



# Institute for Culture & Society Pre-Print Journal Articles

## **Editorial: Emotional Geographies**

**Kay Anderson and Susan Smith**

**The definitive version of this article is published in:**

Anderson, K. & Smith, S. 2001, 'Editorial: Emotional Geographies', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, N. S 26(1): 7-10.

**The definitive version of this article is available online at:**

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1475-5661.00002/abstract>

(institutional or subscribed access may be required)

**The journal *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* is available online:**

[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1475-5661](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1475-5661)

(institutional or subscribed access may be required)

**doi:** 10.1111/1475-5661.00002

Copyright remains with the Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers)

### **Disclaimer**

Please note that this is an electronic, pre-print version of this article produced by the Institute for Culture & Society, University of Western Sydney, in accordance with the requirements of the publisher.

Whilst this version of the article incorporates refereed changes and has been accepted for publication, differences may exist between this and the final, published version. Citations should only be made from the published version.

### **User Agreement**

Copyright of these pre-print articles are retained by the author. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article to facilitate their own study or non-commercial research. Wider circulation and distribution of the material and/or use of it in profit-making activities is prohibited.

URLs to access this pre-print version can be freely distributed:

[www.uws.edu.au/ics/people/researchers/kay\\_anderson](http://www.uws.edu.au/ics/people/researchers/kay_anderson)

## **Editorial: Emotional Geographies**

**Kay Anderson**

Durham University

**Susan Smith**

Edinburgh University

There has been talk recently about a ‘policy turn’ in geography; about giving the concept of relevance a new lease of life. This is timely, coming as it does, in the wake of increased political opportunities for academic engagement in policy formation (Peck 1999; Massey 2000). But it also expresses growing frustration with those aspects of cultural geography which seem (to some) to be esoteric, inward looking and apparently oblivious to any ‘real’ world in which injustice abounds. It is hard, on the one hand, not to sympathize with some of the sentiments behind Hamnett’s (1999) quest for a ‘geography without origami’; or with Martin’s (2001) and Peach’s (forthcoming) concerns that attending to the flexible niceties of a fluid and open social world can divert attention away from a range of more enduring political and economic problems (cf. Smith 1993). It is encouraging, on the other hand, that the flurry of editorials, special issues and ad hoc commentary which now seek to rescue geography’s relevance is so attentive to the human dimensions of public policy: to the way that ‘relevant’ policies may have to be small in scale, humanizing in intent, embedded in context, enacted through bodies and so on (e.g. Pollard et al. 2000; Swyngedouw 1999). Our concern, however, is that as the policy-relevant movement increasingly distances itself from the ostensibly narcissistic extremes of cultural studies, a concept at the heart of the latter, yet (in our view) crucial to the former, will fall by the wayside.

In recent months, together and in our individual research, we have been reflecting on the extent to which the human world is constructed and lived through the emotions. In doing so, we have been forced to confront the glaringly obvious, yet intractable, silencing of emotion in both social research and public life. We are hardly alone in arguing that this suppression produces an incomplete understanding of the world’s workings, or in claiming that to neglect the emotions is to exclude a key set of relations through which lives are lived and societies made (cf. Williams 2001; Neu 2000; Pugmire 1998). In human geography, however, what little talk of emotion there is occurs squarely in the cultural (and often feminist) corners of the discipline (Koskela 2000; Nash 1998; Smith 2000; Widdowfield 2000; Wood forthcoming). Neither the vocabulary nor the concept of emotional geographies appear to have a place in the return to ‘relevance’. We contend, however, that this neglect leaves a gaping void in how to both know, and intervene in, the world.

Emotions are an intensely political issue, and a highly gendered one too. The gendered basis of knowledge production is probably a key reason why the emotions have been banished from social science and most other critical commentary for so long. This marginalization of emotion has been part of a gender politics of research in

which detachment, objectivity and rationality have been valued, and implicitly masculinized, while engagement, subjectivity, passion and desire have been devalued, and frequently feminized. In the light of numerous influential critiques of the politics of enlightenment thinking it is perhaps surprising that the new policy turn in geography has not seemed more open to post-rationalist styles of thinking. As it is, thinking emotionally is implicitly cast as a source of subjectivity which clouds vision and impairs judgement, while good scholarship depends on keeping one's own emotions under control and others' under wraps.

A consequence of this is that emotional relations tend to be regarded as something apart from the economic and/or as something that is essentially private, and does not substantially infuse the public/policy sphere. In some senses, moreover, this is reinforced by the most obvious route into emotional geographies, which is gained through settings where the emotional is routinely heightened, for example in musical performance, film and theatre, spaces of mourning and so on. The aim here is to find clues about the emotional content of social relations either from people whose professional lives are all about evoking emotion, or from people whose emotions are, for a time, brought to the fore by personal joys or tragedies. At particular times and in particular places, there are moments where lives are so explicitly lived through pain, bereavement, elation, anger, love and so on that the power of emotional relations cannot be ignored (and can readily be appreciated). Attempting to inhabit these explicitly emotional spaces contrasts with more conventional models of social research whose settings are selected to cast light on political behaviour, economic rationality, class relations and so on – areas of public life whose emotional content is usually (deliberately) played down.

An emphasis specifically on emotionally heightened spaces may usefully illustrate the way that social relations are mediated by feelings and sensibility. It may also provide the experience and expertise researchers need to track emotional geographies into some less obviously emotional domains of life. But this approach can also be complicit with a wider tendency to separate out and segregate the emotions, keeping them outside the mainstream of both scholarship and policy. To tackle this, we want to argue for a fuller programme of work, recognizing the emotions as ways of knowing, being and doing in the broadest sense; and using this to take geographical knowledges – and the relevance that goes with them – beyond their more usual visual, textual and linguistic domains.

What possibilities are there for developing a geographical agenda sensitive to the emotional dimensions of living in the world? What happens to conventional human geographies when we embrace their emotive topographies, their 'structures of feeling', in the words of Raymond Williams (1977, 132)? And can we be sure that the effort it takes to answer these questions will be worth the journey – that what we find will be conceptually and practically 'relevant'? Below we sketch a reply to these questions – some heartfelt thoughts on post-rationalist geographies, which suggest that judgements about the nature of proper research and the scope of 'real' geography be made with feelings (rather than without them).

In economic geography and employment studies more generally, for example, workplace performance and productivity are generally conceived of in terms of wages, human capital, working conditions and so on. Yet, absenteeism, as well as the quality

and quantity of employees' output, can depend critically on uncharted emotionally-charged personal relations (both at home and at work). In particular what happens at work may depend on family dynamics and on life at home, on how much control an employee has over their working life and employment relations, on their experience of journeys to work and so on. In short what happens at work may depend on the most personal, private and emotionally-present intricacies of a worker's complex life. To leave these out of the productivity equation is to leave half the analytical challenge unmet.

A similar point can be made in relation to housing studies, where housing transactions are largely cast in terms of supply, demand, profit, loss, and to a lesser extent preference structures (taste and aesthetics). In fact house buying and selling has been recognized for many years by medical sociologists as a key stressful life event. The process is shot through with emotional relations (including humiliation, shaming, anger, pride, greed) between a host of parties, including buyers and sellers, agents and brokers, lenders and advisers. These emotional relations are rarely acknowledged in the conduct or dissemination of research, and their impact on housing outcomes is virtually unknown. It is hardly surprising that we continue to be puzzled by the dynamics of housing market competition and its cycles of boom and bust, when its most intimately relevant (emotional) logics are so routinely set aside.

A further ramification of this concerns the ethics of public policy. Generally, when key public sphere decisions are made, for example to effect the pit closures in the English North-East, the emotional impacts and costs do not feature in the decisionmaking calculation. There is no requirement to bring the privately emotional into the rationally public, despite the obvious interpenetration of these spheres. While we recognize that many of the people affected by these decisions may not want their private emotions made public (and here there is much to discuss), our point is that academic commitment to highlighting the emotional consequences of seemingly rational economic decisions is an important element in bringing these actions to account. If the logic of efficiency depends on the silencing of the emotions, academics have a role in pointing out that this is an ethically questionable state of affairs.

This point bears on a whole host of areas. Population geography and international migration studies, including movements associated historically with imperialism, spring to mind. Traditional concerns with push-pull factors, the 'laws' of migration, the mobility transition, assimilation and cross-cultural encounter have more recently been tempered by critical approaches invoking, for example, languages of 'dislocation' and 'belonging'. But these more critical approaches are not necessarily more 'sense'itive. It often seems as if the role of the researcher is still to overcome the immediacy of people's corporeal experiences – in relation to the demands of migration, exile, integration and resettlement – by acts of will and intellect. In the field of geopolitics, the disembodied idea of 'state' security still prevails conceptually over a more broadly conceived visceral concept of 'human' security (Hyndman, forthcoming). Performing the role of cool interpreter in the face of the displacement experience, or in instances where personal and collective hurt thoroughly infuse politics and memory – for example in the many faltering efforts underway world-wide towards indigenous reconciliation – makes for anaemic knowledges predicated on the artificial separations of private and public, body and citizen, domestic and global.

In sum, a return to relevance and the quest for a ‘policy turn’ in geography seem to us to be key areas where an awareness of how emotional relations shape society and space is important. That said, difficult questions remain, not least concerning how actually to grasp the emotional, and what to do with ‘it’ when we have. Our argument has been that social relations are lived through the emotions, but that the emotional qualities of social life have rarely been made apparent within the lexicon of social research. Tackling this requires us to confront a methodological as well as a conceptual challenge. Empathy (or *verstehen*) – the language of the philosophies of meaning – took the study of lived relations in geography some distance (eg Buttner 1974; Ley 1977; Pocock 1984). More recently the issue of ‘affect’ has attracted the attention of geographers using psychoanalytic tools of analysis. Non-constructivist approaches – approaches associated with being and doing, with participation and performance, with ways of knowing that depend on direct experience (including autobiography and biography) more so than reflection, abstraction, translation and representation – offer encouragement, if not as yet clear strategies, for accessing the world as mediated by feeling (cf. Smith forthcoming).

Using these approaches effectively seems to require activating not only one’s ‘geographical imagination’, but also a sharper ‘geographic sensibility’. Difficult as that might be, and acknowledging that the disclosure of things subterranean may in some cases carry its own risky politics, it seems important to make a start. Renewed attention to relevance in geography suggests it is timely to cast off the stance of the silent bystander, especially one whose position erases a key area of human experience – one steeped in those feelings and emotions which make the world as we know and live it, yet which remain spectacularly unacknowledged in much of what we do, and in virtually every ‘policy’ that we recommend.

## References

Buttimer, A. 1974, *Values in geography*, Association of American Geographers, Commission on College Geography, Resource Paper No 24.

Hamnett, C. 1999, 'The emperor's new theoretical clothes, or geography without origami', in Philo, C. and Miller, D. (eds), *Market Killing. What the free market does and what social scientists should do about it*, Longman, Harlow.

Hyndman, J. forthcoming, *Toward a feminist geopolitics*.

Koskela, H. 2000, 'The gaze without eyes': videosurveillance and the changing nature of urban space', *Progress in Human Geography*, 24: 243–65.

Ley, D. 1977, 'The personality of a geographic fact', *The Professional Geographer*, 29: 8–13.

Martin, R. in press 2001, 'Geography and public policy: the case of the missing agenda', *Progress in Human Geography*.

Massey, D. 2000, 'Editorial: Practising political relevance', *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, NS25: 131–3.

Nash, C. 1998, 'Mapping emotion', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16(1): 1–10.

Neu, J. 2000, *A tear is an intellectual thing: the meanings of emotion*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Peach, C. forthcoming, 'Social geography, new religions and ethnoburbs: contrasts with cultural geography', *Progress in Human Geography*.

Peck, J. 1999, 'Editorial: Grey geography?', *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, NS24: 131–5.

Pocock, D. 1984, 'Feelings and mapping feelings', *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, 9(2): 248–50.

Pollard, J., Henry, N., Bryson, J. and Daniels, P. 2000, 'Shades of grey? Geographers and policy', *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, NS25: 243–8.

Pugmire, D. 1998, *Rediscovering emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Smith, S. J. 1993, 'Social landscapes: continuity and change', in Johnson, R. (ed.) *The challenge for geography*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Smith, S. J. 2000, 'Performing the (sound)world', *Society and Space*, 18: 615–37.

Smith, S. J. forthcoming, 'Doing qualitative research: from interpretation to action', in Limb, M. and Dwyer, C. (eds), *Qualitative methods for geographers*, Arnold, London.

Swyngedouw, E. 1999, 'Marxism and historicalgeographical materialism: a spectre is haunting geography', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 115: 91–102.

Widdowfield, R. 2000, 'The place of emotions in academic research', *Area*, 32: 199–208.

Williams, R. 1977, *Marxism and literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Williams, S. 2001, *Emotion and social theory*, Sage, London.

Wood, N. forthcoming, 'Once more with feeling': putting emotion into geographies of music', in, Bondi, L. et al. (eds), *Subjectivities, knowledges and feminist geographies*, Rowan and Littlefield.