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All together now

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INTRODUCTION

In what way, exactly, is IASA international? First let's acknowledge that the 'international' in the title is quite nicely ambiguous. On the one hand, it can mean that its subject is an international America. On the other hand, it can mean that it is an international association. And of course, in a neat conflation, it can mean both: it can be an international association engaged in the study of an international America. Either way—international America or international association—the idea of the *international* is right at the heart of IASA. But what does the word actually mean in this context? How do commonsense understandings of 'the international' shape the ways in which IASA is perceived and performed? These are the issues I would like to address in this short comment, concentrating in particular on the link between the idea of the international and the concept of scale.¹

While I think that this connection could be usefully explored in both of the dimensions folded into the association's name (subject and practice, international America and international association), I would like to focus primarily on the latter, because it seems to me that the burning question facing IASA today is the question of membership. Given that most potential IASA members already belong to at least one other American studies association, where is the incentive to join (or become active in) this one? A good argument for investing in IASA is that, as an international association 'one scale up' from the various national associations, all of its members should be equally 'at home'. In a multi-centered, international collective, nobody should be able to derive authority and authenticity from their literal or relational proximity to a dominant domestic center. But an alternative argument for joining IASA reads the association, just as cheerfully, as a space that is not so much multi-centered as uncentered, not so much the 'top layer' in an arrangement of scales as a space of constant internal realign-

¹ I would like to thank my colleagues Julia Leyda, Hiroshi Okayama, and Yujin Yaguchi for their generous and helpfully critical readings of earlier versions of this essay.

ments and co-presence, not so much an *inter-national* association as a *not-national* association.

This second way of reading the internationalism of IASA, of course, runs counter to the way in which the 'international' is commonly defined in terms of interactions and connections between nations: 'extending across national boundaries', for example, or 'involving more than one country'. This conventional definition implies that an international association exists primarily to facilitate interaction between already-existing nationally-defined groups. Within this definition of the international, even individual members of an international association are understood to embody existing national positions. Such an understanding of the international, as the arena for the interaction of nations, national groups, and nationally-defined individuals, seems to me to invoke and privilege an academic space of scales. Imagined vertically, this scale appears as a series of steps, starting at ground level with the individual, moving up to the departmental and the institutional, ascending again through the local and the regional and the national, and finally reaching the ceiling at the international. Within this kind of arrangement of scales, the local would often be assumed to be the more immediate, everyday, tangible, personal, engaged, and face-to-face, and the international the more distant, more complicated, more intermittent, and (often) more powerful: something towards which you have to 'work your way up', perhaps as the representative of a national or regional association. In other words, by the time the individual becomes visible at the top level he or she will be expected to have acquired, en route, a layered collection of scale-related identities.

This understanding of the 'international' as the top-layer in a space of scales seems obvious in theory, but for me personally IASA—in practice, in the event, and on the ground—has emerged as an event-space with a much stronger sense of something local and engaged and personal, and a much weaker sense of something hierarchical and national, than this would suggest. Reflecting on my experience of the international event-spaces produced by the IASA so far, I think it might be useful in imagining one aspect of the potential attractions of its practical geography to experiment for a moment with an interpretation of the international as the not-national, the non-national or the un-national, reducing the prominence of the concept of scale implied in conventional interpretations of the term 'international' and emphasizing instead the idea of an academic event-space in which the organizing effects of scale, center, and 'leading edge' are absent. In essence, I imagine that for some potential members the key point to IASA might well be its ability to function as a flexible, even mildly chaotic, non-hierarchical and decentered academic space in which all kinds of constituent locations are equally 'here' and equally 'now', a space characterized by what the geographer Doreen Massey has termed 'coeval multiplicities' and 'radical contemporaneity' (Massey, 2005: 8).

SPACE

In a recent issue of the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* Sallie Marston, John Paul Jones III, and Keith Woodward published a provocative paper



entitled 'Human geography without scale'. I would like to take up and redeploy for my own purposes some of the key terms used in this article, because I think that the shock value of the concept of a 'geography without scale' might facilitate the difficult process of willed estrangement from familiar spatial premises, thereby, for example, making it possible to defamiliarize and destabilize some of the common scale-related assumptions surrounding the concept of the 'international' in academic practice. I think that such a process of conceptual estrangement might make it easier to see that we are not simply subject to academic geographies but are also collectively responsible for producing the geographies within which we work—not only in terms of how we organize ourselves but also in how we talk about what we do.²

Critical engagement with the ways in which we perform conventions of spatial organization might help us to see how these practices and discourses render some kinds of scholarly interaction highly visible while relegating others, equally real and significant, to obscurity. We might reflect, for example, on the way in which the widely-assumed significance of national location in academic sorting springs from cycles of practice and perception rather than from some kind of environmental determinism. 'Japan-based American studies', in other words, emerges as a visibly coherent entity precisely because we have trained ourselves to look for patterns of coherence that can be mapped onto national territories. Coherence emerges in national shapes because we are looking for ways in which groups defined nationally can be differentiated. As Marston and her colleagues argue in relation to scale, as soon as we have become used to ordering space in particular ways, as soon (for example) as particular 'layers are presupposed', then it becomes 'difficult not to think in terms of social relations and institutional arrangements that somehow fit their contours' (Marston, Jones, and Woodward, 2006: 422).

This is, of course, not to say that coherence cannot be found in an entity defined as 'Japan-based American studies'—clearly it can. My point is simply that we should acknowledge the self-fulfilling circularity of the usual process: first, a frame is identified; then, coherence is detected within that frame; finally, the frame is read as the product of the pattern and not as its necessary precondition. That this frame should so often be national is far from surprising. American studies, as a field foundationally defined by reference to the nation-state, has typically tended to identify frames (i.e. sort scholarly interaction) by reference to the national; even those frames which are not literally national themselves have conventionally been defined in relation to the national, as 'less' or 'more' than national, above or below the national—as sub-national, for example, multi-national, or international. Nonetheless, the significance of the nation-based sorting of American studies worldwide is not an inevitable product of natural geography; national affiliation is a highly significant factor in American studies scholarship around the world because socio-spatial habits of academic training, sorting, networking, and affiliation have made it so.

² For more on this point, see Hones and Leyda (2004) and Hones and Leyda (2005).

In turning the national around in order to see its coherence as the product of socio-spatial practice, rather than as the frame within which spatial practice takes place, we are performing a shift in geographical thinking from space-as-container to space-as-product that has become an accepted and expected move in contemporary human geography. As Nigel Thrift explains, while geographers today disagree energetically about how best to conceptualize and talk about space, there is nonetheless broad agreement about the necessity to break out of the habit of thinking of it as a container in order to generate different ways of thinking about it as a product:

However different the writings about [...] different kind of spaces may appear to be, they all share a common ambition: that is to abandon the idea of any pre-existing space in which things are embedded for an idea of space as undergoing continual construction exactly through the agency of things encountering each other in more or less organized circulations. This is a *relational* view of space in which, rather than space being viewed as a container within which the world proceeds, space is seen as a co-product of those proceedings. (Thrift, 2003: 96)

SCALE

Scale is one of the most 'natural' and apparently obvious aspects of the common-sense geographies we routinely live within and (in living) produce. But for geographers scale is as controversial a concept as space, provoking fundamental disagreement over whether it even exists as a product of practice or is simply an organizational device or 'intuitive fiction'. Nonetheless, as Andrew Herod has pointed out, '[r]egardless of how scale is thought of ontologically, it is important to understand that the ways in which [scales] ... are presented rhetorically can fundamentally shape how we conceptualize the world and its social processes' (Herod, 2003: 234). The concept of scale is obviously useful; but we are so familiar with the concept of scale in academic interaction that it has become difficult to 'unimagine' it, even temporarily, to envision global scholarly exchange situated in some different kind of space than that characterized by the different levels of the institutional, the local, the regional, the national, and the international. Still, the attempt to think geography without scale might sometimes be useful for that very reason, in that it might help us to acknowledge alternatives to the discursive framing power of nation-related scale in academic practice. Even if scale is a way of seeing things, put into practice, that way of seeing things—talked into familiarity and put into effect—will have practical results. Without conceptual alternatives, these results will seem given rather than produced and it will become even harder to imagine interactions in space in any other (non-scaled) ways.

For example: if IASA is routinely imagined as the layer above the national, or as the container which includes the national, and if membership, even of the individual scholar, is nationally-inflected, then various concrete results are likely to occur. It may be taken for granted, for instance, that it is important to make visible IASA's commitment to worldwide inclusiveness (and the spatial distribution of input and power) by providing data on the current global locations of its exec-



utive articulated by reference to national affiliations. This way of demonstrating internationalism may seem nothing but commonsense, hardly worth noting, but in fact the point here is precisely that the role of IASA as a worldwide collective is being confirmed, performed, and certified in a particular commonsense way, by reference to the national. This common sense is based on the shorthand of scale: the simplest, most economical, and most immediately visible way to demonstrate that IASA is an organization geographically defined and yet not defined by territorial borders being to shift down a level and make visible the spatial spread of the different nations 'represented' at the sub-international (in other words, national) level. Of course, this way of authenticating "worldwideness" is almost brutally reductive. The complexity of the position of any individual scholar in a worldwide geography of American studies is hardly even hinted at by a one-word reference to a single national affiliation. To note that a scholar lives and works in, say, Poland certainly says something about her physical location in absolute space, and probably implies other interesting things about her location in other kinds of (relative, relational, virtual, textual) space. But it leaves a great deal of information about her locations in various time-space dimensions completely invisible, despite the fact that these locations are just as geographical, just as real, just as much a part of the 'worldwide', and just as significant as her literal domestic and institutional location within the borders of a particular national territory.

For example: consider the fictional case of two scholars teaching together one year in an American studies program at a Japanese university. Both have PhDs from US institutions, but while one is a member of faculty at the Japanese university, the other has tenure at an American college and is currently working in Japan for a year as a visiting lecturer. The first has recently published an article on international diplomacy in the *Japanese Journal of American Studies*; the second is working on a book about US–Japan relations for a UK-based publisher. Even a brief thinking-through of the complex 'locations' of these two scholars should reveal some of the reductiveness of articulating geography in terms of national location. The privileging of the national scale in identifying geographical diversity smoothes over enormous inconsistencies. To take one obvious example, even though the Japanese university may have a (different) visiting lecturer in American studies every year, the classes taught by those lecturers and the work they produce in their visiting year will not commonly be understood to be part of *Japan-based* American studies. The usual assumption is that in taking their classes students will somehow become temporarily relocated, once a week, into a US educational context. Similarly, work researched and written in Japan by the visiting lecturer, even if it is subsequently presented at a European conference or published in the UK, will sooner or later have its complex geographical history erased and will become absorbed into the mainstream of work produced within and understood to be characteristic of the context of US-based American studies.

Meanwhile, the teaching and research of the fictional Japan-based professor continues to be understood as firmly located in Japan. Her work is part of 'Japanese American Studies'. This is despite the fact that much of her training and research

was and is undertaken in the US and Europe, that she is an active member of academic associations registered in several different countries, and that she is preparing to take a sabbatical devoted to archival research in London and Geneva. When she writes for an English-language, on-line journal like the *Japanese Journal of American Studies*, she consciously writes for a potentially worldwide audience. This fictional professor is also, like the fictional visiting lecturer, a member of IASA. Perhaps, during the year in which they are working in adjoining offices and teaching the same students, the two of them collaborate in putting together a panel proposal for the next IASA world congress, meeting over beers in the university's faculty house. Their collaboration emerges on the conference program, however, not as something collegial, invented across a table, but as something *inter-national*, pulled together across an ocean, with one of them representing Japan and the other embodying the USA.

Obviously, maintaining (and making visible the maintenance of) geographical diversity on a world congress program or within an international association's executive is a good thing, and the fact that the most intuitive way to display that diversity tends to be by reference to national location is unsurprising. Nonetheless, the fact that the "worldwideness" of the conference and of the association is made visible primarily by reference to *national* affiliations, with the implication that individuals enter the international from below, as national representatives, both results from and contributes to the maintenance of an academic geography within which, as Marston and her colleagues point out, 'levels of scale are in danger of becoming "conceptual givens", reflecting more the contingency of socially constructed political boundaries and associated data reporting than any serious reflection on socio-spatial processes' (Marston, Jones, and Woodward, 2003: 422). In this way, within the scalar structure reinforced by IASA's performance of the 'worldwide' as the 'inter-national', individual scholars are expected to access the international from the level below, stepping up from and representing clearly distinct national positions.

SITES

Is it possible to be 'international' without being national? In their argument in favor of 'expurgat[ing] scale from the geographic vocabulary' Marston and her colleagues would certainly seem to suggest that it is worth trying to imagine these two conventionally distinct layers flattened out. But their argument does not suggest that this flattened-out space is a space of unchained fluidity: in fact, they characterize the openness celebrated by 'flow-enthusiasts' as a 'reductive visualization of the world as simply awash in fluidities', an alternative visualization that ignores 'the large variety of blockages, coagulations and assemblages [...] that congeal in space and social life' (Marston, Jones and Woodward, 2005: 422). So, in these terms, a non-national international would be a space that was neither rigidly scaled nor completely free-flowing: in fact, it would have to be a space amenable to constant reinventions made in response to constantly changing on-the-ground (or on-the-net, or in-the-mail) spatial relations, able to adapt all the time to new



'coagulations and assemblages'. One such coagulation might emerge, for example, when the two fictional professors started working in offices on the same corridor in the same university despite still being positioned in the ordering logic of the national (and conventionally international) scale in distant national territories. Of course, the collaboration and interaction of individual scholars is enabled not just by the physical proximities of sharing workspace or meeting at conferences, but also by the relational proximities enabled by online discussion lists, by long-distance co-authoring, by external examining, or by the deeply-buried networkings of the peer review system. In the course of all kinds of collaborations and interactions taking place in all kinds of different spaces, scholars individually generate their own unique academic geographies, taking up relationally-defined positions in various visible and invisible spatial contexts and combining particular elements of location, affiliation, and access to create highly idiosyncratic geographical positions linking multiple spatial dimensions.

As a result, when scholars interact or intersect, it is not only different individuals but also different multi-dimensional geographies that are being brought into contact and woven together, even if only for a few moments. The resulting highly unstable social sites emerge in a space the geography of which is enormously oversimplified when imagined in the terms of the inter-national layer of conventional academic scale. So in this sense the flattening together of the international and the national does not necessarily reduce complexity or deny difference but rather, by rendering less powerful the conventionally dominant national distinction, it enables many more differences and 'switching points' of knowledge and power and energy to become visible. Each of these contingent sites that emerge through practices cutting across scale and distance are, of course, constantly interacting with other complex sites, merging and separating, coagulating and assembling. This seems to me to be akin to what Marston, Jones, and Woodward are describing in their discussion of locations that are locations despite not being, in fact, literally (physically) located: *milieu* or sites 'actualized out of a complex number of connective, potential processes'. In this understanding

a social site is not roped off, but rather [...] inhabits a 'neighbourhood' of practices, events and orders that are folded variously into other unfolding sites. Thus, its complexity arises as the result of a number of different interacting practices—each potentially connected to other contemporary sites—and orders. (Marston, Jones and Woodward, 2005: 426)

While this may sound very abstract, what I am reaching toward here in linking this concept of the 'social site' to the geography of the international or non-national association is the muddy opposite of abstraction. The language of 'event-spaces' or 'non/localized sites' may be unfamiliar, and the concepts may sound theoretical, but in practice, at ground level, we inhabit and practice the worldwide academy in exactly this messy, scrunched-together, folded-and-ripped kind of a way. This is certainly no more theoretical and abstract than the elegant simplicity of the local-regional-national-international scale; it's just a different way of sorting chaos.

The non/localized geography of sites that Marston, Jones, and Woodward propose to take up as a replacement for what they regard as the inhibiting architecture of hierarchical scale is intended to facilitate, they say, a greater range of 'entry points' into progressive politics and to make imaginable a non-scaled space that enables greater connective flexibility between social sites. They are focused on the issue of engagement with and resistance to global capitalism, not the geography of academic organizations. But leaving aside entirely the problem of whether it is possible or even responsible to work with the concept of non-scaled sites of resistance, I think the concept of 'entry points' invoked here can be usefully applied to the question of IASA membership, as can the push toward an unscaled space, which in the context of IASA might be viewed as worldwide interactions not assumed to be of necessity sorted by reference to national positions. It seems to me likely that some potential IASA members will be drawn to the organization precisely because of its relative openness and lack of a long-established, hierarchically scaled internal structure. The two fictional professors for whom national affiliation was such an oversimplification, for example, might well be attracted to an organization that was not-national, an organization in which unscaled assemblages and coagulations were expected and acknowledged. They might, for example, be attracted to an IASA in which the 'international' was understood in terms of openness of access rather than in terms of scaled structure.

Part of this openness is related precisely to the fact that, although IASA has so far tended to narrate its global reach and geographical diversity in terms of the inter-national, it is nonetheless possible to enter IASA directly, without going through a national association, and without declaring a national affiliation. For some members, one of the advantages of IASA is surely the extent to which it is *disconnected* from the structures of national associations. Individual members are able to sidestep the social and institutional complexities and obligations and hierarchies of sub-national, national, and multinational associations entirely and enter IASA from anywhere at all, several places at the same time, or nowhere in particular. Absent a supporting subscale of national territories, each with their own domestic center, IASA becomes able to generate a non-national, multi-dimensional space in which there are no centers at all, only contingent sites of interaction, and in which everybody is equally co-present in the here and now.

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