokeshire, West Wales. The spaces of that building, according to Peter Kraftl and Peter Adey (2008: 214), were designed as 'not only symbolic, but more than representational, haptic, performative, embodied, material, and affectual'. There is no escape. The non-representational is everywhere.

Contributing to non-representational theory's philosophical exposition this year was a set of essays by British and continental European male geographers undertaking various kinds of conceptual heavy lifting (Dewsbury, 2007; Doel and Clarke, 2007; Dodgshon, 2008a; 2008b; Fraser, 2008; Harrison, 2008; Korf, 2008; Netto, 2008). I mean this as a compliment. To engage at the level of philosophical elucidation, interpretation, and deployment found in these pieces required significant acuity, effort, dedication, and scholarship. It seemed to me that this work now defines at least in the UK the character of contemporary philosophy in geography. It is continental European rather than Anglo-American, concerned with ethics and the subject rather than analytics and the truth, is often ontological rather than epistemological, critical rather than architectonic, dialogical rather than declarative. While I struggled to understand the writing in places, I admired it for its energy, liveliness, and commitment. I came to think of its sometimes unusual vocabulary as a means to shock or jolt me into looking at the world in a very different way ('Life, but not as we know it'). The world is not some static entity, independently existing 'out there' waiting to be represented, but is continually in flux, constantly being performed in a 'specious present' (Dodgshon, 2008a: 300), leaving residues of 'corporeal remains' (Harrison, 2008). These vocabularies are meant to extend and intensify thought and action, to address the big questions of 'Life, the Universe, and Everything'.

But you have to admit that there is an odd sociology and geography at work. Why are all these philosophical expositions by men? None of the contributors to the collection *Feminisms in geography* (Moss and Falconer Al-Hindi, 2008) (who are all women) give even a mention to non-representational theory, nor to the authors who are key to it. And why so British given the increasingly voluminous international traffic in geographical ideas? Withers (2007: Chapter 2) argues in the case of the Enlightenment (one of the deadly enemies of non-representational theory) that categorizing it by country provides an insufficiently nuanced geography of the production of its ideas and spatial circulation. Such a judgment applies in this case too. When I call non-representational theory British, it does not do justice to its complex internal geography, but nonetheless there is something peculiar about its geography.

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It is another topic for research when the philosophy of non-representational theory becomes geography's history.

VI Conclusion

Paul Valéry said 'A poem is never finished, only abandoned'. I feel like that about this progress report. In fact, I am not sure how a report about the history and philosophy of geography can ever be finished. It would imply that the loose ends were sewn up, that the history and philosophy of geography had come to a dead halt.

The contributions this year were as vital, lively and energetic as ever. While I began with several geographers who passed beyond life, their unfinished works continued to provoke, remaining open to revision and interpretation by future audiences. Philip Larkin, from whose *Aubade* I took my epigraph, was someone cynical about how posterity would treat him, writing a blackly funny poem about his potential fate (*Posterity*, Larkin, 1988). But on a good day he could soar, recognizing unlimited possibilities – which I would like to think applies as much to the history and philosophy of geography as it does to life itself.

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:

> The sun-comprehending glass,
> And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
> Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.
> (Philip Larkin, *High windows*, 1988 [1967])

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