AHRC Beyond Text: Performances, Sounds, Images, Objects Programme

Research Programme

Specification October 2007

Version 1.0

Beyond Text: Performances, Sounds, Images, Objects

Executive Summary

The **Beyond Text** strategic programme was developed in 2007 following a period of consultation with the arts and humanities research communities which identified visual communication, sensory perception, orality and material culture as key concerns for 21st century scholarship and the wider community. It recognises that today's digital culture means that communication is more rapid and often more transitory than ever before; performances, sounds, images and objects circulate swiftly on a global scale only to be replaced by even newer versions. Who controls and manages this material and its dissemination is now a key political, economic and legal question. Yet these are not new problems but ones with long historical roots. **Beyond Text** will create a collaborative, multi-disciplinary research community to work with those outside Higher Education on these issues. The programme will help inform and inflect public policy relating to our cultural and creative heritages and futures; it can also, for example, help inform educational practice at a time when traditional notions of literacy are being challenged by advances in communication technology. The programme will also foster public understanding of the many oral/aural, material and visual forms in which creativity has been generated and used. Finally, in bringing together those who create works and those who preserve, display and study them, the programme will break down traditional boundaries between practice-led or practice-based research and other forms of investigation. The £5.5 million programme will run for 5 years until May 2012.

Programme Specification

In today's digital culture, communication is more rapid and often more transitory than ever before; performances, sounds, images and objects circulate swiftly on a global scale only to be replaced by even newer versions. Who controls and manages this material and its dissemination is now a key political, economic and legal question. Yet forms of non-textual communication and creativity have long been, and indeed remain, vital and widespread in many cultural contexts, and the visual, material and aural records of the past and present offer very different insights from those found in written documentation. This means that hierarchies which have conventionally prioritised the written word over other forms of production are being challenged from many different directions.

The programme centres on five thematic, interdisciplinary areas which take up these challenges: Making and Unmaking; Performance, Improvisation and Embodied Knowledge; Technology, Innovation and Tradition; Mediations; Transmission and Memory. Attending to the full range of sensory perceptions, these themes provide a framework to investigate the formation and transformations of performances, sounds, images, and objects in a wide field of social, historical, and geographical contexts, tracing their reception, assimilation and adaptation across temporal and cultural boundaries. By building on work that is already underway and developing new activities, the aim is to treat these phenomena as objects of inquiry in their own right and to engage in research involving processes and practices that go beyond those associated with the written word and other forms of inscription.

Emphasising both the past and the contemporary, **Beyond Text** will bring together an international, multi-disciplinary community to consider the processes of creating and communicating cultural values through sound and sight, recognising that these often depend for their continuation and realisation on a range of textual practices. Thus **Beyond Text** does not mean 'Without Text'. While the creation and interpretation of performances, sounds, images and objects on both special and every-day occasions is the central concern, their translation, mediation and recreation through text remains key to their investigation. This is an issue that is increasingly important with the rapid transformation of new forms of recording and digital dissemination. Because of these aims, **Beyond Text** is of interest to those within the arts and humanities in Higher Education Institutions but also to those responsible for making, monitoring, preserving and disseminating performances, sounds, images and objects elsewhere and in other contexts. Here, **Beyond Text** provides a key opportunity to build on the strengths of collaborative and interdisciplinary work in the arts and humanities to develop and support collaboration with non-academic stakeholders, and to develop new research techniques and outcomes.

Programme Aims and Objectives

The aim of the programme is to support a multi-disciplinary community of scholars and practitioners drawn from Higher Education, museums, galleries, libraries and archives, business, policy, media, technology and the law to explore how human communication is articulated through sound, sight and associated sensory perceptions in both the past and the present. It aims to enhance

connections between those who make and preserve works and those who study them, bridging divides that have often hampered effective scholarship, policy debates and discussion. It aims to have outputs which generate new questions and research and to provide a platform for future investigations. In doing so, it aims to be deliberately international and comparative in order to encourage innovative forms of research.

By the end of the five-year period, The **Beyond Text** programme will have:

1. Stimulated high-quality research in the thematic areas, and in response to the research questions posed by the **Beyond Text** programme which will both draw on a wide range of disciplinary resources and skills and encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, in and beyond Higher Education Institutions.

2. Made distinctive contributions to the theoretical, conceptual, thematic, practice-led and empirical study of these areas.

3. Created an arena for shared debate both within and beyond the academic community on how to use evidence, approaches and methods to generate new questions and issues for those working with performances, sounds, images and objects.

4. Developed a body of theory, methods, approaches and case studies which allow for a comparative analysis of issues concerning these questions and themes across time and place.

5. Facilitated connections, communication and exchange – at both project and programme levels – between researchers and a wide range of individuals and organisations outside academia with an interest in the research and its outcomes, including but not limited to those in the ICT, public policy, legal, creative and cultural sectors, museums, galleries, libraries and archives, performance spaces and the media. These connections will be international as well as British in scope.

6. Contributed to public awareness of this research through programme and project-based outputs and events.

7. Generated research findings and outcomes of international significance, and disseminated them to an international audience both within and beyond academia.

8. Developed a vibrant research community whose activities will continue beyond the life of the **Beyond Text** programme.

9. Built capacity in this field, in part by supporting early career researchers and postgraduate students.

10. Informed and inflected public policy in this field.

The programme as a whole will meet these objectives with contributions from individual projects and leadership from the programme director. Projects are expected to help in achieving the above, but are not expected to deliver all of the programme's objectives.

How do we define what is 'Beyond Text'?

The term **'Beyond Text'** is deliberately broad and designed to encourage innovative research that will address key issues of sensory communication across time and place. This includes all forms of aural, oral, visual, material and performative practices. At the same time, there is an awareness that the very concept of text itself is geographically and historically contingent and will vary according to disciplinary domains; as stressed above, **Beyond Text** does not mean 'Without Text.' For those working on the past, even the very recent past, evidence will have been selected, recorded and annotated, often using writing, notation or other forms of inscription. Such texts will often act as a filter for cultural knowledge and practice. We expect an attention to the tensions, ambiguities and interactions that occur during these mediations, and the ways in which non-textual material sit alongside other forms of recording to lead to some of the most interesting aspects of the programme's research.

Contributing disciplines and collaboration

The programme themes listed in the Annex are intended to attract researchers across the full range of arts and humanities disciplines covered by the AHRC, potentially in association with colleagues from other disciplines including the

social, psychological, computing and medical sciences. We expect to fund a range of diverse methodologies and approaches: empirical, theoretical and research where practice is integral will all be supported. Different disciplines and practices will contribute a range of resources, skills and knowledge to what will be a broad project that emphasises both historical depth as well as the contemporary and which is intended to be international in scope at programme and, where appropriate, project levels. We expect the final results to reflect the distinctive nature of this programme and welcome outputs in a wide range of media.

There is already considerable work underway in many of the thematic areas described below and the programme will create links with related research groups in order to seek out and develop new collaborative possibilities. Efforts will be made to connect the programme with other research centres and programmes funded either wholly or partly by the AHRC (such as the 'Diasporas, Migration and Identities', 'Landscape and Environment' , 'Designing for the 21st Century' and 'Science and Heritage' programmes and the AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice) or by other Research Councils and charitable foundations. Public bodies, voluntary and community agencies, private companies, performance and artists (by artists, we are referring to visual artists, performers, musicians, creative writers, poets and other producers of original creative work), and individuals with an interest and stake in the research and its outcomes will be involved at both programme and, where appropriate, project and network levels. The director of the programme will provide a lead in forging connections between UK-based researchers and their international counterparts. A database of researchers and others interested in the programme will be developed. They will be kept informed of progress, events, and connections to other programmes, relevant funding opportunities, and future developments. A website will be launched with regular updates.

Programme Timetable and Schemes

Beyond Text has been two years in development. A broad consultation with the arts and humanities communities concerning strategic priorities was held in early 2005. Over 140 ideas for new strategic initiatives were submitted, including themes such as 'the transition from print to visual culture', 'memory, culture and museums', and 'the uses of non-textual culture'. The AHRC's Strategic Advisory Group considered the full range of themes submitted and short-listed six. One of these was 'Non-Textual Cultures'. This theme was developed further and Council

approved funding for 'Beyond Text' in December 2005. An outline consultation framework was developed between 2005 and 2007. Two consultative workshops followed over the spring and summer of 2007 and a call for further input took place on the AHRC website. The Programme Specification was agreed by the steering committee in autumn 2007.

The £5.5 million programme will run for 5 years until May 2012 under the oversight and management of the programme director and a steering committee. The programme will be commissioned in two phases. The first call for applications for Networks and Workshops, Collaborative Doctoral Awards and Large Grants will be issued in October 2007. A second call will be issued in early 2009 for Small Grants. In addition, there may be support available for post-graduate led conferences from 2008. All applications will be peer-reviewed and specially convened panels will make the final funding decisions. In addition to specific research projects, workshops and networks, and studentships, the programme will also support its own networking events, open forums for discussion and postgraduate student conferences. An interactive website will be developed to publicise information about these, to feature projects, to make connections, and to disseminate research.

Support for research in the first phase will be provided through three schemes:

- Research Networks and Workshops
- Large Research Grants
- Collaborative Doctoral Awards

The second phase will be provided through:
- Small Research Grants

The arrangements outlined in the AHRC's Memoranda of Understanding with the National Science Council of Taiwan and Korean Research Foundation (KRF) apply for applications under this programme.

Research Networks and Workshops will support successful applicants to run *either* a series of workshops over 1 year (up to £15,000 fEC), *or* a network of researchers over 2 years (up to £30,000 fEC) to enable researchers to share ideas, to develop collaborative proposals or publications, and to support engagement between scholars in the UK and beyond, and between scholars and

other stakeholders. Proposals - with full economic costs of up to £30,000 for workshops or £60,000 for networks - that seek to develop partnerships with colleagues outside the UK from areas targeted in the AHRC's International Strategy will also be eligible. It is expected that about 16 grants will be awarded under this scheme and the closing date for this call is 24th January 2008.

Large Research Grants (for between £100,000 and £600,000 fEC) will support about 9 projects with a duration of between 1 and 3 years. Applications for 3-year grants may propose a single studentship in association with the project. The competition will be conducted in 2 stages: first, an outline phase, followed by a request for full applications from short-listed candidates. The closing date for outline applications is: 14th February 2008 with the subsequent closing date for full applications on 26th June 2008.

Collaborative Research Studentships will encourage and develop collaboration between Higher Education Institution (HEI) departments and non-academic bodies under the **Beyond Text** programme. These studentships will provide opportunities for PhD students to gain first-hand experience of work outside an academic environment. It is expected that about 5 grants will be awarded for 3-year, full-time awards that will commence in October 2008. The closing date for this call is 17th January 2008.

Small Research Grants (for between £20,000 and £150,000 fEC) will support projects from less as well as more established scholars, and from those wishing to undertake small-scale innovative or short projects of up to 18 months. It is expected that about 10 of these grants will be awarded in the second phase of funding. The closing date for this call will be announced in late 2008.

Programme Planning, Management and Evaluation

The Director of the programme is Professor Evelyn Welch from the School of English and Drama, Queen Mary, University of London. She is supported by a steering committee comprising academics from a range of arts and humanities disciplines and other stakeholders. With their help, and that of a part-time programme administrator, Professor Welch will oversee the running of the programme, develop its coherence, ensure that it meets its objectives, contribute to its dissemination, maximise its wider impact, and report annually on its work.

As part of its responsibilities, the steering committee will monitor the programme (individual projects will also be evaluated using normal AHRC processes). Its members will receive annual reports and the final programme report and will ensure that the objectives of the programme as stated in this specification are met. They will advise the Director and the AHRC on the development and management of the programme.

The programme's focus on matters of common interest provides potential for linkage. It offers opportunities for mutual reflection on issues or findings, and the added value that comes from researchers and research teams meeting to extend their thinking and ambition beyond individual project boundaries. To these ends, grant-holders will be expected to attend regular workshops at which they will share and discuss their research, to submit annual reports which will contribute to the annual programme report and to regularly provide material and links as requested for the website as well as participating in a final series of events scheduled to take place in 2012. To ensure co-ordination within the programme, the director will support exchanges between researchers on different projects. Existing AHRC award-holders working on relevant projects may also be invited to participate in programme events and to contribute to the website during the life-time of the programme. It is expected that the outputs that are generated by the projects will take a very diverse range of formats from print and e-publications to exhibitions and performances (both live and virtual) as well as through other media. These will be cross-linked where appropriate to make the programme's interconnections visible to a wider audience.

Non-academics, particularly from the ICT, creative, cultural and media sectors will be involved in the programme through participation in the projects supported and programme events, and representation on the programme steering committee. The involvement of colleagues from outside Higher Education will be vital in terms of fully understanding and providing access to the communities and individuals involved in the creative research supported and disseminated by the programme.

It is through activities such as those outlined above that the coherence of the programme and its impact will be assured. In addition, monitoring and evaluating the volume, level and quality of activity (e.g. of conferences, workshops, lectures, media and electronic output, exhibitions, publications, creative work and performances, and other opportunities) will demonstrate the value added by the programme and its contributing projects to public knowledge

and understanding. Moreover, it is anticipated that capacity building in the study of the issues raised by the **Beyond Text** programme will contribute to the sustainability of programme activities. The legacy of the programme – the extent to which issues continue to be discussed and researched within the arts and humanities beyond its lifetime- will also be a mark of its success. A full evaluation of the programme will be conducted by the AHRC up to two years after it has concluded.

Enquiries about the scholarly content, aims and themes of the **Beyond Text** programme should be directed to Professor Evelyn Welch at the contact address below:

Professor Evelyn Welch
School of English and Drama
Queen Mary, University of London
Mile End Road, London E1 4NS
E.Welch@qmul.ac.uk

Enquiries about the application procedures, competitions and timetables, application forms and application process should be directed to one of the AHRC officers as detailed below:

Research Awards Officers

Patrick Lansley	e-mail: p.lansley@ahrc.ac.uk	Tel: 0117 987 6663
Julie Warrington	e-mail: j.warrington@ahrc.ac.uk	Tel: 0117 987 677
Dylan Law	e-mail: d.law@ahrc.ac.uk	Tel: 0117 987 6682
Katie Baldock	e-mail: k.baldock@ahrc.ac.uk	Tel: 0117 987 6578

Senior Awards Officer

| Katherine Barkwith | e-mail: k.barkwith@ahrc.ac.uk | Tel: 0117 987 6679 |

Programme Manager

| Anne Sofield | e-mail: a.sofield@ahrc.ac.uk | Tel: 0117 987 6674 |

ANNEX

The **Beyond Text** programme is structured around five themes which raise a range of research questions where comparative work can play an important role. Underpinning these themes is a set of broad research questions which are intended to guide inquiry rather than to prescribe individual research topic*s.* These are:

- How might we better understand the diversity of oral, aural, visual, material and performative practices in both the past and present when these are often communicated without written explanation or in transitory form?

- How is knowledge and cultural value created and transmitted over time and place when it is not deliberately recorded for posterity? How does the process of recording or interpreting this material in textual form change knowledge and cultural values?

- What are the political, economic and social conditions, past and present, under which some forms of visual and oral communication, performances and objects are encouraged and preserved while others are suppressed, ignored or destroyed? What are the ethical considerations, stated or tacit, that lie behind these decisions?

- What are the frameworks, past and present, that determine the concept of ownership and cultural rights over sounds, performances, images and objects? How has the rapid development of virtual and digital media challenged these concepts?

- What intellectual, educational, legal and cultural traditions shape (or possibly limit) the current study of performances, sounds, images and objects and how might richer and more reflective scholarship in this area be developed?

- How might we better understand and evaluate the ways in which the performances, sounds, images and objects of our pasts and present can be captured and disseminated for future study?

- How can communities that make creative works and those who study these endeavours come together to work effectively and innovatively? Can the dominant distinctions between creators and researchers be dissolved in the interests of understanding and innovative production?

- What are the new challenges and opportunities presented by an increasingly globalised digital culture and what are the possible responses? How can we harness advances in interactivity, visualisation, simulation and new forms of participatory media to the widest possible benefit?

Successful projects will be expected to address one or more of the themes, but the questions listed below are intended to be examples of potential inquiry and areas for debate rather than to prescribe individual research topics.

1. Making and Unmaking

This theme marks an important shift from studying the finished object to investigating the processes through which things are either generated, changed, dissolved or destroyed. This involves issues of power and authority as well as questions of creativity.

- *Interpretation and investigation of the process of making:* What is the status of the artefact or performance as a made (or ready-made) object or artistic experience? What are the relations between processes and technologies of design, construction and use, objects and artworks, objects and performances? How can we study things by making them? How does making affect knowing? What are the roles of play and iteration in the making and unmaking of cultural expression? How does and did drawing operate as a cross-media process of observing, thinking and writing? What is the difference between thinking-while-drawing and thinking-while-writing?

- *Loss and preservation:* Who decides when something is complete and when it is worth preserving in a specific state? Who decides what is authentic? How do different bodies, physical or virtual, interpret performance and what changes and losses result from these interpretations? Is conservation beneficial or harmful to a changing understanding of creative practices? How is loss experienced in the decay or destruction of a monument or archive? What are the needs for

preservation and long-term maintenance of multimedia and other digital elements? Do we lose performances forever if they are never recreated? Are objects silenced or rendered meaningless through loss of knowledge about their significance and use? What are the ethical issues involved in these decisions?

- *Reception and the making of meaning:* How does the making of things affect the ways they are received, used and understood? What happens to things after they are said to have been finished? What is the difference between 'reading' things, and reading texts, for their meanings, and for the intentions and actions of their makers or authors?

2. Performance, Improvisation and Embodied Knowledge

This theme emphasises the multi-media concept of the performative and the spectacular; questions of improvisation and its relation to a script; and the issues of sensory, tacit forms of knowing and their transmission in a range of cultural practices and technologies. It looks at how education and the passing on of knowledge occur without textual transmission. It also considers the politics of performance. Who controls performances and what acts of resistance or subversion are possible in different social and cultural contexts?

- *Performance and sensory knowledge*: How is, and was, sensory knowledge performed and what knowledge is, and was, created as a result of performance? In what ways are crafted objects part of networks of knowledge and learning across space, time and culture? How can the synaesthetic or cross-modal transfer of sensory knowledge help to build understanding?

- *Script and/or improvisation:* Whether special events or part of the 'every-day', do performances and spectacles follow a script, and if so, how was, or might this script be written? What is the relation of improvisation to performance and score? How do we address the limitations of textual notation and what happens when the script is subverted by participants?

- *Learning beyond text:* How is the knowledge of improvisational practice passed across time and place? How are (and were) the senses trained, and how are they involved in training? What different kinds of knowledge do

they yield? How do political and social groups use both special and everyday performances to create collective identities and shared beliefs in both the past and the present? How can approaches which go 'beyond text' contribute to inclusion, particularly digital inclusion, by involving groups which do not usually use the written word?

3. Technology, Innovation and Tradition

New materials, instruments, systems of production, distribution and reception have all had an important impact on our understanding of creativity and its development. But while recent technological advances have ostensibly transformed global communications, linking peoples of different economic circumstances, political systems, and geographical location, how much has really shifted in terms of reception, social networks and the trust and value placed in communication? What can we learn from cultural practices in earlier technological eras?

- *Innovation and its impact:* What is the impact of innovation on the history of performance and cultural practices? How might new technologies recover or change practice? Do we see and hear differently because of the technology that is available to us? How geographically, politically and socially contingent are our experiences of visual and oral technology? What ethical implications arise because of this? Does an understanding of technological change in the past help us to understand the implications of the fast-moving shifts that we are facing today?

- *Technology and trust:* What is the impact of visual and auditory technologies, past and present, on social and political relationships? How does the legal context for this changing technological environment impact on what can be disseminated and by whom? What challenges are posed, and have been posed in the past, to notions of copyright and intellectual property by concepts of public ownership or open access? How is trust in images, sounds and objects generated in different cultural and historical contexts undergoing technological change?

4. Mediations

The dichotomies posed by the traditional contrasts between 'text and image', 'notation and music', 'script and performance' suggest unhelpful divides. This

theme goes beyond binary divisions to look at mediated relationships which may include text but could also concern the interaction between images and sounds, images and objects, or sounds and objects. These relationships may be both enabled and constrained by the material forms in which they are communicated and increasingly by the developments in technology and the management and the legal environment that shape their potential for distribution and redistribution.

- *Image, inscription and understanding:* If the comprehension, evaluation and further articulation of images and objects cannot be entirely dissociated from written texts, what are these inter-relationships and how are they expressed? What is the difference between the viewing experience of reading words and of looking at other images, objects, and performances? How have images and other non-textual embodiments allowed us to interpret and contest texts? How has this changed over time and place and what implications might this have for multi-media experiences today?

- *Notation, description and instruction:* When does description become notation? What knowledge is created as a result of musical or theatrical performance? How is it transmitted? How are notational systems used to execute activities? How is knowledge generation enhanced by bringing in other forms of notation than the written word? How do we address the limitations of textual notation? What creative potential lies within notation?

- *Object and description:* How is the full sensory experience of a performance or object including taste, smell and touch, preserved for posterity? How can these experiences be described and in what ways might the possibly tacit know-how of makers be transformed through its descriptive explication? How might this depend on whether the explication is textual or other-than-textual?

5. Transmission and Memory

Written texts have been, and are, crucial to the processes of social memory and to the transmission of knowledge across generations and between societies. Yet other media and forms have played an equally important and often neglected role. This theme focuses on the work of memory in terms of objects, oral cultures

and performance, and the ways in which it brings about transmission across time and space.

- *Memory and the senses*: How does transmission work when it is multi-sensory, and what is the role of the senses in processes of knowing and remembering across time and place? How do we capture the sensory experiences of the past and what does this mean in terms of cultural memory and identity? How does this relate to immigrant, national and trans-national cultures?

- *Memory and witnessing*: What is the status of witnessing as opposed to notation? How does this bear on oral testimony and oral history in the context of legal and historical research? How reliable is oral or visual evidence considered to be, relative to that of textual documents and why? How do we study secrets, rumour, gossip and other transitory forms of communication? How is memory silenced and by whom?

- *Memory and loss*: What happens when memory fails, when transmission of oral, aural and gestural traditions does not occur and when knowledge is lost? What happens when language is lost and what are the ethics of its preservation? Can different modes of transmission (in the past or present) be in tension with or work against one another? How should we account for the emergence of post-literate communities in relation to texting, signing, and new linguistic groups that possess a significant oral culture?