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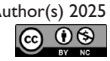

DOI: 10.1177/14744740251319033
journals.sagepub.com/home/cgj


Naturalism and the self-effacement of the non-representational subject

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Abstract
Non-representational and materialist theories have enabled geographers to understand subjectivity as something that is interwoven with intimate and dynamic spaces. While previous work has questioned the political efficacy of integrating subjectivity into the environment, this paper traces a 'new' problem to the philosophical naturalism of early non-representational work where the subject was construed as an immanent part of the natural environment. The ambiguity of what this immanence means risks obscuring the functional and grammatical distinction between self and environment that is used in producing and communicating geographical knowledge. From this perspective, the paper argues that the enlivening of cultural geography can also be interpreted as achieving an opposed, morbid effect. The problem is contextualized with examples from early extensions of psychoanalytic theory concerning the alienating consequences of objective self-representations. It is argued that non-representational and materialist geographies may benefit from further clarifications of what theories of integrating subjectivity into the natural world mean in practice.

Keywords
Roger Caillois, Sándor Ferenczi, materialism, non-representational theory, subjectivity, philosophy of geography

Introduction

In this paper, I will argue that attempts to naturalize subjectivity in early non-representational theory and cognate materialist theories risk becoming a little too literal. The source of the risk is an apparent conflation between descriptions of what subjectivity *is* with what a subject *does*. Whereas a heart may be a bundle of muscle fibers, its role is to pump blood. Likewise, the relevant kind of subjectivity may *be* interactions of lively spatial processes, but its *function* is grammatical; acting

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as a structural part of knowledge of the world. But, precisely because of what it does, a subject, in this epistemological sense, is incapable of representing itself in the same way that it represents other things. Although it is possible to describe and explain subjectivity, that is not the same thing as a subject treating itself as that which it describes. When a subject proceeds to treat itself (*qua* subject) as a spatial process, it is no longer a subject. On this account, treating oneself as a dissolved subject threatens a real dissolution of that same subject.

In view of this argument, this paper aims to theorize what such dissolution means and offer some tools to think about it as a spatial phenomenon in its own right, taking cues from Roger Caillois' and Sándor Ferenczi's reflections on being assimilated into space.[1,2] The paper is thus an exploration of the spatialities of geographical thought.

Cultural geography's turn to naturalistic theories of subjectivity that was underway by the end of the 1990s remains a highly interesting episode in the history of geographical thought. Its expansion of the realm of legitimate geographical theory was carried on the back of philosophical commitments that privileged how entities such as subjectivity come into being. For example, in her *For Space* (which outlines a moderate position), Doreen Massey sought to make space as 'exhilarating and threatening'[3] as philosophers have taken time to be. The recuperated concept of space would be 'almost like a shift of physical position, from an imagination of a textuality *at which one looks*, towards recognising one's place *within* continuous and multiple processes of emergence'.[4] Revisiting the agenda-setting moments of this shift is important for two reasons: First, it might be argued that the shift to a dynamic concept of space has become a lasting fixture of geographical thought. If there were philosophical problems present at the outset, those problems may still be around. Second, the problems encountered in the more radical proposals to integrate subjectivity into processes of emergence may teach us something about the kind of subjective formations that are involved in producing geographical thought in general. In particular, I will propose that revisiting early non-representational theory presents an opportunity to think about geographical thought as a spatial relationship that is subject to determinate, and perhaps identifiable, constraints.

It is clear that more recent attempts to create a lively concept of space have continued to interpret subjectivity as something constituted by dynamic material relationships, irreducible to a thinking self or other humanistic categories that privileged the activity of the subject over and above the surrounding world.[5,6] One of the lasting concerns of geographers has become 'to conceptualize new models of subjectivity outside of the classical paradigm that both cleaves the human subject from the world and simultaneously restricts subjectivity to a given set of subject positions'.[7] While other aspects of geography's turn to materiality and the performative aspects of representation have been criticized from political perspectives,[8,9,10] subjectivity is now widely seen to be an integrated part of environments that many cultural geographers may once have considered separate. Still, there are aspects of cultural geography's initial 'spacing'[11] of the subject that deserve more attention. In particular, I will argue that naturalistic commitments in the early non-representational and materialist turns raise questions about the sense in which the subject can be said to be integrated into its surroundings and what remains after said integration.

First, I must begin by clarifying my use of 'naturalism' by which I have in mind the philosophical position that there are no supernatural entities; which is to say that everything that is immanent to the natural world, which is often conceived as bound by laws uncovered by the special sciences. This is a different sense of 'naturalism' than appeals to natural norms that have been used to justify racist and misogynist oppression. Similarly, I use the term 'naturalization' and its derivatives to refer to descriptive and explanatory accounts that are made to accord with naturalism rather than in the other sense of making some fact seem normal.

Second, let me elaborate on what I have in mind with another example. In recent work, Eden Kinkaid discusses the consequences of transforming concepts of subjectivity in and post-phenomenological

geographies[12] – a strand of thought with an inheritance from non-representational theory.[13] According to Kinkaid, it would be appropriate to take a moment to reflect on the kinds of subjectivity or selfhood that are *used* by geographers to create new concepts of subjectivity in non-representational and post-phenomenological geography, and that not doing so risks compounding epistemological questions related to social positionality and differences of identity.[14,15] Kinkaid recounts the response of a reviewer to the original proposition, who

> when they paused for a moment to reflect on the existence of the self, they 'have to admit that when I take a moment I often don't find such stability nor a stable reference point.' Despite this moment of radical instability, the review carried on, with the reviewer stating their personal opinions on the issues at hand. These views issued from an 'I', a grammatical reference point that betrayed some sense of the self that the reviewer sought to deflect.[16]

For Kinkaid the problem is primarily one of accountability, of how one can make use of a subjective 'I' but simultaneously elide recognizing any stable identity. I want to build on this and focus on the 'grammatical reference point' in order to attend to a related but distinctive problem that is created by naturalist attempts to integrate the subject into the physical environment, which have been concerned with reifying anthropocentric subjects. As Williams and Burdon put it, 'it bears repeating that, without careful consideration, the language we use to describe experience can all too easily end up reinstating a subject-predicate mode of thought'.[17] Clearly, the 'we' indicates that the authors have not fully left such a mode of thought (nor do they need to since they are not trying to), but it is worth developing different imaginations of what leaving it could mean for doing geography that contrast with even guarded affirmations. Unguarded attempts to revise the concept of subjectivity presumably implicate the subjectivity of the geographer in one way or another.

I want to suggest, firstly, that early non-representational and materialist theories risked integrating subjectivity into the environment to the point of losing the function of the concept as a result of their commitments to a form of naturalism, and secondly, that we can usefully understand problems with geographers' own subjectivity as problems with naturalism. My argument does not depend on the correctness of naturalism as a philosophical doctrine, nor am I denying that human beings *qua* subjects are part of the natural world: Instead, I want to use this insight to think about the sort of spatialities created by geographical thought.

The assimilation of the subject to nature

The turn to non-representational and materialist theories that began in the 1990s drew inspiration from a mixture of phenomenology,[18] corporeal feminism,[19,20] biological concepts like autopoiesis[21] and new translations of French philosophy that has been seen as the naturalist branch of post-structuralism (notably Deleuze and Guattari's co-authored work[22])[23,24] to establish an image of the human being as standing in a composite[25] or *integrated* relationship with the surrounding world.

The theoretical syncretism of early non-representational theory meant that integration was achieved through a mixture of (post-)phenomenological[26] and naturalistic – often biological and neuroscientific[27,28] – perspectives on the human being. Part of the problem is that these perspectives came with different interpretations of what integration meant. I propose that the kind of problems that Kinkaid notices emerged because the phenomenological-naturalistic hybrid understanding of the human being is treated as inhabitable in the sense that it became a methodological guiding light or the theoretical foundation upon which to cultivate forms of interconnection with the environment.[29] It was fully clear what the spacing of subjectivity meant.

Before I develop this argument, it should be said that the philosophical backdrop of non-representational theory has been identified as a source of problems by other geographers. For example, the problem is reflected in Chris Philo's remarks that 'more-than-human' geographies that cast the human being as a part of processes that are external to it can seem to minimize the human rather than expand it.[30] On her part, Kirsten Simonsen has argued that some of the apparent problems with non-representational theories hearken back to 'geography's old problem of naturalism',[31] but she did not specify whether the old problem refers to underlying assumptions of quantitative spatial science, debates around structure/agency, earlier concerns with geographical and environmental determinism or any combination thereof. In contrast to these candidates for being 'old' problems, the early materialist also contains a 'new' problem with naturalism that can help us understand some of its problems with subjectivity and makes it an uneasy fit with the integrated accounts of 'body-landscape relations'[32] espoused by its proponents.

In examining problems with subjectivity as problems caused by naturalism, there are reasons for highlighting earlier non-representational and materialist theories compared to a broader review that tries to capture the diversity of work in these areas that exists today.[33] Fundamentally, I am interested in the structure of the problem rather than in examining its scope, in quite the same way that many other geographers work with case studies to demonstrate spatial concepts of unknown extent. What began in cultural geography at the end of the 1990s was a pivotal moment, and while, arguably, there have been more nuanced attempts to explore the more-than-human aspect of the human since then, it is worth returning to earlier events in order to examine what sort of nuance may be required and why. The speculative excitement of work from this period also makes the problems stand out.

The first moment I want to highlight can be found in Nigel Thrift's early expositions of a non-representational theory.[34] In the introduction to his 1996 book, Thrift cites the following passage from the social psychological work of John Shotter approvingly:

> many of our motives are the products of our activities, not the other way around . . . in this view just as we talk of Godot because we wait, not of waiting because of Godot, so (for instance) we talk of motives because we act, not of acting because we have motives - crazy though it may sound to say it. While our talk of motives may act back upon the disorderly activities of our social lives to 'lend' them some order, the search for motives as such is illusory. It is an attempt to explain our self-formative activities in terms of a product of these self-same activities.[35]

By undermining the motivations of Beckett's characters Vladimir and Estragon, what is achieved is an exchange of one perspective for another, a sentiment that has been mirrored recently by Roberts et al., 'it is not subjects that have perceptions, but rather it is perceptions that produce subjects'.[36] The problem is that exchanges of this kind appear to complicate the functional core of what it means to be a subject at all; namely, the ability to account for oneself in terms of that self-formative activity that Thrift, through Shotter, repudiates as illusory.

A change of perspective may be a useful addition to any analysis of subjectivity if it manages to shed light on what is going on at another level of description, in another context or scale (in the sense that a physiologist and a behaviorist may describe a smile in different terms). But Thrift's perspective goes further because it provides an account of subjectivity that is revisionary in the sense that it purports to inhabit the content of the impossible truth. At this point, non-representational does not merely attend to a different level of subjectivity or operate with regard to a different referent of the word subjectivity. On the contrary, its strong form would make naturalistic explanation manifest on the level of who we are, so as to say: *Your actions precede your motivations, and you can learn new things if you understand yourself accordingly.* But just *who* will learn these things if the revised subject is reduced to an ontological patient?

As Thrift rightly notes, the fact that the natural sciences have become more amenable to 'various forms of systems theory, complexity theory and nonlinear dynamics'[37] may make them more palatable to social theory but does not resolve the 'new' problem by virtue of this fact alone. By 2008 Thrift has noticed that projecting subjectivity to the processes through which it emerges may amount to renunciation and mentions the necessity of sticking to the 'illusion of conscious will'.[38] This tension is a paradigmatic example of what I mean by a 'new' problem with naturalism.

A similar 'spacing'[39] of the subject occurs in Sarah Whatmore's rendition of cultural geography's return to materialism.[40] For Whatmore, it was not so much that geography had been unconcerned with the world, as that it had forgotten its own materiality, its human embodiment. It was in the meeting, the encounter between the human and its surroundings that cultural geography was invigorated and could expand its vocation:

> the most important difference (a big claim, I know) in the 'something/happening' in cultural geography's materialist recuperations is that this return to the livingness of the world shifts the register of materiality from the indifferent stuff of a world 'out there', articulated through notions of 'land', 'nature' or 'environment', to the intimate fabric of corporeality that includes and redistributes the 'in here' of human being.[41]

But how is the new distribution of the 'in here' and 'out there' to be conceived? The connection is vital and facilitated by a projection of subjective agency into the world. From this moment on, geographers could no longer see the world as inert or as a mere receptacle for human appropriation. Instead, the human is represented as fully immanent to an active world – perhaps we are swarms of differences but ontologically speaking there is level ground between the swarms. An emphasis on ontological parity, such as this, is an important component of naturalism. Like in Thrift's case, it is noteworthy that co-constitution is not just a metaphysical claim, but a methodological commitment intended to transform cultural geographical practice by recognizing that, yes, this is a lively world of which I am part and I should treat it as such. For Thrift, it was a matter of getting beneath the mundane appearance of subjective agency to inquire into the forces which bring it about. For Whatmore, it was a question of reinterpreting and juxtaposing the attributes associated with human interiority and exteriority.

Calls to experience oneself as integrated in the world are problematic because of the status they afford the subject. Following Kant, subjectivity has often been considered a conceptual constraint in epistemological contexts, something closer to a function than a thing.[42] Even if one can disagree with this tradition for different reasons, it is worth considering what it would make of non-representational theory, not least because it offers a means to clarify what was achieved by the naturalization of subjectivity.

The problem I have in mind stems from mixing two ways of talking about subjectivity that occurs when co-constitution becomes an inhabitable proposition. A material description of what subjectivity *is* subsumes the irreducible function of what a subject *does* as a grammatical constraint on knowledge. The doctrine of co-constitution risks negating the subject that would say that co-constitution is true by failing to satisfy the logical criterion that makes subjectivity operate. A similar argument has been proposed by Thomas Metzinger with regard to the hypothetical replacement of our phenomenal experience of being 'selves' by a description of underlying neurophysiological states.[43] Metzinger argues that one can either remain a self *or* be properly convinced that one is not. *You* cannot be convinced that you are not a self, and if 'you' are convinced, it will no longer be *you* who is convinced. I am effectively transposing the same structural dilemma to non-representational geographers' assimilation of their subjectivity to the world. Either the thesis that the subject is integrated in the natural world fails and the subject does not really think about itself as integrated

or it succeeds in a way that effaces the subject that convinced itself of it. Here, I will proceed to examine the consequences of the second horn of the dilemma: that the non-representational and materialist integration thesis could, in principle, be successful at the cost of effacing the subject that performed the conceptual integration of itself into the environment.

The upshot is that the real effacement of the subject can be seen as part of a longer history of self-effacement. Including geographers' 'new' problem with naturalism within such a history can lead to a revisionary interpretation of the non-representational and materialist attempts to naturalize the subject by theorizing how these theories created a distinctive relationship to space. What is at stake here is the meaning of the spacing of the subject; the sort of spatiality that is enacted by it.

A cue to perform this dialectical move comes in the form of a 1935 paper by the French writer Roger Caillois that starts from an unusual interpretation of biological mimicry, which he interprets as an instance of a regressive tendency of being attracted to the environment to the point of dissolution.[44] Although Caillois extended this tendency to different human contexts, perhaps most memorably in cases that early 20th-century psychologists believed demonstrated a weakening of vital forces,[45] I believe he had no good reason to present a unified explanation behind his case studies. The consequences of Caillois' idea are not problem-free,[46] and Theodor Adorno accused the totalizing naturalism of an earlier text on mantises of leading to fascist implications which is an accusation he likely would have repeated about the mimicry paper.[47] The accusations of fascism in the 1930s are by implication but I note that Caillois undoubtedly expressed pro-colonial and white supremacist views about knowledge 20 years later.[48]

My discussion is limited to Caillois' discovery of a spatial problematic in the phenomenon of mimicry which remains a starting point for a provocation due to its recognition that self-representations can *perform* the sort of self-effacement that he attributes to mimicry. I hope to revise this notion and bring it to bear on geographical work that naturalized the subject to suggest that a theoretical integration of the subject in the natural world of the kind apparently endorsed by Thrift and Whatmore can be seen as a kind of self-effacement of a piece with Caillois' examples. Self-effacement is a genuine possibility for geographical thought and, moreover, a distinctive spatial phenomenon that is understudied in its own right. Examining it can enhance our understanding of what is required by cultural geographers to revise their concept of subjectivity in materialist times. In the following two sections, I will try to make the problematic of self-effacement conceivable. Then I will return to what non-representational theory's spacing of the subject might mean in view of it.

The allure of space

Caillois' article begins as an interpretation of biological mimicry from which he established a series of far-reaching cultural and psychological parallels. Mimicry, according to Caillois, belies a primitive and potentially dangerous '*temptation by space*'[49] that has the potential to lead to a kind of '*depersonalization by assimilation to space*'[50] that is recapitulated in culture, such as in sympathetic magic according to which like produces like and associations persist between two objects that have once touched.

As Elizabeth Grosz has pointed out, Caillois disagrees with the view that mimesis confers adaptive benefits, stating that he 'claims that mimicry in the insect world does not have clear survival value: its purpose is not to ensure the survival of the species through providing camouflage against its predators'[51] or by providing means of sneaking up on prey. (A mimetic system is usually seen as including three participating roles: a model, a mimic, and a target which is duped.[52]) Instead, Caillois believes mimicry and associated phenomena like camouflage are ultimately morbid, a 'dangerous luxury'[53] opening toward a failure to stand apart in the world as an autonomous being.

To prove his point Caillois uses examples like cannibalism in cryptic larvae whose coloration melds into the environment to such an extent that their kin devour them unwittingly.

This amounts to a dubious evolutionary explanation of mimicry, but the kind of phenomena Caillois points to is real, or at least plausible in the sense that a gardener can *really* mistake a phasmid for a stick. Caillois' theory could thus be delimited to the virtual tendency behind the actual slip-ups of systems constitutive of discontinuity within the world even without granting these slip-ups any explanatory primacy (although it is doubtful whether Caillois would concur with this interpretation). Acts of standing apart by blending in can and sometimes do fail in some practically efficacious sense. Interpreted in this way, morphological relapses to the environment in mimicry and becomings-other of sympathetic magic can be connected to the next step of Caillois' discussion, according to which the relapse is repeated in downright pathological disturbances between selves and their worlds. Caillois describes a relevant psychosis like this:

> To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar.[54]

A typical formulation, according to Caillois is '*I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself'*.[55] To have such an experience is to live through an inner night or to take the night into one's inner being. The formulation is imprecise but the gestural articulation of the experience gives way to the analysis of the phenomenon it refers to: a kind of weakening of the ability to stand out.

It is interesting to note that Caillois proceeds to organize mimicry in biology and magic together with the experience of this internal night as variations of the same root phenomenon. The organization of such diverse phenomena along a common axis can be interpreted in the same way that a shoemaker might prefer to group all bipeds even though, for example, birds and humans are evolutionarily distant. Mimicry and psychosis are different phenomena yet constitute similar relapses into space in their respective domains. Such relapses are present in a significant range of activities. Even the proliferation of novel concepts of space from modern science and mathematics is associated with them, as Caillois believes that for science 'everything is milieu'.[56] There is something simple yet provocative in extending the problem to historical conceptions of space. Basically, there is a dimension of the history of thinking about space that belongs to the concrete history of becoming-autonomous from the environment and the corollary temptation to blend in:

> The feeling of personality, considered as the organism's feeling of distinction from its surroundings, of the connection between consciousness and a particular point in space, cannot fail under these conditions to be seriously undermined; one then enters into the psychology of psychasthenia, and more specifically of *legendary psychasthenia*, if we agree to use this name for the disturbance in the above relations between personality and space.[57]

Caillois was not alone in noticing the possibility of depersonalization by means of assimilation, although his construal of the problem was novel. The term psychasthenia is borrowed from Janet, an influential pre-Freudian psychiatrist who used it to describe a weakening of psychic power.[58] The Bergson-inspired psychiatrist Minkowski is also a recurring reference whose work on schizophrenia characterized the core of the condition as a diminution of *élan vital*.[59] Although most reflections on schizophrenia from this time have little clinical use today, they deserve attention as part of the intellectual history of thinking about the difficulty of standing apart from the

environment. Finally, Caillois compares his discovery to Freud's death drive in a footnote but does not develop the comparison,[60] although he does propose an '*instinct of renunciation*'.[61] Despite this conclusion, it may be more productive to read Caillois' history of legendary psychasthenia in a taxonomic manner over and against Freud's internalist notion of an autonomous drive.[62] Rather, the takeaway should have been that death is something that can happen in the course of a relatively autonomous system identifying itself too closely with the environment. It is hard to see why Caillois must posit an instinct since he is not burdened by the need to explain an oddity in the context of a theoretical system like Freud was. Maybe such instincts exist, but the point is that Caillois' taxonomy does not face any internally motivated demands to take a stance for or against their existence.

In the context of a taxonomic reading, then, certain musings of early psychoanalysts remain helpful because of their rich descriptions of the tension between selfhood and the environment, which differs from the language of feeling used by Caillois. Caillois runs the risk of conflating the tendency toward assimilation underlying the feeling with the feeling of assimilation.[63] Identifying a more tractable object that includes instances of *feeling* assimilated to cases of *actual* assimilation makes Caillois' sketch of a 'diagonal'[64] history of temptation by space capable of incorporating geography's 'new' problem with naturalism. A diagonal history, as I understand it, is basically a kind of unexpected Aristotelian taxonomy that could, for example, describe a four-legged genus that includes chairs and dogs in a way that cuts across our everyday treatment of things.

Before getting to that point, however, I want to show that treating the feeling of assimilation as a kind of assimilation is not a unique idea. Traces of it can be found elsewhere; both in the explicit form of theory and enacted in practice. In both cases, I want to suspend the theoretical context of the notion's appearance and treat it in the bare terms of Caillois' diagonal history of nature.

The diagonal history of being assimilated to space

Let me consider another example. In his clinical diaries, the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi intermittently reflects on camouflage.[65] In a 1932 entry about ego withdrawal and the imposition on the subject of an extrinsic, 'alien will' as a result of childhood trauma, he suddenly asks why the fur of polar bears is white:

> The environment itself (the arctic region) has no interest in coloring the polar bear's fur white; only the bear derives benefit from it. Theoretically, however, it is not impossible that a higher, shared attribute that includes both the individual and the environment, such as for example a universal tendency observable in nature toward a state of repose, may be in force as a higher principle, constantly working to balance out the differences between accumulations of danger and unpleasure.[66]

The question underlying the surprising shift of topic concerns the internalization of exteriority, and hence the assimilation of the organism to its environment. But this process is now sublated into a higher principle and transformed into a natural rather than psychological affair, not dissimilar from Caillois' instinct of renunciation whose explanatory validity I will not speculate about here. What is interesting, though, is the transversal connection between the psychological trauma response and the adaptation of the polar bear as similarly regressive tendencies to be assimilated.

A few months after the entry on polar bears, Ferenczi likens impositions of the external world on the organism to photosensitivity, going so far as suggesting that eyes and skin are at once 'traumatophilic', sensitive to the impositions of the external world, and the basis for 'orientation'[67] since they are the organs that displace many heterotroph organisms from continuity with their environments. This even leads Ferenczi to propose that schizophrenia is a 'photochemical mimicry

reaction' that is primary to any self-assertive response to the external world, thus short-circuiting the autonomy of the ego:

> Fear dissolves the rigidity of the ego (resistance) so completely that the material of the ego becomes as though capable of being molded *photochemically* – is in fact always molded – by external stimuli. Instead of my asserting *myself*, the external world (an alien will) asserts itself at my expense; it forces itself upon me and *represses the ego*.[68]

And then, 'Schizophrenia is presented as a "photochemical" mimicry reaction, instead of self-assertion',[69] which leads up to the claim that, 'The photosensitive "mimicry reaction" in nature is more primary than the self-assertive or self-important reaction'.[70] Here, Ferenczi offers a speculative account of the basis of schizophrenia by connecting it to an alleged natural priority of external stimuli over any self-preservative function. The ability to stand apart in nature is an ongoing, active struggle. For Ferenczi, schizophrenia returns the sufferer to a place that is upstream from the ego, leaving a bare body that is made pliable to another's will taking over the site where the subject could express its agency. It is through the subject's assimilation to this impersonal force that we should see that we are *also* dealing with an explanatory subsumption of self-description in naturalistic terms. In this sense, the tendency toward depersonalization assimilation to space is the failure to will according to the demands of what it means to be a subject.

What is at stake here is less the ability of Ferenczi's metapsychological speculations about an alien will to provide a direct explanation of geography's problem and more how the naturalist attitude creates a parallel problem in geography. As Caillois anticipated with respect to the proliferation of decentring concepts of space through 'modern science' naturalist explanation threatens to *recreate* the problematic prospect of confusing one's own will for another's – and this applies to Caillois' own natural history too. Whereas for Ferenczi, the maligned patient of the alien will is subjected to the traces of a traumatic event through misidentifying its own will with the perpetrator's will something oddly similar happens in the comprehension of oneself as another part of nature, whereby by analogy a blind force without subjective source is imputed to a world that encompasses the knowing subject.

Add to Ferenczi's notes the putatively shared root between mimicry and modern spatial representations identified by Caillois and there is more than a hint of a single problem's extension and internal variations. The problem of being depersonalized by assimilation to space can be understood as inclusive of the tendency toward relinquishment of independence, a temptation to renounce one's contours that occurs among more and less autonomous systems. It does not only pertain to complete erasure in physical or social space but generally, to internal threats to the functional strategy through which (relative) discontinuity from the environment is maintained, including conceptual and theoretical self-constitutions. On this level, the problem is irreducible to a lack of activity per se: it can also involve a lapse of trust in subjectivity or a kind of alienation from the subject's ability to subject itself to its own desires.

Naturalism in cultural geography as self-effacement

The conceptual recapitulation of depersonalization by assimilation to space that is relevant to geography might even be seen as a relative of G. E. Moore's so-called 'naturalistic fallacy'[71] which calls reductions of out normative talk to a descriptive register, the typical case being a confusion between the good and the pleasant. In the case of the 'new' problem, it is the subject that is dislocated as the talk about being a subject is shorn of its autonomy and integrated back into nature as part of some unseeing force (confer Rosenberg for a connection the fallacy to self-objectification

of the Cartesian kind[72]). The message from the literature mapped here is clear: a too-intimate immersion in the environment, whether morphological, magical or conceptually objectifying, involves a risk of really becoming part of it. And if this threat is taken seriously, it is hard to see why it should not be present when geographers attempt to immerse their own discipline in the environment. The fact that we ordinarily manage, circumvent or hold the temptation by space at bay does not remove it as a concrete prospect.

When it is interpreted as a case of following the lure of space, the tone of geography's materialist recuperations suddenly becomes negative or even morbid. In addition to changing the valence of materialism (which has often been treated in terms of affirmation), the prospect of being assimilated to space has explanatory value for how the materialist turn in geography created new problems for the notion of subjectivity. *The conceptual dissolution of subjectivity threatens a real dissolution of the subject.* If this analysis is correct, it not only contributes to explaining some of the challenges cultural geographers have faced when trying to rethink the concept of subjectivity as being in immanent integration with the environment, but it also suggests that the naturalist thesis about the co-constitution of subject and the environment tends toward a self-effacement that needs to be reined in if anything is to be said at all. While I do not think this implies that attempts to naturalize the subject in geography must be abandoned, cultural geographers might consider the benefit of accounting for what theoretical change means and how conceptual frameworks interact in addition to more nuanced theories and conceptual frameworks to avoid the seemingly 'morbid' interpretation. The challenge, in other words, is to turn the interpretation I have presented here into something that targets a strawfigure.

As I mentioned above, my analysis also depends on the possibility of successfully integrating the subject and the landscape; the foreground and the 'background'.[73] If integration is *not* possible, it might be necessary to theorize what the early non-representational and materialist projects achieved instead. Here again, the underlying question concerns the relationship between our theoretical accounts of subjectivity and the forms of subjectivity we draw upon to give these accounts.

Proceeding beyond these caveats, let me dramatize how the early propitious moments of the materialist turn may appear in the light of the connection between geography's 'new' problem with naturalism and the history of self-effacement. By seeking parity between the 'in here' and the 'out there',[74] the return to materialism belied an impulse to return to the surroundings. Thrift's struggle to preserve a sense of agency while shifting his analysis to its conditions of coming into being has a similar structure despite not being articulated in spatial terms. It leads to a return to a prior state, which can be read as decidedly morbid compared to the stated purpose of enlivening the 'dead geographies'[75] that were fixated on interpreting the content of representations. If so, the assimilation of geography to space has been a partial success at best since geographers still routinely use words like 'I' as Kinkaid demonstrated.

The notion of a depersonalization by space that can be found in Caillois and Ferenczi nevertheless points to a contrasting interpretation of what transpires in the affirmation of materialism, and the commitment to something like an immanent, 'non-organic vitalism'.[76] The phenomenon of affirming the ontological co-constitution of subject and environment can be seen as an exercise of self-effacement. In an older reflection on psychoanalytic theory in geography describing Lacan's mirror stage,[77] Steve Pile suggested that geography is a 'medium of deception'.[78] From the perspective of the 'new' problem with naturalism, it is hard to think of a better description of cultural geography and its dynamics. As do mimetic insects, geography supports its independence through subterfuge. In both cases, there are horizons beyond which trickery tricks the deceiving subject into automatic renunciation: phasmids devouring their neighbor's legs, polar bears losing their young in the snow and geographers taking themselves for geophysical forces. By recuperating the conceptual language of relinquishment and morbid repetition to talk about philosophical

naturalism, we get a different idea of *why* the materialist return was important. It was important because it defined the challenge of a thoroughgoing naturalism in geography; that is to say, it was important because it showed how inhabiting an integrated subject can also be read as a representation that enacts its own renunciation.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper has sought to interpret cultural geography's attempt to immerse subjectivity in the natural world by placing it alongside accounts of what Roger Caillois called '*depersonalization by assimilation to space*'.[79] By casting cultural geography's problems with subjectivity as a 'new' problem with naturalism the paper has developed a theoretical understanding of what the early non-representational and materialist projects did when synthesizing naturalistic and humanistic concepts. What has emerged as a result is a new understanding of what non-representational theory did to subjectivity. Its conceptual dissolution of subjectivity is conceivable as a real dissolution of the subject, something that creates a distinctive spatiality of indifference. I have suggested, as a corollary, that cultural geography implies a certain degree of humanism or subjectivism to operate on the world. The problem created by integrating subjectivity into the natural world speaks to a potential limit of how cultural geographers can think of themselves as parts of their environments and still do their jobs.

How, then, can geography represent itself as a part of the natural world? Despite placing the question inside a history of self-effacement, it is too soon to conclude that any naturalistic integration is foreclosed. The manner and circumstances in which cultural geography can represent itself as a part of nature should be interrogated in more detail. Intercalating naturalism in a history of self-effacement problematizes what it means for geography to successfully address nature (and itself in nature), and brings out the difficulty involved in such a seemingly everyday achievement. It gives us a reason to consider whether there might, after all, be limits to what geographers can think and address tricky questions about what geography is that can, perhaps, only receive provisional answers in line with partial perspectives that emerge from theorizing the spatialities *of* geographical thought.

Acknowledgements

An early version of this paper was presented at the RGS-IBG 2021 Annual Conference in a session on Disarticulated Subjects organized by David Bissell and Paul Simpson. I would like to thank Jonathan Pugh, James Ash, and Robert Shaw for their useful feedback on material that became part of this paper. Finally, the comments from three anonymous reviewers made the paper significantly better than it would have been otherwise.

Ethics statement

Not applicable.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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