

Connected Communities

Imagining the Place of Home

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Background

Executive Summary

This scoping study and research review examines the relationship between how home and community are the product of powerful acts of imagining. It focuses on each of these terms and of their relationship to the imagination and to each other. In this way it seeks to understand each of the words “connected” and “communities” both separately and in relation to each other.

A central element of the project’s work was to organise two interdisciplinary workshops to develop and reflect on research parameters and findings. The Research Review document, our most substantial output, is comprised of an extensive bibliography which tracks and cites arts and humanities research on home, community and the imagination. It also, and importantly, includes close readings of key critical texts to deepen understandings of the categories we worked with. Finally, it develops a series of particular foci to give specific examples of the larger theoretical work it performs. We concentrate on the American revolution and its aftermath, and the events of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath, through which the relationship between home and community and the way that each has been imagined, is brought under great pressure.

Researchers and Project Partners

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Key words

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The following overview outlines each stage the project went through and how these led to the production of our major output, a 22,000 word Research Review mapping arts and humanities research on home and the imagination.

That document is available at www.leeds.ac.uk/imagininghome and should be read in conjunction with this shorter report. A crucial element to the way the project developed was through the two workshops which took place at the start and towards the end of its lifespan. These allowed us to consider the parameters for planned research and to reflect on our findings as well as areas of possible future research. In what follows we give a brief account of the evolution and development of the project before concluding with a set of recommendations for future research.

Our starting point was the claim that both home and community are constituted at least in part out of powerful acts of the imagination and that, furthermore, ideas of community are frequently underwritten by ideas of home. We wanted to develop a stronger idea of the extent to which the imagination and acts of imagining were central to each of these categories, which we also conceived of as modes of thinking or narration. Since the imagination is central to the arts and humanities, a focus on imagining allowed us to examine the ways in which the categories of home and community have been important within that discipline. Prior to the opening workshop the PI, CI and Project Researcher established protocols for its management with the specific intention of drawing together and learning from the different disciplinary affiliations of those involved.

Workshop 1, 7 March 2012

- 1. *Aims and Parameters*** A primary desire of the opening workshop was to make visible those assumptions that determine how we define home in order to expose the underlying methodologies of specific fields and disciplines. We examined the three terms held by the project's title and how they fit together, paying special attention to the ways in which the imagination and place converge to produce home as a meaningful idea. We asked how, on the one hand, the idea of home might be aspirational but, on the other, is subject to various forms of management – and often management generated by anxiety. At all points we remained cognizant of how home fits interstitially between different places/imaginings. A key aim of the workshop was to establish the parameters of the Research Review.
- 2. *Theorizing Home: Key Questions*** the workshop asked:
 - Where do we go to find the work we determine to be significant? And, what do we expect to find there?
 - Can we establish any key terms, or would categories be a better way of organizing findings?
 - Can we work across objects and not just across fields/disciplines?
 - The difficulty of making disciplinary distinctions when considering a topic which transgresses disciplines and, in fact, imbricates a range of fields from architecture, phenomenology, geography, history, psychology, cultural studies, etc., was discussed at length, leading to the following questions: i) to what extent can

these fields be separated and what is the value of doing so? ii) Is there a sense in which identifying separate modes of inquiry might remind of the benefits of discourse crossing over fields? iii) Can we talk about home as something that necessarily intersects the physical and the abstract? What are the consequences of this?

3. **Conclusions** the workshop came to the following conclusions which went on to help determine the shape of the Research Review:
- There is a profound interdependence of the competing ideas and influences discussed thus far that needs to be acknowledged and further examined.
 - Home might be thought of as a mode of thinking rather than an object, and nostalgia, affect, and material possession impact upon home as a narrative.
 - Home is an idea founded on the fiction or fantasy of privacy in the face of the inefficiency or instability of that concept.
 - Home seems a category at once too empty and too full, and something always defined in relation to something else. There is great critical value in thinking through the relationship between the affect of home versus its physical space and how that distinction is maintained or collapsed.
 - While looking historically at representations of the home is crucial, so too is determining the extent to which home has been, and is, determined as something always with an eye to the future – what it might be, rather than what it tangibly is.

Home, the Imagination, and the Creation of Community

The opening workshop allowed the project team to develop the early ideas that had governed the process of writing the funding bid. During the research conducted in the project's first half, key terms that were raised in the workshop and preliminary discussions were refined and made more concrete. The project's two primary conceptual strands – home and the act of imagining – were initially theorised discretely. The significance of home was examined in a range of fields including, most prominently, literary studies, phenomenology, architectural theory, material culture, cultural geography, psychology, and cultural studies. Increasingly, however, the project examined home and imagination as concurrent and mutually informative categories, synthesising existing work that uses those concepts in tandem while thinking through new ways they could be placed in dialogue within the context of community.

Crucially, the project structured its research in the first period with the aim of developing a theoretical basis for the intersection between home and imagination in order properly to conceive of the relationship between home and community. By focussing on home as the site of intersecting social practices and ideologies, the project established the necessary base better to understand the role home plays in the creation of community, whether community is conceived as a theoretical tool or as a lived reality.

Representations and Practice: Understanding Home

An important result of the opening workshop and of ensuing reflections upon it by the PI, CI, and PR was a deepened understanding of how home is conceived and understood through, on one hand, representation and, on the other, practical experience. The discussions across the course of the workshop and the reports produced subsequently revealed the variety of ways that home is conceived directly in relation to these two modes. This work led to the development of a variety of conceptual models through which we understand home to operate as either a driving force in lived experience and/ or as a goal of it.

Order and Logic

The way in which home becomes a motivation for the imagination, and the way in which home is the result of various rituals and social practices, are often mutually dependent. However, the project found benefit in distinguishing between these in order to identify the different ways in which home converges with the imaginative. A key unifying concept has been that of order. After the opening workshop, the project identified a variety of systems of order that are either ways of managing the idea of home or consequences of ordering, or both of these things. This in turn led to an understanding of the logic of home as an important conceptual tool for grouping various practices and representations, and recognising a common desire to produce or maintain order. The ideas that have been discussed in relation to this include social and cultural theories that reflect upon the policing of the physical space of home by interior and

exterior bodies. It has covered concepts of domestic tyrannies, machines of order, and archivability. These key phrases have focalised our ideas surrounding the specific ways in various contexts through which a convergence of rules or shared practices might reflect upon the individual home as a constituent in larger communities such as the national body.

The insights of material culture scholarship for the process of archiving home have provided a bridge between the motivations for, and results of, imagining home. The concept of the archive makes clear the various desires guiding the ways home is imagined; acts of making home a narrative forged out of physical objects lay bare the value apportioned to home even as they produce a tangible outcome of that desire. Recognising the profound interdependency of these practices and the imaginative acts guiding them has proven essential to our work.

Developing the logic of home has accommodated existing research into the work done by cultural studies and cultural geography relating to the idea of the mental map, which has been considered representative of the ways in which the social sciences have conceived of imaginative acts. This led to questions surrounding how we might think about the concept of the mental map not as an actual graphic representation, but rather as a model that is not systematically applied in a didactic manner. We asked if there was a workable phrase we could develop to describe the process by which home constitutes an affective nexus, while continuing to recognise (and even affirm) the fallacy of being able to comprehensively describe or circumscribe the full range of these affects.

By framing home as the crucial constituent in creating the concept of community, the project has focussed on identifying the kinds

of imaginative acts held by home. Our work has revealed the parity between order and logic as governing principles in conceiving, representing, and understanding home, and as essential ways of constructing community. By exploring the commonality between, and the interpenetrative effects of, order and logic in constituting both home and community, the project has underscored the mutual interdependence of these concepts.

Mid-project Conclusions

The tentative conclusion reached by the mid-project period – which provided the foundation for much of the subsequent research – is that imagining home is necessarily underwritten by a belief, and investment, in the value of that act. This conclusion affirmed our understanding of home as hugely significant and, although endlessly mutable, a fundamentally shared concept. Furthermore, the project’s research up to this point accounted for, and worked better to understand the ways that this sense of value not only determines the process of imagining home, but guaranteed the transformative role of home in terms of how community is experienced, how it is represented, and how it is understood. This understanding came in part at this stage from the research being undertaken for the Research Review which involved creating a series of bibliographies.

The Process of Creating the Bibliographies

The first stage of compiling the bibliography as it exists in the Research Review began immediately after the first workshop. All the key texts that were mentioned by participants

were put together into a Preliminary Bibliography. These texts reflected a variety of disciplines but together also represented the areas of expertise provided by those participants who supplied specific references. At this point the texts had a strong cultural geography and history-orientated presence.

In order to make the navigation of early bibliographic research easier, texts were then grouped under the following disciplines: philosophy; political theory; phenomenology; architectural theory; human geography; sociology; marketing studies and economics; psychology; history; feminist/gender studies; cultural studies; and literary studies (further sub-divided into indigenous studies, American studies, and general literary theory/studies).

Following the repeated discussions of literary and artistic representations in the workshop, a separate bibliography of primary texts, including literature, fine art, photography, and theatre and performance art was compiled. Other bibliographies were sourced and used. Still working on the same Preliminary Bibliography, systematic and comprehensive work on two sources; a special issue of the journal *Home Research* concerning home, and back issues of the journal *Home Cultures*.

During the next stage of bibliographic research, the Preliminary Bibliography was left to one side and systematic searching of databases was undertaken. A series of named journals was identified. Since the earlier stage of work had prioritised research in the disciplines of History and Geography, this stage moved to a focus on literary and cultural studies. Focussed keyword searches and a temporal frame of the last 15 years were used to produce a manageable bibliography.

By the point at which we held the concluding workshop, we had produced an extensive

annotated bibliography. It was circulated in advance of the workshop, along with reports of our findings to date, with the request for participants to read and reflect upon these documents and advise on how we might add value to their research findings.

Workshop 2, 27 June 2012

The discussion was largely comprised of an expansive consideration of the relationship between the project's completed work and future research initiatives. The debates that took place during the workshop were often interdependent, and frequently moved between reflections upon the wider significance of the research and how that research might enable and enhance public engagement activities.

Several suggestions were made by participants about the ways in which the Research Review's bibliographic portions might better exemplify the underlying methodological questions that had been discussed during the workshop. Following a general discussion about the ways in which the project has envisaged the role of literary texts as separate but crucial to the bibliographic parts of the Research Review, it was proposed that the bibliography include a section of close readings of literary texts considered as significant by the project team.

This would provide further weight to the bibliography while also clearly expound the value of literary studies. It would allow for a deeper exposition of the relationship between the key terms of the project's title by performing the methodologies central to imagining home, and facilitate a stronger sense of how these methodologies reveal home and community as interdependent

concepts. This and other recommendations were incorporated into the final stage of the preparation of the Research Review.

Outputs and Dissemination

- The PI attended the Creative Exchange national launch workshop, Manchester, 15-16 May 2012. The Creative Exchange is one of four Knowledge Exchange Hubs for the Creative Economy funded by the AHRC.
- The PR attended the Vitae Yorkshire and North-East Hub Public Engagement Conference and Competition on 8 May 2012, and submitted a poster based on research in progress to the competition component of the event.
- The PI and PR delivered a paper jointly written by the project team at the Domestic Methodologies Conference, 13 June 2012 (The Geffrye Museum of the Home, London). The team will send the completed article to a journal in due course.
- The project has been closely involved in the establishment of two Cross-Disciplinary Research Themes by the Leeds Humanities Research Institute in 2012-2014. These themes will lead various research activities across the institution, and the PI and CI were invited to submit their ideas based on the work of "Imagining the Place of Home".
- The PR attended the M&S Archive and University of Leeds Special Collections Study Visit, 23 March 2012, organised by the Histories of Home Subject Specialist Network.
- The project has strengthened connections with the Centre for Studies of Home and submitted a profile to their research register, which will allow other relevant

and interested parties to access details of the 'Imagining the Place of Home' via the Studies of Home website.

- The creation and maintenance of a website for the project is ongoing.

Recommendations for Future Research

The project contends that:

- the ways in which the conceptual creation of home and community might be best understood as complicit with the imaginative structures of the literary is an area that has not been fully explored
- the links between imagination and home as well as that between imagination and community need further research
- the ways in which imagining home is intrinsic to its creation and sustenance, and the relationship of such a process to imagining community/communities is a productive area for future work
- the relationship between broader cultural idea of home and imaginative work as represented by literary and cultural texts needs further research
- the extent to which home and community might each be the source of comfort, inclusion and liberation but also discomfort, exclusion and coercion is a productive area for future research.

We further argue that a focus on literary and cultural texts is an especially fertile field to examine many of the issues we raise above since the imagination is so central to the literary.

References and external links

The full Research Review can be found by following this link:

www.leeds.ac.uk/imagininghome



www.connectedcommunities.ac.uk