Transient convergence and relational sensibility: Beyond the modern constitution of nature

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ABSTRACT

The paper builds on the critique of what Latour (1993) terms the 'modern constitution' and its configuration of nature as an independent and external entity to human culture and politics. The paper suggests that, firstly, moving beyond the modern constitution to a world of amodern or postnature (Braun, 2004; Hayles, 1999) marks a shift from ontological stability to ontological instability, where 'nature' is now constituted by merging and emerging ontologies. In this unstable new world order, the paper argues that postnature should be understood as a transient convergence in a context of flow, union, and divergence. This perspective emphasises the role that emotions play in this relationship, arguing that they are both part and product of the transient convergence of postnature. 'Humans' are now constituted in and with the temporary coincidences that form 'nature', and the relational sensibility that is produced through this convergence is vital to fully understand the post-natural world. The paper concludes by suggesting that this postnature can provide new premises for protecting the world of which we are a part.

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1. Introduction

Far from having put the idea of nature to rest, critical geographers still have important things to discover and say about it. (Castree, 2004:194)

Debates over the nature of nature have long preoccupied scholars in the social sciences. In recent years, inspired, in part, by the work of Latour (1993), social scientists have focused their attention on what he has termed the 'modern constitution' and the role it plays in framing western conceptualisations of nature. This constitution, which he traces in particular through the emergence of the natural sciences, is significant as it ontologically separates humans from nature, disables nature's agency, and relegates the non-human world to a passive recipient of human interference. Latour argues that this division of powers can be regarded as the metaphysical cornerstone of modernity's self-understanding. It has as a consequence been both embraced and critiqued by a range of political actors, including those concerned to protect nature (see, for example, Devall and Sessions, 1985; Gottlieb, 1991), domesticate nature (see Ellen and Fukui, 1996), or exploit nature (see McPhee, 1989).

However, focusing attention on the modern constitution has also refined its critique. Scholars such as Latour and Whatmore assert that the modern constitution has got it wrong; its ontological separations, premised on the creation of discrete categories such as 'humans' and 'nature', are increasingly questioned. According to these scholars, there is not (and most importantly never has been) an ontological separation between humans and nature; as Whatmore puts it, "the idea of a pristine space [nature] 'outside society' is an historical fallacy" (1999:10). Indeed, as Latour argues, despite the 'willful' and pervasive deployment of, and reliance on, this metaphysical dichotomy, even those who think of themselves as being archetypically modern have never actually been able to maintain this absolute divide – and to this extent 'have never [really] been modern' (1993).

In light of such critiques many scholars have sought to adopt more appropriate approaches to the nature of a non-modern world. As a consequence, theories have tried to develop an alternative 'amodern' or 'post-natural' constitution. In general terms this new collectivity (Latour, 2004) does not sever humans from the natural world, rather it emphasises the importance of both relational connections and relational agency for all actors within a network, including the non-human. Although different in their detail, theories built on this premise can be seen to include Actor-Network Theory (see Callon, 1986; Latour, 1999; Law and Hassard, 1999), concepts of socionature (see Swyngedouw, 1999), the Cyborg Manifesto (see Haraway, 1991), and notions of hybridity (see Latour, 1993).

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After briefly outlining an understanding of a 'post-natural' constitution this paper employs and extends these ideas. It suggests, firstly, that these amodern ideas constitute a shift from ontological stability to ontological *in*stability. In place of the modern constitution which manufactures and imposes clear ontological categories onto the world, the world is now constituted by *merging* and *emerging ontologies*. In a world where classification by discrete, fixed categories has given way to entities/processes (Harvey, 1996), unstable ontological forms emerge as these entities/processes converge and diverge in the constant remaking of the world. In this unstable new world order, postnature should be understood as a temporary coming together of a range of unstable entities/ processes: postnature is a *transient convergence* in a context of flow, union, and divergence. The paper details this understanding of postnature and emphasises that 'humans' are constituted *in and with* the temporary convergences that form this post-natural world.

Focusing on this mutual constitution draws our attention not only to the theoretical implications of postnature, but also how we experience it - how being part of postnature can make us feel. Drawing on the phenomenological tradition (Guignon, 1993; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Vycinas, 1969) and the recent turn in the social sciences towards emotion and practice (see Anderson and Smith, 2001; Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Davidson et al., 2005; Nash, 2000; Thrift, 1996, 1997, 1999 and Wood and Smith, 2004), the paper argues that the *relational sensibility* produced through this mutual constitution is politically significant. Not only can the relational sensibilities of postnature provide new motivations to protect the world of which we are a part, but also raise broader questions concerning the political influence that the emotional turn in the social sciences could have.

2. Nature and the modern constitution: The end of nature

Debates over the nature and culture of nature have preoccupied scholars in the social sciences in recent years. Discussions have, for example, focused on whether nature is (just) a social construct (see Smith, 1998, 1999); on the appropriate actions for humans in the natural world (Cooper and Palmer, 1992; Disch, 1970; Elliot, 1995); and whether nature can be restored or habilitated following and via human interference (Elliot, 1997; Throop, 2000). However, focus on these important issues has also prompted renewed scrutiny of the philosophical assumptions that continue to be a focus of such debates, and the manner in which these assumptions have been used to ground a particular ordering of the world.

If, following Latour, we understand the 'modern constitution' as emanating from the attempt by Renaissance scholars to discipline and control the 'multitudinous, churning, spewing energies' of the world (Philo, 2005:826), then this was achieved through dividing up the chaos of reality into discrete conceptual categories – filing cabinets to use the analogy of Barnes (2005) – affixed with labels such as 'human', 'place', 'economy', 'culture', and, of course, 'nature'. Using such apparently durable and static 'noun chunks' (after Laurier and Philo, 1999) to conceptualise the world translated the dynamism and unruliness of reality into an ordered and static representation. This representation was employed to facilitate the detachment of humans from a messy reality and enable their presidency and stewardship over the world (see Attfield, 1991).

The modern constitution thus constructed nature as an *external element* to human culture. As Haila (2000:155) has it,

'Culture' is… equated with all human artefact, and 'nature' with the external environment, that is, culture and nature are distinguished from each other as if they were two separate realms of reality.

With nature now separated from human culture, humans stand outside nature to understand it. From the perspective of the modern constitution, this position offered no impediment to knowledge generation as detachment from the object of study remained the essential prerequisite for good scientific inquiry. This separation of culture from nature also involved a valorisation of the human over the natural. Human agency was privileged over nature, and the non-human world dismissed as passive and inferior. The modern constitution also comprised a detachment within the scientific observer that paralleled the separation of humans from nature. Human knowledge was divided into that which could be cognitively processed by the rational mind, and that which was sensed by the emotional body; modern knowledge was intellectual, reasoned and cognitive, the embodied affects of passion and emotion were deemed irrational and silenced as 'nonknowledge' (Pile, 1994: 259). In short, the scholar was now not only detached from nature, but also 'disembodied' (McDowell, 1994: 241), producing a knowledge that, from the perspective of the modern constitution at least, functioned as a faithful (because emotionally detached) representation of the reality of the world.

Despite the longstanding tradition of the modern constitution and its widespread effects, it is not without its critics.[1] Latour, for example, argues that the modern constitution's purification of the world into discrete categories is fundamentally flawed. From his perspective, 'humans' have never been separate from 'nature',[2] and the ontology of the world has never corresponded to the filing cabinet tidiness of the modern constitution; as Braun explains:

It is only we moderns who imagine that it is possible to assign things unambiguously to 'culture', 'nature', 'science', and 'politics'. It is only we moderns who engage in these acts of 'purification' even as we continuously mix things together into hybrid networks through countless acts of 'translation' that go unacknowledged. …If there is anything that makes us truly 'modern', …it is our proclivity, first, to simultaneously purify the world into essences all the while furiously producing ever new heterogeneous associations, and, second, to only *subsequently* become anxious about the results. (Braun, 2004:169)

According to Latour, therefore, the translation of the messy chaos of reality into the discrete filing cabinets of the modern constitution (e.g. 'culture' and 'nature', 'mind' and 'body') has meant that the actual processes and phenomena of the world have been misunderstood from the outset. Concerns over the 'end of nature' thus centre more appropriately on how our modern understandings of the 'purity' of nature are misplaced (see McKibben, 1989), rather than highlighting any new shift in the material colonisation of 'nature' by 'culture'. Thus, following Latour, "despite our belief in a world of distinct domains," humans and nature, "have always been tangled together" (Braun, 2004: 169). This realisation has led many scholars to abandon the ontology of the modern and return to the world itself in order to redraw an alternative amodern, or post-natural, constitution.

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[1] In the West, for example, many within the ecological movement of the twentieth century have strongly countered the modern approach, whilst the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth century also offered an alternative to the modern constitution.

[2] From Latour's perspective, human interference in the material world of nature has been going on (presumably) since our species has existed. As Cronon states: "everything we know about environmental history suggests that people have been manipulating the natural world on various scales for as along as we have a record of their passing" (1997: 42).

3. A non-modern constitution of 'nature'

Rejecting the modern constitution has led to a, "fascination with the 'post–natural'" (Castree, 2004: 191). Through this fascination, dualistic and oppositional framings of 'nature' and 'culture' have given way to perspectives which focus on the connections between these once separated categories. This 'fascination with the post-natural' thus emphasises the *interactions* between the categories of 'nature' and 'culture' and how these no-longer-isolated categories are bound together in networks or 'relational complexes' (Rouse, 1996). This change in focus is emphasised by the choice of vocabulary used to describe the human-natural interdependencies studied, be they rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), hybrids (e.g. Latour, 1993), cyborgs (Haraway, 1991) or socionatures (Swyngedouw, 1999). In this way the "impossib[ility] of physically disentangl[ing] the social from the natural" has been highlighted (Castree, 2001: 13).

For example, the importance of interdependencies within networks has been acknowledged through Actor-Network Theory (or ANT) (see Callon, 1986; Latour, 1993, 1999; Law and Hassard, 1999). As Callon states,

> against the nature–society dichotomy characteristic of 'modern' geographical thought, [ANT] argues for an 'amodern' ontology in which we recognise the 'hybrids' or 'quasi-objects' that litter the world we inhabit. (Callon, 1986: 211)

Theories such as ANT therefore mark a shift away from the independent conceptual categories of the modern constitution, and towards an interdependent reality where things are always acting and being acted on by everything else. To use the words of Lewis, "in the real world everything is continuously 'interfered with' by everything else" (1960: 45). As Cloke and Jones (2001: 649) identify, theories such as ANT begin to recognise this mutual interference, providing, "an excellent framework for deconstructing nature-society binaries, and for mapping the combined and networked agency of a number of different actants, both human and non-human".

Linguistic manoeuvres and a refocusing on networks have thus brought with them a concomitant emphasis on agency beyond the human. As strongly as the modernist constitution denies the agency and autonomy of non-human species and processes, non-modern constitutions insist that 'nature' within their networks remains "too *present* to be dismissed" (Lears, 1997: 145). Thus instead of 'nature' being simply acted on by human culture, scholars have sought to remind us of how 'nature' can itself act on and up within networks. Whatmore (2002), for example, illustrates how viruses enact a biophysical agency which has not only economic costs, but also political and cultural affects on both the animal and human food chain, whilst Pollan (2003) suggests that the domestication of animals by humans can equally be considered as the domestication of humans *by* animals.

Thus the rejection of the modern constitution has brought with it an acceptance that agency is distributed throughout the post-natural networks that have become the subject of analysis. This shift thus abandons the isolated agency of the modern world (and the valorised capacity of the independent human) for a world where *relational agency* holds sway. Here the success of human action (for example) is structured by the capacities of others within the relational complex, whilst the agency of the network itself may not equate to the sum of its individual parts – the network may effect a greater capacity through synergistic combinations between its actants, or its capacity may be negated through resistance or annulment within the network. Yet despite the change of emphasis from isolated categories to relational networks, criticism remains that such emphasis has not completely abandoned the categories of the modern constitution, but simply bolted them together. As Kirby argues in relation to Haraway's cyborg (a cybernetic hybrid of machine and organism, see Haraway, 1991),

> Haraway's 'disassembled and reassembled recipe' for cyborg graftings is utterly dependent upon the calculus of one plus one, the logic wherein pre-existent identities are *then* conjoined and melded. The cyborg's chimerical complication are therefore never so promiscuous that its parts cannot be separated, even if only retrospectively. Put simply, for Haraway, there once was not a cyborg. (Kirkby, 1997: 47, emphasis in original, also cited in Whatmore, 2002: 160)

Criticism is levelled therefore that some amodern approaches appear to build on the 'one-plus-one' logic of the modern constitution, rather than reject it entirely. However, as Braun notes, Latour's amodern ontology sees things rather differently:

> the world does not consist of discrete 'things' that are brought into relation… resulting in hybrids that are mixtures of pre-given pure forms, but instead consists of flows and connections within which things are continuously (re)constituted. (Braun, 2004:171)

Despite their differences, when taken together, these amodern ideas constitute an important shift in the constitution of the world. This shift is from a world of ontological stability (however manufactured and imposed), to a world of ontological instability. Instead of inhabiting a world where clear ontological entities act on other clearly categorised entities, the world is now composed of flows and connections – of 'beings' that are also 'becomings' (to use the words of Whatmore, 2002), of 'entities' that are also 'entities/processes' (to use the words of Harvey, 1996), or of 'noun chunks' that are really 'verbs' (to use the words of Laurier and Philo, 1999). This world, and the modern categories that we have used to understand it, e.g. 'culture', 'place', and 'nature', are no longer as isolated, durable, or static as previously accepted. This paper builds on this amodern constitution by suggesting that we as 'humans', or 'culture', 'place', and 'nature', or indeed any of the noun chunks used to discipline and order reality through the modernist constitution, are coincidences *merging and emerging*.

4. Emerging postnature

If we accept a non-modern constitution a world is formulated where things aren't ontologically stable or essential. Despite our attempts to fix through words, to order and discipline the world into intelligibility, we are aware that even the more persistent coincidences of life – like us, like places, like nature – change over time: they ebb and flow, flourish and decline, mutate or miscarry. Although we are used to the modern vocabulary which disciplines the world into the fixed borders of 'things', 'places' and 'natures', we also sense how immersed and emergent these 'things' are. As humans, for example, we are porous and absorbing, we ingest, inject, and swallow, and we can catch and inhale a range of other 'things'. As a consequence our borders are not as fixed as we may initially think, this apparently singular 'noun chunk' is not necessarily as stable or as independent as the modern constitution would have it. Sometimes the changes that arise through these processes of convergence are brief – we become defined by a cold or a virus perhaps. But sometimes this change is more persistent – a pregnancy, for example, or perhaps even a death. From this perspective, we are no longer fixed noun chunks, but are constantly changing; we are always becoming something else. There is movement, metamorphosis, re-emergence, and divergence. For a non-modern constitution of the world we need sensitivity in language, practice, and philosophy to this ontological instability.

Here, therefore, we are identifying an ontology of mergers and emergings. These coming togethers and coming aparts are not meetings of discernible things that are fixed and 'lock-together' to make a new composite. Rather they are mergings where 'things' interpenetrate, coalesce and form, yet do so only temporarily. This is what Haraway (2003: 100) describes as an 'ontological choreography', where the world is not made up of static, disembodied nouns, but 'fleshy verbs'. Accepting such ontological instability raises profound questions: what constitutes postnature in this unstable new world order? What role does emotion play in these merging ontologies? And, what political significance does this shift have? The remainder of the paper goes some way to answer these questions.

Firstly, what constitutes nature in this new world order? It is important to note from the outset that an ontologically unstable postnature is not a noun chunk, it cannot 'end' in a conventional, modern sense, rather it is a transient convergence; a temporary coming together of many 'things', an ongoing assemblage of entities/processes. To be more precise, a number of key components can be discerned to co-constitute postnature. Firstly, non-humans. Animals, birds and reptile species, viruses, meteorological conditions, biospherical reactions, and geological forms (to give them all their 'noun chunk' categorisation) are part of any postnature. Secondly, humans are also integral to this post-natural constitution. Both these human and non-human components are not stable or fixed in their ontological make-up, but are relational complexes both before their coincidence in any postnature, as well as producing a new postnature through their merger. Concomitantly, therefore, both components are not independent, rather interdependent, both in terms of their converging and converged form. Accepting these components also implicitly identifies a third component in postnature, namely the broader environmental and cultural context that contains and acts upon humans and non-humans. In the words of cultural geography, this component can be described as the role of 'place' in co-defining postnature. From this perspective places are not passive stages on which actions occur, rather they are the medium that impinge on, structure and facilitate these processes. As Tilley states, places are 'involved in the action and cannot be divorced from it' (1994: 10). Places then, are not only a medium but also an outcome of action, producing and being produced through human practice (see Anderson, 2009a for a full account of the role of place). Postnature is therefore not simply a locking together of separate entities within a passive context, rather it is a convergence of mutual interaction and interference involving non-humans, humans, and place. The meaning of any human or non-human species in this assemblage can thus only be marginally known if taken in isolation; as Brower suggests in respect to one post-natural species, the condor, "the condor is 5% feathers, flesh, blood, and bone. All the rest is place. Condors are soaring manifestations of the place that built them and coded their genes. That place requires space to nest in, to teach fledglings, to roost in unmolested, to bathe and drink in, to find other condors in, [and] not too many biologists [!]" (in Badiner, 1990: 160).[3]

5. Practice, emotion, interaction

From this perspective, every convergence of postnature is unique, and each temporary. As different entities/processes unite and depart, the transient convergence of postnature is reformed. By acknowledging the uniqueness and transience of this assemblage it is also important to acknowledge the *involvement* of many actants and actions in every postnature. From the outset, neither humans nor non-humans have prefigured dominance in terms of agency within a convergence; rather collective agency is constituted through mutual practical interaction. The importance of interaction within postnature can be further detailed through employing the turn within part of the social sciences towards theories of practice (also known as 'non-representational theories') (see Thrift, 1996, 1997, 1999).

Theories of practices have developed as a response to the valorisation of meaning and understanding discerned solely through text, materiality, and as a consequence, representation. They begin from the assumption that although these aspects of modern, scientific knowledge are important, they can only ever be partial. As Thrift puts it: "the varieties of stability we call 'representation'…can only cover so much of the world" (Thrift, 2004: 89). The 'stability' of representations often fail to capture the instability of ontological emergings, it misses or ignores the "fleeting encounters [for example, that make] a critical difference to our experiences of…place" (Lorimer, 2005: 83). Non-representational study therefore defines itself as different to – as before or beyond – modern forms of representation. A non-representational (and perhaps non-modern) study begins with a focus on practices, on the *interactions* rather than the *things* that constitute our world. Importantly, however, this understanding is not the knowledge of a scholar disembodied and detached from nature, rather it is of an unstable entity/process emerging with others into a transient convergence of postnature. In this way, a focus on practices also seeks to take seriously, the "embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, …and sensuous dispositions" that also influence our experience of postnature (after Lorimer, ibid.). It is crucial to emphasise the importance of the role of emotions in postnature further.

> I suggest that th[e] emotional and constitutive role of nature … has been underplayed in western environmental debates, which have been dominated by rationalist scientific discourse in which emotion is suppressed and emotionalism denigrated. (Milton, 2002: 91)

As we have seen, the modern constitution imposes categorisations on the world to discipline and order it. Part of this process involves the severing of mind (and rationalism) from body (and emotion), with the former being valorised and valued when understanding the world and the latter, as Milton identifies above, being suppressed and denigrated. However, alongside the turn towards unstable ontologies and non-representational practices, there is a growing recognition that emotions are integral to both our humanity and understanding. As Vitterso et al. state: "As a new century begins, attention to affect and emotion has been recognised as an essential impact of any study of humankind" (2001: 137). Emotions, therefore, are increasingly seen as essential components in our knowledge systems, as well as inevitable productions from our interactions with the (post-natural) world of which we are a part; it is through emotions that we "literally make sense of the world" (Wood and Smith, 2004: 534).

In my own discipline of geography, many scholars have attempted to engage with emotional connections to aspects of 'nature' in a number of areas (e.g. gardens (Hitchings, 2003); science (Waterton, 2002); animals and food (Risan, 2005; Roe, 2006); and farming (Convery et al., 2005)). These studies outline that, although engaging with emotional connection is important, our emotional responses in and to nature are not essentialist in form, indeed emotional responses vary "dramatically from culture to culture and even from individual to individual" (Preston, 2005: 379). As Milton states:

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[3] When I consider this point I am reminded of how as a child I took home pebbles from the beach because they looked so beautiful on the shore. I was always disappointed as, once at home, they looked ordinary without their place in what I now see as the broader emergence of the post-natural coastline.

it is self-evident that nature protectionists feel strongly and positively about nature and natural things. It is equally clear that some people feel differently. Why is it that, for some of us, the sight of an otter turns our world upside down while others do not even wish to know about it? (2002: 55)

These studies emphasise, therefore, the importance of paying attention to the variety of emotions individuals and groups have towards the natural world in order to gain a perspective on the value, agency and status of nature in these relations.[4] Generally speaking, however, these studies often correspond to the one-plus-one logic of the modern constitution and focus on how the isolated individual responds to an external nature, rather than recognising the co-constitution of humans and nature in a post-natural sense. However, if we turn to the phenomenological tradition we witness how practice and emotion merge into a more unstable ontology.

Phenomenology *starts* with the assumption that we 'participate in things': not at a distance, as we are in the world we would know. Thus philosophical reflection involves experience, which implies that the sensuous *and* the affective are central to the process of knowing: 'This is what I feel in the face of….' How else would we get at the specific quality of any phenomenon? (Game, 1997: 391)

The phenomenological perspective is useful to us here as it celebrates the experience rather than the representation of the world, as Game and Metcalfe (1996: 5) state, it recognises that "passion, social life and soci[al sciences] only exist in the in-between, in specific and moving social *relations*". It is this recognition that comes closer to the merging and emerging ontologies of postnature. It is through various practical engagements that we become part of the convergence of postnature, and the emotional responses produced through this engagement then become definitive of that relationship. These emotional responses, this affective intensity, does not derive from the practice in isolation, nor the chunk-to-chunk practice of a person and a natural place, but the practice-in-this-coming-together of unstable components (namely: non-humans, biospherical processes, culture, environmental context, etc.). This is, therefore, a *relational sensibility*, which is part and product of the transient convergence of any postnature.

6. Relational sensibilities and postnature

We ought to say of ['nature'] not only – this is what it looks like, but, this is how I feel it. (Watson, 1983: 392)

The final key component of any postnature is relational sensibility. Relational sensibility is the emotion registered within a human being, but produced through the co-constitution of that human within a transient convergence of postnature. The coming together of non-human, human, embodied practice, and place results in an emotional experience that is both the product of this convergence, and itself becomes part of the broader, relational constitution. A relational sensibility thus contributes to a knowledge that is both embodied and cognitive, producing an understanding that identifies relational

interdependence and co-constitution in the post-natural world. Let us take an example to explain further. The following extract is taken from an experience essayed by naturalist and writer Barry Lopez.

If you walk up, say, a dry arroyo in the Sonoran Desert you will feel a mounding and rolling of sand and silt beneath your foot that is distinctive. You will anticipate the crumbling of the sedimentary earth in the arroyo bank as your hand reaches out, and in that tangible evidence you will sense a history of water in the region. Perhaps a black-throated sparrow lands in a palo-verde bush – the resiliency of the twig under the bird, that precise shade of yellowish-green against the milk-blue sky, the fluttering whir of the arriving sparrow….. Draw on the smell of creosote bush, or clack stones together in the dry air. Feel how light is the desiccated dropping of the kangaroo rat. Study an animal track obscured by the wind. These are all elements of the land, and what makes the landscape comprehensible are the relationships between them. One learns a landscape finally not be knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationships in it – like that between the sparrow and the twig. (1989: 64)

Here Lopez conveys many of the key aspects of postnature. Firstly, he tells us of his (and (y)our) immersion in this post-natural place through walking into this dry arroyo in the desert, this is the beginning of his convergence. From this point on, he co-constitutes this postnature through an 'active, practical and perceptual engagement' with it (after Ingold, 1996: 120). This interaction is embodied and tactile, it unites physical sensation with mental capacity (both imaginative and intellectual), and merges human body with non-human geology. A range of sensory practices merge Lopez into the scene (e.g. 'walk', 'reach', 'smell', 'clack', 'feel', 'study'). Through these practices Lopez contributes to the ongoing assemblage of postnature and generates a relational sensibility from this assemblage that enables him to comprehend it. This relational sensibility conveys the uniqueness of the postnature he is at once a part of ('you will feel a mounding and rolling of sand… that is distinctive'); it hints at the previous convergences that have gone before ('you will sense a history of water in the region'), and also foresees the convergences to come ('you will anticipate the crumbling of sedimentary earth… as your hand reaches out'). This comprehension identifies the importance of relations and co-constitutions emerging from the scene (for example, the relationship between the 'whirring sparrow' and the 'resilient twig').

Relational sensibility is thus produced by the transient convergence of postnature, but also then contributes to its ongoing constitution. Through humans interacting with the convergence of non-humans and place, emotional responses are registered in them that combine with intellect to produce comprehension of the scene. By giving weight to these relational sensibilities postnature comes to be defined not only by the convergence of non-humans, humans, and place, but also by these emotional involvements; postnature comes to be co-defined by 'how it makes us feel'. To be precise, however, a relational sensibility is not simply 'this how I feel in the face of…' (after Game, 1997), but rather 'this is how I feel being co-constituted by… ', or, 'how I feel being converged with…'. It through being merged with postnature that a relational sensibility arises (and thus it is most often felt through a particularly embodied or tactile engagement with postnature, e.g. surfing (see Anderson, 2009b); walking (see Anderson, 2004; Wylie, 2005); or kayaking, see below).

As stated, the transient convergence of postnature should be understood in a context of flow, union, and divergence. As the 'human' merges into postnature, they also emerge from it (they leave the dry arroyo in the case of Lopez). This divergence does not leave the 'human' unchanged as a result of the encounter. Aspects

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[4] It is also important to acknowledge that any engagement with emotional sensibility within the confines of one paper will be necessarily partial. As this paper continues it recognises that there are many examples and approaches that could be chosen to show and tell of emotional connections within postnature (for alternatives of these see non-western or 'indigenous theories', as detailed for example Devi, 1995, and Spivak, 1990; critical feminist theories most notably on embodiment, for example Braidotti, 1994, and Butler, 1990; as well as environmental psychology approaches, see Manzo, 2003; Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Fried, 1963).

of the relational sensibility formed through their convergence stays with(in) them. I have written elsewhere about the transformative qualities of what this paper calls the transient convergence of postnature (Anderson, 2009b), but here I wish to acknowledge the political significance of the legacy of convergence.

7. Relational sensibility as motivation for action

In the following edited except, Duff articulates the affects of his convergence with the postnature of the sea.

> kayaking… is like the initial plunge into a mountain stream, it refreshes and wakes the body and mind to new life… I come [to the sea] for this sense of awe that reaches deep inside me and strikes a note that I knew would be there.
> …Out of nowhere [however], awe was suddenly replaced by fear. I suddenly wanted to gather it all in [the sea, the rocks, the gulls] and somehow protect it. …I wanted to tell the headland, the waves, and the limpets clinging to the rocks, running white with the retreating waters, that I cared. …The ache in my heart was the fear of losing the companionship of the winds and the swells, of losing the… connection I had experienced on the ocean…. On the sea I was utterly myself. What I feared was having to be something other than who I was on the ocean. (Duff, 1999: 64/222)

In this passage, Duff senses and celebrates what can be seen as an emerging but unstable ontology. He documents his acknowledgement of how a relational sensibility merges his own sense of self, his own identity, inextricably within postnature; he can only be 'himself' when he is part of that transient convergence with the sea, coast, and kayak. Relational sensibilities thus emphasise the co-constitution humans can have with postnature. However, they are not only significant in terms of the definitional substance of postnature, but also due to their potential to motivate political action. As Duff states (above), when a threat is sensed to the postnature of which he is a part he, "suddenly wanted to gather it all in and somehow protect it" (Duff, 1999: 64); this urge to protect is significant as it introduces new premises for protecting the post-natural world.

Conventional valuations of nature that premise political action and protection are those associated with instrumental, intrinsic and inherent value. Instrumental value, as defined by Connelly and Smith (1999: 18), is attributed to nature when that natural 'resource' is deemed to be of use to human beings. As a consequence nature may be protected as the continuance of natural systems (e.g. climate, atmospheric conditions, water availability, resources for shelter, etc.) is deemed crucial for human survival in the long term. Intrinsic value, in contrast, is attributed to nature above and beyond any 'use-value' to humans, it is a value that motivates protection of natural species or landscapes for their own sake (see ibid: 19). As Carter suggests, such a perspective advocates that, "all lifeforms should be given the opportunity to pursue their own destinies" (2001: 73). The third motivation for natural protection is inherent value and this occurs when an individual sees, for example, "a flock of geese flying overhead… and appreciate[s] it spiritually and aesthetically and value[s] it accordingly" (Connelly and Smith, 1999: 19). Although implying a relational sensibility between humans and nature, inherent value does not explicitly foreground the emotional, performative and co-ingredient dimensions of this relationship that would define an amodern value of postnature. These conventional motivations to protect nature rely upon the modern constitution, standing outside nature to comprehend and value it. However, from a post-natural perspective, we "cannot step outside [postnature] to comprehend [it] 'as is really is'" (to paraphrase Castree and MacMillan, 2002: 209). 'Nature' from this latter perspective is not to be protected in and of itself, or for reasons of an

isolated species' survival or conscience; but rather so (the potential for) a relational and experiential convergence can be retained.

In the first instance therefore, the urge to protect as exemplified by Duff (above) is based on the wish to retain the potential for convergence with postnature. Such a premise for protection is based on the 'disassembled and reassembled recipe' of postnature (after Kirkby, 1997, and above), a version that retains the legacy of modernism by configuring the post-natural world as a "meeting of discernible things that are fixed and lock together to make a new composite" (ibid.:47). Drawing on the relational sensibility prompted by this coming together, we as humans sense the transient convergence we are/were apart of, and can wish for further, similar, involvements (due perhaps to the 'sublime' experience encountered through coincidence).[5] From this perspective Duff's urge to protect is motivated from the transient convergence in effect becoming an extension of his own sense of self; a new composite is formed around the human, involving kayak, place, practice, emotion, etc. The urge to protect therefore becomes translated into a further variation of a 'self'-ish act: we wish to protect postnature due to the relational sensibility we gain from transient convergence. Although anthropocentric in its interpretation, this urge to protect is thus prompted and sustained crucially by the relational sensibility that draws attention to the post-natural connection to the human world. It is relational sensibility that provokes recognition of what would be lost if such a connection could no longer emerge. Such recognition, if harnessed appropriately, may be significant to achieving the goal of post-natural protection, indeed, this interpretation of the urge to protect may already resonate with research in environmental psychology and geography on place attachment and community campaigns (see, for example, Bricker and Kerstetter, 2000; Vitterso et al., 2001; Seamon, 1984).[6]

However, following Braun (2004, and above), a further amodern interpretation can be made of the urge to protect as exemplified by Duff (above). If as Braun suggests, "the world does not exist of discrete 'things' that are brought into relation… but of flows and connections within which things are continuously (re)constituted" (2004: 171), then the amodern urge to protect is not oriented around notions of self-extension or instrumentality. From this perspective, postnature is not separate in any sense from humans, rather humans are merged fully within a transient convergence. From this perspective the anthropocentric, or indeed ecocentric, 'human' – however extended or connected – is meaningless: we have never been modern, but always hybrids. In this view, the relational sensibility prompted through becoming postnature introduces a different motivation for political action: action is prompted in order to maintain and respect the co-constituted

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[5] As Gergen outlines, "although variously understood over the centuries, the sublime was consistently used to refer to a power or force that was both beyond and prior to the human capacity for rational articulation" (1996:137). However, Gergen suggests that feelings of inspiration and awe are prompted in humans from the *relations between* nature and humanity; from, in Gergen's words, these "unfathomable processes of relatedness" (1996: 138). Such vocabulary and configuration clearly echoes social science moves away from binary distinctions between humans and the non-human world, and towards more hybrid, relational diagnostics between entities and processes (but crucially not insisting that one-plus-one logic of the modern constitution be discarded). In this situation, the feelings of awe and inspiration, of energy, even of fear, that arises within humans from their experiential relations with postnature come to form part of their identity and sense of self.

[6] As Belk offers, place attachment can be defined as, "to be attached to certain of our surroundings [and] make them a part of our extended self" (cited in Giuliani and Feldman, 1993: 271). This attachment between places and self-identities becomes defining through a range of activities, be they habitual or singular, so much so that changes to natural places creates 'detachment' and results in mourning, grief, and loss in individual and group identity and continuity (see, for example, Fried, 1963; Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Manzo, 2003).

assemblage produced through transient convergence. In other words, the non-humans, humans, place, practice, and relational sensibility produced by this assemblage. Crucially, therefore, this motivation no longer posits nature-in-isolation to be worthy of protection, but rather foregrounds the transient convergence of postnature as the entity/process that is significant. The relational sensibility prompted by the practice-in-this-coming-together of unstable components prompts an urge to value the collective assemblage, as it is this convergence that has (at the very least) experiential, emotional, and environmental value. Through shifting attention away from solely rationalising 'nature' in the modern tradition and towards considering the crucial role of emotion in constituting postnature, a new valuation of the world is thus introduced that is holistic and beyond conventional premises of protection. If this valuation is accepted, attention must now turn to what political weight could be given to relational sensibilities and their role in constituting the world.

8. Conclusion

Postnature as a transient convergence suggests its preservation due its value as a relational 'resource'. Given the range of campaigns, protests and behavioural changes that focus around the emotional dimensions of human-nature convergence (be they individual lifestyle changes towards sustainability (see Hobson, 2001), neighbourhood campaigns, or radical protests (see Anderson, 2004; Wall, 1999; Foreman and Haywood, 1987; Lee, 1995), the (post)nature of a non-modern world appears to have resonance with many people, affecting their identity and lives in important ways. Valuing postnature as a relational resource therefore may be a useful shift in emphasis, but this move is not without problematic implications. Once (or if) we accept that there are crucial convergences between 'humans' and 'nature', and this union changes our sense of 'self' and 'nature' in key ways (as we now may consider ourselves as 'ourselves-in-postnature'), then what political import do we give to these insights?

As all interactions in and with postnature are individual to an extent (despite them being influenced by and influencing broader cultural milieu), should these interactions become the basis from which to make political decisions on 'postnature' protection? Will some convergences be more valued than others? Will, for example, the tendency for 'safe' relational sensibilities be valorised over those that may be-*wild*-er us? (Personally speaking, it is these bewildering aspects of post-natural convergence that I value most highly). These questions are of significance not simply for the debate on nature or postnature, but have political ramifications for the emotional turn in social sciences more broadly. What weight should be given to the 'emotional' dimension of humankind in more general political deliberations? Informally, but nevertheless influentially, some emotional sensibilities clearly bring affects to bear on political decision-making, but should these become more explicit?

Focusing on the relational sensibilities arising from the transient convergence of postnature is therefore a fundamentally political move. In a world where the modern constitution retains dominance, it becomes important to highlight the different ways in which we may protect and value 'postnature'. This may be in terms of the potential for relational and experiential convergence, or by taking seriously the chimerical complications inherent in the relational interdependence of the post-natural world, and the provocative implications these produce.

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