

“Mountain site related performance: bringing mountain culture into the climate crisis debate”

Expanding on research from the new monograph: *Performing Mountains* (Palgrave 2020), this paper seeks to explore two related conference themes: ‘mountains as site of performance and ritual’ and ‘climate and landscape’. Mountains are ‘sentinels of change’ (Braun 2016: 1), according to a report by the Mountain Research Initiative (MRI). They are ‘tightly linked to their surrounding regions’ (11) - a canary in the mineshaft, or pigeon in the city (Glickman 1991). Like the polar ice caps, mountains and their glaciers offer us a window onto how the world is transforming as it warms up, an indication of how delicately balanced our ecosystems are and a warning writ large on the horizon of what lies ahead if rising carbon levels are not addressed radically by 2030 (IPCC 2018). The pivotal role of science in assessing and addressing the current state of the planet’s health is well known (notwithstanding the disproportionately loud voices of a few climate-change deniers). But the importance of culture and more specifically *mountain cultural production* remains to be appreciated fully by policy makers and mountain research institutes internationally, despite historic and recent developments in cultural geography and cultural geomorphology.

Focusing on contemporary examples of site-related performance (appropriating Miwon Kwon’s term), this paper expands on some of the findings of the *Performing Mountains* book arguing that live performance can generate unique sensitivities and connections between high landscapes and humankind, generating without fanfare or sententiousness a sense of responsibility and informed enquiry in audience and maker alike. References will be to a range of work engaging with mountain environments - from Sonja Hinrichsen to Hannah Tuuliki, from David Shearing to Kate Lawrence. The richly illustrated paper will conclude with a rallying call for a more dynamic and productive relationship between mountain studies and performance studies.

Professor Jonathan Pitches (Chair of Theatre and Performance, University of Leeds)