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Seeing Like a Survey

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ABSTRACT

This article explores a performative understanding of social science method. First, it draws on STS to consider the plausibility of the claim that research methods generate not only representations of reality, but also the realities those representations depict. Second, it undertakes an archaeology of a major survey – a Eurobarometer investigation of European citizens' attitudes to farm animal welfare – in order to explore the character of its performativity. Finally, it considers some of the implications of the performativity of research tools for the future of methods in social science.

KEY WORDS

Eurobarometer / method / performativity / ontological politics / science and technology studies / survey research

Introduction

There are two great views of method in science and social science. On the one hand it is usual to say that methods are techniques for *describing* reality. Alternatively, it is possible to say that they are practices that do not simply describe realities but also tend to *enact* these into being. The first approach represents the received wisdom. It works on the assumption that in one way or another reality has a definite form that is substantially independent of and prior to the tools used to inquire into it. Then it assumes that it is the job of inquiry to discover and describe this reality as best may be. There are many philosophical variations to this basic position. These include a list of 'isms' that embrace positivism, empiricism, falsificationism, realism, critical realism and pragmatism. But this is a broad metaphysical church and also informs most commonsense understandings of research methods.

The second approach – the idea that methods are practices that tend to *enact* realities as well as describing them – treats knowledge practices as more or less *performative*. It is a minority view, though not without its own philosophical genealogy.[1] In this article I explore this second, performative position, in the context of social science survey research. I suggest that it is consistent with our common-sense intuition that the world is indeed solid, regular, 'out there' and more or less independent of what we think of it. But, and more importantly, I also suggest that it is analytically and politically productive because it asks us to explore what it is that our methods actually do, and then whether or not this is desirable.

In what follows, I start by exploring the plausibility and provenance of this performative understanding of method. Next I undertake an archaeology of a major example of survey research – a Eurobarometer investigation of European citizens' attitudes to farm animal welfare. My interest is in the performativity of the latter – in exploring the layered character of the realities that it helps to enact. I conclude by considering some of the implications of the performativity of research tools for the future of methods in social science.

Reality Practices and Performances

If knowledge practices are performative, enacting whatever it is that they are reporting, a question straightaway follows. How is a sociologist able to make warrantable claims about the attitudes and behaviour of consumers? Or, for that matter, a pharmacologist report findings about binding conjugates in targeted drug delivery systems? How can the producers of knowledge plausibly claim that something *is* the case?

An initial response to this question – though little more than a restatement of it – runs so. Knowledge practices, and the forms of knowledge that these carry, become sustainable only if they are successfully able to manage two simultaneous tasks. First, they need to be able to create knowledge (theories, data, whatever) that *work*, that somehow or other hold together, that are convincing and (crucial this) do whatever job is set for them. But then secondly and counter-intuitively, they have to be able to *generate realities* that are fit for that knowledge.[2] This is the difficult part, and I explore it initially by offering a simple illustration of the kind of response that is needed.

The asylums in France are, or at least were, filled with people claiming to be Napoleon.[3] At the same time, if we are committed to warrantable knowledge, we are likely to insist that there is a difference between Napoleon Bonaparte, historical figure (born 1769 in Corsica, died 1821 on St Helena) on the one hand, and the various alternative putative Napoleons located in the psychiatric system on the other. But how might we do this? The performative answer is this. The real Napoleon was enacted in a network of political, military, diplomatic, economic and social practices. We might think of this as a kind of 'Napoleonic hinterland'.[4] Since such practices kept on re-occurring, this hinterland spread through time. Since they happened in different places, it also spread across space. So, for

instance, the events of the 18th Brumaire in Paris enacted Napoleon as Consul. The battle of Austerlitz enacted him as military genius. After Waterloo his confinement on St Helena performed him as a continuing serious danger to the great powers of Europe. If we – academics, readers of history, psychiatrists – distinguish between this real Napoleon and other figures who also claim that status, then it is because our practices (including our knowledge practices) include at least elements of this particular Napoleonic hinterland. Perhaps, following Tolstoy, we doubt his genius (or that of any other general). Perhaps, indeed, we are hazy about the historical specificities. Even so we treat that vagueness seriously. Napoleon was First Consul, Emperor of France, and a military threat. And it is this that distinguishes this figure from the other putative Napoleons. These are different because they lack a hinterland of practices that enact them as the real Napoleon. Instead they are performed in a quite different hinterland of psychiatric reality-enacting practices, and are enacted as tragic figures in need of treatment.

The argument, then, is that realities (as well as knowledge of realities) depend on practices that include or relate to a hinterland of other relevant practices – that in turn enact *their* own realities. But how might we think of such hinterland-networks? How and why do they come to be solid? These are questions that have been explored in the science and technology studies (STS) literatures.

In their book *Laboratory Life,* Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1986) use an economic metaphor to talk of the contexts – the hinterlands – surrounding the knowledge practices of scientific endeavour. The book is an ethnography that describes the production of knowledge at the Salk Laboratory in San Diego. The authors first consider the *ideas* discussed in the documents written by scientists in the laboratory. Second, they touch on the *experiments* those scientists are doing. Third, they explore what is *embedded* in those experiments. And, finally, as a way of throwing all this into focus, they talk about how much it would *cost* to unravel the knowledge coming from the laboratory. And what they argue (and it is more or less common sense) is that it is fairly easy and cheap to doubt unsubstantiated hypotheses. This happens routinely in conversation. It is only a little more difficult to disregard a small series of experimental results. They can, for instance, be put down to experimental artefact. It becomes more difficult to question and unravel a published article, though it can be done, and controversies sometimes erupt in the scientific literatures. But it is not at all easy to question results derived from widely used experimental techniques. Or to question basic claims or theories. So why is this?

The answer (here comes the cost metaphor) is that all the practices in the field are *invested* in and turn around those techniques and theories. The latter are included in the hinterlands of a great many knowledge practices. The consequence is that though it can indeed happen, undoing those techniques is likely to be difficult and costly. In particular, since most fields of science rest on multiple techniques, over time new methods come to replace old. Such shifts in the hinterland are relatively common and relatively undramatic. Much less usually, techniques that were taken to be sound are successfully deconstructed. But this kind of head-on attack on a widely enacted part of the hinterland is literally and

metaphorically costly and indeed unusual. In general, week by week, in scientific practice sustainable knowledge rests in and reproduces more or less stable networks or hinterlands of relevant instruments, representations – and the realities that these describe. And this is why realities – together with the techniques representations that enact these – generally feel solid and reliable.[5]

Two important counterintuitive consequences follow from this performative understanding of methodological practice. First, though the realities done in science practices are real enough (because they are too costly, metaphorically and/or literally, to undo), those realities are only real in *particular networks or systems of circulation*. This means, counter-intuitively, that realities are not real outside the chains of practices that perform them. Bruno Latour catches what is at stake in his remarkable essay *Irréductions*

> We say that the laws of Newton may be found in Gabon and that this is quite remarkable since that is a long way from England. But I have seen Lepetit camemberts in the supermarkets of California. This is also quite remarkable, since Lisieux is a long way from Los Angeles. Either there are two miracles that have to be admired together in the same way, or there are none. (Latour, 1988: 227)

Latour's point is that the seeming ubiquity of Lepetit camemberts depends on a large network of practices. Without containers, humidity controls, refrigeration, bacteriological testing, and all the rest, they would not make it to California. Indeed, they only exist there because the conditions in Californian supermarkets (and all along the supply chain) are similar to those in France. All of which is obvious for camembert cheese, but applies just as much to Newton's laws. These only exist within a network of scientific laboratories that have been modelled in a particular way. The practices of those laboratories have to be reproduced in the Gabon if those laws are to move there from Cambridge. Conversely, outside the networks of practice that enact those realities, they do not manifest themselves while other quite different realities do.

Such is a first consequence of a performative understanding of knowledge and its realities: that truths are not universal (Law and Mol, 2001). In this way of thinking, the features of the outside world that go with those truths, 'the real' as philosophers put it, are and is only 'realized' in definite form within the networks of practices that enact or perform these.

A second has to do with why it is worthwhile thinking in this way. One answer is that it opens a political space. It allows us to ask about the circumstances and how the real might be better enacted. It becomes possible to reflect on a politics making a better version of the real – that is on an 'ontological politics' or an 'ontopolitics'.[6] A comment on this. Reflect, for a moment, on the classic feminist slogan: 'biology is not destiny'. This separated sex from gender. Sex might be biologically determined, but gender is not. This meant (ran the argument) that no politics followed from the sexual differentiation of bodies. The argument did excellent work, but now it does not look radical enough, because it assumes there to be a single fixed biological reality: the sexed body. But if different realities are enacted in different knowledge practices, as is indeed the case for sexed bodies (Hirschauer, 1998; Hirschauer and Mol, 1995), then this is not

right. For these are performed anatomically, endocrinologically, genetically, psychologically, and epidemiologically, and each of these does a *different* sex in a *different* set of locations. Sometimes these sexes overlap and sometimes they map onto one another. But sometimes they do not. One small example. In the networks of epidemiological and endocrinological practice, the distinction between people who menstruate and those who do not may be more important than genetic or anatomical difference. This is because for those who menstruate, cholesterol level and the epidemiology of arterial disease do not correlate with the intake of saturated fats, which is not the case for the class of non-menstruating people (Mol, 2008). All this tells us that biology is *not* destiny – but in a much more radical way than imagined by first or second wave feminists.

I am saying, then, that different realities are enacted in different practices and places, scientific, social scientific, and elsewhere too. They are not easily, trivially, or cheaply enacted. And they travel from one site to another only with difficulty. Thus argument about performativity has nothing whatsoever to do with philosophical idealism or the notion that 'anything goes' or anything is possible. Practices always demand effort, the arraying of appropriate hinterlands. But despite the effort it takes, a performative understanding of knowledge and the worlds that it describes makes space for a politics of the real. And this is a politics in which we might try to strengthen some realities while weakening others, some systems of reality circulation rather than others.

This is what the sociology of science is telling us. If we are prepared to get into the technical specificities of knowledge production, then it is opening up a profoundly political space. Feminist technoscience scholar Donna Haraway does this in her essay on 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1991a, 1991b), as does Annemarie Mol (2002) in her book *The Body Multiple*. And others are working this way too.[7] Is the biomedical-Alzheimer's related reality dementia destiny? Not so, says Ingunn Moser. Other dementia realities – and programmes of treatment – are out there and they are real. It is just that they are in danger of being elbowed out of elderly care because the resources tend to be directed into biomedicine and its realities (Moser, 2008).

So What Do Surveys Do? Notes Towards an Archaeology

If we start to think in this way, we may also ask questions about social science methods. What do they perform? What realities are they helping to generate? And where? To explore these questions I turn to an example – the Eurobarometer, which is a long term set of surveys of European public opinion that tracks issues of continuing concern, as well as commissioning special surveys on particular topics.[8]

In 2005 nearly 25,000 people in the 25 EU countries were interviewed about their attitudes to farm animal welfare and its relevance or otherwise to their purchases of meat, eggs and other animal products (Eurobarometer, 2005). A further Eurobarometer survey on this topic appeared in 2007. 'Animal welfare', says this second report (reporting on the views of 29,000 interviewees), 'is seen as a matter of great importance across the EU (Eurobarometer, 2007: 4). Faced with the

question, 'Please tell me on a scale from 1–10 how important is it to you that the welfare of farmed animals is protected?', the average score was 7.8, and 34% of those interviewed said 10 out of 10 (2007: 4); 62% said 'yes, certainly' or 'yes, probably' when asked: 'Would you be willing to change your usual place of shopping in order to be able to buy more animal welfare friendly food products?' (2007: 38).[9] Most thought that farm animal welfare in Europe has improved over the last decade. Many (40%) thought that farmers are in the best position to improve welfare (2007: 49)[10], and nearly three-quarters (72%) thought they should be rewarded for doing so. Many (54%) said that currently food labels didn't help when shopping, and 53% said that they could not easily find the information that they needed in the shops (2007: 49). Again there were large national variations. For instance, interviewees from new EU member states were more worried about information than others. Even so, the report added that 'this issue of labelling is particularly important' across the EU as a whole (2007: 49).

So what are we to say about these results? What are they *performing*? What versions of the real are they helping to enact? I respond to these questions in layers by attempting a Foucauldian archaeology.

Layer One: The European Consumer

Lying on the surface and before we even start to dig we discover a European consumer who cares about farm animal welfare. Call this layer one.

Here is a question: if you ask people about farm animal welfare, then what are they going to say? The answer, of course, is that they are likely to say they are in favour of it. Few of us want to sound like monsters. Perhaps, then, the Eurobarometer is already in methodological trouble.

That sense of trouble deepens if we observe that attitudes and actions relate together only uncertainly. So in the context of Eurobarometer people *say* that they want farm animal welfare, but they *do* much less about it. For instance, survey research from the Welfare Quality project tells us that in the UK 73% of the public say they think about farm animal welfare in general, but only 39% even *claim* to do so when they are shopping (Kjærnes and Lavik, 2007: 18). Other evidence tells the same kind of story. The adult membership of the UK's RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) was around 31,000 in 2007 (RSPCA, 2007: 5), down from 36,000 in 2004 (RSPCA, 2005: 5). For Compassion in World Farming (2007) it was around 20,000.[11] This is not very impressive. Indeed, it points to a yawning gap between attitudes and actions. Admittedly, against this 6–7% of the British public say they are vegetarian (Kjørstadt, 2005), while up-market supermarkets such as Waitrose insist that animal welfare is also good for business.[12]

What to make of this? Though the evidence points in both directions, on balance it sits uneasily with Eurobarometer's findings. It is tempting to say that Eurobarometer is *describing* a European consumer but failing to enact a *reality* to match. Perhaps, then, we should say that it is enacting *attitudes*, but what these have to do with actions is limited.

If we were being conventional we might say that this is bad social science. But I do not think it is quite as simple as that. So how about this as a first attempt at a performative alternative? Eurobarometer is creating a reality *but only in the context of its own interviews*. In these it is indeed real. But this is a reality that links poorly with other animal-consumer-reality-practices, or at least some of them. If it did this better then there would be a network-hinterland of practices working with more or less the same consumer in other places. A solid and sustainable consumer, one that was transportable, like Lepetit camemberts, the laws of Newton, or the real Napoleon.[13]

Layer Two: European Politics

Layer number two. A question: why have there been two Eurobarometer surveys on attitudes to farm animal welfare in two years?

The quick answer is that something is happening in Brussels. I do not know the details, but it has to do with the lobby group called the pan-European Eurogroup for Animals on the one hand, and the interests of DG 5, the section of the European Commission responsible for Eurobarometer, on the other.[14] It seems that the door of the latter is wide open to the former. But other things are happening too. Here is a quote from the first Eurobarometer report. We are back in 1974:

> Just as a barometer can be used to measure the atmospheric pressure and thus to give a short-range weather forecast, this Euro-barometer can be used to observe, and to some extent forecast, public attitudes towards the most important current events connected directly or indirectly with the development of the European Community and the unification of Europe. (Commission of the European Communities, 1974)

So, and we are still on the second layer, *Eurobarometer is part of the so-called European project*. Eurosceptics tell us that this means we should not take it seriously. Since it is not independent it tells us nothing about 'European public opinion' and can do nothing to undo the European democratic deficit. Indeed, it can be added that a real 'public opinion' is only possible with a lively shared media, but since this does not exist for Europe as a whole[15] this means that there is no such thing as 'European public opinion'.[16] Full stop.

As it happens I am a Euroenthusiast, but this Euroscepticism is valuable because it helps us to cut through some of the strata that are necessary for an archaeology and so articulate some additional enacted realities. But in following this critical line we also need to be wary. This is because social criticism, Euroscepticism included, tends to assume that it has unmasked the single deep reality lying behind and animating (what are therefore revealed to be misleading) appearances. But that is exactly the argument I am trying to get away from. I want to say, instead, that criticism articulates *some* of the realities being enacted in particular locations. It generates particular hinterlands. It does this by spatializing those realities, showing them to be *locally* enacted, for instance in the corridors of the European Commission, or the polling organizations to which the

latter delegates its survey research.[17] And then it works (this is the critical move) by linking these in turn to alternative sites and realities that re-context them in a discrediting manner. So, for instance, here the link is made between seemingly innocent survey findings and hidden political agendas on the one hand, and a political theory of legitimate and illegitimate public opinion on the other.

To do this, then, is to mobilize a particular hinterland, but the realities done here are not alternatives. They do not replace or explain the other realities away, except in particular (in this instance Eurosceptic) locations. Instead, if we think performatively, then we need to say that these realities subsist *alongside* all the others. And what is at stake is what is successfully connected with what, in particular practices of enacted network-hinterlands.

Layer Three: Subjectivities and the Location of Politics

Layer number three. Here is a quote from Eurobarometer 2005:

> The labelling of products would certainly help the *consumer* to opt for a greater selectivity of purchases in favour of animal welfare products. (2005: 72, my italics)

This is interesting because it *describes* consumers while simultaneously mobilizing a series of *assumptions* about them.[18]

Consumers are being made into *individual decision makers* faced with products on shelves about which they are supposed to make choices.

These consumers are also *rational* decision makers because they make use of 'information' (for instance, labels on meat) when deciding what to buy.

Further, they are being performed as *ethical* decision makers because they care about animal welfare and allow this to inform what they buy.

And finally, they are *under-informed* decision makers because, lacking 'information', they cannot choose properly.

These are some of the more or less invisible assumptions being enacted in this single sentence. So layer number three, which this article also enacts by linking the findings of Eurobarometer with theories of subjectivity, is about performing a full-blown theory of the subject, the person. And, one might add, a specific understanding of the appropriate place for political action which, at least with respect to animal welfare, is properly to be done by individuals in supermarkets, person by person, at the moment of purchase. Which suggests in turn that it is also helping to enact a neoliberal version of political economy.[19]

Now look at this. It comes from Eurobarometer 2007:

> To make … choices [about purchasing animal products] it is crucial that the *public* has information that enables them to determine the welfare conditions that lie behind the products they see on shelves. Results from this survey show that this information needs to be improved. (Eurobarometer, 2007: 49, my italics)[20]

This is a shift in register, a move from 'consumers' to 'the public'. As is obvious, the two are different:

> As one member of the advisory group noted: 'the consumer and the citizen are generally not the same person, and supermarket companies listen to the former

first and the latter a long way second'. (Fox and Vorley, 2004: 23, quoted in Miele et al., 2005)

This tells us that more political subjectivity work is being done. For what kind of creature is a consumer? One answer is that it is a subject that may on the one hand *request* information about goods by virtue of being an actor in a market, but on the other has no particular *right* to that information.[21] This reflects the fact that the sanction available to a consumer is not legal or administrative. Rather, and often powerfully, it is to refuse to buy and to walk away. Whereas for 'the public'? Well, the citation is ambiguous. But at least in democratic theory we are edging towards citizens, states and rights. We are watching a shift of registers and institutional locations from the market to the law and administration, to places where the state and its agencies are intervening and regulating. So my suggestion is that Eurobarometer is simultaneously enacting *consumers* who would like more information, and *citizens* with rights to that information. It is enacting a hybrid European consumer-citizen and with that, and not coincidentally, the further need for a European state that will respond to the existence of this hybrid. Which is, to put it mildly, a creative piece of social and political engineering.[22]

Layer Four: Europe as a Container of Individuals

To understand layer number four we need to make a detour into elementary survey methods and look at how the Eurobarometer works as a research instrument.

1) The 27 EU countries are treated as different populations.
2) Inside each population, cities, towns and country areas are treated as separate sub-populations.[23]
3) Sampling points are chosen within each unit.
4) Investigators draw a 'starting address' at random from the electoral register or the telephone directory.
5) The sample is generated by adding every nth address (Eurobarometer, 2005: 77).
6) The respondent is chosen at random within each household using something called the 'closest birthday rule'.

When the interviews are done (around 1000 in most EU countries) the sample and the country population are compared. The question is: does the sample match statistics from Eurostat or the national statistics offices in important respects including 'gender, age, region and size of locality' (Eurobarometer, 2005: 78)? Is the sample 'representative'? If it is, then good. If it is not then the findings are adjusted. Finally, the statistics are generated, one, for individual countries, two, for particular demographic groups, and three, after weighting the countries in terms of population, for the EU as a whole. These are the figures that appear in the reports, along with the obligatory health warning about their statistical significance.[24]

This is so mundane that I find it difficult to think about it creatively. But let me try. I want to say, though this is scarcely original, that statistics is a set of methods practices that uninterestingly and therefore more or less invisibly *enacts a very particular version of the collective*. In particular, it performs it as a *countable population*. So for Eurobarometer Europe is made to be:

1) a set of *individual* people, with
2) *measurable attributes* such as opinions that
3) may be aggregated to produce a collective distribution of opinions.

This means that those individuals are treated as *isomorphous*. (This is because the detection of specific differences requires the creation of similarity in other relevant respects.) This means in turn

- that these statistical methods are creating a *homogeneous* European *collective space* containing isomorphic individuals which is
- then *re-stratified* into sub-spaces or sub-populations (for instance, 27 country distributions of opinion), and, so, in re-creating the nation state in a particular mode. Then, and finally
- Eurobarometer makes statistical assumptions about sample-population relations. Within certain limits of confidence the sample is said to *represent* the population and so to stand for it.

All of this is utterly straightforward. It is bog-standard statistics, but what it is doing is more or less invisibly enacting a particular *kind* of Europe: to repeat, Europe is being done as an isomorphic population of individuals in a homogeneous and bounded conceptual and geographical space. And this is layer number four.

Layer Five: Romanticism, or Collectivity as Statistical Collection

Layer number five follows this closely. Eurobarometer draws on and enacts methods used by pollsters, market researchers and social scientists. These reality-making research practices are so widely translated that the kind of collective reality they work to create is very hard to see. Collectivity is being naturalized as a population of individuals.

I hardly need to say that it was not always so. Durkheim did not know about representative statistics. Neither did Charles Booth. Indeed, a range of social science authors have shown how this and related reality-enacting apparatuses have been institutionalized.[25] By now so much has been invested in the routines of survey research, the network-hinterland has been elaborated so much, that if we think in the terms proposed by Latour and Woolgar, it has become almost too expensive to undo them or the realities that they collaborate to make. This means (and it is a part of the story) that those realities circulate into places such as the European Commission which come to *depend* upon them to see, statistically, like a state.[26]

This, then, is level number five in the archaeology. But there is a way of putting this philosophically. This is that the network-hinterland of survey research and statistics is enacting a *romantic* version of the collective. This is a way of signifying that it is imagining collectivity as a more or less *coherent whole* that both *contains* and *is emergent from the interactions* between the individual elements that make it up. I want to make two points about this.

Such 'statistical holism' is a version, but only one version, of philosophically romantic emergent holism. So, for instance, sociologists and anthropologists like to bandy terms like culture and structure about – but these too are often best understood as enactments of emergent romantic wholes, albeit generated in a different way and located in other network-hinterlands. Against this there are alternative and quite different ways of knowing and performing collectivity.[27] Thus romantic holism looks 'up' to discover a large and emergent complexity. It then assumes that this larger context can be known in a manner that is single, centred, explicit, homogeneous, and abstract. By contrast the baroque is an alternative sensibility that works by discovering context and complexity *within*, and then it takes these to be small, non-coherent, heterogeneous, specific, sensuous, implicit, and resistant of any overview.[28]

What is important here is not so much the specificities of this baroque alternative. It is rather the fact that there *are* alternative ways of enacting collectives, and that these become progressively more difficult to enact and realize with the successes of statistical romanticism and its qualitative cousins. To put it in Foucault's language, romanticism tends to define the conditions of collective possibility.

Conclusion: The Implications of Performativity

Methods practices are performative. They help to enact the world that they describe. Since the character of this performativity is predominantly implicit, we need an archaeological reading if we are to start to articulate the realities they imply (Law, 2004a; Law and Singleton, 2003). Such an archaeology is relational, always incomplete, always capable of articulating new versions of performativity. This is the instinct that informs a baroque or monadological inquiry into the nature of method.

In the context of the Eurobarometer I have argued that the latter does not simply describe and enact European consumers' views of farm animal welfare. Inter alia it also: does the consumer as an individual rational-ethical subject; reproduces the individual act of consumption as a proper location for political action; generates a hybrid consumer-citizen; allocates rights to the latter; enacts the EU as a neoliberal political site; performs Europe as an isomorphic population of individuals in a homogeneous, bounded, conceptual space; reproduces statistics and survey research as reliable tools for describing and so enacting social reality; and naturalizes a philosophically romantic version of the collective in which 'small' individuals are located within, and treated as contributory parts of, an emergent larger whole. But what does all this suggest for a politics of method?

A pessimistic response would suggest that statistics and survey research re-enact a widely circulated set of possibilities and set limits to both the real and what can be known of the real. This implies that we are caught in a hegemonically enacted version of reality and politics from which there is no escape. That we are within something like an all-embracing episteme. But there are two reasons for a more optimistic response.

First, Eurobarometer's methods practices are not particularly coherent. Instead, they struggle uncertainly and with only partial success to enact consistency. Do consumers' attitudes reflect consumers' actions? Not necessarily. Are citizens the same as consumers? Again, not necessarily. Is rational consumption consistent with ethical consumption? Well, surely it depends. Do people at the point of purchase necessarily want to be the site at which ethics and politics are done? Often not. Does survey research catch what is important about consumption? Arguably not, at least a lot of the time. Is Europe well-represented as a population of isomorphic individuals? Answer: only sometimes and for certain purposes. Are subjects centred and isolated individual decision-makers? Not necessarily. Are the realities enacted in survey research and its relatives ubiquitously translated? No, they are not. But if the Eurobarometer is not very coherent then there is hope. Specifically, instead of being caught in a single ontological and epistemic embrace, we can start to work on and in the fissures in the hope of making other realities.

Second, I earlier claimed that truths are not universal and that methods only work to make reals in particular places. But this suggests that it is not so much that the Eurobarometer is wrong, but rather that its findings are alive and well – but in highly specific places. These no doubt include the networks that make up the specialist press on food, farming or meat, and then in locations such as the RSPCA, and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), sections of the EC, and particular EU-funded projects.[29]

This again points us in the direction of an ontological politics. For if we do not like the realities being done by the Eurobarometer then it becomes important to elaborate other methods practices with other network-hinterlands, other realities, other sets of connectivities, and other circuits. And there are signs, perhaps so far only straws in the wind, that this is happening. So, for instance, there are many innovations in social data-gathering and analysis by the private sector, which depend decreasingly on social science research (Osborne et al., 2008; Savage and Burrows, 2007). And some of those innovations are being used, adapted, and remodelled within academic inquiry. So, for instance, the EU-funded Welfare Quality project has used representative surveys to research and (I am arguing) create its realities, but also interviews, focus groups,[30] pinboards, citizens' juries, stakeholders' meetings, and so-called integration meetings,[31] all of which enact different versions of the world, its objects, and its subjects. And in other contexts further suites of methods – for instance versions of electronic data-mining – are also under development.[32]

Perhaps it is too soon to speak of a methodological diaspora, but this performative understanding of method suggests the need to come to terms with the idea that universalism is dead, with the sense that truths – and realities – are

always located somewhere in particular, and that if they travel then they do so with more or less difficulty. The struggles, specificities and differences that follow if universalism is replaced by multiplicity hold out the promise of distributed and heterogeneous politics of reals.

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Notes

1 Sources include Foucault (1972, 1976, 1979), Hacking (1992) and Rheinberger (1997).
2 Performativity is a term coined by philosopher J.L. Austin (1965) to describe those circumstances in which words are not descriptions ('constatives') but are actions, affecting or creating a reality. I am using the term in a way that is broader: practices (including knowledge practices) are performative because they enact realities. See Law (2004a).
3 See also Callon and Law (1982).
4 For a longer discussion of the notion of hinterland, see Law (2004a)
5 Though it can be understood in this way, what I am proposing here is *not* a version of constructivism. I am not trying to argue that survey research or the new nano-pharmaceutics are constructed by human agents. Instead I am suggesting the materially heterogeneous methodological practices produce subjects, objects, and representations of some of those objects.
6 On ontological politics see Mol (1999, 2002). On ontopolitics see Latour (1997) and Hinchliffe et al. (2005).
7 Post-colonial author Helen Verran's work on 'ontics' and reality enactments represents another powerful version of the argument (Verran, 1998, 2001), as does Vicky Singleton's on public health and cervical screening (Singleton, 1996).
8 The larger context for this article is a participative study of a project on European farm animal welfare and its improvement, a topic currently of considerable public and expert debate within the EU. In the period 2004–9 the EU has been funding a €17m project on farm animal welfare. This project, called Welfare Quality (http://www.welfarequality.net/everyone), is also concerned with labelling for consumers (Welfare Quality, n.d.).
9 This is linked to the idea that welfare friendly production means that animal products are healthier and of higher quality. See Eurobarometer (2007: 49).
10 Vets (26%), governments (25%) and animal welfare NGOs (24%) were also believed to be important.
11 Compare the figures for the UK's National Trust with its 3.4 million members and 43,000 volunteers (National Trust, 2007). And the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' 1 million members and 13,000 volunteers (RSPB, 2007).

12 See, for instance, Waitrose (2008), where the text, in part, reads: 'All our beef is reared to standards set independently by Assured British Meat (ABM), which cover everything from ensuring the animals have a healthy diet, to minimizing stress during transportation. They inspect farms regularly to ensure all the criteria are being met. The cattle are only transported by ABM-approved hauliers, and on arrival at the processing plant, are rested and given fresh water to drink.' And see the comments about Waitrose in Roe and Murdoch (2006: 55): 'I spoke to the butcher about how the animals that enter meat production for Waitrose have been raised, transported and slaughtered. He said it was possible to trace the meat back to the farm. However nobody had ever wanted to.'
13 I adapt the argument developed by Annemarie Mol in her work on the coordination of medical practices in lower limb atherosclerosis. See Mol (2002).
14 I thank Mara Miele for discussion of this point.
15 Note that this argument usually rests on a version of politics in which democracy is understood as debate between free citizens in a polis. I am grateful to Annemarie Mol (2008) for discussion about embodiment and citizenship and Andrew Barry (2001) for his instructive account of the materialities of innovative political arenas.
16 See, for instance, Keller (1997).
17 The importance of space has been articulated in the context of resistance and multiple orderings by Doreen Massey (2005).
18 What follows reflects discussion with Annemarie Mol and her analysis of the role of consumer choice and citizens' rights in health care. See Mol (2008).
19 It is, of course, also contentious. Welfare Quality research reveals, for instance, that in Norway focus group members have a relatively high degree of trust in the public authorities compared with elsewhere in the EU (Terragni and Torjusen, 2007: 255). A possible implication is that a politics of welfare is properly undertaken by the state rather than by individuals at the point of choice in supermarkets. I thank Mara Miele for discussion of this point.
20 As noted earlier, 54% say that food labels do not help, and 53% say that they cannot easily find the information that they need.
21 For a powerful sociology of markets (that is also about how economic theory has helped to create markets) see Callon (1998, 2007).
22 One branch of political theory (Walzer, 1983) contends that different 'spheres of justice' are best held separate.' My argument is much closer to that of Boltanski and Thévenot (1987) and Thévenot (2006).
23 This is done using European 'administrative regional units'.
24 'Readers are reminded that survey results are estimations, the accuracy of which, everything being equal, rests upon the sample size and upon the observed percentage' (Eurobarometer, 2005: 78).
25 See MacKenzie (1981), Porter (1995), Osborne and Rose (1999), and Mitchell (2002).
26 I (mis)quote Scott (1998).
27 Kwa (2002); Law (2004b). See Leibniz (1973) and Whitehead (1978).
28 We are in Leibniz's (1998) monadological world here, and in particular that of Whitehead (1978) with his non-compossible monadology.
29 Blokhuis (2007: 9). And see Kjærnes et al. (2007: 6–7).
30 See, inter alia, Evans and Miele (2007).
31 See, for instance, Kjærnes et al. (2009).

32 See, for instance, the work on genomic-related patenting strategies (Oldham, 2006) and issue crawler (McNally, 2005) in the Sociomics Core Facility of the ESRC Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics.

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