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Public geographies II: Being organic

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Abstract

This second report on 'public geographies' considers the diverse, emergent and shifting spaces of engaging with and in public/s. Taking as its focus the more 'organic' rather than 'traditional' approach to doing public geography, as discussed in the first report, it explores the multiple and unorthodox ways in which engagements across academic-public spheres play out, and what such engagements may mean for geography/ers. The report first explores the role of the internet in 'enabling conversations', generating a range of opportunities for public geography through websites, wikis, blogs, file-sharing sites, discussion forums and more, thinking critically about how technologies may enable/disable certain kinds of publically engaged activities. It then considers issues of process and praxis: how collaborations with groups/communities/organizations beyond academia are often unplanned, serendipitous encounters that evolve organically into research/ learning/teaching endeavours; but also that personal politics/positionality bring an agency to bear upon whether we, as academics, follow the leads we may stumble upon. The report concludes with a provocative question – given that many non-academics appear to be doing some amazing and inspiring projects and activities, thoughtful, critical and (arguably) examples of organic public geographies, what then is academia's role?

Keywords

collaborative working, construction, knowledge positionality, public geography, relevance, virtual space

I Introduction

Duncan: To be honest, in writing the first report on the 'rise' of public geographies, I struggled with the need to convey that public geographies are simultaneously 'part of the geographical furniture, a "field" maybe, but not just a "field", a tradition, what we all do, from "where we are at" (of course)' and 'tied ... very firmly to the present, to developments occurring now or at least in very recent years across the social sciences, and to the future ... becoming, not fully formed, different in some way from what has come before, promising'.¹ In part, this related to their apparent diversity and breadth, with how these geographies are clearly

'multi-faceted, multiple, plural, engaged, engaging, amorphous, unbounded, and uncertain'.

However, the work of Michael Burawoy, developments in public sociology, and similar turns and trends across the social sciences hinted at a number of points of potential clarity and agreement. First, the perceived value of such conversations has been encouraged by the perception of a widening gap between a

Left-orientated, ‘critical’ academy and increasingly neoliberal and uncritical ‘real world’. Second, and to fill this gap, at the heart of public geographies is the basic notion of being in conversation with publics (however defined and formed). Third, these conversations are both literal and metaphorical, encapsulating a wide range of possible approaches and styles of engagement, and underpinned by strategic thinking concerning how to ensure that they are ‘overt, visible, authenticating, recognizing, unrestrained, communicative, engaging, and necessarily outreaching’.

Finally, two main subforms of public geographies can be identified. The first of these is the ‘traditional’ form – written academic outputs that reach beyond the usual ivory tower audiences, eg, newspaper articles, where the academic acts as catalyst in engendering (public) debate primarily through and in their traditionally perceived role as ‘an academic’. In the second, less visible form, the academic as catalyst is involved, connected, active, and it is this more ‘organic’ form and style of approach to public geographical work that is the focus of the second of these reports.

But most forms of public geographies are rarely categorizable as one or the other of the terms used above; rather than there being an either/or binary of style and form, what and how people ‘do’ public geographies is less clear cut, more liminal, and positioned somewhere more fluid on a continuum of engagement, with any engagement with public(s) shifting about between the stereotype ivory-tower knowledge producer, distanced from the ‘real world’ and those who inhabit it, and the ‘academic as public intellectual, activist, wearer of many hats’, teetering on the brink of going native and becoming a civilian.

Towards this latter end of the spectrum of engagement, though, there are different expectations of, and openness towards, a broader range of mechanisms of engagement in public geographical endeavour, with more emphasis on alternative media, strategies and styles that are seen to encourage and facilitate the more interactive, unrestrained, engaging conversations considered to underlie more organic approaches. The examples that follow show there is much more to geographical engagements with publics than is visible, recognized, and valued by the mainstream vehicles and avenues of dissemination, calculation and accountancy (such as RAE, citation indexes, impact rankings) that form part of the way in which academic selves, identities and the knowledge they produce are constructed, framed and disciplined on a daily basis.

Kye: Tragically, that is as far as Duncan got in writing this article, dying unexpectedly in October 2008.² I inherited his work computer hard drive, on which the above words were filed, and public geographies related stuff from his office – piles of academic papers, pamphlets, flyers, DIY handbooks, community calendars, maps, printouts of webpages, newspapers clippings, handwritten notes ... and a humorous object or two. I am also fortunate to have spent many hours discussing both the first report and this one with him, as well as public geographies more broadly over a couple of years. So I have been sitting with these articles and memories, thinking about what he wanted to say. As he struggled to do the topic justice, so I struggle to do him justice, and I am feeling a little more than unqualified to be writing this. Nevertheless, as Duncan used to say, here we go.

II Making geographies visible: into the ether

First and foremost, Duncan intended this report to be ‘a shameless plug’ for ‘all that great stuff out there.’³ Through examples, he meant to highlight the diverse ways in which organic public geographies play out – to explore varied and ‘unorthodox’ engagements across academic- public spheres and what such engagements might mean for geography/ers. He believed that the internet is an increasingly important space for

these activities, specifically enabling conversations, and intended to focus on how the phenomenal expansion of the world wide web has generated a range of opportunities for (public) geographers. Websites, blogs, wikis, file-sharing sites, open access/source publishing, podcasting, videocasting, discussion forums, social networking sites and video-blogs comprise a whole range of ‘tools in the public geographies arsenal’.

There is a range of potential positives to such a brave new (virtual) world, not least the democratization of knowledge production. And there are thousands of examples. Table 1 (websites) and Table 2 (blogs/wikis) are compiled from addresses on the printouts Duncan had accumulated, many of which he’d gleaned from a trawl of email forum lists (CritGeog, LeftGeog, Pygywg,⁴ Antipode), themselves virtual forums for geography-related debate. Pertinently, there has been discussion on these lists regarding the utility/rigour/relevance of the ‘blogosphere’, some of which I draw on here (eg, go to www.jiscmail.ac.uk, enter ‘crit geog’ in the ‘FIND LISTS’ keyword search, click on CritGeog-Forum then search for ‘enthusiasm blog’).

To what extent do web-based activities constitute public geographies, though? Duncan problematized any simple binary between organic and traditional forms of public geographies in his introduction, and we had had discussions about how there is an increasing diversity of ‘dissemination’ within that end of the scale considered more ‘traditional’, specifically through the internet. Table 3 has examples of academic endeavours that have been uploaded onto the web, but ‘crucially, the degree, meaningfulness and quality of interaction, and the extent to which anyone might actually want to listen to what academics/ geographers have to say, and respond’ (Fuller, 2008: 838, original emphasis) is critical here. These developments could partly be considered traditional dissemination via new technology (here’s my work, you can read/access it), but their intention can also be about being open to public interventions, being ‘engagement-friendly’ – eg, the RGS-IBG attempt for wider participation in its review process (Sir Professor Conway’s talk; see Table 3). At the least, Duncan believed that the internet makes academics more visible and accountable to people outside academia, which is rare when we publish in journals.

Indeed, many academics now have a personal website, wiki and/or blog, not only to enable free access to written documents, but also to open up their research interests/current projects to geographers, to the wider public and also to research participants. Critical and feminist geographers, in particular, are making their work relevant to audiences beyond academia in this way, and PhD students are increasingly turning to blogs to try out ideas, engage in debate, and think through their research. Importantly, such sites can be useful sources for policy-makers; moreover, the internet offers the potential to generate all sorts of connections to future collaborators, sources of data, research projects, and debates going on in other disciplines – the latter is arguably more accessible over the internet than through disciplinary-specific journals.

There are connected arguments here regarding making seminars/conferences/events more (publically) accessible. Recent examples I have experienced include the first seminar in a series regarding ‘public geographies’,⁵ in which talks/ sessions were videoed and footage made available online, specifically to prompt wider discussion on a related wiki (see <http://engaging-geography.wordpress.com/2-seminars/i-how-did-that-happen>), and an event in which speakers were audio-recorded and this material used as a catalyst for virtual debate (see <http://multi-culturality.wordpress.com/podcasts>), but people who run distance-learning courses around the world will have much more to say about this (see DiBiase, 2000; Martin and Treves, 2007). The central point here is that multiplicitous conversations rather than one-way dissemination are key to ‘being organic’.

‘Public engagement’ is often emphasized in ‘impact of research’ requirements of grant

Table 1. Websites (many of which have links to blogs!)

URL	Description
http://biomapping.net	Christian Nold's community mapping project, recording people's emotional responses in local public spaces – including the 'Greenwich Emotion Map', a six-month artist commission based on individual walks aggregated to 'visualize a shared landscape of emotion'
http://countercartographies.org	Alternative mapping of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA, its interactions with and influences on students and local communities
http://fed-up-honeys.org	Project for and by 'young urban womyn of color', challenging stereotypes and contesting space
http://greenmap.london21.org	Map to search for green/environmental events and organizations in London
http://hbfc.clearerchannel.org	Do It Yourself handbook: 'A Radical Guide to Ethical and Sustainable Living'
http://thecoalhole.org	Documenting 'direct action' against the use of coal for energy production in the UK
http://thepansyproject.com	Resistance against homophobic abuse by artist Paul Harfleet
http://thinktank.boxwith.com/2007/07/pedagogical-factory-project	Non-conventional public education: exploring strategies for an educated city
http://www.21stcenturychallenges.org/challenges	Initiative by the Royal Geographical Society UK to encourage public engagement and 'enable informed decision-making among consumers, parents, voters, and employees and collectively as society'
http://www.350.org/dia.php	'International effort to raise awareness of the need to decrease carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere to 350 parts per million'
http://www.abahlali.org	Land rights campaign by/for Abahlali baseMjondolo, the South African shackdwellers' movement: part of a network of the 'radical poor people's movement'
http://www.areachicago.com	Seeks to create an independent network for organizations and individuals committed to social justice through cultural and educational practices within the city
http://www.bnsg.net	Artists who have devoted their research 'to the mutations in perceiving territories and places'

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

URL	Description
http://www.cat.org.uk	Centre for Alternative Technology, with links to a wide range of environmental, social and spatial justice organizations/sites
http://www.chicam.org	Children in Communication about Migration action research project funded by the European Commission
http://www.commonaction.org	Links to various sites promoting youth engagement and student involvement in social justice issues
http://www.diasporas.ac.uk/index.htm	Example of a UK Research Council programme's website
http://www.doaj.org/doaj	Directory of Open Access Journals
http://www.doaj.org/doaj?func=subject&cpid=83	
http://www.gees.bham.ac.uk/research/clusters/cpp/pgwg	University of Birmingham Public Geographies Working Group
http://www.geography.org.uk	The Geographical Association, 'furthering the learning and teaching of geography', runs various public geography initiatives including the Young People's Geographies Project as part of its remit
http://www.youngpeoplesgeographies.co.uk	Interactive website for children aged 9–10 years old doing geography projects
http://www.geojoes.co.uk	
http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/livingwage	Jane Wills' action research on the London Living Wage campaign
http://www.geography.dur.ac.uk/projects/fearsandhopes	Participatory action research exploring experiences of place among young people in the northeast of England, including an anti-bullying art project with young people of British and African backgrounds
http://www.ggip.co.uk	Give Geography Its Place campaign, raising awareness of the importance of the subject in preparing young people for life in the twenty-first century
http://www.iied.org	International Institute for Environment and Development – with lots of participatory action research materials from the 'developing world'
http://www.indymedia.org.uk	A network of individuals, independent and alternative media activists and organizations, offering grassroots, non-corporate, non-commercial coverage of important social and political issues
http://www.juicygeography.co.uk	Noel Jenkins' site offering 'ideas, lessons and resources for school geography' for age 11 and up
http://www.lammas.org.uk	Low-impact living and sustainability issues
http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/global_refugees	Academic research in partnership with regional community arts organizations, exploring transnational migrants' of belonging
http://www.missionexplore.co.uk	The Geography Collective's site encouraging young people to (re)engage and explore their local environments

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

URL	Description
http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/sass/about/media/mediaprodfilms	Collaborative films made by university students and local communities about Newcastle, UK
http://www.onehundredmonths.org	Climate change campaign site, counting down the months before 'we could be beyond our climate's tipping point' – tick tick tick ... Links to a wide range of other related environmental sites
http://www.otesha.org.uk	'Taking sustainable living personally', this project aims to share good ideas to 'create social and environmental change through our everyday lives'
http://www.participatoryactionteam.org	Group run by and for children of 'incarcerated family members', researching sources of stress and support among their peers
http://www.publicgreen.com which links to	Los Angeles-based artist Liz Mogel's work, including the Atlas of Radical Cartography and Journal of Aesthetics and Protest
http://www.an-atlas.com and http://www.joaap.org/new3/index.html	Participatory Geographies Research Group of the Royal Geographical Society
http://www.pygyrg.org	
http://www.rescuegeography.org.uk	Research project 'exploring understandings of space and place with mobile technologies', combining walking interviews, GPS and photography
http://www.rgs.org/hiddenhistories	Felix Driver's and Lowri Jones' public exhibition and website devoted to the role of indigenous peoples and intermediaries, including interpreters and guides, in the history of exploration
http://www.safetysandbox.co.uk	Participatory action/art research project working with local communities and sex workers in Walsall, UK
http://www.spacehijackers.org	A group of 'anarchitects' ... dedicated to battling the constant oppressive encroachment onto public spaces of institutions, corporations and urban planners'
http://www.st-alexander.nl	Sichting Alexander is a non-profit Dutch research and advice bureau on youth participation
http://www.terrorbullgames.co.uk	'Grapples' with serious geopolitical issues through 'the medium of the board game'
http://www.uhc.org.uk/ on which can be found	Ultimate Holding Company, a Manchester, UK, based collective 'exploring the modern city through critical cross disciplinary art practice' – 'A Public of Sorts' was a research project which aimed to engage with art audiences in Manchester, encourage a dialogue with non-art-going audiences and included provocative art interventions in 'public' spaces
http://www.uhc.org.uk/website/uploads/a-public-of-sorts-report.pdf	

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

URL	Description
http://ukyp.org.uk	UK Youth Parliament website
http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/cypguide/index.html	Unicef's child and youth participation resource guide
http://www.urbanearth.co.uk	Project to '(re)present our habitat by walking across some of Earth's biggest urban areas', photographing the walks and editing photos into short films of the urban landscapes
http://urbanadventure.wordpress.com	Interdisciplinary research and development, specializing in 'action research and co-inquiry to support learning and change in complex social and organizational systems', focus on work with organizations 'where social outcomes and social responsibility matter'
http://www.uwe.ac.uk/solar	Research project investigating experiences of neighbourhood public spaces among immigrants to the UK
http://www.walkingvoices.group.shef.ac.uk	Community-centred, collaborative performance art – see especially The Walking Project (USA and South Africa based) and Hilary Ramsden's 'interruptions, interventions and interactions'
http://www.walksquawk.org which links to http://walksquawk.blogspot align="char" char=" " fixalign="center".com/hilaryramsden	'We Think explores how the web is changing our world, creating a culture in which more people than ever can participate, share and collaborate, ideas and information'
http://www.wethinkthebook.net/home.aspx	One of Duncan's favourite sites, showcasing and celebrating 'ephemeral art' placed on streets in cities around the world
http://www.woostercollective.com	A collection of world maps, where territories are resized on each map according to the subject of interest
http://www.worldmapper.org	

Table 2. Blogs and wikis (some are open to responses, some are password-protected)

URL	Description
http://academicparticipation.wordpress.com	Elinor Predota's 'action research notes, as I navigate my way through postgraduate learning in human geography'
http://blogs.esri.com/Info/blogs/geography	Geography matters related to GIScience and geospatial technologies
http://crookedtimber.org	Collective from philosophy, literature, cultural studies, political science, sociology, educational policy studies, communication studies disciplines, as well as non-academics; many posts consider issues of social and spatial justice
http://cyberbadger.blogspot.com/ which links to http://mapsthatmatter.blogspot.com	Martin Dodge's research interests, especially around cartography; most recent postings around the public exhibition 'Mapping Manchester: cartographic stories of the city'
http://ecoecho.edublogs.org	Example of a blog devoted to the activities of students, in this case 'third grade classes at ECO Charter School in Camden, New Jersey', USA
http://engaginggeography.wordpress.com	ESRC funded seminar series exploring 'public geographies'
http://globalhighered.wordpress.com	Kris Olds' and Susan Robertson's thoughts/research 'Surveying the Construction of Global Knowledge/ Spaces for the 'Knowledge Economy'
http://gregorydonovan.org/cyberenviro	Example of a PhD student's research blog, taking 'a psycho-ecological approach to understanding the mutual shaping of cyborgs, cyberculture and cyberspace' (I am not sure what a 'dingpolitik' is, though.)
http://guerrillageography.blogspot.com	Direct action educating, 'to cause thought, connected thinking, stimulate the public and to wear down public resistance to geography, usually carried on by small groups behind public(s) lines, or in occupied spaces'
http://hilaritygeoghegan.wordpress.com	'The culture of enthusiasm: a way of passionately being-in-the-world'; research interests including geographies of knowledge and knowing, collecting and collections, and collaborative research
http://innercitysnail.blogspot.com	One of my favourites: a 'slow-moving street art project'
http://intersections.wordpress.com/about	Affiliated to the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council's 'Diasporas, Migration and Identities' research program
see also http://www.diasporas.ac.uk/index.htm	
http://inthemiddleofthewhirwind.wordpress.com	Team Colors Collective site with documents and debate regarding protest movements and contemporary radical organizing
http://kafila.org	'This team blog is a collaborative practice of radical political and media critique, and an engagement with the present'; includes geographers' contributions
http://mapperz.blogspot.com	Blog attempting to provide advice regarding the 'newest, fastest, cleanest and most user friendly maps' and GIS sites among the gazillion available online

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

URL	Description
http://multiculturality.wordpress.com/podcasts	Blog including audio podcasts of debate questioning the European 'Crisis of Multiculturalism'
http://mutablematter.wordpress.com	Angela Lasts' PhD research, 'an interactive project about our relationship with matter – the stuff that surrounds us, that we are made of and that increasingly comes up in public debates around new technologies'
http://povesham.wordpress.com	Muki Haklay's blog exploring the 'Usability of Geospatial Technologies, GIScience and Environmental Information'
http://savageminds.org	Collective of Professors, lecturers and PhD students 'devoted to both bringing anthropology to a wider audience as well as providing an online forum for discussing the latest developments in the field'
http://ubisurv.wordpress.com	David Murakami Woods' 'kind of research diary and clipboard exploring surveillance, security and society'
http://veryspatial.com	Site hosting VerySpatial Podcasts, centred on geography and geospatial technologies
http://writingcollaboration.wordpress.com	Initially put together for Ian Cook et al.'s presentation at 'Doing collaboration differently: challenging an unequal academy' and intended to provide space for discussion after the event, and evolve as a collaboratively written paper on collaborative writing
http://www.apartmentmanchester.blogspot.com	Artist-led project and exhibition space in social housing in Manchester, UK – work responded to issues surrounding the location of the space
http://www.cafe-geo.net	French-language geography-inspired discussion and thoughts
http://www.flickr.com/photos/alphadesigner/3192055736/sizes/o	Alternative map of Europe by Artwerk
http://www.gearthblog.com	Google Earth blog
http://www.jgieseking.org/blog	Jen Giesling 'geographer and PhD candidate in environmental psychology' research on the (potential) social and economic changes of queer women's spaces and places in New York City
http://www.lars.intanzania.org/about	Lars Johansson's project is 'to write about documentary filmmaking, participatory video, poverty and conflict over natural resources in Africa'
http://www.nowhere-fest.blogspot.com and http://loiterers-resistance-movement.pbworks.com	Psychogeography outfit, the Loiterers Resistance Movement, based in Manchester, UK
http://www.podnosh.com/blog	Established to make a 'Grassroots Channel' podcast for the Birmingham Community Empowerment Network, Podnosh works to connect local communities and schools with policy-makers, using social media
http://www.reclaiming-spaces.org	International virtual space for exchange and reflection among urban activists

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

URL	Description
http://www.southernspaces.org	Peer-reviewed open access journal and forum, with 'audio, video and interactive imagery and text' about real and imagined spaces and places of the US South, intended for 'researchers, teachers, students in and out of classrooms, and the general public'
http://www.spaceandculture.org	Weblog dedicated to critical debate regarding social spaces of all kinds
http://www.sprol.com	'Worst places in the world'
http://www.st-alexander.nl	Stichting Alexander is a non-profit Dutch research and advice bureau, collaborating with a range of organizations, groups and universities around youth participation
http://www.whereproject.org	Tim Lindgren's PhD research and wider interest around 'place blogging'

funding – with research councils' own websites posting research 'outcomes'. First, we need to think carefully about what exactly we mean/ understand by these terms: dissemination of results to the public is not the same as involving publics in research dissemination, whether using the internet or not; while economic impact is very different from social change (cf. recent debate on CritGeog forum). Second, we need to be aware of exploiting our own labour here: it is almost expected that you will set up an associated web- based something as part of research activity in addition to academic papers/chapters/conference presentations, which may be setting dangerous precedents for ourselves/future academics, requiring that we do this work on top of other pressures in a neoliberal academy demanding increasing productivity (Fuller and Askins, 2007; Bauder and Engel Di-Mauro, 2008). Thus 'website work' needs to be taken seriously alongside other audited/auditable fare, and this report adds to calls for 'public engagement' more broadly to be given validity within the quantifying of our roles.

We should also bring critical perspectives to bear regarding equality. We need to problematize the processes through which web-based interactions may be exclusionary and the extent to which the broader points raised in this report translate across different geographies: far from everyone has access to a computer/internet connection, and there are issues around technical skill, literacy and physical ability. There is a range of social and environmental matters to consider, too, before we all 'turn on and tune in' to the dazzling potential of the internet for public geographies. Not least are resource consumption and energy use issues, alongside questions of power relations – eg, who owns/controls websites and the software that enables them? Utilizing Rupert Murdoch's Facebook surely has parallel dilemmas for plenty of people who campaigned against the publisher Elsevier Reed's involvement in the arms trade (see Chatterton, 2008). The web references in the tables are not edited from my own ethical/political perspective: 'veryspatial' appear to be sponsored by ESRI, who appear to have sponsored a 'Homeland Security Summit' in summer 2009 in the USA, and I am wondering about their role in military mapping.

There are ethical concerns, too, around safeguarding those involved in public geographies with us, especially children. As with any research, organic public geographies/ers need to carefully consider relationships with and responsibilities towards others in virtual space. This has long been a topic of academic

Table 3. Traditional and more organic public geographies

URL	Description
www.myspace.com/anders_lund_hansen http://davidharvey.org	David Harvey (City University of New York): 'The Right to the City' lecture given at Lund University and 'Urban Roots to the Fiscal Crisis'
http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/freethink-ing2006/pip/hcb0r	Doreen Massey (Open University): 'Is the World Really Shrinking?'
http://www.paglen.com/pages/media.html	Trevor Paglen (UC Berkeley) speaking on The Colbert Report talkshow
http://veryspatial.com/ (podcast series, special episode 49)	Dick Peet talking about Human Geography journal
http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00jcd7/Start_the_Week_30_03_2009 http://video.google.com/videosearch?q=annebuttimmer&sitesearch	Susan Smith discussing house ownership, Nicholas Stern on climate change and Peter Singer on fighting poverty
http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/listenagain/listenagain_20070101.shtml	'Invitation to dialogue – the history of geographic thought', early geographical debate initiated by Anne Buttimmer and Torsten Hägerstrand
http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=RGSIBG#g/u	Geographical Association-led takeover of the 'Today Programme' on BBC Radio 4 in the UK
http://www.blackwell-compass.com/home_video#gecofilm	Professor Sir Gordon Conway introducing the RGS Annual Review, one of many videos available from the Royal Geographic Society on YouTube
	James Evans and Phil Jones (2008) video-paper 'Towards Lefebvrian socio-nature? A film about rhythm, nature and science', Geography Compass 3 http://www.history.ac.uk/public
	'History and the public' conference 2006, plenary talks and roundtable discussion
http://www.thegreatdebate.org.uk/RadicalPolToday.html#HuttonGiddens1	Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens discussing politics (indirectly geographical.)

consideration in the computer science, medical ethics, behavioural science and psychology fields (Morris, 1999; Hakken, 2000). While geographers have been interrogating the virtual world as space and place for a while (eg, Crang et al., 1999; Kendall, 2002; Adams, 2005), we have spent less time on the ethics of engagement through such spaces (though see <http://www.becta.org.uk>, a public resource regarding ethics/ issues/good practice for online working with schools/schoolchildren).

Websites of all kinds, of course, should be carefully appraised regarding the reliability and rigour of material found there: the social construction of bloggers as opinionated individuals not restricted by academic concerns around research has some validity. The point is we need to retain criticality. Duncan, by his own admission, spent many hours per week 'surfing the t'interweb', and in writing this report I got properly sucked into the ether trail. Ire-emerged after a week's 'research', somewhat dazed by the huge diversity and wealth of information. Such immersion in material is not only the realm of the internet, as we can get lost following trails of ideas in (paper) journals too, but the effortless click onto the next page/next site/picture which then takes you on another thread exacerbates such pursuit. Indeed, internet addiction is an emergent issue (and research topic – see Jay Sosa's entry on www.savageminds.org, 31 May 2009) to be aware and wary of.

The world wide web, then, surely has a central role in the 'new', organic, emergent, public

geographies – both in making them visible and in making them happen. Debates about the internet are increasing for academics more broadly, not least the effects that open access journals may have on the academy, which links to several points raised above. There is a need to carefully reflect upon the virtual world as an enabling space, and what it may offer to or detract from public engagements around geographical issues. But organic public geographies also involve conversations with publics in the real as well as virtual sense, to which we now turn.

III Doing public geographies: process and praxis

Actual/real/physical ... however you choose to define it, much of the organic public geographies Duncan attested to in his first report involve being together with others, ‘working with area- based or single interest groups, in which the process itself might be the outcome’ (Ward, 2006: 499). And it is the being process-orientated that lends organic public geographies not only to utilizing the internet, but also to certain kinds of geographical endeavour. Duncan had made notes suggesting ‘key themes’ which fall into this emphasis on process: participatory (action) research; psychogeography; academic activism; teaching (we discussed widening participation initiatives and free universities alongside the ‘usual’ forms); and collaboration between geographers and the art world (examples of all are included in Tables 1 and 2).

There is, importantly, the proviso that much organic public geography spans more than one theme, given that they are constituted through process, and I would add that any areas of work/geography may be publically engaged – eg, see Caroline Bressey’s archival research regarding the presence of black communities in Victorian-era Britain (<http://www.danacentre.org.uk/events/2007/10/16/162>) and Divya ToliaKelly’s recent exhibition exploring the cultural heritage of the North of England ([http:// www.twmuseums.org.uk/news/exhibition-toexplore-multicultural-hadrian-s-wall](http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/news/exhibition-toexplore-multicultural-hadrian-s-wall)).

Moreover, Duncan would often say that he ‘didn’t set out to be a public geographer’; that his own personal journey to public geographies followed an emergent path, through the doing of certain kinds of geography, networking and other activities, which led him to being involved in the Birmingham Public Geographies Working Group symposium outlined in his first report. And this ties in with a point that became central in the first of the ‘public geographies’ seminar series mentioned earlier⁵ (see <http://engaginggeography.wordpress.com>). Entitled ‘How did that happen?’, the aim was to be open to conversations around how public geographies occur: rather than ‘what is public geography?’, our question was ‘how do geographers engage with publics?’ What emerged was that often/in many cases, it is a serendipitous process. Indeed, Susan Buckingham used the term ‘serendipity’ in her opening talk as part of a panel discussion, and it was taken up and reflected upon by the other speakers as well as in wider debate across the participants ... pivotal to many experiences/doings/journeys were somewhat ‘lucky’ happenstances, chance meetings, fortunate connections, unplanned moments leading to new paths, new involvements in or with organizations, communities, individuals, projects, research, actions, and/or teaching of a public flavour, as broadly defined in Duncan’s first report.

There are two points to make here. The first is that not only public geographies result from serendipity or unplanned moments: all manner of academic/geographical inquiry can and does emerge from fortunate encounters, though these are rarely documented, and omitted from official dissemination/reports. What organic public geographies can/should do is foreground the necessarily unforeseeable processes involved as a positive element of this work, and argue for the value of such methodology/activity. Currently, it is difficult to find funding, time or space for ‘unstructured’ research of this nature: we need

to build our case and argue that it has its own logic/structure, full of potential.

The second, and complicating the first, is that, at some level, different degrees of agency are evident. Serendipity involves a 'being in the right place at the right time' but there is also the 'putting oneself in the right place at the right time'. Serendipity might mean 'fortune' or 'chance', but there is maybe more to 'making the connections' (Hawkins et al., 2009) than that. Just one case in point: at the 2009 annual RGS-IBG conference, the Participatory Geographies Working Group⁴ hosted sessions outside formal conference space in a local community centre, open (and free) to everyone, in an effort to enable more participatory, public debate. All manner of conversations between all manner of people ensued, sparking potential new collaborations, connections and research.

This 'spatiality of serendipity' links to a well-developed literature around praxis, positionality and 'relevance' regarding our place as geographers (covered in Duncan's first report) – having a certain politics, a 'geography of responsibility' (Massey, 2004) or 'caring geography' (Lawson, 2009), tying in our work/role as academics to our duty as citizens at a range of scales. It also connects to emerging debates regarding the emotionality of motivation – we take up serendipitous encounters, follow up chance opportunities, because it feels right (Cope, 2008; Wright, 2008; Askins, 2009; Brown and Pickerill, 2009). For me, doing organic public geographies is grounded both in specific ways of thinking/ seeing the world, alongside having a will to public geographies, an emotional connection to (feeling passionate about?) the subjects/issues/ relationships involved (see Mitchell, 2008).

IV Onwards: beyond 'public geographies'?

I hope that this report has been useful in raising a
few points/issues, and putting together in one
place a range of potentially stimulating and

relevant site s/blogs/wikis to explore. There are some amazing and inspiring projects, activities, reflections out there, many of them thoughtful, critical and (arguably) examples of emerging, organic public geographies. This brings me to a final thought here: what about those people doing geography without us? Non-academics (as Duncan put it, 'a bunch of brilliant amateurs') going around doing projects/research/ community engagement at the grassroots level, specifically geographically focused ... public, yes, but is it public geography?

Knowledge production debates loom large here. If we take seriously the notion of academics as co-learners together with publics (Freire, 1972; Fals Borda, 2001; Giroux, 2005) in a two-way process – or, rather, along multiple trajectories – then surely when academics are taken out of the equation people retain the ability to think geographically, think critically about geographical matters, learn, and act upon their learning. This would suggest that organic public geographies happen regardless of academic involvement. In Duncan's words, 'that opens up a can of worms', and is perhaps an uncomfortable issue. Given the potentially all-encompassing scope of geography, long recognized as a central paradox of our discipline (Johnston, 1984), there is a vast array of projects that could claim to be organic public geographies. What then is our role?

For a variety of reasons, there is not going to be a third report to address this question, so I leave it hanging there. But I am certain that debate around doing public geographies will continue ... organically.

Notes

1. Duncan quotes directly from his first public geographies review article (Fuller, 2008) throughout this introduction.
2. For those unaware of Duncan or his work, there are obituaries available in ACME 8(1), Antipode ([http:// www.antipode-online.net/antiobits.asp#fuller](http://www.antipode-online.net/antiobits.asp#fuller)) and Social and Cultural Geography 10(3

3. Such 'quotes' throughout the rest of this report are personal comments (as best I can remember them) from Duncan, or handwritten notes I found among his public geographies stuff.
4. Participatory Geographies Working Group of the Royal Geographical Society, pronounced 'piggywig'. Duncan was co-founder of this group, and the name reflects his love for amusing acronyms as well as his dedication to doing geography outside the academy (see www.pygywg.org). The group has now become a full Research Group of the RGS.
5. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK), entitled 'Engaging Geography', the proposal for this seminar series was led by Duncan, though sadly he was not alive to see it come to fruition.

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