Welcome to the eighth Centre for the GeoHumanities newsletter. 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.
Think Deep Project: Undead Matter

Undead Matter is a project convened by curator Sophie Williamson. In its current format it is a series of online ‘constellations’ and podcasts, the latter of which have been funded by Harriet Hawkins’ Philip Leverhulme Prize and are part of the ERC Think Deep research project.

The first of the podcast commissions has now been released (in partnership with Camden Arts Centre) and is a conversation between Sophie Williamson and choreographer Okwui Okpokwasili. Forthcoming recordings include conversations between writer Daisy Hildyard and marine microbiologist Karen Lloyd, Poet Myung Mi Kim and geographer Kathryn Yusoff.

Undead Matter weaves paths through the entangled lives of geological ancestry, deep time and ever-turning matter. Artists (including the work of Think Deep research fellow, Flora Parrott), poets, dancers, writers and musicians speak with geographers, cryomicrobiologists, astrologers, anthropologists, paelontologists and others met along the way. These conversations, whilst rich with scientific and indigenous knowledge, unfold speculatively, positioning each poetically in relation to one another. Each collaborator offers their own perspective on our place within the infinite impermanence of universal matter: past, present and possible.

Undead Matter considers the universality of death, extinction and ever-reforming matter as phenomena to understand existence: alive with agency, permeating the contemporary and redirecting futures.

https://undeadmatter.com/podcasts/

Still taken from 'Bronx Gothic' by Okwui Okpokwasili - part of one of the ‘constellations’ on the Undead Matter website.
Think Deep Project: Rates of Decay

Rates of Decay is a new exhibition of artwork by ERC-funded Think Deep postdoctoral research fellow Flora Parrott.

The exhibition of six sculptural, textile works, draws on long walks along the chalk cliffs during periods of lockdown. The work thinks through everyday geologies: life spans and gradual erosion of different types of materials encountered along the way, including bags for life, old teeth, young teeth, shells, flower petals, plastic packaging and stones.

Each of the textile pieces tells a part of the story of materials and encounters from the walks along the chalk cliffs, the works are densely embroidered, embellished and appliqued with photographic silk patches, coins, bone, teeth, rawhide, soap and shells.

The project is the result of the first phase of Parrott’s research considering everyday geologies and the transformative potential of the subsurface.

Detail from one of the new textiles work in ‘Rates of Decay’ by Flora Parrott.
Plant Humanities: The Philosophical Life of Plants

*The Philosophical Life of Plants* is a research network funded by the AHRC, a five-way collaboration between various philosophy and literature departments, the archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew (London) and the Goethe and Schiller Archive in Weimar. It is led by PI Daniel Whistler (Philosophy) and Co-I Danielle Sands (LLC). Its aim is to explore the ways in which plants and thinking have been interlinked since Goethe’s fateful *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen* [*The Metamorphosis of Plants*] (1790) and the ways in which theoretical ideas have been determined by encounters with plants over the past two centuries.

More information about the project and coming events can be found on the website: [The Philosophical Life of Plants](http://plantphilosophy.org.uk)
The COP showcase featured presentations on Climate Change Research in the Social, Cultural and Historical Geography Research Group (RHUL). The presenters included:

**Sasha Engelmann:** *When I image the earth, I imagine another:* a citizen-artist network producing a global weather report for COP26. What would it mean to collectively image, and in doing so, reimagine the planet? To see its details and patterns from multiple perspectives and many situated positions? If we could each take a photo of our home from space, could we build a patchwork, an impossible view, another whole earth?

On the first day of the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, a network of people operating DIY satellite ground stations around the world captured a collective snapshot of the Earth and its weather systems: a ‘nowcast’ for an undecided future. Tuning into transmissions from three orbiting National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) satellites, members of the network collected imagery and submitted field notes from their geographical locations. Combined, these contributions generated a polyperspectival (from many angles) image of the earth. Led by open-weather (Sophie Dyer and Sasha Engelmann) with Rectangle (Lizzie Malcolm and Daniel Powers), the artwork is a feminist experiment in imaging and reimagining the planet in an era of climate crisis.

For more information on the project please visit: [https://cop26-nowcast.open-weather.community/](https://cop26-nowcast.open-weather.community/)
Liling Xiu: Due to the impact of climate change, ice melting in the Arctic has brought both challenges and opportunities to China as a “near-Arctic state”. Liling’s presentation about “China’s geopolitical imaginations of the Arctic explored how climate change has been embedded into China’s imaginations, representations and practices in foreign policy, academic research, popular culture and domestic tourism.

Flora Parrott: Invisible Fish: Adapting from surface, to subsurface, to surface. An account of an ongoing creative collaboration between artist Flora Parrott and writer Lindiwe Matshikiza, centering around a moment of encounter between a cave diver and a previously unknown species of cave fish. The fish has adapted from the surface species of Loach. This talk reflected on deep underground imaginaries and how they might contribute to surface living and a rethinking of the human relationship to the environment.

Image by Sasha Engelmann 'NOAA-18 2021-10-31 His equal' can be found at: https://cop26-nowcast.open-weather.community/

Mobility and Geohumanities event May 2021

Moving forward: A concept-based conversation on mobility and the humanities. Co-organised by: Centre for Advanced Studies in Mobility & Humanities, University of Padua (MoHu Centre)Centre for the GeoHumanities, Royal Holloway, University of London (CGH) and the Academy of Mobility Humanities, Konkuk University (AMH).

Mobility as a concept-based methodology stimulates the conversation between diverse humanistic domains. This event aimed at forging connections between critical ideas of movement across the humanities, as well as feeding the existing exchange between three institutions that have embraced such a humanistic perspective in engaging with mobility research.

Further information about the event can be found at: https://www.mobilityandhumanities.it/2021/04/29/annual-conference-2021-and-networking-event-padua-royal-holloway-konkuk/
The virtual colloquium 'Sacred Mobilities in Byzantium and Beyond: People, Objects and Relics' was hosted by the University of London’s Institute for Classical Studies in June 2021 and co-organized by the RHUL Hellenic Institute and Centre for the GeoHumanities. Attended by a wide international audience and featuring a keynote address by the eminent art historian Professor Alexei Lidov (Russian Academy, Moscow), the event explored the nexus between mobility and the making of sacred space in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine world.

All religious belief implicates space, all religious practice makes up geography. In the broad sense, the term 'sacred' indicates something 'different', 'set apart', 'other', as well as invested with special meaning. Yet, where do the boundaries of the sacred lie? Is sacred space an ontological given, or is it a social construction? Is it a portion of territory or the product of a set of embodied practices? Is it permanent or ephemeral?

Speakers from Russia, Georgia, Spain, the U.S., Israel, Cyprus, Greece and Great Britain reflected on different types of sacred mobilities, including the use of sanctifying materialities, the duration of the transformation of sacred space, and the creation of ‘infrasecular geographies’.

Further information about this event can be found at: 
The AHRC Plant Humanities project held two online workshops in July with speakers from Dumbarton Oaks, New York Botanic Garden, Kew Gardens and Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh.

The first of these, on July 1, featured international project partners Yota Batsaki from Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC who spoke of the Plant Humanities Initiative there; and Elena Canadelli from the University of Padua. The third speaker was Vanessa Sellers, Director of the Humanities Institute at the New York Botanical Garden. The second workshop focussed on experiences of plant humanities research in botanical gardens in the UK. Here Mark Nesbitt, Research Lead for Economic Botany at Kew Gardens and Lorna Mitchell, Head of the Library and Archives at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) were the speakers. Both workshops were well attended by a range of academics and practitioners from universities, botanic gardens and museums, united by a common interest in interdisciplinary research around plant collections.

Details of our events and those of others working within plant humanities, can be found on our Twitter feed, which now has well over 2,000 followers.

Image: Workshop 1, Speakers and delegates at the Plant Humanities international workshop held online on July 1, 2021.
A set of eight essays on Plant Humanities

A set of eight essays on Plant Humanities, edited by Felix Driver & Caroline Cornish, is being published in the autumn 2021 issue of The Ethnobotanical Assembly online Magazine (https://www.tea-assembly.com/)

The Ethnobotanical Assembly (TEA) is an online magazine featuring research, writing, and thinking about people-plant relationships. TEA aims to bring together the growing community of people thinking and working at the interface of people and plants. And contributors to TEA come from a range of backgrounds including ethnobotany, botany, anthropology, history and poetry.

The autumn issue is guest-edited by Felix Driver and Caroline Cornish and dedicated to the Plant Humanities. Contributors include RHUL colleagues Redell Olsen who has written a poem on the moonflower at the Cambridge Botanic Garden; and Danielle Sands and Daniel Whistler whose reflective piece on plant thinking is entitled ‘Finding the plantness within ourselves’. Other authors are: Kate Teltcher, English scholar and author of Palace of Palms; Luciana Martins (BBK) and artist Lindsay Sekulowicz who have written about their respective engagements with the collections of nineteenth-century explorer Richard Spruce in the Amazon; Yota Batsaki, Executive Director of the Plant Humanities Initiative at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington DC; Steeve Buckridge (Grand Valley State University) writing about lace-bark in Jamaica; and Plant Humanities collaborator Mark Nesbitt from Kew Gardens.

Botanical Drift image:

Plant Humanities in action: The Act of Tending to the Centre: Falling Body (Gravitational Pull) (2014); Emma Waltraud Howes performs as part of the Botanical Drift programme of art interventions at Kew Gardens, June 5-6, 2014, curated by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Petra Lange-Berndt. Photo: Mark Nesbitt.
Oli Mould's book 'Seven Ethics Against Capitalism'

Oli's book was published in July 2021 and the blurb reads:

Capitalism has become so dominant that it is difficult to ever imagine a world in which its injustices and inequalities are not violently present. In this ambitious and compelling book, Oli Mould turns his diagnosis of capitalism's perversions towards defining the new set of ethics we need to succeed in organizing a more just society.

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, capitalism has been rocked to its foundations and 'the commons' as a means of providing for all people in our world has come crashing into the foreground. However, in order for the commons to be a viable alternative to the injustices of capitalism, it needs to be grown to a planetary scale. This is not an easy process, but if we can commit to act ethically in the world, then suddenly anything is possible. Blending theoretical thinking and real-life examples of commoning in action, Mould guides the reader through a suite of ethical mindsets – mutualism, transmaterialism, minoritarianism, decodification, slowness, failure and love – which can stand firm against capitalism's seemingly inexorable ability to co-opt and subsume all before it. When thought of collectively, these ethics can offer tantalizing visions and practical approaches towards a world beyond capitalism.
Welcome to GeoHumanities!

We would like to welcome Aya Nassar as a new lecturer in GeoHumanities. Aya Nassar is interested in elemental geography, the materiality of cities, memory, infrastructure, fragments of space and storytelling the politics of the postcolony. More recently, these interests revolve around geopoetics, aesthetics, ruination and attachments to postcolonial sovereignty. Aya holds a PhD in Politics and International Studies from the University of Warwick, and has taught in Cairo University, University of Sussex, Durham University before joining Royal Holloway. So far, her research has focused primarily on Cairo and, sometimes, Coventry. Methodologically, she works with archives, and is interested in the city as archive, as well as living with incomplete and truncated research.

We would also like to welcome Himani Upadhyaya as current visiting PhD (until Christmas 2021).

Himani is a postgraduate research student in the Department of History, Ashoka University, India. Currently, she is a visiting postgraduate research student at Royal Holloway's Department of Geography, where she is being mentored by Professor Felix Driver.
Himani's doctoral thesis examines mapping and surveying practices in the Himalayas in the nineteenth century C.E. with a view to investigating the roles of local and indigenous communities in scientific knowledge-production. The focus of Himani's study is British Kumaon, a mountainous region overlapping with the Indian Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. As a recipient of the Inlaks Research and Travel Grant, Himani is visiting London to study archival material - including private papers, historical maps and scientific specimens - related to British surveys in the Himalayas. Himani received her M.Phil. degree from Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University.