

The embodied imagination:

affect, bodies, experience

Submitted by Leila Alexandra Dawney to the University of Exeter

as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

January 2011

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature:

The embodied imagination:

affect, bodies, experience

Abstract

This thesis offers a critical interrogation of the relationship between and co-production of bodies, texts and spaces. It introduces and develops the concept of the embodied imagination through the philosophy of Spinoza and recent Spinozist thinkers as a way of informing a materialist account of the production of experience. The embodied imagination, as material and affective, can supplement a Foucauldian account of subjectivation through its ability to offer an account of experience ‘after the subject’ – of experience as the surface effects of the movement of affect through and across bodies, texts and spaces that are productive of transsubjective social imaginaries. This can contribute to a fuller account of subject production and to a formulation of embodied politics based on a political analytic of feeling.

These conceptual arguments are mobilised through exemplars from ethnographic fieldwork based on the geographical concerns of landscape, embodied practice and place imaginaries. In particular, I point to specific outdoor practices, techniques and regimes that, in their imbrication in certain imaginaries, contribute to a sense of place and belonging. Through a ‘thoroughly materialist’ approach to these concerns, bodies’ involvement in material relations with other bodies and with the world are shown to be central to experience-production. I argue too that this approach can expose the relations of power that produce the very materialities of bodies, and as such can shed light on the politics of the nonrepresentational and its centrality to the production of embodied subjectivities. In doing so, a postfoundational sociology of embodied experience is formulated that operates according to a politics of radical contingency. This postfoundational perspective foregrounds an ontology of the encounter over presence: an ontogenetic account of the emergence of bodies, texts and spaces from their material imbrication in a world charged with affective resonance.

Contents

Abstract.....	2
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
Bodies, texts and spaces.	6
The embodied imagination and the politics of affect.....	9
The structuring of experience and the historicity of the body	10
The geographies of radical contingency and the impossibility of presence or connection	12
Chapter summaries.....	12
Chapter 2: Towards a postfoundational sociology of embodied experience	19
Part 1: Practice	20
Part 2: Embodiment and experience	38
Conclusion.....	51
Chapter 3: Spinoza and the embodied imagination	55
Introduction	55
Spinoza today.....	57
Substance.....	59
Motion and rest	60
Conatus	61
Mind and Body in Spinoza.....	62
Affect.....	64
Forms of knowledge.....	65
Imaginaries.....	66
The embodied imagination.....	72
The politics of affect.....	75
Reclaiming the imagination	76
The embodied imagination in practice	78
Chapter 4: New materialisms.....	81
Introduction	81
Affect after the subject.	83
The materiality of thought.....	86
New materialities and spatialities.....	95
A return to the human	101
Conclusion: the materiality of the text	103
Chapter 5: Interlude.....	107

The story so far	107
Exemplars and theory	111
The problem of writing	113
The theoretical and the empirical.....	115
Chapter 6: Landscape, place and the embodied imagination	122
Introduction	122
Cultural geographies of landscape.....	123
Approach.....	126
Landscape and Englishness	127
Turquoise	129
Imagining Cornwall	132
Constellations.....	135
Undercliff	137
Swimming.....	141
Conclusion.....	144
Chapter 7: Affective bodies and the interruption.....	147
Introduction	147
Malevolent inscriptions	154
A campsite incident.....	156
A camper van incident	158
Conclusion.....	160
Chapter 8: Techniques of the self and the embodied imagination	163
Introduction	163
Techniques of the self.....	164
Future selves	169
Secular pilgrimages	172
Hupomnemata	175
Storing experience outside of the body.....	178
Spectral selves.....	180
The temporalisation of the self.....	182
Conclusion.....	184
Chapter 9: Landscape, foundation, testimony - geographies of disconnection	186
Introduction	186
A conversation in a pub: a connective imaginary	187

The foundation in Arendt and the nonfoundational in Nancy	190
Tintagel and the testimony of landscape.....	196
Geographies of disconnection	200
Conclusion.....	204
Chapter 10: Conclusion.....	207
Affect, Spinoza and materialism	208
Imaginaries and the embodied imagination	210
The production of experience.....	212
Power and feeling: the politics of affect	215
Affect and ideology	217
Geographical concerns.....	219
Spectres of deconstruction: undoing relational thinking	222
Bibliography	227