Stepping from the Wreckage: geography, pragmatism and anti-representational theory.

Abstract

This paper draws out linkages between non-representational theory (NRT) and pragmatism. In doing so it sets NRT in a much wider, historical antirepresentational movement. This should add momentum to its progress, and open up the considerable pragmatist and neo-pragmatist heritage as a resource for dealing with questions about methods, politics and ethics that NRT raises. Firstly I outline pragmatism and NRT to ground the discussion. Secondly the convergences between pragmatism, poststructuralism and the later work of Wittgenstein are considered. After that I go through a series of working principles which can underpin what is being termed antirepresentational theory. These include; the primacy of life and action, pluralism, materiality/spatiality/temporality/relationality, anti-essentialism, creativity, collectivity, fallibilism, and disorder in method. I conclude by considering antirepresentational knowledge production through radical incrementalism underpinned by witness and narrative.
Nietzsche was as good an anti-Cartesian, antirepresentationalist, and antiessentialist as Dewey. He was as devoted to the question “what difference will this belief make to our conduct?” as Peirce or James (Rorty, 1991b: 2, emphasis added).

Introduction

My aim in this paper is to develop linkages between non-representational theory (NRT) and some of the heritage of pragmatist thinking. As Wood and Smith (2008), and others in this special issue point out, explorations of these potentially fruitful synergies are surprisingly sparse in geography, as they are in the wider social sciences (Baert, 2005).

As I will set out, NRT and related poststructurally infused positions, such as Actor Network Theory (ANT) and hybrid geographies (from here on in just NRT), stem from deep dissatisfaction with the basic foundations, assumptions and aspirations of much human geography, related social sciences, and other (overlapping) realms of thought and knowledge, notably politics and ethics. The dissatisfaction is with the ongoing trajectories of enlightenment/modern aspirations of progress towards truth through the elimination of doubt and the application of reason, language and power in the dividing, sorting, representing and fixing of the world. This NRT stance shares much with the pragmatist and neo-pragmatist movement. However, since its inception in late 19th century North America, pragmatism has pursued more avowedly antirepresentationational ontologies and epistemologies. I feel aspects of NRT and pragmatism can be usefully combined to develop what can be termed antirepresentationational theory (ArT).

Making clear and developing linkages between NRT and pragmatism serves a number of purposes within and beyond geography. Firstly it places NRT in a wider intellectual movement away from representational knowledges and the systems employed to build and defend them. Secondly, this should ensure that NRT is not treated/greeted with quite as much ‘shock of the new’ that it sometimes is (see
Lorimer’s (2005) summary of NRT’s reception in cultural geography). Thirdly it adds weight to the NRT initiative which still faces much misapprehension and suspicion (as pragmatism does). Fourthly, it opens up the complex and diverse pragmatist and neo-pragmatist canon as a resource for those seeking ways forward within a number of areas raised by NRT, not least in terms of ethics, politics, epistemology, methods and so on. The early pragmatist works of James, Peirce and Dewey form a remarkable treasure trove of creative, radical thought.

The thinkers who espouse pragmatism and NRT claim that the need for change is urgent and the stakes are high. It is not hard to argue that we are living through the crash of the enlightenment project both in terms of knowledge production and the social formations, politics and ethics there from birthed. However the enlightenment project is a vast body with great diversity and momentum, thus the crash involves the breaking of many things, over very large tracts of thought, and space and time. Some compartments/functions remain in tact. Some people might not be that aware that the troubles around them amount to a crash (rather than a bit of turbulence), or they are choosing to ignore the situation in a ‘business as usual’ mode. Those sceptical about the need for transformative approaches to knowledge, politics and ethics need to seriously consider the history of this and the last century, and ask themselves, are they happy with business as (more or less) usual?

The brutalist architectures of modernism, such as the dualisms of nature/culture, mind/body, reason/emotion are looking very tired; the reliance on reason, objectivity and certainty as the sole arbiters of truth is breaking up. Conflict and (gross) over/under consumption riddle a world in which new forms of geo-political and geo-environmental cataclysms seem to be taking shape. NRT is trying to configure knowledge making/practice which can critically/creatively engage with this troubled world. This has also been the pragmatist project - to build alternative non-modern ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies. We need to step from the wreckage - the crude industrialisms, capitalisms, technologies, ideologies, theologies and identities that have crashed so dismally (not least ecologically) rather than remain within them, trying to patch them up, or worse still, fighting over the ghastly ruins of it all. We need to salvage what is useful, rebuild, move on.
I do not claim NRT and pragmatism to be synonymous, but I would say that NRT, and all the more specific theories and ideas employed therein, are being, and should be, used in a generally pragmatist sense. At one level pragmatism can be understood not as a theory or even a set of theories, but rather as an attitude towards theory and knowledge. Theories are tools, metaphors to be used if we feel they are useful to us. They are not tools for revealing the world but for intervening in it. This applies to geography and all other forms of knowledge making.

What follows is a pragmatist reading of pragmatism and NRT. I am seeking out what I see as interesting and useful and trying to pass this on. I outline pragmatism and NRT and discussions about convergences between pragmatism, poststructuralism and Wittgenstein. After that I go through a series of principles which are common to these approaches and which need to be developed to underpin new ways of doing knowing and knowing doing.

**Pragmatism**

Pragmatism emerged in late 19th century in America and was influenced by a number of the profound scientific, technological, philosophical and political developments of the time. Menand (2001) names Darwinism, the development of statistical methods, the horrors of the American Civil War which (rather than the First World War) was the first industrial war of mass slaughter, and the growth of democracy as key influences. Pragmatism’s birth in the fulcrum of early modern America gives it certain aspects of ‘the new world’ - a world in creation. The declaration of independence had happen only a century earlier.

Pragmatism’s American heritage brings with it much baggage, not all by any means positive. There are of course terrible histories of that and later times which still need confronting and learning from. It may also account for the indifference and even suspicion it received within European, particularly French philosophical circles, and thus via poststructuralist indifference, relative indifference in poststructuralist geographies.
The there is a creative ‘will to power’ in this history which becomes a founding
principle of pragmatism. The world is to be made, not revealed and accepted. West
(1989) sees this emerging from the work of Emerson who was interested in the mythic
self which could be built in 19th century America. Although Emerson was a
significant influence on Nietzsche and the early pragmatists, the latter’s ‘will to
power’ was ‘more secular [than Emerson’s] and more communal [than Emerson’s and
Nietzsche’s]’ (Rorty, 1999: 26), i.e. it is a collective will to power. This is a critical
aspect of pragmatism’s political potential.

Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey are usually considered the
founding thinkers. Key antecedent ideas were derived from Emerson and other
philosophical and ideological traditions notably the work of J. S. Mill, utilitarianism,
liberalism and democracy, the process philosophy of Whitehead and Bergson, (see
Bergson’s (1946) essay in defence of James), and logical positivism. In turn
pragmatism has subsequently influenced or anticipated several key philosophical
authors and movements. Wittgenstein, Nietzsche and Heidegger and poststructuralism
more generally are often claimed to show pragmatist tendencies (see below).

The work of the pioneers was developed in the 20th century by such notable figures as
Mead and Hook. Some aspects of early pragmatism did its way into humanist
geography via the Chicago School and symbolic interactionism (Jackson and Smith,
1984). Critically, in terms of the visibility of the early work, a revival or rejuvenation
of the tradition, sometimes coined neo-pragmatism, emerged through the highly
influential work of Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam and others in the 1980s and
1990s.

The early pragmatists were ‘anti-philosophy’ in so much as they turned away from the
‘traditional’ and the abstract and towards concreteness and action, as can be seen in
this defining quote from James’s 1907 Pragmatism

A pragmatist [ ] turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal
solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and
pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy,
towards facts, towards action and towards power (1981: 28).
Statements such as these have been boiled down to the somewhat clichéd summary of pragmatism - ‘the truth is that which works’. Two initial points can be said about this. Firstly, in the work of Peirce, James, Dewey, and within the neo-pragmatism of West, Rorty, Goodman and Putnam, there has been much debate and even dispute about the precise articulation and implications of core pragmatist positions. The second thing to say is that this is a more complex and subtle statement than first appears. For example, it has resonances with logical positivism and notions of verification. It has empiricism and experimentation at its core. These were key themes within Peirce’s more scientifically orientated notion of pragmatist methods. And Menand, (1997, xiii) suggests that James was ‘stretching a principle of scientific inquiry to cover thinking generally’.

Pragmatism, and particularly the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty is often deemed to be too ironist, liberal, white, American and middle class to be palatable to those seeking radical philosophical, political and ethical approaches. This is unfortunate for pragmatism does offer a profound challenge to representational thinking while at the same time being dedicated to liberational politics and ethics. It is significant that it has a heritage of development and use by ‘outsiders’ in mid-twentieth century American academia/society, and more latterly feminist thinkers. West (1989), the architect of ‘prophetic pragmatism’, stresses that the emergence of pragmatism reflects America’s social/political history with ‘its revolutionary beginning and its slave-based economy’ (5). He recounts how a number of figures within the development and practice of pragmatism were outsiders to the ‘American male WASP cultural elite’. For example, Sidney Hook and Lionel Trilling were second-generation Jewish Americans, working in the context of the ‘fervently anti-Semitic Ivy League institutions of the forties.’ (ibid). Similarly Du Bois, a fifth generation American of African descent, who remained at odds with the establishment throughout his life,

allies himself in word and deed with the wretched of the earth. In the United States, this principally takes the form of performing intellectual work within the institutions, organizations and movements of Afro-Americans or those whose focus on their plight (p. 138).
Du Bois studied under James and claimed that it was the latter’s teaching on pragmatism that turned him from the ‘lovely but sterile land of philosophical speculation’ to a philosophy that could be applied to ‘an historical interpretation of race relations’ (ibid).

Sullivan (2001), Seigfried (1996) and Fraser (1995) have developed feminist accounts of pragmatism. These efforts are instructive as they have served to act as an alternative space for post poststructuralist feminism where more emancipatory forms of anti-essentialist thinking can develop. Those who have a greater vested interest in theory/knowledge which claims to make a difference, turn to a doctrine ‘whose common denominator consists of a future-orientated instrumentalism that tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action’ (West, 1989: 5). It is to West’s form of pragmatism that Emel (1991) turns in her formation of ‘provocative pragmatism’ (see below). There are also extensive literatures of pragmatism in relation to aesthetics ((e.g.) Shusterman, 2000), literature (Poirier, 1992), law (Posner, 1997), history (Appleby et al, 1994), environmentalism (Light and Katz,1996) and education (Dewey, 1916).

Pragmatism is, in a way, a relativist approach, Thayer-Bacon (2002) labels it as ‘qualified relativism’. It operates on the basis that fixed objective truths, and the search for them, is not a useful way of thinking about knowledge aspirations and practices, and suggests that there are other useful grounds to build upon. Much of pragmatism tries to show that this kind of relativism, contrary to often expressed doubt (e.g. Bassett, 1999) does not undermine the efficacy of intellectual effort, and cut it adrift in terms of political and ethical opportunities, rather, it does the reverse. The turn away from representations and truth claims as the grounds and the goals of knowledge is a move away from static, impossible to achieve (see Wittgenstein below) fundamentalist positions, which can be so destructive in whatever field of discourse they occur in (Latour, 2005).
**Non-representational theory (NRT)**

NRT has been pioneered and developed by Thrift (e.g. 2004a/b), Dewsbury *et al* (2002), Lorimer (2005) and others. It is a rich combining of poststructuralism, science and technology studies, actor network theory (ANT), complexity theory, feminist concerns with embodiment, various body/mind sciences, traces of phenomenology (dwelling), the process philosophies of Whitehead, Bergson and more besides. Within all this complex heritage and interest Thrift does acknowledge some indebtedness to pragmatist thinkers, at times referring back to the work of Mead (Thrift, 1999) Dewey (Thrift, 2000) and James (Thrift, 2004a).

NRT is interested in many things; materiality, becoming, emotion and affect (the non/pre/extra-cognitive ‘intelligences of the body’) embodiment, movement, relationality, ecology, complexity, practice, performativity, play and excess. Much of what life is lies within these energies. Rational thought, language, culture, economy and Political power *are not ignored* but are seen as emergent from, and embroiled within, all these other key life energies in the performative specificities of space-time formations. Knowledge production is not outside looking in but part of these ongoing streams of becoming. Although often challenged as politically and ethically dissolute, Thrift and others (e.g. Dewsbury *et al*, 2002) make it clear that they are seeking new ways of ‘knowing’ which can enact new kinds of liberational politics and ethics – an area in which pragmatism can help..

Thrift (2004a) has also made it very clear that his reason for developing NRT is a deep dissatisfaction with current social science practice (including that in human geography). He feels that the richnesses, vitalities, ecologies and movements of the becomings of everyday life are simply missed by established social science ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies. They are too static, and seek to represent apparently settled structures of social life which are mainly articulated in the obvious conduits of rational thought, language, culture, economy and Political power. There is a direction of extraction, reduction, simplification, explanation and representation. NRT moves the other way. It is ‘a machine for multiplying questions and thereby *inventing new relations between thought and life*’ (Thrift, 2004b:71, emphasis in original).
This turn is to knowledge making/claiming as a process of creation always embroiled in the flux of the unfolding world. This is what non-representation means. It is future, practice, and life orientated. It is a turn to creativity, specificity, openness, fluidity, risk, uncertainty, and pluralistic views of knowledge as practice in/of/for the world. It tries to be tentative, modest, fallible, experimental and collective. All these are also traits of pragmatism and are expanded upon below.

The combinations and recombinations of multiple theoretical perspectives within NRT is itself a pragmatist approach to knowledge. It assumes the complexity/specificity of unfolding life cannot be captured by singular and/or monolithic theoretical endeavours. There is a use of theories as narrative tools to try to capture, keep up, work with the richness of the unfurling world. Before we go on to consider various working principles which could underpin ArT we will consider how pragmatism’s heritage has been compared to that of poststructuralism and with Wittgenstein’s later work, both of which underpin aspects of NRT.

*Poststructuralism and pragmatism*

It is significant that a number of neo-pragmatism thinkers (e.g. Rorty 1991a/b; Goodman, 1995; Putnam, 1995; Sleeper, 1993) and commentators on (neo)-pragmatism and geography (Emel, 1991; Wood and Smith, 2008) see pragmatism as sharing/anticipating a number of trajectories with poststructuralist thought, but also offering a more energised, radical, political response to their shared insights. It is also significant that the later work of Wittgenstein, also largely ignored within geography, (Curry, 2000) (but see Harrison, 2002 for notable exception) can be seen as a turn to a pragmatist stance.

One interpretation of the work of Deleuze and Guattari is that they are trying to generate a flurry of new conceptualisations/language elements for the practice of thought/life (see Patton 1996, Hallward 2006). The point being that entrapment in old languages, models and metaphors was stultifying thought, politics, ethics and life. This is clearly shown in their generation of a whole series of new ‘concepts’ such as body without organs, assemblage, becoming animal, smooth space, war machine, nomadism and rhizomes, which were dedicated to the proliferation of new
connections, rhythms, trajectories and velocities of thought-practice. Such concepts, operating in spatial, material and relational embodied registers, in inception and application, have been a key inspiration with NRT orientated geography. For example rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari: 1988) which was developed as an alternative to ‘tree logic’- the many thought systems which draw upon the hierarchical, unidirectional logic of root, trunk and branch. Rhizomes are a very different, non-linear matter which bring with them very differing practices and readings of spatial articulations.

Massumi (1992) captures this creative trust as he ends his Translator’s Forward to *A Thousand Plateaus*... ‘the question is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel’ (xv). This is quintessentially pragmatist, but as James and Dewey would add, it obviously needs to go on to say, ‘and what new actions, politics and ethics can these new thoughts/feelings conjure?’ This is, in essence, why Rorty (1991a: xviii) thinks that pragmatism in the form of James and Dewey is ‘waiting at the end of the road that Foucault and Deleuze are currently travelling’. Indeed, in the light of such potential congruities and synergies, there have been attempts to explicitly bring poststructuralism and pragmatism together in the services of radical democracy (e.g. Mouffe, 1996). It is of note that Latour is now referring to the work of Dewey, James and Peirce (see Latour, 2005 and other publications on [http://www.bruno-latour.fr/](http://www.bruno-latour.fr/)).

Those American philosophers call their tradition pragmatism, meaning by this word not the cheap realism often associated with being "pragmatic," but the costly realism requested by making politics turn toward pragmata —the Greek name for Things. Now that's realism! (Latour, 2005: 1)

Rorty (1991b) uses the work of Dewey to try and show how pragmatists go beyond what he terms the post-Nietzschean position.

Dewey and Foucault make exactly the same criticism of the tradition. They agree [ ] about the need to abandon traditional notions of rationality, objectivity, method and truth. They are both [ ] "beyond method". They agree that rationality is what history and society make it - that there is no over-arching
ahistorical structure (the Nature of Man, the laws of human behavior, the moral law, the nature of society) to be discovered. But Dewey emphasizes that this move "beyond method" gives mankind an opportunity to grow up, to be free to make itself, rather than seeking direction from some imagined outside source, his experimentalism asks us to see knowledge-claims as proposals about what actions to try out next (76).

Pragmatism is thus more optimistic than the sometimes fatalistic conclusions of (some) poststructuralist positions. It is a particular focus on the liberating aspects of pragmatism which is central to prophetic/provocative pragmatism (West, 1989; Emel, 1991). NRT needs to move on from general statements and declarations of intent to become operationalised in more specific engagements with the world (i.e. research) and questions of ethics and politics still (will always) needs work. The various disciplinary developments and applications of pragmatism can help in this respect.

Thrift has set out the importance and potential of NRT in terms of the political and the ethical (e.g. 2004b) but it is not hard to see why some might find cause for unease. For example, Dewsbury et al (2002) in their section on NRT and pluralism state they are ‘hospitable to whatever happens; to whosoever or whatever arrives’ (438). This is echoed by Harrison (2002: 501), quoting Derrida - ‘let us say yes to who or what turns up’. In a similar vein, Thrift (2005) has said, in effect, that creativity is an ethical act. These are clearly following Deleuze’s imperative of creation; ‘herein, perhaps, lies the secret: to bring into existence and not to judge.’ (1998: 135).

Such statements don’t convincingly shake off the air of ‘conservative quietism’ that some feel also hangs around Wittgenstein (Harrison, 2002: 499). Should we be hospitable to whatever turns up (a kind of determinism?) and all creative acts? Pragmatism, particularly ‘provocative pragmatism’ (Emel, 1991) unashamedly says that it is open to the rich plurality of the world, agrees that knowledge is of it, and for it (and always limited and contingent) and yet still is confident enough to talk of more familiar and specifically identified (non foundational) aspirations of hope, values, ethics and politics.

Wittgenstein as a pragmatist
The claimed convergences between Wittgenstein’s work, particularly that in *Philosophical Investigations*, and pragmatism are also worthy of note. It could be said that the turn from the formal, foundational, logical structures of the early work, to the ‘rough ground’ of everyday life as the locus of meaning in the later work, embodies much that the pragmatist turn is trying to achieve. A turn from ‘pure’ philosophy in search of foundations and related method systems to a relativist, creative, ‘beyond method’ approach which is grounded in and orientated towards everyday life.

Curry (2002: 90) sees Wittgenstein as ‘the geographical philosopher’ because he was ‘an empirical researcher who at every turn found evidence that philosophical problems arise out of the everyday activities of common people’. Actions and everyday lives are the sources and contexts of questions and the reasons for asking and answering them. This was the central theme of one of Dewey’s key works; *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy* (1917). For Curry, Wittgenstein’s later work is a counter to ‘the traditionally Olympian and architectonic philosopher standing outside the world’ (90), a move that Rorty, Putnam and all pragmatists insist upon.

Wittgenstein shows that the pursuit of foundation leads to, in the end, nothing. His later work refuses to seek for central problems of philosophy but sees many foci in the particular and unevenness of life, and has ‘a deep appreciation of the nature of places and their role in everyday lives [ ] which are created and maintained through everyday actions of everyday lives’ (Curry: 2002: 110). Pragmatism’s concerns for everyday life and action also obviously leads to questions of place and space. Language and life practice cannot be boiled down to a formal logical structure, rather meaning is emergent and specific to the endlessly variable spatialised emergences of life.

Wittgenstein wanted to ‘bring back words from their metaphysical to their everyday use’ (Grayling, 2001, 116). The *Philosophical Investigations* deliberately avoided establishing a clear system and method and this is its challenge. ‘Wittgenstein empathically rejected systematic approaches to understanding language and knowledge. It [knowledge] has no nature, no essence’ (Stern, 2004: 14). He was critical of the ‘view from nowhere stance’ as we are always in ‘forms of life’ with corresponding forms of knowledge and language (which, are complex, divided and labyrinthine). Hacker (1999) points out that ‘Wittgenstein puts the human being – a
psychophysical unit, not an embodied anima – a living creature in the stream of life. For it is human beings, not minds, who perceive, and think, have desires and act, feel joy and sorrow’ (4). All these traits resonate with NRT and pragmatism interest in embodied action.

Putnam (1995) is partly critical of Rorty’s reading of Wittgenstein but concurs that the later Wittgenstein is pragmatic. He discusses how Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘natural expression’ relates to pragmatism’s anti-sceptical stance in that we should not mistrust or try to see through common language and ideas but rather work with them, or at their margins. There is a kind of relativism here, between forms of life and their associated languages games, yet also naturalism in that people’s feelings and statements emerge from their human nature (Grayling, 1996: 120). In Wittgenstein, as Perloff (1996) points out, this can lead to a different approach to ethics - ‘here is where Wittgenstein’s “mysticism” comes in – however impossible it may be to formulate ethical principles, it is possible to engage in ethical actions’ (21). This ‘ethics without foundation’ often asks questions which have no answer - ‘they merely open up new spaces, as “poetic” as they are “philosophical” in which to take a deep breath’ (Perloff, 1996: 23). So here again there is a call for creativity, for newness, for experimentation - philosophy, or theory not trying to answer, to represent, but to fold newness (a proliferation of questions) into the world.

**Some working principles of ArT**

In what follows I attempt to generate some working principles of ArT. In doing so I draw upon aspects of NRT as set out by Thrift (2005) and merge/complement these with a range of principles of pragmatism drawn from readings of Peirce, James, Rorty, Putnam, West, Emel and others. In Thrift’s (2005: 472) terms these attempt to generate ‘an ethics of intelligence’ which could underpin a ‘non-representational geographic ethics of knowing’. These, however, are not specific to geographical inquiry. They should underpin all knowledge practices including those of politics and ethics. Having said that, they are geographical, in that they embrace the fact that life is inherently embodied, emplaced and emtimed.
If the world presents itself in a vast array of relational specificities articulating materialised and lived time-space patternings which are non-linear complex unfoldings, then attempts to boil this down to representations of fixities and foundations seems limited to, at best, very partial success. Thrift (1996) and James (1909) have both have said that existence/life is nothing more or less than a bewildering number of encounters unfolding across continually making space and time. Any brief, faint traces of knowledge, politics and ethics which can exist, only take place in and through encounters embedded in temporal flows. In light of this non-modern ontology, ArT tries to de-represent knowledge in order to free it up for action.

*Working principle # 1: life comes first*

Putnam, a leading figure in post-second world war American philosophy, states that pragmatism ‘is way of thinking [ ] of lasting importance’ because it points to ways out of the ‘old philosophical bind that continue to afflict us’ (1995: xi). The *primacy of action* is the first of three defining characteristics of pragmatism that he identifies. It operates in two senses. The first is that all knowledge making emerges from the world (of practice). They are actions in and of particular environments, including language. The world/life is already at work and any knowledge emerges from within. This was key to Peirce’s work and thus in place at the beginning of the pragmatist movement.

From his earliest to his latest writings Peirce opposed and attacked all forms of epistemological foundationalism and in particular all forms of Cartesianism and a priorism. Philosophy must begin wherever it happens to be at the moment, he thought, and not at some supposed ideal foundation (Burch, 2006: 1).

Putnam points to the similarities between James’s stance and Wittgenstein’s insistence that all our notions depend on our “forms of life”. This understanding can generate wonder and enchantment (Bennett, 2001) and be liberational if forms of life are not static, (completely) determined, and are perhaps reworkable by action and experimentation - ‘the world should be free to display its spectacular and amazing
performances [ ] that can pass their energetic demands on. This is the principle of wonder.’ (Thrift, 2005: 474).

The second sense is that emergent knowledge practices are only of interest through the way they refolded back into (wider) practice. They are judged on consequences and not correspondences. This verification through life is at the heart of pragmatism - verification through other means; experiential, political, practical, ethical, poetic even.

Stuhr (1993) argues that a call to action is at the centre of Dewey’s pragmatist approach as typified by his essay ‘The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy’. Dewey’s work is driving philosophy away from the hermetic academic continuation of the tradition, towards an approach focused on the nature and problems of everyday life. He stated that ‘philosophy is vision, imagination, reflection - and these functions, apart from action, modify nothing and hence resolve nothing’, so, as Stuhr concludes, philosophy ‘must serve today as an impetus to action’ (p. x). The world comes first means that the thought-action-assessment axis becomes a radical incrementalism of experimentation, where failure, error and uncertainty are inevitable – ‘the world should be free to teach us. That means retaining difficulties, uncertainties, inaccuracies since mistakes are a part of the lesson [ ]. There is a pragmatics of error which is crucial in all this. [ ] this is the principle of testing life’. (Thrift 2005: 474)

Working principle # 2: life comes as plural and in flux
In ArT life is taken to be a searingly rich (complex) becoming; a flux of continuous creation. This richness has a dynamism and momentum which continually swamps the capacities of theory, politics and ethics. We should not assume that within this richness and flux there are singularities and regularities to be unearthed which will answer all our questions. Fixed static views are limited in use (but are not useless altogether). In setting out this principle of NRT Thrift draws specifically on pragmatism, deploying James’s term ‘multiverse’, stressing, ‘the world should [ ] be held to be multiple. [ ] This is the principle of relentless pluralism’ (Thrift 2005: 474).

Pluralism was at the heart of James’s pragmatism as set out in A Pluralistic Universe (1909) and elsewhere. He argued that the universe could more properly be called a multiverse in that there is no need to think that everything is related in fundamental
kind. Existence offers a multiplicity which is in flux - ‘a humming-buzzing confusion’ which is evolving – on the move. Dewey (1982: 29), in an account of pragmatism’s early development, highlights this attack on Monism by James. Monism consists of essentialist meta-narratives, which build a rigid picture of the universe ‘where everything is fixed and immutably united to others', thus sacrificing the 'concrete and complex diversity of things'. Instead, Dewey (1982) tells us, James’s idea of pluralism ‘leaves room for contingency, liberty, novelty, and gives complete liberty to the empirical method, which can be indefinitely extended’ (p.29). This recognition of ‘the contrast between the confused complexities of reality and the characteristics of logical thought’ was as Durkheim (1983) also points out, a key feature of pragmatism and its attack on not only Monism but rationalism.

Pluralism undermines essentialist, foundational positions as it expects that differing parts of the world might be liveable/ knowable in differing ways. It thus leads to methodological pluralism and political and ethical pluralism. Again this anticipates Wittgenstein’s insistence that we should not seek to try to smooth out or see through the ‘rough ground’ of the world but rather accept embrace that there is, in effect a multiverse of forms of life and language (human and non-human) through which life/meaning is articulated. Such ideas are central to NRT approaches to geography as set out by Dewsbury et al (2002) and are to be found in recent calls for methodological pluralism in geography given the complex hybridity of the world, e.g. Cloke (2003) and Murdoch (2003). Peirce’s concept of Tychism centered on the belief that ‘nature is not a static world of unswerving law but rather a dynamic and dicey world of evolved and continually evolving habits that directly exhibit considerable spontaneity’ (Burch, 2006: 1).

Working principle #3: life always comes in complex, relational spatialities, temporalities and materialities (bodies)

The pragmatism of James has been called a relational ontology (Thayer-Bacon, 2002), in that he asserts that objects were to be understood through their relations rather than as ‘pure objects’ and that our knowledge of objects is neither objective or subjective but a complex outcome of knowing and action in an environment. The pragmatism of James thus had phenomenological tendencies and influenced the development of phenomenology through Husserl (see Rosenthal and Bourgeois: 1980)
Peirce used the term “synechism” ‘a word deriving from the Greek preposition that means “(together) with’”, to counter dualisms and to reach towards the complex continuities of existence. He ‘held that the continuity of space, time, ideation, feeling, and perception is an irreducible deliverance of science, and that an adequate conception of the continuous is an extremely important part of all the sciences’ (Burch, 2006: 1).

As Rorty (1999: 72) has it, ‘by thinking of everything as relational through and through, pragmatists attempt to get rid of the contrast between reality and appearance’. This claim to relationality anticipates basic positions within NRT particularly when coupled with the idea that relationality is always temporal, i.e. ongoing and cannot be captured as static relationships.

That the ‘social’ of the world is completely embroiled in, and woven through with the wider temporally/spatially mobile, materialised, relational, non-human processes of the world has been the corner stone of approaches such as ANT. Pragmatism certainly anticipated this to a large extent. It also anticipated that social processes cannot be taken to be predominantly rational, cognitive, language driven, but rather that emotions, memory, and affect make up a large part of who we are and what we do.

The work of James, Peirce and Dewey collectively addressed a range of processes now central to NRT concerns. James was a pioneering theoretical psychologist interested in emotion, affect and reason (James, 1890). Peirce was interested in creativity, for example the creative role of love in evolution (Peirce, 1893). Dewey was interested with the continuities between thought and action - learning by doing, and became a key influence on 20 century educational ideas (see Menand, 1997, xxiii). So there was and is, in pragmatism, an central interest in pre/non-cognitive intelligences (Goodman,1995: p. 2). Rorty (1999: xxiii) gives a kind of dwelling account of human lifen suggesting that pragmatists ‘start with a Darwinian account of human beings as animals doing their best to cope with the environment – doing their best to develop tools. [ ] Words are among the tools these clever animals have developed.’

*Working principle(s) # 4: anti-foundationalism and antirepresentationalism*
Rorty describes pragmatism ‘as a generalised form of antiessentialism’ (1991b: 72). This is a point he makes repeatedly. His Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, can be seen as an attempt to drive home the attack that the early pragmatists made on philosophy as the search for foundational, essentialist, metaphysical structures. As such, pragmatism tries to de-represent our ideas of knowledge, truth and theory. Rorty tries to show that questions such as “what are the fundamental, objective laws or facts of the universe”; and especially “can we be certain or not in our representations of them”, are of little use in themselves; better to ask what consequences any claim might have. As he puts it, ‘pragmatists treat inquiry – in both physics and ethics – as the search for adjustment’ (1999: 72). Does this new law of physics help? Does this new idea about ethics help? And of course, ‘help’ means a complex, open, never finished, set of discussions about politics, ethics, values, collective and individual human and non-human well-being and interaction.

Rorty (1991b) also asserts that pragmatism is antirepresentational, a position which can be interestingly contrasted with the ‘more than representational’ development that Lorimer (2005) adds to NRT. Thrift (2000) say that there is ‘no hiding’ from NRT and Rorty’s efforts to be antirepresentational has to be taken in much the same light. He claims pragmatism ‘does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather a matter of acquiring habits of actions for coping with reality’ (1991b: 1), and he argues that this is essential for effective knowledge, ethics and politics. This, he admits, is at some odds with pragmatism’s long-term engagement with and use of natural science methods. But the response to this is to say that when some natural science, or any knowledge claim, seems to be able to produce a robust representation of some object/process, that is a potentially useful piece of information with which to work - let’s fold it into action and see what happens! The representation is only part of a wider process. Clearly, as Law (2004) shows, scientific representations script what they are revealing, but this is not a denial of the material reality of existence. Whether something is really true, revealing of some essential fact or other, is not worth worrying about that much (because we can never be sure). In the end, as Wittgenstein also shows, this is not really a question that should be asked or answered.

What are the consequences of this knowing? That is the pragmatist question. The logical positivist notion of verification still ‘half stands’ but within other forms of
verification. The ‘truth’ of a piece of knowledge is more or less the same as the usefulness of knowledge. For example, Galileo’s development of the Copernican, heliocentric solar system is much more useful than the geocentric model it replaced. It helps us better understand the patterns we see around us, and to plan things (e.g. space exploration). It seems pretty likely that it is true, but importantly, it works and it joins things up, makes short cuts possible (like sling shotting space probes around planets on their voyages into deep space). But then a myriad models in the natural and social sciences have seemed water tight, until suddenly they are not. Defending it as the truth - why bother? Use it till it wears out, test it to destruction (falsification) (maybe it never will be). If we just keep using it, and are not too sceptical, and not too trusting or dogmatic (keeping an eye out for a little inconsistency which might open up a new view) then the interesting thing is what use is this knowledge in making new worlds? Representations might help, but are not goals in themselves; they are, or should be, means in wider systems/processes of knowledge practice, ethics and politics.

Working principle(s) # 5: creative/experimental, fallible, collective
Thrift supports his view of NRT as ‘a machine for multiplying questions’ by insisting that ‘the world should be added to not subtracted from’ (Thrift 2005: 474 ). Creativity, experimentation, fallible (modest theory) and collectivity should all be enfolded into the conduct ArT practice. This creativity can be found in James’s assertion that;

Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, simplifying; saving labour; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally (James 1981: 30).

This resonates with the messengers of Serres which bring ‘rapprochement and rapport between categories’ (Bingham and Thrift, 2000: 285) and of the ‘movement thoughts’ of Deleuze and Guattari.

In NRT there is a call for modest method and theory in so much as limits, and trial and error experiments are recognised. This is embedded in pragmatism, particularly its fallibilism which was pioneered by Peirce. Doubt is placed at the heart of
knowledge, yet it does not disable it, rather, it energises it – ‘where the modernist intellectuals saw doubt as debilitating, Peirce saw it as liberating’ (Diggins, 1995: 190)

Bernstein (1991) terms pragmatism as a tradition of ‘engaged fallibilistic pluralism’ (which means), ‘taking our own fallibility seriously - resolving that however much we are committed to our own styles of thinking, we are willing to listen to others without denying or suppressing the otherness of the other’ (p. 336). Pluralism within pragmatist thought means not only assuming that existence is plural in nature but also that theoretical engagement with it should come in plural forms which are ‘interpretive, tentative, always subject to correction’ (ibid, p. 327). This entails replacing established adversarial styles of academic argument with ‘a model of dialogical encounter' in which one ‘begins with the assumption that the other has something to say to us and to contribute to our understanding. [ ] This requires imagination, sensitivity and perfecting of hermeneutical skills’ (ibid). It is not assumed that this process will resolve disagreement, but rather that it will produce a mutual reciprocal understanding, which includes understanding of disagreements. This fallibilistic element of pragmatism anticipates Thrift’s notion of NRT as ‘modest’, ‘affirmative and therefore collective expression’ which does not seek to play the ‘macho’ stance ‘boy’s game’ of building and defending theoretical ground at the expense of others (2004a: 83). Linked to fallibilism is Peirce’s metaphor of knowledge as a cable, in which the ‘multitude and variety’ of ideas and theories are woven intimately together, thus making it collective and ongoing.

**Working principle(s) # 6: solidarity, contingency, and irony**

In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) Rorty argues that the idea that there is an essentialist element in the core of all humanity that may be a source of universal solidarity is wrong. Rather solidarity is a contingent element within humanity that has to be built and nurtured. This does not mean the concept is devalued, rather the reverse.
While granting Nietzsche his point about the contingent historical character of our sense of moral obligation we need to realize that a *focus imaginarius* is none the worse for being an invention. (p.196).

In other words, in a typically pragmatist move, solidarity within humanity is a truth we can invent for ourselves, it is not given a priori, and this to me makes it, and any ethics which might flow from it *more powerful, valuable and worth defending*, than if it is revealed, as somehow given from ‘beyond’ . This certainly bears similarities with Harrison’s (2002: 499) discussion of the challenge made of NRT in relation to principles.

the idea that in somehow abandoning the conceptual apparatus of rules, resolvable meanings and thereby essence and identity, and thus representationalism per se, results in quietism, is in fact, no more than the belief that without such idealizations the only alternative is chaos, or to think that just because we apply rules without principles we do so in an unprincipled way [ ] neither of these are the case.

But this to me is a weak version of the pragmatist stance. Here there is a defensive stand against the accusations of relativism and/or conservatism that anti-essentialists face. These are the difficult political/ethical ramifications of the NRT initiative. The stronger, pragmatist position is that the move to anti-essentialist positions *is fundamental for ‘progressive’ (newly defined and always open) politics and ethics and not a risk to them*. Any systems of knowledge/power/authority which are based upon any kind of essentialist claims are unsustainable and dangerous. What happens if ‘discovered’ foundations turn out to be indifferent or hostile to us? It seems pretty likely that the universe of becoming *is* generally indifferent, or possibly hostile (in terms of material arrangements) to our particular form of becoming (we know of no life elsewhere as yet). More importantly, what happens if different people find different apparently essentialist grounds and stick their flag in them. You have fundamentalisms. You have nations, empires and wars.

Importantly, Rorty’s solidarity is not built by making the other same, but by taking the precautionary ethical position of assuming the other can suffer and should be given
the opportunity to recoil from that suffering as I would do. His ‘liberal ironist’ position is liberal in thinking that ‘cruelty is the worst thing we do’ and ironist in facing up to the contingency of our most central beliefs and desires (1989, p.xv).

Working principle(s) # 7: yearning, romanticism and hope

The provocative pragmatism of Emel (1991), which draws upon West’s (1989) prophetic pragmatism embodies all the general characteristics of pragmatism outlined above and differs mainly in terms urgency of action and a heightened negotiation of tragedy and hope. This version is intended to be more politically and ethically radical than the neo-pragmatism of Rorty which can be interpreted as too liberal ironist (Rorty’s own label for himself), and too comfortable (depending on where you are sitting). Rorty’s division of the private and public domains is regarded by Mouffe (1996) as an impediment to his version of pragmatism’s critical potential.

According to Emel, provocative pragmatism, 'accepts the insights of post-structuralism and is energized by them rather than made radically skeptical' (1991: 385). Its pluralism, fallibilism, recognition of the contingency of self, knowledge, and truth bare the hallmarks of the latter, but its response to these is a romantic, optimistic, engaged, stance which also confronts tragedy and evil.

hooks (1991) opens, Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics with (amongst three others) a quote from West –

In this world-weary period of pervasive cynicisms, nihilisms, terrorisms, and possible extermination, there is a longing for norms and values that can make a difference, a yearning for principled resistance and struggle that can change our desperate plight (1).

West (1989) acknowledges that his version of pragmatism is 'deeply indebted' to post-structuralism and 'the challenge of Michael Foucault', but stresses they diverge over the notions of romanticism and hope. He sees Foucault as 'the exemplary anti-romantic, suspicious of any talk about wholeness, totality, telos, purpose, or even future'. He goes on, 'prophetic pragmatism shares with Foucault a preoccupation with
the operations of power’ (p.223), but is also ‘unashamedly guided by moral ideals of creative democracy’ (p.226).

West (1989: 215) also draws upon ‘third-wave left romanticism’ as in the work of Unger which is 'both refreshing and disturbing'.

[After] a century of unimaginable atrocities [ ] many of us now lack any ready way to imagine transformation. We feel trapped in a world with no realizable oppositional options, no actualizable credible alternatives to this sense of political impotence - this experience of acquiescence without commitment (p. 215).

In contrast to this Unger has ‘a romantic sense that the future can and should be fundamentally different from and better than the present' (p.215).

West (1989) argues that many figures of the pragmatist tradition have, in differing ways, attempted to face up to the tragedy of the world. Pragmatism ‘confronts candidly individual and collective experiences of evil in individuals and institutions' (1989: 228) while at the same time retaining a balancing affirmation of hope. He claims that prophetic pragmatism

    tempers its utopian impulse with a profound sense of the tragic character of life and history. This sense of the tragic highlights the irreducible predicament of unique individuals who undergo dread, despair, disillusionment, disease, and death AND the institutional forms of oppression that dehumanize people (p.228).

Solidarity with those who face tragedy becomes a central focus of West's form of pragmatism. 'Human struggle sits at the centre of prophetic pragmatism, a struggle guided by a democratic and libertarian vision, sustained by moral courage and existential integrity' (228).

Emel stresses that it is these aspects of provocative pragmatism, focusing on the ‘front-line’ of ethics/politics that distinguishes it from the critical pragmatism of
Rorty. 'Explanation and diagnoses are encouraged to focus down to levels where transformation can occur' (1991:389). Thus ambitions of ‘grand theory’ transform to ambitions for small acts of intervention.

Emel (1991) concludes that,

> every tool available must be employed to turn the tables on entrenched power: cunning, wit, parody, science and all manner of slight of hand. Provoking, subverting, reinterpreting, unsettling, the pragmatic tactician must tack back and forth - between theory and practice, publics and academics, politics and culture (p. 388).

This again anticipates many traits of NRT and also recent formulations of ‘public geography’ and ‘guerilla geography’. It bears similarities to the dingpolitik of Latour (2005), which forms through and around networks, collectives, and ‘issues of concern’, where the more than human are given voice, where political assemblies are of multiple form, and where there are not grand narratives of succession, but many streams of politics flowing at once - ‘a pixelisation of politics’ (Latour, 2007: 1).

**Working principle(s) # 8: after method**

The natural and social sciences do seem to be able to produce robust representations of stable processes. But these should not be seen as underlying or primary structures on which the more ephemeral, soft tissues of life hang. Rather these are important, apparently stable forms within the larger flux of the world.

It seems fruitless to question, say, the reality, constancy, and ubiquity of gravity. It appears to be a constant but it is distributed amongst, and interacting with, a whole host of contingent, non-linear fluxing events. Uncovering the nature and process of gravity, and many other processes, is an obvious role for science. But beyond that, the interesting thing is what we do with gravity – bounce on trampolines, crush people to death with stones, build fountains, pull bombs out of planes, pull food parcels out of planes, and so on.
So we need not abandon the forensics of precise methodologies. As Harrison et al, (2004: 7) put it,

> There are many ways to know the world and many forms of expertise have developed to describe aspects of the world. To backtrack is not to abandon the expertise that has developed in investigating and exploring it. (Harrison, Pile, and Thrift, 2004: 7).

Rather we need to recognise that these techniques are elements of a wider process of knowing which is an active, creative force, framed by wonder and by verification of use.

In his essay ‘pragmatism without method’ Rorty (1991b) spends some time trying to explain why pragmatism can be both semi-scientific and semi-philosophical (my terms) in ways which do not contradict or cancel each other out, but rather generate a ‘non-method’ which is fluid, open, and poetically responsive to the world it finds.

> If one takes the core of pragmatism to be its attempt to replace the notion of true beliefs as representations of “the nature of things” and instead to think of them as successful rules for action, then it becomes easy to recommend an experimental, fallibilist attitude, but hard to isolate a ‘method’ that will embody this attitude (Rorty, 1991b: 65-6).

The flexibility and openness of pragmatism points towards multi and interdisciplinary approaches, which are being called for in geography and beyond, in recognition of the fluid, hybrid nature of any aspect of life (Braun, 2003).

Rorty resists developing a method, although it is tempting in terms of selling the pragmatist approach. Philosophy is not separated from, and experimentations can operate in and between, social science, natural science, poetry, art, politics and literature. The epistemological/methodological divides which currently isolate these approaches are seen as merely ‘institutional and pedagogical’.
Law (2004) also explores an ‘after method’ landscape where new creative, performative ‘method assemblages’ would be tailored to the specificity of the part of the world to be considered, and would acknowledge, indeed embrace, the idea of making the world rather than revealing it. Messiness is acknowledged and welcomed – ‘the world should be kept untidy. It should have negative capability, or as Keats put it “a man [must be] capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” [ ] This is the principle of messiness’ (Thrift 2005: 474). This might mean bringing once seemingly distant and alien approaches in art, technology, philosophy into our practice, it might mean weaving the technological, natural, political, and the cultural into new formations (Thrift, 2005).

**Conclusion: radical incrementalism and witnessing**

Calls to theory and research as creative action seem *de rigour* in geography. For example, as Hinchcliffe (2007) pleads in *Geographies of Nature*

rather than offering interpretations of nature, or analytical concepts, the injunction must be to join the doings, to experiment, to engage in the doings of environments, to environ them in better ways (191).

It seems we are all pragmatists now - or should be. Note here there is creativity *with* judgment - ‘better ways’. How are we to pursue better ways with out foundational grounds?

Whitford (1991: 14) points out that to envisage ‘new social or ethical forms’ is to confine the future within the conceptualisations of the present. ‘Progress’ is not about moving towards utopia, it is about moving away from dystopia, as Bauman (1993: 224) puts it, ‘what we want is to get away from here. Where we hope to land [ ] is a ‘there’ which we thought of little and knew of even less’.

We need a restless, radical incrementalism. As the Johnny Mercer / Harold Arlen song has it; ‘you’ve got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to
the affirmative’. This can be done by modest, fallibilistic, experimentation, with a constant toing and froing between idea and practice (this is Rorty’s summation of Dewey’s work), a constant will to act and to judge the consequences in the settings of the particular. Thrift (2005), with some added ingredients, sets out a similar trajectory.

This work [NRT] earns a living from a relational view of reality [and] a constructionism of a particular kind, namely a transcendental empiricism (or pan-experimentalism) in which construction never takes place in general but always in relation to a matter of concern and commitment, a lure to our attention which provides an intensification of feeling (474).

In his paper on Wittgenstein, Harrison (2002) turns to the idea of witnessing to begin to build an ethical/political momentum for NRT (see also Thrift, 2004a). This essentially asks, what can be said about – or done with, Wittgenstein’s call for the event to be taken seriously (in and of itself), the call to describe and not to explain, or worse, to abstract or seek meaning elsewhere/prior to the event. Harrison feels that the direction to readers ‘to pay attention to whatever is taking place in front of them’ (2002: 500) can be understood as a call to witness, and that to witness is more than just observing and reporting on an event, it can be to share and deeply empathize with pain and suffering – the negative (although it could be applied to joy and love – the positive) and otherness – without fully knowing it. Pause to think how often it is that understandings of and responses to current/historical events are not prompted by explanation or analysis but by witnessing of one kind or another.

Witnessing is often expressed as narrative. And here we connect to the long running tension between explanation (representation) and certain forms of narrative. NRT is drawn to towards ethological narratives - a sort of ‘radical ecological empiricism’. Serres, an influential figure in NRT thinking (Bingham and Thrift, 2000), has made narrative a central means of exploring the flowing interconnectedness of life - ‘what better way to describe this fluctuation than with everyday words, concrete experiences--in short, by narrative?’ (Serres 1995: 65).

There is a strong affinity between narrative, artistic practice and NRT (see Thrift 2004a) and related approaches such as hybrid geographies (Whatmore, 2002). More
generally the developing of linkages between geographical and artistic interests and methods is going on apace in the pursuit of methodologies sensitive to process, performativity and affect. Writers, painters, photographers, performers, and poets are often commenting upon, ‘analysing’ - witnessing the world and their and/or other people’s place in it, but through affective/creative narratives rather than rational/representational registers. They do this by generating new accounts of/in the world which might witness eloquently. They add new accounts to the world (e.g. images, movements, sounds, artefacts) which at the same time reposition current forms of being. (e.g. Dion, 2007).

Thrift is not the only one who considers that ‘performances’ are often more telling (of the world) and more ethically and politically alive than much social science and academia. Rorty (1991a/b) has been at pains to point out that art, particularly in the form of literature, can have much more telling effect on society than centuries of precisely argued metaphysical philosophy and, latterly, realist social science.

Witness and narrative are being explored as means of generating new political and ethical languages within poststructuralism and NRT. Barnett (2005) suggests that, at worst, poststructuralist theory can ‘generate an epistemological and ethico-political impasse for itself’ through the generic device of ‘essentializing the logic of exclusion as the ontological foundation of all modes of subjectivity’ (8). Barnett suggests that a reading of Levinas alongside Derrida can point to ways beyond this impasse by which the other is excluded. The ethical relationship, he suggests is inevitably (and) ‘irreducibly asymmetrical’ (18), and rests on an openness towards the Other in which temporal dimensions of being are critical. Within this temporal being in relationship to other, Barnett sees ‘acknowledgement’ (knowledge which includes recognition of suffering and sympathy and the demands of the other) as a means by which the gulf between self and other can be crossed.

Why should we want the world given to us or revealed to us when we can do it (or, at least, bits of it)? Correspondence theories, essentialist, universal truth claims are always going to be claims. Proof is always a kind of rhetoric, and can always be willfully ignored anyway. Secondly who/what is to say that if there are universal, essential truths that they are going to be comfortable for us or even take any notice of
us. Relativism means we are freer to build our own world. Of course there are a myriad constraints, but there are a myriad opportunities as well (science can narrate both). And within this there are surely many possible futures some of which will be better and some worse. Our efforts should be geared to the former. If we get grounded on foundations movement is less possible. Conflicts are bound to occur, and conflicts based on fundamentalisms are extremely difficult to resolve and are the most destructive.

Radical incrementalism implies working with, yet away from the present, without any great plans as to where we are going. How do we respond then to the present in this kind of relation? If we keep witnessing (engaging with the practices of the world) and folding these accounts back into ongoing practice, who knows where the world goes? Of course there will be explanations, representations, and plans for action, but these always framed in an openness and an incremental experimentation which relies on re-witnessing or constant witnessing. And how do we judge as we have to in the end? The judgment is in what we choose to witness and the re-witnessing of the consequences of actions taken. Is this working? How do these stories compare? Where/when/how would I like to live? We need not be too sceptical; we can build on the common currencies of pain, suffering, well being, happiness and love.

As Louis MacNeice (1988) put it in the poem ‘London Rain’ - ‘We need no metaphysics / To sanction what we do’ (p. 72). We need to engineer new formations (Thrift, 2005) and pragmatism (like NRT) is a philosophy of heterogeneous engineering.

According to Peirce, the most fundamental engine of the evolutionary process is not struggle, strife, greed, or competition. Rather it is nurturing love, in which an entity is prepared to sacrifice its own perfection for the sake of the wellbeing of its neighbor (Burch, 2006: 1).

This is the idea of “agapeism” - ‘growth comes only from love’ Peirce (1893, in Menand, 1997: 52).
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