**Keynote Speakers’ Abstracts**

Ben Highmore – *Mundane Aesthetics and Everyday Poiesis*

While the term creativity can seem freighted with ideas of originality and expressive individualism, the philosophical term “poiesis” can suggest a more everyday sense of making, or of bringing forth. Thus the hurriedly prepared meal, made out of whatever is to hand, might be better understood as a form of poiesis than as a “creative” act. Poiesis could be the name we give to an everyday creativity: activities that will become misrecognised if we “promote” them to a level of artistic creation. Similarly, to register the everydayness of poiesis we need to rethink aesthetics as a form of mundane experience. And this means becoming attentive to the often ambiguous, habitual and “weak” sensorial experiences of daily life. In this talk I will use examples from the Mass-Observation archive and elsewhere as a way of investigating everyday practices of poiesis.

Sarah Moss - *Dirty Laundry in Public: doing the washing in fiction*

If I were ever to read my own on-line reviews, I’d find that some of the people who dislike my latest novel do so because the narrator is always doing the laundry. There’s more than one reader offended by the idea of a father handling his daughters’ underwear (it’s a waste of time to argue with anonymous reviewers even in one’s head, but I would like to know if they also think mothers shouldn’t wash their sons’ smalls). I noticed when I began to think about it that there’s a laundry set piece in my earlier novel, Bodies of Light, which required days of research on Victorian washing practice and technology, and left me with the idea that staying dirty was the functional choice for women in Victorian cities.

I’m interested in a literature of laundry because laundry is even less visible in fiction than other forms of domestic labour and yet takes up hours of someone’s time every week in most households. There’s now an extensive scholarship on food in literature. Mrs Ramsay might know how to make a beef casserole in To the Lighthouse but it’s hard to imagine her putting her visitors’ sheets through the mangle. When Jane Eyre turns her hand to housework up on the moor, she kneads bread, tops and tails gooseberries, beats the carpets and washes the walls, but fresh clothes continue to appear as needful, even with three women in the house regularly crossing open moorland in ankle-length dresses. And yet from the eighteenth century, household guides assume that everyone has clean underwear daily, and in most of the houses I know the rhythm of the washing machine cycle is one of the anchors of the day. I have energetic conversations with friends, clever friends who write books and have several degrees, about whether it’s worth getting a dryer, where we dry the clothes without one, whether ironing should be practised on special occasions or not at all. An early indication of the gulf between my mother-in-law’s expectations and my own was her broad-minded concession that it didn’t really matter if our town garden was small as long as there was room to hang the laundry out of sight of the house; on the other side my grandmother was clear that underwear should never be hung out where the neighbours would see it. Laundry practices bring environmental concerns, both global and very local; class markers; ideas about the value and use of time; anxieties about the public and the private, and that’s before we think about who performs this work for whom.

I write about daily life because I think it matters, because I think there’s a gender and class politics in the idea that domestic labour doesn’t belong in literature, because we show love and anger and resentment in the way we do laundry and because you can say more with a nicely pressed shirt or a bloodstain than you can with flowers. Whoever does your laundry knows your secrets, and is therefore in a position of considerable narrative strength.

Sue Heath and Andy Balmer - *Seeing through the lines: some lessons in observational drawing*

What might happen when a bunch of sociologists are given sketchbooks, sets of paints - and licence to play? Apart from nervous hilarity and a fair amount of mess, we might also expect some reflections on where the drawn line might sit within the methodological palette. In our plenary, we share some of our own methodological musings arising from a collaborative experiment in observational drawing involving the Morgan Centre and artist Lynne Chapman. Part of the deal was for Lynne to teach us how to sketch and for us to explore if and how we might be able to use sketching in our own research practice. In concluding that ‘yes, we probably can’, we grappled with a number of challenges to our more usual practices of seeing and representing the social world, which we will explore in this paper. In particular, we focus on the notions of sketchiness and concentrated seeing, before considering some specific examples in more detail. Along the way there might well be a spot of sketching. Come with pencils at the ready…