



## History and philosophy of geography: Looking back and looking forward

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### ABSTRACT

This introduction to the special issue *Reflections on Histories and Philosophies of Geography* discusses the context and content of nineteen articles written to mark the fortieth anniversary of the History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group (HPGRG) of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG). The group was founded in 1981, two years after the early career researchers who set up the group, Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, published jointly their first critical interventions in support of human geography's paradigmatic shift away from positivism, based on an early form of social constructivist argumentation. We argue that the subsequent proliferation of epistemic pluralism, which is discussed in the contributions to this special issue and has characterised the activities organised by the HPGRG, exemplifies the considerable value of three historiographical practices: first, engaging with the history and philosophy of geography collectively in one research group; second, situating methodologies within the history and philosophy of geography; and third, critically interrogating the discipline's evolving geographical knowledges, professional practices, and material cultures from different authorial positionalities.

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In 1979, Jim Bird, of the University of Southampton, outlined the advantages of methodological and philosophical proliferation in human geography, responding to the question 'Where are we now — pluralism?'.<sup>1</sup> His intervention drew inspiration from the notion of ideological pluralism mentioned by Iain Wallace, of Carleton University, in an Association of American Geographers (AAG) conference call for papers in 1978. Since then, the history and philosophy of geography has been characterised by growing epistemic pluralism.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> James Bird, 'Methodology and Philosophy', *Progress in Human Geography* 3 (1979) 117–125 (p. 117).

<sup>2</sup> For tracing this considerable conceptual and methodological proliferation in geography books since the 1980s, see, for example, Peter Haggett, *Geography: A Modern Synthesis* (Third edition, London: Harper & Row, 1983); *Key Concepts in Geography*, ed. by Sarah L. Holloway, Stephen P. Rice, and Gill Valentine (London: SAGE, 2003); *Theory and Methods: Critical Essays in Human Geography*, ed. by Chris Philo (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Pauline Couper, *A Student's Introduction to Geographical Thought: Theories, Philosophies, Methodologies* (London: SAGE, 2015); *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Physical Geography*, ed. by Rebecca Lave, Christine Biermann, and Stuart N. Lane (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Tim Cresswell, *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction* (Second edition, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2024).

this special issue, nineteen contributions, including this introductory essay, discuss a remarkable multiplication and diversification of geographies and geographers, from historical and contemporary perspectives, to mark the fortieth anniversary of the History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group (HPGRG) of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG). The authors have been affiliated mainly with British universities — at least for part of their academic careers — and with the HPGRG.

The proliferation of geographical research topics, approaches, and positionalities in British universities for more than four decades has been shaped by waxing and waning public institutional support, degrees of academic freedom, and critical consciousness. A striking example for early critical history and philosophy of geography, with profound impacts on the feminisation of the discipline, is Gillian Rose's comprehensive feminist critique of masculinist geographical knowledge production from 1993.<sup>3</sup> Paradoxically, epistemic and sociocultural diversification has also been encouraged by a neoliberal demand for relentless academic publishing in the context of the regular national research audits in British higher education, the infamous research assessment exercises introduced in 1986 and

<sup>3</sup> Gillian Rose, *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

renamed the research excellence frameworks from 2014.<sup>4</sup> Looking back and looking forward, we argue that the development of the history and philosophy of geography in British universities can aptly be characterised by the notion of creative evolution.<sup>5</sup> By creative evolution we mean a collective sense of contextual, critical, and nuanced academic knowledge production that values both historical and contemporary analyses (yet not necessarily among all geographers at the same time) and has also been shaped by contradictions, controversies, and conflicts, involving a variety of geographical ideas, personalities, and settings.

The contributions to this special issue analyse geographical thought, professional praxis, and material culture by engaging with diverse biographies, enriching philosophies, and variegated legacies within and beyond the academy. These themes link to the research experiences of HPGRG members, as discussed at the group's anniversary event, *40 Years of HPGRG — Looking Back and Looking Forward*, on September 7, 2021.<sup>6</sup> Our reflections add knowledge and understanding to critical interrogations of how national academic systems, learned societies, and professional bodies contribute to the (re)production and (inter)nationalisation of academic communities in geography.<sup>7</sup> The HPGRG has helped not only British geographers but also international PhD students, early career researchers, and academics — based in British universities, affiliated as international group members, or participating in the HPGRG conferences sessions and special events — to network with geographers working on the history and philosophy of geography.<sup>8</sup>

Reconstructing the origins of the HPGRG identified two dates of interest: the foundation of the first IBG Working Party on the History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought in 1981; and the upgrading of this group to a fully-fledged IBG Study Group in 1985.<sup>9</sup> The original

plan was to celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of a fully-fledged IBG Study Group with a view to publishing the reflections on the fortieth anniversary of the group's foundation. However, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the HPGRG anniversary event was postponed by one year. Originating from an open call for reflections among HPGRG members in February 2020, and complemented by thematically orientated invitations of past, present, and future HPGRG members, the HPGRG's one-day anniversary symposium was held online and attended by 59 geographers, who were mainly based in the United Kingdom (81%) but included eleven geographers in Australia, Brazil, Germany, Ireland (2), Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, The Netherlands, and the United States.<sup>10</sup>

The positionalities of the contributors to this special issue range from doctoral researchers via early career, mid-career, and established academics to emeriti professors. The authors were awarded their PhDs in the 45 years between 1979 and 2023 in the United Kingdom, the United States, Belgium, Germany, and Italy and France (jointly). They started teaching geography in the university from 1967, and they received their pre-university education in the United Kingdom, Canada, Jamaica, the United States, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. This situation reflects recent internationalisation processes in British universities through international PhD students, researchers, and academics, as well as ongoing European and transatlantic collaborations, based on international academic travels, research visits, and return migrations, although still overwhelmingly based in economically affluent global north contexts.

Reflecting on four decades of history and philosophy of geography at the HPGRG anniversary event and in this special issue has provided situated geographical, institutional, and cultural perspectives that add new insights to existing published accounts, such as the multiple editions of *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography since 1945*.<sup>11</sup> We argue that the epistemic pluralism expressed in the special issue contributions exemplifies the considerable value of three historiographical practices: first, engaging with the history and philosophy of geography collectively in one research group; second, situating methodologies within the history and philosophy of geography to clarify nuanced epistemological and ontological similarities and differences; and third, embarking on a critical (re)discovering, (re)reading, and (re)assessing of the discipline's evolving geographical knowledges, professional practices, and material cultures from different authorial positionalities. Limitations through partialities, omissions, and silences are obvious through the Anglocentric and human geographical emphasis, which both reflect the nature of the HPGRG membership. Hence, we suggest that this situation provides scope for future HPGRG events, especially more conversations between physical and human geographers, as well as new interdisciplinary collaborations.

## A new research group for new debates

The foundation and development of the HPGRG need to be situated within the dominance of geography's positivist research paradigm in the 1970s because this inspired early career rebellion and creativity. By the 1960s, increasingly specialised British physical

<sup>4</sup> Noel Castree, 'Research Assessment and the Production of Geographical Knowledge', *Progress in Human Geography* 30 (2006) 747–782.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of creative evolution in the context of *élan vital*, understood as a creative impulse of human ingenuity based on instinct, intuition, and intellect, see Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (translated from French by Arthur Mitchell, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1911); and especially Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (translated from French by Donald A. Landes, London: Routledge, 2022). This notion can be regarded as an inspirational precursor to more networked epistemological and ontological understandings of creativity, knowledge production, and innovation, as discussed, for example, by Heike Jöns, 'Dynamic Hybrids and the Geographies of Technoscience: Discussing Conceptual Resources Beyond the Human/Non-Human Binary', *Social & Cultural Geography* 7 (2006) 559–580; Couper, *A Student's Introduction to Geographical Thought*, pp. 95–98.

<sup>6</sup> We had been encouraged, as research group committee members, at the regular Research Group Forums, organised by colleagues in the RGS-IBG Research and Higher Education Division (RHED) for all thematically specialised RGS-IBG research and working groups (31 in 2020–21), to build up our research group archives and celebrate our groups' founding anniversaries in order to document research group origins and activities, reflect on main achievements, learn about changing debates and disciplinary identities, and inform future agendas. For a brief report on the online HPGRG event, see Heike Jöns, '40 Years of HPGRG — Looking Back and Looking Forward', *HPGRG Newsletter* 1 (2022) 4–6.

<sup>7</sup> For a historical perspective, see Charles W.J. Withers, *Geography, Science and National Identity: Scotland since 1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); for recent debates, see Maria-Dolors Garcia-Ramon, 'Globalization and International Geography: The Questions of Languages and Scholarly Traditions', *Progress in Human Geography* 27 (2003) 1–5; Claudio Minca, 'The Cosmopolitan Geographer's Dilemma: Or, Will National Geographies Survive Neo-Liberalism?', *Geographische Zeitschrift* 106 (2018) 4–15.

<sup>8</sup> The HPGRG's remit 'includes the histories of geography; contemporary philosophies, theories and methods in the field of geography; and the history and philosophy of knowledge in associated disciplines'. Constitution, History & Philosophy of Geography Research Group, Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (January 1999), RHED virtual HPGRG archive at the RGS-IBG, London, 1.

<sup>9</sup> David N. Livingstone on behalf of the History and Philosophy of Geography Working Party [a revised group name] of the IBG to the Study Groups and Research Committee of the IBG, Application for Study Group Status, 30 July 1984, Livingstone HPGRG papers, RGS-IBG Library and Archives, London, Folder 1 (1980–1984), 1–2.

<sup>10</sup> The HPGRG Committee, 'Invitation to HPGRG Members: 35 Years of HPGRG — Looking Back and Looking Forward: A One-Day Symposium of the History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group (HPGRG)', Tuesday, 1 September 2020, Royal Geographical Society with IBG: Call for Contributions', *HPGRG Newsletter* 1 (2020) 2–3; Jöns, '40 Years of HPGRG — Looking Back and Looking Forward'.

<sup>11</sup> Ron Johnston and James D. Sidaway, *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography since 1945* (Seventh edition, New York, NY: Routledge, 2016). See also *A Century of British Geography*, ed. by Ron Johnston and Michael Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

and human geographers had still seen potential in developing common theoretical and methodological approaches through quantitative modelling.<sup>12</sup> During the 1970s, however, Anglophone human geographers developed Marxist perspectives, humanistic approaches, idealist philosophy, linguistics concepts, phenomenological viewpoints, and other critiques of positivism in their research, with a view to examining a broad range of dynamic lifeworld experiences.<sup>13</sup> It is in this wider context of vibrant developments in Anglophone human geography during the 1970s that two PhD students at Queen's University of Belfast, Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, began to publish jointly their critical interrogations of the latest philosophical ideas in geography and took the initiative to found an IBG Working Party on the History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought to encourage new debates.

In the five years from 1979 to 1983, Harrison and Livingstone published seven joint journal articles, one joint book chapter, and four discussion response commentaries on topical philosophical debates in geography.<sup>14</sup> The first joint publication by the two PhD researchers critiqued the calls by the American early career geographer Leonard Guelke, who had been awarded his PhD at the University of Toronto in 1974, for an idealist human geography, a conceptual approach Guelke had developed during the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> In our view, their subsequent exchanges would be well suited for teaching the history and philosophy of geography. The first discussion commentary by Guelke on the 1979 *Area* paper by Harrison and Livingstone and their concise response provide an especially insightful summary of contrasting viewpoints about vital academic debates during an ongoing paradigmatic change in human geography away from a focus on positivist spatial science.<sup>16</sup> We

therefore position the special issue contributions within these controversial debates about philosophies of geography that inspired the foundation of a new research group.

Guelke had suggested an idealist approach for human geography as a conceptual alternative to positivist spatial science because he opposed 'the search for laws and theories in human geography' and thought that human activity could not be researched with 'the methodology of the natural sciences'.<sup>17</sup> Since neither 'phenomenological humanism' nor Marxism provided a convincing alternative for him, Guelke proposed to draw on the idealist approach by the historian Robin G. Collingwood. Presented in Collingwood's 1946 book *The Idea of History*, this approach suggested putting aside one's own theories and interpreting empirical evidence to allow for 'an intellectual reconstruction of thought by detached scholars, whose very detachment hopefully shields them from subjectivity and emotional bias'.<sup>18</sup> In response, Harrison and Livingstone argued that Guelke's "'idealism" is firmly anchored to the positivism he claims to replace', but not before outlining the following contradiction:

This conflation of reality and its reconstruction leads either to a realist position, where reconstruction becomes a direct apprehension of reality, or to conventionalism, in which the reconstruction is a free creation of the human mind rather than the summary of received experience.<sup>19</sup>

Instead of agreeing with Guelke's call for a researcher's 'total detachment from the subject of study', Harrison and Livingstone argued for an acknowledgement of 'total involvement'.<sup>20</sup>

Based on this exchange, we suggest that the argumentation by Harrison and Livingstone can be interpreted as an early plea for a social constructivist research perspective within human geography. This viewpoint acknowledges the influence of the researchers' positionalities and personalities on the research outcomes and differentiates what is researched from what is argued about the researched.<sup>21</sup> Harrison and Livingstone did not use this specific terminology of social constructivism, but they emphasised how geographical knowledge production was shaped by the knowledge-makers' interests, beliefs, and prior knowledges. By the early 1990s, Livingstone wrote that he had 'no particular label to attach to the approach that I want to advocate', but his aim was to develop the research trajectory sketched by historians of science Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, well-known advocates of social constructivism, by avoiding, as they had phrased it prominently in their book *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, 'preferring idealizations and simplifications to messy contingencies'.<sup>22</sup> Livingstone also called for 'a greater sense of how texts and contexts are constituted reciprocally', thereby evoking the now widely employed notion of the coproduction of the content and context of academic knowledges.<sup>23</sup> Livingstone had mentioned this notion a year earlier, in a *Journal of Historical Geography* article of 1991, when he cited its usage with a hyphen (co-production) by the anthropologist of science Bruno

<sup>12</sup> See *Models in Geography*, ed. by Richard J. Chorley and Peter Haggett (London: Methuen, 1967).

<sup>13</sup> For postpositivist conceptual perspectives in the 1970s, see David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974); Leonard Guelke, 'An Idealist Alternative in Human Geography', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 64 (1974) 193–202; Gunnar Olsson, *Birds in Egg* (Ann Arbor, MI: Department of Geography, University of Michigan, 1975); Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976); Anne Buttner, 'Grasping the Dynamism of Lifeworld', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66 (1976) 277–292; Derek Gregory, *Ideology, Science and Human Geography* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, 'There and Back Again: Towards a Critique of Idealist Human Geography', *Area* 11 (1979) 75–79; Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, 'Philosophy and Problems in Human Geography: A Pre-suppositional Approach', *Area* 12 (1980) 25–31; David N. Livingstone and Richard T. Harrison, 'The Frontier: Metaphor, Myth and Model', *Professional Geographer* 32 (1980) 127–132; David N. Livingstone and Richard T. Harrison, 'Immanuel Kant, Subjectivism, and Human Geography: A Preliminary Investigation', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 6 (1981) 359–374; Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, 'Meaning through Metaphor: Analogy as Epistemology', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 71 (1981) 95–107; Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, 'Hunting the Snark: Perspectives on Geographical Investigation', *Geografiska Annaler (B)* 63 (1981) 69–72; Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, 'Understanding in Geography: Structuring the Subjective', in *Geography and the Urban Environment: Progress in Research and Applications*, Volume 5, ed. by David T. Herbert and Ron J. Johnston (Chichester: John Wiley, 1982), pp. 1–39; David N. Livingstone and Richard T. Harrison, 'Reflections on a Phenomenological Approach', *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 3 (1983) 295–296. For the commentaries, see Richard T. Harrison, 'Writing/Righting the World: Reflections on an Engaged History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought', *Journal of Historical Geography* 85 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhge.2024.03.006>, footnote 9.

<sup>15</sup> Harrison and Livingstone, 'There and Back Again'; Guelke, 'An Idealist Alternative in Human Geography'.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard Guelke, 'Idealist Human Geography? Comment', *Area* 11 (1979) 80–81; Richard T. Harrison, and David N. Livingstone, 'There and Back Again: Comment Reply', *Area* 11 (1979) 81–82; Leonard Guelke, 'There and Back Again: Comment', *Area* 11 (1979) 214–215; Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, 'There and Back Again: Comment Reply', *Area* 11 (1979) 215–216.

<sup>17</sup> Guelke, 'Idealist Human Geography?', p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Guelke, 'Idealist Human Geography?', p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison and Livingstone, 'Idealist Human Geography?', p. 82.

<sup>20</sup> Harrison and Livingstone, 'Idealist Human Geography?', p. 82.

<sup>21</sup> Jöns, 'Dynamic Hybrids and the Geographies of Technoscience', pp. 562–563.

<sup>22</sup> Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 16–17; David N. Livingstone, 'In Defence of Situated Messiness: Geographical Knowledge and the History of Science', *GeoJournal* 26 (1992) 228–229 (p. 228).

<sup>23</sup> Livingstone, 'In Defence of Situated Messiness', p. 229.



Latour for characterising the influential Shapin and Schaffer book of 1985.<sup>24</sup>

This multidisciplinary coproduction of a significant moment of paradigmatic change in the discipline of geography and the foundation of the IBG Working Party on the History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought in 1981 paved the way for an impressive proliferation of conceptual perspectives in human geography shaped by geographers' diversifying research trajectories, experiences, positionalities, personalities, and interests.<sup>25</sup> The origins of the HPGRG thus confirm the wider observation by the social historian Peter Burke that intellectual innovation often created new institutions.<sup>26</sup> In the late 1970s, established discussion groups on the history and philosophy of geography existed in international organisations but not at the national level in the United Kingdom. Yet, to be fully understood, this remarkable connection of epistemic and organisational changes in the history and philosophy of geography needs to be situated within the profoundly divisive and violent everyday environment that the group's cofounding early career researchers experienced during the Northern Ireland Troubles. This lingering conflict, as Harrison elaborates in his contribution to this special issue, encouraged their escape into epistemic debates and their desire to network with colleagues in other British universities.

## Biographies

This special issue is structured into the three sections: *Biographies*; *Philosophies*; and *Legacies*. Each section is headed by one lead article followed by five shorter contributions. The first section, *Biographies*, discusses themes that have been central to scholarly debates about geography for more than 40 years.<sup>27</sup> In 1977, two important initiatives began that help to assess the role of biography and autobiography in understanding the history and philosophy of geography. Both were informed by the personality, networks, and academic activism of Anne Buttimer (1938–2017). The first was the International Dialogue Project that Buttimer promoted with Torsten Hägerstrand (1916–2004) at Lund University from 1977 to 1988. This project gathered more than one hundred autobiographical interviews with geographers and other practitioners in the social and environmental sciences.<sup>28</sup>

The second project was the establishment of the annual serial *Geographers: Biobibliographical Studies* (GBS) (one of whose current editors contributed to this special issue). While GBS was first edited by Thomas Walter Freeman (1908–1988) and Philippe Pinchemel (1923–2008), Buttimer was closely involved in its foundation given her role in the IGU Commission on the History

<sup>24</sup> David N. Livingstone, 'The Moral Discourse of Climate: Historical Considerations on Race, Place and Virtue', *Journal of Historical Geography* 17 (1991) 413–434 (p. 430).

<sup>25</sup> We therefore answer Paul Claval's question from 1982 in the affirmative: 'Will such an explosion of philosophical interests continue in the 1980s?'. Paul Claval, 'Methodology and Philosophy', *Progress in Human Geography* 6 (1982) 449–454 (p. 449). See also footnote 2.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), pp. 32–52.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Anne Buttimer, *The Practice of Geography* (London: Longman, 1983); Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (London: Guilford, 1994); Innes M. Keighren, *Bringing Geography to Book: Ellen Semple and the Reception of Geographical Knowledge* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Federico Ferretti, *Anarchy and Geography: Reclus and Kropotkin in the UK* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> Federico Ferretti, 'Between Radical Geography and Humanism: Anne Buttimer and the International Dialogue Project', *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 51 (2019) 1123–1145; Michael Jones, 'Anne Buttimer's *The Practice of Geography*: Approaching the History of Geography through Autobiography', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 100 (2018) 396–405.

of Geographical Thought.<sup>29</sup> Buttimer's main proposal was to avoid dealing only with the biographies of famous people in the discipline and to expand scholarly interest to include the life trajectories of all people working in geography, a suggestion which, she thought, would result in an unexpected richness of 'general insights ... emerging from these essays'.<sup>30</sup>

The archival sources linked to Buttimer allow for an understanding of the GBS as an experience that marched in parallel with the International Dialogue Project, anticipating the currently widespread interest in rediscovering alternative and neglected figures in the discipline. This mood has been endorsed by the GBS editors, who recently published an issue only dedicated to women in geography and another one completely dedicated to South American geographers.<sup>31</sup> Since its foundation, the GBS was instrumental in demonstrating the effectiveness of biography for understanding scholarly ideas as being also the result of contexts, experiences, and localisations of concrete persons. Therefore, we argue that biography and autobiography have played an important role in fostering general awareness about the revolutionary moves that are known today as social constructivism, contextual readings, and the spatial turn in the history of scientific ideas and practice.

This rich history of geographical biography is one reason why we can introduce six insightful contributions on *Biographies* that represent a diverse and very telling series of examples of how biography and autobiography can be used as conceptual tools for reading all kinds of geographical ideas. In the lead article, Tim Cresswell shows how a mix of autobiographical sources, as intimate as personal memories and archives are, can help to make sense of the progressive development of one's scholarly thought. Cresswell does this by reflecting on how his own views were affected at different moments in time by the numerous places and moves he undertook during his early transatlantic academic career in England, the United States, and Wales, thereby considering himself a 'mutable mobile'. This autobiographical narrative provides an understanding also of his more recent twenty-first century stints of permanent employment in England, the United States, and Scotland because these have continued Cresswell's pronounced academic transnationalism and invaluable contributions to an emphasis on mobilities research in geography and associated fields from socially and culturally differentiating perspectives.<sup>32</sup>

The five subsequent articles in this first section on *Biographies* have been ordered by the authors' year of PhD completion. By so doing, a sense of chronology emerges that deepens the readers' understanding of the authors' context-specific experiences, perspectives, and outlooks at different career stages. Hugh Clout provides an autobiographical, or metabiographical, reflection in the spirit of the International Dialogue Project, explaining how he managed to find a niche for biography during a certain stage in his career that has encouraged him to author an impressive range of GBS essays, including collaborative essays and collective biographies. Biography is of course more than a simple niche, as is also demonstrated by Elizabeth Baigent's survey of current

<sup>29</sup> This is evident in the France Folder, the Freeman Folder, and the England and Scotland Folder, Anne Buttimer's Archives, School of Geography, University College Dublin [hereafter DBA, provisional inventory].

<sup>30</sup> Buttimer to Freeman, 21 July 1983, Freeman Folder, DBA, provisional inventory.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Baigent and André Reyes Novaes, 'I Am Not a Man: Maybe this Makes Things Different', *Geographers Biobibliographical Studies* 38 (2020) 1–14; Elizabeth Baigent and André Reyes Novaes, 'On Southern Traditions and Geographical Trajectories', *Geographers Biobibliographical Studies* 40 (2022) 1–24.

<sup>32</sup> Cresswell's PhD of 1992 in Geography, supervised by Yi-Fi Tuan at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in the United States, informed his first book: Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). See also Cresswell, *Geographic Thought*.

biographical works in geography. Baigent highlights how biography is not only instrumental for reflecting on disciplinary canons and diversifying histories of geography but also a genre worthy of attention in its own right. Discussing the roles that memory plays in constructing views of how certain ideas originated, it seems as if memory, and even more so autobiographical memory, should be critically understood as the expression of selective processes and situated standpoints on how canonised ideas emerged in the discipline.

Richard Harrison sheds light on the wider context in which he founded the IBG Working Group on the History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought together with David Livingstone. Most importantly, he contrasts their original interests in the philosophy of geography, conducted in what he experienced as an academic space of civility, with the insecure everyday environment in Belfast during the violent Northern Ireland Troubles of the 1970s and 1980s. With hindsight, this extraordinary situation of political and religious polarisation and violence may have supported the early career researchers' rejection of positivist and realist approaches in favour of an acknowledgement of socially constructed realities. Harrison discusses how three other aspects also mattered: first, their desire to institutionalise exchanges on the history and philosophy of geography at a national level; second, their interest in making the most of the context dependency of geographical knowledge through conversations; and third, to develop their academic interests collectively, as nourished by Belfast Professor Bill Kirk's encouragement to read widely in and beyond the history and philosophy of geography. Harrison argues that both the history and philosophy of geography remain central to a discipline that is simultaneously facing the tasks of engaging critically with the questions how the historiography of the discipline has been constructed at different moments in time and what kinds of new knowledges and understandings, critical perspectives, and policy advice on twenty-first century challenges geographers can contribute through their research.

Mette Bruinsma shifts the biographical debates from academic geographers to geography students and from individual to collective biographies. Her analysis of a corpus of undergraduate geography dissertations submitted to the University of Glasgow over seven decades allows for an appreciation of the question how the idea of valorising individual positionalities and research perspectives has been translated into geographical writing since the earliest levels of university teaching and learning. Bruinsma argues that in the early decades of interest, the subjects of undergraduate dissertations were typically regional themes treated in a generally formal way, while in more recent times students' texts increasingly accounted for topics related to their daily lives. This may imply field research on music and artistic scenes in which the authors of the dissertations are personally implied; matters of cultural identities, possibly inspired by their belonging to migrant communities; and the discussion of several kinds of sport and social activities in which students personally participate, thus underlining a growing acceptance of the feminist standpoint that highly subjective experiences should shape research agendas.

Agostinho Machel Nkrumah Pinnock discusses matters of academic inclusion and diversity autobiographically. He especially reflects on how his own transnational experiences and mobilities are related to the broader picture of academic and political engagement to foster more inclusion in British universities. Indeed, such transnational experiences can define a theoretical and methodological framework for centring such matters. In this sense, relational Caribbean and transatlantic spatialities should be understood as concrete and lived spatialities and as an instrument for making sense of Global Black Geographies. Once more, lived experiences matter beyond the narrowly defined fields of the history

and philosophy of geography. We can consider the ongoing appeal of the biographical method in geography as one of the outcomes of the early work of scholars such as Buttimer, Freeman, Hågerstrand, Pinchemel, and others, whose contributions we still acknowledge for the current developments that they pioneered because biographical and autobiographical accounts continue to shape disciplinary debates in novel, diverse, and enriching ways.

## Philosophies

The contributions in the second section on *Philosophies* raise important questions about ways of writing geography, as well as about the historical, institutional, and philosophical forms that have bound history of geography to philosophy of geography in certain ways at certain points of time, thus speaking also to debates about the unity of the discipline. The conjunction 'and' in 'history and philosophy of geography' is invested with complex assumptions about the aims and methodologies of studies sharing a basic concern with exploring the 'current condition of their own discipline'.<sup>33</sup> While the papers range widely in focus, approach, and argument, perhaps one thing binding them might be a call for and exploration of pluralism within histories and philosophies of geography. As Trevor Barnes and Eric Sheppard observed in a widely discussed paper on pluralism within the subdiscipline of economic geography, there are many different kinds of pluralism and not all of them follow a spirit of 'open conversation and a tolerant community'.<sup>34</sup> At its worst, pluralism can lead to divisions and scattering, or to geography becoming a fragmented discipline lacking a coherent project.<sup>35</sup> At its best, pluralism can lead to enhanced experimentation and creativity, enabling new vocabularies, novel theories, innovative models of academic debate, and even new practices of hope.<sup>36</sup> Running across the papers in this section is a commitment to thinking the plurality of approaches to human geography in ways that are generative in this latter way.

The section on *Philosophies* is headed by a coauthored lead paper that analyses how epistemic debates on the history and philosophy of geography, as facilitated by HPGRG annual conference sessions and special events, coevolved in conjunction with the RGS-IBG research group's organisational developments and sociocultural changes among contributors over a period of four decades, since the foundation of the constituent working group in 1981. This paper is a collaborative project of the HPGRG committee members 2020–21, plus long-term HPGRG committee member Pauline Couper as a trained physical geographer. It critically appraises the group's history of institutionalised geographical knowledge exchange to illustrate that the group's own activities have both reflected and contributed to changing sociopolitical contexts of knowledge production, just as the group members' work has shaped the constantly changing conditions of geographical knowledge production. It is notable to see calls as far back as in the 1980s for an anarchistic approach to methodology within geography, which can be interpreted as a refusal to be constrained by certain approaches in favour of pluralism.

<sup>33</sup> Felix Driver, 'New Perspectives on the History and Philosophy of Geography', *Progress in Human Geography* 18 (1994) 92–100 (p. 97).

<sup>34</sup> Trevor J. Barnes and Eric Sheppard, "'Nothing Includes Everything": Towards Engaged Pluralism in Anglophone Economic Geography', *Progress in Human Geography* 34 (2010) 193–214 (p. 194).

<sup>35</sup> Barnes and Sheppard, "'Nothing Includes Everything"', p. 194; Ron J. Johnston, 'Geography — Coming Apart at the Seams?', in *Questioning Geography: Fundamental Debates*, ed. by Noel Castree, Alistair Rogers, and Douglas Sherman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 9–25 (p. 22).

<sup>36</sup> Barnes and Sheppard, "'Nothing Includes Everything"', p. 194.

The analysis of epistemic developments further shows that the HPGRG conference sessions and events provided important platforms for the development and discussion of contextualist, constructivist, and critical research perspectives in the history and philosophy of geography and of new cultural geography in the wider discipline. The HPGRG events also contributed significantly to conceptual debates about poststructuralist, postcolonial, post-modern, critical, feminist, and decolonial geographies, especially through examinations of the coproduction of geographical knowledges, multiscalar geographies of science, experimental creative methods, as well as more-than-human and more-than-representational research perspectives. This article concludes by stressing the wider relevance and long-term impact of Livingstone's 1980s research on racist legacies in the earth sciences because this work has informed anti-racist consciousness and action for the creation of more inclusive academic environments at Harvard University in the early 2020s — almost 40 years after publication.

This journey through four decades of institutionalised knowledge production, exchange, and networking is followed by five shorter articles that are again ordered by their authors' year of PhD award. Marcus Doel delivers a playful provocation that simultaneously critiques anniversaries, the research group, and geography itself. While challenging the history and philosophy of geography, and asking whether there is any such thing as a geographical thought, Doel also pushes beyond the forms of argument more usual to the discipline, interweaving a sense of proliferation and ephemerality, and thereby underlining multiple vulnerabilities of geography and geographers. Doel had presented his contribution at the *40 years of HPGRG* event on the occasion of his thirtieth PhD anniversary, with the presentation title and underlying philosophies explicitly referring back to his deconstructivist doctoral research 'Between a Carcinogen and a War Machine: Deconstruction, Poststructuralism and the Writing of Critical Human Geography'.<sup>37</sup>

Beth Greenhough traces the influence of the writings by feminist historian and philosopher of science Donna Haraway in geographers' work, simultaneously drawing attention to key developments in geography over recent decades. She discusses the turn towards embodiment in feminist geographies, interrogates engagements with intersectionality and difference, and draws attention to more-than-human agency in more-than-human worlds. Greenhough argues that Haraway's 'ability to speak to, with and through an attention to difference' is conducive to opening geography up to different ways of knowing, offering the explicitly situated, embodied, and emplaced knowledges of Bawaka Country et al. as an example. Perhaps knowledge produced through such 'situated relationality, grounded through place' offers the possibility of an affirmative answer to Doel's provocative question of whether a 'geographical thought' actually exists?

In a commentary exploring form and formal analysis within geography, Julian Brigstocke argues for a much greater plurality of forms within geographical writing. By multiplying the forms and genres of geographical writing, he suggests, history and philosophy of geography can appeal to (and thus coproduce) a greater diversity of authorities in its claims to knowledge and truth. Geography occupies a unique place within the poetics of knowledge, and across the history and breadth of the discipline, the figure of the

'geographer' in academic writing and the ethical practices associated with that descriptor have been constructed in a myriad of different ways and associated with myriad virtues and vices. In the context of a growing divergence of histories of geography from philosophies of geography, Brigstocke suggests that a productive point of convergence could be in developing a fuller historical and philosophical genealogy of the aesthetics and poetics of geographical writing. Drawing on the vitalist thought of nineteenth century sociologist Jean-Marie Guyau, who had an important influence on early anarchist geography, Brigstocke argues for a project, simultaneously historical and philosophical, of pluralising the forms and genres of geographical analysis.

It is in a similar spirit that Emily Hayes's commentary offers a speculative experiment with synoptic vision in the history of geography. Hayes draws together three papers that would not normally be thought together, by Henry Sidgwick from 1885, Halford Mackinder from 1887, and James Frazer from 1921, each addressing 'scope and method' or 'scope and methods' in philosophy, geography, and anthropology, respectively. Grouping together these studies otherwise divided by significant spatial and temporal gaps, Hayes practices her own kind of synoptic vision. What we see by bringing these men's thoughts and expressions into one image, Hayes suggests, are a number of key connections, such as their spatiotemporal languages, their claim to a synoptic vision of spatial and temporal knowledge, and their racialised spatiotemporal understandings, deriving from diverse applications of natural selection theory. At stake in Hayes' commentary is a kind of speculative play which licenses the production of alternative histories and philosophies of geography.

Michiel van Meeteren's contribution closes this section by exploring pluralism in the history of geography from the perspective of Dutch geographers with connections to British universities, and especially to Queen's University of Belfast in the late 1970s. He critiques the problem of 'silofication' of different subdisciplines and discusses the encyclopaedic approach, developed by Marcus Heslinga and Andries Kouwenhoven in the Netherlands from the 1960s to the 1980s, as a way of developing an engaged pluralist geography. An evocative spatial figure for this approach is Ben de Pater and Herman van der Wusten's (1996) notion of 'the geographical house'. This figuration sees geography as an old villa with many rooms (specialisations) and windows (approaches) that all provide different views on the geographical environment. The geographical house is not a finished product designed according to an architectural masterplan, but it is a physical structure that has been created through a long history of continuous rebuilding, extension, improvisation, and redecoration. Making this disciplinary house a home requires caring for it, taking responsibility for its upkeep, admiring it, and recognising how much is shared by the inhabitants who live within its walls. We therefore think that the epistemic diversity that comes across in all contributions to this special issue not only unites the history and philosophy of geography in unexpected ways but also situates the different subdisciplines within international and interdisciplinary discourses across the sciences and the humanities.

## Legacies

The third and final section discusses *Legacies* of geographical knowledges, practices, and materialities within and beyond disciplinary boundaries, thus demonstrating that disciplinary legacies can take a variety of forms beyond academic publications. By discussing academic and public debates, political activists, material cultures, academic rewards, and intellectual progress in different historical, geographical, and sectoral contexts, the authors collectively validate an ongoing significance of geographical knowledge

<sup>37</sup> Marcus A. Doel, 'Between a Carcinogen and a War Machine: Deconstruction, Poststructuralism and the Writing of Critical Human Geography', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1991); see also Marcus Doel, *Poststructuralist Geographies: The Diabolical Art of Spatial Science* (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999).



production for education and innovation, as well as activism and governance, in both public and private spheres. Moreover, the insights gained from all contributions to this special issue confirm that expecting short-term and medium-term impacts of academic research in the social sciences and humanities, and especially in fields such as the history and philosophy of geography, can be rather short-sighted. As the example of Livingstone's early oeuvre shows, it may take many decades for critical humanistic research findings to be of practical use in everyday contexts because these may have been considered to be unchangeable, ascribed low importance, or (un)intentionally marginalised. This section on *Legacies* thus shows that researching the history and philosophy of geography can create the strongest arguments for both geography's enduring value and the insight that historical perspectives cannot only situate findings on legacies in broader contexts but may also be able to draw on more comprehensive documentary and artefactual analyses than contemporary studies can do.

In their lead article, Mark Boyle and Audrey Kobayashi critically interrogate relevance debates about different geographical approaches in Anglo-American geography during the 1970s and thus at a time of the paradigmatic revolution that radical geography instigated in the United States. By unearthing fascinating exchanges between geographers practising radical, critical, applied, and other types of geographical research, the authors are able to interrogate critically a variety of epistemically differing, value-loaded, and politically contrasting views. Drawing on a discussion of the ways in which often opposing views of what geography should be about have shaped the impact of geographical scholarship along a spectrum ranging from scholarly activism via public policy advice to private consulting, Boyle and Kobayashi argue for a new generation of 'scholar policy activism' that would be historically informed by the burgeoning relevance debates of the 1970s but requires contextualisation in the very different political and academic contexts of the 2020s.

The collaboration between Boyle and Kobayashi, which has spanned more than a decade, has brought together Kobayashi's pioneering work about gendered and racialised relations within and beyond the discipline of geography, and her interest in Jean-Paul Sartre's work, with Boyle's reading of Sartre's interpretation of dialectic reasoning as circular and their joined research interests on migration, urban and rural change, and postcolonial studies. Most importantly, Kobayashi and Boyle have critically analysed people-led war crimes tribunals and anti-austerity protests in Ireland in the context of postcolonial theory informed by their critical appraisals of Sartre's oeuvre.<sup>38</sup> We therefore suggest that a version of the theoretically informed 'scholar policy activism' they envision in their special issue article is sketched by their joint work.

Federico Ferretti challenges current commonplaces that view the history and philosophy of geography as something less 'relevant' to public geographies and less 'useful' stuff than other branches of the discipline. According to Ferretti, we should oppose the dogmas of the neoliberal university, such as the principles of the marketing and commodification of knowledge, by showing the relevance of geographical histories for radical, critical, feminist, and

decolonial perspectives in the discipline. This way, history and philosophy of geography can play key roles in current bids to decolonise the discipline against ideas of alleged scientific objectivity and neutrality and empower geographers to take a critical and clear stance in the context of social and political challenges of today, such as anti-colonial activism. Ferretti discusses the life and work of the French anarchist, feminist, and anti-colonial activist Louise Michel (1830–1905) to exemplify the potentialities of critical histories of geography in nourishing current radical, feminist, intersectional, anti-racist, and decolonial research approaches, public debates, and political interventions.

The material culture of geography is discussed by George Tobin, Hayden Lorimer, and Simon Naylor, who examine the role of physical relief models and different types of material modelling exercises in the teaching and popularisation of geography. From the late-nineteenth century, when the use of plasticine allowed for small-scale model building exercises in the classroom, to the mid-twentieth century, when this genre was celebrated by Dudley Stamp's colourful compilation of physical relief models, geographical teaching and learning benefitted enormously from those three-dimensional, visual, and tactile representations of landscape features. In our reading, the authors' insightful analysis underlines in vivid ways three valuable broader insights: first, how more recent fashionable concepts such as the 'material turn' and 'creative methods' have their antecedents in geography without these precursors necessarily being drawn upon; second, there is a rich history of geographical traditions with profound impacts on wider publics before the quantitative revolution; and third, the significant attention devoted in the discipline to the relationship between geography and everyday practices provides much scope for further studies about the field's popularisation across various publics.

Pauline Couper reviews the first decade of the HPGRG undergraduate dissertation prize, reflecting on both the content of the submitted dissertations and the practice of awarding a prize. The dissertations illustrate geography's pluralism in substantive focus and epistemologies. Those with a more historical orientation also reflect increasing recognition of the diversity of voices involved in geographical knowledge production in the past, even if the credit for such knowledge production was almost always reserved for white male geographers. The highly innovative work of some of the dissertations highlights that undergraduate students are not limited to just reproducing the discipline but can also extend its bounds and step into its future. Couper notes that the award of a prize is a practice situated within the context of the neoliberal academic prestige economy, thus reflecting current conditions of knowledge production in universities. As such, this is a practice that has both a geography and politics that may be worthy of further exploration.

Innes Keighren's commentary draws on his experiences of writing progress reports on the history and philosophy of geography for the journal *Progress in Human Geography* when reflecting on the intriguing question what progress means in the history of geography. Considering the possibilities for creating a more open and inclusive cosmopolitan and decolonial research agenda, Keighren identifies three promising avenues for future studies — first, more sociocultural inclusion when researching who 'constituted the everyday life of the discipline'; second, the digitalisation of study resources and archives; and third, the use of visualisation and playfulness in a 'history of geography for others'.

As part of the wider research agenda that emerges from this collection of essays for the histories and philosophies of geography, the concluding assessment by former HPGRG chair Richard Powell adds new insights to the variegated interpretations of the field. Powell's critical commentary scrutinises the often mundane but

<sup>38</sup> Mark Boyle and Audrey Kobayashi, 'Metropolitan Anxieties: A Critical Appraisal of Sartre's Theory of Colonialism', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36 (2011) 408–424; Audrey Kobayashi and Mark Boyle, 'Colonizing, Colonized: Sartre and Fanon', in *Theorizing Anti-Racism: Linkages in Marxism and Critical Race Theories*, ed. by Abigail B. Bakan and Enakshi Dua (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 184–204; Mark Boyle and Audrey Kobayashi, 'In the Face of Epistemic Injustices? On the Meaning of People-Led War Crimes Tribunals', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33 (2015), 697–713; Rory Hearne, Mark Boyle, and Audrey Kobayashi, 'Taking Liberties with Democracy? On the Origins, Meaning and Implications of the Irish Water Wars', *Geoforum* 110 (2020) 232–241.

time-consuming everyday practices, correspondences, and challenges that inevitably occur when running an (inter)national research group. Furthermore, he situates both the group members' voluntary academic service and the HPGRG's fortieth anniversary reflections within pivotal wider societal issues in times of economic crisis. We note that the prolonged period of strike action in British universities over fair pensions, pay, and working conditions that Powell mentions occurred at a time — from 2018 to 2023 (with the strike action starting in 2017) — when the share of public expenditure and public-to-private transfers in British tertiary educational institutions decreased to the disappointingly low figure of 53% in 2019.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusions

To conclude, we argue that the ethos of pluralism offered across the special issue contributions, far from giving in to ever narrowing interdisciplinary specialisation and fragmentation, diversify 'the spaces of knowledge' to be examined in the history and philosophy of geography.<sup>40</sup> In different ways, the gathered insights contribute to a thinking of how geography can open up to different kinds of knowledges, through practices that are situated, embodied, emplaced, and ready to take imaginative and speculative leaps. This ontological and epistemological pluralisation of geography has both been shaped by and found its expression in a growing socio-cultural diversification of geographers, as well as in a broader acknowledgement of the many people who are facilitating the functioning of institutionalised knowledge production and exchange through the RGS-IBG and its events, and thus of research groups like the HPGRG, as vividly represented in a recent painting adorning the entrance of the RGS-IBG headquarters in London. This painting differs from other representations in the RGS-IBG building, which focus on white academic geographers, scientific travellers, explorers, and RGS leaders, by joining — on their virtual video screens — the portraits of nine people with different educational and job roles, varying links to the RGS-IBG, and diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including two female professors of colour, the building's male caretaker, and an award-winning female school pupil.<sup>41</sup>

Looking back and looking forward, it is evident that both physical and human geographers continue to have pressing contemporary issues to contribute to, which call for more theoretically-informed, empirically-grounded, and policy-relevant critical geographical research, as it emerged across a range of themes as part of the creative evolution that has characterised research on the history and philosophy of geography linked to the HPGRG activities and the group members' research. We envision a future research agenda that more often considers the history, methodology, and philosophy of geography together, supports more conversations between physical and human geographers, and studies why students decide to become geographers and not geologists, engineers, economists, sociologists, ethnographers, historians, or philosophers — all with the aim of achieving a deeper understanding of the variegated nature of geography to develop its full potential.

Based on the notable contextualist, constructivist, and critical geographical legacies of the HPGRG and its pluralist present, we are

convinced that the need for more academic advocacy and public policies on the following — from our perspective desirable — democratic and inclusive practices across the world could be constructively informed, and perhaps even better understood, by research on the history, methodology, and philosophy of geography, as the discussions of these concrete practices in the different contributions to this special issue clearly show. We thus envision a politics of geographical knowledge production that helps to achieve the following:

- to respect and support ethnic minorities;
- to protect the livelihoods and heritage of Indigenous populations;
- to mitigate humanmade climate change;
- to reduce the highly uneven socioeconomic geographies in the world;
- to prevent the appeal of authoritarian populism to majority populations;
- to create more sustainable communities with affordable or free access to health care, education, and social security;
- to protect workers' rights and pensions and promote social and spatial justice;
- to facilitate equality, diversity, and inclusion of people with diverse identities;
- to maintain and increase rather than reduce public funding and academic freedom in universities as seats of cultural innovation and critical consciousness; and
- to convince the widest possible publics of the immeasurable value of both peaceful coexistence and the practice of working together nationally and internationally to create mutually supportive and fairer societies.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Heike Jöns:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Project administration, Conceptualization. **Julian Brigstocke:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Conceptualization. **Pauline Couper:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Conceptualization. **Federico Ferretti:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

The four coauthors were members of the HPGRG committee. Brigstocke is a current HPGRG committee member and the group's chair. HPGRG committee membership is voluntary and includes only unpaid positions.

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<sup>39</sup> OECD, *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022), p. 266.

<sup>40</sup> David N. Livingstone, 'The Spaces of Knowledge: Contributions towards a Historical Geography of Science', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995) 5–34.

<sup>41</sup> See the painting entitled zoom, oil on tablet, 70cm x 130cm x 03cm, by the artist Steve Russell from 2021.