Zones of Intensity Invested with Desire
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Abstract: **This paper explores the meaning-making potential of cultural sites of historical importance within the current framework of human communication that now seamlessly intertwines digital, electronic and organic forms of contact. The paper argues that the computer-guided communication prevalent now favours the systematic and programmed and that has repercussions in terms of our sense of identity as organic beings living in a physical world. A response is to reinforce a sense of place via direct experience in cultural sites that are invested with a strong sense of place, referred to as "zones of intensity invested with desire" (this term was coined by Russell West-Pavlov and referenced by Darko Radovic to address the visual bias of urban planning). The argument follows that there needs to be a conscious reconnection with all the senses, overcoming the current visual bias encouraged by communication via the printed word. Art as alternative modality of relations has a strong role to play to reconnect us to the meaning-making elements in physical sites and reinforce the sense of place so crucial in our existence as organic beings.**

Keywords: **cultural heritage, sense of place, non-power fragmentation, sense of identity, visual bias, presence, displacement, self-hypnosis**

I. Introduction

This investigation was initiated through my artistic exploration of Talayots; protohistoric sites in the island of Mallorca, on the Mediterranean Sea off the eastern coast of Spain. These rock-based constructions are the remains of early settlements in the island and constitute a meaningful cultural heritage for the populations that followed. In current times, most of the sites are abandoned and poorly signposted. Their presence barely registers in a cultural environment dominated by the tourism industry with its focus on beach, relaxation and entertainment.

During visits to sites in the central and southern part of the island, this isolation from mainstream culture came palpably through. At the same time, there was an intensity to the experience and a sense that the constructions were an active transmission from the past as historically significant to the development of the island and how it operates now. This led to questions about what particular sites might mean for the communities that live in those areas and how the qualities inherent in those locations can enhance a sense of place and a sense of community for people and make them feel like they are part of the integrated whole.

II. SENSE OF PLACE

At this point in time, as our digital presence integrates more and more seamlessly with our physical reality, it is a good time to examine the notion of sense of place as a means of shaping and reinforcing our sense of identity. Sense of identity is an expression of what we value and leads us to prioritise certain elements in our lives and particular activities become important—are activated—as a result of our identification with certain meanings and processes. The current predominance of the digital as a social context means that a vast majority of people are concentrating their attention and effort into developing and establishing their identities online rather than affirming and replenishing their connections within their local environment. This trend is set and reinforced by the global nature of our production and distribution systems that locate and communicate our daily routines via the disembodied rather than the physical.

This has clear repercussions in terms of how people envision their reality and plan for the future. It was George Herbert Mead early in the nineteenth century who proposed that the mind and self emerged out of the social process of significant communication [1]. Marshall McLuhan expanded on that in the mid nineteen sixties with key insights about the invisibility of our mental environments, conditioned by the communications media that help to shape them; making a strong correlation between the patterns of a culture and its primary means of communication [2]. So, if our sense of self is rooted in our means of communication, and that is increasingly sited in a digital space more and more integrated into our

physical reality, how does that affect our sense of place?

This paper suggests that fragmentation is taking place with greater frequency as a majority of people situate their identities digitally rather than in a fixed geographic location. Fragmentation is a term used typically in computing to refer to the obstruction of retrieval of data caused by file storage in noncontiguous clusters, meaning that the integrity of the whole package of information is disrupted as bits of data get scattered in packets in the various holes and pockets of space available on an overpacked hard drive. So every time there is a command to retrieve one file, all the bits and pieces that make up that file in its entirety have to be retrieved from separate locations in the hard drive, slowing down the retrieval process. The computer user has to perform a defragmentation in order to restore file integrity, increase storage capacity, and improve performance. [3]

In psychology, fragmentation is the name of a psychological disturbance where thoughts and actions are split apart.[4] Like a computer file with its bits of data randomly scattered all over a hard drive, a human being whose thought activities (both real and fictional) are located on various online social media networks will have a difficult time connecting their identity to their local environment. Sherry Turkle raised this concern in her 1995 book Life on the Screen: Identity in the age of the internet but the work did not question the trajectory, it simply observed it, allowing for the eventual conclusion to be a new way of conceiving of identity and relationships as being multiple and de-centred [5]. In terms of exploring the possibilities of what it is to be human, this is exciting terrain to investigate as researchers conceptualise identity as

multiple, fractured, and engineered. I researched this phenomenon in 2000 and concluded:

"The individual as semantic construct is increasingly appearing to be, not a philosophical position, but a contemporary necessity—maybe hard to swallow for most of us, but nevertheless a necessity. The experiments and processes of the hard sciences cannot tackle the concept of the self in the way that they can comfortably name, evaluate and plot human DNA. Without scientific proof that the self exists, we look to our mirror for validation. But our reflection today encompasses more than just our physical experience, it also includes the worlds that we experience on and through screens. We are reflected more by prisms than by mirrors, and they reveal the possibilities of the many, not just the one." [6]

The key word in that statement is necessity. As we situate more and more firmly our everyday contexts online—work, socialising, purchasing, information gathering—the protocols established by the various interfaces we encounter require that we conceptualise and communicate our world in the grammar and syntax of the digital and we begin to lose sight of the benefits of integral action guided by our interaction with the natural world. In a 1967 review of Understanding Media: The extensions of man, Richard Kostelanetz wrote: "[Marshall McLuhan] maintains that a major shift in society's predominant technology of communications is the crucially determining force behind social changes. Initiating great transformations not only in social organization but human sensibilities." [7] The current digital system allows us to slot in, fragmenting bits of our reality and splicing it with spots of fantasy and fakery, so that we can fit into the system protocols established for us by engineers and marketeers.

When most of the activities are disconnected from one another, it is difficult to engage with the entirety of the actual experience and respond intuitively. Intuition is like a muscle that needs to be flexed and exercised regularly in order to remain functional and it requires integration of mental and physical processes to be activated; it requires presence. The reason this is a serious concern is that intuitive behaviours and responses are connected to the organic, and an appreciation and care for intuition are a key means of protecting the organic in us, and by extension, protecting the organic environment that sustains us as living humans. If we lose sight of this, we threaten our own survival. If the organic loses importance in our minds through a digital prism, then we will not take the necessary steps to maintain and protect it. This is already happening in our world, as Facebook updates take precedence over local neighbourhood shops closing down around us.

If our sense of identity is most closely identified with our presence online, then what we hold as important becomes more disconnected from the world around us. The purchase made from a global conglomerate at the click of a button does not then register in our minds as the demise of local businesses that support the vibrancy and infrastructure of our local communities and that provide sustainable employment and income for our friends and neighbours. To properly appreciate the complexity of our online and offline lives and begin to take steps to shape our decisions to account for the importance of the organic in our lives, a strong sense of place is required. This means an appreciation for it not just in terms of survival, but also in terms of how it reinforces meaning in our lives, connecting us to our past, to our future, and to one another.

This becomes a difficult point to argue in a socio-political atmosphere that celebrates short-term gain over long-term perspective. If a person does not feel a connection to place, caring about its past and aiming to protect its future, then it is not a factor in the decision-making process made every day. In that scenario, the loss of local community spaces formerly used as shared public space does not register as tragic. It is noted simply as an evolutionary step towards progress, as more and more social activities move online. Fragmentation then becomes a reality for many, with pockets of activities disjointed from one another gathered up daily to make up the whole guided by rational thinking processes rather than holistic responses guided by intuition. The question addressed here is what do we value in our lives? What are we willing to work hard to preserve and maintain?

It will be easier to follow the flow of an increasingly digitised, systematised and programmed existence; a world where many choices are recommended to us or are manipulated without our knowledge as we follow protocols that increasingly force us to pursue and value the systematic and programmed rather than the integral and intuitive. A reinforcement of a sense of place can help us to identify more closely with our lives as organic beings living in a physical world and to respond accordingly.

III. Local versus Global

This development has been ongoing since digital communication began to roll out on a mass scale, from the mid 1990's onward as commercialisation of the internet made it possible for the general public to communicate online. Still, at that time, there were enough required activities conducted through local channels that reminders did not seem necessary. At this juncture in history, the once unrestricted world wide web is being overtaken by privatised pockets of activity in the internet. Facebook is an example of that. It gives a small number of individuals unprecedented access, and by extension, control over individuals interacting in those spaces. People placing personal data in their profiles find it mimicked in the contextual advertising that appears within the interface. Taking this one critical step further, Facebook conducted a hidden mood experiment in 2012 involving hundreds of thousands of Facebook users without their knowledge, exposing one group to "negative emotional content" and another to "positive emotional content" to study the effect this had on the users' own postings [8]. There was public outcry when this was recently reported as it unmasks the control that Facebook can actually exert on its users, but it has not detracted from a continuing rise of use of Facebook, with 1.35 billion monthly users in the third quarter of 2014 [9]. This links back to McLuhan's notion that the nature of the media we use to communicate has a direct effect on human sensibilities. In the case of Facebook's experiment, it influenced emotional responses based on the tone of voice of the content provided to specific users.

We look at systems rather than consider the individuals using the systems. This has been the trajectory of globalised production and distribution, where the integrated production cycle gets separated into tasks that are divided up and most often outsourced to be completed as discrete segments that are collated by the distributor. It is the distributors, under unified brand banners, that are identified by the public who access these goods and services. The

reality is geographically fractured, with complex routes of goods and information managed by computer-guided systems. Communications with the distributor are managed through digital interfaces with a push for ticketed communications that follow digital protocols limiting the nature and range of feedback individuals can have with distributors. This is happening across all sectors: manufacturing, banking, business, education, and government. Human communication shaped via computer-guided interactions.

If people's sense of identity is located (or dislocated) via the digital then what is valued and, by extension, what is protected and reinforced is guided by values informed by discrete elements, such as status, price, and convenience. It is not that this was not taking place before, but that it has been amplified by the ability of digital processes to aggregate information and distill it as data that can be mined, evaluated [10], and, as in the case of Facebook, used effectively to impact on users' emotional state and behaviour. In their recently published book "The Point of Being", Derrick de Kerckhove and Cristina Miranda de Almeida acknowledge the "cognitive and perceptual changes in which we are immersed in the digital era" [11]. "[T]he basic premise of the book is that the alphabet has emphasized a visual dominance among the senses people use to perceive the world as a whole, a trend that has repressed or toned down information from other senses" and it is time now to " examine the impact of electricity or that of digital technology on [human] sensibility" [12]. For many centuries our main means of communication had been through the printed word, and as we transitioned to a digital interface for communicating, that visual bias

remained [13]. Now that integration of digital with physical is increasingly becoming more seamless, it is time to begin to incorporate other senses more consciously as a way of transmitting information. This would begin to correlate the digital to the physical more meaningfully, allowing for more integral responses and minimising fragmentation of activities and thought processes. The authors describe it as "a way to situate the sense of self through the physical, digital and electronic domains that shape physical, social, cultural, economic and spiritual conditions at the beginning of the twenty-first century." [14]

What the authors call for is "a re-sensorialization of the environment" so as "to complement the visually biased perspective with a renewed sense of our relationship to the spatial and material surrounds" and encourage a "topological reunion of sensation and cognition" [15]. A reinforcement of sense of place—reconnecting us as humans to the communities we are a part of in the physical world—provides us with a critical psychic anchor that identifies us through physical sensation as well as online communication and allows us to engage with digital communications more integrally; that is to say, taking into account our physical reality as well as our digital identity.

IV. INTENSITIES AND RHYTHMS IN LOCATIONS

In the early nineteen-sixties, Daniel Boorstin coined the phrase "pseudo-events" to refer to phenomena that substituted the artificial for the real, the image for reality, across modern life in the United States. Boorstin defined pseudo-events as possessing the following characteristics: not spontaneous, planted for the purpose of being reported, having an

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ambiguous relationship to underlying reality (with its interest primarily arising from this ambiguity), and intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. [16]

This "self-hypnosis" [17], most successfully reinforced via mass media then, is rampant today and has grafted quite intricately into our most mundane day-to-day communications via social networks such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, to name a few of the most prevalent current ones. The pseudo-events that used to influence us on a mass scale are now part of carefully constructed individual identities expressed via the digital.

Boorstin saw this phenomenon as a visual gauze, as a mirage impeding people from engaging with the reality of their social condition. His solution? "Each of us must disenchant himself, must moderate his expectations, must prepare himself to receive messages coming from the outside…The least and most we can hope for is that each of us may penetrate the unknown jungle of images in which we live our daily lives. That we may discover anew where dreams end and where illusions begin. This is enough. Then we may know where we are, and each of us may decide for himself where he wants to go." [18]

It is this world of images that De Kerckhove and Miranda address, identifying "a visual dominance among the senses people use to perceive the world as a whole, a trend that has repressed or toned down information from other senses." [19]. Presence—a state of awareness situating the individual in time and space—is achieved through physical sensation and experience allowing physical sensation to function as psychic anchor. It activates the ability of the spatial framework to provide a sense of history from which to embrace the shifts and changes of time [20]. This

innate acknowledgement of a state of being can offset the multiple refractions, made up of a hybrid of real and fabricated data, that are transmitted via digital communication on a daily basis. A sense of presence anchors identity more firmly on lived experience, rather than on the simulations projected through screens, and helps connect that identity more closely with the lives we live as organic beings in physical reality.

It allows for a reconnection with the intensities and rhythms transmitted through physical sites and perceived not just through vision, but through all the senses. There will then be sites that will be more meaning-making than others, providing us with a psychic anchor, a sense of belonging, for our identity in a historical as well as a spatial framework. These are "zones of intensity invested with desire" (Russell West-Pavlov as referenced by Darko Radovic); "territories where milieu components cease to be directional, becoming dimensional instead, [ceasing] to be functional to become expressive" [21].

The expressive qualities transmitted via the intensities and rhythms experienced physically at sites "invested with desire" are resistant to the rational thinking process, based as it is on breaking down components into discrete elements that can be quantified. Instead, it is the qualitative approach, guided through a subjective exploration, that lends itself to convey those experiences. It is the artistic dimension that can communicate subtle messages related to beauty, aesthetics, and experience in ordinary life [22]. It can impart the sense of wonder attached to experiencing sites that possess meaningful cultural traces embedded integrally in the terrain. Connecting with those intensities and rhythms

requires presence; conveying those experiences requires integral action.

In sharp contrast to the Talayot sites discussed at the beginning, there is the Lithica limestone quarry in Menorca, an island adjacent to Mallorca. The nurturing of the Lithica site is the opposite of what I experienced in the abandoned sites in Mallorca. Twenty years ago the working quarry at Lithica was shut down and was rescued from certain decline by an artist cooperative committed to maintaining it as a cultural heritage site [23]. There is a regular artistic programme at Lithica, commissioning artistic actions set in its physical terrain that can respond integrally to the site's intensities, connecting the visitor to the meaning-making properties of the landscape through presence. I understand this activity as a way of reconnecting audiences to the palpable sense of place transmitted at the site through the subjective artistic action. So when encountering a space like Lithica, there is a connection with its intensities and rhythms—its socio-cultural uniqueness—experienced through the senses, through being there; and that is what makes those sites special.

In a recent project there curated by Magdalena Aguiló, the artists Claude Queyrel and Pascale Stauth superimposed an optical vocabulary onto the landscape [24], reconnecting the sensory transmissions of the site to our contemporary visual bias. This intervention I understand as hybridising the phenomenal sensory experience of being at this immense site replete with historical significance with a need to reduce that experience to the visual bias. Edward T. Hall identified the role of art in his book The Silent Language: "the artist doesn't lead cultures or create the patterns, but what the artist can do is hold up a mirror to society, so that society can actually see things that maybe were missed out through other filters." [25] The intervention by Queyrel and Stauth is in a sense using an optical vocabulary to convey the visual bias of contemporary life; reconnecting visual perception to the other senses activated by being at the site.

In this way, our dependence on simulations both through mass media and individual communication mediated by the digital can be offset—in fact reset—through integration of the senses via physical experience to break through the visual gauze, to receive messages coming from the outside, and address the "self-hypnosis" Boorstin identified.

In a talk earlier this year, researcher Lorenzo Tripodi discussed public space as continually negotiated, not as a nostalgic vision, but as a process involving blurred boundaries through internet and mobile devices [26]. This intricate connection between organic, electronic and digital interweaves our means of communicating and has an effect on our sense of identity, with displacement (26) as a possible result. Twenty years ago Bill Viola observed that art was more relevant and vital now than ever for the development of our inner lives, "even though it remains confused and inconsistent in its response to the new demands and responsibilities placed on it in this time of transition". He continues: "You realize that the real work for this time is not abstract, theoretical, and speculative-- it is urgent, moral, and practical". [27]

There is a role for art to play in reconnecting us to a sense of place to help us identify more closely with our lives as organic beings living in a physical world and to respond accordingly. Through interplay within its context, the artwork can disengage the elements that make up our lives and reconfigure them in ways

that allow us to understand them as mutable; revealing that we can effect change through subtle readjustments of the way we connect elements together. So, is art's role, like Viola stated, "urgent, moral, and practical"? For Krzysztof Ziarek a work of art is "understood as a force field" that can "become disencumbered of the governing configuration of power and open an alternative modality of relations" (28). In this framework, "art becomes a dynamic occurrence, a shifting and movable field of tensors and forces capable of repeatedly and differently rupturing the social conditions of production and reception"(29). He refers to "non-power" or the "power-free" (30) as art's ability to "open an alternative modality of relations"(31).

It is this "alternative modality of relations", I believe, that can play the moral and functional role Viola envisioned. As our digital, electrical and organic interactions interweave more and more seamlessly, art as "shifting and movable field of tensors and forces" can help us to break through communication protocols that more and more systematically are having a direct effect on our human sensibilities. Connection with the artwork in this way can engender a more opaque and personal identity, reconnecting us to our inner lives. Intensities inherent in the artwork can be amplified through its direct interaction with the physical environment, connecting us to the meaning-making elements that make up our existence as organic beings.

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