

Call for papers –
The Royal Geographical Society / Institute of British Geographers Annual Conference, London.
28-31 August, 2007.

Touching Places / Placing Touch: Space, Culture and Tactility

Session convenors:

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Context

Touch comes before sight, before speech. It is the first language and the last, and it always tells the truth. (Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*)

Touch is integral to every aspect of social action and its symbols and meanings deeply infuse all cultures. The places where people want to touch, are allowed to touch, are obliged to touch, refuse to touch or are forbidden to touch, form a complex and delicately patterned landscape. Given the deep importance of touch in all aspects of human spatiality, the tactile senses are poorly researched by human geography. Geographers have quite simply been out of touch. Encouragingly, the neglect of touch is beginning to change as part of wider conceptual developments in geography around affective aspects of everyday spaces and performance, focusing on the sensual and the emotional. The affective turn has so far however underplayed the socio-cultural complexity that regulates touch in different places . the conventions of when, where and with whom one can touch. And we do not really understand how these conventions are policed, or the degree to which places of touch are gendered, or how age, culture or ability are associated with touch. This session aims to advance understanding of touch in geographical scholarship, moving beyond a physical mapping of uneven tactility, to focus on developing a rich understanding of touch in terms of individual social life, personal experiences and tasks, and spatial contexts.

Suggested themes around experiences of touching places

We invite theoretically informed analysis on the following broad themes and are open to suggestions of other papers that consider the differential meanings of the places of touch:

- Dirty places and contagious contacts
- Erotic spaces and seductive feelings
- Touching domestic spaces and Caring Practice
- Placing tactile play
- Violent places and the feelings of pain
- Tactile art and artefacts
- Crossing tangible cultures
- The healing touch - places and wellbeing
- The tangibility of knowledge spaces

- Working through touch
- Touch and technology
- Touching ethnographies and sensuous scholarship
- Getting back in touch: epistemological futures for tactile research

Please email short abstracts (max 200 words) to Sara.MacKian@manchester.ac.uk by 31st January 2007.