

25 October 2009

Project Aims, Methods, Findings and Highlights

Negotiations about identity, homeland and attachment to place, are often at the root of investigations of contemporary migrations and politics in conflict regions. But it is rare that the impact of the physical world, and its role is brought into consideration. The main aim of *De-Placing Future Memory* is to understand the nature of the bond which ties memory into place. Is it possible or even desirable to shift or cause a break in that bond? In identifying what it is that strengthens and weakens such ties it has considered theoretical debates on identity and materiality from a number of disciplines and brought these together with a case study of Iraq and the Middle East exploring the very real experiences of the dis-placed and the de-placed. This has been carried out through an innovative fusion of historians, archaeologists, geographers, curators, anthropologists, and scholars from politics, drama and film, as well as practicing artists and musicians.

The project's most important successes were threefold.

- The first achievement was the creation of an atmosphere which allowed experts from different fields to find a common language in order to discuss the key themes. This was generated not through the oversimplification or generalisation of ideas but rather through drawing on each other's work in order to demonstrate how the distinct ideas and methodologies functioned. To reach this point of a common dialogue, it was essential that there was a preliminary introductory workshop that initiated the ongoing collaborations throughout the intervening period, resulting in an in-depth debate and discourse addressing the project's main questions in the final workshop. It also succeeded because over 80% of the participants were able to take part in all the activities, and because there was time to bring in experts for areas where it was felt that additional knowledge was needed. For example our understanding of the experience of 'indigenous communities' in the contemporary world was significantly enhanced through the contribution of the curator for contemporary native art, Kathleen Ash-Milby, from the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian, USA, and also through the presentation of the political science theorist, Andrew Schaap. He used the case of the Tent Embassy in Australia to test the applicability of the concept of de-placement, which this project has foregrounded.
- The experiment of approaching the theme of place and memory through a collaboration between art/music practitioners and academic researchers surpassed all expectations. In part because of the mutual interest in the theme and many crossovers in the nature of inquiry that built on each other. It was essential that individuals were generous in exploring their own positions from a different perspective, and also being open minded in testing unfamiliar approaches. Participants were asked to reflect on the impact on memory of the material/audio world, not only through a verbal/textual medium, but through the expression of that agency via journeys that included actual drawing and music making. From a different perspective the musicians and artists strove to use their medium of choice to test the ways in which the bond between memory and place could be manipulated, resulting in art pieces that were created specifically for the final workshop. The substantial number of cross-disciplinary/practice collaborations and resulting works (outlined below) are a testament to what has been possible. As well, because of the nature of the outcomes, which combined scholarly discussion, art works and music pieces, it was possible to bring the ideas to a much wider audience in a very immediate way. During the period of the workshops (which does not include the ongoing public interest) the project directly engaged some 1000 people, of whom at least half were members of the public. The key academic findings, artistic works as well as music compositions specifically created for the project were presented in a number of public events: collaborative symposia, an art exhibition, a music performance, student and school children workshops, and a presentation at the Phoenix arts Centre in Exeter. All the details and results from the project are also available on the De-Placing Future Memory web sites:

<http://projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/deplacingfuturememory/index.php>
<http://projects.exeter.ac.uk/futurememory/>

- The final and perhaps most crucial advances were those made in relation to the main theme of the project: the bond between memory, place and identity. The ephemeral nature of that bond was already acknowledged by the participants and reflected on in their independent research, as was the agency of the audio/material world. Hence the aim was to explore the meaning and impact of these realisations and also how they can and have been harnessed. The most crucial statement was that there is no authentic or original bond between physical place and identity. But the physicality of a place is only one of its characteristics, which can be weakened or strengthened, depending on the socio-cultural context in which it exists. Place is also performative and relational, and in that sense does not exist without memory. The input of political scientists, historians as well as geographers and scholars from drama were crucial in framing the parameters of this

debate which allowed the testing of the concept of de-placement - the idea that in particular situations individuals and communities can be removed from place altogether, or have place removed from them. This could be the result of a complete transformation of the physical place where they live where, as a result of a disjunction between the memory-place and the transformation of the material fabric that embodies that memory, which forces an over-writing of place, as for example Baghdad after the destruction during the Iraq war. Alternatively, de-placement could result from the transfer of people, as for example into the 'permanent' refugee camps in Palestine, which disallows place to exist through the suspension of the bond and the possibility of future memory. The workshop explored moments in time when such phenomena have occurred, as well as ways that an alternative approach to place can overcome the state of de-placement. In particular the work of MalAllah, through her ruins technique, and Petti and Hillal through de-colonizing architecture, addressed this question. The theme was also explored through the medium of music - and especially the idea of mnemonics in the work of Wood, Korula, Lee and Salim. From a more abstract perspective McMullan and Webster, who were the main vectors or translators in the academic-art dialogue, created art works that embodied the multi-sensory experience of place highlighting the role of the material world and making explicit the dependence on our ephemeral memory in the creation of the bond to place, which in effect *is* place. This was done through the mediums of painting, drawing and challenging the traditional practice of mapping. The collaborative effort resulting from these diverse experiences and expertise is crucial for a better understanding of the broad spectrum of individuals' and communities' relation to place, and its transformation. It also allows the possibility of creating alternative imaginaries of place, which move beyond the current bounded nation-state perspective. The full impact of the contributions will be presented as a publication (a journal article in the first instance, with an edited volume in the longer term), and a virtual exhibition of the art work and music on the web site, noted above, as well as in a permanent location (through URL coding) in the Special Collections of the Library of the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter.

Confirmation statement / explanation of variance

The project followed through the research which was outlined in the original application to the AHRC. The main changes have all been additions to the original goals and aims, which are summarised below:

Additions to the Project's original proposal

1) Performance Art:

Mike Pearson: Drama, University of Aberystwyth
Jerri Daboo, Dance, form Drama, University of Exeter

2) Iraqi and Middle East artists:

Sandi Hillal: Sculpture, architecture, installation; Palestine, Italy: Stateless Nation 2003 Venice Biennale
Hanaa Mal Allah: Painting, Installation, Iraq, London based
Alessandro Petti: Sculpture, architecture, installation; Palestine, Italy: Stateless Nation 2003 Venice
Rashad Salim: Painting, Installation, Piano Project, Iraq, London based

3) Music Discussion, Performance and Composition:

Janet Forbes: Royal Conservatoire, The Hague, Specialist - Recorder
Maya Verlaak: Composer, Royal Conservatoire, The Hague
Jonathan Lee: Composer, Musician, University of Exeter
Marion Wood: Music Conductor, Composer, Director of Music, University of Exeter
Anna Korula: librettist, Politics, University of Exeter
Rashad Salim: artist (as above) collaboration for Piano project with Marion Wood and Music Scholars
Used also in dramatic performances at Exeter Northcott Theatre, week of October 10, 2009.

4) Involvement of UEA, Norwich, World Art Studies

Presentation by Elena Isayev (PI) at the Postgraduate Conference on Heritage, at UEA, spring 2009
Recorded response to project themes by Dan Rycroft World Art Studies, UEA in collaboration with
Paul Young, English, University of Exeter

5) Change in US speakers to include

Kathleen Ash-Milby, curator, contemporary art, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian
A vire of funds was requested, and granted, from the AHRC in order to do this.
The ideas of US academics, part of the original AHRC application, Sue Alcock & Michael Shanks,
were presented by other participants, although they were not physically present

6) Incorporation of material assemblages (especially spent bullets) in the project and Exhibition from:

University of Exeter Archaeological survey collection from the Somerset Levels
Martin Bell, the Foreign Correspondent's, personal collection of spent bullets from foreign campaigns

7) Public engagement:

a presentation of the project at the local Phoenix Arts Centre
alongside the Public Exhibition Opening there was also a Music Performance (5 October 2009)
Creation of a post-card invitation by artists McMullan & Webster entitled Reconstructing Cartographies
it was sent to 1500 people which continues the project through the circulation of the postcards

Additional support and funding has been received from:

- School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Exeter: £500
for a project assistant, PhD student - Gillian Ramsey
- Migrations Network, University of Exeter: £ 3000
Funding for travel for Iraqi and Middle Eastern artists
(part of these funds were originally to be used to buy out Elena Isayev's time for work on Migrations)
- Funds for a Music performance and composition from the University of Exeter Arts and Culture Initiative
Jonathan Lee: Composer, Musician, University of Exeter. £ 2000
Composition: *Remember Me* (15 minutes) for brass, djembe, and two voice
- Support in kind from the Participants and also from the University of Exeter
for the Public Opening of the Exhibition September - October
and by the Music Director Marion Wood, for the Piano Project - workshops and performances

Applications had also been put in to the following bodies, to fund the Iraqi and Middle Eastern artists but were not successful:

- Arts Council of England
- Gulbenkian Foundation
- INIVA
- Bookworks (<http://www.bookworks.org.uk/asp/home.asp>)
- The University of Exeter Alumni Fund (DARO)

Structure of the project

The nature of the workshop expanded in its aims, allowing a wider range of disciplines/art practitioners to participate, while the theme itself gained a more clear direction. This has been possible thanks to additional financial support from other sources, and the proposals from individuals who saw further potential within the project, which have been outlined above. This has allowed us to work with a much wider pallet of ideas, questions, expertise and experiences, which has captured the imagination of individuals across many disciplines in academia and also in the public sphere. The wide dissemination of our aims has been in large part possible, thanks to the support of the AHRC in creating a very professional web service. We have as a result been building up our website and are still continuing to do so as we bring together the images, videos and audio recordings from the project.

The structure of the project is described below, with a full list of key participants at the end. Details of the Symposia programmes with presentation titles are attached. For a detailed description of the art pieces and music compositions please see attached 'gallery plan' & 'Art Text' which accompanied the exhibition. For images of the work and recordings please see the web site - which will be updated over the next few months.

- There were two symposia, one in May and the other in September 2009, which had 25-7, key participants and were each attended by some 60 people, including research students from within and outside Exeter University as well as members of the public, among them artists and curators.
- In the intervening period between the symposia (also prior & after) the following collaborations took place:
 - Artist Salim and Music Director Wood and Music Scholars, as well as the Northcott Theatre
 - Based around Salim's art installation and performance of *The Piano Project*
 - Archaeologist Hurcombe and artist MalAllah working in the Devon landscape
 - employing MalAllah's 'ruins technique' and archaeological material assemblages
 - as well as Martin Bell, the Foreign Correspondent's, collection of spent bullets
 - Political Scientist Dumper and artist McMullan exploring ideas of mapping especially in connection to the *Conflict in Cities Project*
 - Historian Isayev and artist Webster, exploring changing ideas of memory and place
 - especially in connection to the *Drawing in Time* pieces and ancient Rome
 - World Art Studies (at UEA) Rycroft, Isayev and Young, creating a recording in response to the project themes and especially work of Petti and Hillal
 - Wylie, JD, Geographers and Pearson, performance artist, with response by Johns-Putra, English
 - created a performative presentation and dialogue around the project *Trace/Displaced*
 - Kaye from Drama and Isayev, historian, explored the idea of memory and place
 - by involvement in the project *Performing Presence*.
 - Wood, Music Director & Korula, librettist experimented with operatic performance dealing with trauma
 - a part of which was performed at the symposium with Music Scholars
 - Musician Forbes and composer Verlaak experimented with sounds as mnemonics
 - the result was a presentation of the composition at the symposium
 - Ash-Milby, US curator and curators from Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter
 - viewing and discussion of the native American artifacts in UK collections

- In connection with the second symposium a series of public events took place which are outlined in the next section. As well the art works and the music pieces in conjunction with the academic discourse have been used directly in teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students, by a number of the researchers/lecturers based at University of Exeter, especially in Classics and Ancient History, Geography, Political Science and Drama.

Engagement with non-academic stakeholders

Key Planned Public Events associated with *De-Placing Future Memory* September - October 2009

These were held in conjunction with the main international workshop/symposium 24-25 September 2009

- Art Exhibition at the IAIS main Hall Gallery (mid September to mid October)
 - Public Opening event (5 October 2009) attended by c. 100 people
 - Members of the public also came to view the exhibition throughout the four weeks when it was on
- Musical Performance took at the Opening of the Exhibition, *Remember Me* by Jonathan Lee
 - 15 minute piece for 2 singers, brass quintet and djembe
 - Conducted by Marion Wood, performed by Exeter Music Scholars
- Conference and Artists; workshop *The Fine Art of Getting Lost*, with school children 23 Sept. 2009
 - Part of the School's Conference: *Who do you think you are?* c. 200 students from local schools
- Café Scientifique event at the Exeter Phoenix Art Centre 5 October 2009
 - attended by c. 100 members of the public, to full capacity of the space.
- Article in the local news paper, *The Express and Echo*, (5 October 2009) about the project

Part of the engagement with the public has been unplanned - but simply through using the town and its community and incorporating the community within the project in the ways described above, in sum:

- Taxi firms and drivers - asking them to lead the journeys and tell their stories of the town
- Canoe rental places - explaining why we are doing what we do
- Pub managers - especially the Double Locks where part of the workshop was held
 - as it was the end point for the journeys, perfectly located on a Double Lock on the Exeter Canal.
- Curators from the Royal Albert Museum, who took part in the workshop
- Members of the public encountered & engaged with during journeys through the town as part of the workshop
- Members of the public coming to see the exhibition during its one month opening

Contribution to the Programme

The activities of this project and the links created fit the diverse aims of *Beyond Text* in the following ways:

The project addresses the theme of Transmission and Memory across time and space. It is interested in the way that materiality and art practice, helps us to understand how future memory is embodied in places and objects and how this in turn affects senses of belonging. The inquiry also relates to immigrant cultures, by articulating the nature of the memory-place bond, and exploring how dis- and de-placed communities create meaningful memory monuments.

The project has succeeded in:

- Enabling an interdisciplinary and inter-practice exchange incorporating artists and researchers from diverse fields and practices. It has created an atmosphere of collaboration and integration of knowledge through verbal and non-verbal media.
- Exploring the role that the physical world has on memory transmission by incorporating theoretical approaches to materiality, with historical and contemporary case studies and the methods of art practice.
- It is highlighting the relevance of theoretical approaches to the understanding of community and individual action, in historical and contemporary scenarios, where issues of ethnicity and memory ownership are in conflict, and where there is acute displacement.
- It has already begun engaging the wider public, in a dialogue of the workshop themes by providing opportunities to actively participate in the methods of inquiry, via the conference, artist-led journeys, exhibitions, and music performances, allowing a reflection on the role of the physical/audio environment as memory guide and its impact on identity, especially in relation to place and the idea of home.

Publications and Outcomes

To date there have been no publications in the traditional kind, although at least one in the form of a journal article is being written, and possibly an edited volume - in the longer term, is currently being planned.

- A paper entitled: *De-Placing Future Memory*
for publication, possibly for the *Cambridge Classical Journal* or *Cultural Geographies* 2010
- Still under discussion an edited volume and an artist book/ catalogue

The project has already seen the creation of the following pieces of art specifically for it:

- 3 music compositions 1) Jonathan Lee; 2) by Marion Wood; 3) by Maya Verlaak and Janet Forbes
- the creation of a body of art works by:

Catrin Webster: a series of works made up of numerous postcards as well as paintings and drawings
including 6 entitled *Drawings in Time* and 6 entitled *Found Images*

Shauna McMullan: 2 pieces entitled: IN BLACK AND WHITE, Rafah, page 19, The Guardian, 19.01.09
IN BLACK AND WHITE, Gaza, page 2 & 3, The Guardian, 07.01.09

Shauna McMullan and Catrin Webster: *Re-constructing Cartographies* (2009) 16 Prints

Rashad Salim: 2 pieces of art ink on paper scrolls: 1) Series: *Allegory* 2) Series: *Ain-Ohm-Epsilon*
An installation and music piece: *The Piano Project* with Marion Wood

Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hillal: *Book of Returns* (2009) (Copy 2/3) Lead and printed paper
part funded by Exeter Migrations Network

it is owned by the project and will be housed in the University of Exeter Special Collections

Hanaa MalAllah and Linda Hurcombe creation of a series of 8 temporary objects/art pieces
with Martin Bell's Collection of bullets and casings

and archaeological assemblages from Somerset Levels.

Entitled: *Encasing (Bomb Canister); Bulletin (Rubber bullet); Catch (Bullets); Red swastika*
Untitled; Untitled; Nest; Limb swastika

A series of 8 paintings with mixed media by all participants created during the workshop.

- The use of the Website as an alternative publication / presentation/ idea sharing place
- In progress creation of an image collection (with unique URL coding) to be housed in the Special Collections of the Library of the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter.

Forward plans

In many ways these workshops have been a starting point and catalyst for a variety of activities as well as ways of thinking. Future plans, arising from the workshop, outside of the publications and other outputs noted above, include the following:

- A major application by Elena Isayev (PI) to the European Research Council, starter grant scheme, for a five year project to work on a related theme entitled *Alternative Place: past and future*. This will be in direct collaboration with four of the artists including: the British artists Catrin Webster & Shauna McMullan and the Palestinian based artists/architects Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hillal.
- Findings of the project will be incorporated in the research towards a book *The Paradox of Place* which will be carried out by Elena Isayev during her time as Davis Fellow in History at the University of Princeton 2010.
- Collaboration between archaeologist Linda Hurombe and Hanaa MalAllah - exploring an artist's residency.
- Collaboration between geographer John Wylie and the artist Catrin Webster on conceptions of Landscape. Exploring the possibility of an artist in residence.
- Further DetailsInclusion of Shauna McMullan, an artist, within the *Conflicts in Cities Project*, in part run by the political scientist Mick Dumper.
- Collaboration between Music director Marion Wood and artists, Hanaa MalAllah, Rashad Salim, librettist Anna Korula and Historian, Elena Isayev to produce an operatic performance work which deals with the theme of shifting and breaking memory bonds as related to traumatic events.
- Continuing collaboration will be explored with Dan Rycroft of World Art Studies at the UEA and the Sainsbury Centre for the Arts, with the possibility of the art works from the project to be displayed in its Gallery.
- The music composition, *Remember Me* by Jonathan Lee will be performed at the Public launch of the University of Exeter's Arts and Culture Initiative

Other issues

It has been a wonderful journey - but the organisation of the project - because of its multi-practice nature, and involving varied activities, has required a substantial amount of time in organising the events on the part of the PI, much more than anticipated. On average some 12 hours a week were spent on the project, the figure on the application was 1.9. The real cost of the project was some 20 times more than had been budgeted. It was only possible, as a result of gaining some modest additional funding from other sources outlined above, and, more crucially because participants, generously gave their time voluntarily to the various activities and in the setting up and organisation of the events. In particular I would like to highlight that while academics on the whole have a salary that supports such research activity - the artists and musicians are unsalaried, apart from commissions. Hence, except for the two lead artists whose time was budgeted for in the original application (but who gave at least three times as much time as they were paid for), the rest of the artists and musicians, including the Music Director, gave their time without being paid for it. We also have support from staff in the University outside of their working hours in helping to set up the exhibition and performance, simply because they were enthusiastic about it, in particular Sean Goddard, Catherine Bell and Marion Wood. It would not have been possible without the joint efforts of all these people.

I would also like to add what a pleasure it has been being part of the Beyond Text initiative. From a technical basis the Web site provided by the AHRC has been absolutely crucial, and very well run. My slight criticism concerns the reporting process, especially in light of the relatively short time periods and small amount of funding which the workshops/networks have. The reporting structure, its length and categorisation is wholly inappropriate for schemes of this kind. While I have enjoyed writing this statement, which I hope brings out the energy, innovation and the importance of the project and its outcomes, having to write the online interim and final reports has been a frustrating experience, not least because it is repetitive and cumbersome to write, and no doubt to read. The interim report and this final one has taken three whole days to complete. On a positive note I would like to highlight the networking and collaborative efforts of the *Beyond Text* director Evelyn Welch and her team who were very helpful, and succeeded in creating a forum of exchange and discussion. In particular Evelyn's support, enthusiasm and good advice has been absolutely essential, equally important was the AHRC's ability to be open minded and responsive to changes during the lifetime of the project.

Key Participants

Academic and related

Nadje Al-Ali: Anthropology/SOAS, University of London

Christine Allison: Kurdish Studies, University of Exeter

Kathleen Ash-Milby: curator, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian, USA

Sean Carter: Geography, University of Exeter

Jerri Daboo: Drama, University of Exeter

JD Dewsbury: Geography, University of Bristol

Michael Dumper: Politics, University of Exeter

Chris Gosden: Archaeology, Oxford University

Will Higbee: Film Studies, University of Exeter

Linda Hurcombe: Archaeology, University of Exeter

Elena Isayev: Classics and Ancient History, University of Exeter

Nick Kaye: Drama, University of Exeter

Ilan Pappe: History, University of Exeter

Mike Pearson: Drama, University of Aberystwyth

Gillian Ramsey: Classics and Ancient History, University of Exeter

Dan Rycroft: World Art Studies, UEA, Norwich

Ruba Salih: Anthropology, Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter

Andrew Schaap: Political Science, University of Exeter

John Wylie: Geography, University of Exeter

Paul Young: English, University of Exeter

Artists

Sandi Hilal: Sculpture, architecture, installation; Palestine, Italy: Stateless Nation 2009 Venice Biennale

Janet Forbes: Royal Conservatoire, The Hague, Specialism - Recorder

Jonathan Lee: Composer, Musician, University of Exeter

Hanaa Mal Allah: Painting, Installation, Iraq, London based

Shauna McMullan: sculptor, lecturer, Glasgow School of Art

Alessandro Petti: Sculpture, architecture, installation; Palestine, Italy: Stateless Nation 2009 Venice Biennale

Rashad Salim: Painting, Installation, Iraq, London based

Maya Verlaak: composer, Royal Conservatoire, The Hague

Catrin Webster: painter, Aberystwyth, lecturer Carmarthen Art College

Marion Wood: Conductor Musician, Director of Music, University of Exeter

Advisors and Other Participants

Ahmed Abu-Zayed, Librarian, Special Collections, IAIS, University of Exeter
Catherine Bell - Postgraduate School and Curatorial support, University of Exeter
Martin Bell - Journalist, Foreign Correspondent, London
Catherine Brace - Head of Geography, University of Exeter
Gina Cox – Curator, University Art Collection, Exeter
Caitlin De Silvey - Curator, Geography lecturer, University of Exeter
Regenia Gagnier - English, University of Exeter
Sean Goddard - Artist and Technical drawing, Archaeology, University of Exeter
Margo Greenwood - Education Project Manager for DAISI (Devon Arts in Schools Initiative)
Andrew Jones - Archaeology, University of Southampton
Anna Korula - librettist, Political science, University of Exeter
Adeline Johns-Putra - English, University of Exeter
Ruba Salih – Anthropology, Institute of Arabic & Islamic Studies, University of Exeter
Larry Shenfield - Vice Consul, PhD in Classics and Ancient History, University of Exeter. *in memoriam*
Ian Summers - Physics, University of Exeter
Helen Taylor - University Arts & Culture Development Fellow, University of Exeter
Catherine Yusoff – Artist, Geography lecturer, University of Exeter
Alex Walsham - History, University of Exeter

NB This report is accompanied by the following attachments:

- 1) Future Memory May Workshop Program
- 2) September Workshop Program
- 3) Gallery Plan to the exhibition
- 4) Text to accompany the Art Exhibition and Music performance