



# Vertical Geographies Workshop

*Vertigo (2009) FABIO GIAMPIETRO*

**DATE:**

**Wednesday 8 December 2010, 9.30am-5.00pm**

**VENUE:**

**The Boardroom  
Royal Holloway @ Bedford Square  
2, Gower Street  
London  
WC1E 6DP**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

- [www.verticalgeographies.com](http://www.verticalgeographies.com)
- [backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/12/vertical-geographies/](http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/12/vertical-geographies/)
- [a.d.pinkerton@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:a.d.pinkerton@rhul.ac.uk)

**WORKSHOP SPONSORS**



# Workshop Schedule

**09.30:**        **Arrival and coffee**

**09.45:**        **Introduction: Alasdair Pinkerton**

**10.00:**        **Panel 1**  
**Space, Bodies and Violence**  
**Chair: Alasdair Pinkerton**

Aerial Life: space, substance and 'being-in-the-air'  
Pete Adey, Keele University

Resisting remote control warfare online: 'Shoot an Iraqi'?  
Alan Ingram, University College London

**11.00:**        **Coffee**

**11.15:**        **Panel 2**  
**Aerial Visions**  
**Chair: Klaus Dodds**

Flight from modernity: aerial photography and the emergence of a social conception of space  
Jeanne Haffner, Harvard University

Shadowlands; exploring the vertical and angular geographies of camouflage  
Isla Forsyth, University of Glasgow

'Targeting the vital': vertical visualities and the exposure of the British landscape, 1936-1945  
James Philip Robinson, Aberystwyth University

**12.45:**        **Lunch + exhibition**

**13.45:**        **Panel 3**  
**Verticality and Urban Experience**  
**Chair: Innes Keighren**

Vertigo: for a vertical turn in critical urban social science  
Steve Graham, University of Newcastle

Vertical urbanism  
Andrew Harris, University College London

The politics of verticality revisited  
Christopher Harker, Durham University

**15.15:**        **Coffee**

**15.30: Panel 4**  
**Air, Space and Geopolitics**  
**Chair: Jason Dittmer**

The Uncertainty Principle: Verticality, War and Disorder in Schmitt, Sloterdijk and Virilio

Rory Rowan, Royal Holloway, University of London

The geopolitics of British outer space in the mid-twentieth century

Oliver Dunnett, University of Nottingham

**16.30. Concluding discussion**

**17.00. Close.**

## **Additional Information**

### **Audio Recording**

The workshop will be recorded and archived in collaboration with the Backdoor Broadcasting Company - an organization based between Oxford and Royal Holloway which specializes in working with academics to disseminate our research within and beyond the academic community. More information about the "BBC" can be found here: <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/>

The **Vertical Geographies Workshop** page on the "BBC" site can be found here:

<http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/12/vertical-geographies/>

### **Funding & Support**

This workshop is supported by the British Academy through a Postdoctoral Fellowship, 2007-10 (Ref: PDF/2007/443) and a Small Research Grant, 2009-10 (Ref: SRG 52121), and by the Department of Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London (<http://www.gg.rhul.ac.uk/>).

### **Further information**

For further information about this workshop please visit the workshop website:

[www.verticalgeographies.com](http://www.verticalgeographies.com)

Or contact the workshop organiser, **Dr. Alasdair Pinkerton**:

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# Abstracts

## PANEL 1

10.00-11.00

### **Aerial Life: space, substance and 'being-in-the-air'**

Pete Adey, Keele University

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On his return from the trenches of the First World War, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner would express a feeling of heaviness; a kind of pressure pushing in at him, weighing down on him as if 'the outcome is in the air and everything is topsy turvy'. The treatment for Kirchner, ironically, was the thin and pure mountain air. In this paper I work and move from a position around aerial space and turn towards the matter of air itself. Both, the paper suggests, are glued together by the problem of 'life' and questions of how that life can become the object of security and violence. Following Peter Sloterdijk's orientation towards the matter of air as a point of explication between the human (body/community) and its environment, the paper outlines a project which sets out the air's crucial role in the suppression of the subject by war, militarism and violence before pausing. How has the air not simply killed, but filled the body with a lightness and an integrity, allowed it to inhabit hostile spaces - holding it together not pulling it apart? For Gaston Bachelard, air is the 'hormone that allows us to grow psychically'. Taken to the limits of its survival and insulated from excessive speeds, brought to the extreme vertical situations of high altitude mountain peaks, to the lows of subterranean worlds and the troughs of new moral and aesthetic depths – through the states of life's existence - the paper outline a project that takes the air seriously.

### **Resisting remote control warfare online: 'Shoot an Iraqi'?**

Alan Ingram, UCL

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'Remote control' warfare, involving the deployment of weapons at a distance via electronic observation and control, is a core aspect of contemporary military practice that raises a host of geographical, political and ethical issues. But how might it be resisted or problematized? This paper considers an experimental art project - Wafa Bilal's work entitled Domestic Tension/Shoot an Iraqi - that sought to call remote control warfare into question via an interactive, technologically-enabled installation and performance. Living for one month in front of a paintball gun connected to a webcam and chatroom, Bilal invited participants to fire the gun or not and to engage in discussion. Reflecting on his own brother's death in a US air strike in Iraq and the role played by missile controllers located in the US, Bilal asked participants to think about what it means to live under constant surveillance and threat of death. The paper suggests that this project, which entailed a wide variety of unanticipated consequences, offers a number of insights into the ways in which people become implicated in contemporary geopolitics via practices of violence and non-violence.

## **PANEL 2**

11.15-12.45

### **Flight from Modernity: Aerial Photography and the Emergence of a Social Conception of Space**

Jeanne Haffner, Harvard University

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As a technique of representation, aerial photography has often been associated with "top-down" urban planning programs initiated by twentieth-century modern capitalist states. This book seeks to demonstrate that, in fact, the new social conception of space developed by French urban sociologist Henri Lefebvre and others in the 1960s and 1970s was actually engendered with the aid of this novel twentieth-century tool of vision. Beginning in the 1930s, French social scientists working in a variety of different academic fields used aerial photos to investigate the spaces of human habitation in French colonies as well as in France. The technique, which was closely linked to the French colonial state and military, helped them to see the connection between spatial organization and social organization. After World War II, these anthropological theories of spatial organization were turned back onto the metropole. By the 1960s and 1970s, as we will see, the anthropological critique developed in the 1930s had become a full-fledged attack on contemporary urbanism.

### **Shadowlands; exploring the vertical and angular geographies of camouflage**

Isla Forsyth, University of Glasgow

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Solomon J Solomon the British artist and WWI camoufleur was by the end of the war a man haunted by shadows. He had recognised the irregular specks on an aerial photograph to be signs of a cunning bluff, trickery and deception which had outwitted the aerial camera. He recognised camouflage.

WWI had seen the emergence of military aerial surveying and thus in turn the evolution of modern military camouflage. By WWII air power had grown in strength and purpose and there was a greater urgency to develop camouflage. War was now being fought vertically as well as horizontally, a game of cat and mouse ensued. Aerial photographic interpreters paid close attention and developed a detailed appreciation of vertical geographies to expose enemy military strategy, therefore camoufleurs, in turn also had to become experts in visual literacy. This attempt to outwit aerial reconnaissance was an exercise in understanding and subverting the entanglement of vertical and horizontal planes revealed by the camera's lens through exposing cast shadows. Therefore, the angle of the sun's rays, the plane and the camera all had to be considered whilst developing camouflage schemes. Thus, the story of the World War camoufleurs is one of an emergent and complex vertical geography preoccupied with angles which brought new understandings of cubic and military space into being.

### **'Targeting the vital': vertical visualities and the exposure of the British landscape, 1936-1945**

James Philip Robinson, Aberystwyth University

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Throughout the interwar period, Britons marvelled at the wonder of the aeroplane, revelling in excitement at the possibilities it enabled. At the same time, optimism was countered with feelings of anxiety, of the imagined and affective realities of destruction that aerial warfare could wreak. In response to this perceived threat, civil defence planners instigated the static camouflage project,

resulting in the production of perceptively 'hidden' practices and spaces of concealment within the British landscape. In this paper, I explore the intelligence-gathering processes of the camoufleurs, and their attempts to collect knowledge as to the 'conspicuousness' of key industrial targets through the systematic observation of the landscape from the air. Centred on the examination of RAF observational reports, I discuss the characteristics that rendered factories and other industrial installations as 'targets', before demonstrating some of the attempts which were made to make such features merge into the landscape.

### **PANEL 3**

13.45-15.15

#### **Vertigo: For a Vertical Turn in Critical Urban Social science**

Steve Graham, University of Newcastle

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This wide-ranging, syncretic paper offers a cross-cutting view of a range of emerging research on the politics of verticality which attend to contemporary urban spaces. Arguing that critical urban social science has long neglected the vertical aspects of urban life, the paper seeks starting points for a 'vertical turn' within such research through engaging with recent research in architecture, political theory and cultural studies on the intersections of architecture and contemporary colonial power, the profusion of skyscrapers and subterranean architectures, and the proliferation of vertically-organised sensors and targeting and imaging systems within security, military and cultural circuits. These emerging developments are connected with earlier discourses on the politics of vertical architecture, aeriality and the vertical view within urban studies, architecture, cartography and geopolitics. The paper finishes with a reflection on the challenges of addressing the politics of verticality and aeriality within critical urban social science.

#### **Vertical Urbanism**

Andrew Harris, UCL

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The paper considers how contemporary cities are constructed, framed and understood through vertical axes and dimensions. It charts upward trajectories in not only iconic high-rises, but in vertical gardens, townships, slums and urban farms, and in modes and methods of urban transport. The paper argues that these vertical manifestations and domains of urban life are not simply a response to space constraints and land values but mark and make visible new forms of social and political power, which disrupt notions of centre-periphery in traditional, flatter models of the city. Although recognising the validity and relevance of highlighting and analysing spatial dichotomies between vertical and horizontal urban worlds, the paper seeks to complicate such binaries. Drawing on recent research from Mumbai, the paper explores and identifies overlapping (or 'vertizontal') connections, practices and assemblages in three-dimensional city-making.

#### **The politics of verticality revisited**

Christopher Harker, Durham University

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Weizman's politics of verticality has been key to understanding a whole series of geographies through which the Israeli Occupation assemblage works. In this paper I want to move beyond this analysis to explore some Palestinian politics of verticality, and how they might interact with the

political spatial forms Weizman maps out. I examine recent shifts from horizontal to vertical living in Ramallah, and particularly the moves made by recent migrants to Ramallah from 'horizontal' family houses in their places of origin to the 'vertical' apartment buildings that have been built in Ramallah in the last fifteen years. While there are many consequences of this shifting topology of everyday life, I focus on changing intimacies to open up the ways in which social relations also become wrapped up in changing topographies. I argue that there are as many politics of verticality as there are verticals, and that it is always necessary to think verticals in relation to horizontals and vice versa, or in other words articulate relational topographies.

#### **PANEL 4**

15.30-16.30

#### **The Uncertainty Principle: Verticality, War and Disorder in Schmitt, Sloterdijk and Virilio**

Rory Rowan, Royal Holloway University of London

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An understanding of political order as essentially grounded in space is central to Carl Schmitt's recently translated late works, *The Nomos of the Earth* (1950) and *The Theory of the Partisan* (1963). Schmitt did insist however, upon an 'elemental' distinction between land and sea and the differing forms of political relations each made possible. Air-power had already made this crude distinction seem anachronistic in 1950, something even Schmitt fleetingly acknowledged later. This paper aims to examine how Schmitt's brief consideration of air-power relates to his wider analysis of geopolitics and the new spatializations of the political emerging in the late Twentieth Century. It will argue that despite his rather rusty and distinctly reactionary geopolitics many of the changes Schmitt feared air-power would effect in the relationship between space and politics has been borne out by recent literature on 'vertical geopolitics'. It will ask however if a productive dialogue exists.

#### **The Geopolitics of British Outer Space in the Mid-twentieth Century**

Oliver Dunnett, University of Nottingham

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Recent work in historical geography has increasingly engaged with outer space as a realm for geographical enquiry. In particular Denis Cosgrove encouraged a return to a cosmographic tradition of geography that incorporates three-dimensional notions of space which would not be limited to the Earth's surface (Cosgrove, 2008, *Geography and Vision*). My paper will focus on the British Interplanetary Society, which was established in 1933 to promote British involvement in outer space. I aim to demonstrate how the vertical geographies of what I term 'British outer space' were from the outset characterised by international connections. These networks developed throughout the 1930s despite increasingly tense situations on the world stage, and display a non-state-centred concept of internationalism, united around the principle of space flight. Following the Second World War, however, I shall demonstrate how this concept came to be replaced by the parallel notions of Commonwealth and European space projects, as the technical know-how of space flight became increasingly sophisticated.



Photo: Derelict Paris Metro, Bradley L. Garrett