

# 1 Non-Representational Research Methodologies

## An Introduction

*Phillip Vannini*

There are, and there will always be, miserable days in the lives of researchers. These are the days when the inevitable realization that our work is utterly inadequate at apprehending the intricate textures of the lifeworld subjects of our analysis and description strikes with its mightiest force. These are the days when reading again one's writings, playing back one's video or audio documentaries, staring at one's photos, or recalling one's performances pushes an author over the depressing abyss of self-insufficiency and doubt. These are the days when researchers wish they had chosen an art career devoid of the pretensions of accurate representation. For some of us the doldrums of these forlorn days fade away with the next long-awaited book contract or the prospect of a jaunt to an exotic conference destination. But the awareness that our work is invariably partial, simplistic, or even unimaginative and inauthentic is bound to resurface again, and again. Depiction—it seems—is futile.

Should we then surrender? Or perhaps come up with a new scientific method? Or maybe, given the zeitgeist, a cute new “app” for our journals? Maybe we could. But we will not be doing any of that here. This book is not a self-help manual for the sufferer of a midlife epistemological crisis. It does not promise handy solutions, formulas, procedures, or codes for a more accurate representation of disparate lifeworlds. And because it does not aim to offer original laments over the crisis of representation or the death of the author it does not hope to lend a shoulder to cry on either. So, you might wonder: what exactly are these sheets of paper good for? Well, for a more radical solution, really: to quit—hopefully for good—our obsession with representation. Let this volume be a manifesto for the ethos of *non-representational research*.

Non-representational research—the skeptical reader might immediately react—sounds like the most apropos synonym for non-funded and non-published research. How can, after all, research—which is the very process of describing, understanding, and explaining an empirical reality—deny its very *raison d'être*? How can people whose job responsibility is to be all but fiction authors pretend to be able to obliterate the single criterion that separates them from the domain of fantasy?

## 2 Phillip Vannini

Admittedly, these are not ungrounded, unsympathetic, or merely cynical critiques. And to complicate the picture even further, non-representational authors themselves may even have deep and fundamental doubts about the value of non-representational “research”—and for some the scare quotes here are absolutely obligatory. Some may indeed question the very idea of research and of method, for example, or deny the value of a body of knowledge—epistemology or methodology—exclusively dedicated to doing research more accurately. Yet all of us writing in these pages in the end hold the belief that the research we all do has at least some merit and promise. Is our denial of representationalism the true answer to the crisis of authority and representation then? Non-representational research methodologies—of which this book provides a panoramic gaze—offer, if not definitive, at least compelling responses to this interrogative.

But let us back up for a second. What is all this fuss about non-representational research? Our quest for non-representational methodologies is born out of the growth of non-representational theory. Briefly, non-representational theory (or as it is sometimes referred to, “more-than-representational” theory; see Lorimer, 2005) is one of the contemporary moment’s most influential theoretical perspectives within social and cultural theory. As evidence of this popularity, simply consider Nigel Thrift’s (2008) instant classic *Non-Representational Theory: Space/Politics/Affect*. Only five years after its publication the book, according to Google Scholar, has been cited 646 times. Non-representational theory is now widely considered to be the successor of postmodern theory, the logical development of post-structuralist thought, and the most notable intellectual force behind the turn away from cognition, symbolic meaning, and textuality.

Non-representational theory is popular and influential, but it is controversial and often poorly understood. This is in part because of its complexity, but in large part also because of its limited application in research practice and because of its many unanswered methodological questions. How actually powerful and useful non-representational research is, in this sense, is yet to be fully appreciated. This book proposes to tackle this very subject by outlining a variety of ways in which non-representational ideas can influence the research process, the very value of empirical research, the nature of data, the political value of evidence, the methods and modes of research, the very notion of method, and the styles, genres, and media of research. The chapters to follow, therefore, aim to serve as a launching point for a diverse non-representational research “agenda.” Such parliament of perspectives, we hope, will spearhead a long-lasting non-representational research tradition across the social and cultural sciences. But let us proceed by outlining first the nature of non-representational theory.

### NON-REPRESENTATIONAL THEORY

As Lorimer (2005, p. 83) concisely puts it, “Non-representational theory is an umbrella term for diverse work that seeks to better cope with our

self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds.” With roots in the fine and performing arts, solid foundations in human geography, and expansions across cultural studies, the humanities, and the social sciences, non-representational theory is a mosaic of theoretical ideas borrowed from fields as different as performance studies, material culture studies, science and technology studies, contemporary continental philosophy, political ecology, cultural geographies, ecological anthropology, biological philosophy, cultural studies, the sociology of the body and emotions, and the sociology and anthropology of the senses—to name only a few.

Theoretically, non-representational theory stands as a synthesizing effort to amalgamate diverse but interrelated theoretical perspectives, such as actor-network theory, biological philosophy, neomaterialism, process philosophy, speculative realism, social ecology, performance theory, poststructuralist feminism, critical theory, postphenomenology, and pragmatism. Its typical reference lists therefore tend to feature names of philosophers like Michelle Serres, Bruno Latour, Michel de Certeau, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Donna Haraway, Erving Goffman, Alphonso Lingis, Brian Massumi, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Tim Ingold, Emmanuel Levinas, Alfred North Whitehead, Isabelle Stengers, Maurice Blanchot, Jean Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou, Gilbert Simondon, Nigel Thrift, and probably most commonly of all Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

Due to its eclectic character it is quite difficult to summarize non-representational theory’s diverse ideas succinctly. Thrift’s (2008) work is quite helpful in this regard. In a difficult but remarkably clear, well-organized, and contagiously enthusiastic opening chapter to his foundational volume on the topic, Thrift outlines seven core principles, or ideal qualities, of non-representational theory. Thrift is quick to point out that his intent in territorializing non-representational theory is not to systematize it but rather to outline the potentials of a new experimental genre: a hybrid genre for a hybrid world. His seven principles, therefore, are to be understood as a tentative formation of a new intellectual landscape that is liable to enliven—through the “application of a series of procedures and techniques of expression” (p. 2)—a new hybrid: a science/art that works as an interpretive “supplement to the ordinary, a sacrament for the everyday, a hymn to the superfluous” (p. 2). Neither laws nor root images, the principles work as exercises in creative production and as “practices of vocation” (p. 3) meant for an imprecise science concerned more with hope for politico-epistemic renewal than validity. And—opportunistically—the principles very much aid our brief overview.

According to Thrift, non-representational theory’s first programmatic tenet is to “capture the ‘onflow’ . . . of everyday life” (p. 5). Life is movement—geographic and existential kinesis. Movements of all kinds are profoundly social activities that are both perceptive of the world and generative and transformative of it (Ingold, 2011). Life is a viscous becoming in time-space moved by the “desire to do more than simply squeeze meaning from the world” (Thrift, 2008, p. 5). Existence is marked by an instinctive intentionality—a Deweyan qualitative immediacy of sorts—that transcends

consciousness, and by an effervescent energy unharnessed and unprogrammed by thought. Non-representational theory therefore rejects the cognitive tendencies of radical empiricism, representational identity politics, and the post-modern obsession with deconstructing textual meaning (Lorimer, 2005). It emphasizes instead the power of the precognitive as a performative technology for adaptive living, as an instrument of sensation, play, and imagination, and a life force fueling the excesses and the rituals of everyday living.

Second, “non-representational theory is resolutely anti-biographical and preindividual” (Thrift, 2008, p. 7). Autobiography “provide[s] a spurious sense of oneness,” whereas biography offers a “suspect intimacy with the dead” (p. 7). What Thrift—borrowing here from Freud—seems to fear is biography’s ambition to find, as well as construct, an artificial sense of individual wholeness and hermeneutic coherence in the past, whereas non-representational theory is truly anchored in the present of practice. Of all seven principles this is arguably the most obscure, as Thrift fails to specify what precise types of biographical work he is most inimical toward, what further reasons he has—besides the battle cry remarks reported earlier—for conflating biography with humanistic whole-ism, and whether his criticism extends to more contemporary poststructuralist forms of narrative inquiry. In spite of the cryptic meaning of this point, together tenets one and two constitute non-representational theory’s criticism of methodological individualism and a strong incitation for complexity and relationality, a point taken up later in this chapter and in several chapters of this book.

Third, non-representational theory concerns itself with practice, action, and performance. Non-representational theorists are weary of the structuralist heritage of the social sciences and suspicious of all attempts to uncover symbolic meaning where other, more practical forms of meaning or even no meaning at all exist. Relying primarily on performative approaches to relational action and on postphenomenological and Deleuzian philosophy, non-representational work puts a premium on the corporeal rituals and entanglements embedded in embodied action rather than talk or cognitive attitudes. As Lorimer (2005, p. 84) puts it,

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. Attention 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, judgment and ultimate representation. In short, so much ordinary action gives no advance notice of what it will become.

Fourth, non-representational theory is built on the principle—borrowed primarily from actor-network theory—of relational materialism. Material

objects are no mere props for performance but parts and parcel of hybrid assemblages endowed with diffused personhood and relational agency. “The human body”—Thrift tells us—“is what it is because of its unparalleled ability to co-evolve with things” (p. 10). In this sense material objects are to be given the same conceptual and empirical weight that is warranted to their human companions. Things form a “technological antecconscious” (p. 10) with the human body’s nervous system, and therefore non-representational theory ought to reject any separation between corporeality, materiality, and sociality. Going even farther than Thrift, Ingold (2011) argues that materiality is a useless abstraction: it is a concept we impute to things because we do not bother to hold them in sufficient regard for what they are and what they do. The actual “materials, it seems, have gone missing” (*ibid.*, p. 20) from social scientific analysis because the symbolic qualities of the “objects” they make up unduly take precedence. But upon close examination non-representational writers realize that materials are active: “they circulate, mix with one another, solidify and dissolve in the formation of more or less enduring things” (*ibid.*, p. 16). Materials are their doing and it is through their qualities, movements, and force that they exert their life.

Fifth, non-representational theory is meant to be experimental. Non-representational theorists feel a deep antipathy for the hyper-empirical conservative tendencies of the traditional social sciences, for the conventions of realism, and—obviously—for any manifestation of positivism. By invoking the expressive power of the performance arts, Thrift calls on social scientists-cum-artists to “crawl out to the edge of the cliff of the conceptual” (Vendler, 1995, p. 79, cited in Thrift, 2008, p. 12) and to engage in a battle against methodological fetishism and in a “poetics of the release of energy that might be thought to resemble play” (p. 12). By refusing a social science obsessed with control, prediction, and the will to explain and understand everything, Thrift calls for a sense of wonder to be injected back into the social sciences (also see Ingold, 2011b). Non-representational work tries to be restless and willfully immature. It seeks to push limits and strives for renewal. Indeed, as we will discuss throughout this entire book, non-representational work aims to rupture, unsettle, animate, and reverberate rather than report and represent.

Sixth, non-representational theory stresses the importance of bodies. Thrift (2008) views bodies not as subjects for microsociological empirical attention but as the engines of political regeneration, driving the new politics and ethics of hope that he proposes. Bodies are especially important because of their affective capacities. Affects are “properties, competencies, modalities, energies, attunements, arrangements and intensities of differing texture, temporality, velocity and spatiality, that act on bodies, are produced through bodies and transmitted by bodies” (Lorimer, 2008, p. 552). Non-representational theory’s attention to affect and its derivatives—moods, passions, emotions, intensities, and feelings (Anderson, 2006)—transcends the human, focusing on relations amid inanimate objects, living, non-human

matter, place, ephemeral phenomena, events, technologies, and much more (McCormack, 2006). Thus non-representational theorists posit affect as an uncircumscribed force unbounded to a whole self and unanchored in human subjectivity (McCormack, 2006).

At last, the seventh tenet of non-representational theory stresses an ethic of novelty suggesting “a particular form of boosting aliveness” (p. 14) and a promissory, regenerating Jamesian potentiality: a “jump to another world” (p. 15). Traditional ethical systems will not suffice for non-representational thinkers, built as they are on traditional humanistic principles of a univocal human subject, “transparent, rational, and continuous” (p. 14). A new ethics built on the craftsmanship of everyday life and existing on the “interstices of interaction” (p. 15) is liable to “build new forms of life” in which “strangeness itself [is] the locus of new forms of neighborliness and community” (Santner, 2001, p. 6, cited in Thrift, 2008, p. 14).

Non-representational theory’s seven tenets are meant to sensitize social scientists to the fact that “they are there to hear the world and make sure that it can speak back, just as much as they are there to produce wild ideas,” “to render the world problematic by elaborating questions,” and to open research and theorizing to “more action, more imagination, more light, more fun, even” (Thrift, 2008, pp. 18–20). These tenets are points not only of theoretical departure but also of methodological inspiration, as we will see next.

## NON-REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH

Representation is a tricky affair. Doel (2010, p. 117) explains,

Ordinarily, representation is bound to a specific form of repetition: the repetition of the same. Through representation, what has already been given will come to have been given again. Such is its fidelity: to give again, and again, what has already been given, without deviation or departure. Such is its fidelity to an original that is fated to return through a profusion of dutiful copies; an original whose identity is secured and re-secured through a perpetual return of the same and whose identity is threatened by the inherent capacity of the copy to be a deviant or degraded repetition, a repetition that may introduce an illicit differentiation in the place ostensibly reserved for an identification.

In wishing to do away with the repetitions, the structures, the orders, the givens, and the identities of representation, non-representational theory is quite ambitious. It seeks novelty and experimental originality. Rather than to resemble, it seeks to dissemble (Doel, 2010, p. 117). It wants to make us feel something powerful, to give us a sense of the ephemeral, the fleeting, and the not-quite-graspable. It hopes to give life to the inanimate and

the more-than-human. It strives to be animated, to be on the move, to be constantly doing something meaningful (and occasionally something meaningless and not so serious) without necessarily having to resort to spoken commentary, to extended captions, and to research informants' transcribed accounts and illustrating narrations. It does not refute representation but it pursues it in parallel with differentiation (Doel, 2010). It wants the impossible, really. No wonder then, as Dewsbury (2009) puts it, it is destined to fail it. Yet, as he incites us to do following Beckett's famous dictum, in the end our job as non-representationalists is to simply fail better.

But what exactly do non-representationalists do, to begin with? Can a student of non-representational theory hope to study anything—from public opinion on third-trimester abortion to the effects of mobile media use on adolescents' political outlooks, or from environmental NGOs' best practices to the moral dimensions of the self-concept—with her newly found theoretical muse? Or is it more prudent to suggest that some research topics are better tackled with other, more appropriate tools, lest one end up hammering away at a screw? Given non-representational theorists' propensity to develop ideas around bodies and performances and about “the making of meaning and signification in the manifold of actions and interactions rather than in a supplementary dimension such as that of discourse, ideology, and symbolic order” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 2) we believe that non-representational research will be better equipped—at least in the first instance—to tackle the following subject matter, in no particular order.

Firstly, non-representational research concentrates on *events*. Events are happenings, unfoldings, regular occurrences inspired (but not overdetermined) by states of anticipation and irregular actions that shatter expectations. Events—their sites, actors, stakes, consequences, politics, and temporalities—reveal old and new potentialities for collective “being, doing, and thinking” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 19). Events bring forth drama and conflict, uncertainties and ways of thinking, subjectivities, differences, and repetitions (Dewsbury, 2000; Turner, 1975). Events are indeterminate, excessive, and irretrievable (Dewsbury, 2000) affairs whose unfolding allow us to apprehend the structures of change and the dynamics of stability (Massumi, 2002). Accidents, predicaments, advents, transactions, adventures, appearances, turns, calamities, proceedings, celebrations, mishaps, phenomena, ceremonies, coincidences, crises, emergencies, episodes, junctures, milestones, becomings, miracles, occasions, chances, triumphs, and many more events all equally reveal “the contingency of orders to morph into an explicit concern with the new, and with the chances of invention and creativity” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 19). Events, in sum, are examined because they inevitably highlight not instrumental plans, blueprints for action, and a priori scripts and conditions but rather the possibility of alternative futures, the failures of representations, the contingencies of interventions, and the effervescence with which things actually take place.

Secondly, non-representational research privileges the study of *relations*. Non-representational researchers, alongside with relational scholars, believe that life arises from the entanglement of actors—human and non-human animals, organic matter, and material objects. Inspired by either actor-network-theory (e.g., Law & Hassard, 1999), knowledge on assemblages (DeLanda, 2006), or meshworks (Ingold, 2011), non-representational researchers study not units in controlled isolation but rather the vital processes through which relations take place. Herein lies much of the non-representational skepticism towards methodological individualism, with its tendencies to single out, bracket, and narrow down phenomena, as well as its humanistic bias for conflating the social and the cultural with human exceptionalism. A relational view of the lifeworld, on the other hand, zeros in on the crossroads between metaphysical and material, crossroads “where many different things gather, not just deliberative humans, but a diverse range of actors and forces, some of which we know about, some not, and some of which may be just on the edge of awareness” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 10). Such emphasis on relational materialism, immanence, and the sociality of “things” prompts non-representational researchers to study associations, mutual formations, ecologies, constellations, and cofabrications that highlight how the conjunction “AND” matters more than the verb “IS” (*ibid.*, p. 15 after Deleuze, 2001, p. 38).

Thirdly, non-representational research focuses on *doings*: practices and performances. The non-representational attention to practices—from the most mundane and routine to the most ritualized—stands in sharp contrast to other perspectives’ preoccupation with “internal” states of mind, like thoughts, ideas, motivations, drives, values, beliefs, traits, and attitudes. Whereas representational theories study the mind and its operations as preconditions for action, non-representational researchers examine thought exclusively in action, concentrating on unreflexive, semireflexive, unintrospective, preobjective, and habitual actions and interactions. The idea of performance captures well the meaning of practice and helps non-representational researchers “unlock and animate new (human and nonhuman) potentialities” (Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000, p. 411). Performance is a kind of action. To be sure, actors perform, but so do others, and without any scripts. Athletes perform by running faster or hitting harder, cars perform by driving more efficiently or hugging the road more securely, lovers perform by lasting longer and pleasing more, and so on. Performance is, essentially, about getting things done. Performance is therefore a potential waiting to be actualized: an opening, a possibility awaiting the unfolding of practice (Schechner, 2006). Non-representational researchers then study performances as expressive engagements of the body’s kinesthetic and intuitive power to produce certain effects, whether expected or unexpected, intended or unintended, inventive or uninventive, effective or ineffective.

Fourthly, non-representational research analyzes *affective resonances*. Affect is a pull and a push, an intensity of feeling, a sensation, a passion,



an atmosphere, an urge, a mood, a drive—all of the above and none of the above in particular. Affect is embodied but not coterminous with the body. Non-representational theory was born, in large part, as a reaction to the textualist tendencies of social constructivism (Anderson & Harrison, 2010). Among many other concerns, non-representational researchers found much to be desired in the constructivist techniques of “reading” the human body and its endless representations in various media as if it were a text. Moreover, non-representational students of affect prefer to study the unsaid and the barely sayable (see McCormack, 2002; Stewart, 2007). Thus non-representational researchers examine affect as a capacity: the body’s capacity to be moved and be affected, and the body’s capacity to move and affect other people and other things. According to Anderson (2006, p. 735) therefore affect is best understood non-representationally as “a transpersonal capacity which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications)” —a definition that underlines the body’s productive capacity and its radical openness to others, and its origin in a transpersonal space marked by emergent doings of various kinds.

Fifthly, non-representational researchers are keen on examining *backgrounds*. Backgrounds are the sites that fall outside of common awareness, the atmospheres we take for granted, the places in which habitual dispositions regularly unfold. Anderson and Harrison (2010, p. 8) explain that a background is the backdrop “against which particular things show up and take on significance: a mobile but more or less stable ensemble of practices, involvements, relations, capacities, tendencies, and affordances. A zone of stabilisation within the manifold of actions and interactions which has the form of a holding wave or recursive patterning.” Backgrounds are thus (post) phenomenological lifeworlds that come to being as an outcome of practices of habitation (Ingold, 2011). They are the roads and trails our wayfinding weaves (Ingold, 2011), the piping and the cables our quest for speed, power, and light forms (Bennett, 2010; Thrift, 1996), the knowledge our doings enact (Latour, 1999), the gatherings, the homes, the towns, and the spaces by the roadside where ordinary affects pervade our bodies (Stewart, 2007). Backgrounds are made up and “open to intervention, manipulation, and innovation” as well as “colonisation, domination, control, cultivation, and intervention” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, pp. 10–11), but for that no less real, no less tangible, no less consequential.

Events, relations, practices and performances, affects, and backgrounds aren’t everything. They aren’t little either. They are often little understood, infrequently studied, but very intriguing staples of the non-representational research regimen and its future appetite. There are more subjects, of course. But together these five important sets of interests make up more than just an arsenal of research avenues, for whatever a non-representational study may be precisely about, these five forces reverberate across the lifeworld, informing and shaping each other, unfolding in more intricate patterns as new research directions are revealed, inspiring non-representational analysis

and rendition. But if events, relations, practices and performances, affects, and backgrounds are mostly the “what” of non-representational research, and the beginning of the “how,” what more can be said about the actual conduction of non-representational work? Is there a non-representational methodology? Can there be non-representational methods?

## NON-REPRESENTATIONAL METHODOLOGIES

Now that the central tenets and key research foci of non-representational theory have been properly introduced, let us return for a moment to the event with which we opened this chapter: the sad day in the academic’s representational life. Feelings of despondence, inefficacy, and frustration may very well be the epitome of the futile scholarly effort over representation, but to truly understand the significance of this situation and its relevance for the non-representational paradigm we must reflect on this case in greater depth. In fact, to be honest, there is nothing prototypically non-representational about this situation. After the crisis of representation (see Clifford & Marcus, 1986) *all* academics regardless of theoretical persuasion and methodological orientation are likely to struggle with the “validity” of their representations. Realists may endeavor to portray a faithful account of a social world, for instance, just as tirelessly as nominalists may labor to construct the nuances their narratives. To write—but the same can be said of other modes of scholarly communication as well—about a research subject is always, inevitably, to translate. And *traduttore, traditore*—the translator is a traitor—as we all know. So, how does the non-representational ethos come into play in all of this? How can non-representational ideas tackle this challenge in unique ways? In a moment we will find out, but for now another introductory step back.

To speak of methodologies is not the same as to speak of method—despite the myriad journal articles with their mistaken interchangeable headings on these matters. *Research methods*, let us be precise about this, are procedures for the collection of empirical material (i.e., data) (e.g., see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Collection means obtaining and inventorying through gathering techniques, such as interviews, participant observation, and so forth. Research methods also encompass other issues pertinent to data collection, such as case selection, sampling, recruiting participants, and much more. Methods, in other words, are tools through which we get data. What we do with these data once we have accumulated enough is a matter of research strategy. *Research strategies* are procedures for the treatment of data, such as data organization, analysis, and presentation. One may thus adopt a sensory ethnographic strategy to data collected via participant observation methods, for example, or a narrative strategy, or grounded theory, or very much anything else that fits the researcher’s preference. Methods and strategies require that students and scholars exercise judgment and make explicit

choices throughout the research process. These choices are all but random, as large bodies of knowledge—both practical applications of methods and strategy, as well as more abstract reflections on pros and cons and on epistemological foundations (e.g., this book)—have accumulated over time. These bodies of knowledge are what we refer to as *methodologies*.

So, now that methods, strategies, and methodologies have been clearly defined we can finally tackle the big question behind this chapter: are there unique non-representational methodologies? The answer is a resounding yes, though as it will be clear from reading the chapters included in this book there is no univocal and orthodox non-representational methodological school of thought. Some agreement exists however, I surmise, in how the despondence and sense of insufficiency felt by our poor frustrated colleague might be tackled. And that approach, I believe, might very well be the trademark of non-representational methodologies. What is that approach, then? First, let us rule out some possible alternatives.

The very first option to rule out is that of a unique non-representational method. There simply isn't one. Non-representational researchers conduct interviews, focus groups, observations, participant observations, introspections, archival research, case studies, breaching experiments, artistic interventions, performances, and a plethora of other traditions of data collection that researchers affiliated with many other paradigms and theories undertake. About this Thrift (2008)—in singling out particular methods—is simply wrong. The non-representational researcher is not characterized by the choice or by the rejection of a particular method. And indeed the non-representational researcher—concerned as she is with issues of novelty, extemporaneity, vitality, emergence, and experimental creativity—might very well be uninterested in systematic procedures of data collection.

The second option to rule out is that of a unique non-representational mode or medium of communication. Non-representational research can unfold through writing, through photography, through dance, or through poetry, video, sound, art installations, or any of the other research communication modes and media available in the twenty-first century (for very extensive and useful directories, see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Knowles & Cole, 2007). In this sense we must be skeptical towards pronouncements about the absolute superiority of “performance”-based strategies over others. First, this is because performance is no magic-bullet strategy: it has its pros (e.g., liveliness, embodied presence, relationality) and it has its cons (e.g., limited applicability and analytical depth). Second, because despite all the lip service paid to performance and in spite of all the claims to be doing performance hardly anyone does it (no, a journal article is not a performance!; see Saldana, 2006) and, honestly, even fewer people do it right.

And the third option to rule out is that of an escape from data and a retreat into theoretical solipsism. Although there is nothing wrong in developing theoretical essays with little or no grounding in an immediately

observable empirical background or case, non-representational theory, if it is to continue to be useful, must not retreat into developing theory for theory's sake. In a global, neoliberal academic environment overpreoccupied with research impact and universities' relevance in their communities, eschewing empirical analysis altogether is not something we should wish to encourage anyone to do (and indeed this might very well be a shortcoming of current non-representational work in general: too few are non-representational research studies in relative comparison to the sheer number of conceptual elaborations and theoretical interventions).

What is the unique non-representational approach, then? It is an issue of *style*—a unique style in territorializing, de-territorializing, reterritorializing, and animating life. To say this differently, the non-representational answer to the crisis of representation lies in a variety of research styles and techniques that do not concern themselves so much with representing life-worlds as with issuing forth novel reverberations. The key lies in a different orientation to “data.” Data, the Latin word for given, is not so much what interests non-representationalists. Other scholars—phenomenologists, nominalists, and constructivists to name a few—are similarly skeptical towards the world as given. But what truly distinguishes the non-representational research from others is a different orientation to the temporality of knowledge, for non-representationalists are much less interested in representing an empirical reality that has taken place *before* the act of representation than they are in enacting multiple and diverse potentials of what knowledge can become *afterwards*. This can get awfully complicated, so let us say it in different and simpler terms.

Imagine you are actually the one academic frustrated by your all-too-human inability to represent an event or feeling or encounter as you experienced it. Your orientation is towards the *past* of knowledge: you struggle to report precisely—or sufficiently creatively—something that happened already. That is happening because events are unique and their mimesis is impossible. But let us say your orientation changes. You cease to be so preoccupied with how the past unfolded and with your responsibility for capturing it. You become instead interested in evoking, in the present moment, a future impression in your reader, viewer, or listener. It is the present that suddenly interests you, and how the present can unfold in the future: what can become of your work, in what unique and novel ways it can reverberate with people, what social change or intellectual fascination it can inspire, what impressions it can animate, what surprises it can generate, what expectations it can violate, what new stories it can generate. It is no longer what happened that matters so much but rather what is happening now and what can happen next. It is no longer depiction, reporting, or representation that frustrates you. Rather, it is enactment, rupture, and actualization that engage your attention. Such is the ideal nature of non-representational research, its unique “strategy”—or to sound a bit less instrumental—its signature *style*.

## TOWARDS A NON-REPRESENTATIONAL STYLE

Over the last ten years a number of explicitly methodological reflections on the potential of non-representational work have appeared in the literature (see especially Dewsbury, 2009; Doel, 2010; Greenhough, 2010; Hinchcliffe, 2000; Latham, 2003; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010; Stewart, 2011; Wylie, 2005). Although none of these observers has claimed to hold the magic ingredients for an authentic non-representational research recipe—and if that ever were to exist, it would undoubtedly constitute an egregious contradiction in terms—several points of agreement have emerged.

For example, Latham (2003) argues that the beginning point must be a fight against methodological timidity. Timidity is difficult to define but easy to recognize. Thrift (2000, p. 3) finds the prototypical expressions of timidity in the interview and ethnographic data “nicely packaged up in a few supposedly illustrative quotations” commonly displayed in qualitative research articles across disciplines and more broadly in the “know and tell” (Thrift, 2004, p. 81) style of much empirical research. I, personally, view the problem as less inherent in the method and more in the actuality of practicing particular methods. Indeed “the representational is not the enemy” (Dewsbury, 2009, p. 323; also see Doel, 2010; Lorimer, 2005). There is nothing wrong in sharing illustrating data, but there is much left to be desired in making ethnographic and qualitative knowledge entirely subservient to theory and utterly secondary to it, so much so that knowing takes precedence over telling and silences it under heavy introductions and even bulkier formulaic literature reviews, discussions, and conclusions. The very accepted format of the typical journal article with its focus on what happened during research procedures indeed might very well be the most forceful weapon with which the hegemony of timidity asserts its conservative power (see Stoller, 1984; Vannini, Waskul, & Gottschalk, 2011).

A wider range of methods and styles than those most typically practiced in books and journal articles can allow researchers to engage in more creative and more performative practices. To this effect, Dewsbury (2009, p. 324) calls for the disruption of research habits and for novel expressions of creativity:

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.

For Dewsbury (2009) the key thus lies in making research more performative. This does not necessarily mean staging research and acting out findings (though given all the performance rhetoric it would be nice if it did, at least *some time*), but striving to find inspiration in the arts, in the poetics of embodied living, in enacting the very unactualized expressive and impressive potentials of social-scientific knowledge, in taking dedicated risks, in exercising passion, and in finding ways to reconfigure thinking, sensing, and presenting by emphasizing the singular powers of action, locution, and thought (*ibid.*).

Like Dewsbury, Latham argues that new styles can draw inspiration from the sensuous, embodied, “non-cognitive, preintentional, and commonsensical” (2003, p. 1998) practices of everyday life, as these are laden with creativity and possibility. As he writes (*ibid.*, p. 2000),

Where Thrift seems determined to push for some kind of rupture in our ways of doing research (a stance that is somewhat ironic given his general distaste for stories of rupture, break, and discontinuity), I want to suggest that, rather than ditching the methodological skills that human geography has so painfully accumulated, we should work through how we can imbue traditional research methodologies with a sense of the creative, the practical, and being with practice-ness that Thrift is seeking. Pushed in the appropriate direction there is no reason why these methods cannot be made to dance a little.

Of course, whatever “the appropriate direction” is truly is the question, and many of the contributions to this book tackle this precise subject. For Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) the direction is affective, kinesthetic, and sensuous. For Laurier and Philo (2006) the direction is that of seeking what *more* and what *else* can be said through instance of language in use. For Stoller (2008) the place to go is in the “in-between,” or as Hinchcliffe (2000) puts it: in the gaps of knowing and in the unsaid. For me (Vannini, 2012) and for Pink (2009) a possible direction lies in going beyond the book, towards the realm of the multimodal. For Ingold (2011) it is in new traces of writing, like drawing and sketching, whereas for Stewart (2011) the direction is in evoking the ordinary affects of everyday atmospheres.

The idea that research should try to “dance a little” more has been explored by many other non-representational thinkers (e.g., see Thrift, 2003; Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000). Consequently, a greater focus on events, reflexivity,

affective states, the unsaid, and the incompleteness and openness of everyday performances is beginning to characterize the non-representational research style writ large (e.g., see McCormack, 2002; Stewart, 2007; Wylie, 2005). The key distinction of these approaches is that—in the words of Dewsbury (2009)—they relish the failures of knowledge. Dewsbury (2009) and Doel (2010), for example, incite researchers to embrace experimentation, to view the impossibility of empirical research as a creative opportunity (rather than a damming condition), to unsettle the systematicity of procedure, to reconfigure (rather than mimic) the lifeworld, and in sum to learn to fail, to fail better.

The non-representational idea that there are other diverse ways of knowing (e.g., see Hinchliffe, 2000) is perhaps more than anything else at the core of the ethos of *animation*. By animating lifeworlds non-representational research styles aim to enliven rather than report, to render rather than represent, to resonate rather than validate, to rupture and reimagine rather than to faithfully describe, to generate possibilities of encounter rather than construct representative ideal types (see Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000). If indeed there is a quintessential non-representational style, then it is that of becoming entangled in relations and objects rather than studying their structures and symbolic meanings (Hinchliffe, 2000).

Let us then conclude this brief section with a brief but inspiring example of what this style might entail. In *Redrawing Anthropology*—an edited collection aimed at stimulating the non-representational imagination of anthropologists and ethnographers alike—Ingold (2011) begins his introduction with a curious-looking drawing: a swoosh-like zigzag line that, he tells us, is a salmon. When prompted to draw a fish most of us would draw an oval body and add fins, tails, and a head marked by the typical gluttonous and gullible expression of a fish. In other words, asked to draw a fish most of us would admittedly draw a representation of its image, of its being. But Ingold suggests, instead, that to draw life as contained within clear lines of demarcation, lines that encapsulate and contain a body, is to draw death, because bodies are open to the lifeworld and move along with it, not inside of it. Regrettably, much of contemporary social scientific research ends up, indeed, focusing on things that are stable, static, completed. Drawing a fish as the line of its movements and its practice teaches us a way to reenliven research. The zigzag line—indefinitely more than the oval shape—animates the fish and reverberates its doings, goings, and becomings, and that is the lesson for all of us: to be attuned to life as an unfinished process of growth and movement; to be attuned not to where life lies but rather to where it is going next.

So, if this is where we are (or is it?) where do we go next? And how do we stand on more comfortable grounds? How do we better communicate to wider audiences of students and scholars the uniqueness of non-representational research? How do we insure that the vitality captured by non-representational theory is articulated within its empirical projects?

How do we establish the value of non-representational research in the face of regressive, realist, evidence-based, institutional politics? How do we experiment differently? And how long should we go on experimenting? How do we engage other media, other genres, other styles, other tools? How do we ensure ethical principles are respected? How do we convey the hybridity of the lifeworld when most methods are so uniform? How do we express sensuality through largely asensual modes, such as writing? How do we practically ensure fluidity, openness, fallibility, and all that in the face of shrinking word count limits? How do we convey relationality? How do we ensure performativity when research continues to be mediated at a distance by writing and other absent modes? How do we write about affect? How do we manifest corporeality in the face of a lingering culture of researcher uninvolvement? How do we value materiality for what it is, rather than who it is for? How do we gain further appreciation for affirmativity and still maintain a foot in the world of interpretive practice? How do we ensure space is made for multimodality? And how can research practices that are so concentrated on ineffability be politically committed, sustainable, moral, intelligible, relevant, and consequential? These are some—indeed most—of the questions asked in this book.

Typically introductions to edited books summarize each chapter's content in a few sentences. I won't do that here. Short summaries of that kind are but small representations, small souvenirs, small concessions to a worldview of books as objects that have already taken place and now await cataloguing. Rather, I leave you to follow the threads of each chapter on your own, as they evolve and move in succession. For this reason my work as editor has also been minimal. I have not held the authors to a template, a precise set of expectations, or to a particular area or subject I wanted them to represent. I have simply pestered them to stick to some kind of deadline, and then I've watched them swim in currents of their own choosing. Hayden Lorimer, who has done the same, has written a reflection on where the following of the chapters has taken him. But he, as much as I have, and presumably you will, has simply witnessed these chapters as events in the trajectory of our colleagues' thinking. It is in this spirit that we can now follow them.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. (2006). Becoming and being hopeful: Towards a theory of affect. *Environment & Planning D*, 24, 733–752.
- Anderson, B., & Harrison, P. (2010). The promise of non-representational theories. In B. Anderson & P. Harrison (Eds.), *Taking place: Non-representational theories and geography* (1–34). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. (Eds.) (1986). *Writing culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- DeLanda, M. (2006). *A new philosophy of society*. London: Continuum.



- Deleuze, G. (2001). *Pure immanence: Essays on a life*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Dewsbury, J. D. (2000). Performativity and the event: Enacting a philosophy of difference. *Environment & Planning D*, 18, 473–496.
- Dewsbury, J. D. (2009). Performative, non-representational, and affect-based research: Seven injunctions. In D. DeLyser, S. Herbert, S. Aitken, M. Crang, & L. McDowell (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative geography* (322–335). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Doel, M. (2010). Representation and difference. In B. Anderson & P. Harrison (Eds.), *Taking place: Non-representational theories and geography* (117–130). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Greenhough, B. (2010). Vitalist geographies: Life and the more-than-human. In B. Anderson & P. Harrison (Eds.), *Taking place: Non-representational theories and geography* (37–54). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Hinchcliffe, S. (2000). Performance and experimental knowledge: Outdoor management training and the end of epistemology. *Environment & Planning D*, 18, 575–595.
- Ingold, T. (2011a). *Being alive*. London: Routledge.
- Ingold, T. (Ed.) (2011b). *Redrawing anthropology*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Knowles, G., & Cole, A. (Eds.) (2007). *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Latham, A. (2003). Research, performance, and doing human geography: Some reflections on the diary-photograph diary-interview method. *Environment & Planning A*, 35, 1993–2017.
- Latour, B. (1999). *Pandora's hope: Essays on the reality of science studies*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Laurier, E., & Philo, C. (2006). Possible geographies: A passing encounter in a café. *Area*, 38, 353–363.
- Law, J., & Hassard, J. (1999). *Actor network theory and after*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lorimer, H. (2005). Cultural geography: The busyness of being “more-than-representational.” *Progress in Human Geography*, 29, 83–94.
- Lorimer, H. (2008). Cultural geography: Non-representational conditions and concerns. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32, 551–559.
- Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the virtual: Movement, affect, sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- McCormack, D. (2002). A paper with an interest in rhythm. *Geoforum*, 33, 469–485.
- McCormack, D. (2006). For the love of pipes and cables: A response to Deborah Thien. *Area*, 38, 359–377.
- Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. London: SAGE.
- Saldana, J. (2006). This is not a performance text. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12, 1091–1098.
- Schechner, R. (2006). *Performance studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Stewart, K. (2007). *Ordinary affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stewart, K. (2011). Atmospheric attunements. *Environment & Planning D*, 29, 444–453.
- Stoller, P. (1984). *The taste of ethnographic things*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Stoller, P. (2008). *The power of the between*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Thorpe, H., & Rinehart, R. (2010). Alternative sport and affect: Non-representational theory examined. *Sport in Society*, 13, 1268–1291.
- Thrift, N. (1996). *Spatial formations*. London: SAGE.

- Thrift, N. (2000). Introduction: Dead or alive? In I. Cook, D. Crouch, S. Naylor, & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Cultural turns/geographical turns* (1–7). Harlow: Longman.
- Thrift, N. (2003). Performance and . . . *Environment & Planning A*, 35, 2019–2024.
- Thrift, N. (2004). Summoning life. In P. Cloke, P. Crang, & M. Goodwin (Eds.), *Envisioning human geographies* (81–103). London: Arnold.
- Thrift, N. (2008). *Non-representational theory: Space/ politics/affect*. London: Routledge.
- Thrift, N., & Dewsbury, J. D. (2000). Dead geographies—and how to make them live. *Environment & Planning D*, 18, 411–432.
- Turner, V. (1975). *Dramas, fields, and metaphors*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Vannini, P. (2012). Public ethnography and multimodality: Research from the book to the web. In P. Vannini (Ed.), *Popularizing research* (136–141). New York: Peter Lang.
- Vannini, P., Waskul, D., & Gottschalk, S. (2011). *The senses in self, society, and culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Wylie, J. (2005). A single day's walking: Narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30, 234–247.