SENSE(S) OF PLACE
New Media, Cultural Heritage, and Place-Making

Panel Discussion
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PANEL SYNOPSIS

What is place, and how can new media technologies put place at the heart of cultural heritage? The topic of the panel discussion could not be more ambitious and controversial. Still, it is fascinating.

The aim of the panel is to explore and debate the different, sometimes competing perspectives on the design practices, methodologies, and technologies that can bring a sense of place in the preservation and appreciation of cultural heritage. Place is a common research topic for many of the speakers and delegates. The panel will discuss emerging issues related to place, raised during the two-day conference, and encourage members of the audience to reflect on their own practices and actively participate in the discussion.

The discussion will cover issues ranging from how we can recreate a sense of place within technological environments to how new media can help us to technologically augment people's different engagements with particular spaces and territories. These issues entail questions concerning the creative relationship between actual artifacts and virtual dimension, tangible and intangible cultural objects, and our sense of past, present, and future as well. More concretely, they raise debate about who has the capability of producing content and what this content has to be, who is in charge of creating context, and whether the latter is a matter of information architectures, augmented reality, experiential settings, or temporal boundaries of engagement and storytelling.

The topics addressed will include: virtual environments (VEs), mixed reality environments, locative technologies, cross-media, technological augmentation of public space, and design models for place-making and sense-making.

Elisa Giaccardi
Yehuda Kalay
DESCRIPTIVE THEORY DOES NOT BUILD PLACE

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New media, virtual heritage, cultural heritage, and “place” are all hotly contested concepts, of interest to many different fields. They have in a common a slippery definitional outline, a part to play in fiery interdisciplinary debates, and pose many difficulties for those people attempting to create a prescriptive as well as descriptive theory that explains and employs them effectively.

With real world cultural heritage projects, one must consider actual problems of preserving the present, while allowing people to in some way understand the past. According to constructivist and constructionist theories, the best way of creating understanding for people of different learning abilities and interests, is to allow them to interact with the object in question. Virtual heritage, for all its difficulties, can augment and afford experiential understanding via interaction in a way not always directly accessible through present day cultural sites. It may sound flippant, but *place* can actually get in the way of cultural understanding for both the public and for archaeologists. For what survives may not always be accurate, authentic, or revealing.

On the other hand, many critics have argued that virtual environments lack a sense of place. In trying to answer these critics, the danger lurks that in attempting to create a sense of place, we convince the public of a hypothetically constructed past. With technology currently used by many VR centres, stereovision and head mounted displays; wide screen displays, navigation and commentary provided by a resident expert, such issues might appear resolvable. I disagree.

Virtual heritage environments typically encounter issues of meaningful interaction, authenticity, accessibility, maintenance growth and emergence of evaluation-friendly visitor learning, cultural understanding of inhabitant values and beliefs, and of course the ethical issues of site ownership, management and identity. I fully admit that many in the virtual heritage community may need to revisit heritage studies to see how real world places have attempted to answer similar issues.

My suggestion is that new media (i.e. small n and m) technology offers more accessible, user friendly, and innovative ways of capturing and
expressing place *qualia* to current generations. New media has challenged Presence research to study not just response to virtual environments, but also virtual environments with suitable content. The artistic expansion of new media in terms of enhanced sensory input and output, may help virtual reality break free of the mouse and the screen as the constraints of digitally based work.

New media has started to separate data from platform, which may eventually also help port VR to the wider public. New media has addressed consumer demand for personalisation, social sharing, and identity, in entertainment media. Virtual heritage, by contrast, has been slow to address audience and user issues. New media, through its holes, hacks, and add ons, has also helped foster a community-based network of developers who are helping create open source projects. Virtual heritage needs to utilise such technology so that the training of designers and owner-operators can help distribute and manage the content.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Erik M. Champion currently teaches interactive multimedia and games design in the Information Environments program at the School of IT, University of Queensland, Australia. He previously worked as lecturer at Swinburne University of Technology in Multimedia and User Experience Design. He has also worked in the IT industry, for DEC, Compaq, and Hansen. Erik also has a Masters in philosophy and a Masters in architectural history and theory, with publications in aesthetics, architectural theory, Nordic architectural history, and theories of the sublime.

DIGITAL PLACE-MAKING—TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DESIGN OF BOTH CONTEXT AND CONTENT

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The concept of virtual environment represents a revolution in cyberspace design transforming it from a means of communication to an environment that affords a variety of online activities. This transformation has stimulated a new approach to the design of VEs: the import of the place model into VEs.

The essential function of any environment is to offer both content (activity) and context (physical & socio-cultural setting/space) for the embodiment of individuals who engage in the activity. It is like in a theatre, the stage-setting, the actors and the audience, the performance, together make a theatre “place”. These components are interwoven interactively with one another in terms of generating changes in one another’s components and characteristics, and these interactions cause a series of emotional, cognitive and practical place products to be engendered, as in the sense of place. Content, in particular, plays a key role in making a place, because they provide a reason and a purpose for being there. Therefore place-making is more than the creation of a container: a setting or a space.

Place-making, when considered as the configuration of the relationship between context and content, varies by medium. In architecture, content is usually pre-defend (such as by the client, the society, the legal code, etc.) and implied or suggested through the design of physical context, rather than defined explicitly. In cinema, filmmakers start from and concentrate on storyboard: activities play a dominant and active role, while settings are viewed only as a passive background.

The case of designing virtual environments (VEs), however, is different from design in both physical architecture and film. The design of VEs resembles, metaphorically, landing on a vast, new, unoccupied continent. The newcomers have no predefined socio-cultural practices to follow, and do not know what to do there or how to behave. To achieve some sense of coherence (i.e., make a place that can support social activities), VE designers must not only design the context, but also assume at least partial responsibility for designing the content.
However, many of the VE designers do not realize the difference between media, thus they spend much time working as a “digital” architect on the creation of virtual “brick and mortar” settings, and cause many ‘dead’ containers, devoid of live content. Guided by this working philosophy, a virtual heritage site may have no significant difference from a lifeless physical model, which is far from UNESCO’s idea that a heritage is the integration of both tangible and intangible heritage.

Therefore, designing VEs is, in this respect, closer to the activity of filmmakers than to the activity of architects. Yet, unlike passive movie audiences, the users of VEs are active participants in the action, much like the users of physical environments. Hence, the design of a VE is a unique task, which combines the traits of both architects and filmmakers, a fact that has often been overlooked by designers of VEs.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Xiaolei Lily Chen is currently a PhD candidate in Dept. of Architecture, University of California at Berkeley. She has a master’s degree and bachelor’s degree in Architecture from Southeast University of China and had worked as an architect in Jiangsu Provincial Architectural Design & Research Institute for years. She got several design awards during her architectural practice in China. Her research interests include sense of place and architectural design, the impact of social and cultural factors to architectural design, place-making in digital environments, and the use of media technology for storytelling in architecture.
A METADESIGN PERSPECTIVE ON PLACE-MAKING

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Place is a relational horizon. As such, it cannot be engineered. However, new media allow us to explore new ways for engaging with the people, stories, interpretations, and values that pertain to a specific environmental setting. Bringing or strengthening a sense of place in either geographic or distributed communities means creating interaction spaces capable of sustaining this engagement. In this regard, designers can play imaginative roles, thus combining the technical and the poetic. From the perspective of metadesign, which is focused on the creation and nurture of sustained participative mechanisms, the task is to sustain the whole “repertoire” of knowledge and social relations that are responsible for the creation, communication, and renewal of our sense of place. This is possible only when we give people active and constructive roles, and we engage them in looking at each other’s experiences, in connecting with each other’s feelings, and in building insights that may lead to new meanings and new relationships.

Collective storytelling plays a critical role in supporting such a situated, reflective, and narrative mode of production and interpretation of place. I argue that to enable collective storytelling and achieve this mode of production, we need to combine media, technologies, and social practices in a process comprising collection (users must be able to capture their experience as connected to specific environmental settings and produce content); narration (users must be able to reflect upon their experiences and express these reflections by unfolding and reacting to the data collected); and interpretation (as instantiated by the dialectics between “knowing” and “seeing”). It is a participative mechanism, combining experience and imagination, which must be activated, sustained, and regulated over long periods of time by the synergy of different players and in the context of new working relationships.

The creation of affective geographies based on locative technologies and collaborative mapping; the combined use of different media and spaces (the old media, the web, the wi-fi plane, the public space, etc.); and the design of social software applications are promising tools in support of place-making, for which examples may be provided.
My argument is that information and communication technologies are not merely tools for processing data and making it available, but can constitute a creative force and stimulus for community development and cultural intervention. From a metadesign perspective, the topic of new heritage is therefore crucial, and represents the locus of our sense of place: what is worthwhile to be revealed, preserved, and communicated, in that it expresses our shared values and (hi)stories.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Elisa Giaccardi (moderator, panel organizer) is a Research Associate at the Center for LifeLong Learning & Design (L3D), University of Colorado, Boulder. She holds a PhD in Interactive Arts from the University of Plymouth, UK (Planetary Collegium, ex CAiiA-STAR). Prior to her academic position at the University of Colorado, she was Head of New Media at Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, Turin, Italy—a non-profit organization for research, training, and documentation on art, culture, and media management, economics, and policies. Elisa Giaccardi’s background brings together humanities, media, and design. She combines academic and professional activities in new media art, interaction design, and cultural management with a strong interest in metadesign, new heritage, and affective geographies. Her transdisciplinary research in metadesign was awarded the European grant “Ideas for the Future” by Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei in 2001. She has lectured and published her work in leading scholarly journals and at international conferences, and she is a member of advisory boards and technical committees for the European Academy of Design, ACM, and MIT Press.
MAKING PLACES IN CYBERSPACE

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The advent of computers and computer-based telecommunication has opened up new opportunities to inhabit a different kind of space—the Information space. Unlike the telephone network, Cyberspace has quickly become more that just another means of communication: it has become a destination in and of itself. People shop ‘there,’ are entertained ‘there,’ and get educated ‘there.’ To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, “There is a There There,” even if it can only be experienced through the mediation of computers. Cyberspace is thus quickly becoming an alternative kind of space where everyday economic, cultural, educational, and other human activities ‘take place.’

People, however, do not simply occupy space. They occupy place. Space is only one key ingredient of place: the other key ingredients are the people themselves, and the activities they perform there. This triad makes it possible to think of Cyberspace as a potential locus of human activities, because even though one of the key ingredients is very different from its physical counterpart, the other two may not be different.

Making places for human inhabitation is what architects and other environmental design professionals have been doing in physical space for thousands of years. Cyberspace designers have, however, largely adopted the ‘document metaphor,’ rather than place-making principles, to guide their designs of the new space. As the web matures, and as it assumes more fully its role as a place rather than as means of communication, there will be a growing need and opportunity to design it according to place-making principles rather than document-making ones.

But Cyberspace lacks materiality, is free from physical constraints, and can only be ‘inhabited’ by proxy. What modifications are needed allow the use of Cyberspace as a place? Which aspects of physical design can be used to organize the information space into meaningful places? For which activities? Which ones cannot? I argue that Cyber-places can be designed to afford social interaction that embody and express cultural values, much like physical places do, but they will not necessarily resemble their physical counterparts.
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Yehuda Kalay (panel organizer) is professor of Architecture and Director of the Center for New Media at UC Berkeley. He holds a professional degree in Architecture from the Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, and PhD in Computer-Aided Design from Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, PA). Prior to his tenure at Berkeley, Professor Kalay taught in the departments of architecture and computer science at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he also served as co-director of the Department of Architecture. He is a founding member and past president of ACADIA (Association for Computer Aided Design In Architecture), and Editor-in-Chief of Automation in Construction, an international refereed journal published by Elsevier Science in Oxford, UK. Kalay’s research focuses on new media, collaboration, knowledge-based design, and extending the principles of architectural design to Cyberspace. His work has been reported in numerous conferences, over 100 scholarly papers, and six books, the most recent of which is Architecture’s New Media (MIT, 2004).
THE PLACE OF THE PAST

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One of the characteristic features of modern technologies, and especially modern digital technologies, is the way in which they seem to change our understanding and experience of space, time and place. Yet in spite of this, human existence remains fundamentally bound to place and this is itself reflected in the nature and significance of heritage experience and practice. Heritage is not merely about the grasp of a sense of the past or of one’s relation to that past. Indeed, a sense of the past, and so also of time, is inseparable from a sense of place, as well as of space. To understand how and why this might be we need to examine the way in which human existence is indeed temporally, spatially and ‘topographically’ constituted. Heritage sites and artefacts should be understood, not merely as symbolically significant for the formation and articulation of a sense of identity, but as having a more concrete role in providing the locales for the constitution of collective as well as individual memory and action. Heritage sites and artefacts can be understood as the concretisation of memory and meaning in ways that project such memory and meaning out into the world, and so open up, not only a sense of the past, but also of the future – configuring the world into certain forms of possibility and action. While digital technologies allow for new ways in which heritage can be experienced and understood, such technologies also threaten to move us away from the concrete and the placed, towards a more abstracted, disembodied and apparently manipulable form of spatial and temporal engagement.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Jeff Malpas received his PhD from the Australian National University in 1986. He has published across a wide range of areas including the history of philosophy, phenomenology and hermeneutics, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, epistemology and the philosophy of place and space. He was a Humboldt Research Fellow at the University of Heidelberg in 1988-89 and is currently Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania and Director of the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Ethics. Among his publications: Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, forthcoming).
A DIALOGICAL POSITION ON PLACE IN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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In Ireland, cultural heritage is a living, often conflictual, and deeply political issue. The commodification of place and identity is often pivotal, as people respond to not seeing themselves and their place in the heritage representation.

As an experiential construct, ‘place’ refers to the ways in which people live in and make sense in the world. The sense of being at home in one place and not in another is a sensory and affective sense, given cultural expression and meaning in reflection and recounting, and transformed by the emotional and intellectual threads of experience. As sensory and affective experience becomes transformed in thought and story, a building, the top of a mountain, or a chat room can become significant places for people – not just physical structures, natural landscapes, or digital discourses, but also meaningful and heartfelt places. When they become places, they become encultured and dialogical. In this way, place and culture depend on each other.

Peter Wright and I have expressed this dialogical approach to experience in a framework that includes four threads of experience - compositional, sensual, emotional, spatio-temporal - and six sense-making processes – anticipating, connecting, interpreting, reflecting, appropriating, and recounting. The framework has been used in a number of projects concerned with technological augmentation of public space. Two that are relevant to this workshop are Mark Blythe’s evaluation of the Shogun exhibition at The Royal Armouries Museum and his work on RIOT, an interactive play about a riot that took place in 1831 in Queen Square, Bristol. RIOT attempted to connect people in Queen Square in 2004 to the events there in 1831. The former employed walkthrough techniques informed by the framework. The latter involved interviewing participants and interpreting the interviews partly informed by the framework.

Some lessons learned from this work about technologically augmenting experience of place in cultural heritage settings include:

• Designers must engage people at the level of personhood, not treat people as anonymous, equivalent units. This involves appreciating their
biographies and expectations as much as the qualities of the space and the exhibit.

- In designing place, interaction designers must also understand experienced time. Temporal boundaries of engagement can be stretched by including anticipation based on previous experience and the potential for reflection and recounting.

- However when engagement is tightly bounded by cycles of activity it can result in a reified sense of place that misses the potential for creativity and invention in the relationship between technology, place and self.

Design for experience means leaving potential for creativity in the dialogue between self, place, and technology, often by making a strong statement, potentially enriching self and space. This goes to the heart of what interaction design can aspire to in augmenting place in cultural heritage. Going back to Ireland, people feel that when you take their particular place seriously, you take them seriously and when you trivialize it you trivialize them.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

John McCarthy is a senior lecturer in the Department of Applied Psychology, University College Cork. He teaches courses on Culture and Cognition and was one of the team that developed the first Masters in Internet Systems in Ireland to which he contributes material on Cultures of Technology. He is an EPSRC Visiting Fellow at the University of York UK, a Senior Visiting Fellow at DIRC one of the UK Interdisciplinary Research Collaborations (IRC), sits on the EPSRC Peer Review College, and has more than 60 peer-reviewed publications.

His research is concerned with theories of experience in Psychology and other social sciences and technological mediation of people’s experience in work, educational, and social settings. For the last few years he has been particularly involved in three projects:

- Interpreting the Bakhtinian account of experience (with Paul Sullivan);
- Providing conceptual foundations for experience-centered design (see *Technology as Experience* an MIT Press book with Peter Wright);
- Contributing to a major Irish project on technological augmentation of public space (with Liam Bannon and Luigina Ciolfi, see *Shared Worlds Project*).
NEITHER REAL NOR VIRTUAL: THE MUSEUM AS A LIVING MEMORY THEATER

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For the past twelve years I have been working towards transforming the traditional museum space from a mere container of precious artwork to a living, dynamic, interactive narrative set. Through exhibits and installations designed for various venues such as MOMA, SF MOMA, and Italy's La Scala Opera Theater, I created a series of quasi-magical environments designed with the look and feel of a theatrical or cinematographic set, and capable of communicating to the public in an engaging and playful manner thanks to the use of advanced new media technologies.

This approach aims not only at making cultural heritage more interesting for visitors by using electronic sensors, video projectors, and dynamic 2D and 3D presentations to create “hands-on” exhibits and compelling audiovisual narratives for the objects on display. In my view, this type of media-enhanced communication is effective only if it is contextualized in the frame of a clearly defined space that through a carefully designed theatrical-like interactive set can truly seduce, attract, and interest people. Thanks to this balanced mix of real and virtual elements, we can create a place in which our make-believe leverages more from our childhood's imagination and play, rather than from a display of computer-generated replicas of our historical heritage.

My approach to designing museum exhibits and spaces for cultural institutions is radically different from what is commonly known as "virtual reality". Virtual reality (VR) created the expectation that people would be able to experience “place” by strapping them with goggles and suits that fooled their perception, and focused on creating computer-generated “identical” reproductions of cultural heritage, places, artwork. In simple words this is somewhat equivalent to copying reality into the computer and using sensors to "put people inside the computer.” However virtual reality has rarely been an effective and engaging communication medium: it takes a tremendous amount of effort and artistry (and money) to make “place” interesting when it is entirely computer-generated and in despite of such efforts VR remains “cold” and it fails at making people feel like “being there.”
In my approach instead, which is part of a line of research known as Mixed Reality or Augmented Reality, I use interactive technology and new media to enhance and give life to REAL places, in which the full embodiment of the visitor is essential to the experience we propose. This is equivalent to packaging small fragments of 2D and 3D computer-generated narrative elements and projecting them into the real space, and using our technological knowledge to time and trigger their presentation so as to unfold an engaging story for the visitor. In other words, as opposed to the virtual reality scenario, this is like “putting the computer inside a real space populated by real people.”

In my talk I will describe ways to reinterpret the museum space as an exquisitely scenic place where lighting, choreography, narrative rhythm, costumes and colors are produced with the aid of state-of-the-art technologies. The museum space enhanced by these new narrative tools based on innovative technologies resembles a stage set where the main characters are the objects themselves, a set complete with special effects and stage tricks expressly designed to delight the spectator, and keep his interest alive.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

An interactive technology inventor, museum exhibit designer, and fellow of MIT, Flavia Sparacino established Sensing Places, a company dedicated to creating cutting-edge exhibition spaces. She has created “interactive narrative environments” for museums, corporate headquarters, retail stores, theatres, theme parks, airports and cities around the world. Her emphasis is on natural interfaces that, through advanced computer vision algorithms and electronic sensors, allow people to freely interact with physical objects, digital videos, graphics, and light. She has designed museum installations for MOMA, SFMOMA, and Milan’s La Scala Opera Theater. A nominated Knight of the Republic of Italy, she holds five academic degrees, a PhD from MIT, and works as a technology consultant for large architecture studios and museums around the world.