

Further details on overall research project

'Challenging concepts of "liquid" place through performing practices in community contexts' (Challenging Place) is an AHRC-funded research project led by Sally Mackey, 2011-2014.

The summary on the original application for the award reads:

'Challenging concepts of 'liquid' place ...' ... brings together two research teams - Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, and Aberystwyth University - and three community arts project partner organisations: Half Moon Young People's Theatre, London; Oldham Theatre Workshop (OTW); Cyrrff Ystwyth, Aberystwyth. Using recently devised performance practices with each organisation, the research asks to what extent contemporary theories of dislocation and transience are evidenced in particular 'real world' contexts, how performance practices can be used to consider relationships to place and how dislocation can be eased through such practices. The projects will stimulate theorisation together with 'best practice' models for further dissemination as material for facilitation in community arts organisations.

Traditionally, 'place' is associated with longevity, continuity, community, the normative and security - as well as boundaries, defence and exclusion. In contrast, contemporary existence is more frequently described as place-less, characterised by transience, wayfaring and deterritorialisation. This project makes use of current academic thinking about place, mobility, globalisation and cosmopolitanism while also raising questions about how we define and experience place and 'dislocation'. In real social contexts, there is wide variation and the situation is hugely complex: whilst deterritorialism has led to geographical dislocations, with all the concerns and problems that displacement can imply, other people may experience place very differently.

The research comprises three stages, each of a year's duration. First, three participatory performance-related research projects will be developed and refined. The research teams will work with project partner organisations (all of whom have established reputations in community drama) to create place-based projects that use models of performance practice previously derived within research environments. The community groups comprise newly located refugee families (with OTW), unemployed predominantly second generation translocated migrants (with Half Moon) and learning and physically disabled adults who do not have mobility of place (Cyrrff Ystwyth). The choice of the three organisations offers a diversity of location, target community group and form of practice. While all the participating groups might be described as socially vulnerable, most importantly they have been selected as demonstrating different relationships to place.

In Year 2, a range of performance manifestations will take place. Forms of performance will include fully realised devised performance, a workshop series and short residencies. The researchers will provide guidance, 'training', oversight and evaluation as well as some hands-on facilitation. The focus is the participants' response to their sense of place and 'locatedness'. The projects will be documented through recorded interviews, questionnaires, film footage and observation notes. This will provide material to judge the effectiveness of the practical research, to prompt refinements of both the models of practice and current theory.

In Year 3, analysis and organisation of the outcomes of the research will take place. This includes re-forming the models of practice into material for use by other community arts organisations, the completion of three journal articles and a book proposal. The models of practice will be disseminated through an industry-related symposium held at Central with approximately 75 representatives from international and UK community-related organisations. The flexible models of practice will be presented through web-based documents that offer a series of performance-based activities with graphic representations, DVD clips and reflections on appropriate usage. This work will then be made available on dedicated website pages at Central.

This research follows questions raised at the end of a previous project *Performing Place: the Caer Llan Trilogy*, 2002-2004 (www.performingplace.org). See http://crco.cssd.ac.uk/35/225/Additional_thoughts.pdf for Mackey's thoughts about performing place at the close of this previous research project which specifically lead into the *Challenging Place* application (made in 2010). For example:

These projects have employed some of the broad practices of the CLT. Beyond this, it would be interesting to test the specific strategies and theories that have arisen out of deconstructing the project in this site. Do these translate? Can such a set of strategies and theories offer a coherent and comprehensive approach to a performance of place? In addition, can such a performance of place be deemed useful, valuable or worthwhile to the participants?

Between writing the application for Challenging Place and its realisation as a research enquiry at Half Moon, the nature of the 'client group' at Half Moon changed from NEETs to their senior youth group. The change was agreed by the AHRC. Changing aspects of participatory drama work at Half Moon was a result of funding cuts, prevalent in arts organisations at this time.