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Visions from Behind a Desk: Archival performance and the re-enactment of colonial bureaucracy

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Abstract

Can ten weeks of archival research be considered a re-enactment of the daily life of black African clerks who created the records? What would such a claim entail when it is made by a white female scholar? Drawing from my experience of archival research in Zambia, and from recent enthusiasm in historical geography for 'enlivening' or 'animating' the past, I analyse what parameters would be necessary for this re-enactment to be considered a success. This paper explores how breaking up historical situations into units of gesture and experience affects the narrating of history. It asks what models of the self are implied by re-enactive historical investigation; in relation to the agency of historical actors, and also to the performativity of their original gestures. It argues that performative investigation of the social and cultural geographies of the subaltern sits uncomfortably with current scholarly practices in historical geography. This is in part because that work is largely carried out by lone scholars, but also because of the highly individualised, self-conscious and self-possessed modes through which the outcomes of performative research are narrated. Finally, borrowing the term 'acts of transfer' (from the performance scholar Diana Taylor), this paper proposes that this contemporary performance of clerical work is only one route through which the colonial past resonates, or acts, in the present. The lives of the colonial clerks were locked into structures of racial and socioeconomic inequality that survive outside my performance. Does 'performing' the past overwrite or obscure these other continuities? To avoid such an erasure, both the ethical consequences and epistemological goals of performative research in historical geography need to be more clearly articulated in relationship to the sociomaterial geographies of the present.

Introduction

In March, July and August 2013, for a total of ten weeks, I spent all day, Monday to Friday, carrying out archival work in Zambia, in both the National Archives, Lusaka, and in the archives of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines, Ndola.[1][2] Each day I ordered up files from the stores. Each day I unfolded cardboard, tentatively opened files that had been collated by tags, and often failed to separate one carbon-print page from another. Each day

[1] I'd like to thank the anonymous reviewers, and Ruth Slatter, for a great deal of help in clarifying my thoughts, and improving their articulation. I'd also like to thank Simon Werrett for pointing me to the use of the term 'sociomateriality' in history of science literature, and Tim Boon for offering the opportunity to explore literature on performative methods in more depth.

[2] All images the author's own.

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I typed furiously, copying out document after document onto my laptop. I noted dates, set up cross-references and indexed names.

In this paper, I am going to make a claim that, at first appearances, seems absurd: that this stretch of seemingly regular archival work by a white, British, female scholar constituted a re-enactment of the experience of a black male clerk in early twentieth century colonial offices. I consider the re-enactment a failure. Nonetheless the apparent clumsiness of this choice of scenario invites closer attention to performative methodologies.

Fig 1.

The possibility that this experience could operate as an "investigative re-enactment" (Cook, 2004) is one that is encouraged by research in the material turn, which co-opts a much wider range of historical matter as sources, and applies more obviously creative strategies of interpretation than in traditional historical scholarship. Often re-enactment proposes a "common, transcultural" experience of the human body: "the only class of historical events that occurred in the past but survive into the present" (Prown 1993: 2-3). In work over nearly a decade, historical geographers have explored these methods and

49 found them to be productive, both in generating new sources of historical evidence, and in
50 connecting the documentary record of the past to other more sensual practices. Re-
51 enactment techniques are now quite frequently referred to as 're-animating' or 'enlivening'
52 the past (DeSilvey, 2007b; Dwyer and Davies 2010; Gagen et al., 2007; Mills, 2013).

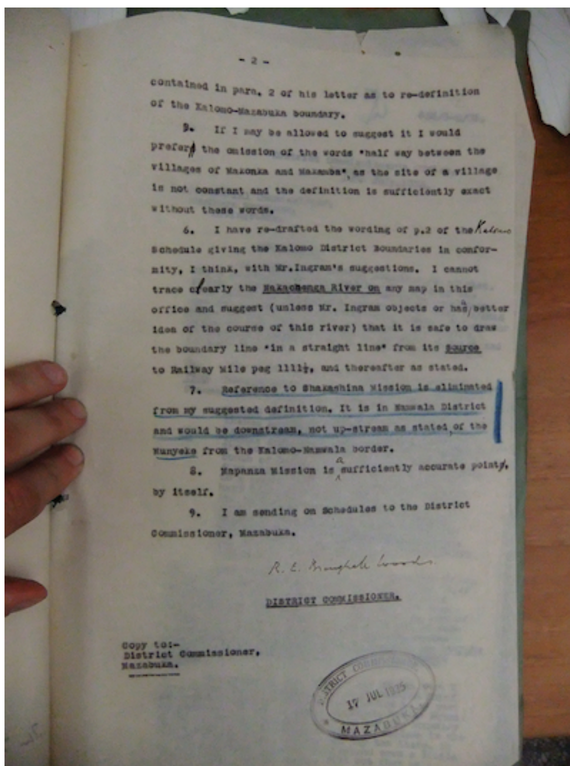
53 However, there has also been hesitance about taking up performative strategies for
54 interpreting material culture. Using material culture as a source requires increased amounts
55 of empathy and imagination as tools for historical work. Some historians have voiced
56 scepticism over the kinds of experiences that are open to our empathetic capacities (Cook,
57 2004). Doubts have also been expressed over the relationship between these more creative
58 research techniques and empirical study (Duncan 2002, Griffin and Evans, 2008). Broadly
59 speaking the existing literature is polarised between experimental enthusiasms for
60 performative research methods, and more distant 'armchair' critique. This paper bridges
61 these two positions with a focused analysis of the failure of my experiment. In what
62 follows I describe how this experiment emerged and its methods in more detail. More
63 importantly, I draw from literature in historical geography, but also social and cultural
64 geography, anthropology and critical performance studies to address the discomforts and
65 silences that resulted.

66 Key to this analysis is Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003). I have borrowed
67 Taylor's definition of performance as an "act of transfer", the transmission of "social
68 knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated… behaviour" (2,3) in order
69 to consider how 're-enactment' is enmeshed in broader expressions of social knowledge
70 and identities. I suggest that the cultural identity of the researcher as a "bourgeois, self-
71 possessed individual" has a strong impact on performance as a mode of historical research
72 and is incompatible with the narration of many kinds of embodied historical experiences
73 (Hartmann 1997, 54). Accessing the embodied past through the lens of the Romantic lone
74 scholar also re-organises our view of the present, highlighting certain commonalities

between a researcher and past actors, but simultaneously obscuring other routes through which the past manifests itself today.

Context

In spring and summer of 2013 I was researching the history of colonial cartography in Northern Rhodesia, the former British colony that, in 1964, gained independence as Zambia (author). In the process I became increasingly interested in the bureaucratic work of mapping. From the colonial archive as a putative whole (read between records in the UK and Zambia) it was only possible to produce intermittent pictures of daily work within the Northern Rhodesian Survey Department. Through even these fragments, however, it became clear that the colonial bureaucracy deployed a practice that is very familiar from other areas of colonial economies: the use of cheap human labour in place of more costly technological devices. The sheer number of these employees suggests that they had been responsible for the material production of the bulk of the archive under my fingertips.



- 2 -

contained in para. 2 of his letter as to re-definition of the Kalomo-Mazabuka boundary.

5. If I may be allowed to suggest it I would prefer the omission of the words "half way between the villages of Makonka and Makamba", as the site of a village is not constant and the definition is sufficiently exact without these words.

6. I have re-drafted the wording of p.2 of the Kalomo Schedule giving the Kalomo District Boundaries in conformity, I think, with Mr.Ingram's suggestions. I cannot trace clearly the Makachenga River on any map in this office and suggest (unless Mr. Ingram objects or has a better idea of the course of this river) that it is safe to draw the boundary line "in a straight line" from its source to Railway Mile peg 1111½, and thereafter as stated.

7. Reference to Shakashina Mission is eliminated from my suggested definition. It is in Namwala District and would be downstream, not up-stream as stated, of the Nanyeke from the Kalomo-Namwala border.

8. Mapanza Mission is a sufficiently accurate point by itself.

9. I am sending on Schedules to the District Commissioner, Mazabuka.

R. E. Broughall Woods

DISTRICT COMMISSIONER.

Copy to:-
District Commissioner,
Mazabuka.

DISTRICT COMMISSIONER 17 JUL 1935 MAZABUKA

Fig 2.

90 The reconstruction of the architectures of knowledge in government now has a venerable
91 history. Latour in 'Drawing Things Together' proposed a highly successful model for the
92 movement of matter towards a centre of calculation, serving that centre with evidence for
93 making claims and exercising control (Latour, 1990). For Latour the paper matter itself *is*
94 the government. Yet, as we learn from Ogborn's analysis of letter writing in the East India
95 Company (2002), or from the investigation of Pakistani bureaucracy by Hull (2012), the
96 'rules' of paperwork cannot fully determine the movements and habits of human actors.
97 Actors pick out the limits and contradictions in bureaucracies: to understand the system we
98 need to account for those behaviours.

99 Yet if the colonial archive was thin on its own processes, information about the African
00 administrative employees was almost non-existent. Much had to be inferred from the form
01 rather than the content of the archives. In one folder, for example, it was possible to trace
02 how a government agent, Henry Matondo, achieved greater social status as his
03 correspondence shifted from pencil to fountain pen over the years 1951-1952.[3] A letter
04 written on 12th May 1954 was notable for being the earliest typed document I saw that had
05 been signed by an African administrator in his own name.[4] Such faint echoes of the clerks
06 are scarcely amplified in the secondary literature—there have only been a handful of
07 publications on African colonial bureaucratic employees (Lawrance et al. 2006). So how
08 could the legacy of the clerical workers be written back into the history of colonial
09 government?

10 As I worked through the documents I became conscious of quite how strongly my archival
11 gestures invoked my own experience of bureaucratic labour. The copying out, ordering,
12 and referencing brought back memories of secretarial work I had done for employment

[3] BSE1/10/31 National Archives of Zambia

[4] Letter from Musamai Mateyo to Divisional Surveyor, Choma, 12th May 1954, SP4/12/62 National Archives of Zambia.

agencies to support my studies, the generation of invoices and filing of tax returns I have done as a freelance worker, and the tracking of student progress as a tutor. I started to hold, unfold, and examine the papers more consciously. This consciousness was enhanced by the opportunity to see some of the original office technologies on display at the Mining Industry Museum in the Zambian Copperbelt (Fig 3). I began to wonder whether considering my archival work as a re-enactment might offer insight into the material processes of the fossilisation of the archive, and the behaviours 'around' paperwork that Hull's ethnographic work so carefully exposed.

Fig. 3

I began to pay more attention to the materials in front of me, to the gestures and the rhythms of my work. This wasn't a re-enactment in line with costumed Napoleonic battles, but rather closer to the sensory attention paid by Patchett to the construction of a taxidermy tiger's head (2008), or by Lorimer and Whatmore to the weight of a historic weapon (2009). The process had, I would say, partial success. It focused my attention on the labour inherent in the archive: how the documents had been produced, reproduced, organised and

29 circulated; their indexing, dating, filing and stamping; and to how they were stored. On the
30 other hand this attention to embodiment didn't – in any meaningful sense – allow me to
31 understand more about the 'experience' of paperwork from the perspective of an African
32 clerk. It seemed that this approach could generate certain kinds of understanding but not
33 others.

34 Conceptually framing the archive as a stage was a fairly natural extension of the shift from
35 seeing the archive as a source, to seeing it as a subject (Stoler 2010:44). Historical
36 geographers have already observed the ways in which the archives invite particular
37 performances in historical work (Ashmore et al. 2010; Lorimer, 2010; Rose 2000). These
38 analyses have all examined how the construction and use of archives refracts political
39 power. However, applying this methodological approach to the colonial archive made
40 political concerns extremely explicit. There is a strong sense in the literature on material
41 culture as a historical source that material can serve to prompt or choreograph gestures,
42 and that the repetition of those gestures is to re-experience them, to walk a mile in another
43 person's shoes (Petrov 2011). The idea of inserting myself imaginatively into the skin of a
44 colonial African employee was deeply troubling. Just the word 'skin' in that sentence has
45 an impact that suggests that the empathetic performance of embodied historical experience
46 is a far more complex strategy than is sometimes acknowledged. As I interrogated the
47 successes and failures of this experiment, I was driven to consider more closely how
48 experience and identities are framed through the process of re-enactment.

49 **Paperwork as an 'act': breaking up history into units of experience**

50 A key problem that emerged quite quickly as I tried to understand my re-enactment was
51 the difficulty of scale, and what paperwork 'was'. Taking up gesture as a unit of
52 experience has implications for how we understand historical situations, and the location of
53 their essence or meaning. To write history from gesture is the "privileging of experience

54 over event or structure" (Agnew 2007, 301). The significance of bureaucracy comes from
55 being a networked system of activity, and from its persistence well beyond the individual.
56 So how would breaking up history into gesture at the scale of a single desk affect the
57 narration of this particular historical subject?

58 An initial question was that of duration. I began to ask whether ten weeks was enough time
59 to build a sense of the archival gestures. Paperwork derives its meaning from repetition:
60 repetition in the sense of the immaculate reproduction of documents, but also repetition in
61 the sense of boredom. Through repetition, sociomateriality emerges; the co-production of
62 bodies *with* their tools and environments, as the gestures of work turn into toughened skin,
63 altered muscular structures, or chemical transformations of the lungs (Roberts 2015). In
64 industrialised societies, these transformations have often been uncomfortable, or even fatal.
65 On the timescale of sociomateriality, the unit of the gesture tells us very little.

66 It is interesting, and complicated, that performative methods are often used to access
67 historical experience that aren't documented by first-person accounts, to revive histories
68 'from below'. They are, therefore, very often attempting to describe lives that were *locked*
69 *in* to very uncomfortable gestures over long periods, or lifetimes. The physical discomfort
70 caused by deskwork is certainly very different to working with drills on a coalface. There
71 is, nonetheless—Steedman reveals in *Dust*—physicality to the fabrication and use of
72 papers and inks that leaves traces on human bodies (2001).

Fig. 4

I find Steedman's *Dust* to be a very successful attempt to juxtapose the temporalities of encounter between a historian, material and past human experiences. More often, however, when historians (and historical geographers) encounter material culture performatively it is framed in a language of exploration, commitment, endurance and improvisation that—in similar ways to the language of fieldwork—invokes a romantic sublime (DeSilvey 2007a; Lorimer 2010). Although historical geographers often "forgo any claims to the possibility of recovering in fullness the realm of lived gesture, touch and emotion", they might aim to, "seek out historical 'performance' in its immediacy and evanescence" (Gagen et al. 2007:5). Historical understanding built from flashes of intuition, I would argue, is difficult to reconcile with the sense that most of the tasks that accumulate in our everyday to become history are embodied over years of repetition, are carried out unconsciously, and are extremely boring (Schilling, 2003). Framing the immediacy and hyperawareness of re-enactment as an 'access' to history can—if that language remains untempered— shape an idea of past experience as being made up of intense and fleeting moments rather than of grinding everydays.

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90 In the same way that the scale of a single gesture might not serve to represent its repetition
91 over time, there is a tension between the mode of individual scholarship and activities that
92 are as inherently social as clerical work. The re-enactment of craft or technically difficult
93 work can be measured against the yardstick of a goal object: historical material culture can
94 reveal whether (or not) the appropriate skills and techniques have been acquired by the
95 historian (Patchett 2016). Other historical experiences are more open-ended, more
96 processual, however, and don't offer such clear criteria for success. In such enquiries
97 historical geographers have turned to surviving historical actors as companions, or better
98 guides, who help ground, interpret and analyse the fragments of historical experience
99 gained in re-enactment (Lorimer 2003, 2006; Patchett 2016). In Zambia I didn't succeed in
00 finding anyone who could talk me 'around' colonial bureaucracy with either their own or
01 hereditary memories (Ashmore et al., 2012).

02 Importantly, however, the success of a bureaucracy depends on its operation at the level of
03 a system, geographically organising a large collection of bodies and objects. I began to
04 wonder whether it was framing my re-enactment so closely around myself—from a single
05 desk-space—that was causing a failure to get to the essence of the experience of
06 bureaucracy. The traditions of living history, and battle re-enactments demonstrate much
07 larger assemblages of people and stuff, and represent a better possibility of accessing
08 highly 'social' historical situations. However, whilst such collective endeavours are
09 relatively common outside of the academy, they mesh awkwardly with the typical social
10 patterns of research in historical geography. The romantic language pervasive in
11 performative historical research that invokes individual insight seems to erode even the
12 social mechanism of peer review.

13 Beyond historical geography, there are an increasing number of projects using collective
14 approaches to interrogate historical systems. Groups of investigative re-enactors have put
15 emphasis on the social and intersubjective aspects of historical technical work. For

16 example, Geissler and Kelly investigated colonial laboratory science in Tanzania (2016),
17 Kneebone and Wood explored the 'hive mind' of historical surgical teams (2014). With
18 hindsight, I think that this would have been a better way to approach colonial bureaucracy.

19 **Models for identity, 'self-hood' and history**

20 Whilst defining and recreating an 'act' of paperwork is complex, the definition and re-
21 embodiment of a historical 'actor' enters realms that are even more fraught with ethical,
22 political and epistemological difficulties. In an investigative re-enactment the historian is
23 (more or less consciously) taking up models for the 'self': for their own person and for the
24 historical actor. Such models assign particular qualities and agency to each. This question
25 is under-theorised by historical geographers who haven't drawn from work in cultural or
26 social geography (or elsewhere) to support their propositions of what 'acting out' past
27 bodies might mean.

28 To re-embody colonial bureaucratic practices is to invoke a cultural milieu in which rights
29 and responsibilities, and perceived cognitive capacities were policed according to skin
30 colour. Attempts to interpret or reproduce behaviours from a colonial bureaucracy must
31 take into account the violence, coercion and degradation in the policing of racial
32 asymmetry. Two problems in particular rise to the surface. The first is a consideration of
33 what acting out 'types' of people might mean for the ethics and epistemology of research.
34 The second is the problem of discerning and narrating structure and agency in the actions
35 of historical actors.

36 Enlivening, and re-animating are strategies associated in historical geography with non-
37 representational philosophies. They are often assimilating modes of enquiry from
38 posthumanist cultural geography that have been called 'witnessing', or 'solicitation',
39 modes that seek out intersectionality at a precognitive level. If taking that non-
40 representational position seriously then the human subject is drawn as an embodied

41 relational construct, emerging out of a series of encounters, or deriving potentiality from
42 contrasts of (for example) movement and rest (Crouch 2003; Harrison 2008; McCormack
43 2003). Although historical geographers have been inspired by non-representational models,
44 they still seem to focus on interpreting sociocultural rather than the precognitive aspects of
45 embodied history. This is, I suspect, the reason that more traditional notions of personal
46 identity linger in this scholarship, albeit in a fragmentary form. The term 'ghost' is often
47 used (DeSilvey 2007b; Edensor 2008; Mills 2013). Lorimer (2007:58) uses the expression
48 'character acting'.

49 In opposition to the vague, fragmented model posited for the historical actor, reports of the
50 performative encounter often detail, with great intensity, the researcher's actions and
51 sensations as they carry out their research. The reports emphasise the researchers' agency
52 (DeSilvey 2006; Lorimer 2011; Steedman 2011). They enter the historian's gestures into
53 what the cultural studies scholar, Stewart, calls the "artful time of the narrator" who is able
54 to re-organise and re-tempo the everyday in order to provide pattern and insight (1984).
55 Performative research often does not, therefore, adhere to dominant schools of postcolonial
56 thought that reject the capacity of historians to speak for the narratively dispossessed, or,
57 indeed, for anyone to give a direct representation of their own consciousness (Spivak
58 1988).

59 The terms 'ghost' or 'character' seem to liberate researchers from positivist constraints and
60 identity politics when narrating embodied pasts, but I don't feel comfortable using that
61 language with regards to the colonial bureaucratic workforce. I'm not willing to abandon
62 the subaltern to fiction. The identities of the clerks have already been flattened to
63 functions, types and caricatures in the colonial record. Hartman suggests that in order to
64 write the history of slavery, scholars should sidestep attempts "to recover voices", with "an
65 attempt to consider specific *practices* in a public performance of slavery" [emphasis

66 mine](1997,12). To do this would require a subduing (not silencing, but a significant
67 lowering of tone) of the "I" present in performative research.

68 **Performativity and agency in the acts of everyday**

69 The delicate balances of self and self-consciousness in historical research really come to
70 the fore when we begin to consider that historical 'everydays' may also have been
71 knowingly performed. On one level it would seem that the colonial clerks would have had
72 little agency in their daily activities, that their interactions with the paper, typewriters and
73 filing cabinets would have left scant room for creative manoeuvre. Yet scholars across
74 multiple fields have been able to demonstrate the ways in which individuals and groups
75 operated tactically, reworking power or creating coping mechanisms to contest attempted
76 impositions of hegemony. Some of this literature has interrogated situations of direct
77 violent coercion in the European colonial past (Duncan 2002; Hartman 1997; Scott 1985).
78 However, parallels can be found in analyses of agency in contemporary labour geographies
79 (McDowell 2008, Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011) as all these scholars have often drawn from
80 de Certeau's analysis of European urban life (1984).

81 It seems likely that a certain amount of 'reworking' was going on in colonial bureaucratic
82 procedures. Although I didn't find any evidence of directly antagonistic behaviour from
83 the colonial clerks, their employers discursively classify them as lazy, inadequate, or
84 promising yet ineffective—well known as tropes to avoid taking the agency of the
85 colonised seriously (Duncan 2002; Scott 1985). Seeking out the conditions of possibility
86 for the clerical workers to 'rework' the bureaucracy for their own ends had been a key
87 aspiration for my experiment in the archives. Yet in this I soundly failed. Using the
88 materiality of the archive to consider writing and filing as embodied work, didn't allow me
89 to identify means by which the clerks could have re-asserted their own will on the system.

90 That failure produced reflection on one particular bureaucratic task, the act of writing. And
91 on deeper reflection it seemed highly doubtful that this was an act that was amenable to
92 closer interrogation through re-enactment. Clerical work, as observed in satirical fiction for
93 nearly two hundred years, bears a strongly ironic relationship to notions of agency and
94 creativity. The condition of the clerk, bound to transcribe, rather than to write, is a parody
95 of the association between writing and self-expression or development. Yet in the physical
96 *re-enactment* of writing, this difference is erased.

97 The conjunction of race, agency and irony in these colonial bureaucratic acts suggests that
98 the conditions of their original 'performance' were highly specific. The 'regulated
99 reiteration' of the performance of race infused what the clerical work was and what it
00 meant (Butler 1993; McDowell 2008; Taylor 2003). The relationality of race in gesture has
01 been described in historical geographies (Cresswell, 2006; Ogborn 2009). Yet to take that
02 relationality seriously imposes sharp limits on what we can expect to understand through
03 'enlivening' historical material culture. Re-enactment can, it would seem, only capture the
04 brute form of enacted gestures and only offer very limited access to their performative
05 significance in their original context.

06 **The performativity of re-enactment: repeating and reproducing the past**

07 A final difficulty that this experiment brought up is perhaps the most obvious: my claim, as
08 a white researcher sitting behind a desk in Lusaka, to *know* about the experience of a black
09 African, is a claim that is embroiled in the racial politics of the present. It is now common
10 for scholars to describe their investigative re-enactments as muddying and confusing the
11 passage of time in productive ways. The terms 'anachronism' and 'haunting' (Edensor
12 2008; Geissler and Kelly 2016) have become celebratory within scholarly research. To
13 focus on how re-enactment practices merge and multiply temporalities, however, is to skip
14 a basic point: that to 're'-enact offers the suggestion that the investigated experience is, in

15 some way closed, that it's 'over'. By 'closing' the past, re-enactment bypasses and
16 figuratively erases the other vectors, or acts of transfer through which the past persists in
17 the present.

18 British colonial racial discourse is far from 'over'; it has multiple living legacies in what
19 skin colour means today. One such is the historic legacy of a culture in which the black
20 body is subject to the casual surveillance of the white gaze (Hartman, 1997), an "economy
21 of looking" (Taylor 2003:13). The problem of embodiment and the gaze in enactment is
22 also culturally entangled with the tradition of white bodies 'blacking up' in civic
23 commemorative performances (Witz, 2009). To re-enact is an act of transfer, in multiple
24 dimensions (Taylor 2003). I am *performing* colonialism in more ways than simply through
25 the clerical gestures.

26 The difficulty of situating this re-enactment within the very live cultural heritage of
27 colonial race discourse is compounded by the geographies of material injustice that
28 survived the political dismantling of European empires. In 'performing' I draw attention to
29 the contrast between my immunised and insured body and the social disadvantage of the
30 archivists, cleaners and contemporary bureaucrats in Lusaka and Ndola whose work
31 continues around my re-enactment. Through re-enacting colonial clerical gestures in the
32 quotation marks of performance I am reinforcing my agency and my capacity for
33 artfulness, in the face of communities trapped in in the "unfinished business" of the
34 postcolony (McCalman 2009:168). The experiment is not only a re-re-enactment, but an
35 arch reproduction of British colonialism's socioeconomic consequences.

36 It is well established in geographical fieldwork that the researcher's body is a site in/with
37 which we "field difference" and "practice" geographies (Dewsbury and Naylor 2002), but
38 the ethical aspect of this needs squaring with performative techniques in historical
39 geography. Whilst in historical geography re-enactment has mostly been used to

40 investigate scenarios that are less obviously politically fraught than colonial governance,
41 re-enacted gestures are nonetheless often treated as 'of' the past, and in isolation from
42 contemporary manifestations of surviving or similar socio-economic structures.

43 Better 'fielding of difference' within re-enactment might be addressed by recognising
44 parallel acts of transfer but Edensor doesn't invite today's Mancunians to qualify or enrich
45 his musing on the "mundane present absences" of the working class in the built
46 environment (2008). DeSilvey's investigation of the materiality of a Montana homestead
47 doesn't draw upon the experience of those locked into salvage economies, or of migrant
48 domestic and agricultural labour in North America today (2006; 2007a; 2007b). Lorimer's
49 investigation of the 'appreciative listening' that was advocated by a refugee of Nazism
50 doesn't invite contemporary political exiles to explore sensory dislocation and
51 disorientation (2007).

52 One of the performances that re-enactment itself produces, by closing quotation marks and
53 artfully placing our attention, is the invocation of patterns of similarity and difference:
54 between past and present, between the historians and historic subjects, and between their
55 respective communities. Material remains are far from being "the only class of historical
56 events that occurred in the past but survive into the present" (Prown 1993: 2-3). Where a
57 researcher privileges their own voice as unique mediator of past embodied experience, they
58 risk overwriting commonalities that are shared elsewhere. Where that researcher ignores
59 the other means, the other routes through which historical experience is manifested in "acts
60 of transfer" and reiterated behaviours (Taylor 2003) they risk augmenting rather than
61 alleviating the unevenness of the historical record.

62 **Conclusion**

63 The lightly re-enactive approach I took during the archival visits was very successful in
64 drawing my attention to the materiality of the colonial record. It failed, however, to support

65 any revelations about how the original clerks would have experienced their work. This
66 suggests that some kinds of historical investigation are more suited to performative
67 approaches than others. Additionally, I'd suggest the performances that are produced in
68 self-consciously embodied historical research are not isolated. Where scholars emphasise
69 their own body as one particular route through which past behaviours can inflect the
70 present, they must recognise where other parallel "acts of transfer" are taking place.
71 Performative research in historical geography needs to be more clearly articulated in
72 relationship to the sociomaterial geographies of the present.
73

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