

The Neighborhood Narratives Project:
New Dialogues with/in the Mediated City

By

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*“when you go back to Sicily
visit my home in Borgetto
it would be my pride and joy
go, embrace my mother for me*

*I was born in that house
All my feelings are there
All my memories are of that place
And our little piece of land –
My brother will take you to see it
We have vineyards and orange groves. . .”*

From the poem, “What Pasquale wrote me. . .”

In Vanzetti’s Fishcart

By Justin Vitiello

Location aware art and media technologies expand the dialogue around concepts such as place, space, and location. What surfaces in the new dialogue is a focus on the transformations associated with ubiquitous computing, in particular our expectations regarding what computers are, what they might do for

us, the role of digital objects in everyday life; how places and spaces are transformed in social and cultural practice; and most importantly the distinction between two aspects of spatially organized environments -- those that arise out of their material and geometric properties (space) and those that arise out of the ways in which human activity takes place within them (place).

In geography place and space are not only 'strategic concepts' that have a particular political purpose but also are ideas to be investigated in their own right. Yet even strategic use of space/place provokes the question of why these notions have the deliberate, calculated effectiveness that they possess. Sometimes a concept has strategic importance because of its relation to some other term (male/female, mind/body) and in which one term is given a privileged role while the other is repressed. In the case of place/space neither seems to occupy a privileged position over the other. Indeed they might better be viewed as antipodal positions along a continuum. For both, their importance seems to derive from their indispensability and ubiquity in human thought, experience, and agency. The very structure of the mind as well as important existential, ontological, and philosophical questions is intrinsically tied to place and space.

Physical landscapes like that of Vitiello's Pasquale are but one representation of place/space. They influence how we process, experience, and represent our activities and thoughts but there are other much less straightforward ways in which our relation to landscape and environment influences our sense of self. Location aware art and media encourages the viewer/user to unearth the layers of information that occupy a space and make known the complex of historical, cultural, socio-political and economic contexts that affect location specific interactions.

In this paper we discuss the Neighborhood Narratives (NN) project and its relationship to these concepts. Neighborhood Narratives is an international education project that explores the issues that surface when new ideas made possible by locative arts and locative media technologies are applied to real places and trigger social interactions that in turn create new dialogues. Despite the

perception that new media arts and technologies fall short of capturing the spirit, personality, communicative power, and sense of place of Vitiello's Pasquale, they do confer on places and spaces a narrative and scientific reflection of the world. Strangers and non-strangers alike leave traces of themselves in the places they inhabit; their desires, anxieties, memories, and histories are communicated through social histories made meaningful through an archeological process of unearthing multiple layers of narrative. The exercises draw on the readings of invisible notes that location aware media attach to spaces, place, people and neighborhoods. In the exercises, the urban landscape is a canvas where analogue and digital media, text, sound, and image are applied to locations in order to document the definable (visible) and undefinable (invisible) aspects of place that simultaneously reveal and construct their essence. The objective is to create site specific annotations such as sound maps, community histories augmented by websites, audio interviews distributed over the cell phone, installations that integrate radio and other communications technology, scavenger hunts, and visual tags that when connected would produce a neighborhood narrative. The process encourages participants to combine the skills of the storyteller (the grounded expert with detailed everyday knowledge) with the flaneur (the mobile observer of the city with a broad overview).

Through the Neighborhood Narratives projects we are able to unearth a Foucaultian like archaeology of place, space, and location. By delving into what lies beneath or on top of what is visible on the landscape, the exercises have the potential for expanding the dialogue around place, space, and location while they also rest at the core of contemporary geographical inquiry.

Since much locative media/arts rely on the Cartesian idea of a base map they are intrinsically geographical in nature. With this as foundation, rather than merely following the contours of location specific variables, the NN projects described here offer a narrative path to understanding the philosophical and psychosocial aspects of concepts such as surveillance, public/private and

local/global relations. These concerns are at the core of how we begin to envision our future.

Neighborhood Narratives explores three themes--place/space, embodied practice and the merger of mixed reality and mobility.

PLACE

Place, according to Yi Fu Tuan (1977) combines a sense of position within society and a sense of identity with a spatial location. Places have historically been viewed as physical sites, with natural and emotional endowments that speak to the limits of human freedom. Not only are our human identities bound up with the hills and valleys in which we live but our very humanness and humanity is bound in this way. It is place that gives rise to humanness – in the form of feelings, attachments, longing, nostalgia, desire, melancholy, and fear.

The relationship of person to place and the idea that human identity is somehow tied to location is a recurrent theme in Western philosophical inquiry and romantic nature poetry. The life of the mind is given form in the places in which we dwell and places themselves shape and influence our experiences, memories, feelings and thoughts. Both traditional and new media artists have striven to capture the subjective, phenomenological conception of place. Bachelard (1964) talks of both the love of place, topophilia, and the investigation of places, topoanalysis, as essential notions in any phenomenological study of memory, self, and mind. For him, the life of the mind is given form in the places in which human beings dwell and places themselves shape and influence human memories, feelings and thoughts. For Derrida (1981a) the outside of any category is already found to be resident within, permeating the category from the inside through its traceable presence-in-absence.

Proust conceived of human life as essentially a life of location, of self identity as a matter of being situated in place and of places themselves as somehow suffused with the human. It is even possible that the idea of human identity being

tied to locality is bound up with biology or evolutionary history, not at all a contingent feature of human character varying as culture and society vary. Heidegger (1962) claims that the Cartesian conception of the world (space) fails to account for the pragmatic and distinctive structure of place. In *Being and Time* his consideration of the work floor tells us that humans are deeply involved in place; so much so that the place/self nexus is practically fused together. To be somewhere is to be in some particular place with its own unique there and yonder. Place is indispensable as the basis for locatedness. Places and regions provide a basis for the everyday demands and relations in which human beings are ineluctably entangled. To recognize them as necessities is essential to understanding what it means to be in the world to begin with. Others, Merleau Ponty (1962) in particular add that the human body is never without a place or that place is never without body; indeed the lived body is itself a place that is indispensable in the constitution of the place world. The places we inhabit are known by the bodies we live in. Similar to Proust, for Merleau Ponty a place is somewhere I might come to and when I do come to it, it is not just a matter of fitting into it. I come to a place as providing an indefinite horizon of my possible action. Even more strongly, Malpas (1999) suggests that place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience; it is not founded on subjectivity but is rather that on which subjectivity is founded. For Casey (1998) and these writers, the “where” is back in place once again and finally” (Casey, p. 340).

The idea that human identity is somehow tied to location and place is not new, but for persons interested in locative arts/media, places/neighborhoods are more than the nostalgia and longing that Pasquale has for his Borghetto. They are infinitely more complex. The locations/neighborhoods created by new location based art and media rely not as much on experience and physical proximity as on the social experience of being connected. Media artists create a new form of information narrative – one that relies on data to describe the world we live in. The primal, nostalgic sites of longing and loss are overlain with the dialectics of experience, culture, politics, and economics. They are also overlain with

narratives invisible to the naked eye. Accordingly, places not only reside in the contemporariness of today but importantly, they are assemblages of memories, experiences, ideas, dialogues, and technology that rest on a foundation of the past and the present at the same time. It is this simultaneity of these dimensions of locatedness that makes new dialogues possible.

Our consideration of place includes a discussion around Public Art and there we explore the issue of permanence/immutability set against the contemporary penchant for that which is indeterminate/ephemeral or transient and temporary. This latter category occupies the middle ground between the fixed, material and the virtual and reflects postmodern sensibilities.

SPACE

Space is perhaps best thought of as a three dimensional void where things are held to exist only if they occupy volume. Location based technologies negate the consideration of volume and view space along the lines of abstract Cartesianism. According to Drew Hemment (2006), locative arts are indexical or statistical; they work within a highly constrained understanding of spatiality, one encountered via a system in which all things are reduced to a set of geographic coordinates. Accordingly many view new media or the digitization of all media as creating a distancing from the humanities and thus contributing to a reconsideration of what it means to be human. Similarly, beginning with the 16th century, the conception of space which relied on the Cartesian coordinate system set in motion a marginalization of place. Space with its numerical properties was regarded as absolute and finite. Thus it was perceived as scientific and crucial to the goal of imperialism. Place, a la Pasquale's Borghetto as the subject of longing, nostalgia, desire, and as a social construction had no existence apart from that of space itself.

Certain activities are accorded special spatial status, while others are not. Driving a truck is spatial (hence, work), talking on the phone is less spatial (hence,

bureaucratic), and pondering an idea is simply ethereal (Sack, 1980, p. 17) hence, indolent.

Dourise (2006) in his second essay on “Re-space-ing Place”, urges us to exercise caution in this line of thinking and suggests that space is as much a social product as is place. Although our experience of space refers to an external world or a Cartesian extension, the mathematical and conceptual resources that we use when we talk about space are the products of particular kinds of social practice. The critical turn he notes, is to recognize that mathematical practice itself is socially constructed! In geographic inquiry space is produced by social relations that it also reproduces, mediates, and transforms. According to Soja place is the result of a process commonly referred to as the socio-spatial dialectic.

Contemporary new media technology has the effect of disrupting the empirical space of everyday action. As the technologies become more sophisticated, faster, more ubiquitous, they end up demolishing former distinctions, boundaries and categories, by their ability to collapse space and time. The work of Michel Foucault is relevant here. In “Space, Knowledge, and Power”, Foucault (1986) discusses utopias, dystopias, and heterotopias. Utopias are sites with no real place since they represent a perfected state. Dystopias can be real or imagined places in which the condition of life is characterized by deprivation, oppression, or terror. Heterotopias on the other hand are real places that contest and reverse sites within a given society. Heterotopias are at once absolutely different from the surrounding places they reflect and yet at the same time actually locatable in geographic reality. As such, they occupy a third space, a marginal location.

Michel de Certeau takes this one step further and posits the existence of atopias – social constructions without territorial boundaries. For our work here heterotopias and atopias speak to crucial “other spaces” spaces made relevant to a mixed reality.

In such a reductive understanding of spatiality, place and the body become a mere residue of the coordinate system (Hement, 2006). De Certeau (1984)

suggests that the grand panorama of the city is only understood by the ordinary practitioners who inhabit it, who live “down below” the threshold of this grand visibility. They walk; creating an urban “text” that is invisible. It exists only in the traces of everyday action (De Certeau, p. 93). The street view counters the political and economic meanings that are inscribed by the materiality of the buildings, monuments and town plan of urban space. This cataclysmic realization occurs when we move our bodies through space. The ubiquitousness of computer technology – upon which locative media arts and technology derive their sustenance - creates new spaces to move in.

EMBODIED PRACTICE

A consideration of embodied practice is the next theme in Neighborhood Narratives. A study of movement opens the discussion to questions around how we respond to sound, smell, taste, image, memory as well as issues of the body – weight, mass and un-enhanced physicality and daily events. Moving bodies through space alters the stasis of the built environment. We invited a group of choreographers¹ to collaborate in the teaching setting, and participate in the investigation of how a constantly changing sense of place affects the way in which we stabilize our sense of orientation.

Poets (e.g. Vitiello’s Pasquale), artists, and philosophers (e.g. Merleau Ponty) have long recognized and acknowledged the privileged status of the body. According to Freud the best way to return to place is through the body and its senses – smell, sight, touch, hear, taste – and through movement. In space, the body’s role is that of providing directionality. Without this, material entities would

¹ The Center for Creative Research (CCR) is a multi-year pilot project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and administered by the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA), designed to create and implement, innovative long-term strategies for artist-university interaction. The Center is currently made up of eleven Founding Fellows (Ann Carlson, Pat Graney, David Gordon, Margaret Jenkins, Bebe Miller, Ralph Lemon, Liz Lerman, Eiko Otake, Dana Reitz, Elizabeth Streb and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar); Artist-in-Residence, Ain Gordon; Project Director, Dana Whitco; and Senior Advisor, Sam Miller, President of Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC).

be disoriented, lacking the definite directionality of “right and left,” “up and down,” “front and back.” Things are not oriented in and by themselves; they require our intervention to become oriented. Nor are they oriented by a purely mental operation: the *a priori* condition that exists independently of experience, orientation, belongs to the body, not the mind. What supplies the missing ground and fills the lacuna is the body. Only as ourselves in our own body are we able to grasp that the spatial world is oriented in certain directions. The true basis of directionality is not absolute space but our own oriented/orienting body – the absolute source (Casey, pp. 229-231).

THE MERGER OF MIXED REALITY AND MOBILITY

The final theme draws on ***the merger of mixed reality and mobility***. Here the concern is with the relationship between the idea of ubiquitous, locative media and the site specific project. When real places are merged with virtual worlds, the result is a completely new environment where physical and digital objects co-exist in real time. The development of this enriched environment has appeared alongside major breakthroughs in our understanding of the brain— how we process sensory information and adapt our sensory functions. We explore all of these relationships by delineating the elements that constitute this new environment. In particular, we focus on the experience created by the use of mobile devices, and so the concept of a migrational city, where everyone is walking around, adds to our analysis of mobility.

In addition to these themes, we also look to current discourses from geography, philosophy, art, architecture, and engineering to inform our work. There are two philosophical issues – one from humanism – what does it mean to be human. How do we locate ourselves in the new mixed reality environment in the mediated city? The second philosophical issue revolves around the questions, “Who am I?” “Where am I?” Ultimately these are the important

concerns facing the world as we ponder our future. They form the framework of investigation for the Neighborhood Narratives Project.

NEIGHBORHOOD NARRATIVES

Neighborhood Narratives is part of an ongoing series of site based socially engaged initiatives, as such it shares a collaborative pedagogy with other location based media programs such as Social Tapestries, a project sponsored by the Proboscis organization in the U.K. Social Tapestries describes itself as “exploring the potential benefits and costs of local knowledge mapping and sharing,” what they have termed, “the public authoring of social knowledge.” Proboscis has explored how networks and modes of communication – virtual and physical – foster and build communities of people and interests (<http://socialtapestries.net>). Similar to Proboscis, Neighborhood Narratives is creating different methods of reciprocal investigation, between artists, scholars, universities and the communities that are associated with them. Using as its central thesis that artists can provide a unique prism through which intersecting and parallel lines of intellectual inquiry can be initiated and examined, NN is creating a transdisciplinary coalition that facilitates meaningful engagement with the practice of research.

Neighborhood Narratives uses alternative technologies, basic mobile recording devices, on-line open-source tools such as blogging, and Google Maps along with analog resources such as sketch maps to produce context rich stories that portray the world, city, or neighborhood. It explores the real and metaphorical potentialities of mapping, walking, and wayfinding as methods of developing attachments, connecting, and constructing narratives in a virtual and spatial locality (neighborhood). Neighborhood Narratives offers a specific and unique situation from which to critically consider the locative arts and locative media in relation to the context of the city and to explore new and old models of communication, community and exchange. The project invites public

participation, engages interactively, and encourages participants to consider their vocabulary of movement in space.

The collaboration with movement artists provides a lens by which to look at the body and movement as physical architecture in urban space. The particular choreographers who are involved in the project draw on the influences of their generation such as chance, happening, do-it-yourself aesthetic, anarchy, and the unconscious, considering movement in the randomness of the everyday public sphere.

At the core of Neighborhood Narratives is its inclusion into the arena of public art. In researching the history of Washington Square Park in Philadelphia, one project focused on public art's concern with the indeterminate, the ephemeral and the transient. Each of the twelve benches in the park had a plaque dedicated to someone who had died. The student made twelve digital collages on which she wrote the story of each person memorialized. The one remaining empty bench was dedicated to her ailing grandmother who had emigrated from Henan, China. In the project, the student unearthed unseen histories of the people marked on the benches, and anticipated the impending loss of her grandmother. She anchored these photos to the benches and left them there. Over the course of the next few days, she went back to see how long the photos lingered.

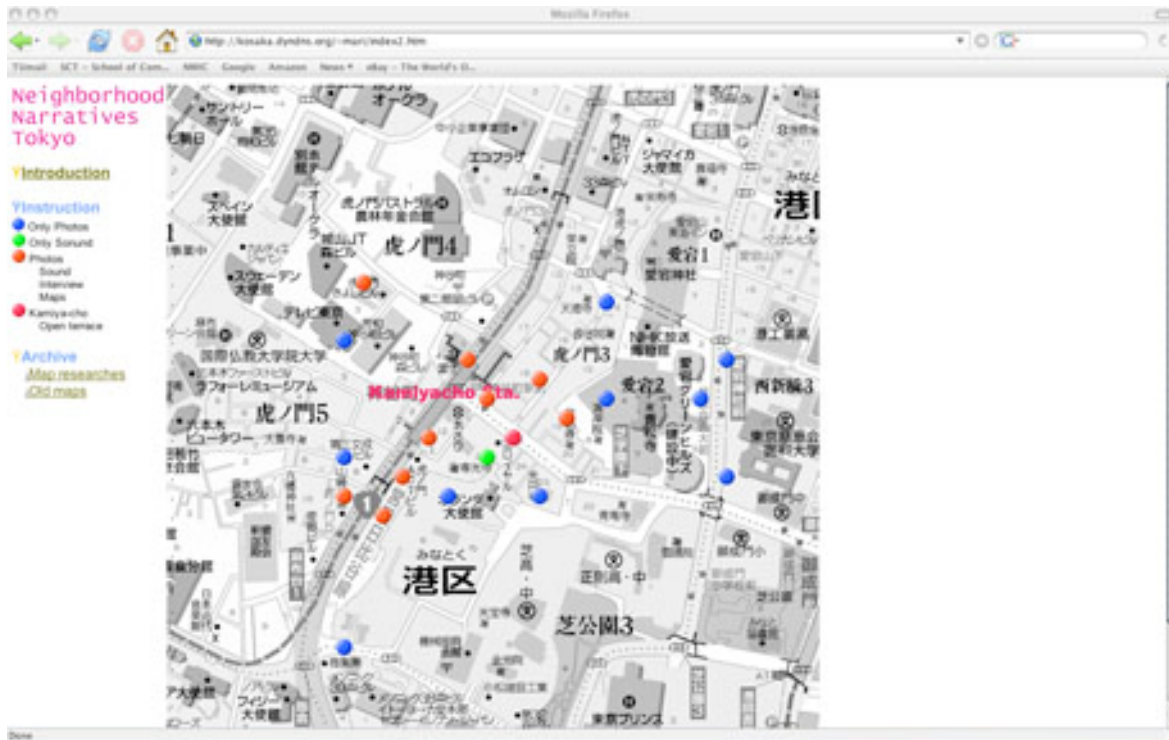
Neighborhood Narratives does not obligate sophisticated technology or design skills into its methodology. Instead it asks students to conceptually understand some of the processes of the mediated city such as negotiating geographic, political, ideological spaces and reconsidering the issues that they deal with in everyday life – the things they carry with them, the cell phones they use, the soft city they walk in, etc. To reconstruct their everyday assumptions in order to use them as a vocabulary and set of tools for looking at themselves and the world creatively and to articulate a personal vision in that form as a final project.

Perhaps the best example of this negotiation of geographical, political, and ideological space is the project “Death and Homelessness on Callowhill Rd.” In

this installation, the disparity between homeless squatters on one side of the street and gentrification on the other provided tools for introspection and reflection. Walking her dog around the block, the student was acutely aware of the difference between these contrasting ways of life. The juxtaposition of the homeless squatters to the newly refurbished homes represented an internal and external vulnerability, which had personal resonance. The installation led participants from Callowhill Road to a tent set up in her backyard. To get the full experience of the installation, participants had to walk a defined walkway filled with blocks – “stumbling blocks” – each one marked by a fabric that represented someone who had died. They had to step over the blocks to arrive at the tent, which was filled with her personal items, a construction of her inner world. In this project, the student juxtaposed the real world – Callowhill Road, with her mental and emotional one.

Beyond the local focus of the projects, Neighborhood Narratives is international in scope. It has been piloted in Philadelphia, Tokyo, London, Rome and New York so far. These classes are networked and linked together in order to investigate the local/global dialectic and how that relationship is being transformed in a mediated world. Each city presents a distinctive canvas to draw on. NN offers a unique vehicle to preserve the individual traces of each student’s path through an archiving of the projects. A map interface provides the conduit to visualize both the individual and overall experience of the local/global dialogue.

Fig. 1 – Student Project: Mariko Kosaka, Neighborhood Narratives Tokyo, Spring 2006



In the experimental learning environment of Neighborhood Narratives we engage with these issues to test first hand how space is transformed, negated or amplified (Hemment 2006). Fundamentally, the goal of engaging with this location data and/or site specific installations is to tease out new awareness and appreciation of place and space.

Here we highlight a few exercises generated by students that capture the aims and intents of NN. The exercises provide students with an opportunity to construct narratives in a virtual and spatial locality, research critical issues of the mediated city, and analyze complex relationships found in everyday reality.

EXERCISES

Mapping: Emotional Maps

The “new” map has become a collage of experiences, using tools and information that are created by a diverse populace. Emotional Maps ask the

students to use the idea of a pop up map – the overview on one side, the detail on another – to map their week or their route on one side and the subjective, emotional experience of that time period, on another. They may use paper or technology, or any material including clothing, to create this “map”. The significance is to measure time, to visualize an internal process and to relate it to route or wayfinding. In another interpretation, they are asked to map their personal path in the city – “my New York”, or “my Tokyo” - to layer their experience on the Cartesian view of the landscape. It is a way to set up a process of “re-storying”, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to amplify their experience of place in order to position themselves, imaginatively and actually within the continuum of nature and technology.

This exercise is related to Bio Mapping, a community mapping project in which over the last four years more than one thousand, five hundred people have participated. In the context of regular, local workshops and consultations, participants are wired up with an innovative device which records the wearer's Galvanic Skin Response (GSR), which is a simple indicator of the emotional arousal in conjunction with their geographical location. People re-explore their local area by walking the neighborhood with the device and on their return a map is created which visualizes points of high and low arousal. By interpreting and annotating this data, communal emotion maps are constructed that are packed full of personal observations which show the areas that people feel strongly about and truly visualize the social space of a community (<http://www.biomapping.net/>).

Orientation: Push/Pull

The Push/Pull exercise we have adopted is used in treatment for vertigo. Two people walk together, one pushing, and the other pulling by holding each other's arms. The person being pushed closes their eyes. The person pushing narrates what they observe around them in a continual stream of association, while the person pulling allows themselves to be “steered” by the other. Not only does one have to rely on the other person for their visual sense of the world, but

they start to separate the senses within themselves. Balance is no longer achieved through visual orientation; it shifts to the legs, the sense of sound, and importantly, the physical proximity of one person to another. The exercise immediately disassociates all these elements and forces the sensory system to reorient itself in real time.

This has led to several projects where the students employ some kind of presence and absence by eliminating or displacing one sense – whether it be sight, or sound. Pairs of students were asked to walk around a block. One partner would lead another who wore a blindfold. They were taken to specific locations on the block, where the student with vision would describe the location in detail. The blindfolded student used their cell phone to call a phone number in order to narrate what they imagined would be in that location in ten years. The result was an audio repository of the imagined block in ten years, mapped to location.

In another exercise, called *Body, Movement, Environment*, two students set out to explore how the body correlates to the physical landscape and everyday places and objects in unexpected ways. Related to the French game of Parkour, an activity that is based on moving from one point to another as directly as possible - overcoming the obstacles of fences, walls, or gaps - these students encountered all the physical obstacles in a block radius. They sought to discover how their bodies created a new spatial experience, which they mapped to place via photographic documentation and video displayed in a monitor. The students here are asked to explore their relationship to the everyday environment, their sensory orientation, and embodied sense of place.

The work of the artist Akitsugu Mayebayashi, in his project *Sonic Interface*, suggests some of the sensory alteration we may yet encounter in the future. *Sonic Interface* is a portable hearing device that is made from headphones, microphones, and a laptop computer. The participant is invited to walk around the city, and experiences modified sonic environments processed real time from the sounds it picks up. Mayebayashi has focused on the auditory sense as an

interface between the body and the environment. By uncoupling sound from vision, his project questions what we assume as "real". "Presence" requires the constant stabilizing and synchronizing of vision and sound; an uncoupling of the two opens up the possibility for other presences, other experiences of "self." This separation also importantly has the effect of destabilizing the experience of "place."

Surveillance: Following

The *Following* exercise was inspired by both Janet Cardiff's audio walks², an example of the expressive, generative version of ambulant geo-notative locative art practice; and Sophie Calle's *Suite Vénitienne*, where she used a conceptual strategy to create a document with photos providing evidence of her search to Venice to look for a stranger she met at a party. One student chose to follow five different people at his usual stop on the subway. Three of these people were "intimate strangers", people he had observed frequently on his route, but whom he did not know. Two people he followed, as a first encounter. He documented the experience of each trajectory, the time and distance traveled the fantasies and assumptions of each life, housing them all in a web-based map project.

² Two of which are *Walk Münster* by Janet Cardiff with Georges Bures Miller, 1997. *Skulpture Project Münster 97*, curated by Kasper König, Münster, Germany and *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* by Janet Cardiff with Georges Bures Miller, 1999. Whitechapel Library organized by Artangel, London, England, June 17 – Nov. 27, 1999.

Fig. 2 - Student Project: Mike Benner, Neighborhood Narratives Philadelphia, Fall 2005



Jean Baudrillard writes,

“To follow the other is to take charge of his itinerary; it is to watch over his life without him knowing it. It is to play the mythical role of the shadow, which, traditionally follows you and protects you from the sun – the man without a shadow is exposed to the violence of life without mediation – it is to relieve him of that existential burden, the responsibility of his own life. Simultaneously, she who follows is herself relieved of responsibility for her own life as she follows blindly in the footsteps of another. Again, a wonderful reciprocity exists in the cancellation of each existence, in the cancellation of each subject’s tenuous position as a subject” (1983 p.82).

Somewhat similarly, the responses of the students to the assignment ranged from one student’s realization that in her heart she loved to follow people – in fact,

she realized that she had quite an “affinity for following people.” A city where walking is the main mode of transportation constantly puts people face to face, often the same people over and over. Since she moved to New York, it had frustrated her to find herself constantly surrounded by people she recognized but had never met. This assignment was her chance to figure out who these people really are. Yet, once she was asked to turn her curiosity into an exercise, the idea of following turned sour. She said, “I felt like I was invading not only their physical space, but their mental space too.”

A different reaction was elicited from another student, who was extremely threatened by the idea of following someone and allowing someone else’s physical itinerary to determine her movement in the city. Her sense of territory had distinct racial and economic boundaries that determined her awareness of safety. Following another route was deeply disturbing. Her solution was to solicit the help of a friend to go with her. However, throughout the experience of following someone on an unfamiliar route, she commented that she had to “watch her back,” which became the next exercise for the class.

The *Following* exercise is similar to the Loca (Location Oriented Critical Arts) project. According to Evans et.al. Loca was initiated out of an interest in how surveillance and social control emerge as a residue or unforeseen effect of virtuous information systems and network technologies. Loca observes people's movements by tracking the position of the Bluetooth enabled devices that they carry. Over seven days more than two thousand five hundred people were detected enabling the team to build up a detailed picture of their movements. People were sent messages from a stranger with intimate knowledge of their motion. Over the course of the week the messages became gradually more sinister, the would-be friend mutating into stalker, "coffee later?" changing to "r u ignoring me?" For participants the experience of Loca is intangible, it unearths what is not seen. The aim is subtle affect. As the developers note, “Loca is like a picture glanced at sideways, a message caught in the corner of the eye, or a mosquito swatted on the arm (<http://www.loca-lab.org/>)." It makes apparent the

kind of peer to peer observations that become possible as a result of the discomforts and dislocations associated with everyday surveillance.

Public/Private: Put Something Here

Site-specific art carries the potential to redefine the intention of public place. Put Something Here, an exercise which is purposely oblique, teases out a variety of responses, all related to issues brought forward by the insertion of “something,” or intrusion into public space. Students are asked to “put something here” to which they usually respond, “What is the something and where do we put it?”

In reply we present Krzysztof Wodiczko’s “Alien Staff,” a pole with a mini video screen on the top and a loudspeaker in the middle that plays a video projection of the person carrying the staff. Wodiczko designed the Alien Staff in response to the dilemma of the outsider, the immigrant who is invisible (and also silent) as he moves through public territory. The Alien Staff is meant to make the bearer (the alien) visible by creating a double presence, one in “media” and one in “life,” inviting a new perception of a stranger as imagined (on screen) or as experienced (real life) (Wodiczko 1999, p.104). In examining projects of this nature, we are attempting to bring forward how engaging new media technologies offer new conceptions of place as a space of resistance, interference, and enunciation in opposition to those augmentations of surveillance and control they also enable (Myers, 2006).

One project, titled Palimpsest FM, consisted of a device that houses a hidden speaker which plays back the sounds of the same spot from an earlier time, anywhere from thirty seconds to a day before. The replayed recording serves as an audio version of a palimpsest, a proof of what had been there before. Using sound as her medium, the student created a nearly seamless overlapping of past and present where the sounds of today cannot be discerned from the sounds of the past. Like a palimpsest, it will be unclear where the past ends and the present begins.

Bachelard speaks of centering oneself in stable surroundings, but if your surroundings are constantly in flux (and also incidentally not just your surroundings) like they are in New York, it is no wonder a sense of ontological anxiety can result. New York City has often been described as a place where the physical environment changes so quickly that rebuilding without being able to erase what came before it becomes very obvious to anyone who has lived there long enough to call New York their home. “You’ve become a New Yorker once you have the urge to point out a place and say, “that used to be . . .” The “that used to be . . .” that every New Yorker expresses is part of the inerasable past that is being built over, it is an expression of memory of a piece of their home and consequently a piece of their identities that is gone but not forgotten. It is embodied in the senses. The urge to tell others what used to be is an attempt to reassert one’s identity and the home they had carved out of the city. This project serves as another means of describing the “that used to be.” But instead of subjectively telling the narrative of one person’s New York, it objectively captures what the place witnessed. The audio palimpsest played back in this project serves as a kind of memorial of what used to be in the immediate past. It stands to commemorate the same everyday New York that its citizens quietly mourn when it is torn down and built over. It memorializes the trivial happenings that many may overlook, but still plays an important role in a place’s narrative and consequently a person’s identity. By placing Palimpsest FM in Washington Square Park under the shadow of the statue of Garibaldi and the Washington Arch, a comparison can be drawn between the monuments that commemorate the selective history of the victors to one that records and replays all voices of the city equally. The neighborhood narrative can then become more complete as it plays back everything it hears.

Local/Global: The International Exercise

In the complexity of the contemporary city, we need to create new experiences of community to fill the need for significant encounter. The international aspect of the class, seeks to create networked relationships of place and alternate spaces of encounter.

One of the ways we measure these interactions is to share relative experience from one place to another. By doing so we succeed in articulating a third space using digital tools and presenting it on the web. The International exercise brings together students from Rome, London, Tokyo, and the US. In each location, the cultural investigation has a different focus, depending on the traditions of the community. London, with a large history of map-making and local lore focused on location and social order. Tokyo begins with the media landscape of the urban environment. Rome is perfectly suited to the use of historic sites as a portal to the mining of the layers of history and anecdote.

The students in Rome and Tokyo were asked to map their route from home to school. By contrasting one city experience to another, and mapping the relationship, we have a new way to visualize and experience different qualities of urban mobility.

In one of the more powerful examples of the international character of Neighborhood Narratives, a Japanese exchange student decided to take the Neighborhood Narratives class in Tokyo, Philadelphia and Rome, creating a world-wide project that had autobiographical connections traced to each city. For Rome, she created an installation called "Bridge." She saw the bridge as a transitional space that linked central Rome to Trastevere, and served as a metaphor for her own states of transition between center and periphery. She gathered clothes from the gypsy market in Trastevere, conscious of their narrative history. Onto these garments she attached a web address for people to discover when gathering the clothes. At that site they would find a map of her path made up of text that narrated her experience of being an outsider. The clothes were laid down on the bridge and left there; the class checked back hours later to see what had

happened. Some elements of the installation had been taken, and some kicked to the side of the bridge.

Fig. 3 Student Project: Mariko Kosaka, Neighborhood Narratives Rome, Summer 2007



Fig. 4 Student Project, Detail, Neighborhood Narratives Rome, Summer 2007



In describing bridges, Heidegger observes,

“To be sure, the bridge is a thing of its own kind; the location is not already there before the bridge is. Before the bridge stands, there are of course many positions along the stream that can be occupied by something. One of them proves to be a location, and does so because of the bridge” (Heidegger 1971).

This is yet another illustration of the ephemeral character of public art.

Place/Space: Cross/Walks – Weaving Fabric Row

Situated storytelling is a way in which digital media are applied to real places, using wireless communications to map narrative to place. Connecting this kind of technological system to the design of a neighborhood story network, extends the interplay of absence and presence and facilitates the dynamic input of

viewers and users in building a virtual portrait/archive; it provides the opportunity to add their own stories and pictures, annotate them, add comments, and respond to each other. It engages elements of photodocumentary, psychogeography, ethnography and environmental design to construct living narratives that tap into the impassioned stories and needs of a given community. These works underline the relationship of place to the larger historical and demographic movement of the area, bringing out personal articulations of cultural events.

A special project generated by Neighborhood Narratives was *Cross/Walks: Weaving Fabric Row*, which constructed a portrait composed of interviews with merchants and personalities from the neighborhood, which had site-specific delivery via cell phone on Fabric Row (4th Street between Bainbridge and Catherine) in Philadelphia. From these elements, an installation was composed in a gallery that combined the remote/local connection in an interactive audio component, along with a web site. The stories were accessible by cell phone in the location where they were told, and the public could add their own contributions from the street; or remote locations via the web. Although the stories are available on the web, but the project's dynamic achieved more resonance when heard on Fabric Row, while walking in the place that was narrated.

Merchants on Fabric Row, once a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, are now ethnically diverse, but share the desire to preserve the sense of place that Fabric Row has acquired through generations. "Cross/Walks demonstrates that both the art and the subject are in transition" (Marder, 2007). The emergence of online shopping and jumbo stores has heralded the demise of small, independent stores, like the ones on Fabric Row. The unique thing about narrative delivered over the cell phone is that it can preserve and distribute a sense of one place to everywhere.

Cross/Walks engages the critical third space of mixed reality by standing on the street and accessing sounds and stories of the location through cell phones. It amplifies the sense of locality and alters the sense of time by adding narratives of people who are simultaneously engaged in live interactions in the same place.

Situated story sites have grown up around the availability of cell phone technology to augment our experience of place. These projects, such as Murmur Toronto, offer “history from the ground up, told by the voices that are often overlooked when the stories of cities are told. We know about the skyscrapers, sports stadiums and landmarks, but Murmur looks for the intimate, neighborhood-level voices that tell the day-to-day stories that make up a city. Once heard, these stories can change the way people think about that place and the city at large (<http://murmurtoronto.ca/>).”

CONCLUSIONS

The Neighborhood Narrative project offers a view of how location aware art and media technologies can be appropriated to initiate new dialogues around concepts such as place, space, and location. It fosters new ways of engaging with/in the mediated city. By relying on walking, mapping and creating installations located between real and virtual space, the NN projects inscribe emotional and artistic visions on the canvas of geographical space. In so doing, they reconstruct collective and individual memories and provide a mechanism for sharing local histories and knowledge. Despite philosophical and existential concerns raised by new media (What does it mean to be human? How do we locate ourselves in a mixed reality environment in the mediated city? Who am I? Where am I?), the projects described here succeed in illustrating how the new sites opened at the interface of place, space, and the body amplify experience. Visualizing internal emotional processes and relating them to route or wayfinding; constructing narratives in a virtual and spatial locality/neighborhood that reveal attachments and connections; positioning oneself imaginatively and actually along a continuum of nature and technology; exploring the ephemeral quality of public art assume heightened resonance when they are located in place. In the NN projects, it is place that provides the richness of experience. For students in Philadelphia traveling on the bus to the site based installations, it is the shared experience of

occupying a common space, a neighborhood unto themselves that was primary. For international students, the richness of the installations achieved the most salience and vibrancy in the place itself. The experience came from actually spending time in Tokyo, Rome, and the neighborhoods of Philadelphia. Place is fundamental. In this way, Neighborhood Narratives offers a specific and unique situation from which to critically consider the primacy of place to the locative arts and locative media.

Neighborhood Narratives uses open source technologies and easily accessible tools. It does so in order to conceptually ground the processes that characterize geographic, political, and ideological spaces in the mediated city. It asks students to reconsider the issues they deal with in everyday life and to reconstruct their everyday assumptions in order look at themselves and the world in a new and creative way. The projects inside of Neighborhood Narratives explore the something else in-between the Cartesian understanding of space and grounded location. They are original and inventive ways to experience Pasquale's vineyards and orange groves, new narratives of place.

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