‘Feeling Class: Emotions, Bodies and the Affective Politics of Social Inequalities’, Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences, University of Sheffield, 5th May 2020.

**PROGRAMME**

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**ABSTRACTS**

Session 1 (09:45 – 11:15): Stigmatising places and bodies

‘Everyone thinks you’re scum’: The Painful Classed Dimensions of Using Drugs – **Michelle Addison (Lecturer in Criminology, Northumbria University)**

This paper discusses the painful affective dimensions of class by looking at the impacts of stigma attached to people who use (or have used) illicit drugs. In doing so, I explore everyday experiences of social and health inequalities, disparities in power and sensations of feeling out of place from the perspective of people who use drugs in neoliberal times. Drawing on qualitative in-depth interviews (fieldwork ongoing) with women and men who use heroin, crack cocaine and amphetamine, this study presents emerging findings about how classed stigma is experienced, negotiated and resisted by some of these most marginalised voices. These insights illustrate that negotiating stigma involves mobilising ‘valued’ capital as well as efforts to resist the negative classed inscriptions from others in society. I argue that these everyday negotiations of class and stigma are fraught with difficulty and not only impact on a person’s mental health and wellbeing, but present important implications for how these people access support services. This paper concludes that class stigma can be an impossible refusal for many of the most vulnerable people in society who use drugs, and contributes to widening social and health inequalities.

‘As soon as you say you’re from here...’ The Half Life of Deindustrialisation and the impacts of organised crime – **Andy Clark (Research Associate in Oral History, Newcastle University)**

This paper investigates the interrelated impacts of serious organised crime (SOC) and the half-life of deindustrialisation (Linkon, 2018) in a former industrial locality. Specifically, it considers the ways in which working-class communities experience different forms of
stigmatisation caused by ‘reputations of multiple deprivation’. Industrial contraction and the presence of serious organised crime is often interconnected in working-class lived experience, but there is little discussion of these relationships in existing deindustrialisation literature. Mah (2014) argues that the decline of industry created a vacuum within working-class communities. I contend that SOC was able to fill this in multiple ways, including illicit drugs to facilitate escapism, paid criminal activity to replace lost employment, goods provision at a lower cost than the ‘legitimate’ economy, and by repurposing abandoned industrial sites. In this paper, I present research on Tunbrooke, a working-class community in the west of Scotland. Tunbrooke is synonymous with deindustrialisation and SOC in Scotland. Drawing on over forty interviews, I discuss the ways in which these multiple stigmas shape the lived experience of the interviewees. I argue that respondents largely concede that Tunbrooke will continue to suffer the effects of economic deprivation, criminality, and stigmatization. However, rather than passively accepting this, there is opposition to the external view of the locality as ‘a violent shithole’ (interview with author, 2017), with an emphasis on kinship and solidarity through adversity. I argue that these perceptions are framed through a lasting communal working-class identity, formed through the industrial period and strengthened as the area experienced the fallout of the half-life of deindustrialisation and the recent impacts of political austerity.

‘I do bite sometimes’: Negotiating territorial stigmatisation in the ‘Sports Direct town’ – James Pattison (Teaching Associate in Sociology, University of Nottingham)

Based on 15-months of ethnographic research, this paper will investigate the effects of territorial stigmatisation in Shirebrook. In particular, the focus will be on the ways in which residents negotiate and respond to the affective dynamics invoked by residing in a stigmatised place. As part of the regeneration scheme created to relieve the impact of the colliery’s closure in 1993, Sports Direct built their headquarters and main distribution warehouse on the site of the former colliery. Sports Direct, Shirebrook’s biggest employer, are renowned for poor working conditions, which are arguably emblematic of contemporary precarious work. A large majority of the approximate 3,000 agency workers employed in the Sports Direct warehouse are migrants from Eastern Europe, which has contributed to and intensified an already long history of class-based territorial stigmatisation in Shirebrook. Shirebrook residents respond to the affect wrought by territorial stigma in various ways. Some use the place-making practice of shared humour as a form of stigma inversion (Wacquant et al 2014). This practice of laughing about Shirebrook amongst its residents illustrates the complexities of symbolic violence and the acceptance of Shirebrook’s subordinated position whilst simultaneously resisting it. Other negotiation practices involved the fierce defence of the town from the scorn directed by outsiders, whilst some engaged in the lateral denigration of deflecting stigma towards less powerful others such as migrants and the unemployed. This paper contributes to the debates on territorial stigmatisation through its application to a relatively small former coalfield town, which provides the opportunity to extend the concept beyond the urban areas where it is usually applied.

‘Eastern European’ stigma: identity management through dis-identification, emphasised nationalism and class dynamics – Aija Lulle (Lecturer in Human Geography, Loughborough University)

‘Eastern Europeans’ seldom, if at all, identify with this identity label. This creates ambivalence, the process, in which individuals pursue tactics on how to present themselves
and feel good with an individual identity. My research examines how migrants manage their identities in Great Britain.

Data draws from my projects in the UK (2010-2018), focusing on research participants who were in ‘working-class’ professional employment. However, not all were necessarily lower-skilled for jobs, nor previously lived as ‘working-class’ in their home countries.

Ambivalence is a process of lacking fixed positionalities. Dialectics of identification and identity process is crucial because ‘Eastern Europeans’ as an identification term cannot be discarded due to media and academic uses of the term as superficially ‘working class’. In the presentation of self in everyday life, Goffman (1959) claimed that people are striving to adjust their social identities with complex images of themselves, and desire to control impressions that other people have of them. Ambivalence of identification with the term ‘Eastern European’ evokes multiple shifts, including denial, emphasised national(istic) and professional identities outside the current employment, and range from stigmatisation to claims of ‘whiteness’ in relation to other migrants. ‘Stigma’ is not an attribute of an identity but emerges in ‘relationships’ (Goffman’s (1963: 13). An ‘Eastern Europeans’ in one geographical or social environment might hide certain attributes that can be stigmatised, but not in others. I claim, and my main contribution in the presentation is, that the most illuminating techniques of ambivalent identity management lead to dis-identification culturally, emphasised nationalism politically and willingness to shift class positions, at least in home countries, which people visit from time to time.

Session 2 (13:30 – 15:00): Emotions of home and housing

“Inside and outside at the same time”: White working class others in the fens of Eastern England – Rowan Jaines (PhD researcher in Geography, University of Sheffield)

“This paper focuses on the fen landscape in the East of England as an area that is home to a particular kind of non-metropolitan working class experience. There is no other place in the UK where food manufacture and distribution is so dominant. Low paid seasonal work prevails in the fens, carried out by Romanians, Lithuanians, Bulgarians and Poles as well as the local domestic population. Schools struggle and there are very high numbers of people with no qualifications. Over half of this disproportionately white population experiences “deprivation”; people have problems with their teeth and there are high levels of “preventable early death”.

This is also a landscape holding five of the districts most heavily in favour of leaving the European Union. It is thus also a place where genuine fear and lived experience of abuse at the hands of anti-immigrant prejudice is interwoven with a shared caricature of “poor white working class Brits” (Rzepnikowska 2019: 71). These sketches of “Brexit voters” echo dominant imagery compiled piecemeal from a familiar list of normative characteristics ascribed to those living in poverty. In a language remarkably similar to 19th century colonial discourse of racialisation, these include but are not limited to: violence and criminality; excessive fleshiness with its accompanying stench and fecundity; lack of ambition, and; inability to delay gratification (Haylett 2001; Rzepnikowska 2019).

The fen landscape - and its history as land reclaimed for industrial farming – is a medium upon which an ideological slippage between economic poverty and poverty of character can be glimpsed. This paper will interrogate the spectre of the “poor white other” in my own research. I will trace the ways that this long-standing ideological construct – which is not just
inextricably linked with processes of racialised prejudice but is necessary to these practices – is animated and articulated across different groups.

**Love in the time-space of inequality – Sam Strong (Junior Research Fellow in Geography, University of Cambridge)**

This paper approaches class as an affective relation—where one’s classed position and identity is produced by, but also productive of, affective intensities. To examine this dialectic, it specifically explores the relationship between love, class and inequality. Love is understood in three senses: as a feeling (to love); as a relationality (to love something/someone); and as a spatial disposition and classed identity (to be in love). It draws on sustained and ongoing ethnographic research in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea—arguably the UK’s most unequal place (Dent-Coad, 2017). This paper centres on the testimony of one resident of a more deprived part of the borough. This resident is currently ‘in love’ and in a relationship with a resident from a far more affluent part of the borough. Despite their respective wards being geographically proximate, they are worlds apart. Illustrated statistically, these differences are stark: across Kensington and Chelsea life expectancy varies by 12 years, and despite the borough having the highest mean per household income in the country, 16% of its residents are classified as ‘low paid’ (ONS, 2018).

In this paper, I want to explore how inequality, class and social difference are felt, performed and lived through the experience of love. Rather than romanticising the affective quality of love, this paper demonstrates how it is both produced and productive of inequality. Firstly, the feeling of love is one that as much builds classed barriers as it does break them down. For this participant, love is something that is itself shot through with inequality and class difference—in how it is expressed, felt and performed in embodied ways. Secondly, as with other emotions and affects, it does not exist in isolation: rather, love is a process that exists in relation with people, places and other feelings. This paper specifically examines the relationship between love and loss – and how the participant’s relationship forces her to question, but also defend and celebrate, her classed geographical identity. Finally, in drawing these points together, this paper considers what it means ‘to be in love’—and how a geographical account of love reveals its operation in and through the psychic landscape of class inequality.

**Space, class and belonging: a comparative study of post-war multi-storey council housing in Sheffield and Manchester – Isabelle Carter (PhD researcher in History, University of Sheffield)**

This paper outlines a comparative case study analysis of mass, multi-storey council housing in inner-city Sheffield and Manchester from the 1970s to the 1990s. It attempts to highlight residents’ voices amidst the more prominent political and cultural narratives of these places, building on recent work in the fields of emotions and spatial history to explore how far these wider discourses intersected with the lived experience of working-class tenants.

Throughout the post-war period, multi-storey estates were sites of significant physical and social transition in Britain’s inner cities. Initially offering a higher standard of living to inhabitants of former slums, the optimism of their early years was soon succeeded by the realities of multiple deprivation in the 1970s and 1980s. Emotions were integral to representations of these estates, which came to be described by the government and the press alike as places of fear, depression and loneliness. Yet while these feelings were
reinforced by some residents, others asserted a sense of belonging to their homes. Using community publications and oral histories alongside local government reports, this paper explores residents’ accounts of multi-storey living. Focusing on the latter years of their tenancy, whether reached involuntarily due to an estate’s demolition or the result of a decision to relocate to another area, the paper suggests that residents’ conflicting accounts of multi-storey housing in Sheffield and Manchester reveal the ways in which their experiences were shaped by the enduring emotional and classed connotations of different spaces.

‘They don’t care if they hurt your feelings’: Emotions and class at London social housing estates undergoing regeneration – Paul Watt (Professor of Urban Studies, University of London, Birkbeck)

This paper analyses emotions and class at London social housing estates undergoing regeneration involving full or partial demolition. It is based on long-term ethnographic research including participant observation and in-depth interviews with the residents (tenants and leaseholders) of several London estates at various stages of the regeneration life-cycle. The paper examines the wide range of emotions that the residents displayed both in interviews and fieldwork settings. Despite the official regeneration narrative that residents would benefit from regeneration due to getting new improved homes and neighbourhoods (Watt, 2017), their actual experiences of the regeneration process – which lasts many years and even several decades – were anything but wholly positive. Instead, the largely working-class residents expressed a series of largely negative emotions as they struggled to live through a regeneration process which was not only protracted, but opaque and frustrating. Each section of the paper examines a specific set of emotions: cynicism and disbelief at the regeneration rationale and promises; nostalgia for the loss of their valued established homes and communities; anxiety and depression at where they were going to be moved to next; desperation and exhaustion at the length of time that the regeneration was taking; and a righteous fury at what had been forcibly removed from them by the ‘powers that be’. Such emotions illustrate the profound class and power imbalances that underpin estate regeneration.

Session 3 (15:30 – 17:00): Affective and creative resistances and solidarities

Mining a Productive Seam: Retraditionalising Working-Class Relations and Performances as a Pedagogical Tool of Possibility – Kat Simpson (University of Huddersfield)

This paper presents data from ethnographic research carried out at ‘Lillydown Primary’, a local-authority school in a former coalmining community in South Yorkshire. It complicates Avery Gordon’s (2008) concept of social haunting arguing that, in order to transcend typical accounts of working-class resistance to schooling (see for example, Willis, 1997; Bright, 2012, 2018), we must move beyond the loss and social violence of the past and begin to reckon with the ‘goodness’ of ghosts – the goodness of working-class culture – that a haunting also transmits. The central argument is that various dimensions of staff and pupils’ shared histories work as an apparatus to diffuse and transform neoliberal processes and experiences of schooling. Particular relations and pedagogies are refashioned upon more traditional working-class codes and ethics, of trust, equality, and solidarity. Most notably, it
shows how traditional working-class humour continues to be used as resource to manage social relations, mediate authority, and ameliorate the effects of dominant neoliberal discourses of education, and its role and function for working-class youth in contemporary capitalist society. Reckoning with and harnessing pupils’ ghosts – the loss, the goodness, and the utopian – is key, this paper argues, to truly understanding and potentially transforming experiences of schooling with and for the working class.

Towards working-class solidarity in the face of racial nationalism: the role of music – Moushumi Bhowmik (Jadavpur University) and Ben Rogaly (Professor of Human Geography, University of Sussex)

As racial nationalist regimes across the globe consolidate their power through their interconnections (viz, Bolsonaro; Trump; Orban; Modi; Netanyahu), so their efforts to divide working-class people along lines of ‘race’, ethnicity, faith, nationality, and differentiated citizenship laws continue apace. With social media trolling and ‘fake news’ increasingly used as additional sources of power for the radical right, challenging racial nationalist narratives requires innovative forms of affective politics. One among these that can build transnational working-class solidarity and also potentially celebrate working-class cultures is music. This paper explores connections being made through music within and across national boundaries and across time using as case studies music developed by those struggling against discriminatory (anti-Muslim) citizenship laws and state violence in India, and socialist internationalist Yiddish music – originally developed to protest against both anti-semitic pogroms and exploitative employment conditions and currently being revived in the UK, the US and eastern Europe.

Stepping in/through time, seaming stories – Ceri Morgan (Senior Lecturer, English and Creative Writing, Keele University)

This performative paper showcases work based on memories of mining in the South Wales and Stoke regions. In 2016, I led a geopoetics (site-responsive creative practices) walking workshop in Silverdale Country Park, site of a former coal-mine, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan Disaster (my aunt, Mair Morgan, is a survivor). The workshop was attended by a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate students, local parish councillors, an archivist, and a former miner and his wife. I carried out informal interviews as we walked around the site. Many participants produced creative pieces prompted by the workshop, including stories, poems, photographs, and a song. These were exhibited, along with quotes from the interviews (all with participants’ permissions) at Silverdale Community Library in Autumn 2017. A launch event featuring readings was attended by students and staff from Keele University, former miners and local Silverdale residents. In 2018, many of the exhibition artefacts formed the basis of a show made in collaboration with immersive performance company, Restoke. Performed at Keele Chapel in June 2018, Seams featured several of the original workshop participants, a small number of professional artists, and community volunteers. The paper will reflect on the capacity for participatory place-writing to engender affective responses to deindustrialisation which are not necessarily nostalgic.

Pain, Love and Laughter: The Emotions of Solidarity on Liverpool’s Docks c. 1960s-1990s – Emma Copestake (PhD researcher in History, University of Liverpool)

David Featherstone (2012: 5) has defined solidarity as a ‘relation forged through political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression’. A member of Women of
the Waterfront, a support group for the 500 sacked dock workers that fought for reinstatement between 1995 and 1998, explained to me during an interview in July 2017 that ‘human suffering makes better people’ because, through suffering, people are able to ‘tune in’ to the pain of others. The pain she referred to encompassed both the physical and emotional pain that defined the experience of many families in Liverpool throughout the twentieth century. The profound reflections of this interview grew from the discussions of everyday moments of love, support and laughter.

In this paper, I focus on the way solidarity was (and still is) embedded in the symbiotic relationship between overt moments of political struggle and the power dynamics that shaped the daily life of dock workers and their families in Liverpool. By drawing upon Barbara Rosenwein’s (2002) concept of ‘emotional communities’, I examine the system of feeling that underlined solidarity including the gendered roles that solidarity and solidarity action entailed. I then assess the prominence of pain at work, at home and in the community before demonstrating how love and laughter functioned as forms of resistance. A combination of oral history interviews and the records of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company are used to highlight the significance of the dockers’ bucket, perm club and days out for retired men to understanding class. This understanding highlights the ways that solidarity has persisted despite the severe restrictions placed upon the traditional infrastructure of solidarity action. Most importantly, I reveal humour’s place at the heart of day-to-day resistance through its ability to subvert power structures, maintain strong bonds and regulate behaviour.