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Configuring Light/Staging the Social 3rd ESRC Seminar 'Lighting Futures'

Reflections on the seminar by *Joanne Entwistle*

The 3rd Configuring Light/Staging the Social ESRC-funded seminar 'Lighting Futures' took place on 19 February 2015. Our event was hosted by STO in their fantastic showroom [STO Werkstatt](#) in Clerkenwell and we had a packed house of about 40 participants. We were delighted to see an overwhelming interest in this event from different practitioners: lighting designers, architects and planning professionals had registered alongside council representatives and urban design academics. The theme of the seminar was 'Lighting Futures' and the aim of the event was to examine the knowledges, practices and technologies through which we use and understand lighting in everyday life, urban planning and design, specifically exploring the role of new lighting technologies and trends in configuring the future of cities. The two panels of three speakers each, a mix of practitioners and academics, focused on different dimensions of these changes.

The first panel concentrated particular attention on the historical, political and technological dimensions of lighting. Dr Anna Carlsson-Hyslop (Research Associate Sustainable Consumption Institute, University of Manchester) opened the first panel of the afternoon with a fascinating paper on previous historical trends in lighting and the place of lighting within energy consumption in the home. Her paper explored how various lighting technologies have proceeded in uneven development and how various factors – safety, technological investment by local authorities but also gender roles and aesthetic tastes – shaped the slow introduction of electricity and domestic lighting in UK homes. Professor Andrew Barry (Professor of Human Geography, University College London) picked up some of these issues in his theoretically

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focused paper, setting out the socio-political dimensions of lighting as infrastructure as well as exploring the reasons why light and lighting have remained largely invisible within social science research. The final paper of the first panel from Brendan Keely (Secretary Society of Light and Lighting) brought these issues together in his overview of the lighting possibilities of the future. Speaking from the perspective of a practitioner, he addressed the issue of light pollution in contemporary nightscapes but is optimistic that we will begin to see a reduction in lighting levels across the world as awareness of light pollution will gradually grow more sustainable lighting solutions locally and internationally.

The second panel opened with an exciting and visually rich paper from Lisa White (Creative Director, HOMEBUILDLIFE, WG SN) on new trends and uses of light with experience design and her paper took us on a tour of new artistic applications of light in different arenas, from road and car design to public interiors. The second paper in this panel from Susanne Seitinger (City Innovations Manager, Philips Color Kinetic) turned the spotlight on city design and the possibilities of new lighting technologies for shaping our experience of future cities, emphasising how light can be a medium through which citizens can 'interact' with their urban environment. The final paper of the afternoon from Professor Marion Roberts (Professor of Urban Design, University of Westminster) continued the urban focus on the nocturnal city by examining the night-time economy and the youth with a focus on issues in relation to that, such as anti-social behaviour. Thinking through the role public lighting can play in creating 'safe' nocturnal environments, this paper returned to the importance of thinking about the *social* dimensions of light and lighting and the complexity of meeting different user needs of the night-time city.

The audience was a great mix of practitioners and academics and the questions and debate that followed the panels, was very lively. In particular, the discussion evolved around the question how to think about lighting futures both in terms of artificial and daylight, but also what role 'smart' technologies can and will play and how the profession of lighting design could benefit from an interdisciplinary discussion that brings together all the different dimensions of light and lighting.



We look forward to continuing the debate at our next ESRC seminar on light and sustainability hosted by the Sustainable Consumption Institute at Manchester University on 30 April 2015.

More information soon here: www.configuringlight.org

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