

<u>Mid-Term 1st Report</u>	AHRC Beyond Text: De-Placing Future Memory,	Elena Isayev
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Aims and Methods of the Project

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 will consider theoretical debates on identity and materiality from a number of disciplines and bring 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 is being carried out through an innovative fusion of historians, archaeologists, geographers, anthropologists, and scholars from politics and drama as well as practicing artists and musicians. The outcomes will be presented in a number of public events as well as academic workshops, publications, website, and two bodies of artistic work specifically created for the project: an art exhibition and a music performance.

Project Websites: <http://projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/deplacingfuturememory/index.php>

<http://projects.exeter.ac.uk/futurememory/>

Confirmation statement / explanation of variance

The project is following through on 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
- 2) Iraqi and Middle East artists:
 - Sandi Hilal: 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, Iraq, London based
- 3) Music Discussion, Performance and Composition:
 - Janet Forbes: Royal Conservatoire, The Hague, Specialism - Recorder
 - Jonathan Lee: Composer, Musician, University of Exeter
 - Marion Wood: Conductor Musician, Director of Music, University of Exeter
- 4) Public engagement: a presentation with the artists at the local Phoenix Arts Center alongside the Public Opening, and the Schools' Conference

Additional support has been received from:

- School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Exeter:
 - for a project assistant, PhD student - Gillian Ramsey
- Migrations Network, University of Exeter:
 - 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)
- Currently funds are being sought for a Music performance and funding for the composition of a music piece
 - This is being sought from the University of Exeter Arts and Culture Fund.
 - Jonathan Lee: Composer, Musician, University of Exeter
- Funds and Support in Kind is also being negotiated with the University of Exeter
 - for the Public Opening of the Exhibition in September
 - to coincide with the UN Year of Reconciliation events

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)

Highlights of the research /important findings [where applicable]

Many of the highlights are included below within the report, especially the collaborative work between art practitioners (including visual art, performance art and music) and academics. The music elements came at the request of the music practitioners, having heard of the project - and been inspired by its ideas.

The findings directly on the theme of place and memory has yet to be fully articulated, and it will be the key work over the next several months.

To date the main highlights have been the exchange of ideas and the unforeseeable links such as how future - memory works similarly in music as it does in negotiations between opposing groups as in the Middle-East, and equally relevant are models from social sciences - especially the works with traumatised children.

Although it has only been 12 hours since we finished the 1st workshop, already the exhibition of artists work in September has doubled in size. There will also now be collaborations between the Visual and Music participants, those from Iraq and from Exeter - eg around the theme of disused pianos. As well one of the artists will be working with a Political Scientist to help with a mapping project, another artist will work with an archaeologist who focuses on the ephemera of materials and landscape, another visual artist will be working with the musicians creating audio drawings. There are ancient historians who never thought their work was so relevant to the present day who will be presenting in September. Most excitingly a new form of music which divides the musical note from its echo - creating a completely different sound - will be experimented with and brought into a new musical composition for the project. A couple of MA students from UEA having been inspired by the project will be helping in the curation of the final exhibition.

Another highlight was an interesting unpredicted effect: the organisation of the journeys through the landscape - in particular the ones that have involved local taxi drivers, local pubs and a canoe rental place, these have stimulated discussions about Exeter as a *place* to locals and outsiders, and notions of memory, in a way that was never anticipated, and as a result has also brought these communities (academic, artists, local, international) together. This was also achieved through the participants taking journeys, created by the artists through the town and countryside of Exeter, and having to engage with people encountered along the way. The journeys had a tremendous effect on the participants, bringing out the themes of the project through experience, and through discussion and drawing allowing these to link back to the more academic papers that were presented on the first day of the workshop. The more difficult bridges to build are those between the theoretical elements and the case-study based elements.

Progress of the project

To date the nature of the workshop has expanded in its aims, allowing a wider range of disciplines/art practitioners to participate, while the theme itself has 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 is allowing 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 wonderful support of the AHRC in creating a very professional web service. We have as a result been building up our website and will continue to do so for the duration of the project as well as beyond it. We intend to use it for displaying the visual and musical art work, as well as the academic pieces, and of course any developments and workshop details. (It would however be more helpful if we could upload our own text and not just images, currently all text can only be uploaded as an attachment rather than as a key text on the web pages). It has also been helpful in organising the De-Placing Future Memory workshops with school children. These will be part of the School's Conference entitled: *Who do you think you are?* with 250 students from local schools (23 September).

In terms of the structure of the 1st workshop, which has encouraged discussions prior to presentation among the participants, this has been very successful. While the presentations are not joint, it was requested that the members of each panel discuss among themselves the direction they would like the panel to take, we have then circulated their joint proposals to the respondents. This has worked very well, and had the effect of both dialogue, and also dissemination. As well, the artists have been in touch with the non-art based contributors, both through art itself - as for example the sending of post -cards, as well as requesting responses to the art work from their own disciplines and discussion. The attendees of the first workshop also reflect a wide audience, representing various disciplines, as well as established scholars, researchers, students, arts / crafts practitioners and curators. An unforeseen direction, has been the inclusion of a 'virtual' angle to the project. As a result of the ideas developing for Future Memory, I was asked to present a paper at a recent *Performing Presence* conference, which has created interesting links with interdisciplinary initiatives with computer artists, and those who were the pioneers in establishing the virtual worlds such as *Second Life*, where memory has a

very different meaning. We have had a very successful first workshop, which has had a lot of positive energy behind it, which is setting a clearer agenda for what will be presented in the second workshop in September, to crystallize our ideas.

Research staff

The only additional associate that has been added to the project is: Gillian Ramsey, a PhD student who has been exceptional in being project assistant and event organiser, she is funded by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Fund.

Publications

To date there have been no publications in the traditional kind

However the project has already seen the beginnings of the following:

- 2 music compositions one by Jonathan Lee, and another by Marion Wood
- the creation of a body of art work by Catrin Webster (see postcard project on the web) & Shauna McMullan
- the beginnings of some poetical works, created following the Journeys
- The writing of a paper entitled 'Ancient Presence: Memory of places never visited and people never met.' for publication, possibly for the *Cambridge Classical Journal* or *Cultural Geographies* 2010
- Still under discussion an edited volume and an artist book/ catalogue
- The use of the Website as an alternative publication / presentation/ idea sharing place

Contribution to the Programme

The activities of this project and the links being 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 first workshop has already 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 and artist-led journeys, and reflect on the role of their physical environment as memory guide and its impact on their identities.

Engagement with non-academic stakeholders

As noted above to date the main 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. One of the managers asked to be more directly involved in the workshop in September, and take part in it.
- Curators from the Royal Albert Museum, one of whom came for the whole workshop
- The individuals and groups encountered and engaged with during the journeys on the second day of the workshop

- A writer who was invited by one of the musicians
- A local weaver who was invited by an archaeologist
- A composer who had wanted to create music for the workshop

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

These will be held in conjunction with the main international workshop in 24-25 September 2009

- Art Exhibition at the IAIS main Hall Gallery (mid September to mid October)
 - Public Opening event (date TBC)
 - A publication/catalogue
- Musical Performance to take place at the Opening of the Exhibition
 - circa 15 minute piece for 2 singers, brass quintet and djembe
- Conference and Artists workshop with 250 local School Children *Who do you think you are?* 23 Sept. 2009
- Café Scientifique event at the Exeter Phoenix Art Centre 5 October 2009

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.

Forward plans

The Key public activities which will take place in September - October 2009 have been outlined above.

The second main workshop will take place in September 24 -25, 2009.

Facilities for this workshop, including exhibition space have all already been booked.

Other types of activities which I have noted above - in terms of collaborations - are all in the early phase- but already they are producing more than what has been anticipated at the start. We are keeping to the original timetable almost exactly.