



Evidence & Temporality Workshop

16 March 2018 - Senatus Room, Westminster College, Cambridge

Convener: Dr Trenholme Junghans

How might evidence and temporality be productively thought in tandem? Construed as the grounds of knowledge, prevailing constructs of evidence often seem to have a retrospective tilt: past occurrences and observed patterns are consulted to make sense of the present and as guides to future action. So conceived, evidence reinforces Occidental ideas of temporality as a continuously flowing current of successive and irreversible moments. In this way it might be said that prevailing constructs of evidence and temporality work to co-constitute one another as figures and frames of continuity and determination.

This workshop will consider ways in which notions and practices of evidence and temporality, and the relations presumed to obtain between them, are being challenged and reconfigured in different disciplinary domains and epistemic traditions, and in conjunction with contemporary developments ranging from advances in genomics and the emergence of a "promissory" bioeconomy; climate change and anthropogenic precarity; and the phenomenon of "fake news" and the dawning of a "post-truth" era.

Speakers & Chairs

Louise Braddock *ISRF Director of Research*

Zoë Crossland *Associate Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University*

Trenholme Junghans *Research Associate ('Limits of the Numerical'), Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge*

Rachael Kiddey *ISRF Editorial Assistant; Postdoctoral Researcher ('Architectures of Displacement'), Pitt-Rivers Museum, University of Oxford*

Paul Martin *Professor of Sociology, University of Sheffield*

Marilyn Strathern *Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge*

Miklós Sükösd *Associate Professor, Department of Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen*

Nina Holm Vohnsen *Associate Professor of Anthropology, Aarhus University*



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Schedule

16th March 2018

12:30pm Lunch & Registration

1:10pm Introduction

- Louise Braddock
- Trenholme Junghans

SESSION ONE

Chair: Louise Braddock

1:30pm Nina Holm Vohnsen

"They Did Not Pilot the Welfare State" - The problem and the promise of piloting in policy-making

In this talk, I want to consider the early stages of planning for a possible pilot on Universal Basic Income in Fife, Scotland. In my talk, I draw on interviews with key stakeholders in the process and a number of internal and public documents related to the case. I focus on a particular moment in the development of the pilot and discusses the idea of 'piloting', which in today's policy-making seems to be an indispensable stage preceding radically new policy. Yet it seems there is a fundamental mismatch between 'a pilot' and the innovative work such are often called upon to do. Taking as my starting point for a discussion a key civil servants lament that "they did not pilot the welfare state" I want to probe the argument that the real potential of a pilot lies not in its capacity to predict and prepare for policy outcome but in its capacity to prototype political alliances which might eventually do other work.

2:00pm Miklós Sükösd

Fake News vs. Journalistic Objectivity: A medium theory perspective

In this intervention, I compare "objective news coverage" with two of its recent challengers, "fake news" (in US/Western online media) and "public opinion management" (in China) from the angles of evidence creation and temporality. The classic notion of *objectivity* in news journalism first means accuracy, i.e., that the professional journalist conveys the exact information that was shared by news sources in the immediate past, as well as non-partiality, and is guided by the famous 5 W-s of information gathering and verification: Who were the key actors in an event? What happened? When? Where? Why? (A sixth question, "how did it happen" is sometimes added.) *Fake news* is not constituted by these principles and methods. Instead, the communicability of fake news becomes the key value that ensures its virality in the online environment. Instead the online users who share fake news become key actors. Verification is missing, while virality rules. *Online public opinion management* is a key term that originated from the information managers of the Chinese internet. It refers to a managed information regime with many successive layers of soft and hard censorship. The Chinese government has established the "Great Firewall" to create a sovereign, heavily controlled internet (a kind of *intranet*) that is partially separated from the global internet where global online services (like Google or Facebook) are banned and replaced by domestic services, and many foreign websites with "sensitive content" cannot be accessed. On the one hand, the content of the Chinese online services are heavily filtered (many keywords are censored). On the other hand, the big data flows of keywords are supplied to government's information managers. The massive flows of online public opinion are effectively visualized and monitored in real time. To interpret the coming of age of online fake news and public opinion management, this paper call for a combined use of *institutional analysis and medium theory*, where, to avoid technological determinism, medium theory is used together with content- and institutional approaches that further consider power relations of media.



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SESSION ONE *(cont.)*

2:30pm Paul Martin

Hope springs eternal: claims-based policy making in the UK bioeconomy

The UK government has supported a massive programme of investment in large scale infrastructure in genomics over the last 20 years by claiming that this will bring both medical benefits to the NHS and stimulate a new bioeconomy. This is most apparent in the funding of Genomics England, the largest biomedical research project ever undertaken in this country. However, much of the justification for this investment is made on the grounds of what the development of genomics technology and the bioeconomy associated with it will bring in the future. This paper will review the evidence marshalled in support on this policy priority in a number of official documents over the last decade and argue that the main driver has been support for a 'genomic imaginary'. Here it is a set of claims rather than solid evidence of the return on previous investment that is shaping policy. The paper will also reflect on claims from earlier policy documents that have been forgotten when they failed to materialise. In conclusion, it will be argued that evidence is used selectively and strategically by the promissory community benefitting from genomics research when making claims for state support.

3:00pm Coffee Break

SESSION TWO

Chair: Rachael Kiddey

3:30pm Zoë Crossland

The Temporality of the Trace: Standing stones and memory work in highland Madagascar

How might we think evidence in relation to memory, the privilege of history and the anticipation of future becomings? Turning to the chaotic and politically unstable world of late 19th century highland Madagascar, I explore how pasts and futures were staked to the market, to slavery, and to the biographies of powerful men through commemorative practices around standing stones. Drawing on Peirce and Derrida I ask about the temporality of such traces, exploring how they both insinuate the past into the present and attempt to shape the potential of the future. What are the implications for how we write history and for how we conceive our own relationships to the traces of the past?

4:15pm Marilyn Strathern

4:30pm Comfort Break

SESSION THREE

Chair: Trenholme Junghans

4:35pm Open Discussion

5:45pm Closing Remarks



Relating Pasts and Presents: History of Science and Social Science

26-28 September 2018 - Harnack-Haus, Berlin

Beginning with the inaugural May 2013 event, the ISRF Annual Workshop provides a platform for ISRF Fellows to report on their research projects, and also to contribute to conversations and discussions around a theme. Each Annual Workshop is themed around a topic, methodology or debate of interest within (and across) the social sciences.

The 2018 ISRF Workshop pursues the line of thought emerging from last year's 'Today's Futures', that to plan intelligently for the future we need to pay attention to the past. But what happens when social scientists and historians meet and talk? Particularly, when the ISRF's fellows meet historians of knowledge at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin.

The ISRF's commitment is to support research which is interdisciplinary and reflexively critical, and seeks new theories and methods for understanding the conditions of life as it is lived by human beings now. In the 2018 Workshop we plan a wide-ranging exploration of how a sensibility to the history of knowledge might inspire thinking in social science. With a format of short research presentations, thematic discussions, dialogues across disciplines, and participants' creative responses, the ISRF will engage with scholars at the Max Planck Institute over what history of science and social science might make of one another.



Title Relating Pasts and Presents: History of Science and Social Science

Date 26-28 September 2018

Venue Harnack-Haus, Ihnstraße 16-20, 14195 Berlin, Germany

Registration <http://www.isrf.org/workshops/annual-workshop/#aw6>

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