Complex and overlapping, approaches to geographical knowledge are informed by diverse ontological and epistemological claims, each shaped by contemporary social, political and economic contexts (Smith, 2005). This essay discusses research on suburban estates, variously framing understudied nightlife geographies (specifically those of UK Garage (UKG) in Essex in the 2000s), as problems of geographical knowledge.

Suburban geographies are rarely studied, instead represented as stiflingly private and monotonous, dependent on commuter-link lifelines to buzzing city-spaces, a 'continuum of the city's spatial–social complexity' (Vaughan, 2015:1). By exploring UKG's understudied geographies, the privileging of metropolitan nightlife is challenged through making suburban nightlife 'playscapes' visible (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002). This combats notions of suburban dependency on the city, providing voice to ignored, forgotten stories (Crang,1998).

Geographical thought shifted in the 1950s, from regional descriptions towards spatial science, addressing post-war town-planning with efficient use of land in mind (Johnston, 2009:50). It assumed researcher neutrality, applying positivist scientific methods to social reality (Grix, 2002). This is broadly interesting in relation to estate-planning, environments built to minimise cost, maximise density and locate dwellings central to their 'own private universe', within the 'public, outside world' (Hart, 2015:13). While beneficial to spatial organisation, quantitative approaches ignore nuanced, active and emotional place-making processes. For example, post-war East London regeneration was incongruously modelled on middle class (individual status and wealth), rather than working class structures (community

identity, common lack of ownership). Needs were assessed on geographical norms of 'middle-class nuclear' rather than 'extended working-class' families (Cohen, 1997:88). Blake (1996) suggests that specific Essex locales became 'Essex-London' after post-war migration from the city. Local identities were reshaped as Essex became, not suburbs, but 'urbs' on the city fringe (p197). Delineation of city/county borders does not reflect specificities of lived experience and identity.

By the 1960s, geography shifted from statistical laws of spatial distribution to 'historical and material processes of uneven urban and regional development' (Gregory et al., 1994:3). Humanistic geographers of the 1970s understood quantitative limitations as 'failing to see beyond the map' to recognise complexity and meaning of human behaviour (Cloke et al., 1991:14, Castree, 2009). They viewed place as a significant way of understanding the world through thoughts, experience, emotions and agency (Blunt, 2009). Space becomes place through human emotional attachment and engagement (Cresswell, 2015). Exploring suburban nightlife geographies requires consideration of 'man-in-the-world' (Tuan, 1971:191). Existing research focuses on urban nightlife contexts, seen to reflect universal British lifestyles, while other geographies remain ignored (Watt & Stenson, 1998, Malbon, 1998). UKG research is similarly urban-centric. Reynolds (2013) explores industry insider club-night, *Twice as Nice*, demonstrating inequalities which privilege visibility of certain groups' practices, positioning suburban UKG as 'out-of-place' (Cresswell, 1996). Tuan (1974) outlines dichotomy between cities as 'cosmic paradigms' and 'civility and freedom' centres, against suburban twilight zones where inhabitants cannot reach 'full humanity' (p225). This juxtaposition neglects processes and place-making within suburban nightlife geographies, the scales of activity across repurposed space and smaller venues in suburban locales, and larger, privatised urban clubs. Humanistic approaches to UKG geographies refocus suburban space as autonomous from the city, recognising creativity and agency of residents in nightlife place-making processes. Drawing upon phenomenological approaches, humanistic geographers value human experience as 'lifeworlds': 'the culturally defined spatiotemporal setting or horizon of everyday life' (Buttimer, 1976:277). This approach recognises the active role of humans in turning space into place, acknowledging 'concepts and symbols in creation of place identity' (Tuan, 1976:269). Suburban nightlife place-making can occur in a diversity of ways, through informal repurposing of space (drinking in parks), moderated repurposed

space ('nappy nights', under-18s club-nights held in Civic Halls), and officially regulated spaces (nightclubs). Some may attend over-18 nightclubs while under-age, but repurposing of space usually reserved for adults provides places for young people as 'human becomings', novices undertaking seemingly adult processes in moderated, monitored spaces (Holloway & Valentine, 2000:763). Mapping 'getting-ready' processes acknowledges young people as 'co-producers of space' (Demont & Landolt, 2013).

For some suburban residents, neighbouring areas can be unfamiliar. Distance between areas are reachable by foot, but imagined differences are much greater. Rose (1995) outlines that senses of place and identity are established by contrast 'with somewhere they feel is very different from them' (Rose, 1995:92). Club-nights provide meeting points for people from different areas, creating new 'imagined realities' in subcultural hubs (Skelton & Valentine, 1998). Imagined realities are also created though pirate radio stations. Alongside increasing popularity of mobile phones in the 2000s, pirate stations provided precursors to social media. Listeners texted DJs for shout-outs and playbacks, using 'networked publics' to gather, socialise and make sense of culture building around them (boyd, 2007). Identity and belonging occurs on different scales, locally, regionally, and in an abstract sense, through radio signal (Rose, 1995). Radio provides new places of connection, mediating access to those central to sites of belonging (Neff, 2005).

Nostalgia is 'for a point in time' rather than space (Tuan, 1971:189). Temporal boundaries of the research require consideration of historic lifeworlds, unreflective of participants' current lives. Humanistic approaches are appropriate to explore lifeworlds, but must consider nostalgia as removed from current reality, as 'enchantment with distance that cannot be bridged' (Kitson & McHugh, 2014:487). Humanistic geography occupies interpretivist positions, but is criticised as being overly subjective (Bryman, 2001). This approach requires emphatic reflexivity by the researcher to disentangle findings from their own shibboleths (Ley & Samuels, 2014:13). Consideration of researchers' own positioning stands in intentionally marked contrast to scientific claims of an objective truth (Thien, 2009:73). A phenomenological focus can present idealised views which ignore societal inequality. Humanistic approaches romanticise place, ignoring ideologies, politics and power structures which inform its construction (Barnes & Gregory, 1997, Creswell, 2003).

Radical geography emerged during political unrest of the 1960s, challenging oppression of marginalised groups (Peet, 2009). It understood space as shaped by inequality across social relations (e.g. class and gender) and had emancipatory aims (Blunt & Wills, 2000). Marxist geographical approaches highlighted spatial inequalities of class and social processes perpetuating inequality. Spheres of work and leisure are historically classed. The propertied middle classes had financial capital and private space enabling participation in leisure activities. Working class leisure spaces were generally public and shared, and became regulated and licenced, reducing 'truly public leisure space' through gradual privatisation (Cresswell, 1996:790). Even spaces which appear to escape established order can still constitute systems of 'bourgeois hegemony to the whole of space' (Lefebvre, 2011:384). UKG is comparatively understudied, viewed as commercialised by dance-music purists, and a soundtrack to violent, deviant British working class identity (Reynolds, 2013). This identity was increasingly vilified through the coinage 'chav' in the 2000s, reinforcing class hierarchies (Wyatt, 2004, Knox, 2009). Media representations legitimised perceptions of violent, debauched underclasses on estates (Haylett, 2001). Working class culture has been associated with tastelessness, embodied by figures of 'chav', 'Essex girl', and 'various other spatially, culturally and historically formulated incarnations of 'white trash'' (Bourdieu, 1986, Skeggs, 2004, Archer, 2007: 223). From Marxist perspectives, these identity representations reproduce inequalities (Blomley, 2006).

For Marxist geographers, bodies become sites implicitly presenting 'notions of the material reproduction of labour power' (Simonsen, 2009:51). However, appearance and the body can provide sites to represent worth and value, challenging power structures (Skeggs, 2004). Archer et al. (2007) argue that young people seek to generate worth and value through clothing, specifically in areas where they might be 'looked down on'. Conversely, such practices can play into oppressive social relations, fixing 'marginalized and disadvantaged social positions' (Archer, 2007:221). Clothing and appearance can become 'condensed class signifiers', creating 'value allocations' (Skeggs, 2004:101).

UKG is associated with brands connoting wealth and status through ostentatious logos (e.g. Moschino, Iceberg). Burberry check, especially caps, became UKG staples, so iconographic of demonised estate culture that nightclubs banned it. People thought Burberry would be worn 'by the person who mugged them' (Bothwell, 2005). Burberry removed check and caps

from stores. It was on 20% of products in 1999, but in 2004, on less than 5% (Bothwell, 2005). Recently, however, Burberry celebrated 'haute-chav', resurrecting the check (and caps) at London Fashion Week, rehashing 'something passé' (Weir, 2017). This appropriation sets a hierarchal barrier between those who 'get it', the irony-literate middle class, and those left out of the joke, working class originators, who despite being sources of inspiration, are deemed 'social scum' (Mandybur, 2014). Tuan (1974) suggests the city denotes civility, but to be suburban means being 'less than urban', metaphorically outside (p226). This type of imaginative geography refers to the construction of geographical space beyond a physical territory, constructing boundaries around consciousness and attitudes 'often by inattention to or the obscuring of local realities' (Morin, 2011:339). 'Othering' suburban estates against the sophisticated metropole reproduces a sense of oddness, with suburban geographies as 'departures from the norm' (Dyer, 1988:44). In relation to the city, the suburb is not discussed as 'real' or substantial in its own right (Tuan, 1974:226). Reducing suburban estates to trends denies voice and marginalises geographies.

Marxist approaches neglect spatial inequalities of characteristics not solely influenced by 'capital' (e.g. gender, ethnicity) (Massey, 1996:238). Feminist geographical approaches examine power and gender and can be used to explore UKG as reproducing gendered, heterosexual hegemony (Bell et al., 1994). De Beauvoir (1997) discusses women as the 'Other' in relation to male 'Absolute' subject (p32). UKG perpetuates practices which emphasise sexualisation and objectification of women, through lyrics, clothing, and structural behaviours, (e.g. free club entry for women).

Historically, suburban developments assumed gendered labour divisions. Women became 'all-purpose, high-value, low-cost housewives' maintaining emotional and physical family wellbeing and supporting wage-earning husbands, which created spatial divisions between public 'masculine' spheres of urban employment, and private 'feminine' spaces of suburban domesticity (England, 1993:26). Suburban women were discussed as 'innocent, passive victims of built environment' (England, 1993:24, Hanson & Pratt, 1995). Feminist geographies focus on spatial and social separation of suburban homes from employment, fundamental to ongoing reproduction of workers and traditional gender relations, while exacerbating domestic work of women (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Contemporary suburban environments are home to more women in paid work, but arguably, constraints of spatial

structures remain, the paid worker role is 'merely grafted onto domestic roles' (England, 1993:29). Gendered space, place and landscape have been studied, but theorisation of gendered leisure space is less frequently discussed (Aitchison, 1999:24). An oversimplification of agency and spatial structures denies understanding of the ways in which women alter their own suburban socio-spatial relations, and academic focus on suburban homes can neglect female agency in nightlife spaces. Feminist approaches could expand understanding of suburban environments, discussing scales of experience between the private sphere of suburban home and public night-time place.

Postmodern and poststructuralist approaches foreground diverse, intersectional identities, (e.g. ethnicity, sexuality), exploring complex social processes. Postmodern approaches rejected 'deep logics' which blinkered ways of seeing (Soja, 1989:73). They argue against one overarching 'truth', instead respecting 'myriad variations' which exist between humans to facilitate clearer views of long-hidden instrumentality of human geographies' (Cloke et al., 1991:171, Gregory, 1998:274, Soja, 1989). Place and identity are continuously influenced by relationships with globalised places, scales and time. For example, Ayia Napa became UKG's seasonal homeland between 1999 and 2003 (Knox, 2009, Wright, 2018). UKG practices played out in Ayia Napa, while Ayia Napa practices informed iterations of UK geographies. UKG became a 'multiscape' when linked to this global scale. Homage was paid to the resort in lyrics (*DJ Pied Piper, 2001*) and album titles (*Ministry of Sound Ayia Napa-The Album*). Global influences 'syncretised' into local cultures (Lipsitz,1994, Blake, 1996:197). A static framing of place would neglect symbiotic, global processes, disregarding continuous flux of space (Massey, 2005).

The cultural turn developed from poststructuralism and postmodernism, rejecting ideas of objective realities, instead considering understandings of space as informed by artistic, cultural or literary representations (Cosgrove, 2008). Representations of suburban identity include stereotypical 'Essex girls' (superficial, promiscuous and unintelligent) and 'Basildon Man', 'industrious, mildly brutish and culturally barren' - didactic, patronising terms reinforcing negative perceptions of 'successful working class people' (Smith, 2018:6). These representations 'other' the suburb as uncivilised and 'wild' in relation to the city (Wunsch 1995). Contemporary representations, (e.g. *The Only Way Is Essex*) triggered appropriations

of identity through voluminous 'Essex blow-dries'[1], or looked upon through guided tours around the county[2]. The cultural turn is criticised as focusing on consumption rather than practice, 'creating deadening effects on an otherwise active world', and shielding the everyday from view (Lorimer, 2005, Cadman, 2009:1). Representation fixes and detracts from everyday flows of life (Massey, 1995: 26).

Non-representational theory challenges a focus on representation, instead concentrating on embodied, performative experience through 'mundane everyday practices' that shape 'conduct of human beings towards others and themselves in particular sites' (Thrift, 1997:142, Cadman, 2009). An 'everyday' focus moves away from uncovering meanings and values, developing a thinking style which values practice. Non-representational theory encompasses feelings, embodied actions and 'sights, sounds, smells, touch and tastes' of experiences (Nayak & Jeffrey, 2011:288). Research on embodied practices of UKG (for example, through clothing or dancing) can provide insight into sense of belonging. Space is a constantly changing process. UKG was informed by existing dance music practices (Thrift, 1997). It leaves residual practices, creating new spaces of belonging through gradual 'variable change' (Relph, 1976:60). In part, Grime music developed from rejection by the 'more-refined' UKG scene, forging camaraderie between Grime artists whose music had 'come directly' from Garage (Hancox, 2018:2)

Often silenced while the city is heard, suburban geographies of UKG have been marginalised, or appropriated as trends, while actual lived experiences remain ignored. Application of different geographic approaches offer glimpses into this as a problem of geographical knowledge. A spatial science lens allows understanding of physical base maps of suburban estates, while humanistic approaches enable layered analysis of space converted into place via investment of human emotion and memory (Cresswell, 2015, Agnew, 1987). While providing voice to individual lifeworlds at specific temporal and spatial points, humanistic approaches do not consider place as shaped by 'inescapable' relationships between knowledge, representation and power (Sharp, 2005:302, Livingstone,

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[1] http://www.essexmakeupacademy.com/courses/big-essex-blow-drying-course/

[2] https://britmovietours.com/bookings/the-only-way-is-essex-tour-towie-tour/

2009). Radical approaches, such as Marxist and Feminist geographies enable critical analysis of power structures of class or gender, but are restrictive in considering diverse identities. Postmodern understandings enable clearer perspectives of instrumentality of human geographies, though despite work on the city, limited postmodern geographical attention has been paid to 'displaced urbanity...of commuter-distance areas' (Blake, 1996:197).

Focusing on embodied experiences rather than representations encourages a model of thinking which values practice, and provides subjects with agency (Thrift, 2009). Suburban spaces are often defined in relation to the city. Non-representational approaches recognise value of everyday suburban practices without urban comparison.

Space remains a process in movement. When considering different geographical approaches, it is important to reflect on the origins and assumptions they are based on. Knowledge and the ways of discovering it are 'not static, but forever changing', addressing ongoing gaps and silences (Grix, 2002:177, Thrift, 2009). Interest in UKG has been renewed through contemporary representations[3], and emerging bricolage of Y2K fashions (e.g. renewed popularity of brands, Kappa and Fila). It is important to preserve suburban heritage, valuing everyday practices to ensure that geographic specificities of individual everyday experiences are not lost, ignored, or replaced by reductive representations of 'a few sounds, items of fashion and some lingo' (Skinner, 2013).

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[3] See for example, pastiche of BBC3 sitcom, *People Just Do Nothing*

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