Centre for the GeoHumanities Newsletter : No 7
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Our seventh Centre for the GeoHumanities newsletter celebrates the news and achievements of centre members from around the globe.

Please get in touch with us on geohumanities@rhul.ac.uk if you have news you would like to share or would like your work featured in the next newsletter.

5th Denis Cosgrove Lecture - Visionary Geography: William Blake and the English Landscape
May 2021 The British Academy, London

We have postponed the 5th Denis Cosgrove Lecture for a year. We will reopen the eventbrite booking site in due course and we hope that you will be able to join us next year!

The Lecture will be given by Professor Stephen Daniels (University of Nottingham).

Geography and Vision are key words in the works of Denis Cosgrove, together the title of his Inaugural Lecture at Royal Holloway in 1996 and that of a career framing collection of essays published in 2008. This lecture explores meetings of material and imaginative worlds in the works of painter and poet William Blake (1757-1827), and their implications for landscape as a field of vision. It addresses Blake’s representation of London and its environs in the early nineteenth century as it was transformed into a major imperial city, as well as images of cottages, cornfields and cathedrals. Visionary Geography locates Blake’s work in relation to wider currents of book and image making in his own time, including topography and cartography, and in terms of its long standing influence, for envisioning English landscape and its possible worlds.
New Grant: Dr Innes Keighren, "Global revolution: William Macintosh and the geography of radical politics," Leverhulme Research Fellowship

Very exciting news from Innes Keighren. Innes has recently been awarded a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship to continue his research on William Macintosh. Macintosh, as you can read on Innes' blog, was an eighteenth-century Scottish merchant, Caribbean plantation owner, world traveller, and controversial author of *Travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa* (1782). Innes has been following the archival trial of Macintosh for a while now, aided by some undergraduate research assistants and most recently his dad who is transcribing Macintosh's Caribbean letterbook while in lockdown. We are excited to see where Innes' following of Macintosh's archives will take him next.

New Grant: Dr Anja Kanngieser, "Climates of Listening: Listening to Pacific Islanders experiences of environmental change," Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellowship

The Centre is excited to welcome a new Marie-Curie Sklodowska fellow Dr Anja Kanngieser. Anja, currently based at the University of Wollongong, was an ESRC Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Geography Department 2013-2014, and returns to RHUL with a new project exploring an interdisciplinary sonic geography of climate change in the Pacific Islands. As Anja writes, "in the Pacific Islands, the impacts of climate change such as rising seas and increasing disasters are worsening the existing environmental impacts of resource extraction such as mining and overfishing, and the legacies of nuclear testing. These combined impacts are severely threatening Pacific Islanders homes and livelihoods. The EU-funded CoL project will amplify the everyday experiences of Pacific Islanders living through these changes. Specifically, it will focus on testimonies, poetry, sounds and stories since these are popular mediums across Pacific cultures to connect to, share and communicate knowledge and experiences of the world. The project will develop an interdisciplinary ‘sonic geography’ to better understand the holistic and dynamic ways that environmental crisis is conceived and addressed."

Anja will join the centre for four years starting 2020-2021. Anja's practice based sonic research and writings can be found on the [Transversal Geographies](#) blog, or in a recent piece for the [Conversation.](#)
New Grant: Felix Driver and Caroline Cornish, "Plant Humanities Initiative: scoping potential research collaboration between RHUL and Kew Gardens"

Members of the Centre for the GeoHumanities Felix Driver and Caroline Cornish have been granted a Knowledge Exchange award from Royal Holloway to undertake a scoping exercise exploring the potential of collaborative research in the plant humanities between researchers at Royal Holloway and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Since March, Felix and Caroline have been talking with researchers and professional staff, in order to establish the range and nature of potential humanities research projects involving staff and collections at Kew Gardens. The term ‘plant humanities’ was first used in 2018 at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington DC, a centre for research into Byzantine, Pre-Columbian and Gardens histories which is affiliated with Harvard University.

In order to evaluate the extent of interest amongst humanities researchers at Royal Holloway, departmental research leads, School research directors and a range of individual researchers were contacted. Researchers from Biological Sciences, Classics, Drama, English, Geography, History, Modern Languages, Law, Media Arts, Music, Psychology, and Philosophy are among those taking part in these discussions.

In parallel, further interviews have taken place with the staff at Kew Gardens and its associated facility at Wakehurst (the location of Kew’s world-famous seedbank). Those involved in these discussions have included scientists, managers and professional staff in Science, Library, Art, Archives, Horticulture, Learning, and Visitor Operations.

The scoping exercise is revealing new possibilities for the development of research collaboration between Royal Holloway and Kew Gardens under the umbrella of the Plant Humanities. ‘The scale and enthusiasm of the response at both institutions has been inspiring,’ said Felix Driver. ‘Research in the plant humanities has real potential to provide a focus for future collaboration between Kew and Royal Holloway.’ A report of findings and recommendations will be ready in July.

Image: Clockwise from top left: Emma Waltraud Howes’ performance as part of Botanical Drift intervention (2014); school museum outreach as part of Mobile Museum project (2019); model of opium smoker (EBC 41297) (1879) in Kew’s Economic Botany Collection; Rebecca Louise Law, Life in Death installation at Shirley Sherwood Gallery, Kew Gardens (2018).

Images courtesy of RBG Kew
Collaboration with Royal College of Music, AHRC

Shedding new light on the experiences of migrant musicians in post-war Britain.

Centre member Pete Adey is Co-I on a major new AHRC grant with the Royal College of Music that launched earlier this year. This interdisciplinary project will run for three years and will study the creative output of musicians who came to Britain from Nazi-ruled Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, shedding new light on the experiences of migrant musicians in post-war Britain. Working with PI Norbert Meyn, researcher and vocal coach at the RCM, and Nils Grosch who is a Professor of Musicology at Salzberg University, the team will use practice-based research, as well as archival work to explore the challenges of performing and mediating a largely unknown body of work by migrant composers.

More about the project can be found here: https://www.rcm.ac.uk/about/news/all/2019-09-18musicmigrationandmobility.aspx

New grant collaboration: 'Depleted by Debt?' GCRF-ESRC grant led by Katherine Brickell, including artists Sophal Neak and Chinar Shah

The Centre for the GeoHumanities is delighted to be in collaboration with Katherine Brickell, as part of the visual arts work stream of her major GCRF-ESRC funded grant ‘Depleted by Debt?’ Katherine’s grant focuses a gendered lens on climate resilience, credit and nutrition in translocal Cambodia and South India. As part of this interdisciplinary research Katherine is working with two local artists: Sophal Neak based in Phnom Penh, and Chinar Shah based in Chennai. A major exhibition will bring together artistic photographic work, with images produced during participatory photo voice work.


Watch this space for further information on the project and its artistic collaborations.
New book: Landscapes of Detectorists

An eagerly awaited book is published this month: "Landscapes of the Detectorists" co-edited by CGH member Innes Keighren and Joanne Norcup. The book offers four geographical readings of Detectorists (a BBC Four comedy-drama) by Innes, Joanne, Isla Forsyth (Nottingham), and Andrew Harris (UCL). The collection is bookended by a foreword from Mackenzie Crook (who wrote and directed the programme) and an afterword from Adam Tandy (who produced the programme's first two series). The book is available to pre-order directly from the publisher, Uniformbooks. It can also be ordered from Blackwell's, Foyles, Waterstones, and online retailers.

For those who haven't before seen the programme, the box set is available to watch on the BBC iPlayer: https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/b06l51nr/detectorists

New Book: A Thirst for Sand

Congratulations to CGH member Will Jamieson who has just published a new work of creative fiction with Goldsmith's Press. Thirst for Sand, reviewed as a "bold and original story," explores land reclamation in Singapore. It is part of Will's wider project including his AHRC techne funded PhD that explores how space is 'written' and 'read' through capital. You can also find Will's fiction in Ambit, his critical creative writing in GeoHumanities, and other writing about Singapore in Failed Architecture. You can get your own copy of A Thirst for Sand from Rough Trade.
Artist Sonia Boyce's exhibition 'In the Castle of my Skin' at Eastside Projects in Birmingham, was a solo show of new commissions and existing work. As well as Boyce's work, it included Flora's recent work made in collaboration with Lindiwe Matshikiza as part of their investigations into bodies and subterranean spaces. Boyce created a large sculpture for the exhibition that is based on a crystalline form of Fool's Gold. This form houses a series of works including Flora and Lindiwe's that explore ideas of improvisation, social bonding and relationships to the built environment and that seek to make room for diverse histories, a common topic in Boyce's work.

A virtual tour of the exhibition is available on Eastside Project's website.

Centre member Sasha Engelmann recently performed in Open Work, Second Body, a live-streamed performance in collaboration with designer Sophie Dyer and author Daisy Hildyard. The piece was part of her residence with German based international arts residency organisation Akademie Schloss Solitude.

Streamed as part of Reveill 2020, a 24 hour live radio programme broadcast from a temporary station in Rotherhithe London, Open Word Second body asked from the climate crisis to coronavirus: what are the tools we need to make sense of events unfolding on vastly disparate scales? Through spoken word, field recordings and radio reception of two satellite images, the work probed the porous boundaries between our bodies, local atmospheres and weather systems.
Book Award: Cecilie Sachs-Olsen wins Taylor Francis Outstanding Monograph Award

Congratulations to Cecilie Sachs-Olsen, whose recent book *Socially Engaged Art and the Neoliberal City* won Taylor and Francis’ 2019 Outstanding Monograph Award (Social Sciences). The book, which was selected from over 500 to win, is based on Cecilie’s practice-based performance research on urban spaces with her performance collective zURBS. The volume draws together Cecilie’s own practice together with global case studies to discuss the potential of artistic practices to question the nature of city environments and the diverse productions of space.
“Greek-Orthodox Religioscapes” by Dr Georgios E. Trantas, The Hellenic Centre, 9th March

Together with The Royal Holloway Hellenic Institute, Centre for Greek Diaspora Studies and Aston University, the Centre for the GeoHumanities sponsored a one-day exhibition and talk on “Greek-Orthodox Religioscapes” at the Hellenic Centre in Paddington, London. The event was linked to ‘GO Religioscapes’, a European Union Commission Horizon 2020 research project that examines the migratory narratives of the Greek and Greek-Cypriot migrant communities in present day Germany and Britain from the perspective of religious aesthetics.

Either previously heterodox converted to Greek-Orthodox or newly built, the churches of these communities contain traces of migratory narratives in their icons, frescoes, architectural and linguistic elements. This study sheds light on how the migratory establishment in the receiving country has been experienced, perceived and immortalised by religious means.
Exhibition- Strata- Kathy Prendergast

Curated by Invisible Dust, for Scarborough Museum Trust with support from Arts Council England and Royal Holloway, University of London

Kathy Prendergast, an artist with a long connection to RHUL Department of Geography, recently combined teaching maps produced by female geography students from Bedford College (now Royal Holloway, University of London) with her own hand-coloured maps for her exhibition Strata. The exhibition was curated by Invisible Dust for Scarborough Museum Trust.

Creative Commissions- Update

GeoHumanities Creative Commissions: Variations on Mobility is a collaboration between the Centre for Advanced Studies in Mobility and the Humanities of the University of Padova and the Centre for GeoHumanities.

The four GeoHumanities Creative Commissions teams in 2019-2020 have developed their projects along different trajectories traced by the unfolding movements of People, Objects, Texts and Ideas across times and spaces. As small groups composed of academics who have embraced art in their research practices, or artists working in collaboration with scholars across various disciplinary backgrounds, the Commissions engage different Theories and Methods of mobility, working with ethnographic, archival, historical, anthropological, geographical and creative methodologies.

The following text and audio-visual materials represent a short update realised by the team to help us follow the path of their creative work.

For further information and ongoing updates about the projects including videos and sound recordings, please, see the GeoHumanities forum.
1) Of Steel and (un)stillness (Pedro Figueiredo Neto, Ricardo Miguel Falcão and Paulo Morais)

Representing and territorialising sound

Of Steel and (Un)stillness explores routiers’ social, cultural and material worlds through ethnographic and artistic practices. Routiers are men of African origin that recurrently drive old vehicles from Southern Europe to West Africa carrying with them spare parts, clothing, money remittances, bicycles, appliances, cosmetics, rice, personal luggage, etc. that are delivered, traded and/or bartered along the way. The uses and meanings of carried items lay beyond the mere functional and utilitarian approaches, or monetary value. All the exchanges and (dis)encounters generated by them are culturally located and play an essential role in the production of social relations and of social recognition while in mobility.

Our commission “Of Steel and (un)Stillness” is essentially built with and through sounds and images. While a considerable part of the materials to be used were gathered during the shooting of a documentary film, our work also comprises the creation of a kinetic and sound-installation through the assemblage of spare car parts, collected in Lisbon’s outskirts. The need to present 2D printable elements as requested by the Creative Commissions team has challenged us in the way we think of and represent our work.

In this post we try a different outtake on the source material. The following spectrograms shall be seen as “splinters” from the original audio tracks. Some consist of raw recordings, while others have been processed by communication apps (Whatsapp for example). Together, these clips create a representation of the sounds of mobility as embodied by one specific roadster, a 60 years old Senegalese man, and in at least two different journeys made in Peugeots 504. Some of these elements also allude to how audio recordings circulate today. Circumstances as such stimulate the search for new methodologies of archiving and alternative ways of making sense of the set of information contained in these audio recordings. In this vein, by providing the context and geo-location in each of these spectrograms, we further explore the possibilities of representation. Such rearrangements intend to go beyond the immediate sensorial and aural worlds of sound and image. We can thus reflect about cycles and textures, but also of noise writ large, as elements of this specific type of mobility of people and objects. Closely tied to the pace of this roadster’s mobility, the selected clips provide a graphic anthropo-(s)cenic soundscape, in which man-made sounds easily overlap and override natural sounds.

Of Steel and (un)Stillness is a GeoHumanities Creative Commission by:

Pedro Figueiredo Neto (anthropologist, filmmaker), http://pedrofneto.com/
Ricardo Falcão (anthropologist, filmmaker), www.rikfalk.com
Paulo Morais (sound artist), https://vimeo.com/paulomorais
2) Flying Boat (Stephen Connolly and Layla Curtis)

Flying Boat

The Empire Flying Boat was a short-lived air service connecting Great Britain with its colonies in operation from 1937 to 1940 and for a short period post war. It offered fast (for the time) passenger travel and mail services following sea routes to Africa, the Far East, and Australia. The “Flying Boat” represented a desired mobility for 48 weekly passengers that was ahead of its time, yet unrecognisable to recent contemporary mobility. And yet the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has changed global mobility and aviation in ways yet to unfold. “Flying Boat” is a GeoHumanities project concerned with the spatial and mobile imaginary enacted by this service projected into this uncertain time for aviation.

Progress Post: May 2020

In spring 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has severely impacted air travel around the globe. In April 2020, passenger numbers were 9% of the same month in 2019. Nation states have identified the mobility of people as a means of contagion, some have responded with travel bans and the grounding of airlines. The Flying Boat Geohumanities Creative Commission has pivoted from investigating the possible impacts on climate change on air travel to explore instead how the pandemic will impact on the future of air travel.

Two overlooked aspects of air travel are emerging from the pandemic; the clear socio-economic inequalities of this mode of transport; and its latent materiality. Flying is a privileged mode of movement: from the global perspective, only 20% of humanity have ever set foot in an aircraft; and in wealthier societies it is a luxury activity. Fair travel is framed as a release from gravity and a freedom to roam the globe, yet as its material entanglements with the Covid contagion have brought it to earth. The infrastructure of aviation is deeply invested in material practices; airports are amongst the largest built environment installations, yet now grid-locked by nose to tail, parked aircraft. Oil is trading in April at negative prices; the onstream infrastructures of fuel production are too cumbersome to slow or stop.

This short video, entitled Chek Lap Kok, 9pm, 1 December 2019, documents a walk to Hong Kong Airport from the Expo centre on the airport island, by means of slow travel, under makeshift conditions, and without carbon expenditure. It’s a harbinger of lean and informal travel arrangements which may be a feature of time to come. This is a provisional, work in progress for the Flying Boat project.

Flying Boat is a GeoHumanities Creative Commission by:

Stephen Connolly, https://www.uca.ac.uk/staff-profiles/dr-stephen-connolly/
3) Pearls from China (Daniele Brigadoi Cologna and Ciaj Rocchi & Matteo Demonte)

Mobility of goods and migration flows from China to Europe in the 1920s

Pearls from China is a project proposed by Daniele Brigadoi Cologna, Matteo Demonte and Ciaj Rocchi that has the goal to deepen and showcase the geographical mobility of goods and people in the mid-1920s. In particular, Pearls from China aims to document how the commerce of fake pearls by Zhejiang’s traders – who exported, imported and marketed them in different European countries – was instrumental in sustaining the earliest Chinese migration to Europe.

Analyzing sources provided by professor Daniele Brigadoi Cologna, Ciaj Rocchi and Matteo Demonte started working on key geographical stepping stones and on a cast of main characters in this migration epic.

By tracing trade and travel trajectories, we have defined a first route by ship that passed through the Suez Canal, and a second by train along the Trans-Siberian railroad.

By profiling the main actors of the mid-1920s Chinese fake pearl trade, we have uncovered the story of a small group of Chinese from Zhejiang whose presence in Japan is proven by documents regarding the compensation requested for the mistreatment suffered following the 1923 Kanto earthquake, as well as by a few rare photographic documents.

There is also documentary evidence regarding the presence of the very same group of fake pearl peddlers in several European countries between 1925 and 1926, when they moved between Germany, Holland, France, Spain, and Italy.
We are now working on the storyboard videoboard for a short video-documentary. We decided to focus on the turning point: repatriated to China from Japan after the Great Kanto earthquake, our main characters arrived in Shanghai, where an intermediary agency offered them a chance to leave for Europe. There, a Sino-French company was recruiting sellers to sell a novelty product: fake pearls.

According to Chinese sources, in Shanghai and Wenzhou it was possible to refer to banking agencies that facilitated the procurement of passports and tickets for expatriation. To these repatriated migrants, those agencies provided useful contacts to refer to once they arrived in Europe. This process explains the sudden surge of arrivals in 1925-1926: for many emigrants who had just returned from Japan, the money saved during the time spent working in that country may have barely just covered the price of the trip.

In 1925, in Germany, several hundred of Chinese from Qingtian settled in Berlin near the Schlesischer Bahnhof (today Berlin Ostbahnhof), the historic terminus of the trains that arrived from Asia.

In the summer of the same year, in Spain, Madrid's public opinion reacted with amazement to the sudden spread of Chinese street vendors of fake pearls through the streets of the city center.

A few months later, in February 1926, the same scene repeated itself in Italy, where the press and the prefectures of the Kingdom were alarmed by the sudden "Invasion" of the several hundred Chinese pearl peddlers who arrived in Italy in droves, mostly across the mountain passes with France.

Although this migration left an obvious mark in the statistics of the Chinese presence in France during the same years, only a few French sources on Chinese migration clearly cite the itinerant sale of fake pearls as an economic insertion strategy.

These pearls, made of coloured glass, were often passed off as made in Japan items, or even as a Chinese product. Though the early batches of fake pearls sold may have been imported from the Far East, there is evidence of subsequent supply coming through Chinese and European wholesalers active in Paris, who mostly sourced their ware from Central European manufacturers.
Thus, it appears that the pearls may have mainly been produced in Europe. Chinese sources mentioning fake pearls among the goods treated by the wholesalers of the Gare de Lyon and the Marais, speak of them as “pearls of Romania”, but other European sources point at the city of Gablonz, in Czecho-Slovakia, as a likely source, as between the two wars it had become a key hub for costume jewellery manufacture, with over four thousand companies on site.

Our goal is to recover as many international sources as possible that can help us trace the itineraries linking the production and circulation the pearls, and to prove their role as an economic insertion strategy for the first Chinese migrants who settled down in continental Europe.

As a creative contribution, our ultimate goal is to realise an animated documentary in which routes and people combine with scenarios and stories that have occurred between Europe and China in the 1920s.

**Pearls from China is a GeoHumanities Creative Commission by:**

Daniele Brigadoi Cologna, [https://uninsubria.academia.edu/DBrigadoiCologna](https://uninsubria.academia.edu/DBrigadoiCologna)

Matteo Demonte and Ciaj Rocchi, videomakers and artist, [http://www.chinamen.it/](http://www.chinamen.it/)
4) The Former State Project: A Journey through Yugoslavia (James Riding, Jack
Wake-Walker and Simon Barraclough)

The Former State Project - On travel writing in the Balkans

The Former State Project: A Journey through Yugoslavia studies mobilities and the geo-humanities and the textual
landscapes represented in a travel-guide. The project team experiment with the form of the travel-guide through a
novel take on the travel-writing genre: a multi-media guide about a place that is no longer.

More specifically, the project team will trace the journey taken in Rebecca West’s travel-guide Black Lamb and Grey Falcon written about journeys in the Balkans prior to the formation of socialist Yugoslavia. Yet before we reach the beginning of this repeat journey, we backtrack a little in this first Progress Report and attend to some of the questions which have arisen regarding such attempts to describe the Balkans. This archival groundwork is the opening of our mobile project on mobile texts, which is presently stilled while in lockdown and immobile as a deadly virus travels the earth. We describe and analyse European imaginary geographies and excursions through this region known as the Balkans, while we are unable to.

It is possible, according to Robert Munro (1895) in his Rambles and Studies in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Dalmatia, that from the earliest times the Balkan peninsula was inhabited by a mixed population, open to fluctuating civilizations from the shores of the Mediterranean to the nomadic travellers from Asia and northeastern regions of Europe (Munro 1895, 4). Little is known of this period, when the western half of the Balkan Peninsula was called Illyria. Northern wanderers—Avars, Serbs, Slavs, and Croats—found a footing in mountainous Bosnia and the Romans were driven to the Adriatic coast (Munro 1895, 4). Without ever being in a commanding position, the Ottomans took control in this liminal land of Orthodox and Latin Christendom.

By the mid-fifteenth century the Ottoman Empire stretched across much of the former Yugoslavia, linking Europe and the Middle East. A rival of Orthodox Russia and Western Europe, it lasted for more than four centuries. In 1875, when Arthur J. Evans was writing, an insurrection was underway against four centuries of Ottoman domination, with Bosnian peasants demanding a redistribution of land and fair taxes (Evans 1876). Only when Serbs, Croats, and Montenegrins joined the insurgency did it become a national war of liberation of the south Slavs—the Yugoslavs. The revolt lasted three years and was brought to an end only through the diplomacy of the Great Powers, culminating in the 1878 Congress of Berlin. It was decided that roughly half of the former Yugoslavia—Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Vojvodina—would be occupied by Austria-Hungary. Several decades later, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was shot in Sarajevo in 1914 by a revolutionary, Gavrilo Princip, precipitating a declaration of war against Serbia, and World War I. After the mass conflict, in December 1918, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes emerged. The revolutionary movement, though, was hampered by lingering religious differences—Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Islam—coupled with a renewed sense of nationalism across Europe post-empire.

As is revealed in these shifting regional geographies, the western Balkans have been a meeting point of cultures for centuries. The culture of the region was formed through this interaction, undermining a sense of a nationalist political identity in the form of a homogenous nation-state. Nonetheless, as Arthur J. Evans travelled through the region, he noted its Islamic nature (Evans 1876). This was a standard response in the travel writing of the era, evident also in the Rambles and Studies in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Dalmatia undertaken by Munro (1895). In 1851, Edmund Spencer wrote, “Scarceley a ray of Western thought had penetrated during the four centuries that had passed away since the Crescent replaced the Cross on the dome of Saint Sophia, and the empire of Constantine crumbled before the might of the Othman; centuries of ever increasing intellect, civilisation and prosperity” (Spencer 1851, 1). For Spencer, the dawn of a brighter day had arisen on the night of Turkish misrule, rekindling the hearts of a neglected and uncared-for Christian people:
Awakened from a trance, to a consciousness of their own power, to an appreciation of that lofty destiny, from which for centuries they have been excluded … Unheeded and uncared for, by those nations of Europe claiming the swarthy son of distant India and Africa, while a portion of her very self remained torpid and corpse-like. (2)

What is more, Paul Edmonds (1927) extolled the hospitality of these exoticized and primitive locations in, To the Land of the Eagle, where an Englishman could travel without fear of being shot. The places through which Evans, Munro, Spencer, and Edmonds travelled, walked, and rambled were for centuries known by the Ottomans as Rumeli. Only relatively recently did the name Rumeli fall out of use, the region becoming instead European Turkey, or Turkey in Europe, and, eventually, around the time Evans and Munro had completed their travels, the Balkans. The name the Balkans refers to the mountains near the centre of the peninsula, across which travel writers would journey to Istanbul.

When we travel through the former Yugoslavia, we intend to drift somewhat against this previous work by outsiders on this area of southeast Europe. Perceptible in historical-geographical travelogues of the Balkan peninsula is Balkanism, and these older regional texts are reminiscent of the more recent ontological accounts of a fractured landscape that Campbell (1998) identified more than twenty years ago in the western Balkans. Indeed the Balkans of today is known and enframed via the collapse of Yugoslavia and its enduring aftermath, and the discursive designators of place are here drawn from a Western imaginary geography of the Balkans (Goldsworthy 1998; Todorova 1997). A repetitve Balkanism takes place, where the region is viewed through an idea that the Balkans is a place of immutable ethnic hatreds outside of a cosmopolitan Europe: a place of mindless slaughter on formless ground (Toal 1996). This imagined Balkans can be found in the opening lines of Glenny’s (1999) magnum opus, The Balkans, 1804—1999, where Stoker’s (1897) Dracula is said to be representative of an almost gothic region. In the old Orientalist tradition, it seems as if the Balkans occupies the center of some sort of imaginative whirlpool where every known superstition in the world is gathered (Glenny 1999).

Echoing the well-established literature on representations of the Balkans in literary studies and geography—such as Inventing Ruritania (Goldsworthy 1998) and Imagining the Balkans (Todorova 1997)—Mazower (2002) argues that representations of the Balkans loaded the Balkans with negative connotations: inharmonious conditions, small antagonistic states, and hostile nationalities, all of which conspired to form the intractable Balkan or Eastern question. Writing of the Balkans as Europe’s ghost, Žižek (2000, 1-2) argues the region is always somewhere a little further to the southeast, and the Balkans are a photographic negative of a multicultural, post-political, post-ideological Europe. A “postmodern racism” exists, Žižek argues, where an imaginary Balkans is constructed as the intolerant other, while the rest of Europe has supposedly come to terms with otherness in its much vaunted – indeed marketed – language of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism (Žižek 2000, 1-2). An imperialism of the imagination is projected onto the Balkans, where an exploitation of Balkan history and geography in Western cultural representations and performances has created a region that is the “Wild East” of Europe and Oriental at the same time (Goldsworthy 1998).

In Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia, a story of a six-week ethnographic trip taken by the British writer Rebecca West (1942), the past is shown side by side with the present it created. Publication of the book coincided with the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia and the epigraph reads: “To my friends in Yugoslavia, who are now all dead or enslaved.” Spomenici—the plural form of the word spomenik, meaning monument in this part of the world—emerged after the conflict, built to memorialise the dead to whom West referred. Unlike many of the monuments built after World War II across Europe, they could not remember a triumph. After the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was invaded by the Axis powers in 1941, internal fighting began between the Partisans—Europe’s most effective anti-Nazi communist resistance movement, led by Marshal Josip Broz Tito—the Ustaše—Croatia’s fiercely Catholic, fascist, ultranationalist, terrorist organization, murdering Serbs, Jews, and Roma while ruling part of Axis-occupied Yugoslavia—and the Chetniks—Serbia’s anti-Axis movement, seeking to retain the monarchy and striving for an ethnically homogenous Greater Serbian state. World War II in Yugoslavia was not simply a war of liberation against an encroaching occupier, Nazi Germany; it was instead a multilayered and divisive conflict in Yugoslavia, which could still be felt long into the twentieth century.

The giant monuments built to commemorate World War II, on sites where battles were fought and concentration camps existed, are not statues of human warriors. Spomenici instead resemble abstract organic sculptures, emerging from the Earth, as if there was a silent acceptance that to use the body—the site of trauma, violence, degradation, and extermination—was both ethically and aesthetically impossible. Nature, apparently, is less problematic. Indeed, what type of human form might be possible here after a divisive and multilayered conflict that dehumanized so many? Nonfigurative concrete spomenici stand as an alternative to statues of human figures, alone in dense forests, teetering on the top of mountain peaks, or clinging to cliffs. Solidly anchored to the land beneath, abstract swirls of material large enough to top the trees round about them, socialist-era spomenici take on the organic form as if grown straight out of the soil. These giant swirling concrete shapes, dotted across the landscape, each gesturing toward the organic, provided a shared monumental history and identity for socialist Yugoslavia. They commemorate those who died as a result of fascism, remember the antifascist struggle begun in the region during World War II, and celebrate the socialist revolution achieved in its aftermath. Despite their massive, somewhat ambiguous, organic material presence—a warning from history of the evils of Nazism and fascism—nationalism returned to the region before the end of the twentieth century.
The unlit eternal flame located on the slopes of Trebević Mountain in a former Yugoslav republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is part of a neglected memorial park (Spomen-park Vraca) completed in 1981 and dedicated to the victims of World War II in Sarajevo—after the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was dissolved, the site became a tactical position for artillery and snipers during the siege of Sarajevo (1992–1996) and was subsequently destroyed (Photograph: James Riding).

After the fall of communism and the death of Partisan guerrilla leader and unifying symbol Josip Broz Tito in the same decade, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia seemed increasingly doomed. Remembered affectionately by many, the benevolent dictator, “father Tito,” eventually became president for life, serving concurrently in various other roles until his death in 1980 at the age of eighty-seven. Many citizens of Yugoslavia who lived through the Tito regime actively removed themselves from nationalist and identitarian debates, which were geared toward the ending of socialism and Yugoslavia (Alcalay 2004, ix). Ammiel Alcalay (2004, ix) writes of an “intellectual surrender” fed by the heroic imagery of Partisans, and the promise of stability that socialism and father Tito provided. Without Tito, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1992) soon ceased to be.

There remains a nostalgia for this bygone socialist era in the seven successor states that stand where Yugoslavia once stood. Yugo-nostalgia is a little-studied psychological and cultural phenomenon. It refers mainly to a nostalgic emotional attachment to desirable aspects of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, economic security, a sense of solidarity, socialist ideology, multiculturalism, internationalism and non-alignment, includes customs and traditions, and looks fondly back upon arguably a more rewarding way of life. Such nostalgia effectively reclaims cultural artefacts, even propaganda films. Present cultural manifestations of Yugo-nostalgia include music groups with Yugoslav or Titoist retro iconography, artworks, films, theatre performances, and tours of the main cities and monuments of the former Yugoslavia republics. These positive facets are placed in opposition to the perceived faults of the successor states, many of which are still burdened by the ongoing fallout of the Yugoslav Wars and are in various stages of economic and political transition.

Prior to the formation of Tito’s socialist Yugoslavia, in spring 1936, Rebecca West visited the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and in spring 1937 West travelled through the former Yugoslavia, returning once more in the summer of the following year. Published in two volumes in 1942 as a thousand-page travel-book, the 1937 expedition remains today an important, evocative and rigorously researched guide to a former state. West’s book acts as a vivid exemplar, a guiding through the landscape and a dense document of the past which provides a template to follow in the present. Yet, it also evokes a Western gaze upon this peninsula known as the Balkans and is guilty at points of Balkanism. The project team as stated at the beginning will cautiously follow the route of West’s journey, which took in the north of the former Yugoslavia first, travelling south initially to Zagreb, Croatia, from Nazi Germany.

Entering the former Yugoslavia became the first descriptive section of Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, following a Prologue, and was called Journey. West described Zagreb and travelled through Croatia to the coast and the Adriatic by road, stopping off at the Plitvice Lakes, before travelling by sea south along the coast past the island of Hvar and Split to Dubrovnik in Dalmatia. This route was described in a section devoted to Croatia and another section on Dalmatia, each including chapters on certain sites, cities, towns, and villages, which were stopping points on West’s journey south. From Dubrovnik, West took an ‘expedition’ by road, and in a section called Expedition, West travels to nearby Tsvvat (Cavtat) and further into Montenegro visiting Perast and Kotor, before returning to Dubrovnik.

Following the short ‘expedition’, West travels east from Dubrovnik by road into Herzegovina and this becomes the next substantive section of the book. Herzegovina, and it is made up of two chapters on Trebinje (Trebinje) and Mostar. The next section of Black Lamb and Grey Falcon is titled, Bosnia, and begins with seven chapters on Sarajevo that amount to almost 100 pages of description. From central Sarajevo, West travels to the nearby suburb of lidžhe (lidža) and to Treboviche (a mountain in Sarajevo) and beyond Sarajevo to Travnik, Yaitse (Jajce), and Yezero (Jezero), writing a final chapter on Sarajevo to conclude this section of the journey.

From Bosnia, West travels to Belgrade, Serbia, by train from Sarajevo and she remains in Belgrade, writing nine chapters on the city and former capital of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in a section titled, Serbia. From Belgrade, West takes a train to Skopjle (Skopje) and in the section on Macedonia she travels more extensively to a monastery, a mountain, and a convent, to Bardovtsi (Bardovci) by road, before taking a horse drawn cart to Neresi, and this is followed by a longer trip to Lake Ochrid (Ohrid) where she writes a number of chapters about places surrounding the lake before returning to Skopje and concluding the section there. The following section is called Old Serbia and begins with a chapter called The Plain of Kossovo (Kosovo) before West reaches the capital of Kosovo, Pristhina (Pristina), and Mitrovitsa (Mitrovica) and Petch (Peć). The final substantive section of the book is titled, Montenegro, a place that West returns to, this time visiting Tsetinye (Cetinje), Lake Scutari (Skadar), Podgoritsa (Podgorica) and Budva. That was the end of her Easter journey, as she writes in the Epilogue, travelling by boat north along the coast of Croatia and back to Zagreb to conclude.
At a crossroads of memory in the former Yugoslavia, this Creative Commission aims to analyse, document, and perform a former state in the present by repeating a definitive yet contentious journey, incorporating contemporary understandings of memory, heritage and mobilities in human geography and the geohumanities. Analysing multi-directional memory, post-memory, and trauma this project about a former state, describes and explores acts of memory, memorial practices, monuments, nostalgia and socialism, and conflict, politics and memory, through a mobile and multi-sensory approach in lived landscapes of memory. Previous work in the western Balkans has focused primarily upon conflict, economic and political transformation and transitional justice, here however we are interested in the spatial practices of memory, literature, and place in post-conflict, post-socialist states and we explore how collective spaces of memory, and memorial acts, objects, and texts affect the present in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia.

Having existed in various forms throughout the previous century, Yugoslavia retains a certain territorial shape and authority in public discourse as a former state in Europe. Yet lacks any recognition or legitimacy as a state today, over twenty-five years after its collapse. Despite this, Yugoslavia is a non-aligned feature on world historical maps and is still remembered and mobilised in different ways by former citizens. Yugoslavia remains within living memory and is tangibly present in the built heritage and cultural representations of the former land of the south Slavs. It is a post-conflict, post-socialist, post-Yugoslav landscape. While Balkanist stereotypes continue to define this region after the series of armed conflicts, ethnic cleansing and genocide that took place here at the end of the previous century, bringing to an end the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. West’s journey taken in the lead up to World War II enables us to think temporally as well as spatially about the region, as the multilayered and divisive conflict continues to be felt, memorialised and remembered in the ex-Yugoslavia. Here these two periods of mass violence are brought together through a performative intervention in post-Yugoslav space on personal and collective memories of a socialist Yugoslavia and its collapse, for both are intertwined, define and drive the contemporary (geo)politics of memory in the region (Riding 2019).

In the past decade, there has been a convergence of transdisciplinary thought characterised by geographical engagements with the humanities, and the integration of place and the tools of geography into the humanities. This emerging intellectual terrain is of course not entirely new, as it speaks back to a long tradition of topographic books and travel-writing by authors in regions such as the Balkans, however the emergence of a newly geographical humanities is explored anew and re-performed in this project by bringing the geo-humanities and mobility studies (the new mobilities paradigm) together. Incorporating a sensuous and materially sensitive approach to grounded fieldwork we undertake a poetic, more-than-representational, and more-than-human reading of the post-conflict, post-socialist landscapes encountered. Arts-based mobilities methodologies identified as part of the new mobilities paradigm will as such be developed in the post-Yugoslav landscape including mobile interviews, time-space diaries, site-writing, poetry and filmmaking.

We have indefinitely delayed the mobile fieldwork in this immobile time, and as such the next Progress Report will be a project trailer—film footage gathered from previous journeys through the region—while Progress Report #3 will be—if travel is possible—field notes taken in the former Yugoslavia while tracing West’s route through the landscape.

James Riding, May 2020