

COMMUNITY: THE IDEAL AND THE HETEROTOPIC

Research into the [Background project](#) uncovered a perception of a community that was held in high regard by the participants. The CLT was founded on the experience of the background project so, whilst community was not axiomatic to the performing place trilogy, there was an assumption by most of the participants, including myself, that the project would in some way build on the strength of the previously established performance community. Reasons for participation in the first intensive, CL1, as expressed on the application forms, included: 'To work with like-minded people who share the same 'language''; 'Having had a taste ... I am now hungry for more'; 'I am keen to meet up with old faces and new ones and exchange ideas and experience'. As [Early responses](#) and, perhaps, [Nesting and temporary location](#) demonstrate, there were high expectations of this community operating as an 'idyllic', creative community.

I was interested in two things here. *To what extent would the presence of an already existing expressive community impact upon the performance of place?* Secondly, and dialogically, *how might the performance of place impact upon a community?* Such an interrogation may offer useful insights into the imbrications of place and community relevant to applying such performance practice in other settings. (My interest in developing strategies and theories for the performance of place for applied theatre settings has been raised in the Further Reading [About Temporary Location](#).) This section of writing cannot comprehensively respond to these questions but it offers one thread towards the debate in suggesting that the 'ideal' of an expressive community may include a heterotopic juxtaposition (as evidenced in CL3, particularly).

Concepts of community are deeply and historically associated with place. A 'primacy of belonging' (Cohen, 1985: 15) has been considered a fundamental constituent of community: you belonged to a group and the place inhabited by them simultaneously. Existence was circumscribed by the physical geography of location and the ethical codes evolved by the people of that place. As Ronald Dore wrote of a Japanese village he studied in the mid-20th century: 'If you live in Shinohata, the "outside world" begins three hundred yards down the road' (*ibid*) and as the philosopher Edward Casey states: 'For archaic Greek bards as for contemporary Western Apache storytellers, places provide permanence, a bedrock basis for situating stories in scenes that possess moral tenor.' (Casey, 1993: 277) Connections between communities, their places of inhabitation and the practices that interpret their belief systems can be traced to the first recordings of existence. A 10,000 year old drawing on the walls of the Trois Frères caves in France is thought to be the village shaman in a ritual protecting the local community, for example.

Despite such traditions, and, as the section on 'Temporary Location' adumbrates, contemporary communities are not always embedded in a singular location. This debate has been thoroughly articulated by researchers across many disciplines now (e.g. Baumann, 2001; Amit, 2002; Delanty, 2003; Nicholson, 2005) and I debate this further in Mackey, 2006. The community that formed around the projects at Caer Llan might be described as such a contemporary community. It was erratic, occasional but with strong ties that extended beyond the projects themselves.

There is much that could be said about the forming and forging of what might be perceived as an 'idyllic' community attached to Caer Llan where most of the participants invested emotionally in the place, the performance projects and the people. I raise just some thoughts briefly here. Sociologist Ray Pahl has undertaken work on 'community of the mind'

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or 'imagined community' that may illuminate something of the Caer Llan community. Pahl's point is that 'imagined communities may have greater resilience and continuity than the seemingly solid occupational communities which have so rapidly disappeared' (2005: 634). To what extent were we willing participants playing out an ideal, imagined community rather than a 'real' community of substance and longevity? More could be said, also, about how the focus on performance, in itself a communion-building activity I would argue, enhanced the community through its emphasis on collaborative creativity, shared adrenalin, merged focuses, joint successes (and failures) and evolving combined memories of performance narratives. (By 'performance narratives', I refer to all the threads of performances that develop, from the jokes that are recalled and repeated to a physical moment in performance that is remembered, spoken about and even repeated in another form at a later date.) There is more, too that might be mentioned about the physical location of Caer Llan and how this encouraged community-mindedness. The site was rural, isolated and secluded - different to the daily living experiences of most of the participants (predominantly city dwellers). An urban/rural binary is implicit in some responses. (Lucy articulates some of this in [Working outdoors](#) and [Temporary communities](#), for example.) Removal from the fast-paced city, the physical seclusion and rural isolation gave many of the participants a clear sense of a communal retreat. The physical boundaries of the 24-acre site of Caer Llan, albeit barely perceptible, perhaps acted as a buffer or metaphysical enclosure. It offered both a secure 'knowable community' (Williams, 1973) and secession from sprawling hectic urbanity into pleasantly bounded rurality. In addition, it might be possible to argue that the close engagement with the material fabric of that landscape through performance engendered a sense of communal belonging as we collectively 'played' on the earth.

In his work on expressive communities, perhaps Hetherington comes close to identifying something of the particular nature of community that was forged at, and forged, the CLT:

[B]eing part of a separate and distinct community has been an important means of establishing forms of identification with others. As well as belonging to some form of grouping, however, this sense of community and location has also carried with it symbolic attachments to particular places. These might indeed be communal living spaces, homes of one sort or another, in which identification with others is invested in a sense of home, or they may be places invested with other sorts of meaning – gathering places, places of pilgrimage, safe places, places of meditation and rest, sites of play and festival – or places that have some sort of significance for a particular group because of some historic event. Spaces, sometimes deliberately, other times more arbitrarily chosen, come to have symbolic attachments to them that give them a social centrality for a particular group. A sense of belonging and community may come to be ordered around the social centrality of particular places. (Hetherington, 1998: 72)

Caer Llan came to have 'some sort of significance' for the participants of the project. The 'social centrality' of the CLT was perhaps the pro-active performance of the place/site that reinforced the 'sense of belonging and community'. Caer Llan became 'invested' with meaning for this community through performance (Hetherington's 'play and festival' equivalent perhaps).

There is much to support the suggestion of a form of 'ideal' community that was constructed through the performing place experiment at Caer Llan. In the selection of clips, however, I have also suggested that the community had overt heterotopic tendencies, particularly in CL3.

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David Wiles suggests that heterotopia is an outdated concept now (2003: 8) yet it appears to maintain relevance for the performance of place. Marc Augé equates heterotopia to non-place (1995: 112), for example, and Mike Pearson suggests that performance as cultural intervention *is* a form of heterotopia (2001: 28). In 'Of Other Spaces', Foucault offers a description of his term:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. (Foucault, 1996 [1967]: 24)

I am suggesting that the deeply known (because intensely performed), safe, utopian place of Caer Llan became a heterotopic place where the community felt able to 'simultaneously represent, contest and invert' (*sic*) itself. It was a place that was 'outside of all places', outside of the everyday and familiar places for the participants; it was a place where '[wo/]men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time' (*ibid.*: 26). Foucault refers to this last as a slice of time or a 'heterochrony'. Caer Llan could be perceived as this heterotopic and heterochronic counter-site, where participants were able to challenge: the memory of the community and its practice (see [Meal Metaphor](#)); the very nature of the work of the research community (see [Challenging the ideas](#) and [Problems of praxis](#)); the role, nature and function of the community members themselves. This latter is not directly evidenced in the video clips but there was considerable unrest in CL3 about perceived hierarchical positions (including my own). Some participants felt less valued than others, for example, and this resulted in a strained working atmosphere for some in CL3.

Whilst perhaps briefly uncomfortable at the time, what I am calling the heterotopic aspect of the Caer Llan community *could* be seen as a natural progression from the 'idyllic' community. Massey comes somewhere near this when she suggests 'multiplicity, antagonisms and contrasting temporalities are the stuff of all places' (Massey, 2005: 159) - and of the communities that are associated with those places, I would add. Was Caer Llan, as it was 'performed' by us, a sufficiently safe and known crucible for open, liminal challenges to the status quo? Where such challenges and fractures were partially resolved was, interestingly, in performance itself. In the Further Reading for 'Performing Place 1', I suggest reasons for the decision by the group to work together in the final piece of the Trilogy, [The Virtuous Well](#). One further reason was quite possibly to allow any fracturing that had taken place during the first days of CL3 to be 'healed' or soothed through the whole group performance. Here, performance had a function of community-reinforcement.

Two questions about community and the performance of place were suggested above. (*To what extent would the presence of an already existing expressive community impact upon the performance of place? How might the performance of place impact upon a community?*) These reflections only partially attempt to engage with these questions and open up a range of further points in addition. The group's shared histories, practices and performance narratives greatly facilitated immediate and communally understood experimentation with practices in the research project; this was clear. In that sense, the 'performance of place' was enhanced by the existence of the expressive community. In addressing the second question, the performance of place project led to an extension of the community's sense of

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self-worth and value, as can be seen in a number of the clips, but it also led to falters and fractures within the community (in CL3). In turn, these fractures did not seem to impact upon the experimentation of practice (in fact, quite the opposite) and, in a further adjunct, performance offered some form of community reparation towards the end of the Trilogy.