
Digital-Cultural Ecology and the Medium-Sized City

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Abstract Submission Form

1. Paper / Proposal Title: Verdant Creativities: urban gardening, new media and sensuous place-making

2. Format: Written paper

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6. Abstract

This paper is based on ongoing research which investigates how practices of urban gardening inform our understanding of northern identities, urban change and cultivation. Focusing on case studies of urban gardening in Leeds and Wakefield, UK, the project explores how gardening communities participate in practices of place-making and connection. These practices are undertaken through planning, planting, and hands-on gardening as well as using new media platforms to facilitate connectivity and create networked gardening communities. In this way the research interrogates the temporal and spatial transformations of place, and the interrelationship between both online and offline locales and the communities they produce. The research speaks to emerging debates within the field of media & cultural studies for a 'non-media-centric' approach responds to that call by refocusing attention on everyday practices of place-making and identity building rather than the grand projects of urban redevelopment that have characterised the previous decade in northern British post-industrial cities (Thompson, 2010; 2013; 2015).

The research explores urban gardening practices in the context of broader national and international debates about urban transformation and the constitution of place. It seeks to explore the 'politics of planting' that might emerge through the exploration of embodied practices, and assesses how far new media facilitates or constrain such practices. These practices of verdant creativity are interrogated via three key themes: creativity, protest and place-making, and seeks to understand to what extent local actors consider their endeavours to be concerned with the creative transformation of place.

Given the return of the 'Garden Cities' discourse under the previous coalition government (in relation to Ebbsfleet), the controversial campaign for a 'garden bridge' for London, and cuts to Local Authorities' budgets in an era of 'austerity' politics in the UK, this research considers how individuals and local groups negotiate and navigate sites to plant and transform.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dr Zoë Tew-Thompson, Leeds Beckett University,

Zoë is a Senior Lecturer in Media & Cultural Studies. Her research interests are underpinned by critical and cultural theory, in particular the work of Walter Benjamin and Jean Baudrillard. Other themes which guide her research interests are memory, identity and belonging, austerity, and ruination. She has published on the relationship between the contemporary city and collective memory in an edited collection on Walter Benjamin's work and urban change. Zoë co-organised the conference *Austere Cultures/Cultures of Austerity* (2011) at Leeds Metropolitan University, Zoë co-edited a special edition of the *Journal of European Popular Culture*. She is currently working on project exploring the relationship between new media and urban gardening in West Yorkshire, entitled *Verdant Creativities*. This project is funded by the Media & Place research cluster at Leeds Beckett University. This bid followed a successful conference held at Leeds Metropolitan University in July 2014 around themes of Media and Place, which Zoë co-organised. She is also currently developing another project as part of the Media and Place cluster with colleagues Lynne Hibberd and Casey Orr which focuses on Yorkshire's Rhubarb Triangle.

Her recent book *Urban Constellations: Spaces of Cultural Regeneration in Post-Industrial Britain* (Ashgate, 2015) investigates the iconic architectural cultural spaces of the contemporary cityscape as engines of regeneration.

Dr Lynne Hibberd, Leeds Beckett University

Lynne is a Senior Lecturer in Media & Cultural Studies, and has published work in several journals including *Critical Studies in Television*, *Feminist Media Studies* and the *Journal of Gender Studies*. Her work focuses on popular mainstream film and television, American independent cinema and on particular TV producers such as HBO and Channel 4. Lynne is interested in all aspects of mainstream film and TV and is currently working on a number of different projects, including essays on the role of older women in pop music and representations of disability on Channel 4. Previous research has examined the changing role of genres in film and TV, exploring how genres are structured, used and experienced across media texts on different platforms. Lynne is currently working on two projects that consider the connections between media and place: Verdant Creativities which explores urban gardening practices in West Yorkshire and Navigating Holme which considers the transformation of Holmfirth and its connection to TV sitcom *Last of the Summer Wine*, for which she was awarded a British Academy/Leverhulme Small Grant in 2015.



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