De-Placing Future Memory

Abstracts for the 21-22 May 2009 Workshop

Panel A
Elena Isayev Introduction
Nick Kaye Gary Hill and the tenses of action

Panel B
Nadje Al Ali, Rashad Salim, & Henaa Mal Allah
Iraqi De&Re/Constructions: Memories, Ruins & Monuments

Our presentation engages with the physical destruction of Iraq in the context of a number of wars (Iran-Iraq war 1980-1988, Gulf War 1991, Invasion 2003) and the ongoing Occupation. Based on oral histories, literature research, visual analysis and art practice we will explore both the various layers of destruction and ruins which shape and fill the memories of Iraqis as well as creative ways to cope, transform and subvert the destruction.

Nadje will provide a historical context by briefly outlining the various layers of physical destruction through the memories of displaced Iraqis. She will provide factual information as well as quotes by Iraqis in relation to the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War, economic sanctions and the recent invasion and occupation.

Rashad will discuss the significance of monuments in the Iraqi imaginary and national consciousness. His historical focus is the Freedom Monument by the late Jawad Selim, one of Iraq’s foremost artists. In the context of the current occupation, he will discuss Muntather el Zaeidi’s act of hurling two shoes in front of a global audience at President GW Bush within the US controlled Green Zone. The obvious insult was transmitted, and is, by now, fixed into global historical memory. What significance does this “Iraqi shoes” memory monument have for post-invasion Iraqi art given the aesthetics of destruction and loss that has so far permeated it? And, is there any relation to the promise and continued identification of Iraqis with monuments of the revolutionary epoch as represented by Jawad Selim’s Freedom Monument?

Hanaa will focus her presentation on sharing images of her recent art work as well as the process of creating her work. Her practice of what she coins “ruins technique” (burning, tearing, scratching, smearing, dripping, dabbing & puncturing) is key to understanding both her work as well her identity as an Iraqi artist who lived through a series of wars, layers of destruction and creation of ruins. Her cultural memory, identity and inspiration goes as far back includes the vivid ruins of Mesopotamia. Her work reflects the interplay between ancient ruins, the machinery of war, death tolls, collapsed infrastructure and buildings. Henaa will argue that she recycles Iraq’s ruins in art, delivering a clear artistic message to the West through the specific process of her technique (Ruins Technique).

Panel C
Materiality, Ephemerallity, Mind, Agency, Body, Object

Chris Gosden
Caring for the Future

Archaeologists and other social scientists have recently put much emphasis on how people in the past were concerned about their past. Much less attention has been paid to how people thought about their future and oriented their actions towards the future. Many aspects of human life require us to develop an attitude of care towards the future, with child rearing and farming being two very different contexts in which this takes place. In this paper I shall develop some general arguments around a concern about and care for the future. I shall use the example of Celtic art – the late Iron Age and Romano-British metalwork of Britain – as a case study through which to develop some of these arguments.

Linda Hurcombe

Archaeologists recognise monuments and natural inorganic resources as having places in the landscape and an effect on societies’ perception of place and materiality. These issues are part of memory and agency.
The organic materials which are found so rarely on temperate sites have not been considered in the same way because on an archaeological timescale they are ephemeral. This paper will explore the ways in which place and personal relationships from organic material culture could be integrated into our understanding of identity, social relations, ephemerality and memory.

Panel D  
Mike Pearson, J-D Dewsbury & John Wylie  
_Trace/Displaced: the materiality of performance._

In this panel we will seek to discuss issues around place, memory, performance and absence. We will activate and engage these tropes through a particular exemplar: a performance entitled _Trace/Displaced_ at the National Eisteddfod, Cardiff, August 2008, in which Mike Pearson was involved.

_Trace/Displaced_ grew out of, and was inspired by, artworks presented over a number of years at the Trace Gallery, Cardiff, run by Andre Stitt (see http://www.tracegallery.org). The Gallery was located on the open-plan ground floor of a 'typical' terraced house. Every month over the winter period Trace presented a performance work - usual at 6pm on Saturday afternoon. Sometimes the work was conceived as an hour-long performance; sometimes it was a durational piece culminating between 6pm and 7pm. The main premise then was that the detritus of the performance should remain as an installation for one month; the gallery would then be cleaned, repaired and painted white again. Some artists create performance in the knowledge that it would have a further life as exhibition and plan accordingly. For others, the material remains really did constitute debris. For the audience there was a continual return to the same room, with memories of previous events ever present. Within the fabric are the traces of performance - filled in, painted over. And all in a terraced house, behind closed doors - extreme acts meet banal processes of d-i-y.

_Trace/Displaced_ is a series of performative pieces in which a maquette of the original gallery space is re-created in other locations, one of which was the National Eisteddfod in 2008. Images and text from this performance can be accessed at: http://www.tracegallery.org/events/tracedisplaced/tracedisplacedeisteddfod.htm. For Mike, the challenge was to work in the public domain - for an audience who had never been in the house - and somehow to reference previous performances experienced there. He decided to work with three sets of objects - shoes, suits, books - working each day for three hours with the accumulating repertoire. On Saturday it poured with rain, Mike made a suit from several suits pinned together; another performer tried to plaster him into the wall.

In this panel, following initial contextualisation and presentation of _Trace/Displaced_, JD and John will offer reflections upon the performance, and stage a dialogue between the panel, and between panel and audience, around the network theme of the embodiment of memory within place. For JD, interest lies in the appearance and disappearance of modes of appearing/witnessing/tracing, modes which may be understood as akin to performance. Stress will also be laid upon the 'placing' of the body in achieving this appearance/disappearance. Here, art is a particular mode of making appear such appearances that 'record' identifications in place that would otherwise disappear. For John, _Trace/Displaced_ prompts, at least initially, reflections upon moving houses. If academic and critical writing on place and memory has often focused on the place-memories of the displaced, what can instances when places are themselves displaced tell us about the relationship between place, performance and memory?

Panel E  
Jonathan Lee  
_Music and the Human Experience_

The function and power of music to effect manifold human experiences will form the basis of a short presentation of an extremely broad and complex topic. There are realms to life that cannot be seen, explained or tested, thus separating art from science, and music is arguably the most powerful art in achieving visions and experiences beyond ‘natural’ life. Furthermore, throughout ages and cultures music has been used to inspire devotion and worship and to express what other forms of communication and art cannot. Rather than looking purely at the theoretical aspects of this power the presentation will look at issues of order and disorder, movement and dance, voices and instruments in humanity’s relentless task to see and admire what is beyond.
Marion Wood
*De-placing future memory; a musical perspective*

The practical impact of past on future: what happens when we listen to music? How are expectations set up of the next beat, the next bar, the next phrase? The conscious moment as a fulcrum for musical interpretation.

A more poetic impact: Metaphors in Music as a starting point for composition. Composers frequently find the genesis of their creative muse in feelings of trauma or isolation. How perspectives of the past can be reworked through musical metaphors, and in turn, seeds developed for a hopeful future.

Panel F  Shauna McMullan & Catrin Webster
*The Artist's Experience*