

## ***Interactive comment on ““Doing with space”: towards a pragmatics of space” by M. Lussault and M. Stock***

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This paper offers an exploration into the conditions of the possibility of a pragmatics of space (p.1), thereby giving new and interesting insights. However, I would still claim several points that seem (more or less easily) improvable. In the next section, I will try to grasp and summarise the main lines of arguments in the paper to be reviewed. Thereafter, several interventions are made that should be reflected upon by the authors since I estimate these to improve the paper (at least, I hope so!).

Main arguments of the paper

Lussault and Stock argue for a methodological shift or turn from an orientation around questions of “being in space” to geographies that concentrate on “doing with space”.

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As important as this shift is, it is far away from being a new one. However, to outline the project of “doing with space”, both argue for a focus on practice. This, as it is later advocated, deems an appropriate way to meet the complexities of human affairs, their spatial dimensions and relations to material artefacts and technology as such. Both start from the premise, that “there is just practice which has spatial dimensions with different styles of spatiality” (p. 4). To put it bluntly: Doing is always doing with space. In the following sections Lussault and Stock struggle along this question how space can be understood as resource or condition to practices. Apart from trying to offer a coherent theory, the authors give instead several hints or parameters that should steer discussion in the emerging field of a pragmatics of space. These sections offer an often black-and-white-reading of the history of geographical thought as it is suspected to be obsessed with the question of “being in space”. Having finally cleared the field so far, the authors then work their way through different arguments in favour of a perspective that puts “doing with space” at the centre of geography’s attention since this seems auspicious to tackle contemporary conditions of everyday life. Outlines of a conceptualisation of space are offered that stress the different semantics of space being incorporated into the different logics of the social. After a short review – and criticism – of different approaches to practice (Werlen’s action-orientated approach, performativity studies, ethnomethodology), the authors finally offer their thoughts on “doings with space”, i.e. when practices get in proof with all possible enactments of space that occur during a given situation (p. 10). The central question is: how is space intertwined with practices: as condition, as tool, as effect (or as possibly all three together)? The project then, firstly, aims to showing the different, or to quote Jonathan Murdoch (1997), heterogeneous associations, linkages and relation that enact the nexus of space/practice. Secondly, it asks whether these practices are facilitated or complicated by different spatialities that are (mostly clandestine) at work in a concrete situation. This, they call “proof” as the situation is never determined, and therefore full of uncertainties that derive to some degree from the interventions of different spatialities. – To give a simple example (which is the result of several reflections trying to translate this very theoretic-

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cal construct to my restricted mind): When meeting a girl in a park, different spatialities that have to be proofed are at work: What, if your preferred meeting-place is already occupied? What, if musical events taking place in the park are producing too much noises? What, if mobile phones intervene in your rendez-vous by connecting you to some other place? There is always uncertainty in “doing with space” as space constantly intervenes: as problem or opportunity. The final chapter of the paper grounds this project in some way, as it proposes some parameters to operationalise this “doing with space” for empirical work: How can a concrete situation be described? What kinds of methods seem expedient? How and in what sense becomes space influential?

Some interventions:

To repeat myself: this is a very innovative paper. But I had difficulties with some points:

1) Throughout the text, a very narrow reading of the discussed literature emerged. This can be justified by the explorative orientation of the paper (and in most cases I really see no problem with this). But, this technique of a narrow and black-and-white-reading is definitely exaggerated on pages 6-8 where a far too narrow reading of past human-geographical approaches to practice is offered under the header “being in space”: Is it really possible to exemplify this influential thinking you call “being in space” by using solely phenomenological and humanistic approaches? This obtains a fortiori since these approaches are generally thought of as establishing a relational understanding of space by emphasising the different types of the incorporation and production of space within people’s everyday life. Because these approaches focus on everyday practices and its interactions with space, they do not give strong evidence for the argument that they represent a “being in space”-thinking. At least it gives less evidence than references to spatial approaches in geography or GIS as “being in space” approaches would give. I suggest that this passage should be revised to find more evident arguments in favour of “being in space” approaches.

2) Although I made several attempts, I really haven’t got through the different defini-

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tions of central terms offered on pages 4 and 5. Even more, this section is a repository for terminological confusion: Is it necessary to talk of action here (the term doesn’t have any importance in your following arguments, which are solely related to “practice” – the same argument holds true for ‘actants’)? Why are acts subsumed under the concept of spatiality whereas the following pages suggest the reverse, as spatialities should be seen as an effect of and to practices (“There is “just” practice, which has spatial dimensions coming with different styles of spatiality”, p. 4; “Space is constituted during the action, not before or after the action”, p. 5). I would suggest a reworking here which a) focuses on the central terms as they are important for the development of your arguments, b) gives some quite simple empirical examples to clarify the theoretical definitions (e.g., the definition of ‘situation’ on p. 4 is a very sterile and hard one to comprehend without an empirical example of a concrete situation you may have had in mind). There are other parts in the text that appear “dense” for they rely on a theoretical, sometimes esoteric language (e.g. your use of ‘space’ on p. 8, the use of ‘dwelling’ on p. 6). Maybe you can open up these parts by explaining a bit more in easier words? (I know how hard it is to translate Derrida into a “more ordinary language”; but this would make the text easier to understand for readers without a profound background in social theory or philosophy). An alternative would be of getting rid of some additional information that doesn’t seem significant to support the overall argument, e.g. the exhausted analysis of skills on p. 16. But I will leave this decision to you ... Just a proposal to open up the text!

3) I follow your overall claim that geography has to be aware of the openness, contingency and “unsteerability” of situations. This article catches these issues adequately from the perspective of practice or “doing”. However, taking into account that you are interested in a particular “doing”, in fact “doing with space”, I found little evidence what different kinds of spatiality can be imagined from such a position. In your paper, there is a certain lack of recent contributions in this field, especially those that start from a position of complexity, of fluid relationships, of movement and of technologically intermediated sociality. Here, making associations with spatial terms or concepts as

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movement-space (Thrift 2004) of fluid spaces (Mol/Law 1994) seem necessary to synchronise some of your arguments about the openness of situations (p. 15) and the new spatial awareness that evolves from the use of technological devices (mp3-player, mobile phones etc.) (p. 4, 8) with recent developments in spatial theory.

4) A similar argument can be made according to the proposed shift from geographies of “being in space” to those of “doing with space”. Although the text offers an innovative way how to calibrate this shift, I miss some links to other projects that work, surely with different terminologies, on same subjects: Think, for example, on geographies of intersectionality (G. Valentine) or the huge efforts in framing non-representational theories in geography (Thrift, Lorimer). Here again, the authors should try to relate their project to broader movements (perhaps in one or two sentences).

5) A very general and important argument that I gathered from your text is that geography should deal more intensively with complexities and contingencies that characterise the nexus of space/practice in a concrete situation. But this argument is only implicitly communicated within the text. Perhaps it makes sense to strengthen this argument (e.g. as part of an overall synopsis) simply because this might open up your arguments to newer discussion in theories that deal with complexities, as systems-theory inspired approaches, to name only one (see also the complexity-issue in *Theory, Culture and Society* 22, 2005).

6) According to the organisation of the chapters, there is a stringent logic discernable, although I would recommend that you revise parts of the introduction: The introduction doesn't clarify sufficiently that this is an explorative paper (and deliberately sketchy paper) where the presentation of new concepts is the main objective – and not detailed discussion of existing theories. (This would be especially fair to calibrate the reader's expectations.) Furthermore, I think that the short paragraph in which you display the different steps to develop and enhance your argumentation (p. 5, columns 10-15) should be extended. It should also be pointed out more explicitly that these steps are reflected in the division of the text. Lastly, the headline to Chapter 2.1 should be a bit

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more related to its content: I miss the hint that you are offering frames how to treat or deal with “space”; maybe a renaming to “understanding [or: figurating] space: from “being in space” towards “doing with space” seems proper!?

7) Just a formal point: Several references (of an overwhelming number of references) in the text are not listed in the references: Particularly, I haven't found Beaverstock, Bingham, Ley [wrong year], Volvey. Please update.

Hope, these points help you a bit to improve this truly stimulating paper.

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