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*Affective lives of rural ageing*

Andrew S. Maclaren<sup>1,2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Geography & Environment, University of Aberdeen

<sup>2</sup>Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences Group, James Hutton Institute

[andrew.maclaren@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.maclaren@abdn.ac.uk)

University of Aberdeen  
School of Geosciences,  
Department of Geography & Environment  
St Marys- Room 101  
Elphinstone Road  
Aberdeen  
AB24 3UF

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## Abstract

Affective and embodied knowledges have come to exert an influence on both rural studies and ageing studies. Drawing together these two contexts and considering the accelerated demographic ageing experienced in rural areas in contrast to urban areas, this paper aims to explore the affective and emotional lives of older people living in rural Scotland. This paper uses non-representational theories as a mode of thought to attend to this aim, whilst considering the application of this theoretical perspective methodologically. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper first explores the more-than-human nature of rural spaces that older people experience. This leads into a consideration of socialities as a contour of rural ageing and the notion of atmosphere as part of an affective and emotional element of rural living. By linking non-representational theories with rural ageing, this paper ultimately contributes to ongoing debates within rural studies on affective rural lives.

## Introduction

Rural spaces and places globally are experiencing demographic ageing much faster than urban areas (Skinner & Hanlon, 2016b). This is due to a complex interaction of socio-economic and demographic processes, that are spatially uneven at supra-national, national, regional and local scales (see for example: East Lothian Partnership, 2016; Eurostat, 2016; Glasgow and Brown, 2012; United Nations, 2015). This ageing phenomenon, and specifically rural ageing, is most pronounced in more developed countries, such as in Europe.

Ageing scholarship, though, has been criticised for having 'never reached its full potential... [with] only a fraction of the depth and scope of the collected theories, concepts, and methods of geography [having] been applied to gerontological thinking and research' (Cutchin, 2009, p. 440; see also Skinner et al, 2015). Davies articulates this further, in that 'dominant perspectives about older rural populations have been informed by positivist demographic methods' (2011, p. 191). With demographic ageing in rural areas there is a need to have a much greater appreciation of not just the socio-economic or demographic processes that contribute to rural ageing as a process, but also the lives of older people living in rural communities, given its increased, and increasing, everyday significance across various contexts.

Concurrently to this context of rural ageing, affective and embodied knowledges have recently come to exert an influence on rural studies (Farrugia et al., 2016; Hughes, 2014; Phillips, 2014; Halfacree, 2012, 2013; Halfacree & Rivera, 2012; Carolan, 2008). This influence has led scholars to consider how we think about rural spaces through our bodies (Carolan, 2008). Specific demographics have been attended to, in order to show the heterogeneous nature of experiences in

rural spaces and places, whether of an expanded middle class population in rural, gentrified England (Phillips, 2014) or young rural people's relations in Australia (Farrugia et al., 2016).

With scholars in rural studies engaged in exploring affective and emotional dimensions of space and place, and ageing scholars now beginning to explore and be influenced by affective and embodied enquiry (Andrews & Grenier, 2016; Skinner et al., 2015; Andrews et al., 2013), this paper draws together these contemporary and complimentary calls within ageing and rural studies. In this contribution, I aim to explore the affective and embodied dimensions of older people's lives in rural spaces and places, and in particular to capture 'insights into the complex interdependencies between people and place' (Hanlon & Skinner, 2016, p. 210).

Building on this focus, I draw on non-representational theories<sup>1</sup>, a mode of thought that has come to exert an increasing influence within the social sciences (Vannini, 2015), to respond to the contentions outlined above to advance the study of rural ageing. To do this, I conducted six months of ethnographic fieldwork in a village in rural East Lothian, Scotland. This paper aims to provide a theoretical contribution to advance how these 'new' theories can be used and actualised in the study of rural ageing and what using non-representational theories as a mode of thought contributes to rural studies and specifically rural ageing.

The paper begins by considering rural ageing scholarship and non-representational theories more broadly to set the context for this research. I build on this context by turning to methodological debates that inform my study, particularly to speak to the recent contentions raised by Lorimer (2015)

surrounding non-representational theories. I then ask my readers to visualise, and jump into the lifeworlds of those who participated in my research, attending to the more-than-human nature of rural spaces and the socialities that rural spaces afford. I end by concluding how this paper contributes to the corpus of work emerging in both rural and ageing studies, through its considerations of the affective and embodied nature of rural ageing that non-representational theories as a mode of thinking offers.

### **Rural Ageing**

Rowles (1978), through his study of ageing, is considered a leading scholar in the history of humanistic thought and practice (Crang & Cook, 2007; Cloke et al., 2004). Rowles' study of ageing expanded to consider 'the rural in rural ageing' (1988), prior to wider debates within rural studies over the use and need for 'rural', its applicability and focus, or lack of focus thereof, on difference and an expanded notion of discourse (Halfacree, 1993; Philo, 1992; Hoggart, 1990; Mormont, 1990).

Rowles' (1988) study has been recently reconsidered by Scharf *et al.* who contend that Rowles was 'probably ahead of his time when he asked explicitly in 1988... "what is rural about rural ageing"' (2016, p. 55). Rowles' (1988) paper built on reflections he had made whilst researching in rural Appalachia, in the United States of America. He asked how two older residents were different: Jennifer-Rose who 'lived on an isolated stretch of road [with]...no neighbours within sight of her home' (p. 116); and Audrey who lived in 'Colton, a settlement of 400 persons, approximately five miles away [from Jennifer-Rose]' (p.116). Rowles asked 'are both these micro-environments equally rural? In census terms, they are embraced within a single definition. However, in terms of the

milieu they provide for the 'experience' of growing old they are far apart' (1988, p. 116).

Further to this diversity of physical experience Rowles identified that the life history of older people in these areas also mattered such as whether an individual 'aged in place' or had migrated recently. In considering these questions Rowles (1988) identified that there was an ambiguity of the term rural, or I would argue an uncritical use of the term, within rural ageing scholarship.

Rowles posited three alternate conceptualisations for rural ageing: '*ageing in rural environments*, in which rural is viewed as an ecological context; the *environment of rural ageing*, in which rural is viewed as a socio-cultural context; and the *rural environment of the ageing*, in which rural is viewed as a phenomenological perspective of those who are growing old' (1988, p. 115; emphasis in original).

Despite Rowles' critical contribution, made almost 30 years ago, the study of ageing and rural ageing specifically has focused primarily on the representational. This is despite recent burgeoning interest in cultural gerontology (see for an overview: Edmondson & Scharf, 2015 on rural ageing; Twigg & Martin, 2015 on ageing) particularly of embodiment and performance (Kontos, 2004; Kontos & Naglie, 2009). There has also been some work by rural scholars that focuses on older, in particular male, farmers' experiences (Gullifer & Thompson, 2006), identity (Riley, 2016) and subjectivities (Garnham & Bryant, 2014). This work offers other perspectives on a specific type of rural ageing, specifically on farming. It does show that rural scholars are engaging with subjectivities and experiences in order to understand differing experiential

ruralities. However, their focus leaves out other rural ageing perspectives, specifically the everyday lives of those not involved in farming.

In understanding rurality, Wenger (2001) critically interrogated the wider interest in the family of representations known as the rural idyll (Little, 1999; Bell, 1997), when she outlined, and challenged, four common myths of rural ageing. That older people:

1. live in pretty villages and small towns, where they spend their retirement happy and contented with few worries or cares...
2. have strong family support networks that are available to provide loving and appropriate care if needed...
3. live in well-integrated communities that take special pains to ensure that the needs of older people are met...
4. have better health and life satisfaction than people in urban areas, and so have fewer service needs' (p. 119).

These stereotypes are idyllic images of the experience of rural ageing. I argue here, that although critically engaging with these idyllic images is a useful challenge to the rural idyll, it also creates an unhelpful binary where once the idyll is challenged an anti-idyll takes over in its place. The focus thus, as Rowles (1988) pointed towards and others have also emphasised, is that rural discourses, of ageing in this case, should be expanded to bring into focus the place based variety of experience older adults have in 'diverse rural surroundings' (Keating & Phillips, 2008, p. 1).

Despite this criticality emerging in rural ageing scholarship, Scharf *et al.* still believe that 'there might have been an increase in the number of studies on...topics in rural areas, [but] generally research lacked a critical and analytical

focus. In many cases, "rural" continued to be viewed more as a research setting rather than being seen as an ever-changing context that can potentially shape experiences and outcomes for older people' (2016, p. 50). The edited collection surrounding *ageing resource communities* (Skinner & Hanlon, 2016) presents a recent example of Scharf *et al.*'s (2016) contention of 'resource communities' and 'rurality' or 'rural' being used synonymously across very different geographical contexts and also how the 'rural idyll' still comes to be used as an overarching idea to describe retirees' motivation for migration (Milligan, 2016, p. 150). Hanlon and Skinner (2016) point towards this lack of criticality in their conclusions to the collection, emphasising the need for development in the geographies of ageing and gerontology more generally, relative to the theoretical and methodological developments seen in wider social and cultural theory.

Where then might rural ageing fit in? Thus far, studies of rural ageing have mostly been focused around discursively engaging through representations and social constructions. Yet, as Halfacree has considered, discourses and social constructions can have 'very real material geographical and socio-political consequences' (2012, p.390). Discourses and deconstruction can only tell so much of the story. Indeed, Anderson can be seen to expand on this where, referring to Deleuze, he argues that a 'representation may function as a 'small cog in an extra-textual practice' (Deleuze 1972 in Smith 1998: xvi) ...we must pay attention to how representations function affectively and how affective life is imbued with representations' (2014, p. 14). Where this paper contributes to the contentions outlined above about expanding (rural) ageing studies is through an engagement with non-representational theories, something called for as part of



a wider relational turn within geography as a whole (Cresswell, 2013), but that might be of use to the study of ageing (Andrews & Grenier, 2016; Skinner et al., 2015; Andrews et al., 2013) and rural ageing (Hanlon & Skinner, 2016) specifically. A focus on practices and experiences responds to Rowles original claim around the need for an engagement with '*rural environment of the ageing*, in which rural is viewed as a phenomenological perspective of those who are growing old' (1988, p. 115; emphasis in original). Other modes of knowing, previously outlined in this paper with regards to emotional knowledges (Kontos & Naglie, 2009; Gullifer & Thompson, 2006), have touched on this. However, non-representational theories offer another lexicon and vocabulary in order to do this and in particular one that appreciates the relational assemblage of environments, practices and performances as well as the embodied aspects that these environments and doings of practises affords. I now turn towards engaging with rural ageing scholarship with non-representational theories as a mode of thought.

### **Non-representational theories and rural ageing**

'Non-representational geographies are concerned, first and foremost, with doings – practices and performances – and how spaces are made through practical application' (Anderson, 2016, p. 16). Initially stemming from the work of Thrift (1996; 1997; 1999; 2000) and his graduate students at Bristol (Wylie, 2002, 2005, McCormack, 2002, 2003; Dewsbury et al., 2002; Dewsbury, 2000; Harrison, 2000), as well as by others (Lorimer, 2005, 2007, 2008; Anderson, 2006; Laurier & Philo, 2006; Tolia-Kelly, 2006), there is now an expanded community (Lorimer, 2015) of scholars across different fields interested in non-representational theories (see Vannini, 2015 for an overview), as my examples

present in relation to the studies of rurality and ageing. Indeed, as Anderson (2013, 2014, 2016) has outlined, there can be no engagement with non-representational theories separate from specific geographies. Through multiple calls and empirical engagements, the contention has been that non-representational theories can enliven and in turn be enlivened through the expanded sub-disciplinary perspectives brought to engage with this mode of enquiry.

Non-representational theories are concerned with how 'life takes shape and gains expression' (Lorimer, 2005, p. 84) and in particular 'how spaces are made through practical action' (Anderson, 2016, p. 16). To engage with everyday spaces and places in this way, scholars have turned to the interrelated concepts of affect and emotion to consider the embodied, corporeal experiences of being in the world. There is, however, 'no stable definition of affect', as affect is associated with the emotion and feeling which a place has on a body, and that body on a place (Thrift, 2004, p. 59); 'affect is a different kind of intelligence about the world' (Thrift, 2004, p. 60). Understanding affect relies upon the manifest ways of the body to move, walk, rest, touch, gesture, sense, feel and perceive the world around us (Latham et al., 2009).

Affect and emotion can be understood in a three-part structure consisting of Affect-Feeling-Emotion (Ahmed, 2004), where:

'affect can be understood in terms of a pre-personal intensity of relation between bodies, where bodies do not necessarily need to be human...feeling can be understood as the sensed registering of this intensity in a body...emotion can be understood as sensed intensity articulated and expressed in a socially recognisable form of expression'

(Latham et al., 2009, p. 112).

Engagements with non-representational theories, affect and emotion have contributed to the understanding of a 'wonderfully diverse range of geographies' (Anderson, 2013, p.454-455). These include engagements as varied as to how the enactment of geopolitical intervention can be understood through the 'tactics and techniques of film-making that foreground affective layers of thinking' in contemporary cinema beyond a focus solely on the discursive practices of codes and scripts (Carter & McCormack, 2006, p. 233-234), to understanding race in encounters in 'racism of assemblages, which traces how loose racial summaries distributed across bodies, things and spaces become the basis for perception, judgment, and action' (Swanton, 2010a, p. 447), or the atmospheric and affective qualities of illuminated spaces (Edensor, 2012).

This work has helped extend our understandings of various socialities, for example race and racisms, to the nature of spaces and how they are imbued with affects or in the produced spaces of consumed cinematic productions among others (see Anderson 2013; 2016 for an overview). The importance of non-representational theories has been that their use adds to previous discursive understands of these and other areas, by focusing on the performative and practice based nature of everyday lives, but also on the non-representational and affective aspects of everyday lifeworlds. Affects and emotions are important in encountering differences, spaces or places, but also performances of and in those spaces and places as well.

These engagements have not gone without critique, particularly of early non-representational scholarship (Pile, 2010; Pain, 2006; Tolia-Kelly, 2006; Thien, 2005; Castree & Macmillan, 2004; Rose, 1997). However, I argue that these

critiques focus on the singular non-representational *theory* as opposed to theories. Through these acts of singular critique and/or rebuttal, they create moments which attach their critique to a singular part or focus. For me, as I have noted previously, it is plural, it is non-representational theories, as it is a multitude of approaches with different series of formations dependent on what is being thought through. As Colls outlines, although there are of course limitations to any body of knowledge or epistemological perspective, we should rather ask 'how might non-representational [theories] allow us to think...differently and to think differently as...geographers?' (Colls, 2012, p. 442). This I see as my challenge and inspiration for engaging with non-representational theories. First not out of novelty (Castree & Macmillan, 2004) in line with the calls for an engagement with this mode of thinking, which Vannini has recently outlined as 'one of the contemporary moment's most influential theoretical perspectives' (2015, p. 2), but to think differently and offer perspectives of rurality, not as a binary good or bad, idyll or anti-idyll, but as a demographic perspective for those whom rural spaces and places form a significant part of their lives.

It is this focus on lives that scholars engaged with non-representational theories and rural studies have looked to impact (Farrugia et al., 2016; Hughes, 2014; Phillips, 2014; Halfacree, 2012; Carolan, 2008). Their aim has been to expand, from the new perspective that non-representational theories offer through an engagement with affects and emotions, on the everyday practices and performances in and of everyday rural spaces and individuals' lifeworlds.

Further to this, these authors have looked to demonstrate how these affects and emotions are important in the encountering and conceptualising of, specifically,

rural spaces or places and the types of performances that go on in those spaces. Ultimately it is to appreciate the diverse assemblages of a (rural) space by considering their materialities, associated images, performances occurring in people's everyday practices, rules and regulations (implicit and explicit), in order to build that layered perspective of that space and place. I look to expand on this burgeoning interest within rural studies, taking inspiration from Farrugia et al. (2016) who focused on the affective lives of young people, by continuing this interest with age, but by considering the lives of older people.

Rowles (1988) was not just ahead of his time in asking what is rural about rural ageing, but in citing the phenomenological experience of rural spaces and places as an important perspective with which to engage. Non-representational theories offer a mode of thinking that considers this diverse assemblage of materialities, images, practices, performances, rules, affects and emotions in order to build a layered perspective of rural ageing, as well as the conceptual vocabulary to do so. It can thus respond to Rowles' (1988) contention for an engagement with the 'rural environment of the ageing'. I turn now to the practice of how I conducted my research.

### **Methodology**

It is useful to note that recently scholars engaged with non-representational theories, and non-representational aspects of the world, have been challenged to engage more in outlining their practices, pedagogies and writing (Lorimer, 2015); 'non-rep[resentational] researchers have remained pretty cagey about creating instructional toolkits or textbook accounts that address questions of methodological design and practical implementation' (Lorimer, 2015, p. 184).

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to contribute towards engaging with

these questions of practices, pedagogies and writing thoroughly, I aim to contribute to the outputs produced by the expanding community of scholars who are engaging with non-representational theories as a mode of thought. This paper provides a commentary on how I engaged with non-representational theories and how I explored the relational, emergent, emotional and affective 'complex interdependencies' (Hanlon & Skinner, 2016, p. 210) older people have in their everyday lives, comments which could offer guidance to others pursuing a non-representational framing in their own research.

Engaging with non-representational theories involves inductive theorising of being in the world (Hughes, 2014; Carolan, 2008; Macpherson, 2007). The research I undertook and present in this article was an investigation into the experience of ageing in rural Scotland. This research comprised six months of ethnographic fieldwork in the village of North Kirkton<sup>2</sup> in East Lothian (Figures 1 and 2). East Lothian was chosen as it presented a space where the many dimensions of demographic ageing in rural areas were likely to be present. East Lothian's population includes a large proportion of older adults, with over a quarter of residents over the age of 60 (East Lothian Partnership, 2016), and it therefore offered potential as a study area, in that older people comprised a substantial group within the community and there would be many potential participants for the research project. Furthermore, East Lothian, despite being a predominantly rural area in close proximity to the eastern portion of Scotland's urban Central Belt and to Edinburgh, has been somewhat overlooked in terms of the construction of rural Scotland.

[Insert Figure 1]

[Insert Figure 2]

My main body of fieldwork involved two periods when I lived in the village, in the spring of 2016, and again in the autumn of 2016, and conducted in-depth ethnographic research. I follow Crang and Cook's definition of ethnography as 'participant observation *plus* any other appropriate methods/ techniques/etc. ... *if they are appropriate for the topic*' (Crang & Cook, 2007, p. 35; emphasis in original). In particular, though, I follow Thrift's (2000a) contention elaborated by Dewsbury (2010), for a flipping of participant observation for *observant participation*. This is where the intention is to immerse myself in the spaces of study, and

'gather a portfolio of ethnographic 'exposures' that can act as lightning rods for thought... [where I] set upon generating inventive ways of addressing and intervening in that which is happening, and has happened, as an academic, that such a method produces its data: a series of testimonies to practice... [and my engagement involved in and of non-representational theories] with practices, embodiment[s] and materialit[ies]'

(Dewsbury, 2010, p. 327).

In this way, my ethnography was observant to the world around me and drew upon various threads of geographical theory in order to generate accounts I observed in the field, and looked to reflect on in my notes. During my ethnographic research, I would often be armed with my trusty Canon Ixus 75, in order to visually record the places and spaces I was in. Ultimately my

ethnography aimed to record the textures of the spaces of North Kirkton, by attending to the materiality of the place, images within and associated with that space, performances occurring in people's everyday practices, rules and regulations (implicit and explicit) associated with that space, the affects, feelings and emotions of a place in order to build that layered perspective<sup>3</sup>.

As part of this ethnographic practice I conducted in-depth interviews with 31 individuals. Although Thrift (1999, 2000b, 2000a) has highlighted an amount of 'methodological timidity' (Thrift, 2000b, p. 6) in the social sciences, and others have critiqued the use of interviews as a method of researching affects, feelings and emotions (McCormack, 2013), I follow Carolan (2008), Phillips (2014) and Farrugia *et al.* (2016), among many others (Hughes, 2014; Swanton, 2010; Macpherson, 2007), who all used interviews to conduct research that might speak to the non-representational aspects of individual's everyday lives and relationalities with space. Indeed, after Laurier and Philo (2006), Carolan has articulated that 'we cannot literally feel in these pages what respondents truly experienced in their lived experience. But this does not mean that we cannot at least get a taste of their world through their words' (2008, p. 412). Interviews thus formed a significant part of my ethnographic practice where textures of place could be brought out from people's narration of their worlds. Moreover, unlike Carolan (2008), Phillips (2014) and Farrugia *et al.* (2016) who all came to engage with the non-representational aspects of individuals' lives secondary to the original research aim, my research explicitly looked to attend to individuals', specifically older people's, emotions and affects and the non-representational aspects of their lives from the start, meaning that a wider range of insights are coupled through multiple methods of practice attending to interviews,



ethnographic notes, and engagement with written and visual sources of the area.

Analysis of my data did not occur as a discrete stage of my research but occurred iteratively as the research progressed. The iterative process involved reflecting on interview transcripts and the notes I had made during interviews or when transcribing an interview, but also finding emergent themes facilitated through the use of OneNote as a tool to order my research. Ultimately my analysis relied on thematic coding of themes emergent from the various forms of data I collected in ethnographic notes, interview transcripts, interview notes, written sources such as press cuttings, magazines, online sites and images (both mine and other people's).

I now turn to presenting some findings from my analysis that aim to draw out insights into the lived, emotional, embodied and affective dimensions of older people's lives in a rural village in Scotland.

### **More-Than-Human<sup>4</sup>**

Rural scholars who have engaged with the affective and embodied aspects of rural spaces and places have highlighted the relationship people have with natures, whether the presence of fauna or flora (Phillips, 2014), the quality of a landscape and an individual's relationship to dwelling in it (Carolan, 2008: drawing on Ingold's (1995, 2000) work on dwelling), or the rhythm rural spaces afford (Farrugia et al., 2016). In my research, the materiality of the world, and older people's encounters with it, emerged as a significant theme within how people related to the spaces and places of their lives in North Kirkton. As Catherine (65) outlines:

*'I mean I sit here and look out there and see the hills up there you know. When I grew up I used to look out my bedroom window and see the fields out there so it's just it's just a very familiar kind of feeling... When I look out here I see big skies, and I love the feeling of space and eh, and being able to see you know, you can if you come walk over, behind the doctor's surgery you can see right over, it's a lovely view, it's a fabulous view and you see right over to the church and the rooftops and the sea and it's beautiful. And that's what I like to be able to see, lots and lots of sky, lots of open space, I suppose it's the opposite to being claustrophobic'.*

As Catherine describes, and like those Carolan (2008) interviewed, the people involved in my research dwelt in the space. When I engaged with people they would commonly describe the local area in terms of the 'countryside' or 'rural', 'fields' or 'open space' (Figure 3). But it was more than just a scopic engagement that Catherine outlined as being able to see. The engagement with the landscape and materialities it afforded were through other registers than just sight, engagements that Carolan outlines as 'kinesthetic and [somesthetic] sensations' (2008, p. 413), to feel, smell, hear, within yourself – sensing the world around you through more than ocular registers. Joyce (84) articulates this in her narrative about her practice of walking:

**Joyce:** *I enjoy walking, being out in the fresh air and I enjoy seeing the countryside...last year we walked up [a local hill] it's, eh, really affective, yes it, eh, gives you quite a feeling.*

**Andrew:** *What in particular for you?*

**Joyce:** *Oh, I think it was just seeing the sun coming through the mist... You know, you can, you can take the same walk at different seasons and how it changes, ehm... you can go different seasons, and the animals you see around I mean, and I mean how the light affects the ehh, the landscape, yeh, I think this is what it is, eh and then you come back home and you feel refreshed.*

**Andrew:** *Refreshed?*

**Joyce:** *Yes that's right, and sort of ehm if you hadn't have been there at that time you'd certainly have missed it, because it's ever changing, I mean you know here particularly ehm different seasons, how, it's like a patchwork and it's a different patchwork in spring, and then you think about the autumn and the rolls [of hay], the straw and the light and the sunlight, when you look at the fields and how it alters during the day, yes, shadows, as well as the bright sunshine.*

The practice of walking in and around North Kirkton, up a local hill, gives Joyce 'quite a feeling'. She articulates, as others looked to, the quality of the landscape and *the view*, but how this view is established as part of a relational assemblage of the quality of the landscape itself and the more-than-human elements that it is made up of (Figure 3). As Wylie has argued, a landscape 'names the materialities and sensibilities with and according to which we see. Neither an empirical content nor a cultural construct, landscape belongs to neither object nor subject; in fact, it adheres within processes that subtend and afford these terms' (Wylie, 2006, p. 520). For Joyce, these materialities are the textures of the *air* and *mist*, the *straw* and *hay*, the *patchwork* of fields. But she also considers that this is a process, as Wylie states, through which the

seasons, and the height of the sun in the sky affords how Joyce sees and feels about the landscape, that it was valuable to have been there in that moment, to have dwelt in the countryside.

[Insert Figure 3]

These feelings that being in the countryside affords are furthered by the natures of rural space and being in the world and feeling *refreshed* as Joyce put it.

Refreshed then might form the link from effect of the materialities and sensibilities the world affords to the feelings felt inside as June (65) felt about rural spaces and the need for *outdooriness*:

**Andrew:** *What is it about the countryside?*

**June:** *Walking, being out in the countryside.*

**Andrew:** *Yeah?*

**June:** *Oh yes, you've got to have, humans have got to have green and nature around them or else they will actually fall to bits! There have been all sorts of studies of this aren't there, that humans even in cities need, must, have some kind of outdooriness to their life, or else they just become mentally ill actually. I think we are still so tied into our peasant roots we...and you don't have to go far back before you find all your ancestors are, were agricultural laborers. I think we are still really not far from that and if you don't have any outside it's awful, you start to feel really weird.*

June outlines the benefit of the countryside and rural spaces as being able to have *outdooriness* otherwise we might start to feel *weird*. This description,

along with Joyce's articulation about feeling refreshed from walking amidst the various materialities of the countryside, contribute to Conradson's (2005) argument of how the nature of rural spaces might offer therapeutic landscapes. This feeling intersects with the recent engagement by health scholars with the notion of well-being and I argue relates to the notion, put forward by Andrews *et al.*, that 'wellbeing might arise through 'affect'; the pre-personal mobile energies and intensities that result from physical encounters within assemblages of bodies and objects' (2014, p. 210). In this case, older people articulate the benefit of having natures and the assemblage that these natures affords and affects them, whether the quality of a mist, a view, the colour, the hay, that they experience whilst dwelling and being in the space. The physical encounters outdoors, *outdooriness* as June puts it, in the rural spaces chimes further with the recent work that has looked to consider the importance of older people's engagements with outdoor recreation (Colley *et al.*, 2016) and the benefits it can bring, felt, embodied or otherwise, in contributing to health and well-being. Indeed, these examples I give might go some way to fleshing out some of the reasons the Scottish Government describe rural Scotland as 'a very good place to live' (2015, p. 4) by attending to people's individual lives in relation to the natures rural spaces and places can affect.

Rural spaces are a construction of a relational configuration of localities, representations and lives (Halfacree, 2006). My work here has specifically considered the lives of older people in Scotland to engage with the understanding of rural space as more than a social cultural construction in our heads, but as something experienced through our bodies, as rural scholars are beginning to outline (Farrugia *et al.*, 2016; Hughes, 2014; Phillips, 2014;

Halfacree, 2012; Carolan, 2008). The affects and feelings produced through this can be attended to thinking non-representationally. This has been my intention with regards to what older people feel in the context of rural Scotland in East Lothian and specifically as residents in the village of North Kirkton.

Within the corpus of rural research that engages with non-representational theories as a mode of thought, much is made about the planes of affect created by natures, as I have illustrated here. However, within Halfacree's (2006) triad of rural space, rural lives are as much a part as locality and representations. These lives do not happen individually but are lived and encountered with other people, in the spaces people dwell. Rural spaces have people dwelling in them but it is the concentration that constructs rurality. Even in smaller concentrations encounters between people happen in the milieu that a hamlet, village or walk provides. This important aspect of rural life has not been discussed in relation to non-representational theories and rural studies. To this, and the encounters older people had in their village, I turn to now.

### **Rural Socialities**

Research in rural spaces using non-representational theories as a mode of thought has highlighted the planes of affect (Thrift, 2003) that rural spaces afford individuals living in them (Carolan, 2008). At the heart of non-representational theories is the appreciation of practices and in particular 'the doings of actions, and how human and non-human interactions are performed' (Barnfield, 2015, p. 282), through our understanding of space, time and life as 'emergent properties of the encounters we undertake and study' (Greenhough, 2010, p. 40). However, this work in rural studies has lacked a clear engagement with the *individuals* living in rural spaces and the affective

relations, through encounters, that other people bring to the interrelations of the lives of rural dwellers. We should then as scholars continue to focus on these interactions whether human or non-human.

Rural geographers have often highlighted the relations between groups, and of the differing experiences. But what of the more banal, seemingly mundane (Lorimer, 2005) encounters that shape lifeworlds? This focus might be reduced to critiques in line with the 'bourgeois imaginary' (Bell, 2006, p. 158), of happy tight knit communities reflective of 'urban middle-class relationships with the country' (Farrugia et al., 2016, p. 122), or to the opposite, where rural spaces become imbued with some anti-idyll, where crime, poverty and isolation are prevalent. Here, I wish to move away from either extreme, where lifeworlds are made up of thousands of differing and different encounters (Wilson, 2017; Thrift, 2008). In my ethnography, I found that everyday encounters made up significant parts of my research through observant participation (Thrift, 2000a) through 'being in a community' but also that personal encounters formed integral parts of older people's lives, sense of place and community. Robert (70) and Isa (82), in their individual interviews, emphasised this point:

*'you'll maybe see it as well most times if you walk, well when you walk down into the village proper, the shops and so on folk'll say hello which you wouldn't expect somewhere if you were living in [a city] as you walk along you wouldn't really expect someone to say hello or oh hello good morning' (Robert)*

*"I just find that, like walking up to the post office, I can meet so many people and have a chat you know... even younger people into the village, I mean, I'll always say good morning or hello or something. And if I can*

*start a conversation that's great. And ehm, it's just that, you have to speak with people, you know' (Isa)*

These narratives describe what was a regular occurrence on my walks into the village. People would say 'hello'. This was noticeable, when having run into someone in the village and walking with them, as we passed others there would be a pause within the conversation to offer a quick greeting, a smile, and perhaps a passing comment about the day or the weather. For those who were more well-known this would often lead to shorter conversations or catch ups about holidays, family, friends or specific places around the area. Attending to these types of encounters relates to Lorimer's summation of non-representational theories that at its heart is the appreciation of the focus on practices and in particular 'how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters...' (Lorimer, 2005, p. 84).

This practice of greeting those you pass in the street, whilst a meaningful practice for Robert and Isa, lifelong residents of the village and surrounding area, was also something that those who had moved to North Kirkton experienced as well. Such individuals articulated feeling involved and enjoying not only the 'natures' discussed in the previous section, but also enjoying that people would say 'hello'. Catherine (65) and Morag (84) both mentioned this:

*'I mean people say hello to you on the street they don't know you but you know [...] know your face kind of thing so yeah...yeah it's really nice'*

*(Catherine)*



*'as soon as we came here, walked down the street that was definitely a memory we've got, how people just spoke to one and other, and still do no matter who or what, people just talk' (Morag)*

For Morag and Catherine, the encounters they have and had in the various spaces of the village both during and before moving there contributed to their wanting to stay. That the village was small enough that people felt they could say 'hello' as they 'know your face' or 'it's just a pleasant thing to do' contributes to a sense of community that North Kirkton was perceived to have. Descriptions of living in North Kirkton and the sense of community provided by these encounters for older people can be related to the idea of an embodiment of the community's affective transmissions offered through encounters, and might be usefully conceptualised as an affective atmosphere (Anderson, 2009, 2014). Indeed, Irene (84) specifically used this term 'atmosphere' to describe her feeling of living in the village:

*'Nobody but nobody passes you without passing the time of day. There is a wonderful, ehm, your atmosphere of friendliness, you know they just say good morning or whatever and if you, ehm, and if you offer anything further they'll join in. They are not stand off-ish at all'.*

For Irene, this daily encounter of saying 'good day' or acknowledging someone in the village contributed to an 'atmosphere of friendliness'. Anderson has articulated atmospheres as a 'transpersonal intensity' (2014, p. 137) that are 'always being taken up and reworked in the events of lived experience: being expressed in feelings and qualified in emotions that may themselves become elements within future atmospheres...atmospheres are 'revealed'

by feelings and emotions but are not equivalent to them... Atmospheres, emanating and enveloping particular things, sites or people, are endlessly being formed and reformed through encounters as they are attuned to and become part of life' (2014, p. 145).

I argue that this concept of an atmosphere is exemplified in North Kirkton, where daily encounters with people in and around the village - of walking down the High Street, walking to the shops, through a field along a path - has developed to a level where an atmosphere has started to envelop the village, or site and people, to use Anderson's wording. Atmospheres are not just 'embodied affects created through unconscious relations with human and non-human actants' as Phillips (2014, p. 66) has argued with regards to rurality and nature, drawing on Anderson's earlier work (2009). I argue that the interdependency between spaces of the village and the people who live in it, speaks to Hanlon and Skinner's contention of the complex interdependencies between 'people and place' (2016, p. 210), and in particular people have with other people within these places. Within North Kirkton I found that this atmosphere of greeting contributed to the interdependencies between people and place experienced by older people. Almost all the people I spoke to were retired, recently retired, or *'you know I do a bit of this, but I'm basically retired...'* (Sandra, 60). Those who were retired generally spent more time in the village during the day than they had during their working life, a change in practice to those used to commuting. This perhaps made the nature of these encounters more common and thus the atmosphere of greeting in North Kirkton more noticeable to older people, as Clark (61) recalls:

*'I was working you know and I'd leave here before 7 o'clock in the morning you know not getting back until, well tea time, ehm I didn't really see the place. You didn't, you don't get to know anybody really when you are working like that. You don't get to know your neighbours or you at least say hello kind of thing and that's it. So it wasn't until I retired that I started taking more in'.*

The long trajectory of these encounters of greeting in the village show how older people who spend more time in the spaces of the village during the 'working day' in particular have formed an atmosphere of friendliness within the village as 'numerous bodies can be said to be atmospheric, in the sense that people, sites or things produce singular affective qualities and emanate something like a characteristic' (Anderson, 2014, p. 146). Rural spaces of a village can be seen to have an affective quality through the daily encounters people have in their everyday lives. The village greeting is an integral part of North Kirkton's culture, something people would do, and the rural sociality that this produces is an important element of the rural space.

## **Conclusion**

I have looked to contribute to a new avenue of research in rural studies in three ways. The first is to contribute to our understanding of demographic ageing, through consideration of particular emergent themes. Demographic ageing is a global occurrence (United Nations, 2015), with developed countries experiencing this phenomena in a very specific, spatial way, with rural spaces ageing faster. Given this increased, and increasing, significance of rural ageing, I have therefore specifically looked to such a rural space in Scotland in order to contribute to this field of enquiry. I have moved beyond the perceived dominant

paradigms of describing rural ageing in purely demographic terms (Davies, 2011) to an appreciation in the research design of my project of lived experiences, emotions and affects (Anderson & Smith, 2001).

Second, this move has been in response to contemporary calls within rural ageing studies for more focus on the everyday lives of older people in rural communities (Hanlon & Skinner, 2016; Scharf et al., 2016; Skinner et al., 2015).

Everyday lives are important to understanding and conceptualising rural space (Halfacree, 2006), as thinking about rurality and the countryside through bodies (Carolan, 2008) helps to get us *out of the armchair* (Bunce, 1994; Halfacree, 2014) and to engage with the affective and embodied aspects that

representations afford but also that localities have *in* rural spaces. This focus on emotions has been used before in other work, for example, as previously noted, through a consideration of older male farmers. However here I look to specifically deploy the use of non-representational theories across a mixed group of older people in order to engage with the hidden geographies of ageing (Skinner et al., 2015) applicable across this demographic, of which emotions and affects of older people's everyday lives form a part. To attend to these emotions and affects, I have engaged with non-representational theories as a mode of thought to provide a language through which to report them back in academic work, however imperfect (Vannini, 2015; Dewsbury, 2010; Carolan, 2008). This mode of thinking offers another way to get at these everyday affects and emotions, by allowing specifically for relational embodiments that older people have in rural spaces. Understanding lived experiences is important, in particular the mundane everyday practices that make up an individual's rural life, as to fully gain an appreciation of their rurality, we cannot solely look at

representations or localities but must also consider the charges of affect that an individual experiences from these representations or the locality they live in.

Finally, by continuing the work of this expanded community of scholars engaging with non-representational theories, specifically rural scholars including Farrugia *et al.* (2016), Hughes (2014), Phillips (2014), Halfacree (2012) and Carolan (2008), and by considering how we might go about this (Vannini, 2015), I have aimed to expand our understanding of different ruralities. Of those rural scholars, Farrugia *et al.* (2016) have highlighted how age is an important demographic to consider in relation to rural spaces, following a longer tradition within rural studies (Philo, 1992). Indeed, those using non-representational theories have been criticised for ignoring individuals' differences (Tolia-Kelly, 2006). In this research, by focusing on the embodied experiences of older people, I hope to bridge non-representational theories as a mode of thought with a specific demographic. Non-representational theories also allow for a way to engage with the relationality between and within representations and localities through a focus on everyday lives in the construction of rural spaces. Where the use of non-representational theories could go is to explore how representations of rurality function affectively and thus help reproduce idyllic or anti-idyllic notions of rurality. My work here focused on rural localities and their materialities, but future work could build on this to explore these notions of the rural idyll and in turn consider how rural assemblages and their affects reproduce conceptualisations of rurality. Work that could go some way to contributing to Woods' noting of 'the creeping back into discussions of questions about the definition and conceptualization of rurality' (2009, p.851), and, furthering this, Cloke's contention that 'much more needs to be known about its

precise importance in relation to how people perceive, practice, and experience being-in-the-rural' (2013, p. 229). Two points I argue that ask for a renewed focus on practices and everyday lives. Future work could usefully draw on and thus extend current engagements with non-representational theories, both presented here and by other rural scholars (Carolan. 2008; Hughes, 2014; Phillips, 2014, Farrugia et al, 2016), through utilisation of current frameworks, such as Halfacree's (2006) triad of rural space, as a conceptual basis.

In this light, I feel there is still further work to engage non-representational theories with the geographies of ageing and rural ageing specifically. One area that underlines much of the experiences I articulate in my empirical sections around the more-than-human and rural socialities, was a person's specific individual geo-historicity; where Catherine referred to the view from her bedroom window as a child or where Clark considered the change in sociality since retiring. Anderson defines geo-historicity as 'the manner in which capacities have been formed through past encounters that repeat, with variation, in the habits, repertoires and dispositions of bodies' (2014, p. 85). He has articulated the importance of a person's geo-historicity in the way people mediate affects and thus relate to the spaces of their lives. Studying ageing considers people who have had longer to accumulate a variety of experiences that inform their own geo-historicity and natures of encounter and thus the way they may mediate encounters within their own lives. Engaging with age relationally and considering geo-historicity may provide further interplay between the geographies of ageing and non-representational theories, in exploring the complex interdependencies of people and place.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> I use the plural 'theories' in line with others (McCormack, 2013; Colls, 2012) to highlight the heterogeneity within this mode of thinking.

<sup>2</sup> North Kirkton and any names that appear in my paper are pseudonyms to maintain anonymity in line with normal practices of ethical research.

<sup>3</sup> My thanks to Paul Cloke for engaging in a brief, but none the less, valuable discussion of the methods to deploy that I elaborate on here, after a University of Edinburgh Human Geography Research Group seminar he gave on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

<sup>4</sup> All more-than human scholarship is not 'more-than'/'non' representational scholarship. With 'more-than-human' I refer to the 'nonhuman agents [that shape] space and place' (McCormack, 2009, p. 277), which I include as both alive and unconscious agents, human or non-human made.

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## Figure Legend

*Figure 1: Map showing the 32 Council Areas of Scotland with East Lothian highlighted in blue*  
(The Scottish Government, 2005)

*Figure 2: Map of East Lothian showing settlements and the principal transport network* (Google Maps, 2017)

*Figure 3: Montage of North Kirkton (Top Photo 'The View' and Left Photo 'The Hills from the Living Room', source: Author Photographs; Right Photo 'The Hay, The Village, The Hills', source: Respondent – used with permission)*



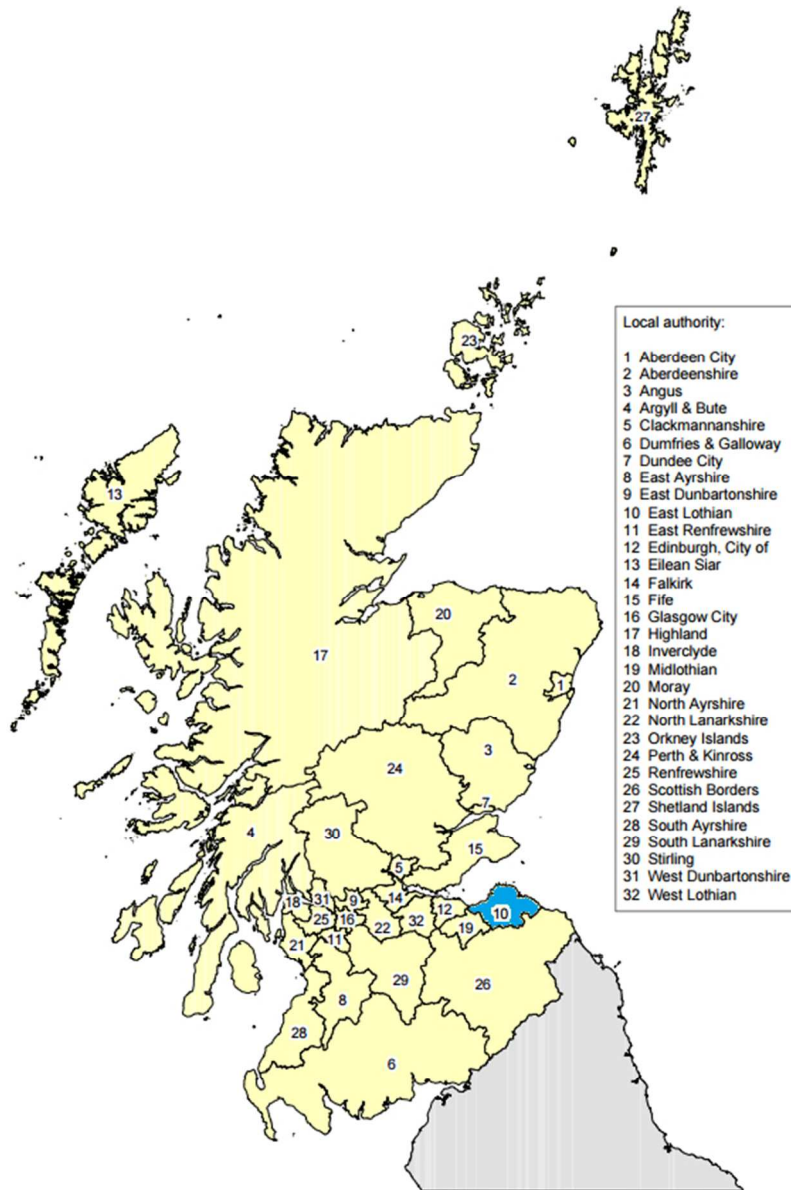


Figure 1: Map showing the 32 Council Areas of Scotland with East Lothian highlighted in blue (The Scottish Government, 2005)

152x223mm (96 x 96 DPI)



Figure 2: Map of East Lothian showing settlements and the principal transport network (Google Maps, 2017)

307x208mm (96 x 96 DPI)

Accept



Figure 3: Montage of North Kirkton (Top Photo 'The View' and Left Photo 'The Hills from the Living Room', source: Author Photographs; Right Photo 'The Hay, The Village, The Hills', source: Respondent – used with permission)

172x125mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Accepted