

Landscape, Photograph, Kin: A relational approach to Transappalachian Migration

This paper examines how Transappalachian landscapes participated actively in the production and maintenance of kinship and community ties through the porting of funerary photographs in migration journeys to the industrial Midwest during the 20th Century. I argue that both photographs and landscapes functioned as material agents within these relational networks, demonstrating how objects, physical terrains and bodies co-constitute social relations across distance and time.

Building on Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart's conception of photographs and postcards as active objects, the paper extends this analysis to include landscape as a more-than-human contributor to kinship. As these images moved along routes of migration, they carried not only representations of the dead but material and affective traces of Appalachian landscapes while simultaneously becoming embedded within Midwestern industrial environments. Landscapes thus emerge not as passive backdrops but as participants in the making of kinship, shaping how relationships to the dead and to "home" were materially experienced and sustained. Tracing this practice into the present across Appalachia and the Midwest, the paper proposes a framework in which land, photograph, and family are mutually constitutive, reframing migration as an ongoing reassembly of relations across human and more-than-human domains.