



Doherty, C. (2017) 'I thought I was working class until I went to Glasgow': Sticky Discourse and Absence to Understand Unequal Places. ECER 2017, Copenhagen, Denmark, 22-25 Aug 2017.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/219729/>

Deposited on: 6 July 2020

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

'I thought I was working class until I went to Glasgow': sticky discourse and absence to understand unequal places.

Catherine Doherty

University of Glasgow

Paper for ECER, Copenhagen August 2017.

Presented in symposium: Making inequality: ontologies of research into pedagogy in high poverty contexts

Abstract:

When told I was moving to Glasgow, my dentist promptly quoted the British sitcom *Porridge*: 'I thought I was working class until I went to Glasgow.' Though written in mid-1970s, this joke remains active, doing the work of characterising a community from a distance, to sustain a reputation for stark disadvantage forty years later. Despite urban renewal and civic rebranding, the stigma sticks. In the same way that categories of gender or race precipitate realities for the coded, the reputation of places travels before them creating presumptions that inform interactions, or avoidance thereof. In this paper, I use this quip as a provocation to reflect on firstly, **how researchers contribute to the reification of inequality, and secondly, how inequality is a relational term that warrants enquiry on both sides of the equation.** I conclude by comparing these complex emergent and relational ontologies to the flat world of league tables and international comparisons, asking how such 'knowing' will act on places from a distance.

This joke forces me to think about how my own research in schools servicing disadvantaged communities takes stigmatised reputations as a point of departure and sampling heuristic. In turn my ethnographic work re-animates and sustains such reputations by producing accounts that can potentially become 'causally efficacious'. I borrow this phrase from Bhaskar's (1998) critical realist philosophy of social science. This philosophy embraces a layered ontology, including *both* the intransitive dimension of the material world, *and* the transitive dimension of discursive and normative forces, to explore the interaction of forces and actualities in an open system (Stones, 1996). Similarly Archer's (2007) reflexive sociology talks of actor's 'fallible readings' that inform personal projects. **I'm interested in how reputations circulated in and by educational research, league tables and jokes, offer fallible readings that nevertheless become causally efficacious.**

Secondly, inequality emerges between advantage and disadvantage. Studies of relational inequality too easily slip into studies of the poor, as opposed to the co-constitutive relation between the haves and havenots. This means asking questions about magnet schools and niche programs sucking talent, energy and capitals out of others. It means we research selectivity, white flight and middle class drift as processes producing inequality. Bhaskar's attention to absence (Shipway, 2010) as an emergent outcome, and absenting to understand change, might build explanations beyond what is present in stigmatised sites.

Introduction

... we perhaps ought to ask whether context is discovered or constructed; and, if it is constructed, whether it is constructed by the participants or by the analyst. (Hammersley, 2006, p.6).

the 'objective' detachment of positivism pervades reports and policies, when the authors inevitably select and re-present their data, and when they ignore their own part in the long history of official mistrust of the 'feckless' poor, which still drives public policy. (Alderson, 2013, p. 33)

When told I was moving to Glasgow, my Australian dentist promptly quoted the British sitcom *Porridge* to me: 'I thought I was working class until I went to Glasgow.' Though written in the mid-1970s, this joke remains active forty years later, doing the work of characterising a community from a distance, to sustain a pejorative reputation for stark disadvantage. Despite urban renewal programs, new populations and civic rebranding efforts, that stigma and its presumptions still circulate and do work in the wider social imaginary – reputations are sticky discourse. This got me thinking about how places are (re)produced in discourse invoked elsewhere by others, the impact and effect of such widely circulated accounts, and my complicity as an educational ethnographer in these reputations and their effects of notoriety.

My interest is hence around the work of representations, be they fictional or factual, and their second order but constitutive effects on communities. More particularly I'm interested in their contribution to creating absences that impact on disadvantaged communities, that is, the diminished and inequitable realities such accounts can precipitate. In this way, I am connecting with ethnography's ongoing wrestle with the ethics and politics of representation. In another way, I am also connecting with current debates grappling with the onto-epistemological puzzle in accounting for how our work as researchers produces the matter which we seek to know – in this case, inequality. Both of these pose a number of methodological conundrums. I will argue that the metatheoretical premises of critical realism, rather than those of new materialism, help me negotiate these conundrums.

In this paper, I reflect firstly on the power of representations through the example of Glasgow. I'm interested in the way that fictional or factual representations of places create truth effects, then how the representations of places and populations that researchers produce also contribute to the reification of inequality over time. I then turn to consider how inequality is, at heart, a relational term that demands enquiry on both sides of its equation. I conclude by comparing these complex discursive, emergent and relational ontologies to the flat world of league tables and international comparisons, asking how such reductive but influential representations can act on places from a distance to exacerbate inequalities by encouraging absence.

Imagined Glasgows and the problem of notoriety.

As a recent arrival, I find myself a consumer of ethnographic accounts. I'm reliant on, and hungry for, representations of Glasgow to give me some sense of the historical trajectories and collective

sensibilities that I am now located in. I have sought out both fictional and factual accounts. I started with the iconic novel, *No Mean City* (McArthur & Kingsley Long, 1957) with its anti-hero, razor violence and poverty-porn, first published in 1935. It offers a thinly veiled auto-ethnographic account of lives lived in the notorious Gorbals district (how is it that I already knew what ‘the Gorbals’ should connote?). This is work that is comparable to the ethnographic fiction of Amitav Ghosh in its rich description of place and community zeitgeist. The characters are observed with both a tenderness in understanding the people’s constraints and modest aspirations, and a cynically politicised eye on their conditions and prospects.

The novel and the ‘truth’ about Glasgow it exported immediately attracted protest from middle class citizens and critiques in the local newspapers:

Unfortunately, it seems to us that the book may positively be harmful. The reputation of our city is undeservedly evil ... magnified beyond all reason ... Glasgow has got a bad name, and Glasgow is suffering because of that bad name; and this book, which is widely noticed in the Press, will tend to confirm the evil reputation of our city. ... The very fidelity of the picture will convince those who have no personal contact with life in the slums of a manufacturing town that Glasgow must be worse than any other city, for, they will say, surely nothing so horrible can exist anywhere else. (quoted from the Glasgow Evening Citizen, 28 October 1935, in McKean, 1990, pp. 31-32)

Though banned from local libraries, and denounced by the church, the first edition was reprinted eight times, and paperback editions continue to be printed, defying locals’ abilities to control their own image and quash this version of who they are. The representation reportedly took on a life of its own:

Thus the preferred image of Glasgow became that of a Victorian Babylon: *The Cancer of Empire*, the Glasgow of adversity, of *No Mean City* and *The Shipbuilders*, of the Gorbals and Red Clydeside, and of single-ends, slums and exploited underdogs. Artists, poets, authors and photographers duly captured that image (for it was not hard to find) and supporting documentation was soon created. The image acquired a substantial supporting constituency. Its momentum was inexorable, and the myth became self-perpetuating. (McKean, 1990, p. 99)

The lines re ‘duly captured that image’ and ‘supporting documentation was soon created’ are challenging – how often does my research do the same to communities forced into the spotlight for the wrong reasons? At what cost to whom?

More recent accounts of Glasgow (Craig, 2010) have continued in this vein, bearing witness to the ongoing impact of de-industrialisation on the community’s morale, health and life expectancy itself, as captured in the concept of ‘the Glasgow effect’. Plays selected in the school curriculum as set texts for the Scots literature component continue in this vein: ‘Men Should Weep’ (Stewart, 1983) with its oppressive tenement kitchen, and ‘Sailmaker’ (Spence & with Cooper, 2008) with its obsolete tradesman. These narratives keep the intergenerational memory alive in the present.

Counterfactual narratives emerged to balance the record, notably *The Second City* (Oakley, 1946) which underwent a number of revisions, most recently in 1990. In an autobiographical account of this book’s provenance, Oakey (1990) tells of rediscovering books on Glasgow published in the

1800s: 'that was when Glaswegians really had deep-seated convictions about the greatness of their city' (p.119).

I next read a young adult novel, *Divided City* (Breslin, 2006), which is often used as a class text in Glasgow schools. It offers a thoughtful and sympathetic account of the deep religious schism in the city lived through allegiance to football clubs. In this book, this history is disrupted by a narrative of violence towards an asylum seeker, forcing the young protagonists to confront discrimination on multiple scales. A visit to an exhibition of artworks by Joan Eardley, 'A sense of place'ⁱ has helped me visualise the tenement children of the 1950s and their poverty, portrayed here with a charming mixture of candour and respect. These and the television series *Taggart* depict Glasgow as an unremittingly gritty urban environment, far removed from the 'dear green space' its name and more sentimental versions would conjure up (Hind, 1966).

Yet when I walk through the streets, the grand sandstone buildings of the business centre, and the gracious homes of wealthy suburbs and satellite towns tell very different narratives – ones of growing rich on trade in African slaves, tobacco and cotton with the New World. Glasgow's contributions to the 'triangular' trade across the Atlantic and the subsequent anti-slavery movement is currently being recovered and reassessed (Mullen, 2009). The massive remnant crane on the Clyde speaks to another historical moment and its forms of wealth. As a new resident my challenge is to knit all these 'Glasgows of the imagination' (McKean, 1990, p. 101) together and make some sense of their complex connections between wealth and poverty, power and subjugation that I move through. My dentist's joke reverberates in my mind and I wonder why the disproportionate wealth of employers was missing from the Glasgow stories circulated abroad – why are the owners of the considerable means of production absent in these accounts and clear of their stigma?

Through this example of coming to know Glasgow through representations thereof, my point is that such representations, whether fictional, factual or artistic, all do work in the world by circulating and legitimating selective versions of a place and its people. These become travelling ideas that 'convince those who have no personal contact' thus offer no right of reply. These ideas produce effects: people 'suffer because of that bad name' which can 'positively be harmful'. Furthermore, such discourse is sticky. It adheres to a locality over time and resists erasure or revision: reputations gain 'inexorable momentum' such that 'the myth becomes self-perpetuating'. These confounding properties of representations are all too familiar to ethnographers.

Ethnography and its discontents regarding the work of representation

Ethnography takes the cultural politics of representation very seriously after what's been termed a 'crisis of representation' (Delamont, Coffey, & Atkinson, 2000, p. 224) in the face of postcolonial, postmodern, feminist and poststructural critiques of its 'serious fictions' (Clifford, 1988, p. 10). This conflicted and reflexive field of methodological thinking could teach other educational researchers a lot about the power of authoritative representations, and what that might mean for the practice of research. For example, ethnographers have actively experimented with new media and new genre (A. Coffey, Renold, Dicks, Soyinka, & Mason, 2006; Sparkes, 2009) to disrupt the disembodied authoritative voice of academic genre, and grappled with what the new ontologies of virtual space and online communities mean for methodological precepts (Hine, 2000). Coffey et al. (1996) pointed out the ironic contradiction between the 'heterodoxy' emerging in ethnography in response to these efforts, and the convergent orthodoxy emerging around software-enabled analysis and

unreconstructed grounded theory. This argument anticipated similar post-qualitative critiques of humanist social science from St Pierre and others (for example, St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

Conventional ethnographic methods of the past typically draw temporal and/or spatial boundaries around the object or community of study, but what gets lost and found in that delimiting move? Hammersley reflects on the flaw in that logic, given how fractured and compartmentalised modern lives and identities had become:

We sometimes tend to treat people as if their behaviour in the situations we study is entirely a product of those situations, rather than of who they are and what they do elsewhere— simply because we do not have observational data about the rest of their lives.
(Hammersley, 2006, p. 5)

This is a provocative challenge for those of us interested in educational inequalities. How can we understand the relational state of inequality if we only study one side of it? If we limit our study to the less advantaged side of the inequality relationship, we risk limiting our explanations to within these parameters, and thus disconnect 'deficit' from its necessary counterpart 'surplus' elsewhere.

Burawoy (2000) and Luke (2002a) similarly dispute the capacity to draw boundaries around increasingly global and networked lifeworlds:

For what will count as a 'context', as the 'local', or for that matter, as 'a community', or a 'site' ... is never self evident. We should persistently ask: Is that a context or an artefact of design and discourse? (Luke, 2002, p. 209)

I'm interested in the last point in particular, in terms of how the opinions and discourses circulated amongst/by external parties contribute to the production of the local context, in particular by motivating absence from it. In other words, to understand conditions in the here and now, enquiry and accounts of 'context' need to extend beyond to include parties who circulate reputations that have produced the here and now. Further, the conditions of 'here and now' are not just produced through who and what is present, but equally through who and what is absent. Then the link becomes how do reputations deter presence and precipitate absences that contribute to relations of inequality? I'm thinking of the doctors, teachers and nurses that don't apply for jobs in this locality, the businesses that choose not to establish an office there, the middle class families that choose to go where there are 'better' schools, the racial groups that steer away, the private investors that look elsewhere for opportunity, the government services that choose 'better' serviced locations, the tourists that don't come ... these choices by others elsewhere make inequality happen. Our empiricism has to attend to the presence of absence.

Social scientists are implicated in this process of representation. We produce, legitimate, and circulate knowledge of communities and hence contribute to the social construction of their public reputations – positive or negative. This involvement resonates with different metatheoretical arguments about the inevitable **slippage between theory and practice worlds – between knowing, doing and being**. Firstly, Giddens's (1976) distillation of principles for sociological research culminated in the idea of the 'double hermeneutic', recognising that the meanings made in social science will escape and do work in their uptake elsewhere:

any generalized theoretical scheme in the natural or social sciences is in a certain sense a form of life in itself, ... the connection is not merely a one-way one ...; there is a continual 'slippage' of the concepts constructed in sociology, whereby these are appropriated by those whose conduct they were originally coined to analyse, and hence tend to become integral features of that conduct. (p.162)

More recently Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay (2015) take another provocative step in their critique of the routine 'researcher reflexivity' moves in qualitative research as acts of confession and absolution. They consider the 'performative effects of research', by which they mean 'how disciplinary ways of knowing (through associated methods and discourses) enact particular realities of the world' (p. 213), to argue that 'different "realities" about teachers and Indian education reform are assembled in and through research' (p. 238). Their concern is with how educational research feeds policy in development agendas, thus plays an active part in the politics of knowledge. Under this lens, researchers become "'brokers" and "translators" of knowledge' (p.232), and should be held accountable for the knowledge they sponsor into the world, and its second order effects. To me, these arguments are **engaging with, and worrying the hyphen in onto-epistemology** but without using that particular language.

Onto-epistemological conundrums continue

The nexus between ontology and epistemology has haunted social science in its struggle for legitimacy over the years. It has been a site of an ongoing, formative struggle configured and reconfigured over time. For example, the concept of 'reification', to refer to scholarly processes that make a 'thing' of the abstract has long done work in this space. Barad might use 'thingification' (2003, p. 812) for the same problematic. Are we just talking about the same thing in our different languages?

Barad (2003) is the champion of 'posthumanist materialist account of performativity that challenges the positioning of materiality as either a given or a mere effect of human agency' (p. 827). Her arguments compare the assumptions of representationalism with her theory of agential realism and performative discourse to understand the relationship between 'matter' and 'mattering' through associated discourse. In this way she is reacting to the logical extremes of the linguistic turn and seeking to reclaim the material world to understand its 'material-discursive forces' and 'material-discursive practices' (p. 810). For me this seems a forced binary and an exaggerated straw man argument, which only makes sense if you were totally converted by the most radical poststructural arguments. Methinks she doth protest too much.

Critical Realism (Gorski, 2013) never threw out the material world, but offered a rich and multidimensional ontology that could accommodate 'realist' dimensions as well as discursive dimensions and their interactions, all being 'causally efficacious' strata in the realization of social reality in an **open system**. Reputations as discursive constructs that take on a life of their own, and float away from any materiality, can be accounted for in this inclusive ontology. Bhaskar (Bhaskar, 1998, 2002) and colleagues (for example, Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002) that elaborate his arguments describe a process of **emergence**, being the realization of actualities (both empirically evident and not) from the numerous potentials at play in the complex open system of the social. The emergent phenomenon is derived from the pre-existing layers of reality, but what

emerges is of a different order and 'is not reducible to the level from which it arose' (Shipway, 2011, p. 41). Reputation can thus surface and be understood as a 'thing' in itself capable of causing its own truth effects, not just as a trace of that which it represents.

For me the concept of emergence resonates with Barad's concept of intra-actions which foregrounds the process and relations of becoming – the 'practices/doings/actions' (p. 802) and the 'the intertwined practices of knowing and becoming' (p. 812). Barad's 'relational ontology' would collapse the analytical boundary between 'things' and the human agent that names them, such that representations could not be separated from that which they seek to explain:

a relational ontology that rejects the metaphysics of relata, of 'words' and 'things'. On an agential realist account, it is once again possible to acknowledge nature, the body, and materiality in the fullness of their becoming without resorting to the optics of transparency or opacity, the geometries of absolute exteriority or interiority, and the theorisation of the human as either pure cause or pure effect while at the same time remaining resolutely accountable for the role 'we' play in. (p.812)

This collapses everything onto one intra-active ontological plane on which to think. For me, the premise of 'ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting "components"' (p. 815) conflates dimensions which lose any analytic specificity of their 'quite different properties and powers' (Archer, 2003, p. 2). I'm more interested in the analytical possibilities and layers that Bhaskar's rich ontology gives me to think with and through, and the capacity to hold things apart, to better understand possible complex sites or points of entry for intervention.

From my own limited readings, the major difference I understand between the two metatheories lies in Bhaskar's insistence on the inherent 'intransitive' potentials (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 19) within the deepest layer of the real – ontic potentials that exist regardless of any epistemic interaction. For critical realists, these potentials then play out, being realised or suppressed in their interaction and transitive processing through the 'linguistic and symbolic mediation of reality' (Stones, 1996, p. 6). It is this struggle in a complex open system that makes things both happen and not happen. This is how and where absence emerges as an ontological phenomenon – it emerges as 'a thing' or a result that is worth explaining how it came about.

The discursive construction of place has effects

Turning now to places as objects of study and to absence as a feature of place, Massey(1993) would argue that places are constituted through a relational logic or 'power-geometry' with other places. This logic is implicated in both mobility and immobility: 'some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it' (p.61). Massey proposed an interpretation of place that included rich ontological dimensions and forces that realize a locality:

The uniqueness of a place, or a locality, in other words is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, ... instead then, of thinking of

places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extra-verted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local. (p.66)

Appadurai (1995) offers a similar treatment of 'locality' as a 'structure of feeling' (p.206), which dignifies the phenomenological layer of meanings and feelings that inscribe and augment the material qualities of spatial neighbourhoods. For Appadurai, 'it follows that ethnography has been unwittingly complicit in this activity. This is a point about knowledge and representation, rather than about guilt or violence' (p. 207). Appadurai's argument proceeds to highlight the increasing fragility of a locality's structure of feeling under the pressures of new technologies and new mobile populations, but my interest is in the opposite potential - the stickiness of these structures of feeling that get fixed in negative reputations and adhere across time and space.

In a project regarding family mobility in Australia (Doherty, Patton, & Shield, 2015), I became aware of the power of negatively-inflected reputations to deter people from going somewhere, and the happenstance of how these reputations circulated. Interview and survey analysis showed how a locality's reputation could actively deter professionals such as doctors, nurses, teachers and police officers from taking up positions in these communities, effectively creating 'no-go zones' (p. 171) in smaller communities that relied on the mobility of such professionals to staff their human services. The absence of such professionals impacts heavily on these communities and exacerbates their problematic reputations. In this way, reputations that '*convince those who have no personal contact*' can produce effects, and people '*suffer because of that bad name*' which can '*positively be harmful*'.

The interplay between presence and absence, and different shades of 'knowing' resonate with Massey's point about some being enabled while others are constrained in the power-geometry of relations between places. Absence as an attribute highlights how the ephemeral discursive stuff of reputations can exert powerful effects on communities. It also highlights the relation of inequality between the advantaged and the disadvantaged in how the choices of one group impact the other. In the same way that categories of gender or race precipitate realities for the people thus coded, the reputation of places travels before them creating presumptions that inform interactions with that place, or avoidance thereof. For this reason, we cannot explain 'inequality' by examining only one side of its relational equation, and failing to account for what has left, fled or absents itself.

I am, we are, complicit through my work.

These ruminations and that joke about Glasgow have made me think about how my own research into issues of educational inequality has been sited in schools servicing disadvantaged communities. For example, I recently conducted classroom ethnographies in high school and vocational colleges located in towns with high youth unemployment (Doherty, 2017). I went to those schools in those communities because of their reputations captured in demographic profiles. I assumed that these sites would offer the necessary context for my questions and the necessary grist for explanation. By doing so I thus overlooked the methodological challenges posed by Hammersley, Luke and Burouway. I have unproblematically taken stigmatised reputations as my point of departure and sampling criterion, thus sidestepped the challenges thrown out by Appadurai and Massey.

Most critical sociologists of education, or educational ethnographers earn their professional stripes in their access, immersion, close knowledge and passionate advocacy for particular, high profile disadvantaged communities. Access to the iconic communities of inequality gives our professional identities grit, 'street cred' and kudos. These communities over time become the 'usual suspects', overexposed to well-intended researchers who queue to get in. By locating and limiting our understanding of inequality to what is empirically available within these stigmatised sites, are we contributing to their problems? Despite our critical dispositions, our work re-animates and sustains such reputations by producing authoritative accounts that become what Bhaskar and other critical realists would term 'causally efficacious'. Our studies add to the violence that authoritative accounts can do.

Secondly, inequality is a relation. It emerges in the contrast between advantage and disadvantage. Yet, studies invested in the problematic of educational inequality too easily slip into studies of the poor, looking for both explanation and solution within those communities, as opposed to exploring the co-constitutive and contributing relation between the haves and havenots. Inequality demands 'an *analytics of exogeny*' (Sassen, quoted by Anyon et al., 2009, p. 2, original emphasis), that is, exploration of external conditioning factors, and the broader context that impinges:

Class size, curriculum, or student demographics; teacher experience, pedagogy, or skill; leadership, budgets, buildings or library holdings are not all that makes a school what it is. And describing them does not constitute a satisfying explanation of what occurs there. (Anyon et al., 2009, p. 2)

This would mean asking questions about magnet schools and niche programs sucking talent, experience, energy and capitals out of others. It means we research school selectivity practices, white flight and middle class drift as processes producing inequality, and the political ideologies that encourage them. It means we enquire into where students go when they don't attend class.

Absence and its value for the ethnographic study of inequality

Critical realists pay close attention to absence as 'vital to any account of phenomena in the world' (Shipway, 2011, p. 95). Absence is both ontologically primary, and an outcome that emerges from the struggle between material and discursive forces, and to absenting as a necessary condition of change:

absence is everything that has been lost into the past, besides all the infinite potential waiting in the future, of which only a tiny part will ever be realised. Absence is all that we might have, but have not, been or known or done. It is like a great vacuum absorbing almost all around it, and is therefore a prime mover: pushing and pulling everything forward into new times and spaces. (Alderson, 2013, p. 65)

Bhaskar's concepts of ills and constraints are understood as absences whereas emancipation from ills and constrains is 'the process of absenting ills and constraints' (Shipway, 2011, p. 97)

Ethnographers could profitably pay attention to who or what is absent in their communities of interest, and what becomes absent ('begoing' as Alderson words it) as change and its repercussions play out over time. From our study of family mobility in rural Australia, it became evident that as banks, businesses and services withdrew from small towns, property prices would fall, allowing more welfare-dependent populations to move into newly affordable housing. This would shift the

structure of feeling associated with the locality, with the flow on effect of additional middle class drift away from the townships and schools, particularly at the high stakes stage of children's secondary schools, taking their disposable incomes and cultural capital with them. Such cumulative absence creates the limited conditions of possibility for the local school, and reinforces the stigmatised reputation for that diminished community, feeding a spiral of polarised inequality.

So what, who cares?

We should care about how our research or authoritative test results contribute to, and sustain, educational inequality. This paper started with a casual joke that helped keep a notorious reputation alive over time and space. This provocation led me to consider how representations, fictional or factual, of 'imagined' Glasgows or other stigmatised locations with sticky reputations circulate beyond the control of their locals and create their material and discursive forces or absences that are causally efficacious for these communities. Then I related this effect of reputation to the risks of representations as well understood in ethnographic methodology. I reflected on how I have nevertheless bought into, and thus contributed to sustaining, stigmatised reputations when sampling for my own studies in educational inequality. I pointed to literature that has challenged the capacity to delimiting of the ethnographic gaze, and the need to look outside and beyond any object of study to understand the relational conditions that contribute to its makeup, particularly the absences that create the relation of inequality. I then explored the meta-theoretical options offered firstly by Bhaskar's critical realism and secondly by Barad's new materialism, and explained how the distinct ontological planes, the concept of emergence, and treatment of absence in Critical Realism offered a nuanced architecture to think about the complex processes underlying relations of inequality and its constitutive forms of absenting.

This metatheory thus resources us to think about inequality as a complex, emergent condition produced in a relational power-geometry and sticky structures of feeling that originate and reproduce beyond the site to potentially inform modes of absenting with lived consequences within the stigmatised place. Advantage and disadvantage are two faces of the same processes. As a final reflection I would like to contrast the ontological richness of these metatheoretical resources, and the thin flat ontology that underpins regimes of standardised testing. In Australia, students are tested at regular intervals, scores are aggregated and schools' profiles are made public for comparison, and 'provides valuable information to help make informed decisions about their child's education' (ACARA (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority), 2017). The simplistic, reductive logic behind these authoritative representations of communities and places suggests the test score can be explained by conditions within those sites - the fallacy flagged by Buroway, Luke and Hammersley. Of more concern, these 'naming and shaming' representations take on a life of their own, and start to do work in the public imaginary - tarnishing the reputation of schools, principals and communities, and informing absences by those who are not 'effectively imprisoned' (Massey, p. 61) by the inequalities cultivated. The ICSEA index, designed as some mitigation of decontextualized scores, has also escaped its intended use and serves as another summary expression of reified advantage or disadvantage to fix reputations.

Back in Glasgow Scotland, the re-elected SNP party announced intentions to re-introduce standardised testing in 2017 and make results public (BBC, 2016). However, it was quickly counselled to delay such public release given the risk that such results would inform 'league tables'. This is perhaps a setting that understands the damage that sticky reputations can do.

References:

- ACARA (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority). (2017). My School. from <https://www.myschool.edu.au/>
- Alderson, P. (2013). *Childhoods real and imagined. Volume 1: An introduction to critical realism and childhood studies*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Anyon, J., with Dumas, M., Linville, D., Nolan, K., Perez, M., Tuck, E., & Weiss, J. (2009). *Theory and education research: Toward critical social explanation*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Appadurai, A. (1995). The production of locality. In R. Fardon (Ed.), *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge* (pp. 208-229). London & New York: Routledge.
- Archer, M. (2003). *Structure, agency and the internal conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter *Gender and Science*, 28(3), 801-831.
- BBC. (2016, 6 January). Nicola Sturgeon details standardised school testing plans, *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-35237834>
- Bhaskar, R. (1998). Philosophy and scientific realism. In M. Archer, R. Bhaskar, A. Collier, T. Lawson & A. Norrie (Eds.), *Critical realism: essential readings* (pp. 16-47). London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R. (2002). *From science to emancipation: Alienation and the actuality of enlightenment*. New Delhi: SAGE.
- Breslin, T. (2006). *Divided city*. London: Corgi.
- Burawoy, M. (2000). Reaching for the Global. In M. Burawoy, J. Blum, S. George, Z. Gille, T. Gowan, L. Haney, M. Klawiter, S. Lopez, S. O' Riain & M. Thayer (Eds.), *Global Ethnography. Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World* (pp. 1-40). Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Clifford, J. (1988). *The predicament of culture: Twentieth century ethnography, literature, and art*. Cambridge, MA, & London: Harvard University Press.
- Coffey, A., Holbrook, B., & Atkinson, P. (1996). Qualitative data analysis: Technologies and representations. *Sociological Research Online*, 1(1), 1-16.
- Coffey, A., Renold, E., Dicks, B., Soyinka, B., & Mason, B. (2006). Hypermedia ethnography in educational settings: possibilities and challenges. *Ethnography and Education*, 1(1), 15 - 30.
- Craig, C. (2010). *The tears that made the Clyde*. Argyll, Scotland: Argyll Publishing.
- Danermark, B., Ekstrom, M., Jakobsen, L., & Karlsson, J. (Eds.). (2002). *Explaining society: Critical realism in the social sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Delamont, S., Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (2000). The twilight years? Educational ethnography and the five moments model. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(3), 223-238.
- Doherty, C. (2017). Edufare for the future precariat: the moral agenda in Australia's 'earning or learning' policy *Journal of Education Policy*, 32(1), 34-47. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2016.1215534>
- Doherty, C., Patton, W., & Shield, P. (2015). *Family mobility: Reconciling career opportunities and educational strategy*. London: Routledge.
- Giddens, A. (1976). *New rules of sociological method*. London: Hutchinson & Co.
- Gorski, P. S. (2013). "What is Critical Realism? And Why Should You Care?". *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*, 42(5), 658-670. doi: 10.1177/0094306113499533
- Hammersley, M. (2006). Ethnography: problems and prospects. *Ethnography and Education*, 1(1), 3 - 14.
- Hind, A. (1966). *The dear green place*. London: New Authors Limited.

- Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Luke, A. (2002a). The trouble with context. In V. Carrington, J. Mitchell, S. Rawolle & A. Zavros (Eds.), *Troubling practice* (pp. 207-214). Flaxton, Queensland: Post Pressed.
- Massey, D. (1993). Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place. In J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson & L. Ticknew (Eds.), *Mapping the futures: local cultures, global change* (pp. 59-69). London & New York: Routledge.
- McArthur, A., & Kingsley Long, H. (1957). *No mean city*. London: Corgi Books.
- McKean, C. (1990). Architecture and the Glasgows of the imagination. In K. McCarra & H. Whyte (Eds.), *A Glasgow collection: Essays in honour of Joe Fisher* (pp. 99-106). Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries.
- Mullen, S. (2009). *It wisnae us: The truth about Glasgow and slavery*. Edinburgh: Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland.
- Oakley, C. (1946). *The second city*. London & Glasgow: Blackie.
- Oakley, C. (1990). They wrote about Glasgow: A tribute. In K. McCarra & H. Whyte (Eds.), *A Glasgow collection: Essays in honour of Joe Fisher* (pp. 117-123). Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries.
- Shipway, B. (2011). *A critical realist perspective of education*. London: Routledge.
- Sparkes, A. (2009). Novel ethnographic representations and the dilemmas of judgement. *Ethnography and Education*, 4(3), 301-319.
- Spence, A., & with Cooper, J. (2008). *Sailmaker Plus*. Paisley, UK: Hodder Gibson.
- Sriprakash, A., & Mukhopadhyay, R. (2015). Reflexivity and the politics of knowledge: researchers as 'brokers' and 'translators' of educational development. *Comparative Education* 51(2), 231-246.
- St. Pierre, E., & Jackson, A. (2014). Qualitative data analysis after coding. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 715-719.
- Stewart, E. L. (1983). *Men should weep*. Edinburgh: 7:84 Publications.
- Stones, R. (1996). *Sociological reasoning: Towards a past-modern sociology*. Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press.

ⁱ At Edinburgh Museum of Modern Art, December 2016 – May 2017, see <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/exhibition/joan-eardley-sense-place>