



SPACE, PLACE and TECHNOLOGY

Presence in
Mediated Experiences

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Editorial Preface

The current issue of PNJ proposes an emerging framework to look at mediated environments, the framework of Space and Place. This dichotomy dates back to the Seventies (Tuan, 1977, 2001), but probably due to the appearance of new, original spaces supported by digital technologies, it has been appropriated now with renewed enthusiasm by scholars interested in mediated relations.

This theme attracted our attention several years ago, and the success of the call for papers confirms its current resonance. Borrowed from Human Geography, where these philosophical concepts have been heavily used, Space and Place seem to have filled a gap in current reflection on the human relationship with technologies. This field has always been able to incorporate themes elaborated by other disciplines and to decline them into operational tools. This was the case of culture and situated action, borrowed in the '90s from Ethnography in order to study computerization in its context of occurrence (Button, 1993). It was also the case of the linguistic turn that has endowed the study of situated action with a powerful analytic instrument such as Discourse and Conversation Analysis (Wooffitt, Fraser, Gilbert, Glashan, 1997; Hutchby, 2001). The current 'geographical turn' is orienting attention towards at least two basic elements, often downplayed by previous research on human-computer interaction, namely materiality and environment. The former counters a tendency towards disembodiment that is latent in the literature on cyberspace (Horner, 2001). The latter has always been around, but the current pervasiveness of mobile and personal technologies makes a specific repertoire of concepts necessary to deal with it. The choice of the Journal is to reflect on the ways in which Space

and Place can be connected to human experience in mediated environments, namely to human 'Presence' there.

The selection of papers published in this issue of PNJ offers an overview on these and other ways in which Space and Place matter in the human experience with digital technologies. So many excellent contributions have arrived that two issues of the Journal will be devoted to this theme. The current issue opens with our own contribution (*A Place for Presence. Understanding the Human Involvement in Mediated Interactive Environments*), where a model of the mediated place is offered. It is argued that it is impossible to divorce the discourse on Presence from a discourse on Place and action is proposed as the criterion to organize them both. The characteristics of Place, especially its hybridity and positionality, are emphasized and their implications spelled out.

The subsequent contribution is a theoretical paper authored by Ruth Rettie (*Presence and Embodiment in Mobile Phone Communication*), who discusses mobile phones, a telling case of a social place that intersects with other simultaneous places. By comparing several theoretical frameworks, the author proposes to solve the Presence/Absence dilemma by using the concept of Place. Thanks to this solution, physical and digital aspects are not to be treated as separated realms, and interaction by phone can legitimately said to have its specific place of occurrence.

Rod McCall, Shaleph O'Neill, Fiona Carroll, David Benyon and Michael Smyth illustrate in their paper (*Responsive Environments, Place and Presence*) several instruments to capture the sense of Presence and apply them to evaluate the effects of two different presentation modalities of the 'same' scene, namely Cave versus Head Mounted Display. The results of

this long and articulated study on Presence and Spatial Presence, carried out within the European Project BENOGO, are described in the paper. The findings, according to which the CAVE environment does not seem to provide a higher sense of presence than the HMD, are thoroughly presented and discussed from the perspective of 'responsive environments', a model that considers the possibility to act and the way in which it is afforded as a crucial determinant of the sense of Presence in a mediated places.

Petra Gemeinboeck and Roland Blach (*Spacing the Boundary: An Exploration of Perforated Virtual Spaces*) lead us into the fascinating field of expressive, artistic application of digital technology, Uzume and Maya, allowing us to experience some of the spatial characteristics of a digital place. The interconnection between the spatial configuration of the electronic environment and the user's body is highlighted by making the latter influencing the former. The paper is enriched with wonderful videos where a sample of the experiential possibilities opened by Uzume and Maya are shown, questioning the very idea that physical and digital are separated experiential realms.

In *The Third Pole of the Sense of Presence: Comparing Virtual and Imagery Spaces*, Rosa M. Baños, Cristina Botella, Belén Guerriero, Victor

Liaño, Mariano Alcañiz and Beatriz Rey compare Presence in imaginary and virtual spaces. Several aspects make this comparison interesting; one is the fact that the literature on Presence has often tried a parallel between the two spaces, yet its actual legitimacy needs to be demonstrated; the other is that Presence is considered in its development during the immersion, thereby providing another instance of the interconnection between Space and Time.

The issue is beautifully closed by a paper from another European Project, EMMA; it is not part of the target theme of the special issue, even though it is in several ways resonant of it. 'A Preliminary Study on the Use of an Adaptive Display for the Treatment of Emotional Disorders', by Beatriz Rey, Javier Montesa, Mariano Alcañiz, Rosa Baños and Cristina Botella illustrate the characteristics of an adaptive display designed to support emotional therapy. The paper is accompanied by a video-clip showing the characteristics of these environments and joins back to a previous paper on PNJ, where the characteristics of that EU funded project were announced.

We would like to express our gratitude to the people who cooperated with us in the production of this issue, to the authors who decided to share their work by way of our Journal and to the anonymous reviewers for their generous contribution.

Anna Spagnolli,
Luciano Gamberini
PNJ Editors-in-Chief
May 9, 2005

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