



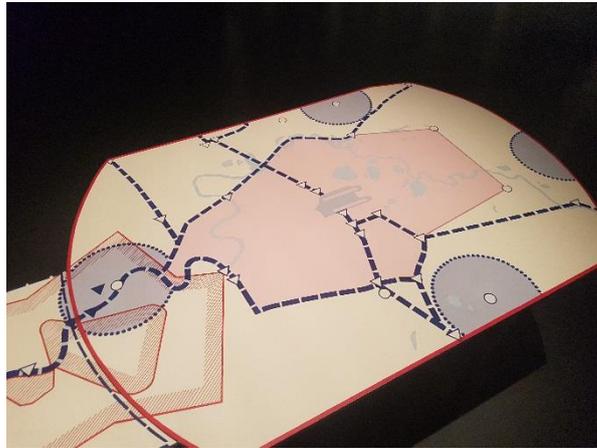
Watermans Arts Centre

THE POLITICS OF AIR

A Symposium

Saturday November 9, 2019 10 – 5.30

Matthew Flinham, Heathrow (Volumetric
Airspace Structures), Mixed media, 2019



Welcome

Watermans Arts Centre invites you to join us for a day of presentations, discussions and debates on the politics of air in the Heathrow neighbourhood. We will be asking: What are the various ways in which the air is used and who uses it? How does the air shape our societies, and how democratically is it governed? How is the air fought over? What ethical questions around air use, noise and air pollution do planners face and how might we equip them to shape its future?

We bring together perspectives from the audience, community representatives, industry professionals and academics across the arts, geography, environmental science and politics. The ambition is an event of international significance in which participants define challenges, generate strategic questions, and instigate new approaches to the struggle over air.

About

The Politics of Air is part of *Air Matters. Learning from Heathrow*, an exhibition and programme of talks, walking tours, and workshops at Watermans Arts Centre.

#airmatters #watermansartscentre

Convened by Dr Nick Ferguson in collaboration with Klio Krajewska at Watermans Arts Centre.

Supported by:



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Schedule

10.15. Welcome note. Nick Ferguson

10.30. Keynote. Professor Derek McCormack. *Heathrow's Atmospheric Things*

11.20. Short break

11.30. **Panel I. Space**

Presentations and discussions in which contributors raise philosophical and theoretical considerations around the politics of air.

Chair: Harshavardhan Bhat

Dr Nerea Calvillo Materiality of Air

Dr Salome Voegelin Indivisible Volumes. Airplanes Landing

Dr Christian Nold Ontological Design for New Politics at Heathrow

1.00. **Break.** A finger buffet lunch will be served in the foyer.

2.00. **Panel II. Resistance**

Conversations with representatives or organisations which have led resistance against the airport

Contributors:

John Stewart. *Aircraft Noise and its Discontents*. In conversation with Nick Ferguson

Ali Tamlit. *Grow Heathrow*. In conversation with Harshavardhan Bhat

Heathrow Pause/Extinction Rebellion. *Drone Activism*. In conversation with Anna Feigenbaum

3.20. Short Break

3.30. **Panel III. Democratic Futures**

Interactive session exploring societal challenges presented by the airport, the future of political struggle in the context of unequal power relations and an expanding aviation industry.

Provocation: Dr Paul Rekret

Contributors:

Dr Anna Feigenbaum

Professor Steven Griggs

Dr George Voss

5.00. Drinks and Performance by Dr Sasha Engelmann and Sophie Dyer 'Satellite Séances'.

Presentation Abstracts

Dr Nerea Calvillo. *Aeropolis, or how to Inhabit the Air*

The air tends to be absent from urban politics, design, and imaginaries. Today, its pollution is drawing attention to it, and yet, the only legitimate ways of knowing and responding to air quality are technological "solutions" that are proving not to be enough. One of the reasons, I argue, is because the air's materiality is not considered in its complexity. So, to think about the air as an organic, inorganic, geological, chemical, technological and biological force, challenges our understanding of the city and of the air. To shape an urban cosmopolitics with the air, from a framework at the intersection of science and technologies studies, feminist technoscience and urban political ecologies, I suggest to use the heuristic of a city to identify Madrid's urban assemblage. Madrid, as a very polluted but average European city, allows to think about the urban air of the every-day, the one that is invisible and mostly imperceptible. The heuristic of the city, as a speculative project, allows to spatialize the air, and makes visible its political and social implications. How can this approach contribute to new framings of the urban air and, therefore, of the city?

Dr Sasha Engelmann and Sophie Dyer *Satellite Séances*

'Satellite Séances' is a performance of citizen-led weather forecasting and atmospheric sensing. For this event radio amateur technology is used to decode images of the clouds and weather from NOAA polar orbiting satellites. The work is timed to coincide with the 15-minute pass of a satellite over London, which happen around 2-3 times per 24 hours. A raw image of the weather is generated to coincide with the Air Matters event and is impacted by the bodies involved in the process.

Professor Derek P. McCormack. Heathrow's Atmospheric Things

Responding to some of the artistic works commissioned as part of *Air Matters: Learning from Heathrow*, this presentation will reflect on how atmospheres in and around Heathrow are rendered explicit through experiments, installations, and speculations with atmospheric things. For the purposes of the discussion, atmospheric things will be understood as devices for generating, sensing, and modifying atmospheres as milieus that are simultaneously affective and meteorological. This discussion will be given focus by drawing on a number of examples in which a deceptively simple object – the balloon – is deployed as a device for doing atmospheric things. These examples, in turn, show us how objects provide important orientations towards the matter(s) of Heathrow's atmospheres.

Dr Christian Nold. *Ontological Design for New Politics at Heathrow*

This presentation reflects on five years of research at Heathrow airport, which focused on it as a controversy involving bodies and sensation as well as noise metrics and measurement devices. I will examine a government funded report called the 'Attitudes to Noise from Aviation Sources Study' (Le Masurier et al., 2007) that found that the onset of annoyance is much lower than previously thought, which would mean the number people affected by noise would be much higher. While heavily contested, the study was dismissed due to 'procedural errors'. Yet, my presentation argues that the rejection was due to an ontological clash between different conceptions of human sensation and politics. These battles over the ontology of sensation are at the core of the Heathrow controversy and yet are largely invisible in the official and activist discourses. Nevertheless, a focus on 'multiple ontologies' (Mol, 2002) opens up the possibility of 'ontological design' (Nold, 2018) that can intervene and support different realities in practice. The presentation displays some of the sensing prototypes that were built via a participatory design process with residents and resulted in an experimental sensing network that offers potential for new kinds of politics at Heathrow airport.

Professor Salomé Voegelin. *Indivisible Volumes*

Airplanes landing

sound a menacing shape in the dark. Periodically bursting forth from nowhere, to pierce a thin whining line that eventually flattens out into a thick form that covers my space, formless but determined. A small murmur becoming large; a great big dragon fly

enveloping my room, expanding its body and imploding its shape to enfold the whole space with the force of its cry, until it moves on, lighter now as if unburdened, vanishing into the night.

www.soundwords.tumblr.com

This presentation reflects on the space between airplanes, human and non-human things on the flightpath. Entering into the verticality of their relationship and the volume of their interdependence to narrate from the invisible in-between and the time of their encounter a perceptual fiction of the real.

Speaker Biographies

Harshavardhan Bhat is a PhD candidate with the Monsoon Assemblages project at the University of Westminster. His doctoral work on the 'air of the monsoon' is an environmental humanities project on changing monsoonal-urban relations in/of the New Delhi National Capital Region. Follow Harsh on Twitter @harsh_co.

Nerea Calvillo is an architect, curator and academic. The work produced at her office, C+arquitectas, and her environmental visualization projects such as *In the Air* have been presented, exhibited and published internationally. Her research investigates the material, technological, political and social dimensions of environmental pollution. She is Assistant Professor at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies at the University of Warwick.

Sophie Dyer is a designer, researcher and activist. She works on visual, open source and human rights-based investigations. Sophie studied at the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths. She co-produces the experimental documentary unit, Concrete Flux. Offline and over the airwaves she is M6NYX.

Sasha Engelmann is a London-based geographer, researcher and artist exploring and initiating collective encounters with weather, atmosphere and the elements. She is Lecturer in GeoHumanities in the department of Geography at Royal Holloway University, where she convenes the Landscape Surgery seminar series, and co-directs the GeoHumanities Creative Commissions program.

Anna Feigenbaum is a Senior Lecturer at Bournemouth University. She is co-author of *Protest Camps* (Zed 2013) and author of *Tear Gas* (Verso 2017). Her writing can be found in

a variety of academic and media outlets including The Guardian, The Atlantic, Al Jazeera America and Open Democracy.

Nick Ferguson is an artist based in London. His research examines the relationship between art, space and power, with a current thematic focus on London Heathrow, its neighbourhoods and airspace. Recent projects have featured at/in the Royal Geographic Society (2019), Places Journal (2019), Tate (2018), and the Journal of Cultural Geography (2017). He is Associate Dean for Research at Richmond University and Senior Lecturer in Critical and Historical Studies at Kingston School of Art.

Steven Griggs is Professor of Public Policy and Director of the Local Governance Research Centre at De Montfort University. David Howarth is Professor of Politics and Co-Director of the Centre for Ideology and Discourse Analysis at the University of Essex. Their work analyses the democratic governance of airports in the UK and Europe, exploring the competing demands of economic growth, increased connectivity and environmental protection. Their book, *The Politics*

Derek McCormack is Professor of Cultural Geography at the University of Oxford. He has written about nonrepresentational theory, affect, atmospheres, and the elemental. He is the author of *Refrains for Moving Bodies: Experience and Experiment in Affective Spaces* (2014), and *Atmospheric Things: On the Allure of Elemental Envelopment* (2018), both published with Duke University Press.

Mike Lynch-White is an international actions coordinator for Extinction Rebellion and the independent 'Heathrow Pause' group. A previous theoretical physics PhD student who left due to climate grief, he now uses these skills to devise and coordinate mass participation civil disobedience actions, in the pursuit of a peaceful global rebellion.

Christian Nold is an artist, designer and academic researcher who builds participatory technologies for collective representation. He has created large-scale public art projects such as 'Bio Mapping' and 'Emotion Mapping'. He has set up experimental currencies: the 'Bijlmer Euro' in Holland and the 'Suomenlinna Kuula' in Finland. Writing includes 'Mobile Vulgus', 'Emotional Cartography: Technologies of the Self', 'The Internet of People for a Post-Oil World' and 'Autopsy of an Island Currency'. He is a postdoctoral research associate in the Geography Department at UCL.

Paul Rekret is the author of *Down With Childhood: Pop Music and the Crisis of Innocence* (2017), and *Derrida and Foucault: Philosophy, Politics, Polemics* (2018) along with many academic journal articles on social theory. His writing has featured in *Frieze*, *the Quietus*, *the New Inquiry*, and he has presented internationally, including at CTM Festival Berlin, Unsound Festival Krakow, ISSUE Projects New York, Cafe Oto London and UnionDocs New York. He teaches political and cultural theory at Richmond the American International University in London.

John Stewart has worked or campaigned in the fields of transport and noise for the past 35 years. Since 2000 he has chaired HACAN which gives a voice to residents under the Heathrow flight paths. He is the author of *Why Noise Matters*, published by Earthscan in 2011.

Ali Tamlit is an activist, facilitator and trainer. He holds a BA in Geography and a Masters in International Development, qualifications which have pointed him towards the need to begin his work in Britain. Between 2014 and 2017 he lived at Grow Heathrow, a protest camp occupying land earmarked for the development of a third runway at London Heathrow. More recently, he has been part of campaigns with End Deportations.

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Salomé Voegelin is an artist, writer and researcher engaged in listening as a socio-political practice of sound. Her most recent book *The Political Possibility of Sound: Fragments of Listening*, 2018, articulates a politics that includes creativity and invention and imagines transformation and collaboration as the basis of our living together. Voegelin is a Professor of Sound at the London College of Communication, UAL.

Georgina Voss is an artist and writer, whose work explores on the presence and politics of large-scale technologies and complex systems. She is a Reader in Systems and Deviance at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, where she is co-founder and lead of Supra Systems Studio.

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