

Abstract proposal for 2018 Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth's 2018 conference

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**ASA18: Sociality, matter, and the imagination: re-creating Anthropology
Towards an anthropology of un/making: affective encounters in abandonment,
ruination, and creative destruction**

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Paper Title:

Chronicles from the wastelands. An exploration of the evental geographies of derelict urban areas.

Short abstract (300 characters):

In this paper we propose to explore the life of urban wastelands. That is, we will unveil the actions that take place in these spaces, their human and non-human authors, and the dynamism that those actions produce in the space itself, provoking sensitive changes in the landscape.

Long abstract (250 words):

We depart from the concept of 'evental geography', outlined by Shaw to designate an approach to the geographic world focused on events, which he defines as "the transformation of a world by inexistent objects and resulting change caused by their appearance" (2012: 622). More specifically, we want to disclose the events that take place in urban derelicts, thus disproving the common idea that wastelands are lifeless, hollow spaces.

Our exploration of the life of urban wastelands is based on two case studies in Lisbon, Portugal. One is an abandoned gas plant, located in the Eastern Zone of Lisbon, historically the industrial and proletarian part of the city. The other is a former aquatic amusement park, located on the Western Zone of the city, in a high-class neighbourhood. We conducted fieldwork in these sites over the last year, including non-participant observation, sound recollection, ethnoarcheology/archeology of the contemporary past, and a few interviews with users of the spaces. The work of ethnoarcheology was especially important. For González-Ruibal, ethnoarcheology consists of collecting and identifying elements of abandoned material culture and detritus of contemporary societies, to understand behaviours through them and to know "intimate stories about ordinary women and men" (2014: 1686).

Our findings expose the subtle life of urban derelicts, composed by humans who dwell and circulate, drawn by the affordances and affective emanations of material remains; animals that look for food and shelter; plants that colonise new terrains and grow; and materials that change due to wind or water erosion.

This research has been part of the project NoVOID - Ruins and vacant lands in the Portuguese cities: Exploring hidden life in urban derelicts and alternative planning proposals for the perforated city - sponsored by Portuguese national funds through the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT), I.P. – the Portuguese national agency for science, research and technology – under the Project PTDC/ATP-EUR/1180/2014.

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