NON-REPRESENTATIONAL THEORY

Paul Simpson

KEY IDEAS IN GEOGRAPHY

ROUTLEDGE

NON-REPRESENTATIONAL THEORY

Non-representational Theory explores a range of ideas which have recently engaged geographers and have led to the development of an alternative approach to the conception, practice, and production of geographic knowledge. Non-representational Theory refers to a key body of work that has emerged in geography over the past two and a half decades that emphasizes the importance of practice, embodiment, materiality, and process to the ongoing formation of social life. This title offers the first sole-authored, accessible introduction to this work and its impact on geography.

Without being prescriptive the text provides a general explanation of what Non-representational Theory is. This includes discussion of the disciplinary context it emerged from, the key ideas and themes that characterise work associated with Non-representational Theory, and the theoretical points of reference that inspires it. The book then explores a series of conjunctions of 'Non-representational Theory and...', taking an area of geographic enquiry and exploring the impact Non-representational Theory has had on how it is researched and understood. This includes the relationships between Non-representational Theory and Practice, Affect, Materiality, Landscape, Performance, and Methods. Critiques of Non-representational Theory are also broached, including reflections on issues on identity, power, and difference.

The text draws together the work of a range of established and emerging scholars working on the development of non-representational theories, allowing scholars from geography and other disciplines to access and assess the animating potential of such work. This volume is essential reading for undergraduates and post-graduate students interested in the social, cultural, and political geographies of everyday living.

Paul Simpson is Associate Professor of Human Geography at the University of Plymouth where he is Co-leader of The Centre for Research in Environment and Society. His research focuses on the everyday life of urban spaces and often proceeds through a combination of ethnographic research and engagements with non-representational theories and post-phenomenological philosophies.

KEY IDEAS IN GEOGRAPHY

Series editors: Noel Castree, University of Wollongong and Audrey Kobayashi, Queen's University

The *Key Ideas in Geography* series will provide strong, original, and accessible texts on important spatial concepts for academics and students working in the fields of geography, sociology, and anthropology, as well as the interdisciplinary fields of urban and rural studies, development, and cultural studies. Each text will locate a key idea within its traditions of thought, provide grounds for understanding its various usages and meanings, and offer critical discussion of the contribution of relevant authors and thinkers.

MIGRATION, SECOND EDITION
Michael Samers and Michael Collyer

MOBILITY, SECOND EDITION
Peter Adey

CITY, SECOND EDITION
Phil Hubbard

RESILIENCE
Kevin Grove

POSTCOLONIALISM
Tariq Jazeel

NON-REPRESENTATIONAL THEORY
Paul Simpson

For more information about this series, please visit: www.routledge.com/series/KIG

NON-REPRESENTATIONAL THEORY

Paul Simpson

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2021
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-138-55216-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-55219-7 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-14800-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Joanna
by codeMantra

FOR AILSA

CONTENTS

FIGURES

BOXES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has a fairly length history beyond its writing over the course of 2017–2019. It has been shaped by a wide range of encounters and events. I first encountered something called 'more-than-representational theory' via Hayden Lorimer early in 2005 in the School of Geographical and Earth Science at the University of Glasgow. That introduction, along with open-minded support of Chris Philo, set it all in motion. 'More-than' became 'Non-' later in 2005 when I moved to Bristol to take up an ESRC '1+3' studentship in the School of Geographical Sciences. There I completed the MSc Society and Space and a PhD supervised by JD Dewsbury. Those four years provided something of an apprenticeship in non-representational theories, particularly during all those Friday late-afternoons/early evenings spent in 'The Hawthornes' engaged in enthusiastic debate and discussion over a range of continental philosophy and social theory. I was very fortunate to be supervised by JD and to be amongst many other PhD students, and Faculty, who shared an interest in this. Of the former, Sam Kinsley, Jules Brigstocke, James Ash, Pepe Romanillos, Charlie Rolfe, and Jen Lea stand out. Of the latter, JD Dewsbury, Keith Bassett, Mark Jackson, Maria Fannin, and Emma Roe equally so.

I've split the time since Bristol between Keele University and the University of Plymouth. At Keele, I was lucky enough to work, and later collaborate, with Pete Adey. That encounter couldn't have been better timed in terms of helping me move off from the PhD. At Plymouth, I've been fortunate to be a part of a really collegiate department which has come to accept the sort of work I do despite it being variously described (good humoredly?) as: 'extreme' cultural geography; 'niche, even for cultural geography'; or simply 'wacky geographies'. Thanks to Jon Shaw, Richard Yarwood, Naomi Tyrrell, Federico Caprotti, Nicky Harmer, Jules Brigstocke (again), Mark Holton, Kim Ward, Matthew Rech, and a host of others for shaping that collegiate atmosphere. I've also been fortunate to be supported by a broader community of academics variously interested in non-representational theories and

associated matters. That has included Ben Anderson, Paul Harrison, Mitch Rose, Derek McCormack, John Wylie, Pete Merriman, Amanda Rogers, Helen Wilson, Jonny Darling, David Bissell, Joe Gerlach, Thomas Jellis, Nina Williams, Damien Masson, Jean-Paul Thibaud, Sara Fregonese, to name just a few. Apologies to those others who I've inevitably forgotten here.

A significant portion of this book was drafted during a semester's sabbatical leave in Autumn-Winter 2017. I would like to thank the School of Geography, Earth, and Environmental Sciences at the University of Plymouth for granting and facilitating that leave. It'd be fair to say, though, that the book would have been finished sooner had I not been put at risk of compulsory redundancy during the following Autumn-Winter semester. There's a whole other book to be written about the trying affects and turbulent atmospheres that increasingly circulate in the higher education sector of the UK.

Thanks also to Tim Absalom for assistance with the production of several of the figures included here. Mark Jackson and John Hargreaves helped in gaining information about the MSc Society and Space at the University of Bristol and the School there more generally. And thanks to Derek McCormack for permission to use Figure 6.1. In addition, thanks go to Andrew Mould and Egle Zigaite at Routledge and Noel Castree for guiding me through the editorial process. The book benefited greatly from the comments of those who reviewed the initial proposal and, in particular, from the comments of the two anonymous manuscript reviewers.

Finally, thanks to Lou for putting up with me and Ailsa for learning to say 'I missed you, daddy' a week after I started writing this book.

INTRODUCTION

Prelude: a scene seen from an office window

It's 8.45am on a Monday morning in autumn. From the fifth floor window, I can see a crossing point over a main road in the center of a city that borders my University's campus. At the opposite side of the crossing is a large student accommodation village as well as a range of other residential and commercial premises. On this side, the University campus. The weather this morning has been inclement, a mix of sharp showers, gusty winds, and the occasional threat of the sun breaking through the clouds. The road is relatively busy with the tail end of rush hour. Pedestrians wait for the crossing signal to allow them to cross the road. Occasionally, someone runs across through a gap in traffic, provoking motorists to beep their horns. Others are sat on low walls or benches or are stood leaning against lampposts, checking phones while waiting on friends to arrive. A mix of University students and professionals approach the start of their day.

At first glance, there may not appear to be much of significance going on here. Looking again, but this time as a geographer shortly heading to give a lecture on 'What is Human Geography' to a group of recently arrived undergrads, there are a number of points that might start to garner attention and take on some significance. The small plastic English flags attached to the door frames of a passing taxicab might be noted and used to illustrate ideas of 'banal nationalism' which can, along with a host of other meaningful signs, come to pervade the cultural landscape (Billig 1995; Wylie 2007a). The transport modes being used here, their efficiency and/or sustainability (or not) (Shaw and Docherty 2014), or the meanings such movement holds (Adey 2017), might seem worthy of discussion. Alternatively, the status of this as a 'public space' might be a topic for discussion, asking questions about who is present, how the space is being used, and how the space is being overtly or tacitly managed. That might lead onto reflections on who is being excluded from use or access (Mitchell 2003).

Figure I.1 A scene seen from an office window (*Author's own*).

Furthermore, the estate agent's office to the right of the image might be flagged and questions asked about the balance of rental accommodation, student accommodation, and affordable housing for sale or rent. That could lead to discussions of gentrification and studentification given the impact of such developments on the surrounding area (Hubbard 2006; Smith and Hubbard 2014). These examples are by no means exhaustive, but would all be quite well-established topics for geographers to discuss in deconstructing such a scene that pick out aspects of its social, cultural, political, and economic geographies.

Thinking about this in another way, though, other points which might expand such a geographic take start to emerge. Drawing on a range of developments around what has been called 'non-representational theory', we might start to recognize that there are other things going on here that are less obviously seen but still potentially significant to the playing out of everyday life in this space.

For example, we might start to ask about things that are more felt in nature. I stood looking at this scene before heading to a staff meeting with a sense of enthusiasm and mild trepidation as another academic year started (that meeting, it turned out, rather dulled any such feeling of enthusiasm). In the scene itself, there are a whole host of bodies that are both encountering one another and are disposed in a range of ways. Some might have shared my feelings of enthusiasm, others feeling quite different. Some of them might be feeling happy and others sad. Some might feel anxious or excited, others hopeful or depressed, and others still sober, hungover, and/or medicated. This might be visible in their facial expressions, the tone of their conversations, their body language, or their gait. But it might also be less obviously visible but end up being something palpably present, even if loosely, in a sort of 'atmosphere' that seems to exist in the space. Some of those feelings will emerge from encounters happening there and then in this space as these people move through it together – people acknowledging each other, or deep in conversation, or getting in each other's ways. However, other aspects will have their origins and destinations in events taking place over longer durations. That might be the events of the previous evening, pending deadlines at University or work, concerns for people or events taking place some distance away, and so on.

Further, we might also start to ask questions about the role that this space and the broader environment it exists within plays here and specifically what choreographic functions it might possess when it comes to what these bodies do and how they feel. This space's layout, its design, its management, the specific weather conditions present therein, and so on can all play a part here. Traffic lights produce a certain stop–start rhythm interspersed by pedestrians crossing. This might sit ill at ease with other timetables – of work shifts, of lectures, of bus timetables, and so on – and so produce feelings of frustration and disruption within the routines of those moving through this space. A range of instructions are also dictated by various signage, some noted, some not, some actively shaping the mood of individuals, others barely registering. And, the occasional wind and rain means that hoods are put up, blocking peripheral vision and so creating a funneled gaze. This all plays a significant role in how this space appears to those who move through it at this time, the practices they engage in, and how that is experienced, whether it is realized by them at the time or not. The surroundings here may recede into the background as individuals excitedly talk to their friends about recent events. Equally, others may be painfully aware of every sound as their head thrums from the excess alcohol intake of the night before. Or tiredness may make them relatively indifferent to their surroundings, moving on auto-pilot and not taking anything in that is happening around them.

Furthermore, we might start to ask questions about the ways in which the situation of the people moving through this space relative to their surroundings is mediated by a whole range of technologies. For example, smart phones (potentially connected to headphones) shape those individuals' awareness of what is happening around them at any given time, as well as allowing them to be aware of things going on at some distance from their immediate surroundings. Such technologies, not to mention the marketing materials encountered here – adverts for club nights pasted to lampposts, fast food promotions on bus shelters and building sides, a stand operated by Jehovah's witnesses, amongst others – all exert a call for our attention. And this is very often a specific sort of call. A whole host of data is being collected here through, for example, smart phones on what catches the users' eyes, what links they follow, what they search for, and so on. All the time, algorithms process this data and increasingly tailor what images are projected to us.

In sum, these sorts of mundane, embodied, felt, interactive, unfolding, mediated encounters are precisely the stuff that geographers influenced by non-representational theories have been drawn to. There is a whole range of subtle, shifting, and elusive geographies at play here in the co-production of these individuals and the spaces they move through on a day-to-day basis. This book aims to provide an introduction to such geographies and to help the reader navigate their way through a host of geographers' work on them.

What is non-representational theory?

'Non-representational theory' ('NRT') has come to refer to a key set of ideas that has emerged over the past two decades or so in human geography. 'Non-representational thinking' was first introduced to geography by Nigel Thrift, a prominent geographer who spent a significant part of his academic career at the University of Bristol (see Chapter 1). While much of Thrift's early work focused on matters of political economy and temporality, a series of questions coalesced from this in terms of practice, agency, the relations of space and time, and the particular societal context in which such relations unfold (see Thrift 1996). Thrift initially turned to such non-representational thinking in an effort to develop an alternative approach to the conception, practice, and production of geographic knowledge. Put succinctly, such non-representational thinking sought to re-orientate geographic analyses beyond what was, at the time, perceived as an over-emphasis on representations (images, texts, and so on) and instead emphasize practice, embodiment, materiality, and process. Or in Thrift's (1996: 5) own words, he felt that:

> A hardly problematized sphere of representation is allowed to take precedence over lived experience and materiality, usually as a series

> of images or texts which a theorist contemplatively deconstructs thus implicitly degrading practice.

By way of contrast, non-representational thinking was to draw attention to a host of "mundane practices, that shape the conduct of human beings towards others and themselves in particular sites" (Thrift 1997: 127). In this, the ultimate focus was to be on "the geography of what happens" (Thrift 2008: 2). In a little more detail, Lorimer (2005: 84) later suggested that what came to be collectively known as 'NRT' focused:

> 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 … which escape from the established academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgment and ultimate representation.

Thrift's initial calls for a greater attention to practice, lived experience, materiality, and the like have been taken up by a range of geographers, and this thing called 'NRT' has since evolved in multiple directions (see Anderson and Harrison 2010a).

If you are reading this book, it is likely that you have encountered 'NRT' in one of a number of contexts. Student readers, for example, may have heard 'NRT' (or 'more-than representational theory' – see below) mentioned in a module on social and cultural geography. If so, it is likely that a range of other terms accompanied this – affect, embodiment, materiality, atmosphere, performance, performativity, and so on. Equally, 'NRT' may have featured in a module on 'The History of Geography' or 'Geographic Thought' or 'Space and Social Theory'. In which case, 'NRT' will likely have been presented as part of a long line of other 'turns' or 'paradigms' which have shaped the practice of geographic research over a wide timeframe. It's likely here that 'NRT' will have been contrasted to other approaches, perhaps most obviously 'New Cultural Geography' or The Cultural Turn. It may also be that 'NRT' is something you've seen referenced in a range of research publications or textbooks. Postgraduate or postdoctoral readers may have heard it mentioned at a conference, workshop, or in departmental seminars. It may be something your supervisor has suggested you read up on for dissertation research. Whatever the case, there's a fairly good chance that 'NRT' seems to be a bit elusive in terms of what 'it' refers to or what this 'theory' actually is. For those who've looked further, you would likely also have encountered not just the sorts of terms mentioned above but also reference to the work

of a range of 'non-geographers', primarily philosophers and social theorists. Here, you might have read quotations from these figures that do not immediately make sense, and, if they do, their arguments might exceed what you'd normally call 'geography'.

There is a common theme that generally runs through such scenarios. 'NRT' is often felt to be difficult to grasp given the way that it mixes conceptual vocabularies, complex social theories, and references to seemingly esoteric continental philosophy; involves potentially unusual styles of research and writing; and, as there is often either a surprising empirical focus or as there isn't a clear empirical object of study at all. In the face of this potential confusion, this book aims to introduce this set of ideas, terms, and developments in a way that both makes them more accessible than might otherwise be the case and, in doing so, provide an orientation in pursuing these ideas further in your own writing and research.

In developing that introduction, it is worth pausing for a moment and saying a few things about the name itself: 'non-representational theory'. Initially, Thrift did not actually call it this. As Harrison (forthcoming) traces in some detail, initially, 'non-representational thinking' was suggested by Thrift as a source of inspiration existing outside geography. However, over a period of around a decade, we can see a shift in references from Thrift and others from 'thinking' to 'theories', from plural (theories) to singular (theory), and ultimately to the proper, capitalized name 'Non-representational Theory'. Hence 'Non-representational Theory' became 'a thing' – an approach with a project or agendas, a target of critique, a subject for textbooks and reference work entries (including this one). This name, proper and singular, itself has presented something of an impediment to the reception and understanding of work associated with that name and the potential contribution it makes to the practice of geographic research. There are at least two reasons for this.

First, the word 'non-representational' has been misunderstood, given a number of apparent connotations that it suggests. For some, the prefix 'non' has meant (or at least implied) a movement away from concerns with representations and text (Nash 2000). In this, it starts to be seen to be about being 'after-' or 'post-representational' (Castree and MacMillan 2004) or 'anti-representational' (see Jacobs and Nash 2003; Smith 2003). This impression is understandable. Some of the early outlines provided by Thrift were somewhat over-exuberant in their treatment of established trends in human geography at that time, especially given the way in which these outlines positioned themselves very strongly in opposition to 'New Cultural Geography'. This theme of 'NRT's' relationship with other strands of geographic thought will be returned to throughout this book (in particular, see Chapter 1). But, for now, it is important to note that such tensions did lead to the proposal of more inclusive nomenclature in an attempt to

(re)build bridges between, for example, those working in or on 'NRT' and 'New Cultural Geography'. 'More-than representational theory' is now a fairly well-established alternative, having been suggested by Lorimer (2005) as a more inclusive name that would soften some of this oppositional tone.

These debates aside though, as will be demonstrated throughout this book, work associated with 'NRT' *is* in fact interested in representations. Representation and representations have not been left behind. In such work, representations are considered for what they *do* in the unfolding of practices (Dewsbury *et al.* 2002). The 'force of representations' is seen in the way that they enter into relations and have capacities to affect and effect (Anderson 2019). This means that they are taken to be 'performative' and so play a part in the ongoing shaping of social life through the unfolding of various actions and interactions. Therefore, the critical target of the 'non' is not representations in and of themselves. Instead, the critical target is a specific way of thinking about the world – a form of 'representationalism' – which reduces the world to, and fixes and frames it within, text or discourse *alone* (Lorimer 2005). Under such representationalism, such texts and the interpretation of their content become the key agenda of geographic work. For much of the work collected under the name 'NRT', by contrast, it is practices that become the starting point for such work. In many ways, the alternative title suggested by Thrift (1997) that never seemed to stick – 'The Theory of Practices' – is more affirmative in orientation and so could have mitigated against such debate and critical reception.

Second, 'NRT' does not constitute an actual theory in the way that other prominent geographic theories do. For example, Central Place Theory articulates a general explanation which would allow geographers to predict and explain the size, number, and distribution of towns. As part of this, certain laws or tendencies are established, and there are certain assumptions that underlie this. Here, we have a singular idea and objective, a clear object of analysis, a clear set of data to be analyzed, and clear results to be presented – distribution can either be assessed (i.e. whether it is conforming or not) or proposed (a model of how it should be in the interest of efficiency) (see Cresswell 2013a). Work associated with 'NRT' doesn't really offer any of this. The closest we get to a singular idea in 'NRT' relates to the importance of practice both as a singular idea and as an object of analysis. However, practice has been understood in a range of ways here, and there is no clear agreement amongst those pursuing research informed by NRTs (contrast, for example, Dewsbury 2000; Harrison 2009).

Really, 'NRT' – if there is such a singular 'thing' – presents us with a style of thinking which values practice and process rather than a theory (Thrift 2008). In some ways, this means that it is better to think of 'NRT' in the plural, as non-representational theories (NRTs) (Lorimer 2008). Again, at the

outset, much of the reference here was in the plural and was about 'thinking' rather than a 'theory'. 'NRT' really acts as an umbrella term for a wide range of ideas, concepts, theories, and approaches largely originating beyond the confines of geography which have in common concerns for practice. Within work done under this banner, ideas from post-structuralists, vitalists, phenomenologists, pragmatists, feminists, and a collection of relational and constructivist social theorists mix in varying concentrations and combinations producing quite diverse and at times seemingly contradictory accounts of this happening of the world (Anderson and Harrison 2010a). Again, this plurality can make 'NRT' as a singular thing hard to pin down. While this book retains a title in the singular as 'NRT' in reference to this 'thing' that requires some explanation, this book itself will attempt to draw out both some of NRTs' diversity throughout – highlighting various debates, discussions, and disagreement – but also show some of the continuities that occur within that. In general, from here on in, I will use the plural NRTs to reflect the plurality within this work. This might lead to a number of awkward grammatical constructions; it'd be much simpler if NRTs were the singular thing they are at times made out to be. However, at certain points, I will use 'NRT' (note the quotation marks) where that supposed 'thing' is the target of reference in the work being discussed.

Key themes

To draw out some of the commonalities amid the diversity in NRTs, I'm now going to give a brief overview of some of the central themes that recur amongst work developing NRTs and so lend NRTs some sense of identity or consistency. These introductions are brief and will be developed in more detail in the coming chapters. The following is really intended to act as a primer for what follows. These interrelated themes are process, subjectification, embodiment, affect, and agency.

Process

NRTs try to attend to the 'onflow' of everyday life (Thrift 2008). The world and the events that take place within it are taken to be dynamic, unfolding, and so based on processes. NRTs thus openly acknowledge the partial and incomplete nature of the accounts of the world that they provide. In this sense, NRTs endeavor to act against what Dewsbury *et al.* (2002) call 'the reductive vampirism' inherent in trying to fix the world within particular structures, models, orders, and frameworks posited by the researcher. NRTs argue that there is always some excess here, something that escapes such framing, given that things keep moving. This means that the world is "more

excessive that we can theorize" (Dewsbury *et al.* 2002: 437). This attention to process is also manifest in the modesty of those practicing research influenced by NRTs in terms of the claims they make about the world and in the way these accounts are produced and presented. Inspired by developments in the performing arts, NRTs often align themselves with a sort of methodological experimentalism that does not shy away from providing an open-ended account of the world (Dewsbury 2010a).

Subjectification

Thrift suggests that 'NRT' is "resolutely … pre-individual. It trades in modes of perception which are not subject-based" (Thrift 2008: 7). Instead, NRTs are concerned with 'practices of subjectification'. 'Subject' here refers to our sense of self which we might assume is a constant accompaniment to our experiences of the world. Such selfhood is a bit like our identity, though not necessarily quite so easy to pin down into identifiable positions (i.e. those related to gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, etc.). We might assume that our subjectivity is something that exists prior to the encounters we have and that it is through it that we make sense of those encounters. NRTs see things differently. For NRTs, subjects move from a secure and organizing position, present in advance of encounters, to become something that (provisionally and perpetually) arises from those encounters through these processes of subjectification. Sometimes, those processes unfold organically, but sometimes, they are also actively shaped; we attend school, are enculturated into specific social norms, and so on. Our sense of self, while potentially having some consistency, emerges and evolves over time here. This subjectification arises out of the world being "made up of all kinds of things brought into relation with one another by many and various spaces through a continuous and largely involuntary process of encounter" (Thrift 2008: 7). Subjectification proceeds from an ever-shifting composition of human and non-human things – various objects, people, technologies, texts, ideas, discourses, rules, norms, and so on – perpetually encounter and shape one another.

Embodiment

Such an attention to subjectification also leads NRTs to be interested in the human body and its co-evolution with things (Thrift 2008). Here, the body is not counted as separate from the world, but rather it is argued that the human body is as it is because of its

> unparalleled ability to co-evolve with things, taking them in and adding them to different parts of the biological body to produce

> something which … resemble[s] a constantly evolving distribution of different hybrids with different reaches.
>
> (Thrift 2008: 10)

By using 'hybrids' and 'co-evolving' here, Thrift is drawing attention to how our bodies, and their relations with the environments they are positioned in, are often tied up with non-human things. Anything from clothing, to contact lenses, to information communication technologies (ICTs), to cars and other forms of transport, all come to interact with our bodies. Such technologies mediate our relations with the world around us, impact on how we perceive those surroundings, and potentially augment what our bodies can do. Thermal clothing, for example, allows us to spend more time in cold environments than our bodies otherwise could cope with. In this, those cold temperature won't be felt as cold as they would without such clothing. Contact lenses bring the world into greater focus. Further, ICTs allow us to communicate over large distances and encounter images and sounds from a host of cultures that we otherwise might not directly experience. They broaden the horizons of our possible experience. And when it comes to transport, cars, for example, both vastly increase our ability to travel at speed but also lead to us developing different forms of spatial awareness – we (hopefully!) end up not just being able to perceive where the limits of our body are, but also the extremes of the vehicle as we navigate through traffic and other obstacles. As a result of such embodied relations with things, NRTs argue that "bodies and things are not easily separated terms" (Thrift 1996: 13). Therefore, NRTs aim to attend to the relatedness of the body and world and its constantly emergent capacities to act and interact.

Affect

This emphasis on the interconnected nature of our bodies with a whole host of non-human things is also closely connected to NRTs' desires to "get in touch with the full range of registers of thought by stressing affect and sensation" (Thrift 2008: 12). A key starting point for NRTs has been the realization that consciousness is in fact a narrow window of perception. At the outset, Thrift became fascinated by developments in neuroscience which cleaved a distinction between thought and action. In particular, experiments which identified a half-second delay between a body's action and the ability to account for that action showed that there was a whole lot going on in our bodies that we might not immediately be aware of or consciously in charge of (Thrift 1996). As a result, NRTs have called for more attention to be given to these pre-cognitive aspects of embodied life, these "rolling mass[es] of nerve volleys [which] prepare the body for action in such a way

that intentions or decisions are made before the conscious self is even aware of them" (Thrift 2008: 7). One way that this was articulated was through ideas of 'affect'. Affect does not refer to a personal feeling but rather to shifts in the state of our bodies which impact upon our capacities to act. These shifts are always going on but we're not necessarily aware of them. However, at times, these affects might come to be felt in our bodies. Think of how we might come to feel jittery after one too many cups of coffee or how we might come to feel down when we have one too many alcoholic drinks. Or it could be something less easily characterized like getting goosebumps or a shiver going down our spine when listening to a song. Such felt experiences emerge as something changes in our bodies – our heart rates shift, our central nervous systems become depressed, and sounds resonate in our bodies as well as in our ears. The outcome of that might be something that we can name as a recognizable emotion – we might say we feel excited or sad – but it also might remain something we struggle to put into words.

Agency

NRTs' interest in the body's co-evolution with non-human things and the affective relations that circulate amid that imply a certain understanding of the status of non-human things, be them animate or inanimate, human or animal, human-made or natural (though those distinctions may themselves be questioned by NRTs). NRTs ascribe a significant amount of agency to the non-human world. This comes through, for example, in references to 'heterogeneous networks' and the relations that make up such networks being 'flat' rather than based on a hierarchy where humans have the power to act and objects are acted upon. Rather than such distinctions between humans and animals or human and things, we are presented with reference to a range of actors or actants (or objects) that play a part in the functioning (or lack of functioning) of such networks. Those might be, for example, the social networks that support communities (though the designation 'social' itself already disguises a host of non-human actants in those networks) or it could be more obviously technical systems that are made up of a whole host of interactions across space and time (think of the internet and its various servers, cables, routers, computer terminals, technicians, webpages, signals, etc.). Ultimately, the emphasis in this is that humans are not the only ones who can make a difference in how life plays out.

The rest of the book

In this book, I aim to do two things. First, I aim to provide an accessible introduction to the key premises of NRTs. This is the primary aim of the text

and is something that is often difficult to find within the existing literature on 'NRT'. This might appear modest, but the vast range of ideas, concepts, perspectives, and debates that have come to characterize NRTs make this more ambitious than it first sounds. Beyond that, though, my second aim is to articulate a particular version of what NRTs offer to geographic scholarship. That does not mean that I am going to proclaim what 'NRT' should be or do or how geographic scholarship more broadly should be done. There is enough of that in the existing NRTs-related literature. Instead, my aim here is to highlight a range of contributions NRTs make and take into account a range of critiques and developments that have emerged over the past two decades. At times, this will mean responding to those critiques, and in others, it will mean recognizing their merits and suggesting what might follow from them and/or how other geographers have constructively responded in their work. This will not add up to "the final word on 'NRT'" but rather, I hope, provide a starting point for readers to pursue their research in light of such ideas.

In doing this, the remainder of the book unfolds as follows.

The next chapter 'Nonrepresentational Theories and Geography' will build on this introduction by further outlining the emergence of 'NRT', focusing specifically on its geographic and intellectual lineages. This chapter will cover where and when (both in a geographic and disciplinary sense) NRTs came from, provide some further explanation of their key thematic interests, and elaborate further on why 'NRT' has proved to be both an instructive and problematic nomenclature. More specifically, the way that NRTs were overtly positioned in opposition to 'New Cultural Geography' will be explored. Connections to and differences from other earlier bodies of work in geography (Time Geography, Humanistic geography, and so on) will also be drawn out. This will show that NRTs did not necessarily present a complete 'break' in the history of geographic thought, but also that it has not meant 'business as usual' in a number of ways.

Chapter 1 is probably the 'heaviest' of the book in that it deals primarily with the ideas that underpin 'NRT'. From thereon in, though, each chapter is intended to act as a stand-alone introduction to a specific conjunction of 'non-representational theories and …'. Each of these chapters takes an area/topic of geographic enquiry and explores the impact of NRTs on how it has been researched and understood. The order of these chapters is deliberate in terms of, broadly, a movement from key themes or concepts to more substantive areas of work. However, it should be possible to read them in any order or independently (and perhaps without the conceptual primer found in Chapter 1).

Chapter 2, 'Non-representational Theories and Practice', will explore further how practice has formed a fundamental starting point for NRTs. This

emphasis on practice pervades the various core themes of NRTs and so much of the literature. This chapter provides a detailed consideration of the origin and nature of this focus on practice, both in terms of it being an analytical starting point – meaning that is has meant a focus on cognate terms such as performance, embodiment, and performativity – but also a direction for empirical inquiry for NRTs. More specifically, this chapter unfolds around a discussion of three key terms from within this work on practice: 'The Event', 'Rhythm', and 'Passivity'.

Chapter 3, 'Non-representational theories and Affect', will explore how affect has come to be a key concept within the NRTs literature as well as a source of some debate. Affect has featured in both conceptually driven writings, and it has formed a core concern for many empirically orientated studies. As such, Chapter 3 will provide a brief overview of some of the central concerns for such conceptualizations, including the complex relations of affect to connected concepts like feeling and emotion. Developing this, the chapter will explore three themes to show the range, nature, and scope of work developing and drawing on affect to think about a variety of geographic contexts and practices. This will focus on 'Animating the Everyday', 'Collective Affects', and 'Mediating Affect'.

In Chapter 4, 'Non-representational theories and Materiality', the focus will move on to how NRTs have rethought the way geographers understand and research materiality. This concern is by no means unique to NRTs. As such, the chapter will start by looking at the questions various geographers have asked about cultural geography's attention to the material world, particularly in terms of the emphasis of 'New Cultural Geography' on texts and representations. In looking to NRTs' specific contribution to these debates, the chapter will consider: 'What do we mean by "matter"?' and a host of different takes on how matter and 'materialization' might be understood.

In Chapter 5, the discussion will move onto what has been both a prominent and contentious conjunction between 'Non-representational theories and Landscape'. A key feature of the initial articulation of NRTs was the way they were contrasted with the work of 'New Cultural Geography'. This comes through most clearly in the particular ways in which NRTs have understood and approached landscape. Broadly, this sees a shift in emphasis from representations to practice and embodied experience. This shift will be further explored here, specifically through a discussion of how, arguably, the term landscape itself implies a fixity and finished character. In response, the chapter will look to the questions asked by NRTs about how landscapes come to be animated by people's practical engagement with them. In that, three themes will be explored in some detail, namely around ideas and practices of 'dwelling' in landscapes, landscape and mobility, and haunted/spiritual landscapes.

Chapter 6 moves on to discuss 'Non-representational theories and Performance'. This chapter will look at how creative and artistic practices have formed a key focus for NRTs since their inception in geography. In particular, the chapter will introduce the central idea that such performances are composed of generative relations between bodies and spaces. Here, performances are understood to shape the character of spaces but equally spaces (and their border social setting) are seen to 'act back' in the unfolding of a performance. This will be explored through two types of performances: dance and music. While not necessarily an obvious topic for geographers to study, dance constituted one of the first substantive areas of discussion for geographers developing NRTs. Further, NRTs have considered the performance and reception of music and sound, but in ways that depart somewhat from cultural geography's past concern with music as a sign of cultural diffusion or a source of identification at various scales of belonging.

The penultimate chapter will explore 'Non-representational theories and Methods'. Throughout the preceding chapters, a diverse realm of phenomena, encounters, relations, and entities will have been introduced into geographic scholarship. This, in turn, opens up questions around how scholars might 'do' research after NRTs. Therefore, this chapter provides an overview of various suggestions for the need to reinvigorate geography's research methods and methodologies in light of NRTs' arguments. In particular, the discussion will focus on geography's recent interest in various forms of image-based methods as a case study for such reinvigoration. That said, the chapter will also propose that readers should adopt a critical disposition toward such methodological proposals and propositions. Finally, the chapter will conclude by reflecting on the challenges of writing about research in light of NRTs.

The book closes with brief concluding chapter which flags key issues and agendas that, based on the preceding discussion, appear significant to NRTs' ongoing development and situation within geography and beyond.

Further reading

In this short dictionary entry, **Anderson (2009a)** gives an accessible introduction to NRTs that highlights where NRTs came from, suggests some elements of its focus which are related to other approaches to doing human geography, and addresses a few critiques that have emerged as a result. **Simpson (2017a)** provides another short introduction to NRTs. Again, some of the key themes found in NRTs are briefly introduced. This provides another initial starting point from which you could identify and pursue further reading from more research-orientated literature. **Patchett's (2010)** blog post provides a good starting point for further reading. Specifically,