

# Anthropology of Britain Workshop - 15th January 2010.

## Representations and 'Realities'

Sheffield Hallam University  
Southbourne, Collegiate Cresc. Campus

### Programme and Abstracts



9.30	registration	
10.00	Introduction and Welcome	
10.10	Session 1: where we are	
10.10	Mapping the curriculum: representations of our intentions to teach	Richard Pountney, Sheffield Hallam University
10.35	(Researching) creative research: dialogues around practice-led research in the UK	Helen Cornish, University of Hertfordshire
11.00	(Un)excitable speech: ethnographic interviewing in the culturally-near workplace	Nigel Cox, Sheffield Hallam University
11.25	discussion	
11.45	coffee	
12.00	Session 2: understandings and imaginings	
12.00	"Non angli sed angeli": The representation of England as a missionary field	Richard Irvine, University of Cambridge
12.25	Religion and spirituality on mainstream British television	Ruth Deller, Sheffield Hallam University
12.50	discussion	
13.10	lunch posters are invited for this time	
14.10	Session 3: senses of place	
14.10	Taste Island Life: Reflections on the relationship between Whisky and Tourism Marketing in Images of a Place and People	Christine McCourt, Thames Valley University
14.35	Drifting Visions & Dialectical Images in a Northern City	Steve Spencer, Sheffield Hallam University
15.00	Representations and 'Reality': Hippies, travellers and the spaces between them.	Elaine Forde, Goldsmiths College
15.25	Senses of place: narratives of bird sounds and place-making amongst the British and the British Diaspora	Andrew Whitehouse, University of Aberdeen
15.50	discussion	
16.10	general discussion and summing up	
16.45	close	

Southbourne is at the 'top' of Collegiate Crescent Campus, on Clarkhouse road - that's 'top' both as north and as 'up the hill'. Details of Collegiate Cresc. Campus are online at <http://www.shu.ac.uk/visit/collegiate.html>.

## Abstracts

### Session 1: Where we are

#### **Mapping the curriculum: representations of our intentions to teach**

Richard Pountney, Teaching Fellow, SHU

This paper outlines work in progress of a doctoral study that is looking at course planning in Higher Education in one institution. It will focus on the work of academics to make representations of the curriculum during the process of preparing formal specifications of a course for validation and approval. One aspect of this, the attempt to articulate meanings, understandings and intentions in documents, is examined. In particular it will address the visual representations (maps, diagrams and other visualisations) that course planning teams are including in the formal specification for the course. It will discuss the extent to which the activity of forming these representations can address the difficulty of describing what may otherwise remain tacit, loosely described and bound in contextual understandings.

#### **(Researching) creative research: dialogues around practice-led research in the UK**

Helen Cornish, Non-traditional knowledge and communication,  
Department of Art and Design, University of Hertfordshire

Academic communities are part of the shifting and changing landscape of communities in Britain today. Changes in UK Higher Education over the last twenty years mean that the ways in which academic practices and communities are represented and represent themselves has been under scrutiny in numerous ways.

One aspect of this changing academic landscape is the emergence of practice-led research in creative disciplines, and the perceived challenge to traditional research this may pose, spanning doctoral and faculty interests. New models for academic practices in creative fields have generated heated debates about the status of creative practice and what constitutes research, as well as how contributions can be made to audit and funding bodies. Competing demands between academic and professional communities may be a significant factor in understanding uncertainties in this field.

The dynamics and processes of practice-led research are currently being investigated by the multidisciplinary Non-traditional Knowledge and Communication project based at the University of Hertfordshire. As an anthropologist and member of the project team, I will explore some key issues raised at two recent events for doctoral students carrying out practice-led research. In turn, these questions may also have some relevance for anthropological enquiry and practice.

## **(Un)excitable speech: ethnographic interviewing in the culturally-near workplace**

Nigel Cox

Postgraduate Research Student, Sheffield Hallam University

In this paper, I critically reflect on my performance of ethnographic interviewing. My ethnographic research is concerned with the constitution and regulation of disability discourse by junior or street-level administrators working in a Higher Education institute, a complex bureaucratic environment that is also my workplace.

My earliest entrances into ethnographic interviewing were troubled by my closeness to the subjects and my engagement in a field of enquiry that I characterise here as being 'culturally-near'. In culturally-near interviewing, a risk of collusion and complicity can be seen to arise in respect of the constitution of particular discourses 'on' the subject.

Collusion and complicity became unwelcome ghosts at the (interview) table and in the other places where my encounters with respondents occurred. These served to trouble my -and their- elucidation of cultural performances, and invited consideration of external knowledges and surveillances that served to constitute our talk in particular ways.

I increasingly became aware of myself and my respondents 'going beyond' active interviewing and reflexive 'norms'. Sometimes we exchanged 'permission' for certain types of talk, or even discussion of the nature of the interview itself. More specifically, our disability-related 'talk' perhaps illustrates what Butler (1997) may have characterised as 'excitable speech'.

## Session 2: Understandings, imaginings and spiritual representations

### "Non angli sed angeli": The representation of England as a missionary field

Richard Irvine

Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Abstract: Alongside the image of England as a secular country stands a different representation: that of England as a land ripe for conversion. At numerous points in its history, England has been described as a missionary field, its perceived irreligion treated as an opportunity to spread true faith, and plans drawn up for its Christian conquest. Can contemporary England be represented in this way? What might we learn from such representations, and how do they feed upon and challenge depictions of England as post-Christian, secularised, or somehow non-religious? I will begin by briefly re-visiting Bede's description of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, before turning to the work of the English Benedictine Congregation, among whom I have carried out ethnographic fieldwork. I will examine the missionary origins of the English Benedictines, and consider their 19th century claims to be "the direct and sole descendants and inheritors" of the Christian mission sent to the shores of Kent by Pope Gregory the Great in 597. Then, turning my attention to contemporary monasticism, I will look at changing ideas of what a 'mission to England' should look like. Finally, I will consider the wider picture of England as a mission territory, and the issues being raised by new kinds of missionary, including those from lands that had previously been the targets of English missionary activity.

### Religion and spirituality on mainstream British television

Ruth Deller, PhD Candidate, Sheffield Hallam University

What religions and beliefs are portrayed on British TV? How are they portrayed? What do viewers think of these portrayals? What are the intentions of the people making the programmes? Ruth's PhD research looks at factual programmes shown on mainstream British channels (channels run by BBC, ITV, Four, Five) during the 2000s, including *The Monastery*, *Make Me a Muslim* and *Around the World in 80 Faiths*. Through analysis of the programmes themselves, interviews with people involved in different aspects of production and audience research, this project is trying to gain an understanding of what TV has been saying about religion, spirituality and belief in the first decade of the 21st Century.

### Session 3: Places and Representations

#### Taste Island Life: Reflections on the relationship between Whisky and Tourism Marketing in Images of a Place and People

Christine McCourt, Thames Valley University

Nestled off the west coast of Scotland lies our magical Island of soft sea breezes, freshly caught shellfish and a bank that comes once a week. One road, one shop, one community, one fine single malt whisky distillery. The Jura spirit is a gift from nature – pure water from Jura's ancient Loch A'Bhaile Mhargiadh (loch of market village) and fresh coastal air as well as expert craftsmanship passed down through generations quietly perfecting this delicate Island malt.

This is the text found on a box of Jura single malt whisky. It seeks to create a multi-vocal image of the place and the people of Jura, taking in tradition, climate, indeed atmosphere. It is presented in idealised tones, playing on an implicit contrast with mainland Britain. The language used is very particular, singular and (surprisingly) oriented towards softness and delicacy.

After decades of declining population and feelings of economic and social marginalisation, whisky and tourism (often as whisky tourism) have become important to both the economy of the Southern Hebrides, and their self and 'other' representation. This paper will discuss the ways in which they trade on ideas of local culture and environment, but also contribute to these.

#### Drifting Visions & Dialectical Images in a Northern City

Steve Spencer, Sheffield Hallam University

The object of this study is the visual exploration of a city through accumulated visual representations and researcher-generated visual data (photographs, video and a website) developed during a series of critical, visual forays around the city of Sheffield. The paper will examine the uses of visual research methods to explore the often contradictory meanings and relationships in the urban landscape. The emphasis is on multiple methods including: indirect ethnographic sources, archives, media images, public art, buildings and objects and images of consumerism as well as direct ethnographic research to build up a composite understanding of an urban landscape in transition.



## **Representations and 'Reality': hippies, travellers and the spaces between them.**

Elaine Forde, Goldsmiths College, University of London

In the mid-90s a controversial Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill became an Act of Parliament. The Act was instrumental in restricting access to land and land rights for anyone in Britain who neither owned nor rented land. Effectively any lawful relationship to the land was to be mediated primarily by an economic arrangement.

This draconian restriction to the dynamic processes of dwelling had implications across society, but the act was levelled at one particular “group” which hitherto had not existed. Prior to the Act, popular media created a new category, which would come to represent in the popular imagination the diverse and divergent opposition to what was effectively a new form of alienation from common land. This representation was a convenient way to unite travellers, hippies, squatters, protest groups, those involved in the free festival circuit under one banner, and so the “New Age Traveller” was born.

This paper will explore how conservative political discourses found it useful to reify these groups into one categorical representation, and will explain how ethnographic research has shown division, divergence and stratification within this category that is crucial to understanding how, far from galvanising a “movement”, such a representation essentialised and politically disenfranchised British counter-cultures.

## **Senses of place: narratives of bird sounds and place-making amongst the British and the British Diaspora**

Andrew Whitehouse, University of Aberdeen

This paper is drawn from narratives received through the Listening to Birds project, which explores how people perceive and respond to bird sounds. Many narratives describe how people resonate with birds through sound, that is, how they attend to birds by listening as they go about their own activities. This resonance is integral to emplacement and a ‘sense of being’ and generates feelings of belonging, contentment and home. Listening to birds becomes focal to a whole bodily experience of the landscape. But when circumstances change so often do the bird sounds and this paper explores how people narrate their responses to these changes, comparing the stories of people who have moved between the UK and Australia and New Zealand, nations with contrasting avifauna. These describe the sometimes alienating, sometimes thrilling initial experience of birds sounding ‘wrong’ or different and how people then learn to relate to the different sounds and landscapes of a new home. I also explore the ways in which the sounds of the old homeland are remembered and what feelings this remembering stirs. These narratives are intensely personal but they describe aesthetic experiences of place and nation, defining and scrutinising how home should sound. Narrative representations, it is argued, are integral to experiencing the realities of place, an interaction that forges an intimate sense of companionship with other species and with the landscape.