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Homing Devices For Unhomely Times

Homing Devices For Unhomely Times

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ABSTRACT
Locative media offer possibilities for constructing new conceptions of home as spaces of resistance, interference and enunciation in opposition to those augmentations of surveillance and control they also enable. These potentialities are considered in relation to a socially engaged art project, 'way from home', which shares common characteristics with locative media art projects. The unique localized situation of this project offers an opportunity to critically consider locative media in relation to the wider context of forced migration and the politics, ethical views and modes of radical potentiality that emerge from this situation of human displacement.

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With the global scale of mass forced migration of populations and individuals, understandings of identity and place have shifted with profound implications for meanings of 'home'. Conceptions of home as continuous, coherent, self-enclosed places of security and belonging, defined through fixed positions of difference of an outside 'other', have been challenged by experiences of displacement following from colonialism in the last century and contemporary shifts in directions and relations of power in the world.

This displacement has resulted in the colonial and post-colonial condition of 'unhomeliness' [1], a sense of disorientation following from collapsed distinctions between public and domestic spaces. Recently, Homi Bhabha commented how complex forms of nationalism and new forms of belonging are developing with movements of migration, 'people and groups often have a kind of split mode of being. They can be political citizens in one particular culture and cultural citizens in a very different kind of trans-national, cosmopolitan sense. They live this split' [2]. Further he has suggested this experience is not limited to migrants, 'If all of a sudden your society, or community becomes a place where a whole range of other people settle, then the nature of jurisdiction becomes different. The very ground under your feet is being renamed, even if you never left it' [3]. This 'jurisdictional unsettlement' can be an opportunity for new perspectives and expanded responsibilities of protecting vulnerable individuals and groups, or it can result in conflict and limitations of enforcability of ethical claims [4].

Irit Rogoff finds an alternative geographical strategy in Michel Foucault's notion of pirates [5], 'They serve as the quintessential form of geographical unframing, the boundary line which signals that there is an outside that is a form not of surveillance but of interference' [6]. This interference relates to those 'spaces of radical openness' bell hooks discovers in the 'margin', a dynamic space of multiple and shifting perspectives, a way of seeing simultaneously from 'outside in and inside out' [7]. She re-conceptualizes 'home' as a site of radical potential, which 'is no longer one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and

everchanging perspectives' [8].

Seeking further control and limitation of movement within its borders, the U.K. government has proposed to implement GPS technologies, presently used to monitor criminals under house arrest, to control, and thereby class together, a population of the 'stateless'—asylum seekers. These enactments of domestic control and identity lock down reveal a xenophobic failure of imagination to cope with a plurality of identities and places of belonging co-existing simultaneously and irreconcilably together. Abilities to instantly fix and calculate locatability enable a complicated and vulnerable visibility. In a culture of racial domination where power is exerted in ordinary spaces and details of everyday life, hooks argues black people 'never "arrive", or "can't stay"' [9]. A shift of awareness to ordinary details of the world, 'to politics as the stressed necessity of everyday life — politics as a performativity' is needed [10]. Bhabha argues there is a power and necessity of narrative, the 'enunciatory right', as a transition and way forward in 'that situation of jurisdictional unsettlement' [11]. This right is not of individual expression, but one gaining force through networks of narratives: 'the accounts of individuals involved on both sides of these deeply…wounding historical situations' which 'are recorded from one moment to another' [12].

It is important to remain critically aware these technologies enable particular exclusions, overexposures and erasures, but also make 'new rounds of exploration of an already explored world' possible [13]. Rather than anchored as tools of surveillance, locative technology can potentially offer 'homing devices' for being at home, at sea.

Contemporary site-specific artists, such as Houston Conwill [14], Graeme Miller [15] and Janet Cardiff [16] have demonstrated how practices of mapping can be employed as critical and creative tools to interpret, generate and appropriate spaces, develop social bonds and emotional attachments with spaces, and reveal multiple and unseen dimensions of a specific context, social space or subjective spatial experience. To similar ends, particular arts practices arising out of the field of locative media are using locative technologies to create networks of communication and exchange, mappings of physical and social space, composite mappings, digital and collective authoring and archiving of public memory within the environment and situated narratives explored in projects, such as '[murmur]'[17], 'Shadows from Another Place' [18], 'Urban Tapestries' [19], 'Field-Works' [20], 'MILK' [21], '(area) code' [22], 'Mapping and Sewing Together Mythologies' [23], 'A description of this place as if you were someone else' [24]. These projects potentially shift and extend awareness to multiple perspectives and details of ordinary life and provide alternative structures for constructing networks of narratives as Bhabha describes.

"WAY FROM HOME"
Part of an ongoing series of contextually-based socially engaged art projects [25], 'way from home' shares common capacities, trajectories, and characteristics with locative media art projects, but using an alternative set of technologies [to those usually associated with the field]: basic mobile recording devices, Internet, sketch maps, and walking. This series of projects is exploring potentialities of spatial art practices of mapping and wayfinding as convivial methods of developing attachments, connectivity and social bonds within a locality and understanding new spatial dimensions of home and belonging through a long-term partnership with asylum seekers and refugees (ASRs), voluntary support organizations, public sector institutions and public officials in Plymouth, U.K. 'way from home' offers a specific and unique localized situation from which to critically consider locative media in relation to wider contexts of forced migration and politics, ethical views and modes of radical potentiality that emerge from particular situations of human displacement.

Plymouth is a maritime city in the South West of England historically significant as a point of departure for colonial expeditions and emigrations. More recently, it remains an important military naval base and designated U.K. 'dispersal area' for ASRs. Particular difficulties exist in this context for integration of both receiving and incoming populations. Given their small minority in a predominantly white population, ASRs are often vulnerable in their isolation and visibility to racially motivated abuse and violence. Opportunities are needed which create possibilities for social interaction, creative agency, self-determination and self-representation, for recognition and exchange of critical resources, capacities and contributions that ASRs have to offer [26].

In 'way from home' a set of instructions [27] invites participants to create an impromptu hand-drawn map of a route from a place they consider home to a special place, with significant landmarks marked along the way. This map is then used to

navigate a different place to that which it portrays. Following this map as a guide, an improvised walk is taken in Plymouth, transposing and re-naming landmarks encountered in the present environment with coinciding remembered landmarks of the map.

Initially, I devised these instructions in dialogue with Plymouth based grassroots refugee support organization Refugees First, who agreed this walk could be a meaningful and effective way of developing awareness and understanding of ASRs experiences for ASRs themselves and for a wider public. One participant later confirmed, 'It made a transference possible. It made me feel I owned part of Plymouth. It made others realise how important home is. The significance of it for us and the importance of it for us' [28].

As a mode for presenting maps and narratives generated from the walks and way of enabling Refugees First to gain Internet access and funding for computers, I conceived the idea of creating an interactive website through an AOL Innovation in the Community Award. Images and spoken narratives generated from a series of walks taken in Plymouth in February 2003 with refugees living in the city were developed into an interactive website and DVD, technically realized with Dan Harris and limbomedia [29]. The user is guided on a walk through a 3-D version of the walker's map accompanied by audio recordings of their spoken narratives, which were also broadcast on BBC Radio Devon [30].

Wayfinding as narration

In 'way from home' participants explore an improvised and undetermined route through the city guided by the sketch of a significant route previously made elsewhere. Decisions of scale and direction are decided in negotiation with obstacles and landmarks the walker meets along the way. Landmarks identified and transposed may be significant to the walker's daily life or may be unfamiliar or rediscovered.

This process of comparison, association and transposition of landmarks from a familiar landscape with those of an unfamiliar one makes visible and explicit strategies that a stranger to a place often makes as part of familiarization and orientation. Places hold memories of past journeys and can be understood as generated through a finding which is a *founding*, in the sense that the past of previous journeys, establishes a way towards future destinations. Places exist as positions in networks of movement, not as locations. With knowledge of this network, a present position can be located within the context of previous journeys. This is ordinary wayfinding, which Tim Ingold suggests 'might be understood not as following a course from one spatial location to another, but as a movement in *time*, more akin to playing music or storytelling than to reading a map' [31]. A stranger's navigation of a country by way of the topographic map would be 'divorced from any narrative context' [32]. Movements and narratives of past and present journeys are both re-enacted in 'way from home' sketch maps and through dialogue with a witness/recorder. This sketch map, as redefined by Ingold, is 'not so much representations of space as condensed histories' [33].

In the interactive presentation of maps resulting from these processes, the map-maker's embodied efforts and interactions within the environment and accompanying ambient sounds become part of the map. Rather than from a point above, as with conventional cartographic representation, the map is followed from the perspective of the walker through a 3-D version unfolding in time with a recorded narration. As the user rolls the mouse over landmarks appearing in this landscape of the sketch map, photographic images of transposed landmarks of Plymouth appear. One participant commented on their experience of this presentation of their map, 'That is really the map…it is really kind of now something physical instead of only relying on the sketch of the map. It's a reality really. It brought me back home again. Hearing it and walking through it…its like I was walking again lively' [34].

CONTOUR OF HOME AS A QUESTION MARK
With conventional cartographic maps, co-existing, contradicting and multiple narrative contexts, histories, journeys, and bodily efforts always involved in finding and founding place, are erased to create an illusion that these representations are direct transcriptions of reality. These erasures enabled European cartography to become a powerful tool of colonization. Ingold argues this erasure has been extended with GPS, quoting Thomas Widlok, "Both a map and a GPS depend on a history of human-environment interactions…from which the experiential aspects of the humans involved have been systematically eliminated to leave nothing but formalized, de-personalized procedures" [35].

Narratives generated through 'way from home' extend geography beyond physical

environment into realms of memory and emotion and make interferences of subjectivities and ambiguities in realms of public knowledge and public record, which have been erased or do not appear in dominant historical accounts. In making a claim of rights, an asylum seeker is enmeshed in depersonalized and dehumanizing processes of documentation of factual details of their lives, of their departure and arrival as record and justification of their claim. This process of mapping personally significant landmarks onto concrete features of the new environment constructs narratives indirectly and through self-contained processes of self-characterization. Proliferation of meanings are generated beyond constraints of dotted lines or point-to-point coordinates functioning to generalize or reduce particularities of individual experience and identity to statistical abstraction.

The first step of the 'way from home' instructions presents an unsettling contradiction for the presumption it makes that 'home' could be represented as a precisely determined and fixed mark. With understandings of 'home' not as location, but as places existing in a network of journeys and situated through knowledge of previous journeys, 'home' takes on the sense of 'homing'. This step is, then, suspended in a motion that propels the marking forward into action, into a performative gesture of narration in a space of ambiguity and potentiality.

The map of one participant was a question mark. 'I don't know where my home is' he said [36]. Denied refugee status and financial assistance and not offered deportation, he was sleeping on the street. From what seemed like an impasse, a conversation opened up between him and a support worker, who claimed this mapping process revealed a totally different perspective and helped him to understand the real meaning of isolation for those individuals who fall between the gaps of representation or jurisdictional responsibility. As hooks suggests, 'At times, home is nowhere' [37]. The process of the 'way from home' project depends upon and values indeterminacy and ambiguity as necessary for enabling creative agency and enunciatory rights.

Another participant's reflection accounts for an awareness of another kind of gap and of bridging that arose through this engagement with multiple perspectives and 'mixed-reality' of lived environment and space of memory. He said:

Looking at things you feel that there is a gap between... Even if you didn't bring the physical things from home, it's always near...What is really of great impact...is that taking someone through that imaginary and putting everything you knew back home somehow becomes a kind of reality [38].

This awareness could be related to that radical view identified in hook's notion of home, what Rogoff refers to as 'a language of geographical double consciousness' [39], or to the 'contrapuntal awareness' of home, which Edward Said attributes to exile [40]. As with contrapuntal polyphony, in which strong and active parts are interdependent, not annihilating, two cultural locations are intertwined with both times and places experienced simultaneously. Historical, political and cultural interdependencies existing between places refugees have fled from and the country of asylum are critically and poetically repositioned into an associative relation. Landmarks and scars of territorial conflicts perceived as distant or happening elsewhere and when are potentially brought closer to 'home' elsehere and now.

CONCLUSION

Without bodily effort of the search embedded in the process of wayfinding, interaction within environment through embodied thinking, understanding and transforming of space could potentially be eliminated with locative media technologies. Processes of wayfinding and mapping, as defined here, demonstrate the importance of maintaining values of indeterminacy, movement, and embodied interaction within the environment in realizing new imaginative constructs of communities and places of belonging, resistance, interference, and enunciation that I have argued are of necessity and possibility in locative art practices. If locative arts projects concentrate on locative technologies' abilities to precisely calculate location without involving singularities and ambiguities of physicality, embodiment, and context, then such projects may only offer simplistic understandings of referentiality and spatiality. They may re-enact exclusions, erasures and overexposures that serve powers of surveillance and control and have historically dislocated, alienated, imprisoned and confirmed positions of otherness.

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NOTES

1. Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 9.

2. Kerry Chance, "The Right to Narrate: Interview with Homi Bhabha",

http://www.bard.edu/hrp/resource_pdfs/chance.hbhabha.pdf, p. 5 (2001).

3. See Chance [2], p. 5.

4. See Chance [2], p. 5.

5. In 'Of Other Spaces' Michel Foucault writes 'In civilizations without boats...police take the place of pirates'. Foucault in Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's visual culture* (London: Routledge, 2000) pp. 91-92.

6. See Rogoff [5] p. 91.

7. hooks, bell, *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990) p.148-149.

8. See hooks [7], p. 148.

9. See hooks [7], p. 148.

10. See Bhabha [1], p. 15.

11. See Chance [2], p. 5.

12. See Chance [2], p. 5.

13. Nigel Thrift, "Movement-space: the changing domain of thinking resulting from the development of new kinds of spatial awareness", in *Economy and Society*, Vol. 33, No. 4, p. 602 (2004).

14. Houston Conwill, *New Ring Shout*, http://www.cofc.edu/avery/tours.html, (1994) and *Places with a Past*, http://www.africanburialground.com /ABG_Artwork.htm, (1991)

15. Graeme Miller, *Linked*, (2003) and *Bassline*, (2004), http://www.artsadmin.co.uk/artists/gm/.

16. Janet Cardiff, *The Missing Voice*, http://www.abbeymedia.com/Janweb/jan.htm, (1999).

17. Shawn Micallef, James Roussel, Gabe Sawhney, *[murmur]*, http://murmurtoronto.ca/, (2003).

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20. Fujihata, Masaki Field-Works, http://www.field-works.net/, (1992).

21. Esther Polak and Ieva Auzina MILK, http://locative.x-i.net/piens/info.html, (2003).

22. centrifugalforces and Jen Southern, *(area) code*, http://www.areacode.org.uk/, (2004).

23. Andrew Patterson and Signe Pucena, *Mapping and Sewing Together Mythologies*, http://locative.net/tcmreader/index.php?locarts;patterson, (2003).

24. Daniel Belasco Rodgers, http://www.mobilebristol.com/flash.html?http: //www.mobilebristol.com/arnolfini.html, (2004).

25. Further documentation of the 'way from home' project can be found in Misha Myers 'Journeys to, from and around: founding home in transition,' in Graham Coulter-Smith, (ed.), *Art in the Age of Terrorism* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing) (forthcoming) and Misha Myers and Dan Harris, "way from home" in "On the Page", *Performance Research Journal*, Issue 9.2, Spring, (2004). Details on the related project, VocaLatitude (2004), can be found at http://www.dartingtonplus.org.uk /projects/vocalatituderepo.html

26. Avril Butler, "A Strengths Approach to Building Futures: Students and Refugees Together", in *Community Development Journal*, April, Issue 40, pp. 147-157 (2005).

27. From confidential and anonymous interview between author and project participant archived and recorded in 2005.

28. Instructions for the 'way from home' walks were included in a fold-out insert of "On the Page", in *Performance Research Journal*, Issue 9.2, Spring, (2004).

29. 'way from home,' http://www.wayfromhome.org, (2003). The audio recordings and video sequences of the site do not run with some Safari browsers. If possible, use Explorer.

30. Audio recordings of the 'way from home' walks were recorded by Fiona Evans and broadcast on BBC Radio Devon during daily news programming from 9-13 February 2004.

31. Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 238.

32. See Ingold [31], p. 237.

33. See Ingold [31], p. 220.

34. From confidential and anonymous interview between author and project participant archived and recorded in 2005.

35. See Widlok in Ingold [31], p. 430.

36. From comments by participant in workshop session of Plymouth's Refugee Week 2005.

37. See hooks [7], p.148.

38. From confidential and anonymous interview between author and project participant archived and recorded in 2005.

39. See Rogoff [5], p. 111.

40. Edward Said, "Reflections on Essay", in *Reflections on Exile* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 186.

41. See Ingold [31], p. 219.

42. See Said [40], p.186.

GLOSSARY

Home and belonging - Conceptions of home as continuous, coherent, self-enclosed places of security and belonging have been challenged and re-conceptualized in contemporary discourse in response to those shifts in the direction and flows of power from colonialization to recent migration. Multiple forms and places of belonging are arising with this shift, with split loyalties of genealogical, linguistic, cultural, and national citizenship and in the case of the asylum seeker denied refuge or return, impossible belongings emerge.

Refugee narratives - An asylum seeker is enmeshed in depersonalized and dehumanizing processes of documentation of the factual details of their lives to record and justify their claim for rights to protection. Literary and aesthetic forms of narrative allow for the ambiguities of subjectivity, such as that of emotion and memory to become part of public record and testimony.

Wayfinding - Tim Ingold's distinction between the processes of wayfinding and those of navigation or map-using lies in the difference between place and location, as he explains, 'Bound together by the itineraries of their inhabitants, places exist not in space but as nodes in a matrix of movement. I shall call this matrix a "region"...Wayfinding...is a matter of moving from one *place* to another in a *region*' [41]

Contrapuntal awareness - This concept comes from Edward Said's discussion in *Reflections on Exile* of a particular awareness of the exile: 'Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music — is *contrapuntal*...Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally' [42].

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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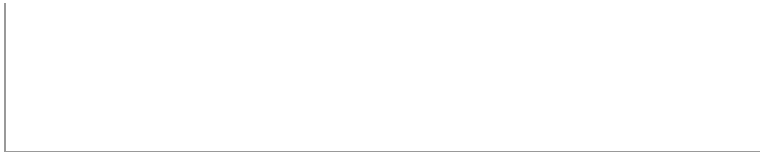
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