

Politics and Ethnography in an Age of Uncertainty

The 12th Annual Ethnography Symposium

University of Manchester: 30th August – 1st September 2017

Keynotes:

Professor Emma Crewe (SOAS, University of London); Professor Bruno Latour (Sciences Po);
Professor Bill Maurer (University of California, Irvine); Professor Hugh Willmott (CASS Business School, London)

Stream 4: Marketing

Convenors: Tim Hill, *University of Bath* & Robin Canniford, *University of Melbourne*

Ethnographies in marketing and consumer research studies once focused on the localised and esoteric worlds of ‘consumer oddballs’ (Arnould and Thompson 2007). From leather-clad Harley riders (Schouten and McAlexander 1995) to modern mountain men (Belk and Costa 1998), to ‘burners’ (Kozinets 2002) and ecstasy-dropping ravers (Goulding et al. 2009), consumer researchers have used single-site fieldwork to detail how shared interests and market resources enable consumers to carve our localised social orders.

Notwithstanding the contributions made in these contexts, questions have been raised over whether single-sited methodologies remain appropriate to investigate a rapidly changing ‘world system’ (Appadurai 1990; Marcus 1995; Burawoy et al. 2000). This world system was envisaged as increasingly complex, interconnected, global in character, and moulded by ‘the penetrating impersonal systems of political economy’ (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 95). As single-sited methodologies could potentially miss how local sites are connected to such processes, multi-sited ethnography was seen as an attempt to adapt consumer research to these changing conditions (Bettany & Daly 2007). Accordingly, descriptions of geographically bounded consumer cultures have been augmented by multi-sited investigations that foreground seamless movements of people, ideas and objects, transnational flows, and the influence of globalized political and economic orthodoxies (Canniford 2005; Cayla and Eckhardt 2008; Kjeldgaard et al. 2006; Penalzoa 1994; Wilk 1995, 2006).

Nevertheless, as we enter the early decades of a new century, the interconnected world system these multi-sited ethnographies sought to reveal has been called into question. Ironically, the loudest denouncements of contemporary connectivity and flows come from the political elites and economic institutions that once championed the creation of financial, technical and supply infrastructures that fed the connectivity of consumer culture. For it appears the unintended consequences of a world marked by increasing complexity and interconnection are new forms of uncertainty (Humphreys and Thompson 2014). As the theme of the 12th International Ethnography Symposium identifies, new forms of uncertainty present a necessity to investigate and reflect on the different ways in which unease, distrust and anxiety manifest in consumers’ lives and how the varied practices of marketing exasperate, reproduce and manage this uncertainty (Giesler and Veresiu 2014). Topics papers might look to address - by no means exhaustive - are as follows:

- How do novel technological or discursive consumption resources emerge and operate in order to render one’s uncertain world controllable? (Bode and Brogard Krisensen 2016; Fitchett and Lim 2008)
- What is the relationship between groups categorised as ‘vulnerable consumers’ (Kerrigan et al. 2007; Hamilton et al. 2014; Piacentini and Hamilton 2013; Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013) and transformations in the ‘world system’?
- What role does the ‘access economy’ (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2016) and increased indebtedness (Penalzoa and Barnhart 2011) play in the creation and reproduction of uncertainties?

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- What are the affective and emotional bodily states produced through increasing uncertainty and the different ways in which brands work to provide individualised solutions to these structural problems? (Holt 2012; Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Thompson and Schor 2014)
- How are marketing techniques - whether these are practices of segmentation and categorisation, or cultural branding (Holt, 2004; Smith and Speed 2011) - implicated in an increasingly populist and unpredictable political arena?
- How are consumer social movements advancing images of a better and new futures (Kozinets and Handelman 2004), whether to achieve environmental sustainability (Chatzidakis et al. 2012; McDonagh 1998) or to secure worthwhile, secure and valuable employment?
- To what extent is marketing and branding benefitting from a global politics that no longer looks to provide utopian images of our collective future? (Bajde 2013)
- What is the relationship between changing political economic structures, mental health issues (Hill 2002; Lindridge et al. 2015), and substance and drug abuse (Hackley et al. 2012; Griffin et al. 2009)?
- To what extent are commercial ethnographies (Arnould and Cayla 2015; Thompson 2011) become more attractive as uncertainties grow over the marketing application and value of 'big data'?

Please submit a 500 word abstract or proposal by **Tuesday 28th February 2017** to **T.R.Hill@Bath.ac.uk**. Decisions on acceptance will be made by 30th March 2017.

The Annual Ethnography Symposium is a leading international forum for debate and dialogue on the theory, practice, and form of ethnographic work. It was established in 2005 at the University of Liverpool as a multi- and inter-disciplinary platform for researchers using ethnographic methods in the social and management sciences. In this time it has established an international reputation for attracting the best keynotes and papers from across the world, covering disciplines as diverse as anthropology, business and management, criminology, history, health-care, philosophy, psychology, socio-legal studies, social care, and sociology. It is unique in its commitment to cross-disciplinary dialogue and its reputation also lies in providing friendly, supportive, yet rigorous critique on papers, integrating and supporting doctoral students, and opening up a wider network of cross-disciplinary scholars to those employing ethnographic methods.

In 2017 the symposium takes as its theme the question of politics and ethnography in “an age of uncertainty” and is hosted at the University of Manchester. In bringing the 2017 annual ethnography symposium to the University of Manchester we hope to take inspiration from the first industrialised city and all the tensions and contradictions that have made politics so lively in this city. From the Peterloo massacre to the mass trespass, the suffrage movement and the founding of the Trade Union Congress, Manchester has been a hotbed of protest, resistance, and revolution. Beyond these obvious manifestations of politics, we might say politics gets made first - or at least reinvented - in Manchester! The site where the atom was first made ‘nuclear’, and where the 1980s acid house rave culture forced us to re-think the boundaries of politics as it expanded our imagination about possible new ways of being, the energies in Manchester are never very far from politics. Feeding off some of these energies is the University of Manchester. Founded in 1824 as the Mechanics Institute, it became England’s first civic university and since then has changed lives around the world; it was here that Rutherford split the atom and Chadwick discovered the neutron, where Alan Turing built the first self-contained computer, and where graphene was discovered by Nobel prize winning scientists Professor Andre Geim and

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Professor Kostya Novoselov. The University also has a proud heritage of cross-disciplinary ethnographic research, following the founding of the Manchester School Social Anthropology by Max Gluckman in 1947.

We invite you to join us in Manchester for the 12th International Ethnography Symposium. For the first time the conference is hosting a series of specialist streams that address the theme of politics from a variety of perspectives and disciplines see <http://www.conferece.manchester.ac.uk/events/ethnography/> where further information, registration, travel and accommodation details can also be found.