

2019-09-01

Worlding with Objects

Gale, K

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/17557>

10.1525/dcqr.2019.8.3.64

Departures in Critical Qualitative Research

University of California Press

All content in PEARL is protected by copyright law. Author manuscripts are made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the details provided on the item record or document. In the absence of an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher or author.

Worlding with Objects

Making Them Less Ordinary

ABSTRACT Donna Haraway has recently stressed the importance of “making kin.” She says: “Who and whatever we are, we need to make-with, become-with, compose-with—the earth-bound.”¹ I sense that “making kin” is an integral animating force in what Jeffrey Cohen refers to as engendering a “lithic ecomateriality” where “mutuality” and narratives of “companionship and concurrency” are always possible and, I would argue, increasingly necessary and deeply desirable. With slowness, dithering, and intensity, this essay offers a poetic cartography of making with extra/ordinary objects on a Cornish beach. **KEYWORDS** Worlding; Bodies; In-formation; Assemblage

In living with the emergence of this essay, I sense it is to be about noticing, wandering, and wondering. I sense a self self/ing, always moving, moving in and around, within and between bodies, bodies of thought, bodies of language, physical bodies, human bodies, nonhuman bodies, and so on . . . bodies body/ing. Wandering in the spaces created by this always sensing relational body/ing seems to be the fuse that lights wondering. This sensing is about bodies in relation, always, as Erin Manning says, “in-formation,”² always on the move, they are never formed bodies, alive in their not-yet-ness: in the fluidities of such compositioning lives the vibrant pulsing of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s “bodies-without-organs”;³ bodies always on the move, bodies always in action, bodies always doing, and bodies always in organization and, processually, always becoming, never (fully) organized. And so, this is the stuff of composition, where processually, those very acts of composting and composing take over from substance, always “worlding,”⁴ moving on, moving with . . . becoming . . .

I have spent a great deal of this life wandering along the beaches and shorelines, cliffs, rocky outcrops, boiling surf, and ever-shifting tidelines that surround my home in Cornwall. Growing up, learning to swim and surf in these vibrant, turbulent waters, learning to climb these awesome, stunning cliffs, and,

Departures in Critical Qualitative Research, Vol. 8, Number 3, pp. 64–68. ISSN 2333-9489, electronic ISSN 2333-9497. © 2019 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Request permission to photocopy or reproduce article content at the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2019.8.3.64>.

increasingly, in these growings up, to simply sense becoming and the emergence of difference as these wanderings take me here and there in the beauty and aimlessness of chance. In the immanence of these movements and moments, in these spacetime creative relationalities, I have sensed these wanderings manifesting wonderings. And so, these wonderings articulate with my doing, my becoming, and the ways in which I make the world. Noticing is crucially connected with this. Aimlessness always takes me elsewhere: a beach I might have walked along 50 times before suddenly comes newly alive; as these bodies-without-organs, bodies in-formation, intra-act, something new emerges, a differentiation takes place, and, in eventful relationality, new life infuses and charges becoming. This occurs on surfaces, it is emergent in a glimmer, a slight echo, a brief hesitation, or perhaps what Maggie MacLure describes as a “glow,”⁵ it is in the not-yet-ness of the always might be; the emergent possibilities and fragility of pulsing new life, it is the in-between-ness of now you see me, now you don’t . . . it might be . . . it might be . . .

It might be a half-mile offshore, as the sudden wheeling, whirling, and plummeting feeding frenzy of gannets lancing, one after another, into a mackerel shoal, just below the surface of the cool blue water, creates a sense of awe as the wild, reckless tumult of life and death plays out before my eyes . . .

It might be in the stark abandonment of a beautifully sea salt–preserved shell of a peeler crab, lying upturned, solitary and peaceful in the sparkling warmth of sun-bleached sand, arresting my attention, pulling me in, animating the detailed intricacies of a closer view, its smooth carapace seductive to my touch . . .

It might be the shaft of sunlight mirrored on evening dusky water, the calm of a flock of gulls overhead, flying quietly home to roost, and that tiny pinprick of light as the first star brings new life in the growing dark . . .

It might be . . . it might be . . .

These noticings and the wondering they prompt are to do with agency in relationality. They make redundant those individualized, psychologized notions of agency that represent and construct it as a solely human force acting upon so-called inanimate bodies and forms; in presencing, they work to displace them through a sensing and a coming to life of what Jane Bennett refers to as “agentic assemblages.”⁶ Key to this way of theorizing is, in line with the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, living with the creation of understanding assemblages as the smallest unit and not the individual of rationalist, phenomenological, and anthropocentric thought. Bennett describes “agentic assemblages” in terms of a distribution of agency through and across heterogeneous, contingent, and confederate multiplicity, composed of human and nonhuman elements. And so

the eventfulness of the “might be’s” of my noticings and the wondering that they prompt are better understood in relation to Baruch Spinoza’s claim that all bodies have the capacity to affect and be affected. While I am acting upon the bodies in my “might be’s,” those bodies, in these “might be’s,” are also acting on me. Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman’s methodology of “thinking-in-movement”⁷ articulates with becoming as a practice of slowness where affect in relationality engages all bodies, human and nonhuman, prompting further doing in the world. In the eventfulness of these “might be’s,” it feels that this slowness of practice also helps to facilitate wanderings that lead to noticings, that allow doors to swing open on the gentle breeze from who knows where and to bring to life wondering and experiencing of the world, worldings that are both simple and profound. This is purposive in aestheticizing becoming, where sensing the world creatively brings worlding to life. Donna Haraway talks of living in the current epoch as one in which the human and nonhuman are inextricably linked in tentacular practices requiring “sympoiesis,” or making-with, rather than “autopoiesis,” or self-making.⁸

So again, in fascination, I am drawn by what for many might be the ordinary . . .

I walk on the beach, in the sunshine, in the wind, in the rain, and my attention is caught by life that is immanent and deeply connected in mine. I see a sea- and sand-polished piece of elvan stone with the iridescence of a lined quartz scar running through its elliptical length. It is animate; it beckons with its shine, with luminous, intense potentiality as it rests there among a millennium of shoreline detritus. I pick it up. It relaxes and rests in my hand like a small exhausted rescued fledgling. I feel its pulse. We are close, bonded in the delicate frisson of an electric moment. Knowing reciprocates and movement is a momentary lifting. I turn it in my hand, gently dusting sand particles from its surface; it begins to shine and move with the gentle gyrations of my fingers. I am aware of the breeze blowing from the west bringing smears of cumulus to cloud and chill the rays of the limp autumn sun. The quartz scar bleeds light; the smooth elvan breathes life into its cusping with my palm. Looking up into the light wind, feeling the feathery wispieness of its touch on my face, I slide the treasure into my pocket, feel its warmth pulsing through the soft material to my skin, and move with it breathing new life into the emergence of the unfolding shoreline.

Kathleen Stewart says that “(t)he vagueness of the unfinished quality of the ordinary is not so much a deficiency as a resource.”⁹ And so, there is a frightening knowing emerging from an awareness of the taking for granted

of the ordinary. There is a dull, mundane non sensing in allowing leaves, stones, and sticks to exist in the world of the inanimate. In my always emergent becoming-nonhuman, I am scared by those torpid allowances of the discursively constructed existence of the inanimate nonhuman. How can I have let these exist within me, within the worlds that I inhabit? How can this disregard for the pulsing animation of existent things, what Bennett calls “thing power,” be allowed to seep into human bodies and to construct them in the alterity of the other in the composting multiplicity of worlds of living things?

And so, this “unfinished quality of the ordinary” has its unfinishedness in the potency of moments of always coming to life. Sensations of movement, the quiet ticking of a clock, the brush of the wind in the coming to life of a face, the warmth of the sun shining through closed eyelids, and the abandoned leaf falling into new and energetic composition, are all deeply forceful in the generation of vital intensities of affect. It is not good enough to live with this in the crass partiality of the simply human. Stewart’s “unfinished quality of the ordinary” is potentiate in what Spinoza has clearly brought to life in our thinking with and of the world by pointing to the capaciousness of what the body can do. My encounters with what “might be” are central to a sensing and making sense of the always not-yet-ness of “worlding.” Knowing is processual in doing, in making with other bodies, in living with the immanence of knowing; these knowings are the conditions of possibility of becoming. In these encounters, events, and emergences, it is not simply about my body—it is more to do with bodies, any body, all bodies in process, movement, and relationality. As Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg argue, it is about “endeavoring to configure *a* body and its affects [and] affectedness, its ongoing affectual compositions of *a* world, the *this-ness* of a world and a body.”¹⁰ To claim to *know* is to live in fixed worlds of substance based on the individualizing im/possibilities of a metaphysics of being; bringing to life *knowing* is to live with the creative relationality and not-yet-ness of the processual and emergent possibilities of always becoming. And so, with Haraway, it is about “staying with the trouble” and not denying the partialities and the ignorance of the simply human. As she argues, it is not possible to stay with the trouble without the practices of joy; these are essential. ■

KEN GALE is Lecturer in Education in the Plymouth Institute of Education, within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Plymouth. Correspondence to: Ken Gale, Plymouth Institute of Education, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Plymouth, Rolle Building, Devon PL4 8AA, UK. Email: k.j.gale@plymouth.ac.uk.

NOTES

1. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 102.
2. Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
3. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1987).
4. Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
5. Maggie MacLure, "The Wonder of Data," *Cultural Studies <==> Critical Methodologies* 13, no. 4 (2013): 228–32.
6. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: The Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
7. Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman, "Stone Walks: Inhuman Animacies and Queer Archives of Feeling," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38, no. 6 (2017): 851–63.
8. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.
9. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 127.
10. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3 original emphases.