In Jan 2011, I was awarded a £127,000 AHRC research grant for a project called: Challenging concepts of 'liquid' place through performance practices in community contexts. Starting in May 2011, this first year is the least 'active'.

This research will investigate ways in which specific communities experience and relate to the concept of 'place' by testing models of performance practices, originally derived within research-based environments. While some in the academy claim we live in 'liquid times' (Bauman 2007) and in an age characterised by mobility (Cresswell, 2006), three case studies have been identified to test and challenge mainstream theories about place and the meaning of 'dislocation' in contemporary society. These community groups have been selected because of their different relationships to locality and migration although they share an element of social vulnerability. The models of performance practices will be designed to address and alleviate this vulnerability where possible. Following the practical research, the models of performance practice will be refined and rolled out for use to large numbers of community-related organisations through a symposium and web pages. The research will also lead to the dissemination of theories of performance, dislocation and place through academic fora.

Half Moon Theatre is on the borders of Tower Hamlets and Limehouse. A community-based theatre with roots back to Berkoff and others, we will be working with their youth theatre. Cyrff Ystwyth is a disabled and non-disabled adult dance-based company in Aberystwyth run by Margaret Ames. Their project has started. OTW is a youth and community organisation. We will be working with refugees in the area and alongside community cohesion agendas. I am taking into these projects a range of experience and 'discomforts' from previous research.

This session traces something of the backstory of my engagement with place and performance that have led to the current research project. Rather than a historical chronology, as a way of drawing patterns and connections in the work, I am drawing on the discomforts, the jolts, the unfortunate instances, the lacunae. I use – 'inoperables' and 'perfidy' for example, as ways into understanding the discomforts and suggest how these 'difficult bits', in fact, led to different insights.

So I'm structuring it around three themes, *leitmotifs* or threads, that are 'discomforting'. I'll briefly introduce projects as I get to them but they will include:

- *Drama, Landscape and Memory*, late 1990s-2000 (research around annual events at the Minack Theatre, Cornwall)
- *The Caer Llan Trilogy* 2002-2004, at a field studies centre on the Welsh borderlands
- *Feast* 2005 (ish) - a south London allotment project (LIFT)
- *Nest* 2007-8 – a primary school in Basildon (Sarah Cole)
- Environmentalism network in Cove Park, Scotland, 2010-11

(I may not have time to talk about *Nest* – chewing, biting off, more, than I – come to mind.) The three 'discomfort' themes are:
- The participant's role in the practice
- The inoperatives:
- Perfidies
In the abstract, I raised place's 'temporal layering'. I don't directly address this but it weaves its way through all three sections.

1. **The participant's role in the practice**

A Me in Dr, L'scape and Memory.
Central, undergraduates, performing at the Minack Theatre since 1994.
[SLIDE – The Minack then onto next link – for The Greek]
Let it roll.
It became a key moment in their undergraduate education and a much-loved memory of performing. I spent 2 years on qualitative, grounded theory research in the late 1990s trying to understand why it became so important. There were avenues I encountered in the theorising of this research including: Harvard academic David Pillemer's work on the privileging of private memories over those of public events. He looked in particular at key moments in student lives which was clearly relevant. It was Edward Casey's work on *Getting Back into Place* that moved me in a particular direction, together with for example, Schama's Landscape and Memory and on to the cultural geographers such as David Matless and Stephen Daniels. Casey's phenomenological philosophy was a strong influence however. In my first article in this area I argued for the creation of a 'place' outside the everyday, possibly as a counterpoint to an increasing nomadism arising from contemporary lifestyles in the affluent west (although I didn't know Deleuze's theories at that point – well, I still don't really). This ontological and material 'place' was created, I suggested, from the density of the experience including the focus on a successful theatre work with its associated moments of arenalin and enhanced emotion. (My MA, light years ago, had been on emotional cognition in arts education).

[SHOW article].

There are two embarrassments – discomforts - about this early work. First, I place the argument of the theatre work in site-specific – which was simply wrong. Second and this is relevant for the 'discomfort' – I didn't write myself into the article as fellow-participant. The piece makes claims for grounded research based on the response of the students and was based in a particular educational model of qualitative research. In fact, it would have had more value and even authority if I had adopted a subjectivity within the work.

This, then, is one of the discomforts in my research – the participant's role in practice and how one acknowledges, validates and interrogates this within 'platial' performance practices that – in my field of applied theatre - are themselves about examining how <u>other people</u> build relationships with place.

B
The Caer Llan Trilogy. [SLIDE Website image]
The CLT was established to experiment with the ideas and practices around the performance of place. How might one characterise it based on extensive practice? Situated in the 25 acres of Caer Llan Conference and Field Studies Centre, Monmouthshire, the CLT involved 60 practitioners at three intensive performance workshops of four or five days each over the August Bank Holidays of 2002 to 2004. Sixty-four people took part in the project across the three years with approximately thirty to thirty-five at each intensive. The research concentrated on the 'returners', those who repeated the experience. Aged between 21 and 40 and mostly applied theatre practitioners/drama educators, the majority had been students at some point since 1993 on the drama and applied theatre degrees at Central. The research made use of this commonality and mutual knowledges (of each other, working methods, interest in non-traditional theatre venues and so on).
Most of the core group had stayed at Caer Llan for ten days in 2000 as part of a tour of the Arthurian legend, *Merlin's Child* to borderland castles.

This research is documented on originally a DVD and now a website:
[Show link]

For the first two parts of the trilogy I made a similar mistake in terms of placing myself in the work – it was about facilitating others' work. In the first, six groups undertook a piece of devising which in fact, turned into site-specific work.

In the second I orchestrated a promenade performance focussing on disrupting and subverting the landscape. There is much else to say about this project which was has been the source for my later thinking about performing place.
For the purpose of this 'uncomfortable' talk, I'm concentrating on one thread - my own sense of 'distanced' participation. I planned the work, sett up the theories, delivered lectures, invited speakers, attempted to guide work as I flitted from piece to piece. It was only in the 3rd year that I found a way to join in – both by performing my own individual response [show?] and by directing a 'finale' piece with the core group. No audience. [Show].
This has led me to think quite deeply about the multiplicity of performing place which will always incorporate the facilitator, the auteur, the leader, the guide, the artist. This has emerged most strongly recently in two different contexts. In researching a project called *Nest* – in a primary school on Basildon with a number of artists leading the work, the particular focus I have taken is looking at the highly temporary role of the artists as place-dweller – as well as the effect of the work on the more resident school population. The article I'm finishing now is called *Cuckoos in the Nest* – it concerns the multiplicity of performing place.

C.This moves me the second of those two emergences of how we engage with place and the third example in this section of participant's role on practice. It's about the Environment network

Last year – 2010-11, I was on the steering group for an AHRC funded network on Environmental change. [Show slide.] Led by Stephen Bottoms, it engaged a number of academics and practitioners (and academic-practitioners) including PLATFORM, Baz Kershaw, Mike Pearson, Alan Read, Alan Reid, Phil Smith, Tony Jackson, Helen Nicholson, NVA, Fevered Sleep and Dead Good Guides. We were invited to think through the actual and potential relationships between site-specific performance and environmental change. At the outset, the term environmental change was intended to include, but not be limited to the question of climate change. Whilst not specifically about place, as the byline suggests from Massey there was plenty of overlap and – of course – you take your baggage along so I took my palatial baggage (joke about palatial baggage…)

As two members of the network steering group Dee Heddon and I offered to curate the second of three workshop weekends, choosing to locate this middle one in Scotland, home turf for Dee with a symposium at Glasgow University and a 30 hour practical stop over at Cove Park.
 - http://covepark.org/
Tour.
I talked about this at a conference in September and Dee and I have written it up for a long introductory article in an edition of *RiDE: the Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* to be published next year.

Where this maps into this theme of discomfort is in finding the 'grand narratives' of climate change difficult to address or interpret in our practice and turning to the participant as the key. By grand narratives, I'm referring to much-repeated polemics about the need to mitigate against climate change (the 2% shift in emissions and we are at tipping point so turn off lights, don't fly, etc – because we say this will happen). Rather than address the large scale issues in our practice on climate change at Cove Park (and we were between two nuclear bases – Faslane and Coulport), we turned in a different direction. This arose form the attention to the small, the personal and the detailed. [Steve's blog and flick down the pictures.] Adopting something of

Ranciere's thesis begun in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, I argued at TaPRA that we learnt more from treating our own knowledge and responses as educative rather than the big picture and the grander narratives. We argued that the work of Cove suggests an emancipatory environmentalism. In Rancière's model of learning (taken from the practice of nineteenth century pedagogue Joseph Jacotot), the teacher 'does not teach his pupils *his* knowledge, but orders them to venture into the forest of things and signs, to say what they have seen and what they think they have seen, to verify it and have it verified' (11). It is the participant knowledge that becomes the most useful and the most instructive – not the schoolmaster's or, if you like in this instance, the grand narrative polemic.

So here was another discomfort of performing place, albeit within a different context – environmentalism. We expected to be performing grander stories and many of us felt uncomfortable about the inclination away from the macro issue of climate change. Instead, almost all of us turned to the personal, the small and the participant's presence in that place. But that discomfort led to more interesting work and more interesting theorising – in this instance, a conceit for an emancipated environmentalist who is firmly located in performing their own portion of place – however temporary that may be,

I'm moving to the second theme but just to recap on what I'm doing here. I'm offering the backstory of a few years of research into performing place that's led to the current project. I'm doing this by pointing particularly to some of the difficulties or repetitive lacunae or puzzles that – looking back on it all for this talk – have prompted new ways of thinking. So, whilst they are discomforts, they have also shifted my own ideas and understandings. They've been wrinkles, gaps, uncomfortable thoughts that I've often tried to push to the back of my mind – but, as with so much research, it's been the wrinkles that have suggested shifts in thinking. Having identified moments where I've struggled with the participant's personal role in practice and how that has led me to consider ideas around the multiplicity of engagements with place and, even, emancipated environmentalists, I'm going onto the second theme.

2. The inoperatives of community.

Those who are familiar with the work of Jean-Luc Nancy will recognise my allusion here although I'm using the notion of inoperative playfully here.
Nancy implies that community is 'inoperative'. 'Community' presupposes it is human-made, constructed by or effected by humans. According to Nancy, however, this makes the term inoperative as a human is always already communing. 'Being with' equates to 'being'. He compares this to atoms saying that it is impossible 'to make a world with single atoms' and that there has to be 'an inclining from one toward the other' (*Ibid:* 3). So, too, with humans: existence is, in fact, co-existence. However, just as this negates community as a humanly contrived 'production', it does not mean that there is an organic, fused one-ness that is community instead. As Shane Phelan says of Nancy's point: 'Being-in-common means being with others, but being with others is the opposite of "being common".' (Phelan, 1984: 84). Nancy rejects such oneness.

[What is interesting in Buber's and Nancy's claims here is the implied rejection of the concept of the sovereign individual, the individual who is 'unencumbered and antecedently individuated … [and thus] prior to society' (Mulhall & Swift 1996, cited in *ibid*). The immanent communing of singular people (Nancy) and the impossibility of 'I' without 'Thou' together with the instinct for communion that is present in all children (Buber) is in clear opposition to the sovereign identity that exists autonomously and *then* facilitates and effects communities. There is no 'prior' existence that precedes the production of community. Both writers suggest a form of communion with others,

an innate co-existence that is fundamentally and axiomatically human and cannot be predated by the sovereign individual[1].]

I want to extend Nancy's notion of inoperative community – the being in common, the being with, Buber's I:Thou, and chart a journey in my own work which looks at the fragmentations of communities of place and how one might reconsider the inoperatives of community in a different way.

One of the expectations of community of place for me has been that performance practices in specific locations can facilitate a community of place – particularly in temporary locations. These communities are often profoundly felt rather than the almost quotidian 'being with' notion of community that Nancy and others imply. These are communities of place of 'profound encounter' as Mark Smith calls it or as Elizabeth Frazer said in 2003: 'will be both euphoric and fleeting' She adds '[T]he aspiration to community is an aspiration to a kind of connectedness that transcends the mundane and concrete tangle of social relationships.' If I were to embroider Nancy's 'inoperative' community after my own experience, I would look more closely at the moments where 'being with' *itself* becomes inoperable. This would have to be a complex argument and a good hard look at Nancy so for now, suffice to suggest, here, there might be additional ways of using the term inoperative when it come to communities of place.

I'm charting a brief journey to explain what I mean.

A Dr, Landscape and Memory
In this earlier work I was keen to suggest that one of the outcomes of 'getting back into place' – however temporary a place and period the Cornish experience comprised - was a fleeting experience of a dense community experience … and a positive one. I argued in the article that followed the work 'What is happening, it seems to me, is that the Minack project is becoming the physical and metaphysical site of a contrived cultural group. Collective memory is a feature of a shared culture. As with all cultures, some members remain at the edges. Others, for reasons of their own, grasp the very heart of the burgeoning culture and fiercely promote, guard, extend and care for it.' I was very interested in communities of place as moments of memorable cohesion.
Moving on to another example.
B *Feast*
To briefly introduce, *Feast* was curated by London International Festival of Theatre. [Slides] For over a year, artists worked with primary school children, staff and parents to create an event in an allotment (two connected allotments actually) in Rosendale, near Brixton in south London. Weekly sessions with a 'selected' group of children included art work as well as tending the growing crops. Events included a launch, a celebration of the equinoxes and the summer solstice. The final event was a feast for over 400 people over two nights on the grounds of the allotment. I argued for the rich and diverse activities of that event as contributing to a performance of place and allude to the fleeting sense of community that was part of the final performative event. As I said in an article on *feast,*

Implying a performance ontology reminiscent of Phelan's evanescent lack, mourning and rememberings, she [one of the 'visitors' – an allotment holder} acknowledged the uniqueness of the moment of the final event at the autumn equinox, of coming

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[1] In fact, it would be possible to argue *against* the use of the term communion as part of Nancy's 'being-in-common'. In the translation used, he says: 'A community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth – which amounts to saying that there is no community of immortal beings: one can imagine either a society or a communion of immortal beings, but not a community.' (Nancy, 1991: 15) This could imply that he reserves communion for metaphysics alone. However, I have elected not draw this point and prefer, instead, to suggest a *form* of communion as apparent within Nancy's thesis.

together on that site at that time, followed by 'dispersal'. She described the power of 'people being their own theatre' and the sense of being in something 'important' and 'unique', partly because of it 'passing away' so quickly. She spoke of the 'amazing transformation' of the walkways for the final event ('The lighted pathway up to the Feast area made it feel like walking into a fantasy space – more surreal because I know the path and plots so well') and that she felt 'terribly sad' the following day when she saw it dismantled.

She alluded to a fleeting moment of communality that inspired her to re-view, favourably, the site, its potential and its temporary dwellers.

C The *CLT*
In CLT 1 and 2 a pretty idyllic community of place seemed to exist, infused by memories and with the pleasure of rejoining each other. At CL 3, a picture of another community, one that is more fractured emerges. In the clip I am about to show, in a framed performative piece, Ben expresses concern about the dilution of the project (the community of people and the quality of the work undertaken) by the time we reached year 3. I may move this on a bit as you'll get the idea pretty quickly. [Show clip 29 – Meal metaphor] In another clip, Challenging the Ideas [not time to play it] participants oppose one of the key ideas for CL3, to re-locate the iconic red tablecloth away from Caer Llan. There were further interpersonal rifts that arose in the first two days of CL3 between participants who believed they were perceived as 'lower status' members of the community. This led to some fractious interactions and a muted working atmosphere on the third day.

These incidents exemplify a different community to a utopian-inflected consociation. The shared focus and unity of purpose that had been conspicuous in earlier parts of the CLT seemed to have dissipated. Ben appeared to have lost faith with the CLT, demonstrating a reluctance to tarnish earlier memories. James challenged new forms of experimentation. Other participants argued.

One way of interpreting these events, rather than seeing them as demonstrating a superficial community of place that had simply outgrown its profound encounters without a sturdy quotidian existence to fall back on, is to consider them as a 'natural' progression taking place within a community that may no longer be thought of as safe or idyllic but perhaps 'mature'. There is a case to be made for what occurred as a form of *liminal heterotopia,* rather than discard the temporary communities as superficial and as bauman might call them 'carnival'. At this point in the community's life, participants felt able to challenge, question, subvert, fall out and, eventually, re-form. It is quite possible that they felt more able to challenge *me* also, as my former role as tutor was increasingly distant. Another way of putting it is that for a community of place to succeed – however temporary a place – is to recognise inoperable periods. I can't unpick the 'liminal heterotopic' moments of a community of place fully here but will simply summarise by saying: As a conjunction of terms liminal heterotopic suggests: a counter-site; a space of difference (from everyday lives) and marginality; a heterochrony; a site of transgression, inversion and challenge; a rite of passage or passing.

CLT 3 made me uncomfortable at times. I found it challenging to begin with and I was upset by some of the fractious debates taking place. It was hard to de-personalise it – but this discomfort led me to reflect on communities of place as immanently comprising inoperable periods where 'being with' others and physically co-located (as at CL) demonstrates a liminal heterotopia.

   3. **Perfidies** –
One deceit – or perfidy - in the performance of place was in my assumption of a singularity, that place can be performed - once. Particularly in the CLT, It became

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clear that a key factor in 'performing place' is its repetition and rearticulation within that repetition. It's not – now, for me, - a once-off performance, a singular activity. A performance of place implies multiple performances. I'll use extracts from the CLT here to lead into what I mean.
[Show clip and explain over]

I began to use Derrida's term *sous rature* – that is 'under erasure' to think this through. *Sous rature* can contribute to a potential meaning of the worn and overused term palimpsest in theories of performance *and* place. Rather than palimpsest referring to something that is firmly layered or 'fixed', layers in a palimpsest might be considered to be permanently 'under erasure', in the same way that certain words are deemed to be fluid. Historical layers are present and not present; they filter into each other, bleed and overlap in an epigenetic process of change. Place does not comprise previous, tempo-historical events that exist only in the past; they continually interact with the present. Places are historically determined to some extent; yet past determinations impact upon a contemporary understanding of place. Similarly, the *performances* of place become a form of palimpsest where performances are permanently *under erasure* rather than erased and rewritten. They are still present and help determine a 'current' performance. I am referring to them still being present in the minds of the spectators particularly.

In the three performances shown – the traces of previous performances were important to those who had been at those previous events.

In all the research I've undertaken, this has been apparent – CLT, *Feast, Nest*, Cove Park and, of course – although I didn't articulate it at the time in the Minack work – the collected memories of that site.

In retrospect, it is possible to see a subtle process evolving. Instead of the explicit inclusion of past memories in prepared, rehearsed performances – which at one point I thought might be a characteristic of a performance of place -, it was the *re-use of sites* and the subsequent re-membering of the site that offered something far more substantial as a significant marker in the performance of place. Drawing on Derrida, I have argued that the trace of past performances in the present performance revitalises that past performance for the audience: the trace is a signature to the current event (1982: 307-330) that is reiterated and privileged through its reframed presence. Rather than ephemeral, fragments of performance at Caer Llan, these were, instead, transformed into iterations of some durability.

Those in the core group formed a composite sense of that place because of these new yet referencing old performances. [Talk about Eddie.]

Another discomfort then. I mentioned earlier my dissatisfaction with the site-specific performances of CL 1 and, alongside that discomfort was a determination to uncover what might be particular in performing place rather than site. It was only after the project of CLT was completed – that I realised one of the aspects of performing place was in this durability of previous performances. In *Feast*, the repeated performances throughout the year – from equinox to equinox – had a similar sense of building an affinity to that place. I haven't had time to discuss *Nest* but this was a 3-year arts project that allowed sites to be reperformed numerous times over.
So – I'm going to bring this to a close. This has been a personal history of performing place that has led to the current project. It has a nuancing of applied theatre throughout because of my own academic history – and that's very clearly present in the new projects. I chose to structure the talk around the discomforts of the process partly, I think, because there is a nice irony in that so often 'place' is associated with 'comfort' and security. I selected three themes or *Leitmotifs* to represent those discomforts, participant ethnography, the inoperatives of place and its perfidies. For the new research project, the intention is to take this knowledge and these practices

into the work – where discomforts have led to useful thinking and shits in understanding – but also recognising that, no doubt, a whole set of new discomforts will probably arise.

[If time to talk about the projects **[put Half Moon DVD on]** – mention the different take on place e.g. Cyrff Ystwyth, too emplaced; the riots in London for Half Moon youth; the refugee status in Oldham. Talk about where we are at – maybe show Adrian Jones' *Capel*. The intensive – and the challenges with the research intensive for example. **[Put DVD on.]**

Something like this work is also being undertaken by Canan Salih, a PhD student of mine and an arts practitioner in London. [Show the clip of Disgraceful Waste of Space].

Haven't mentioned e.g inhabitants as being key to the performance of place. Nor, too, performativity.