

CHAPTER VI
“CAN YOU SEE ME NOW?”:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSIBILITY BREAKING THE
OCULARCENTRIC “FOURTH WALL” OF THE
ANALOG:DIGITAL DIVIDE

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The “desert of cyberia” is expanding and more families are moving from communities into cyburbia.¹ The limitations of human beings, rendered and perceived as a bounded phenomena, are, however, being undercut both through the efforts of philosophical enquiry and iterations of media forms. In these dispersals of agencies and fragmentations of social groups what can an archaeological sensibility offer in the form of reflexive criticism? A call has been made by some archaeologists (e.g. the Metamedia Lab at Stanford University²; also see Witmore 2006) to bring the discipline’s sensibility to bear on the documentation and interpretation of human agency through digital mediation and in digital lifeworlds. The Humanities Lab at Stanford University has begun to articulate critical theory relating to digitized mediation and the politics of presence.³ Others such as Sunny Hansen (2006) have argued that it is a false proposition that digital or virtual reality is any less physically bound than traditional modes of mediation and agency. The development and maintenance of dispersed communities bound together by the web of digital intra-relationships is constructed through, supported by and accessed using analogical keystrokes and mouse-clicks. The digital/virtual architectures of web communities reside in the silicon, copper, quartz crystal and plastics of the many servers around the world. Despite the present tangible experience of the construction and interaction with these architectures, there is a popular supposition that digital or cyberspaces are somehow “other” or less materially bound than other spaces. Can archaeologically informed interventions into the supposed politics of absences/presences of mediated human life worlds provide a more nuanced appreciation of the traces of human enmeshment with complex ecologies of digital and analogical communication? Building on critical steps taken by Stanford Metamedia, this paper reflects on a recent intervention into the virtual game-space of the UK-based theatre company Blast Theory’s “Can you

see me now?“. This paper will question the ocularcentrism of graphic user interfaces and modern media and explore the potentials for deploying a critically informed archaeological sensibility in the politics of these spaces.

We’re all players now...

Between 9-11 May 2007, with the assistance of Danielle O’Donovan, I staged a multi-phase intervention into the world of “Can You See Me Now?” (CYSMN).⁴ Blast Theory staged CYSMN in the Irish Financial Services Centre (IFSC), Dublin, Ireland as part of *We Are Here 2.0* in collaboration with the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham.⁵ This intervention sought to test the boundaries of Blast Theory’s new media performances and game(scripts) by deploying an archaeological sensibility into the perceived liminal divisions between performance, experience and digital mediation. I wanted to explore the ironies evident in the dialectical opposition of “virtual” and “real” worlds in their game architecture, focusing on the constructed drama/politics of absence and presence, engagement, detachment, participation and disillusionment. The intervention was intended to be a response to an invitation by the Stanford Humanities Lab’s Critical Studies in New Media Group to partake in the Politics of Presence Colloquium (24-26 May 2007). Thus the intervention engaged with expectations of presence and absence both of humans as mediator/players and of conceptions of the materials which underlie the manifestation of digital game(play)scapes.⁶

The politics of presence and the proposition of reality

Presence is a contested aspect of social and cultural experience. ... Presence prompts questions of the character of self-awareness, of the presentation of self. Interaction is implicated ... and agency ... Location too. To be present is to be somewhere. ... presence ... directs us outside the self into the social and spatial ... directs us into temporality. (Critical Studies in New Media 2007)

The artist Myron Krueger’s work was the subject of the opening lines of Sunny Hansen’s (2006) recent book *Bodies in Code*. Hansen recounted how in the 1970s Krueger dismissed the concept of the head-mounted display (i.e. virtual reality goggles) as an effective mode of immersive simulation. For Krueger, the only successful means of immersion was a totalizing mediation of the body to the point that there was no distinguishable boundary between “real” and “virtual” responses to human agency/thought. Krueger’s artistic corpus contests what has been an ocularcentric dominance in the development of digitized lifeworlds – an

ocularcentrism which has conjured a glass partition between “real world” agency and digitized or mediated agency. As Timothy Luke (1999, 27) echoed “cyberspace is not a notion about things to come; it is embedded within the material condition of things at work today”.

A false proposition has been created which suggests that digital lifeworlds, digital mediation and cyberspace are less material or embodied than traditional “real” experience. Though perhaps the more pertinent question is whether cyberspace is anymore of a construct than the proposition of reality. In his book *Neuromancer*, the author William Gibson (1984, 51) described cyberspace as:

a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts ... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding...

In this sense, archaeology can be described as a cyberspace – a consensual hallucination experienced by billions based on systematized clusters and constellations of data abstracted from encounters with things believed to be ‘from the past’. Thus what is at play both in archaeological abstraction and digital abstraction is a constructed division between material experience and a conceptualized non-material experience of cyberspace rendered through complex ocularcentric informational architectures. This division between analogical and digital being/agency is supported by modern ocularcentric rationalism. This is something which both runs parallel with and counter to archaeological sensibility. It is parallel in so far as archaeology as a modern scientific practice has been largely structured through the progress of modern strategies of visualizing knowledge systems (see Russell 2006; Thomas this volume).⁷ There is also an ocular focus within archaeological encounter and discovery – seeing through objects. Archaeological sensibilities do, however, offer criticism of modern ocularcentric rationalism. With the more recent phenomenological turn, a sense of the importance of the present body, the embodied mind, in all its capacities in the rendering and mediation of knowledge about pasts has become a focus of some scholarship (e.g. Thomas 1996; Tilley 1997; 2004).

Despite this embodied turn, much archaeological thought still relies (or is constrained by) the two-dimensional abstraction of graphic user interfaces. There has, however, been a movement to more fully explore and exploit the potentialities of digital graphic user interfaces for the application of archaeological theory, practice and sensibility. The most extensive project to date has been the “Remixing Çatalhöyük” project directed by Noah Wittman (2008) and coordinated by Ruth Tringham at the University of California, Berkley.⁸ Amongst its many diverse and laudable endeavours to open up knowledge generation about the past to a wide

community, the project resulted in the development of a virtual three-dimensional reconstruction of the site of Çatalhöyük in the digital world of Second Life.⁹ The three-dimensional visualization of the site is a dynamic demonstration of the potentials for graphic user interfaces to convey information; however, following on from the work of Krueger and Hansen (2006), these Second Life projects are firmly constrained within the bounds of two-dimensional graphic user interface technology and thus firmly constrained by modern ocularcentric experience (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Second Life avatars in the theatre watching a performance.
Courtesy the Second Life Multimedia PressRoom.

A similar note should be made regarding the collaboration between artist Lynn Hershman (2007) and Stanford Metamedia Lab which saw the virtual reconstruction in Second Life of Hershman's 1972 Dante Hotel art installations in San Francisco.¹⁰ Under the title "Life to the Second Power", the project created a virtual and navigable three-dimensional visualization of Hershman's installations open to the public of the Second Life community. Although this is also constrained by ocularcentrism and is a false proposition as the "original" installations would have been a multisensory experience, the project featured notable attempts to undercut the visual. On 25 May 2007, Lynn Hershman and Michael Shanks at Stanford and attendees of the Duisburg Festival in Germany created a mediated co-present event where the participants conversed live through a videoconference while Hershman and Shanks as avatars guided other Second Life residents

(including avatars of those in Duisburg) through the Dante Hotel environment. The event illustrated the potentialities for multi-sensory experiences to create mediated co-presences through dispersed communities.

There are those who are seeking to break through the barrier of the graphic user interface, and we have seen popularization of these efforts in such mangas as *Ghost in the Shell* (Shirow 1991) or such films as *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) and *The Matrix* (1999). The first major step was undertaken in 2005 when Matthew Nagle, a quadriplegic, had the BrainGate chip implant manufactured by Cyberkinetics Neurotechnology inserted into his brain, successfully controlling a right precentral gyrus (an area of the brain responsible for arm movement) (Hochberg et al. 2006). By thinking he was able to control a robotic arm. If we consider the significance of this step with the research undertaken by Yang Dan at the University of California, Berkeley and Fei Li and Garrett Stanley at Harvard University in 1999 where they successfully wired into neurons of a cat and were able to project what the cat saw onto a video monitor, the implications for immersive experience which undercut real:virtual dichotomies are far reaching (Anon. 1999). These steps carry ethical considerations as well as epistemological and ontological implications, but they illustrate the earnest endeavour being undertaken to undercut the graphic user interface dominating digital experience.

9 May 2007 – Introductions to the graphic user interface

On Wednesday I began by introducing myself to the game/performance of “Can you see me now?”, familiarising myself with the rules, boundaries and scripts of the game/performance.

The performance takes the form of an online game and a physical actions occurring in tandem in real time. A “virtual city space” (the IFSC) becomes the stage upon which online players control the movements of their avatars and digital personas. Navigating the twists and turns of the city streets, the movements of the avatars are tracked and translated to “real world” GPS information. This enables the Blast Theory “runners” to hunt and catch the avatars by utilising GPS equipment and PDA’s (personal data assistants, i.e. electronic handheld information devices) to physically run through the “real city space” negotiating not only the digital information but also the “real world” perils of traffic (both vehicular and human), weather and terrain (Figures 2). The movements of the “runners” are also relayed to the “virtual” game space allowing the online players to elude their hunters (as long as they can). The drama, or perhaps humour, of the game is created by parallel yet detached communicative media - the online players only being about to “chat” through text messages which appear on both the players’ and the runners’ screens and the runners’ communicating via walkie-talkies

being streamed through the game portal to the players' speakers. This creates an amusingly parallel yet disconnected form of communication – allowing for an intimate awareness of the strains and emotions experienced by the “runners” by hearing their voices (countered by the anonymity of their handles as simply “runners”) and the anonymous communication of the gamers' personas (countered by the proscriptive form of the game requiring them to input their name).



Figure 2. Paul Dungworth playing/performing “Can you see me now?”.
Courtesy Blast Theory.

As there are multiple gamers and multiple runners, the performance takes the form of multiple rhizomatic game(scripts) which interweave and dynamically affect one another - the movements of the players affecting the movements of the runners and vice versa. Thus the graphic (real:virtual), audio and textual encounters play off each other in a great unraveling of supposed roles of actors, audiences, controllers, gamers and players – the interface of CYSMN acting as a tremendous shattering of the “fourth wall” between theatre/game as graphic user interface and performance or play as a responsive tactile user interface.

A single game(script) begins when the online player is asked to input their

name (first and last) (of course the use of alternate personas and elusive handles abounds). I played as myself (Ian Russell). Next, the player is asked if there is a person they have not seen for a long time and who they still think of, and the player is prompted to input another first and last name. I, again being innocent, naive, honest, what have you, put in names of ex-partners, family members who have long since passed on and long forgotten friends. Once this is completed, the player is cast into the game flow and the streaming audio begins as you are presented with a bird's eye view of the "virtual city space" (the IFSC) (see Figure 4). Cat and mouse games ensue, and the drama unfolds as "runners" struggle to run on gravel, avoid being hit by cars or stop to have chats with the locals while the players goad the "runners" on with chiding remarks. The "runners" maintain nearly constant radio communication – often with a militaristic flair – "*crackle*...over", while the players' comments range from the confused gaming question about the interface to frustration over limitations of game/play to derogative and abusive comments. The game continues until the "runners" come within 5m (real:virtual) of the avatars. Then the online player is caught and the game is over. At this point, the thread of game(script) is concluded by the statement by a "runner" that they have caught/seen "Ian Russell (or another handle)" at a certain location and at a certain time. Then after a brief pause, they then say "and I have just seen (your long lost acquaintance)" and "I am taking the picture now". The game(script) concludes with the taking of digital photograph of an "anonymous" bit of the architecture of the "real city space" (Figure 3) which is named for your absent or long lost acquaintance and archived online.

The first time I played, I entered the name of an ex-partner as my long lost acquaintance. I entered the game and was so engrossed by learning how to navigate the world and understand its rules and boundaries that I had forgotten about the names I had entered. When I was caught (about 5 minutes later), I heard my own name read out – which was fun to hear, but this was then followed by my ex-partner's name. I was suddenly filled with emotion and confusion. Was she playing the game as well, did she know I was there, should I try to say hello? The absence of this person from my life was suddenly converted into a palpable presence through the dynamic physical and mental responses of my body to the emotions which came from hearing her name.

On a subsequent game, I attempted to last as long as possible. I succeeded in being uncaught for over 63 minutes, being finally caught by Peter Crawley who was guest runner (Runner 7). During this time, I was initially excited for lasting so long and outwitting the runners. Yet, after hiding for quite sometime in the virtual carpark, I suddenly felt the futility of my desire to be absent and uncaught from the game. Truly, if I wished to be uncaught then I should merely leave the game and be absent. I was, however, compelled to want to secure victory through an absent presence in the virtual world – taking up an online player position and being able

to listen and see the happenings of the virtual city. I found myself disillusioned by my desire to render a false absence both physically and virtually.



Figure 3. Sarah Ling, 12:17hrs, 9 May 2007 - taken by Paul Dungworth.
Archive photograph courtesy of Blast Theory.

Illusions and economics of presence in cyberspace

Cyberspaces ... are not truly “atopian”, because a nowhere is a nullity. They have a material origin location in the electronic systems which generate their dimensionality through physically networked telecomputation apparatuses. In some sense, they are “ecotopian”, or outside of ordinary space, and open to multiple contradictory appropriations by those who create and then traverse their spatial properties (Luke 1999, 37).

One of the great dangers of cyberspaces are the supposed freedom which they offer to participants. Indeed, it is a faux-freedom and a faux-democracy. Participation in cyberspace comes at a cost. Internet service providers must be paid. Equipment must be purchased and upgraded. Information infrastructures

must be maintained. Fiber-optic networks must be installed, repaired and upgraded as higher bandwidths are required. If there is a citizenship in a cyberspace, it is citizenship at a price tag.

Although Second Life advertises itself as a free community, to access the world, you must be in possession of a minimum system configuration (Luke 1999, 27).¹¹ The ownership of these commodities is assumed in any articulation of the freedom of Second Life. In this sense, the freedom of such cyberspaces is actually a false proposition predicated on a default acceptance of ocularcentric technology and the economic systems of manufacture, marketing, consumption and exploitation which make such things as laptops or desktop computing systems available to certain sections of a population.¹² As Luke (1999, 31) noted:

There is an elaborate and expansive political economy driving cyberspatial development, which is entirely “artificial”. The historical / political / cultural / social forces currently imagining cyberspace as “natural givenness” mostly stand to profit tremendously from every connection.

As of 12 February 2008, Second Life was home to 12,415,112 residents, where 936,172 residents logged in during the month of January.¹³ Out of these residents 55,235 recorded positive economic flow in terms of US dollars in January. This represents 5% of the number of participating residents. Indeed 333 residents recorded a positive economic flow between US\$2000-5000 during the month and 156 of these recorded over US\$5000. These individuals’ earnings equate to what could be described as a salary-base. The significance of the economic possibilities of these communities was made popular knowledge in 2006 when Anshe Chung (Hof 2006), a virtual land baroness, became the first millionaire based on earnings solely from economic exchanges in Second Life.¹⁴

Although Second Life has afforded the “freedom” to exploit the space to such economic ends, the servers, coding and trademark which support the world are owned by the corporation Linden Labs, Inc. This fact has become politicized by the actions of Marshal Cahill who initiated and formed the Second Life Liberation Army:

The Second Life Liberation Army was formed as the “in-world” military wing of a national liberation movement within Second Life. The movement contends that political rights should be established within Second Life immediately. As Linden Labs is functioning as an authoritarian government the only appropriate response is to fight (Second Life Liberation Army 2008).

The avatars subscribing to this movement have taken it upon themselves to act and intervene into the environment of Second Life to highlight the disenfranchisement experienced by some as a result of the economics of ownerships of technical infrastructures. Although the ethics of militarized actions whether in “virtual” or

“real” communities must be considered, the politicization of these cyberspaces is not without significance. As Luke (1999, 29) noted, these experiences represent a new iteration of exchange values in the material world. We have mobilized the economic potential of the electromagnetic spectrum through the industrialization of telecommunication infrastructures and changes within contemporary modes of labour and leisure. With the evident economic exploitation of these potentials and the subsequent disenfranchisement through progress and acceleration, perhaps it is time to follow the steps of artists such as Krueger and viscerally intervene in the manifestation, normalization and “naturalization” of the technogenesis of human experience in digital mediation.

10 May 2007 – Interventions: Undercutting the graphic user interface

On Thursday, I intervened in the performance of CYSMN by locating myself physically in the “real city space” of the IFSC. With the assistance of my colleague Danielle O’Donovan, I situated myself at the Harbour Master Pub on Mayer Street and logged into the game through a publicly available WiFi hotspot. I entered the game under the handle “Ian Russell” and entered the name “Danielle O” as my long lost acquaintance. By controlling the movements of my avatar, I placed it at the “virtual” correspondent to our “real” location (see Figure 4).

I began by exploring the tactics of representations of the CYSMN graphic user interface. By ceasing the movement of my avatar, the game view immediately tracks to a spinning 360 degree horizon view - the point of view of my avatar if you will (Figure 7). Locating myself physically at the same GPS location, I noticed discrepancies between the graphic representation of and my “real world” visual perceptions (Figure 5).

Beyond the ironic absence/presence of myself with my digital self, there were striking absences such as the lack of the Dublin mountains in the graphic user interface and the presence of a fabricated “iconic” Dublin skyline (including new apartment blocks, Georgian buildings from the Liffey and Guinness brewery buildings). Although the schematics of the buildings, layout and architecture of the “virtual city space” held up to scrutinising use value, absences such as, lamp-posts, trees, pedestrians and vehicular traffic made me feel disillusioned in both “spaces”. In which “space” was the game now? Where was I supposed to “play” – who were the “players”? My response was that we were all players now. Thus I sought to turn the game on the “runners” and play with them – testing the boundaries of their “script”, “direction” and, after Brecht, probing the boundaries and the proverbial “fourth wall”.¹⁵

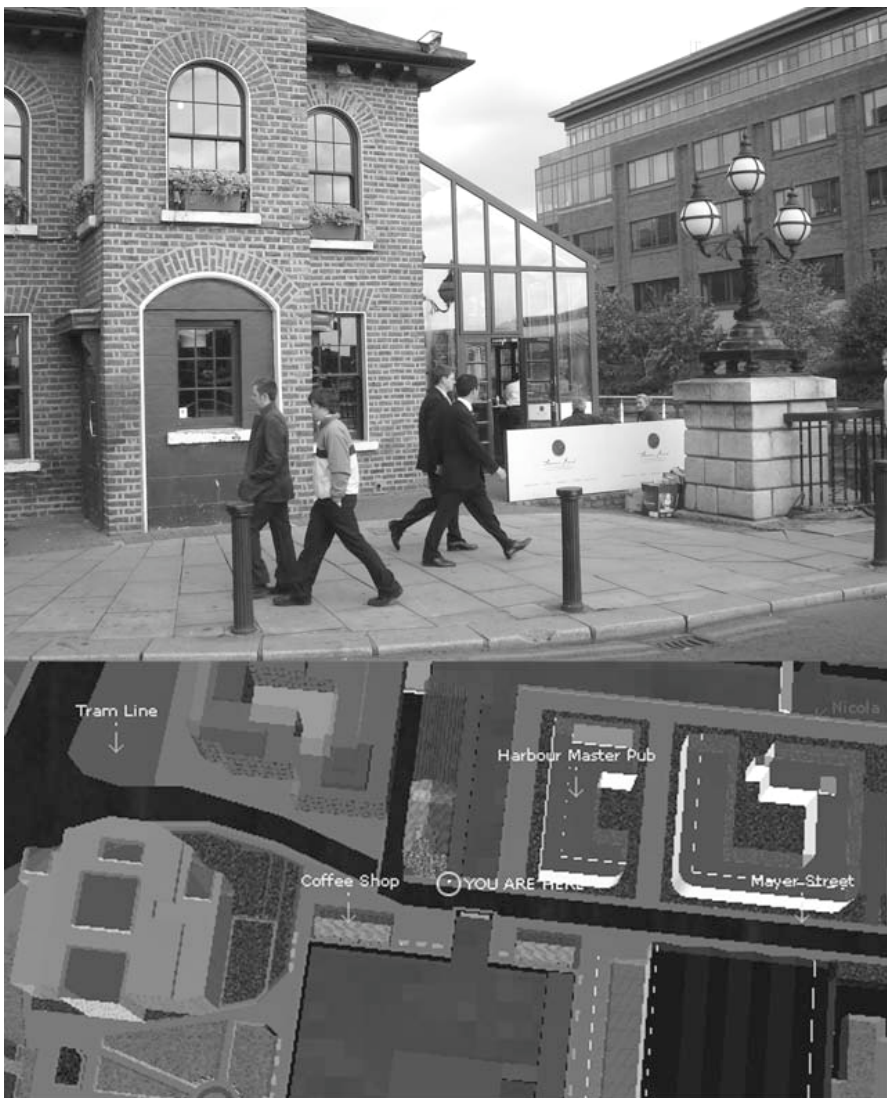


Figure 4. The Harbour Master Pub, IFSC, Dublin, Ireland and the digital cityscape of the IFSC in CYSMN. Photograph by Ian Russell (May 2007). Screenshot reproduced courtesy of Blast Theory.

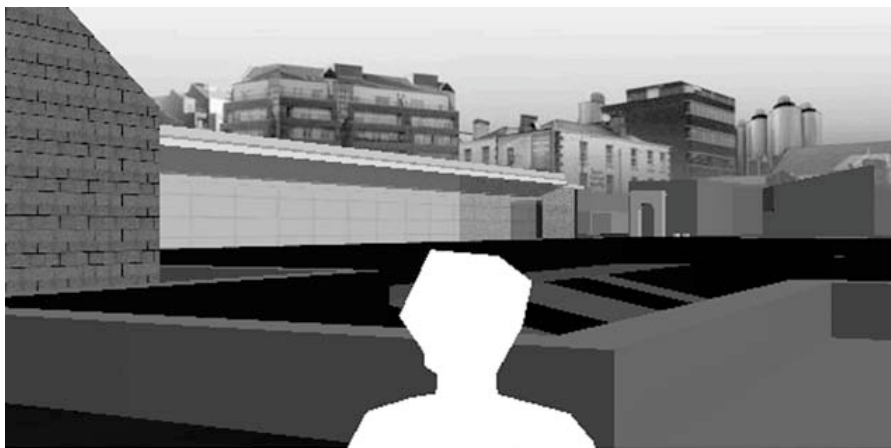


Figure 5. A horizontal view of Dublin's virtual skyline in CYSMN and Ian Russell at the Harbour Master Pub playing CYSMN. Photograph by Danielle O'Donovan (May 2007). Screenshot reproduced courtesy of Blast Theory.

I began by entering text chat messages alerting the “runners” that they could find me at the Harbour Master Pub and that they should call over for a coffee. The spirit of digital conceptual play won out as they merely assumed that I was asserting the location of my avatar – and not myself. Thus I watched as runners moved about my physical space, aloof, disengaged, unaware of my presence. Although intellectually and artistically fascinating and amusing, I also found it somewhat cruel as I ran my avatar down Mayer Street and subsequently watched as Runner 6 (Becky Edmunds) ran past – clearly fatigued by the game (Figure 6). My participation as player had switched to controller or at least instigator or *flâneur* or surveillance operative. Although this was not a panoptic encounter, I suddenly felt a tremendous responsibility for the actions of the runners and an uneasy feeling of implication into voyeuristic fetishes of controlling and viewing the actions of people through new media.

In one instance, Runner 2 (Hannah Talbot) “saw” me at the Harbour Master Pub, and proceeded to take a photograph of my long lost friend “Danielle O” who was actually sitting next to me having a coffee (Figure 7). When Runner 2 reported over her walkie-talkie that she had seen “Ian Russell” and “Danielle O” and that “she was taking the photograph now”. I announced, “I can see you Runner 2!” I had expected that this might have prompted Runner 2 to be aware of my physical presence. I was, however, surprised to see that she gave me a polite, detached smile and kept on with her “work” – in much the same way as you would seek to ignore any “stranger” who spoke to you unexpectedly on the street, particularly when that stranger might be criticizing or judging your role in a piece of theatre. Although Runner 2 was seeking to catch/see me and Danielle, the proscribed form of her action in the game and potentially also skills of urban survival (by not engaging in conversations with men who shout at you) forced the erection of a firm “fourth wall” between the play and the players – a mutual detachment between the players who, though only being a few meters apart, were communicating through satellites many kilometers above their heads.

Part of my desire to participate in the “real city space” was to get a sense of the physicality of the performance. I was, therefore, also subjected to the same weather as the “runners”. In one instance, I had to use an umbrella to protect my laptop. Again, I was caught – this time by Runner 6 (Becky Edmunds). I had alerted her that I was at the Harbour Master and that I “had a red umbrella”, but again the runner did not make the leap to assume that my information was “true” (Figure 8).

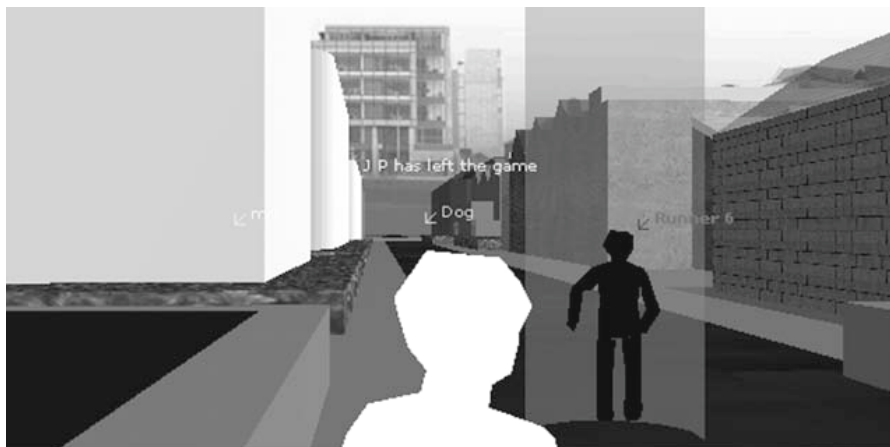


Figure 6. A screenshot of Runner 6 (Becky Edmunds) passing Ian Russell's avatar in CYSMN. Courtesy Blast Theory and Runner 6 (Becky Edmunds) running past the Harbour Master Pub. Photograph by Danielle O'Donovan (May 2007). Screenshot reproduced courtesy of Blast Theory.



Figure 7. Ian Russell at the Harbour Master Pub with Runner 2 (Hannah Talbot) in the background and Danielle O, 12:44hrs, 10 May 2007 – taken by Hannah Talbot. Photograph taken by Danielle O'Donovan (May 2007). Archive photograph courtesy of Blast Theory.



Figure 8. Ian Russell's avatar being caught by Runner 6 (Becky Edmunds) in CYSMN, Runner 6 (Becky Edmunds) taking a photograph of "Danielle O" in IFSC, Dublin and Danielle O, 12:49hrs, 10 May 2007 - taken by Becky Edmunds. Photograph by Danielle O'Donovan (May 2007). Screenshot and archive photograph reproduced courtesy of Blast Theory.

Finally, I positioned my avatar outside the front of the Harbour Master and waited for Runner 6 to arrive. As she approached, my colleague Danielle O'Donovan walked my avatar across the street as I walked across the street. My avatar was caught. "Danielle O" had been seen as well, but just before she took the proscribed photograph, I approached her and said "hi, I'm Ian". Met first by a laugh and moderate disbelief, Runner 6 still continued with the game(script) and took a photograph of the "anonymous" public phone which I was standing next to – despite the fact that I was actually present (Figure 9). She then said over the walkie-talkie, "I've seen Ian Russell. He's actually right here, and he has red hair too". She admitted that when I had said "I didn't know you had red hair", she had thought that I was somewhere on Mayer Street - and that I certainly was not on "one of the terminals at base".

Through an embodied intervention into the material architecture of "Can you see me now?", the "fourth wall" of the game/performance was broken. By simply placing my material body within the "real" world game space, the delicate balance of trusted absence and dispersed agency was unsettled, creating instead an uncertain space of ambiguous boundaries and subtle paranoia. Suddenly the barriers and boundaries between players and runners, between *flâneur* and passersby, dissolved revealing the negotiability of the material architectures and spaces of play, game, performance and being.



Figure 9. Danielle O, 13:12hrs, 10 May 2007 - taken by Becky Edmunds and Ian Russell across from the Harbour Master Pub, IFSC, Dublin. Photograph by Danielle O'Donovan (May 2007). Archive image reproduced courtesy of Blast Theory.

Deploying an archaeological sensibility in cyberspatial politics

Archaeological sensibility helps to encourage the appreciation of the material-temporal constructs of perception, creation and mediation, and it seeks to do so with an understanding of the engaged embodied mind within complex ecologies of experience, information, thought and phenomena. A recent project at Stanford Metamedia has shown how powerful the deployment of an archaeological sensibility can be in the practice of social documentation and criticism.

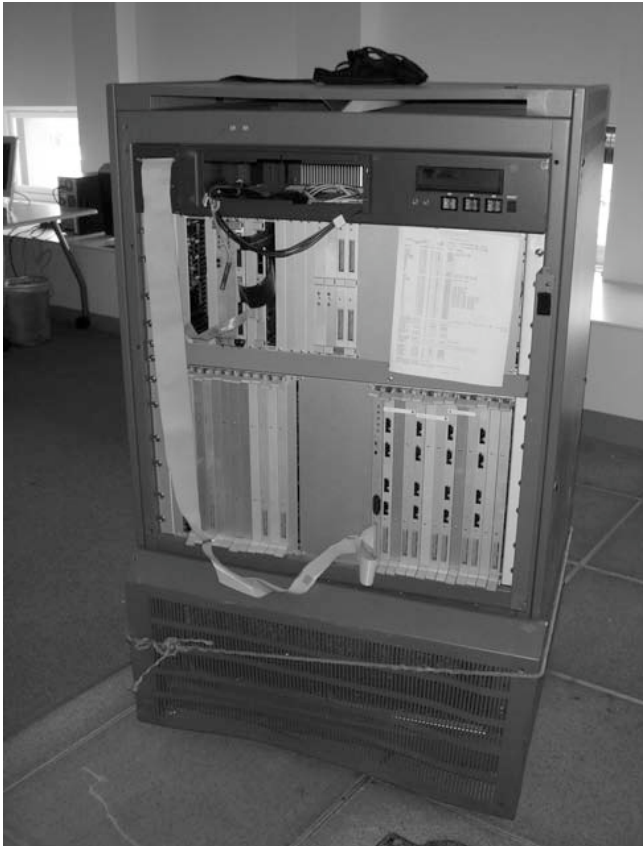


Figure 10. An SGI GT100 series image generator. It was involved in the recreation and simulation of the 73 Easting battle from the first Gulf War (1990-1). It is now housed on the fourth floor of Wallenberg Hall at Stanford University. Photograph by Ian Russell (May 2007).

Stanford has acquired and is preserving an SGI100 series image generator from the IDA Simulation Center as part of the 73 Easting historical project (Figure 10) (Lowood 2007). The unit was involved in the recreation and simulation of the 73 Easting battle from the first Gulf War (1990-1). This was one of the largest simulations ever undertaken.¹⁶ The image generator is now housed on the fourth floor of Wallenberg Hall at Stanford University as part of a project of archaeological documentation and reconstruction undertaken by Stanford Humanities Lab and Metamedia (Lowood & Shanks 2007). Stanford's move to document and preserve the material architecture of this digital simulation is in many ways similar to the call of the recent Dead Media Manifesto by Bruce Sterling (1997).¹⁷ It is a simple proposition which counters the abstract conception and separation of digitised and dispersed agencies from materially based existence. Such simulations and cyberspatial experiences are no less materially bound than any other mode of experience and are just as much a component of the techno-industrial complex.

This initiative illustrates the impact that an archaeological sensibility can have in countering supposed ethereal conceptions of digital culture, and it also highlights the increasing importance of critically informed civic participation within the negotiation, commodification and structuring of the bounds of digital communities.

11 May 2007 – Interventions: Exposing the tactile user interface

On Friday, after having met some of the Blast Theorists the night before, I played out my next level of intervention aimed at the contrast between the constructed anonymity of the runners through their serialised handles and the requested identifications of the players through the provision of first and last names. My target was Niki Woods (Runner 1). From home while having lunch, I entered the game with the handle “Niki Woods” with the long lost acquaintance name “Ian Russell”. This was designed to test the scripting of the piece by seeing how she would react to being approached by an avatar based on her own handle/identity/persona. Initially, she was surprised to find herself chasing herself, and unfortunately it was not herself but Runner 4 (Paul Dungworth) who caught Niki. Ironically then, Paul was standing beside Niki in the Stone Circle in the “real world” IFSC as he said “I have just seen Niki Woods, and I have seen Ian Russell. I'm taking the photograph now”.

My final intervention was then to enter the game as myself with my long lost acquaintance being “Niki Woods”. I then proceeded to chase Runner 1 to force her to catch me (see image below), and upon so doing, she said, “I have seen Ian Russell, and I have just seen myself. I have seen Niki Woods. I am looking at a

dark reflection of myself in the water at George's Dock. I am taking a photograph of myself now" (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Ian Russell's avatar being caught by Runner 1 (Niki Woods) in CYSMN and Niki Woods, 12:19hrs, 11 May 2007 - taken by Niki Woods. Screenshot and archive image reproduced courtesy of Blast Theory.

Runner 1 then made a call out on the audio channel to all runners to tell them to “be on the look out for Ian Russell. He could be on top of a building. He could be anyway. Look out for Ian Russell”. Thus the scripting of the game shifted from one of structured cat and mouse to an inverted situation of paranoia through absence. Although I was not present physically in the “real city space” of the game this time, the residual memory of my physical presence from Thursday rendered a possibility of my presence despite the scripted supposition of absence.

Afterthoughts: The politics of presence and humedia

There were many other levels to which this intervention could have been taken, but I felt that these phases were sufficient for making the artistic and intellectual critique of the work of Blast Theory. The richness of the fabric of the piece allowed for a very fruitful and rigorous intervention exploring the politics of presence and the impact of rendering, through new media, ocularcentric digital/virtual spaces based on a supposed or assumed absence. This intervention, I hope, has illustrated that despite the discourse of the impact of new media on conceptions and perceptions of place, agency, presence, and so on, the embodied, present participation/intervention of a human physically can have as much, if not more, transformative potential.

Through the undertaking of this intervention, I developed a new appreciation of Tim Ingold’s (2007) call to “return to materials”. Through a critically informed deployment of the archaeological sensibility in new modes of mediated experiences, the significance of the materials that undercut abstracted conceptions of mediated relations become immediately apparent (see Cochrane this volume). Humans are in constant and continual negotiation with media and materials in their everyday lifeworlds. Shoes on feet, clothes on bodies, air in lungs, wind on skin, tools with tasks, light with eyes, mobile phones on ears, keyboards with hands, the internet and social lives - media saturate our permeable participation in the world. There are also those subtle and overt mediations with prostheses (physical, digital and mental) upon which many of us rely - glasses, pacemakers, prosthetic limbs, brain-computer interfaces, neuro-prostheses, digital avatars... Describing this appreciation of the enmeshment of humanity in the world as humedia (Russell 2007), it may be possible to appreciate the materials that constitute all media and undercut the dichotomies within philosophies of “being” and politics of “humanities” and enable equal sharing in the diverse and discrete mediations of our uncertain world.¹⁸

We are and never have been without media or mediations in this world. There is no vacuum in which an ideally formed unmediated human functions. Humedia asserts that what is core to human narratives is not ideal form but adaptable

mediation. Thus, discussions of humedia can also help undercut the ocularcentric tendencies of modern mediation of knowledge by accepting the many senses of embodied experience without an over-reliance on the visual sense for the communication of information or experience. Humedia incorporates all manner of media and mediations as an attempt to transcend possible prejudices or discriminations against some mediated lifeworlds. Within humedia, no distinction is necessary between what is normative and adaptive as the forms of what we may poetically term “humanity” are continuously fluid. Thus, humedia does not dwell in the essentialist and reductive ocularcentric thought patterns which seek to alienate other sensory perceptions. Humedia embraces, however, the sentiment and irony of apprehension relating to these media and mediations, and approaches these emotions as access points for discovery and the development of new understandings.

Humans as capricious media respond to and transform not only physical spaces but also digital or “virtual” spaces, effortlessly tripping and flitting between these supposed distinctions as liminal players simultaneously absent and present in the game/play of life. As these spaces are mobilized and structured through economic and political developments, it will become more important for the archaeological sensibility to undercut abstracted methods of marketing cyberspace as a materially unbounded experience. With these considerations, the projects undertaken by Metamedia at Stanford and the “Remixing Çatalhöyük” project at the University of California, Berkley can be seen to be more than progressive applications of new media to the dissemination of archaeological information. They can be seen as the first steps towards a deployment of an archaeological sensibility into the material architectures of cyberspaces. Archaeology as critically informed practice can remind us all of the material basis of our mediated existence and the tremendous implications of the exploitation of these materials for socio-economic and political ends.

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Notes

1. For a more in depth discussion of the themes of cyberia and cyburbia see Featherstone & Lash 1999, chapters 1-3.
2. For full access to the discussions of the Metamedia Lab can be found at: <<http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/MetaMedia/Home>> [Access 17 February 2008].
3. For access to the programme and related content of the Politics of Presence colloquium see Critical Studies in New Media Group 2007 “Politics of Presence – the colloquium” Stanford Humanities Lab (17 June) <<http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/NewMedia/270>> [Accessed 17 February 2008].
4. Blast Theory 2008 “Can you see me now?” Blast Theory. <http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_cysmn.html> [Accessed 17 February 2008].
5. For a full listing of events and commentary relating to We Are Here 2.0, see We Are Here 2.0 2007 “We Are Here 2.0: Docklands, Dublin, Ireland: The Official Blog” We Are Here 2.0 (13 May). <<http://weareheretwo.blogspot.com/>> [Accessed 17 February 2008]. The website of the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham is at: <<http://www.mrl.nott.ac.uk/>> [Accessed 17 February 2008].
6. For programme details of the Politics of Presence colloquium see Critical Studies in New Media Group 2007 “Politics of Presence – the colloquium” Stanford Humanities Lab (17 June) <<http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/NewMedia/270>> [Accessed 17 February 2008].
7. For a compelling discussion of possibilities in visualizing data see Tufte, E. 2006 *Beautiful Evidence*. Graphics Press, Cheshire, Connecticut.
8. The full website of Remixing Çatalhöyük is available at: <<http://okapi.dreamhosters.com/remixing/mainpage.html>> [Accessed 17 February 2008].
9. The fascination with Second Life as a research medium in the university has been growing over the last few years. Built, maintained and owned by Linden Labs, Inc., the Second Life environment offers users the opportunity to develop alternative visualizations of their projected self-images. The popularity of the environment speaks to its ability to offer highly engaging and attractive visual experiences, though Second Life is still entirely bound by ocularcentric GUI technology and thus falls within the modern fetishisation with the visual.
10. Discussions of the work of Lynn Hershman and the Metamedia Lab in relation to Life to the Second Power are available at: <<http://presence.stanford.edu:3455/LynnHershman/261>> & <<http://presence.stanford.edu:3455/Collaboratory/346>> [Accessed 17 February

2008].

11. For example, Second Life states a minimum requirement of a DSL or cable modem internet connection, an 800MHz processor, 512 MB of RAM and an NVIDIA GeForce 2 graphics card. Current system requirements are available at: <<http://secondlife.com/corporate/sysreqs.php>> [Accessed 17 February 2008].

12. In this sense, Second Life is a good example of the impact of dromoeconomics on the manifestation of digital communities (Luke 1999, 32-8). Dromoeconomics is the political realization of the power of speed in economic interaction. In dromoeconomic cyberspace, “the product of one’s labour no longer necessarily appears even temporarily as a physical presence or social interaction; instead, it is immediately embedded in a collective code system” (Luke 1999, 35). Thus the work output or creative endeavour becomes an “ephemeral electronic exercise” which can be bought, sold and traded at increasing speeds where the speed of the trade is itself a commodity. With the potential for economic interactivity constrained in temporal terms and the access to such dromoeconomic spaces predicated on ownership of certain configurations of material commodities, there become a disenfranchisement in the digital/cyber enterprise through rapid acceleration of progress.

13. A Resident is a uniquely named avatar with the right to log into Second Life, trade Linden Dollars and visit the Community pages. Current statistics are available at: <http://secondlife.com/whatis/economy_stats.php> [Accessed 17 February 2008].

14. An extensive description of the economic activity of Anshe Chung is available at: <http://www.anshechung.com/include/press/press_release251106.html> [Accessed 17 February 2008].

15. Bertolt Brecht’s (1898-1956) “epic theatre” strategies developed to “break” the fourth wall of theatrical convention. The “fourth wall” refers to the absent wall in a three-sided theatre. This absent wall separates the audience from the action on stage, and the maintenance of the “fourth wall” is a critical component of the illusory nature of traditional theatre as simulacrum. Notably, this convention has continued in the new media of digital computer games where the “fourth wall” is not immaterial but is the computer screen itself. For a more extensive discussion of Brecht’s “epic theatre” and his relationship to the “fourth wall” see Meech 1994.

16. For an in depth discussion of the simulation of 73 Easting see Lenoir 2000 and Lenoir & Lowood 2003.

17. The Dead Media project website can be found at: <<http://www.deadmedia.org>> [Accessed 17 February 2008].

18. An in-depth description of humedia and the Project Hmedia manifesto is available at: <<http://www.iarchitectures.com/humedia.html>> [Accessed 17 February 2008].

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