

de-localising dialect

Roots and Uproots

22 February 2019, Glasgow

If you've been anywhere near social media in the past few days, you've probably seen the ['British/Irish Dialect Quiz' hosted by the New York Times](#).

This asks a series of questions about your pronunciation and use of local words, checks your answers against various surveys and databases, and then visually maps the way you speak. It's great fun, and many people seem to find it uncannily accurate. For our purposes, it's a timely example of treating **dialect as an index of origins**: the specificities of your speech locate your vocal 'roots'.

Undoubtedly interesting and worthwhile, but viewed through this prism **there's not much dialect can mean other than from, here and us** (or, as the case may be, their opposites). This year-long project – 'De-Localising Dialect' – will explore a range of other angles and perspectives, with a particular interest in **dialect as style, method and creative practice**. Our basic aim is to gather writers, linguists, artists and critics into the same space, at workshop events where we can learn more about each other's questions and practices to do with dialect. Meeting new people and viewpoints is a central aim, so don't be shy!

The NYT quiz-map is harmless fun (though we might note in passing how it tends to 'spatialise' linguistic differences having more to do with class and social power). For our purposes, the main thing to notice is how this locational paradigm tends to side-line a bunch of other interesting things dialect can do, in its disruption of normative social and aesthetic codes, not to mention its performative dimension. (Not just 'put on' or invented voices, but the way vernacular writing, for example, seems to flag and 'enact' its own difference from standard orthography.) Clearly there are a host of clichés to avoid in this terrain – the 'natural', 'earthy', or 'gritty' dialect voice – but also a whole universe of creative and intellectual possibilities to explore.

The theme of this first event – 'Roots and Uproots' – hints at how we may have to re-consider or disrupt some of our habitual ways of thinking about dialect (e.g. as roots/origin, or as an embodiment of pre-given 'identity') to get the most from these collective explorations. We're delighted to be joined by a superb line-up of speakers and performers, and look forward to seeing you on the day!



AHRC Research Network
PI: [Prof Maria Fusco](#), Northumbria
CI: [Dr Scott Hames](#), Stirling