

History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group

*of the Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British
Geographers)*

Newsletter – Autumn 2016

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Please send any material for inclusion in the HPGRG newsletter and any suggestions for future content to Vanessa Schofield (v.f.schofield@durham.ac.uk). We aim to produce a newsletter in the Autumn each year so people send such information by end September each year. Also, we can circulate other information that falls outside of that timing via our mailing list, website, and twitter account.

1. Re-starting the Research Group Newsletter

It might seem odd to (re)launch a newsletter in an era where so many other forms of electronic communication are available. The HPGRG already uses a twitter account (@HPGRG_RGS), our website (<https://hpgrg.org.uk/>) and our mailing list to advertise the activities of the group and its members. However, there is often something quite ephemeral about such mediums; twitter feeds tend tick over at an unrelenting pace and emails are often deleted or archived not to be looked at again. As such, with our 'new' newsletter we'd like to give a little bit more permanence to things, hold them in place to be looked back on on occasion. We'd like it both to act as a means of communicating the work the group is doing now but also keeping a record of this that can be looked back on.

Part of the inspiration to do so came from the discovery of a batch of old newsletters (from 1995-2003) by a previous member of the committee (John Wylie) which were handed to Sam Kinsley, our current Treasurer. These provided an insight into the past of the committee, a past which dates from before many of the current committee's academic careers. And from the notes from conferences, calls for papers, and other accounts included in those newsletters, insights into the concerns of the discipline from that time (concerns that have by no means gone away) come through in very interesting ways.

So, to begin with, we intend to mirror the approach of the past newsletters. The letter (and future ones) will include, for example, information on the committee, minutes from the AGM, information on the sessions we have sponsored at the Annual Conference (including reports from session organizers), and calls for papers. We hope, though, that other things will feature in the newsletter as it becomes re-established. We welcome thoughts and ideas from our membership on this, as well as suggested content. In particular, we'd like to hear about events attended, books being published, or any other interesting activities our members are engaged in which might 'fit' within the newsletter. If you have such ideas, please email Vanessa Schofield (v.f.schofield@durham.ac.uk).

HPGRG Committee, December 2016

2. HPGRG Committee Membership 2016/17

Name	Email	Committee Position	Term dates (start and end years)
Dr. Paul Simpson University of Plymouth	paul.simpson@plymouth.ac.uk	Chair	2014-2017
Dr. Isla Forsyth University of Nottingham	Isla.Forsyth@nottingham.ac.uk	Secretary	2014-2017
Dr. Sam Kinsley University of Exeter	S.Kinsley@exeter.ac.uk	Treasurer	2013-2019
Dr. Thomas Jellis University of Oxford	thomas.jellis@ouce.ox.ac.uk	Website Editor	2013-2019
Dr. Julian Brigstocke Cardiff University	BrigstockeJ@cardiff.ac.uk	Membership Secretary	2014-2017
Diana Beljaars Cardiff University	beljaarsdn@cardiff.ac.uk	Postgraduate Liaison Officer	2016-2019
Dr. Pauline Couper York St. John University	p.couper@yorks.ac.uk	Undergraduate Dissertation Prize	2013-2019
Dr. Heike Jöns Loughborough University	H.Jons@lboro.ac.uk	Ordinary Member	2014-2017
Vanessa Schofield Durham University	v.f.schofield@durham.ac.uk	Communications Officer	2015-2018

Note: If you are interested in becoming involved in the committee, please do contact Isla Forsyth and / or Paul Simpson to discuss this. Or equally, election to vacant positions take place at the AGM which normally occurs at the Annual Conference in late-August.

3. Conference Report from 2016 Annual Conference

For the 2016 annual conference the committee asked those receiving sponsorship from the HPGRG to provide a short report on their session. These are included below.

Beyond interdisciplinarity: Situating practice in the art-geography nexus

The session *Beyond interdisciplinarity: Situating practice in the art-geography nexus* at the RGS-IBG 2016 was convened by JD Dewsbury, Merle Patchett, Owain Jones and Jethro Brice. We called the session because we believe something really exciting is unfolding in the current coming together of geography and art practices. We feel there are real possibilities here for developing new ways of thinking and working relationally the continuity of humans with material and nonhuman worlds, and of moving beyond representational and rationalist modes of thought and analysis. The potential is there. However, we also think there is a risk - that this potential is all too easily lost if we continue to think art and geography alongside each other as two pre-given disciplines, without committing fully to the space where art and geography are enacted as one, new, mode of practice. Too often in interdisciplinary encounters art is enrolled as a means of illustrating, or testing, a theoretical hypothesis - or conversely, geography is enlisted as a way of analysing or rationalising artistic achievement. Here we want to look at art and geography as clusters of available logics which can be challenged and reworked together to create new approaches in experimental research.

The day's three scheduled sessions addressed this provocation in different ways. Contributions ranged from the textual to the highly performative, and included sculptural, performative and video interventions. The session generated a sense of energy and enthusiasm which spilled over into an impromptu fourth session on the lawn outside. As a result, an online platform is now being created to support a future collaborative program including micro-residencies and a number of possible publication outputs.

Drones and geography: Moving beyond military applications

Organizers: Anna Jackman (University of Exeter), Neil Waghorn (Aberystwyth University)

Entitled 'drones and geography – moving beyond military applications', over two slots eight speakers offered a series of critical and conceptual, and user-led reflections of and on the drone. In bringing together both human and physical geographers in discussions of the non-military drone, a platform which is increasing being envisioned and employed in a variety of commercial, civilian, research, and recreational applications and contexts, we were interested in bringing into conversation different perspectives and approaches to a platform recurrently labelled the 'disruptive' technology of the present moment. In our first session, speakers variously interrogated the drone's (im)mobilities, its production and occupation of volumetric topographies and topologies, its visual

affordances and the sociality of its visual capture, and the nature of the drone's enrolment in various forms of non-military knowledge production and modes of ordering and/or control. Illuminating such discussions through fieldwork with a range of (institutional) drone users, speakers offered a range of alternative approaches to the drone problematic. In our second session, discussion turned instead to discussions from scholars themselves employing the drone as a research tool. Speakers outlined what such drones offered to those in the field, evaluating the benefits afforded, as well as the platform's limitations, and showcasing a range of innovative uses to which these accessible platforms can be put. Together, the sessions provided a stepping-stone forum, valuably bringing together a range of discussions of the drone in seeking to attend to the relative paucity of scholarship exploring a technology increasing (envisioned as) occupying the airspace that envelops us.

Geopolitics and geopower: rethinking the links between space and life in the anthropocene

Convenor/Chair: Brice Perombelon brice.perombelon@ouce.ox.ac.uk

This 80 minutes session focused on the interplay between geopolitics, geopower and new environmental thinking in relation to the geo-existential problematic of the Anthropocene. Four abstracts were accepted but only three papers were presented. They highlighted the 1- genealogical lineage of the concept of nature from a geopolitical perspective starting with Von Humboldt's 'Kosmos' (Philip Conway) 2- the possibility of conceptualising geopolitics from a multi- naturalist indigenous alterity, drawing from a metaphysical understanding of geopower (Brice Perombelon), and 3- The geo-normative archeology of the construction of the Arctic as a geopolitical space by the European Union (Michael Laiho). 15 to 20 people attended the event. This demonstrates not only its timely character but also a resurgent interest in the environmental current of geopolitics. Each presentation was followed by a 10 minutes discussion with the audience, which led to a concluding debate at the end of the session. The problematics of marginality and gender representativity in geopolitical fieldwork were raised, specifically as regards the question of whose epistemological assumptions -particular understandings of nature or space- this effectively sustained. The need to avoid the deterministic pitfalls of Kjellen's *Geopolitik* in order to develop an environmentally progressive approach to geopolitics was also identified as central in future attempts to pursue a research agenda in this area. This session thus successfully followed on from workshops organised on geopower during previous RGS-IBG annual conferences. It suggested a re-appraisal of this concept from a metaphysical-genealogical, rather than a post- materialist perspective. As such, this session will surely lead to further reflections on the explanatory validity of geopower in the new geopolitical context generated by the Anthropocene.

Post-phenomenological Geographies: methods and styles of researching and writing the human

The proposal of these two sessions, organised by James Ash (Newcastle) and Paul Simpson (Plymouth), was motivated by an apparent gap within recent work which adopts post-phenomenological ways of thinking about embodiment, materiality, and subjectivity. Namely, what methodologies and methods might be appropriate to conduct post-phenomenological research? These sessions, which were composed on an introduction, 8 papers, and a discussion, and were attended by 40-50 delegates, aimed to address this gap by drawing together a range of papers that focus on post-phenomenological methods and methodologies. In response, the papers in the session addressed a range of key theme and issues pertinent to doing and writing post-phenomenological research. In the introduction, Ash and Simpson opened the sessions with a series of short provocations which sought to provide some background on these issues and, in particular, suggest that post-phenomenological methodologies might be as much about a form or style of analysis rather than being something associated with (less limited to) particular methods or techniques. In the first session - loosely focused on 'subjectivities' - such a concern of a certain style of analysis was developed through a discussion of a range of key methodological themes, including: agency and co-becoming in the context of research with children and young people (Blazek, Loughborough), perception and intentionality in the context of compulsive behaviours (Beljaars, Cardiff), how reflexivity might look for post-phenomenological subjectivities (Rush-Cooper, Durham), and questions of freedom and the sorts of reassuring atmospheres that might act upon bodies/subjects (Tedeschi, Venezia). Attention in the second session turned more towards various objects, matters, and technologies potentially significant to doing post-phenomenological research. Here, discussions covered various forms of photography and how, for example, photography might counter anthropocentric images of thought given the intensities they produce (Keating, Bristol), or how repeat photography of the same place over time might present a particular model of embodied presence and connection with past and present (Rossetto, Padova). Questions were also posed about less overtly material matters and encounters, including on how we can research people's attunements to space through sound (Pavia, Lisbon), and around how we can understand self-landscape relations whereby the mobile subject is not the proprietor of its journey (Williams, Bristol). The closing discussion covered a very wide range of ground, including the recurrent concern throughout many of the papers for what a post-phenomenological politics might look like (variously non-normative), to what adopting such theoretical frameworks does in the context of empirical research and why that is important given the onto-epistemological framing it provides.

Public Libraries and the geographies of knowledge

Dr Joanne Norcup (Session Chair and Convenor).

Motivation for this session came from the lack of explicit engagement historical geographers with an interest in the histories of knowledge, geographies of books, publishing and circulation of ideas have had with the various histories and geographies of the public library, and the current situation public libraries find themselves in Britain under central government 'austerity' politics since 2010 where changes to the funding of local authorities has seen a wholesale reconceptualisation of what the public library is conceived to be and the scale of de-investment of public library provision with the loss of a (conservatively) estimated 8000 professional librarians as well as a closure of on average two public libraries a day (CILIP 2015). As the words 'public 'library' become replaced with information / neighbourhood / community hubs' in local authority restructuring measures, the very meaning of what a public library is and does asks

questions of cultural geopolitical and educational scrutiny. Publishing the call for papers proved interesting in gauging interest in and engagement with themes of public libraries and geographies of knowledge. In the end, the session had the maximum 6 papers (10 minutes in duration) allowing time for further discussion and questions at the end.

The session began with an overview of the various ways in which geographers might engage with the geographies of public libraries and the timely nature of this engagement. (Jo Norcup). Margaret Hung reflected on the historical working geographies of public librarians and in particular how the professional role of the public librarian has changed in how they have been both conceived of and embodied. Ken Worpole's paper discussed the changing architectural designs of public libraries and reflected on the way spatial layout signalled changes in political and cultural ideologies about public learning practices and cultures of learning. Taking a slightly different tack, Richard Sobolweski considered the opening up of a private archive to public engagement giving particular attention to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. The final two papers, by Alice Corble and Katherine Robinson both of Goldsmith College Sociology Department noted the impacts of austerity politics in reconfiguring and reascribing the purpose of public libraries and the attended geographies of social exclusion and resistance to closures. While Corble noted the changing circumstances of Birmingham Central Library, Robinson focused attention on the geographies of library closures in the London Borough of Lambeth and the activism by 'free the ten' of community activism in attempting to save local library provisions and spaces.

The session dovetailed the theme of this year's conference well (nexus) given the multiple ways public libraries as both static and mobile spaces facilitate the flow of ideas and resources, most notably, ideas and knowledges. The session also complemented other sponsored sessions, most pertinently the session on Geographies of Austerity.

All who gave papers were involved as panel discussants in the remaining half an hour of the session which led to the beginnings of a number of interesting angles through which further discussion and research could be undertaken. Ongoing discussions with contributors and those who attended the session reveals interest in the establishment of a Public Libraries and Geographies of Knowledge Working Group at the Royal Geographical Society through which further discussions and research might be generated.

Many thanks to the HPGRG for enabling this session to take place.

The publication and consumption of geography textbooks

Convenors: Tim Hall (University of Winchester); James Sidaway (National University of Singapore)

Textbooks, it has been argued, shape disciplines. They certainly reflect disciplinary mores and fashions. Yet despite their importance to the discipline there has been limited critical and reflective discussion of the production and consumption of geography textbooks. This panel session, composed of seven textbook authors and editors

(Richard Yarwood (Plymouth University, UK), Nick Clifford (King's College London, UK), Innes Keighren (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK) Jo Sharp (University of Glasgow, UK), Pauline Couper (York St John University, UK), Mark Boyle (National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland) and Rob Inkpen (University of Portsmouth, UK)), and a publisher (Andrew Mould (Taylor and Francis Publishers, UK)), aimed to address this lacuna. The panel consisted of a series of short interventions on a specific theme by each member followed by questions from the convenors and audience. The range of issues covered was broad and included historical perspectives, highlighting the significance of the textbook for the shaping of Geographical knowledges, the Geography textbook as a site of contact between school and university Geography albeit one now largely lost under the neoliberalised exam regime that now predominates in the UK, the various pedagogies of textbooks and how they might be deployed by both students and teachers, the visibilities and invisibilities (of academics and editors) involved in the production of textbooks, the personal motivations of textbook authors and the institutional strains they often work under and the changing landscapes of textbook publishing. The set of presentations will become the basis of a special section in *Area*.

4. AGM minutes from 2015/16

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF GEOGRAPHY RESEARCH GROUP

Annual General Meeting

2016

13:10 to 14:25, Friday 2 September, RGS-IBG Sunley Room

1. Apologies

SK (report provided)

2. Minutes of 2015 AGM (PS)

Confirmed

3. HPGRG Sessions for 2016 (IF)

The HPGRG sponsored five session themes at the 2016AC as follows:

- Beyond interdisciplinarity: Situating practice in the art-geography nexus
- Drones and Geography: Moving Beyond Military Applications
- Geopolitics and geopower: rethinking the links between space and life in the anthropocene
- Post-phenomenological Geographies: methods and styles of researching and writing the human
- Public Libraries and the geographies of knowledge
- The publication and consumption of geography textbooks

4. HPGRG Research Group Guests for 2016 (IF)

This year we sponsored 4 guests as follows:

- David Chatton Barker (Beyond Interdisciplinarity: Situating Practice in the Art-Geography Nexus)
- Iain Biggs (Beyond Interdisciplinarity: Situating Practice in the Art-Geography Nexus)
- Ken Worpole (Public Libraries and Geographies of Knowledge)
- Margaret Hung (Public Libraries and Geographies of Knowledge)

5. HPGRG Accounts (SK)

Report from SK copied below.

The HPGRG accounts have returned to a less precarious state, following two years of very little spending.

We have caught up with retrospective and un-cashed cheques for dissertation prizes. We are in the process of returning the £500 group event grant from the RGS, with a view to reapplying for next year's annual conference.

So: we started the year with £1483.43, following the annual subvention of £285 from the RGS.

Outgoings are:

Last year's dissertation award prize money, cashed in May: £50.

We are returning £500 of our balance to the RGS.

This year's dissertation award: £50.

This will leave us with a health balance of: £883.43.

Happy to discuss suggestions for prospective spending but these must be made in writing to the whole committee(?).

6. HPGRG Dissertation Prize (PC)

The 2016 dissertation prize winner is Mirjami Lantto (University of Glasgow), with a dissertation titled 'Experiencing River Landscapes: the Affective Capacity of Landscapes and its Potential in Environmental Management'. We have added this dissertation to the HPGRG website and aim to add further dissertation prize winners (subject to permission).

We also commended Samuel Nutt (Durham University) "The Anxieties of Empire in Byron's Turkish Tales: Exploring the Fiction in Postcolonial Geography" for their excellent work.

There was also some discussion whether to do something similar to other research groups (such as the SCGRG) in terms of provide a years subscription to a journal in addition to the cash prize. There was also discussion over which journal would be most

fitting for the research group (suggested Progress in Human Geography, EPD or Geographical Journal).

Action : PS / PC to speak about pos journal addition

7. HPGRG Website (TJ)

There has been a drop in the number of site visits this year compared with last year. However, the twitter feed very useful in publicising activities (and diverts traffic to the site).

The HPGRG's newsletters for 1995-2003 have now been uploaded to the website.

Nicola Thomas suggested that IBG reports going back a long way should be available and could build on that archive

Action: PS to check with Sarah/Catherine (RGS) about this (and possibly Charlie Withers)

8. HPGRG Membership update (JB)

225 members, 20-25 new members this year.

9. HPGRG Newsletter – update (PS / VS)

Some discussion took place earlier in the year about this between PS and VS. Ideas for it include:

- Digitised copies of past newsletters to be put on website (done)
- Reports from the sessions we sponsor (asked for from this year)
- conference reports (not just RGS-IBG?)
- forthcoming events / cfps
- committee memberships
- publications
- AGM minutes

As such, is still a work in progress.

Nichola Thomas suggested more specifically commissioned content for the newsletter but PS noted 'baby steps' in getting a steady / reliable content stream going first.

Action: IF to chase up conference reports and pass them all to PS and VS. PS / VS to coordinate on production of newsletter

10. Discussion of Research Group Activities / Remit (All)

Prior to the AGM a range of questions were circulated by PS in light of recent discussions about the group's remit and a concern about 'missed opportunities' in terms of interest in the group / its activities. These questions were:

- 1) Is our name 'HPGRG' appropriate to our activities / role in the discipline, or could this be rebranded (include suggestions if you have them)
- 2) Do we need to concern ourselves with this or should we carry on as is?
- 3) How might we tap into theoretically inclined geographers more than we currently do?
- 4) Any other thoughts on the subject

A range of positions were received in response, ranging from no real perception of need to change, issues to questions over the relation to HGRG particularly (and to include them in discussion), to whether we need to consider targeting a reference to 'theory' or 'practise of geography' rather than just history or philosophy.

Also points were raised around whether we should just focus on what we do rather than on what we're called given that we already attract certain work. That said, questions were asked about our membership in that few historians of geography are even members of HPGRG.

Some of the committees assumptions about membership overlaps were confirmed by data provided by Nichola Thomas - there is a significant overlap between SCGRG and HPGRG members and HPGRG members (with some being member of all 3).

At the AGM discussion reflected these points and a general consensus emerged that: priority should be placed on creating an identity by 'doing things' rather than broader issues of constitution, title, etc.. Part of that was felt to already be reflected by dissertation prize topics (now better visible due to uploading of files), sessions sponsored, the newsletter, events, etc. and so to carry on with these and consider how they are (better) made visible.

11. Call for Sessions for 2017 RGS-IBG Annual International Conference (PS)

Back in London, Sarah Radcliffe Chair, but not sure of theme...

Action: IF / PS to coordinate on circulation of call for sponsorship in October.

12. Committee Membership Terms and Elections (PS)

A number of committee positions reached the end of their term at the AGM...

- Treasurer (ended 2016) - SK continuing
- Website editor (ended 2016) - TJ continuing
- UG Dissertation Prize (ended 2016) - PC continuing

Postgrad rep role has become available as VV has (or will imminently) no longer be a postgrad! Diana Beljaars had expressed interest in that post (though not able to attend the AGM). She was nominated / confirmed in post at the AGM.

Chair, Secretary, and Membership Sec. terms are up next year. Some discussions will have to take place over the coming year if replacements are needed.

Action: PS / IF: Succession planning (i.e. targeting individuals) if needed.

5. Call for Sponsorship: Annual Conference 2017

The History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group (HPGRG) invites suggestions for 12 sponsored sessions at the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2017 in London from 30 August to 1 September 2017.

The conference theme is “[Decolonising geographical knowledges: opening geography out the world](#)” and will be chaired by [Professor Sarah Radcliffe](#).

We welcome suggestions for sessions across our remit, interpreted broadly, as the histories and/or philosophies of human geography, physical geography and associated fields. We particularly welcome session proposals that seek to engage with geography’s theoretical and philosophical underpinnings, past, present, and future.

HPGRG sponsorship can provide promotion for your session, help manage timetabling clashes, and enable bidding for funding for research group guests and awards for postgraduate presenters in your sessions.

Please send the following information to HPGRG Secretary [Isla Forsyth](#) and HPGRG Chair [Paul Simpson](#) by **16 January 2017**:

- **title** of proposed session (up to 15 words), name and affiliation of organizers, and abstract of c. 200-300 words
- indication of proposed **format** (e.g. papers or panel discussion, number of papers, use of discussants; for possibilities of session formats, see [here](#))
- **number** of 1h 40 minutes slots requested (note, sessions may not normally occupy more than two timeslots)

We will inform session organizers about HPGRG sponsorship and further procedures in mid-January. The deadline for submitting complete sessions to the Society is **17 February 2017**. This would leave about five weeks for session organisers to send out a call for papers and finalise the session programme.

Please note that any sessions sponsored by the HPGRG will require the session organizers to provide a short (200-300 word) summary of what happened in their sessions for inclusion in the HPGRG newsletter.

The HPGRG committee looks forward to your submissions.