

SCGRG SPONSORED SESSIONS AT RGS-IBG 2017

'Placing' knowledges in Social and Cultural geography: Postgraduate Snapshots

Phil Emmerson (University of Birmingham, UK)
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Abstract

Knowledges of social and cultural phenomena are diverse, contested and geographically contingent. Therefore, the ways social and cultural geographers approach the construction, production and curation of these knowledges demands acute critical attention to both the locations from which knowledge emerges and the locations in which it is presented. S&C geographers should also be attuned to the translational processes that connect these locations (or dislocate them), and to the tacit and pervasive power structures through which both the historical and contemporary "academy" is constructed and reproduced.

Our belief is that social and cultural geographers are well placed to engage with the multiplicity of knowledges within the world, aided by a widening of the empirical, methodological, and theoretical resources being adopted, including, but not limited to: co-production, activism, art, indigenous knowledges (broadly defined), and 'alternative' writing styles. This session thus explores the ways in which Postgraduate Social and Cultural Geographers are negotiating the problematics, difficulties, and potentials of engaging with, and producing multiple knowledges both at the 'core' and 'peripheries' of the 'academy'. Each presentation will be centred around a "Snapshot" (image, artefact, soundbite, etc.) which will form a focal point for the presentations.

Educational Landscapes: Nature, Place and Moral Geographies

Jo Hickman Dunne (Loughborough University, UK)
Sarah Mills (Loughborough University, UK)

Abstract

Geographers have explored both the historical connections between nature, education, rural space, adventure, childhood and youth (Philo 1992; Phillips 1997; Matless 1998 [2016]) and the contemporary use of the 'great outdoors' to foster 'life skills' in informal educational settings (Fjørtoft 2001; Mills & Kraftl 2014). These ideas require fresh attention across different educational landscapes, not least with the (re)emerging moral geographies of learning 'British values' and 'character education' in UK schools. This session critically responds to recent calls for greater use of outdoor environments in different educational spaces, especially (but not exclusively) for children and young people. In so doing, the session seeks to engage with long-standing debates in geography on theories of nature, landscape and place.

As 'nature' is used in multiple ways in diverse educational landscapes by a variety of individuals, groups and organisations, we can ask critical questions of the visions, understandings and (embodied) histories of 'natural' spaces. Indeed, Russell (1999) reminds us to consider 'what nature and whose experience?' and as Kraftl (2013) notes, certain natures are always privileged as learning spaces and others are deemed undesirable or inaccessible. Overall, this session seeks to combine a focus on educational spaces with wider debates in social and cultural geography on landscape, practice and (outdoor) mobilities (Merriman et al. 2008) as well as theories of nature, embodiment and in/exclusion (Macpherson 2009; Tolia-Kelly 2007).

Geographies of the body and technology

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Abstract

Research foregrounding the body has served to challenge and re-orientate geographical scholarship. Within political geography, a focus on bodies has opened up alternative sites and senses of the geopolitical (Martin 2010; Pain 2015; Smith et al 2016). In geographical research on economy, emphasis on the body has illustrated alternative locations and experiences of work (McDowell 2015), as well as providing a lens to view the circulations associated with everyday consumption practices, such as clothing and food (Crewe and Martin 2016; Slocum 2008). Broadly, in such scholarship the body poses questions of where the limits of 'political' and/or 'economic' activity are drawn; which movements across and within these boundaries count, and how such borders and their transgressions are rendered visible. These two strands of geographical thought on the body are influenced by (and in turn influence) cultural geographies that have stressed the relational emergence and leaky constitution of forms of embodiment (Bissell 2015; Colls and Fannin 2013). Therefore this 'cultural' scholarship on the body might be framed as beginning with a different question. Rather than asking how the body changes geographical understandings of geopolitical and economic space, the question becomes how does the body 'itself' change in relation to a variety of spaces and spatial senses.

In this session we seek to interrogate this problem of how bodies question geographies and how geographies challenge bodies through a focus on technology. This builds on research examining embodied spatial experience with technologies, perhaps through considering how (digital) technologies can be understood as ('subject'-producing) 'objects' of study (Kinsley 2012; Ash 2013), but also accounts of technology as, or in interaction with, 'backgrounds' of everyday life, such as on transport, in the home, at work (Bissell 2010; Dodge and Kitchin 2009; Valentine and Hughes 2012, Richardson 2016). Building on this scholarship, we are interested in how geographies of the body and geographies of technology might intersect, and thus more broadly, what geographical accounts might bring to understandings of contemporary forms of social life with technologies.

Dance and the geographies of (de)coloniality

Sofie Narbed (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK)

Abstract

This session explores dance as a key site for understanding, contesting, and remaking relations of coloniality, understood as a 'matrix of knowledge, power, and being' (Maldonado-Torres 2012; see Quijano 2000, Mignolo 2007). Papers interrogate the place of these relations in the (re)production of dance(d) knowledges in theory and in practice, and move towards critical approaches for their decolonisation. In so doing, they examine danced relations between the Global North and Global South, and trace the complex work of dancing bodies in producing, negotiating, and remaking these relations in their practice. In these discussions, the session also has the specific aim of bringing Geography into conversation with scholarly perspectives from Dance Studies. The papers together thus form part of a wider examination of how dialogues across disciplines, across geographical perspectives, and across theory and practice, might contribute to the expansion of the ways dance(d) knowledges are thought, approached, and understood.

Non-representational geographies: practices, pedagogies and writing

Andrew S. Maclaren (University of Aberdeen, UK)

Abstract

Vannini has described non-representational theories as 'one of the contemporary moment's most influential theoretical perspectives within social and cultural theory' (2015, p. 2). However, if non-representational theories are to be truly considered in this vane, there needs to be further consideration of how they are practiced, taught and written (Lorimer, 2015) with responses to the following questions to be developed:

1. 'what is the nature of praxis' (Ibid, p.181) in an expanded community of scholars using non-representational theories, particularly with the numerous parallel calls in the various sub disciplines of geography?
2. how might we not forget students who are keen to learn and engage but often 'foxed by the prospect of venturing out alone' (Ibid, p.184)?;
3. how have non-representational theories affected the way geographers write and present their research?

This session seeks to explore these questions directly, by exploring perspectives from scholars of non-representational theories. It presents a paper session where current researchers can respond to these questions from their own perspectives through their research. This is followed by a panel discussion to offer a space where this triad of practice, pedagogy and writing may be reflected on through the various experiences of leading scholars of non-representational geographies and who reflect an 'expanded community' of non-representational scholars. The session hopes to contribute to the conference theme of decolonising geographical knowledge, by opening up non-representational geographies to those keen to engage with this 'influential theoretical perspective'.

(en)Countering change, (dis)Assembling placeness

Marc Welsh (Aberystwyth University, UK)
Samantha Saville (Aberystwyth University, UK)

Abstract

Place is a foundational concept in human geography conceived in different ways to do different analytical work. Place has been considered from humanist and experience-led approaches (Relph, Tuan, Creswell); as constructed sites of capital accumulation (Harvey); as dynamic and 'constantly becoming' (Pred, Thrift); as decentred and relational (Massey); and more practically, in terms of making places (Marsden, Healey). 'Place' retains conceptual and analytical power. We are interested in drawing together insights from different theoretical approaches that triangulate on the making and unmaking of place in an increasingly interconnected world. Do recent 'turns' and ontological re-framings offer novel ways to examine processes of continuity, change and rupture in places?

These three sessions draw together insights from different theoretical approaches that triangulate on the matter of place, its making and unmaking, in an increasingly interconnected world. Through a wide range of empirical work, the notion of place will be explored through more recent 'turns' and ontological reframings. This final session focusses on emerging research.

Muslim women's geographies – decolonizing discourses, re-writing everyday lives

Dr Christine Schenk (University of Oxford, UK)
Negar Elodie Behzadi (University of Oxford, UK)
Akanksha Awal (University of Oxford, UK)

Abstract

The migrant crisis, the war on terror, and the rise of Islamophobia in Western countries have once again brought the question of Muslim women at the forefront of public attention. Research has repeatedly challenged the caricatured and orientalist representations predominant in Western discourses (Abu-Lughod 2002; Mahmood 2005; Mahmood 2006; Abu-Lughod 2016). Geographers have specifically seized upon religion (e.g. Kong 2001; Hopkins 2009; Kong 2010; Tse 2013) to highlight how Muslim women shape new configurations of religion, politics and public life (e.g. Secor 2001a; Secor 2001b; Falah et al. 2005; Gökarıksel et al. 2010; Ehrkamp 2012; Gökarıksel et al. 2012; Williams 2012; Williams 2014; Gökarıksel et al. 2015). Grounded in post-colonial theory, such research has contributed to challenge the epistemic violence (Spivak 1988) of Western discourses that construct Muslim women as devoid of agency to justify an on-going politics of exclusion. Despite the contributions of this cross-disciplinary literature, there is still scarce knowledge on how women's everyday lives are affected by a contemporary geopolitical reshaping of religion, especially Islam (Abu-Lughod 2016) and how they react (Stewart 2007) through mundane practices to shape the extraordinary (Dwyer 2016). This session draws attention to Muslim women's everyday lives and mundane practices across place, space and scale in the context of the politicisation of Islam globally. We gather interventions from a range of feminist and geographical perspectives that include but are not restricted to the following:

- Ordinary affects of Muslim women's lives
- Contestations of the body and agency
- Multi-scalar activism by Muslim women
- Critical political economic approaches
- Intersectional approaches (gender, race, class, age, sexuality, ability, citizenship)

Critical perspectives on transnational education and knowledge mobilities in the Global South

Johanna Waters (University of Oxford, UK)
Maggi Leung (Utrecht University, The Netherlands)

Abstract

Over the past decade, geographers have been increasingly engaging with the impacts of internationalisation on higher education – particularly in relation to the international mobilities of students - but the implications of this for understanding 'knowledges' are still rarely debated. Transnational education (TNE) is an especially fascinating development within global trends in the internationalisation of higher education, invoking a complex relationship between knowledge production, reproduction and exchange. In TNE, knowledge is usually acquired by students 'at home' through an international (and ostensibly mobile) institutional provider. What we have observed, very recently, is that TNE is being delivered and consumed within increasingly diverse social and geographical contexts, outside the main 'markets' for international education. The 'providers' of TNE are also, interestingly, diversifying beyond traditional centres of global knowledge production. This session considers the meanings and impacts of the growth and changes in TNE within the Global South, to ask, *inter alia*: how do the meanings attached to knowledge production/reproduction/exchange vary across space? What is the impact of TNE on local education and labour markets? How and why is TNE *consumed* in diverse settings? What does TNE in the Global South tell us about changes in international education more broadly? We are keen to receive abstracts from researchers interested in one or more of these questions concerning the relationship between contemporary TNE and knowledges.

For whom and what do we grieve, when and where: The geo-politics of diverse experiences of death, bereavement and remembrance: human and non-human

Ruth Evans (University of Reading, UK)
Beth Greenhough (University of Oxford, UK)
Philip Howell (University of Cambridge, UK)
Avril Maddrell (University of Reading, UK)
Katie McClymont (University of the West of England, UK)

Abstract

Politics are at the core of geographies of death, dying, grieving and memorialisation (Johnson 1994; Sidaway 2009; Stevenson et al 2016), with local and national governments acting as key providers of cemeteries and crematoria and commissioners of public memorials; likewise, immigration policy and welfare regimes impact on experience of bereavement. Yet the politics and political processes surrounding death and how these intersect with socio-cultural differences are under-examined and little articulated. This applies to groups marginalised by monolithic and intersectional exclusion from power; likewise it applies to the politics of what as well as who is 'grievable' in Butler's (2009) terms: which species, where and when? which environments and contexts? Conceptual, empirical and methodological papers explore the varied political dimensions of embodied, personal, socio-cultural, geo-political, environmental and species loss through a geographical lens, including the geopolitics of intersectional migration deathscapes; cemetery and crematoria needs in multi-cultural society; minority provision in the face of hegemonic spaces and practices; gendered, classed and ethnic memorialscapes; death and bereavement in the global South; cross-species grief; animal deathscapes; loss of biospheres and habitat; climate change; and dialogue between human and non-human loss.

Valuing Heritage in the Postcolonial City

Mark Boyle (National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland)
Andrew McLelland (National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland)

Abstract

City marketing - or the commodification of place with a view to selling that place to would-be investors, tourists skilled workers and so on - is a signal feature of the neoliberal and entrepreneurial city. Cultural and historical critiques of city marketing have questioned the ways in which local histories are often appropriated, silenced, and sanitised as part of an attempt to rebrand and repackage cities. In this session we wish to advance these critical engagements by placing under scrutiny the contested values which undergird heritage and landscape inventoring and conservation in the postcolonial city. Our specific focus is upon cities whose histories are inextricably wound up with imperial projects, past and present. This could include cities in colonial or metropolitan heartlands whose affluence, landscapes, and built heritage were shaped by colonialism and cities in colonial peripheries caught up in colonisation and bearing the stamp of colonial power, anti-colonial struggles, and decolonisation. We wish to examine how colonial heritages are valued in these city landscapes in the context of neoliberal development projects - which stories are told, which not, who gets to decide - and what this all means for landscape preservation and heritage management.

Papers are invited from across the Global North and in particular Global South which examine in the context of large development projects:

- The ongoing impress of colonial pasts, anti-colonial struggles, and postcolonial trajectories in contemporary landscapes in cities embroiled in complex colonial and postcolonial histories.
- How colonial landscapes are valued, inventoried and conserved in the postcolonial city
- Contestation and dissonant values in the heritage debates in the postcolonial city.
- The role of city marketing in shaping debates on heritage management, including the 'worlding' of landscapes in cities in the Global South.
- Methodologies (Geo-humanities and digital technologies) through which a wider range of social values might be included in heritage policy and practice.
- The meaning and implications of the recent rise to prominence of a historic urban landscape paradigm for heritage management in the post-colonial city.

A geography of small things: geographies of architecture beyond the high rise

Rachel Hunt (University of Durham, UK)

Julia Heslop (University of Durham, UK)

Abstract

Much of the recent body of work classified as geographies of architecture is directly or implicitly inspired by Jane M. Jacobs, who in 2006 called for attention to 'the geography of big things'. Her 'big thing' was a residential high-rise building. This 'self-conscious Recusit[tation] (Jacobs:1) of a geographical attention to buildings spawned new work, attending to topics including and beyond built form. Her work sought renewed attention to the thing, to its fragmented nature and to the networks involved in its production, effectively calling for work to understand that built things are themselves built of many things. As the title of this session suggests, while inspired by Jacobs' work, what we call for here are papers which instead offer a geography of 'small things'.

This session seeks to bring together researchers who are focusing on the smaller material entities in the built world, including, but by no means defined by huts, homes, sheds, shacks, cabins, yurts, barns, bothies and boats. This includes temporary structures, mobile accommodations, buildings which encourage a relationship with the world out with them, buildings which signify one's place in society, places which can be read as more than the materials from which they are made. Such a session will therefore seek to explore contemporary research with a geography of architecture and the way in which it is attending to new types of spaces.

(Re)Engaging Geographies of Religions, Spiritualities, and Faith

Stephanie Denning (University of Bristol, UK)

Richard Scriven (University College Cork, Ireland)

Abstract

Geographical engagements with religious/spiritual realms have recently ventured beyond 'official' sacred spaces and the Western Judeo-Christian tradition to incorporate a range of practices, scales, and spatialities - including theorising post-religious/post-secular landscapes, tracing religious/spiritual embodiments and identities, and attending to previously marginalised belief systems. The (re)discovery of societal and personal significance of faith has necessitated the deployment of fresh epistemologies to adequately examine the field. This session intends to interrogate recent trajectories and potential directions in the geographies of religion, spirituality, and faith. As posited by Dwyer (2016), "If there is an incipient geographies of religions and spiritualities what provocations will drive it and how will it enrich the discipline?" We invite papers that conceptually and empirically respond to this call.

Contributions could include, but are not restricted to:

What are the disciplinary potentials in engaging with religious-spiritual topics?

How is research adapting to studying formerly 'alternative' or 'marginal' faiths and spiritualities?

How can geographers engage with the religious/spiritual landscapes of the 'global south'?

Where, if at all, can sacred spaces be found? And, theorised?

How can the role of religion/faith/spirituality in public/secular spaces be explored?

How will religious identities and practices be impacted by shifting bio-political and policy concerns?