

RGS-IBG Social and Cultural Geography Research Group

Annual Report 2007

The group membership email list currently stands at 464 members, and is currently £xxxx in credit. In the Calendar Year 2007, the group supported a second successful workshop on Matter and Materiality (see Item 5, below), seven sessions at the RGS-IBG conference (see Item 6 below) and has put into action many of the plans for improving its web presence agreed at the AGM in 2006.

1. AGM, 2007

The AGM was held at the RGS-IBG conference, Kensington Gore, Thursday 30th August 2007. Chaired by Phil Hubbard, and minuted by Secretary Gail Davies, the meeting was attended by committee members Ben Anderson, Kezia Barker (postgraduate secretary), Amanda Claremont (new member), Rachel Colls, David Crouch (new member), Gail Davies, Russell Hitchings, Elaine Ho (new member), Peter Hopkins (membership secretary), Jamie Lorimer (new member), Emma Roe, and Louise Holt, in addition to four other members of the research group. Apologies were sent by Molly Hurley Depret (Communications and Website officer), Elaine Ho and David Land (committee members).

The AGM kicked off with a welcome from the Chair and his impressions of his first year as chair of the group. Acknowledging the enthusiasm of the committee and the range of sessions supported at the annual conference, he nonetheless raised a series of anxieties relating to (i) the lack of SCGRG presence on the web (and associated lack of paper or email newsletter); (ii) the need to ensure that the range of Group activities appeals to the widest possible constituency of social and cultural geographies, including, for example, demography, applied social, population, migration and historical cultural geography, and (iii) the need to ensure the participation of early career researchers and postgraduates through targeted events.

Further agenda items related to progress on the website (see item 2, below); the idea of the SCGRG making more active links to schools and potential pre-HE audiences for social and cultural geography; feedback on the first Materialities workshop (see Annual Report 2006 for details); the potential for a residential reading weekend (to be held at Hebden Bridge, 2008, organised by Kezia Butler and Elaine Ho) and ideas for future conferences as well as RGS Annual conference sessions.

The other business at the AGM related to a statement of financial standing (see item 6, below) and the transfer of the role of Treasurer from Chris Wilbert to Louise Holt. The committee also accepted nominations for new committee members, welcoming four new members (see above).

2. Website

After a period of some years without a website, the SCGRG launched its new website in October 2007. Currently hosted on googlepages.com server (and hence incurring no costs), and maintained by Molly Hurley Depret this website is still under construction but already acts as a useful hub for members of the group. Pages are currently devoted to news/announcements, postgraduate affairs, publications, schools & teaching and committee profiles (see: <http://scgrg.web1.googlepages.com/>) The Chair of the SCGRG has also set up a blog to provide a less formal mechanism for reporting on the group's activities and providing news on issues that may be of interest to the group (see: <http://scgrg.blogspot.com/>)

3. Revised mission statement

In response to discussion at the AGM, a new mission statement/group description was refined, as follows:

This group embraces researchers and activists interested in the way the world works to produce social and cultural difference, engaging with key social science debates concerning identity, subjectivity, citizenship and belonging. The group's collective work emphasises the connections between material and immaterial geographies, stressing that social injustice, poverty, and exclusion cannot be divorced from questions of representation and imagination.

Likewise, it considers the shifting relations between cultural artifacts, practices and landscapes as they take shape in a mobile and seemingly global era. The group is committed to encouraging inclusive and accessible knowledges, destabilising hierarchical and centred knowledges in favour of those which foreground diversity and difference.

As such, the group is keen to promote areas of geography that have often been 'Othered' within the discipline, such as geographies of the lifecourse, the body, sexuality, gender, disability, ethnicity and religion, as well as geographies of the non-human and the 'animal'. The group promotes social and cultural geographies through regular events such as sessions at the RGS- IBG Annual Conference and conferences on contemporary issues in social and cultural geography. The group has an active postgraduate membership and is keen to support events aimed at new career and emerging researchers.

This statement can now be found on the group pages on the RGS website (<http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Research+and+Higher+Education/ResearchGroups/Research+Groups+N+-+Z/Social+and+Cultural+Geography.htm>); on the SCGRG website (<http://scgrg.web1.googlepages.com/>) and on the SCGRG blog (<http://scgrg.blogspot.com/>)

4. Annual Conference Sessions 2007

Sixteen sessions were sponsored or co-sponsored at the 2007 RGS-IBG Conference, London: *Geographies of sleep/sleepiness* (convenors: Peter Kraftl and John Horton) *Geographies of Enchantment* (two sessions, convenors: Tara Woodyer and Hillary

Geoghegan); *Creativity and its Geographies* (two sessions, co-sponsored by EGRG, convenors: Russell Prince and Charles Rolfe) *Animating geographies* (two sessions and a panel, convenors Hannah MacPherson and Dan Swinton); *Geographies of Palestine and Palestinians* (two sessions co-sponsored by PGRG, convened by Chris Harker and Liz Mavroudi); *Senses and Memory* (co-sponsored by HGRG, convened by Tom Barton); *Alain Badiou and human geography* (two sessions, convenor: Marcus Doel); *Masculinity, intersectionality and place* (three sessions, convened Peter Hopkins and Greg Noble) and a panel – *Media space beyond representation* (convenor: Scott Rogers).

The group also co sponsored (with four other groups) a session on *Corporate responsibility in Geography: ethics, power and responsibility in our workplaces* (convened by Larch Maxey and Paul Chatterton). This was considered important in the light of discussions at the 2006 AGM, and subsequent (virtual) debates about the corporate sponsorship of the RGS-IBG by organisations regarded by many as environmentally irresponsible. This debate also broached questions of the politics of publishing (not least in the light of Elsevier's decision to abandon its sponsorship of defence/arms fairs in the wake of a sustained academic protest). However, the remit of the session went beyond this to consider questions of individual, departmental and University corporate responsibility. It is felt that such issues should be debated within the context of the RGS-IBG conference, noting that the RGS constitutes the public face of geography in the UK, and has a responsibility to promote ethically-sound and morally-defensible engagements.

Convenors of all sessions were asked to provide a short report on their sessions but only four were ultimately forthcoming:

1) Animating Geographies, Convenors: Dr. Hannah MacPherson, Royal Holloway, University of London and Dr. Dan Swanton, Durham University
These sessions brought together a set of papers committed to methodological experimentation and innovative styles of presentation in an attempt to animate geographical research. The ethos of the sessions was envisioned as a response to recent criticisms that in cultural geography our research methods and modes of presentation have failed to keep up with much of our theoretical talk. And so the papers enrolled video footage, montage, creative writing, alongside methodical hybrids (combining interview material, participant observation, participant diaries, etc.) to capture affective intensities, to grasp the practised nature of landscape and architecture, and grasp the force of things. A panel discussion responding to the papers and the ethos of the sessions sparked off a wide-ranging and thought-provoking debate, that spoke to a particular momentum in cultural geography (a new new cultural geography?) captured at the conference by the number of papers and sessions inspired by non-representational theory, other theories of practice and questions of enchantment and There was considerable positive feedback regarding the engaging and novel ways in which researchers were now attempting to convey their research material. However, while a spirit of experimentation was applauded some panellists also cautioned that a clear rationale was required for adopting, what can be very time consuming ways of capturing and re-presenting research. The session also sparked a debate amongst panellists about what concepts of animation and animatedness can do for geographical

thought and research. Overall the panel discussion and papers involved a wide-ranging and stimulating set of ideas for the future of animating geography.

2) *Creativity and its Geographies*. *Convenors: Charlie Rolfe, University of Bristol and Russell Prince, University of Bristol* This was well attended, with an audience of around thirty for each of the two sessions. The double session evidenced a number of interesting ideas and debates. A strong focus was the deployment of creativity in policy discourses through new concepts such as the 'creative industries', the 'creative class' and the 'creative city'. The papers engaged directly with the concept of 'creativity' and 'the creative' to ask how it was being translated into policy practice, whose interests these translations served, what they disguised and distorted, and what kinds of social formations they envisioned. The papers were suggestive of the dangers, failings and distortions of creativity as it relates to policy discourse, but there were also hints at the possibilities of creativity as both discourse and praxis. The sessions suggest that there is now a complex engagement with the concept of creativity in geography that provides insights and asks questions of its manifestation in social, cultural and economic spaces.

3) *Media spaces beyond representation*, *Convenor and Chair: Scott Rodgers, Open University* This session began with the basic premise that, although there have been intermittent calls for a better understanding of the geographies of media over the past two decades, the most recent coming-together of geographical research on media was overwhelmingly preoccupied with questions of representation. The purpose of this panel discussion was therefore an attempt to move beyond such representational media spaces, and to identify and perhaps consolidate some new directions on the geographies of media.. First, the panel was asked to consider how some of the recent interests amongst social and cultural geographers in questions of ontology might connect to the study of media, especially via various theories of social practices, materiality, the nonhuman and emotion/affect. Secondly, panellists were encouraged to engage with the long tradition – and more recent surge – of interest in other disciplines (e.g. media studies, cultural studies, social anthropology, and media sociology) at the crossroads of media and space. Finally, the panel was asked to critically reflect on the dispensability of representation, or, whether some reconstructed notion of representation might be central to studying the spatialities of media. The panellists' remarks and subsequent open discussion crossed an array of topics – from activism and publicity to emotion and mediated experience – and raised some interesting questions about 'do it yourself' media as a form of academic expression, production and political activism.

4) *'Senses and Memory'*, *co-sponsored by HGRG and convened by Tom Barton (Royal Holloway)* The principle aim of this session was to provide an opportunity for people to consider the value of a multi-sensory approach to the world and its relationship with memory's complexly spatial nature. The five papers presented brought together scholars from geography, media & film, and sociology, indicating the diverse range of interests in the principle themes. The session was well attended and highlighted the breadth and depth of subject matter available to scholars who take an interest in all of the senses and the

complexity of memory. More importantly, however, the session illustrated the potential for interdisciplinary engagement that might be developed in these areas of research.

Overall, the number of sessions sponsored or co-sponsored at the 2007 conference by the SCGRG was the largest ever, and underlines the continuing centrality of social and cultural geography in the discipline. Further, the range of topics and approaches was broad, and touched upon issues likely to be of interest to many geographers, not just those in the subdiscipline. In this sense we are disappointed that the RGS allows the SCGRG the same number of sessions as are less well-populated study groups, but gratified that in 2007 we were ultimately able to give our support to all but one of the session proposals we were given.

4. Materiality workshop

A workshop held at Durham University, Dec 19th 2007, 10.00-17.00

This was the second of a series of three linked workshops on the theme of matter/materiality, sponsored by the Social and Cultural Geography Research Group of the RGS-IBG and made possible through a conference support grant from the RGS.

The first workshop was organised by Ian Cook (Birmingham), Ben Anderson (Durham) and Joanne Maddern (Dundee) to introduce the theme of the workshop series; specifically, the intention was to consider some of the diverse ways geographers have attended to the material, not least in the wake of a non-representational moment or 'turn' which has problematised so many distinctions of nature/culture, object/agent, text/texture in geography.

Following on from that successful and well-attended event, this event explored a number of key problematics - excess/liveliness, agency/capacity, absence/presence, multiplicity/singularity – which are (or have been) central to the renewed centrality of the material in understandings of social and cultural geographies.

The morning kicked off with three excellent position papers on materialities. The first, from Steve Hinchcliffe, explored the way a garden project in Birmingham was assembled through different materialities, producing different, co-existing and overlapping garden spaces. The second paper was from J D Dewsbury, who explored the movement from flesh to meaning, offering some post-Deleuzian ideas about immanence and presence. Finally, Gail Davies offered a thought-provoking exploration of the different materialities and capacities of captive experimental mice, with a particular focus on the way that animal/cultural divides are worked through in debates surrounding the science of laboratory testing. These papers were followed-up with some lively and wide ranging discussion touching on issues of biopolitics, capacity and life itself (among others).

In the afternoon, group discussions were held in which objects were taken as the basis for exploring questions of how we can deal with issues of materiality, with questions relating to the materiality of visual culture, heritage, hybridity, landscape raised in a conducive environment. The workshop finished with contributions from discussants

Mike Crang, Paul Harrison and Ian Cook, and a general consensus that the event had been useful and productive as well as being thoroughly sociable. We look forward to the next, and final, Materialities workshop in 2008! Thanks to Rachel Colls and Ben Anderson for convening and running so efficiently, and to Durham University for hosting the event

In sum, this was a well-attended day characterised by the same inclusive approach to discussion and debate which characterised the first event. The palpable enthusiasm for the remaining workshop amongst all present suggests that this series of workshops is proving highly popular, with the number of early career researchers present underlining the value of these events in inculcating enthusiasm for social and cultural geography.

5. Extraordinary meeting, December 18th, 1700-1900, Durham University.

Given the changes to the process by which sessions at the RGS 2008 will be submitted and selected, it was felt necessary to consider the range of sessions submitted to the group for potential sponsorship, noting that the number of requests exceeded the 7 'whole' sessions we are allowed to sponsor by some margin. Members of the committee expressed some dissatisfaction with the new regulations, noting that the process again puts us in a difficult position in choosing between different. This task was made harder by the fact that some proposals were relatively provisional (i.e. a call for papers) whilst others arrived more fully formed (with speakers and abstracts).

Given this, the committee discussed the merits of all proposals at length in a two hour meeting, seeking to alight on a range of sessions that (i) represented the diversity of contemporary social and cultural geography (ii) supported both new and experienced researchers (iii) are potentially newsworthy and engaging with the theme 'geography matters'.

As last year, we felt we could support most – if not all- the sessions proposed. This left us with difficult decisions. In the event, we have actually returned to some of the session proposers to suggest that we cannot sponsor the session but that we feel other groups may be able to; where the sessions appears especially strong, yet did not necessarily appear to be centrally located within social and cultural geography, we have encouraged them to approach the Conference Chair, Noel Castree, in due course to secure a session at the conference.

A provisional list of sessions to be sponsored by the SCGRG at the 2008 Conference is hence as follows:

- Where species meet (1.0)
- Photographs matter (0.33, with possible co-sponsorship from PYGYWG and GLTRG)
- Social enterprise (1.0, with independent proposals co-joining)
- Migration and everyday life (1.0, possibly seeking co-sponsorship from PGRG)
- Technology (0.5. with possible co-sponsorship from HPGRG)

- Non-representational geographies (1.0, possible co-sponsorship from HPGRG and PGF)
- The event (1.0, possible co-sponsorship from HPGRG)
- Matters of interdisciplinarity (0.5, co-sponsored by HGRG)
- Fit cities (0.66 with co-sponsorship from GLTRG)

In some cases, we asked proposers to refine their original call for papers/session abstract for clarity; in one instance we have encouraged to similar proposals to combine into one session (i.e. Social Enterprise) given we felt unable to support two independent proposals on a similar topic. The full session details have to be submitted by the research group Chairs to the RGS on the 22nd of February 2008. To aid our administration, we have asked for full information a week before this date, on the 15th of February at the latest.

6. AAG session sponsorship

In relation to the group's remit to publicise social and cultural geography internationally, the group has decided to co-sponsor (with the AAG Political Geography Specialty Group) two panel sessions on the theme of 'The Politics of Affect' at Boston AAG 2008, featuring William Connolly, Jane Bennett, Nigel Thrift and Sarah Whatmore. Given it is sure to be a popular session, and that the group is currently running at a profit, it was decided this initiative was a welcome one, and £300 have been provided to support travel costs of speakers. If this initiative is considered a success, it may be a model to explore in the future, albeit that the remit of the group remains to serve UK-based researchers. The session convenors – J D Dewsbury, Ben Anderson, Emma Roe and Nick Bingham – have agreed to announce the group's sponsorship of the session and compile a report on proceedings for the website and Annual Report.

7. Financial position

Research Group Accounts Reporting Form 2006

Name SCGRG

Period 2007

Receipt and payments account

INCOME

RGS-IBG subvention £550

RGS-IBG grant(s)

Other grants

Subscriptions

Conference income -

Meetings income

Royalties

Interest

Other income (please give details)

EXPENDITURE

Committee expenses -

Conference costs

Meetings costs	-	
Newsletter costs		
Grants and awards		
Other costs (please give details)		
	-	
Total payments		
Net surplus/deficit		Surplus
Opening balance(s) - 1st January (or alternative date)	£3576.57	
Closing balances - 31st December	Xxxxx	

Closing balances comprised of:
 treasurer account
 deposit account

It would help if you gave the additional information for BACS payments
Address of branch where accounts are held Dundee University Branch, Balfour St. Dundee, DD1 4HB.
Account number(s) 156416
Sort code 83-1838

Name of treasurer LOUISE HOLT
Email address of Treasurer
Phone number of Treasurer

Prof Phil Hubbard, January 2008.