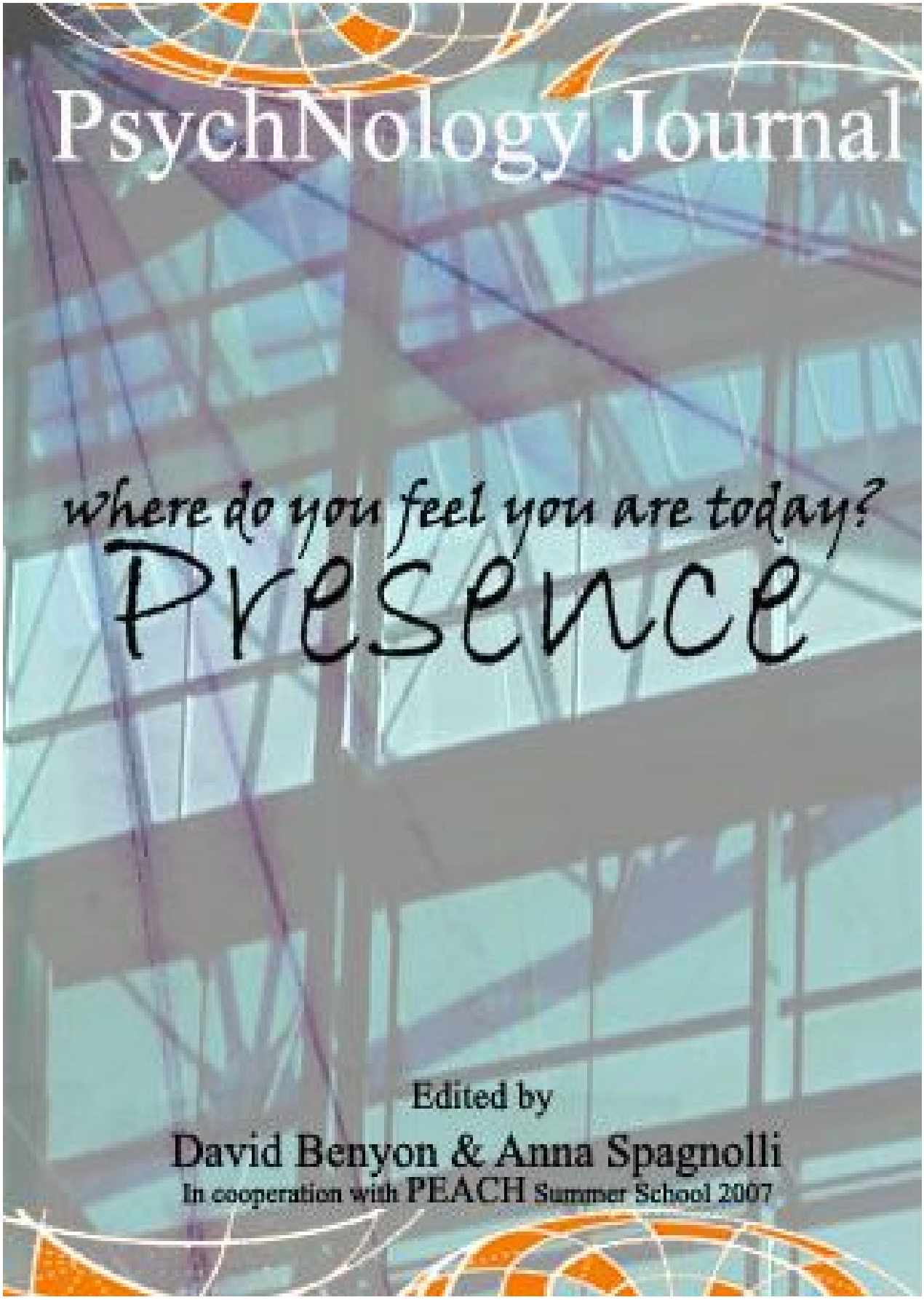
PsychNology Journal
where do you feel you are today?
Presence
Edited by
David Benyon & Anna Spagnolli
In cooperation with PEACH Summer School 2007

PSYCHNOLOGY JOURNAL
The Other Side of Technology

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PSYCHNOLOGY JOURNAL, PNJ
PUBLISHED ON-LINE SINCE SUMMER 2002
WEB SITE: HTTP://WWW.PSYCHNOLOGY.ORG
SUBMISSIONS: ARTICLES@PSYCHNOLOGY.ORG

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Editorial Preface

In July 2007 sixty people from thirteen countries met on the stunning island of Santorini, Greece to participate in the first Peach Summer School. Peach (www.peachbit.org) is the coordination action for presence research established under the European Union's Framework 6 programme for research and development. The aim of Peach is to develop a greater understanding of presence research and to widen participation in the area. Four large integrated research projects on presence were also funded under framework 6. Peach aims to coordinate their actions and maximise the impact of their research.

The Summer School consisted of keynote talks, workshops and demonstration activities presented by experts in the field of presence many of who were members of the integrated research projects. Topics covered included some philosophical views of what presence is, artificial companions and social presence, mixed reality in urban environments, ethnography and the understanding of presence, virtual reality systems and fundamental aspects of physiology. Participants provided a poster for their work.

Following the Summer School, participants were invited to submit an extended abstract for possible inclusion in this special issue of PsychNology Journal, starting a process of expansion and revision that led to the four articles published in this issue. The first one, authored by Daniela Villani and Giuseppe Riva, is entitled '*Presence and Relaxation: A Preliminary Controlled Study*' and assesses the effectiveness of a VE designed to help stress management, in addition to investigating the relationship between such effectiveness and self-reported sense of presence. Four groups of users exposed to a relaxing narrative through different media are compared; the results add to an increasing corpus of works on cybertherapy and presence, and raise the issue of the relative importance of content and medium. In the second article '*Practices to Display Social Presence: A Study in a Shared Mediated Environment*', Fabiola Scarpetta describes a qualitative, contextualized approach to the study of presence practices in a special kind mediated environment, a dyadic chat in a multi-user collaborative game. Thanks to the conceptual tools of conversational analysis, some phenomena are identified as particularly eloquent of the presence resources available in the mediated environment under observation. The next couple of papers are exploratory, yet insightful attempts to investigate novel phenomena such as community connectedness and presence in atom visualizations. Luis A. Castro and Victor M. Gonzales in their '*Being Part of the Life of One's Hometown: Strategies to Support Community Connectedness*' frame presence as an experience relating not just the migrant to important Others, but to his/her whole home community. The mediated Social presence in this case is not an actor's but that of a whole aggregate of actors. Finally, Assimina M. Kontogeorgiou, Joan Bellou and Tassos A. Mikropoulos, in their graphically enticing '*Being inside the Quantum Atom*', bring the readers into the fascinating field of educational virtual environments. In a first evaluation of the Quantum Mechanics visualization system they have built, the authors discuss the participants' statements on their sense of presence, and sketch some possible implications for learning.

In his introductory speech at the Summer School, Giulio Ruffini the Peach coordinator argued that presence stood at the intersection of human cognition, machine cognition and human-machine interaction. We see presence as being grounded also

in the social and in the phenomenology of existence. Others emphasise presence as a central component of survival; presence allows people to distinguish the real from the imagined which gives those people an evolutionary advantage. For many researchers presence is inherently bound up with immersive virtual reality systems, but for others is includes all media and technologies concerned with creating complex experiences. Presence is when the technology disappears from a mediated experience. Presence extends human abilities into far away places, or into different times. This special issue provides concrete examples of what is happening now and a few glimpses into that future.

The issue of PsychNology Journal also includes a paper among the group of works presented at CHItaly 07 and selected for the high scores obtained from the conference reviewers. A first group of them was collected in a special issue at the end of 2007; the remaining ones are published during 2008. In '*Task and Stimulation Paradigm Effects in a P300 Brain Computer Interface Exploitable in a Virtual Environment: A Pilot Study*'. Piccione, Konstantinos Priftis, Paolo Tonin, Denis Vidale, Roberto Furlan, Marianna Cavinato, Antonio Merico and Lamberto Piron report their pilot study in the groundbreaking area of brain computer interfaces. They examine a setting where the elicitation stimulus is presented in a virtual environment and suggest, on the bases of their findings, that the structure of the elicitation paradigm, the modalities of stimulus presentation, and the complexity of stimulus recognition and semantic processing affect the BCI system.

David Benyon
Anna Spagnolli

Guest Editors