

Mimi Ito: Place and Meaning

Technology as a place-making infrastructure. If you look at technologies from the perspective of existing places, they can be seen as disruptive: Kids on cell phones or SMS'ing in the classroom, or even in McDonalds, is seen by the older generation as disruptive, "Why would you disrupt the integrity of the face to face situation with this technology?" But kids don't see it that way?

Kids, especially in their later teens, are physically and emotionally mature, yet they're not afforded the rights of adults. They inhabit spaces owned by others, and their strongest desire is to be with their peers, but they're denied the opportunity. The cell phone provides this possibility. This phenomenon is strongest among young couples – there are very few places where they're allowed to express physical intimacy. They send many messages that are not particularly full of content, but express states, moods, etc. "Place-like" consciousness, a sigh, the providing of peripheral awareness, "I'm going to take a bath now" (to let you know I won't be available for an hour or so).

Cedric: "This strikes me as a relatively ephemeral, thin example – as opposed to the intergenerational wisdom of the Apaches."

Mimi: other examples – copier repair technicians, having access to an open system, suddenly had the ability to self-dispatch, rather than being at the direction of the call center staff.

Richard: Interested in the appropriation of spaces – for instance, skaters at Banks Square in Dublin. Mimi's example seems to point to a situation where the appropriation took place "outside" of physical space.

Ken Anderson: How are meanings of places shared?

Joe McCarthy: Enhancing the experience of a place.

Jeff Kim: Interested in the transformation of roles, organizational structures as a result of technological presence. People are not going to just change their boundaries. He looked at the effects of broadband on Korean elections. "Maybe it's just a matter of scale?"

John Sherry:

Trevor Pering: Interest in how emerging technologies – how they affect people's personal presence, how they interact with their immediate physical environment.

Lishi Kwasitu: Primary interest in how engineers seek information. Did some work for Ken on blogging.

Margaret Morris: Interest in how people construct themselves by shaping their physical surroundings. Also interested in people suffering from cognitive loss, how can technology help people maintain their relationship to places they love.

Marianne Klekacz: Interested in place as a poet, and interested in the idea that location aware computing might have the power to create a paradigm shift.

Patricia Shanahan: works with the active campus project at UC San Diego. What would it take to use this technology to build more of a community. There is a shortage of student

housing, there is a larger number of students working off campus to support themselves. How can this technology make the campus more of a community for the students.

Nicole Friedman: My organization works a lot with underutilized assets in communities (both tangible and intangible)

Cedric Page: I'm a geographer, dean of faculty at DigiPen, where we teach students how to develop for games. Interested in bringing insights from geography – looking for research projects for faculty, and for identifying ways to provide students with a deeper appreciation for “place”. Introducing social science perspective into coursework.

Richard Beckwith: interest in different ways places are “defined” – either through a historical event (the twin towers), or the significance that this is where people meet. In the case of the latter: how important is place in the formation of community.

Randy Jensen: I'm a “performance technologist” – I'm now rationally irrational, no longer enthralled by technology. Come from a military background...how has this changed? Soldiers in the field, generals in their command posts, now share much more information. What will the monuments of today be in 500 years? What is technology doing to us? What is it doing to our spirit?

Back to discussion...

Technology ideas:

Patricia: flash mobs seem to be a mixing of the self-publishing phenomenon, the participatory accessibility of it.

Cedric: Interesting application of technology – when you turn on your laptop, you get a visual collage of the place you are in. Now that you've landed in Portland, your screen saver has changed to be a collage of the local culture.

Randall: How about extending that to knowing the precise location of people...

Trevor's meaningful place: Juneau, Alaska -

Patricia: Central London,

Interesting interplay of personal memory, historical memory, social and ritual

The presence of “there's the real thing!” The presence of atoms.

Sometimes it's not just the physical coordinates, but the physical properties of the environment, that provide one with a sense of well-being. When Margie is walking in the woods, it immediately brings to mind her past, jogging on wooded trails. Sometimes you get off a plane and you take a taxi, and it's “OK this is a real city.” There are templates, prototypes, etc. that are triggered by the presence of certain physical environments: for instance, there is a certain excitement about being in a place like an airport or grand central station. This effect might be most powerful when it's a surprise: the “heightened sense of awareness” – this actually might be related to physical exertion, surprise, hybrid gaming. The concept of flow applies here. Many of the activities that bring the sense of

flow, engagement to people suffering from cognitive decline are the ones that they're limited from doing (e.g., hiking in the woods).

Travel itself changes the meaning of places – and the role of food. Lishi grew up eating shellfish, in his small village. These are the most expensive dishes, and he misses them. Again it comes back to these immediate sensual experiences – tastes, smells, sounds.

Technologies seem so focused on human communication, access and sharing of “information”, at the expense of this a rich sensory experience. How can we deliver a greater sense of connectivity and social connectedness.

Interesting discussion around the role of “place” in the discussion of sporting events – experiencing them on TV versus in person.

How does the engagement of a place change in the presence of others: I don't like traveling alone because the sense of wonderment at these places sometimes feels “wasted”. If no one else is sharing this experience, does it get “logged” somehow? How can I share this with others? There is also the question of feeling safe and secure. If I'm young and traveling by myself, it can be a feeling of vulnerability.

Is there a technology that would allow you to share the experience with someone else? Maybe a person needs to be there for a few reasons: some times I just want to turn off and let someone else take control of the travel.

I took a trip to Hawaii, all the recording of the activities, journaling, documenting, taking pictures, was done for me by the guides.

Mimi's subgroup: Themes

Memorials, design

Remembering versus forgetting. How can you enable memory that is situated in a place.

We started with a discussion of large-scale memorials (Vietnam memorial), but what about more private, personal local place-based information. “Is this a good neighborhood, are there environmental hazards” when you're buying a house. Sort of medium scale information, that might be

We're talking about information, not meaning and stories; what about personal meanings. Live journaling, etc.

Overall it is very difficult to get information about places, overall we don't have enough opportunities for telling each other stories about the significance that places have. Sometimes large events enable this “time out” to do it, but the smaller stuff is harder to transmit, harder to capture or share. “My friends passed this way ten years ago!”

How do we better enable ad-hoc story-telling, something that is more in the flow of daily life. What technologies might allow this?

Locational server in a neighborhood. What if you had a server for a graveyard, learn a little about the people lying there. It's like a museum system for a larger scale – a neighborhood.

iMode has an analogous system, they are hesitant to capture location data for privacy reasons, but they have an i-Area service, you can say “tell me about the area I'm in” and you don't have to know where you are, you get information about the neighborhood. Vendigo is a similar service, but this requires users to enter their current location.

NOTE: this is a commercial service, not the sort of story-telling or meaning-making that some of the prior discussion was about.

Dimensions of meaningful-ness of place, how and why places gain significance.

Intimacy – in the absence of any sanctioned place, Japanese teens are creating their own space for this.

Memory – personal, intergenerational, institutional, national, etc.

An engagement of the senses – Sometimes a place is meaningful not by virtue of its precise coordinates, but its physical properties. A certain kind of trail through the woods. A “real city”. Foods, tastes, smells.

A heightened sense of awareness – Mimi mentioned photo blogging, hybrid games provide this, but so do other things, surprise at a new place, physical exertion, etc.

The issue of story-telling and meaning making emerged as a real central issue.

- We noted memorials, large scale (e.g., Vietnam memorial; Gettysburg) where a major event has forced us to carve out a space for storytelling and remembering.
- On a smaller scale – the murder of two teenage girls here in Portland last year resulted in a temporary memorial at the place where they found the bodies (soon to become a strip mall).
- Smaller scale still: parties where we quiz our friends about the right neighborhoods to move to.
- But what about the smallest scale: how can we create technologies that allow us to tell each other stories in the flow of daily life?