

New Media, Cultural Heritage, and the Sense of Place: Mapping the Conceptual Ground

Jeff Malpas

1. The loss of a sense of place, and the increasing experience of a general sense of placelessness, is often taken to be one of the characteristic features of modernity – and it is a feature usually taken closely tied to the enormous changes in communication and information technologies that have occurred over the last century. Thus, in an essay written just after the Second World War, Martin Heidegger wrote of the apparent obliteration of the near and the far in the face of the technological transformation of the world:

All distances in time and space are shrinking. Man now reaches overnight, by plane, places which formerly took weeks and months of travel. He now receives instant information, by radio, of events which he formerly learned about only years later, if at all. The germination and growth of plants, which remained hidden throughout the seasons, is now exhibited publicly in a minute, on film. Distant sites of the most ancient cultures are shown on film as if they stood this very moment amidst today's street traffic. Moreover, the film attests to what it shows by presenting also the camera and its operators at work. The peak of this abolition of every possibility of remoteness is reached by television, which will soon pervade and dominate the whole machinery of communication... Yet the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness; for nearness does not consist in shortness of distance. What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on the radio, can remain far from us. What is incalculably far from us in point of distance can be near to us. Short distance is not in itself nearness. Nor is great distance remoteness.¹

It is notable that while Heidegger mentions new transportation technology in this passage, namely, the airplane), his comments focus on the recently developed or developing media technologies of the period, radio, film, and television² – technologies that consist in new ways of producing or transforming information and experience that also open up new possibilities for its duplication, distribution, and communication. Those technologies have certainly had a powerful impact over the past fifty or more years, but it is the new media of today, those that are based around the digital and computable, that seem to have the greatest potential for spatial, temporal and topographic transformation, and so for the 'dis-location' and 'dis-placement' of culture and of experience. Indeed, while the phenomenon of globalisation, one of the most obvious forms of such 'de-localisation', is certainly underpinned by social and economic factors, it is a phenomenon that would not be possible without the technologies of computerised information and communication that are so much part of new media.

While the transformative possibilities of new media have a significance that encompasses the entire breadth of contemporary life and culture, they have a special significance in relation to issues of cultural heritage. On the one hand, new media offers enormous potential for the recording, documenting and archiving of culturally significant – and often highly vulnerable – sites and materials, it can enable forms of analysis and reconstruction that could not even be envisaged previously, it can also allow access to sites and materials, as well as making possible new modes of communicating and presenting information about them, that would not otherwise be possible. On the other hand, however, the very character of new media technologies as apparently disruptive of place, and the sense of place, itself represents a serious

challenge to cultural heritage as such since that which is culturally significant is not mere 'information', but is itself tied to particular places and things, and to the practices and narratives that cohere around them. The sense of place, one might argue, is intimately bound up with a sense of heritage, as well as with a sense of culture.

Thus, inasmuch as new media threatens our sense of place, so it also threatens our sense of cultural heritage; as it threatens place itself – threatening the distinction, as Heidegger puts it, between the near and the far – so it also threatens heritage as such – threatening the very means by which our own identities, and so our differences, are articulated (a threat most immediately evident, perhaps, in the homogenisation of cultural experience and its oft-times commoditisation or 'Disneyfication' to which new media seems to contribute).

Much of the discussion of new media in its relation to cultural heritage, whether or not it includes consideration of the sense of place, tends to focus on particular applications of new media technology. This usually has the advantage of being well-grounded in the actual phenomena at issue. The latter is often lacking, it seems to me, in many of the more 'theoretically' oriented discussions of new media that have proliferated in recent years – discussion that seem less concerned with new media as such, as with the rhetorical and polemical possibilities with which it has become associated. Yet if we are to explore the real possibilities and limits of new media as it stands in relation to cultural heritage and the sense of place, whether in terms of particular applications or in general, then it is important to be clear on the conceptual ground on which any such exploration must stand. In this essay I want briefly to map out some of the ground that is relevant here, and to clarify some of the concepts that may be at issue – especially that of 'sense of place'. In so doing, I also want to explore in a little more detail the connection between place and heritage, and the possible threats and opportunities that new media seems to open up in terms of this connection. My approach will be one that may be characterised as both phenomenological and hermeneutical. By this, I mean that the approach is one that is informed by considerations of the actual structures that underpin the phenomena at issue, and that looks to articulate those structures through exploring their interconnection. This means that the exploration of the concepts that is undertaken here is no 'merely' conceptual exploration, but should instead be viewed as 'ontological' in its orientation – it explores the structures that themselves make possible, and so are implied by, our experience of place, our understanding of cultural heritage, and our employment of new media.³

2. Let me begin this exploration by considering some of the key concepts here, in particular, the concepts of new media, cultural heritage, and sense of place. Of these terms, new media is the one that seems to me to present the fewest difficulties. While I recognise that there are some disagreements about exactly how 'new media' should be characterised, and even over whether 'new media' is the best term here, I take 'new media' to refer, much as Lev Manovich does in his *Language of New Media*, to a range of contemporary media that all depend in varying ways on the deployment of computational techniques and devices for the production, reproduction, recording, communication and distribution of information.⁴ Although I also acknowledge that there are contexts in which a distinction between tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and between cultural and natural heritage, becomes important, I take 'cultural heritage' to be a rather broad concept that ought properly to be understood to encompass the natural as well as the non-natural, and with respect to which one cannot clearly distinguish the tangible from the intangible. Indeed, it seems to me crucial to recognise, as I indicated above, the way in which culture and heritage are

themselves always configured in relation to (even though they cannot merely be reduced to) the ‘material’, that is, in relation to particular places, pathways, and things – a point to which I shall return. ‘Sense of place’ refers us, on the face of it, both to a sense of the character or identity that belongs to certain places or locales, as well as to a sense of our own identity as shaped in relation to those places – to a sense of ‘belonging to’ those places. Of these three terms, ‘new media’, ‘cultural heritage’, and ‘sense of place’, the last is the most complex, even if also the most everyday, of the three ideas at issue while it is also, in many respects, the pivotal concept in this discussion. It is a concept that requires rather more than the summary characterisation just given, and is, in fact, the concept to which much of my exploration here will be devoted.

In asking after the idea of ‘sense of place’, there is a preliminary question that must first be addressed, namely, ‘what is place?’ Although there is sometimes a tendency to conflate place with space (and much of the philosophical history of place consists in its subordination if not reduction to the spatial⁵) it is important both to distinguish place from space, as well as from time, and to acknowledge their connectedness. I take the essential characteristic of place to consist in a certain ‘bounded openness’, that is, places have an expansiveness to them such that things can appear and events take place within them, and yet they are also bounded, and so distinct from other places (although the boundedness of a place is never determinate).⁶ The openness of place means that places always open up into spaces, and so place is that within which even space itself appears. Place, moreover, always has a dynamic element to it – place is that wherein things happen, in which things ‘take place’ – and so while place is distinct from time as well as from space, it also stands in an essential relation to the temporal.⁷

Space and time aside, however, ‘place’ is also an ambiguous term in its own right. This ambiguity is particularly well-captured in Gertrude Stein’s famous comment about Oakland – ‘there is no there there’.⁸ Stein’s use of ‘there’ seems to imply at least two, if not three, senses of place. The first, evident in the initial ‘there is’, is the sense in which something is or is not there (in this case, is not) – the sense in which Aristotle says that ‘to be is to be somewhere’,⁹ and that is evident not only in the English ‘there is’, but also in the French ‘il y a’, as well as in the compound verb ‘da-sein’ used in German to mean being present. In this sense place refers us to the essentially singular character of existence – to be is always to be *here, now, in this* (or that) place. The second sense that Stein draws upon, given in the ‘no there’, is the sense in which place refers us to some particular site or locale that has a special significance. In Stein’s case, on one reading, the Oakland she revisited in later life was no longer the Oakland she had grown up in – the family home and neighbourhood had lost the character she remembered – another reading takes the comment to be a more general dismissal of Oakland as lacking any kind of distinctive character at all. The third sense of place that Stein employs, evident in the final ‘there’, is that of simple location – there is no ‘there’ in *that* place, namely, Oakland, as distinct from other places. This last sense might easily be conflated with the first – if one supposes, that is, that to say ‘there is’ something is merely to assert that something ‘is there’. Yet strictly speaking the two senses are distinct – as the fact *that* something is is distinct from *where* something is – even though for something to be is, as Aristotle claims, always for it to be *somewhere*.¹⁰

While it may be distinct, it is nevertheless also the case that this third sense of place is often given priority over both the first and the second. Indeed, as Ed Casey has shown, the increasing tendency, particularly over the last 500 years or so of European history, has been to think of place in terms that reduce it to mere location or position within an extended space – place becomes, as Ed Casey puts it, “a mere

‘modification’ of space... a modification that aptly can be called ‘site’, that is, levelled-down, monotonous *space for* building or other human enterprises...reduced to locations between which movements of physical bodies occur”.¹¹ On this way of thinking, place turns out to be a highly limited or else somewhat arbitrary or constructed notion – identical either with the position of a body in space or else a conventionally defined position (perhaps a mere point) or area of the sort that can be identified using physical markers in a space or coordinates imposed onto that space (and which thereby allows representation in the form of a map).

The question that now arises is which of these three senses of place should be taken to be at work in the idea of a ‘sense of place’ as that might apply in connection with cultural heritage? My preliminary, and rather summary, characterisation of ‘sense of place’ was that it refers us both to a sense of the character or identity that belongs to certain places or locales, and to a sense of our own identity as shaped in relation to those places, such that we might even be said to belong to those places. Such a characterisation might seem to fit, most obviously and directly, with the second of the three senses I have distinguished – with the idea of place as *significant locale*. When Gertrude Stein claims that Oakland has no ‘there’, what she surely means is that Oakland neither has any special character of its own, nor can she identify herself in relation to that place or feel any sense of belonging to it (even if, perhaps, she once did). Moreover, one might similarly suppose that it is this same sense of ‘place’ that is also at issue in the ‘sense of place’ as it is relevant to issues of cultural heritage – places that have a cultural heritage significance, and so that have a relevant ‘sense of place’, are precisely those that have a special character or identity of their own and that also play a special role in shaping the identity of certain societies and cultures. The role of new media in relation to such a ‘sense of place’ can then be understood as one of assisting in the remembering, reconstructing, recording, and representing of these significant locales.

The problem with taking this latter sense of ‘place’ – place as significant locale – as the basis for thinking further about the sense of place as it relates to new media and to cultural heritage is that it does not actually take us very far at all. In fact, it does not take us much beyond the preliminary characterisation of ‘sense of place’ that I advanced above, and so far as new media is concerned, this sense of ‘place’ provides very little illumination of the limits and possibilities of new media in relation to cultural heritage beyond the most obvious. Clearly the sense of ‘place’ that is at issue in the idea of place as ‘significant locale’ needs to be further unpacked – we need to understand better just what the idea of ‘significant locale’ involves. In fact, the conceptual unpacking that is required here turns out to refer us back to the other two senses of ‘place’ that we have already identified – to place as ‘existential ground’ and place as ‘simple location’. Which of these we look to in the elucidation of ‘sense of place’ is crucial in determining how ‘sense of place’ is to be understood, and so also in determining the significance of the idea of a sense of place as it relates to cultural heritage, as well as the limits and opportunities for new media in relation to such heritage. The question, then, is to explore further just what is involved in these two other senses of place, and how they relate to ‘sense of place’ as such.

3. The two senses of ‘place’ that are now at issue are those that treat ‘place’ in terms of what I have termed ‘existential ground’ and ‘simple location’. As I have already noted, it is the second of these, place as simple location, that tends to take priority in much thinking about place – so much so, in fact, that the first sense, place as existential ground, may not even be recognised, and is almost certain to appear as obscure and unfamiliar.

To see the way in which place as simple location is given priority here, one

need only reflect on the pervasive tendency to take place as to a greater or lesser extent derivative of space – even in those cases where place is also understood in terms of ‘significant locale’. In her introduction to a volume of essays significantly titled ‘Constructing Place: Mind and Matter’, Sarah Menin writes:

Taking up the challenge laid down by Amos Rapaport’s argument that ‘place’ has become a buzz word – being ‘space’ plus ‘something’, where the something is never completely explained – this collection of essays seeks to explicate this ‘something’, which may be both mental and, through detailed examples from a variety of contexts, material, or may, indeed, be only mental with little material manifestation. The contrary (a material context with little mental meaning) is more unlikely, since we invest material phenomena with meaning by engaging with them, and there can be little, if any, material that has no meaning.¹²

As Menin presents matters, ‘place’ would seem to be ‘space’ plus ‘meaning’, while ‘meaning’ is, so it would appear, something brought to space by ‘us’ (‘we invest material phenomena with meaning by engaging with them’). As a result, and in spite of Menin’s allusion to a something ‘material’ as also having a possible role here (an allusion which remains somewhat obscure), place emerges as a form of ‘meaningful space’, in which meaning is brought to that space through the conjunction of space with ‘mind’ or ‘the mental’.

While talk of ‘mind’ in this context is less common, the basic idea of place as meaningful or perhaps as ‘humanised’ *space* is widespread. Yi Fu Tuan, in his pioneering work, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, presents place in much this way, commenting at one point that “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.”¹³ Understood as a conjunction of the spatial with the meaningful or the human, place is treated as essentially composed or ‘constructed’ out of two more basic and pre-existing components – *space* and *meaning* (or the human); it arises through the endowing of simple locations, that is, regions or positions in physical space, with meaning through the activities of human beings. In this way the account gives priority to place as *simple location*, and so also to space, over the concept of place as *significant locale*, since the latter is partially composed out of and decomposable into the former. ‘Sense of place’, on this account, is just a matter of the humanly derived significance that attaches to certain simple locations – in Stein’s terms, for there to be no ‘there’ there is for there to be no humanly derived meaning that attaches to the particular spatial location in question.

It is important to note that the idea of space on which this understanding of place draws, if often only implicitly, is the idea of a more or less homogenous extendedness in which particular locations can be specified. As the space itself has no characteristics that are specific to particular locations within it, so the locations are more or less arbitrary portions of, or positions in, that space in which one location is not intrinsically different from any other. This particular way of understanding space is one that has been dominant, at least in European thinking, since the time of the scientific revolution, although it has its origins in much earlier conceptions.¹⁴ It is also a way of understanding space that already tends to bring with it a sharp dichotomy between the realm of the spatial, identified with the realm of the purely physical and even the ‘natural’, and the realm of meaning, of the human or of the ‘mind’. Moreover, although it gives a priority to space over place – place is, one might say, a variety of space – space does not, on this account, carry any meaning or significance of its own. One consequence of this when applied to the idea of the ‘sense of place’, and particularly when applied in a cultural heritage context, is that what matters in terms of the *sense* of place as such is not the simple location to which meaning or human significance is attached, but the meaning or significance as such. Place, understood as

simple location, is, strictly speaking, *meaningless*, just as pure physical space is also devoid of meaning in the absence of human engagement with it. Indeed, Sarah Menin's claim, contained in the quotation above, that "[w]e invest material phenomena with meaning by engaging with them", would seem to carry much the same implication, namely, that in the absence of engagement, there can be no investing of meaning.¹⁵

Place as simple location, then, even though it is one of the elements that underpins the idea of place as significant locale, turns out, on this basis, to have very little role in terms of the *sense of place* that is at issue here. This may seem an odd conclusion to draw, but it is one that follows inevitably from the construal of place in terms of simple location. That construal already separates place *as location* from place *as sense or meaning*. The result of this way of understanding place, and the sense of place, is an odd form of displacement. If the sense of place is given wholly in the meaning or sense that attaches to a location, and is brought to that location by human engagement with it, then it should be possible to record, reproduce, apprehend and articulate that sense or meaning independently of the actual location as such. What will be important is not the location as such, but rather the shapes of practice and ritual, the structures of story and song, the content of idea and concept, that happen to be instantiated in concrete form in and around that location, but which could also be instantiated elsewhere. The *sense* of a place can thus be viewed as actually independent of, and even separable from, any particular place, any particular *location*, to which it may attach. So it seems that, understood in this way, the sense of place has very little to do with place at all.

This approach to place, and the sense of place, and the ways of thinking that seem to be associated with it, may be thought to be evident (although seldom explicitly articulated) in much contemporary heritage practice, particularly in the shift away from the object within curatorial practice, and the more general emphasis on 'intangible' as opposed to 'material' heritage. Of course, there are other factors at work here as well, and yet the way in which we understand place has a very direct relevance to how we understand concepts of culture and heritage, self and world, while the understanding of these concepts also carries implications for the understanding of place. Indeed, my own claim near the very start of this discussion, that culture and heritage are always configured in relation to the 'material, and that there can be no clear or sharp distinction between the natural and the non-natural, the tangible and the intangible, was itself already bound up with a very particular conception of place, one that will be more evident as the discussion proceeds further, and the role of place in culture and heritage. The tendency to view culture as something that is additional to, but also notionally separate from its materiality (a tendency that is present even among those who would otherwise emphasise the material formation of culture) is a common one, and it is itself tied to a view of place that effectively treats the sense of place as additional to and notionally separate from the mere place as such – from 'simple location'. Indeed, this tendency can not only be discerned within cultural heritage theory and practice, but also within many areas of new media, including its applications within cultural heritage practice, and within much of its accompanying discourse.

One of the clearest examples of this is to be found in the work that is often taken as the inspirational source for new media, William Gibson's novel, *Neuromancer*.¹⁶ In the cyber-world imagined by Gibson, in which bodies are referred to as 'meat', physical location matters little. Gibson's world is one in which almost everything has been taken up into the realm of an almost entirely disembodied, displaced world of pure 'meaning' – the Matrix itself is nothing but a enormous system for the computation, storage, creation, replication and transmission of experience, idea, and image. In this respect, cyber-fiction, along with much of the

broader discourse surrounding new media, can be seen as exemplifying a new form of what might previously have been thought of as ‘idealism’, but may be better described as ‘experientialism’ or perhaps best of all, ‘informationalism’ – what matters is not the body to which experience happens to be attached nor the place in which information is encoded, but the experience or the information as such.

Yet we do not need to look to inspirational fiction alone to find examples of the tendency that is at issue here. Within the contemporary cultural heritage community, one can view the many projects dedicated to creating digital versions of cultural heritage sites – whether it be Cairo, Stonehenge or Gettysburg – as predicated on the idea that what matters to that place is not the actual location, but rather the meaning that attaches to the location, a meaning that can, as it were, be ‘read from’ the location, and then recreated digitally, thereby recreating the place, and the sense of place with it. If that is what we think we are doing when we undertake such projects – and the rhetoric of such projects often suggests just this – then we are implicitly working with a conception of place as based in the conjunction of simple location plus human meaning, in which what matters is the meaning, rather than the location as such, and we will likely view any inadequacy in our recreation as derived from inadequacies in the technology, rather than any in principle limitation that derives from the nature of place or sense of place as such. Moreover, on such an approach, one might even lead one to suppose that if one were only able to achieve a complete reading of a site, and so a complete ‘virtual’ capture of the site, then the loss of the actual location ought not to be significant – what mattered about the site, what made it into a significant locale, would have been preserved.

This latter possibility is an important one to consider. If the place, or the sense of place, is indeed a matter of its meaning as distinct from its mere location, then new media will indeed offer huge potential for the preservation of places, understood as significant locales, and the sense of place that belongs to them. New media would, on this basis, offer a truly revolutionary approach to cultural heritage practice – if only we can perfect the technology. Yet the idea that the loss of the location itself would not matter provided the ‘meaning’ attached to the location was preserved is something that ought, I think, to give us pause. Can we really abandon the idea of place as tied to a certain specificity of site? Can the sense of place be transferable in the way that is assumed – can the sense of place be so readily detached from the location to which it otherwise belongs? It is at this point that we need to reassess the considerations that underlie this way of thinking about place and the sense of place – and that underlie the understanding of culture and meaning that is also implicated here. Such a reassessment ought to lead us back to consider other possible ways of understanding place and the sense of place, and, in particular, to consider the other sense of place that I outlined initially and that I have so far left to one side – place as what I termed ‘existential ground’.

The sense of place that is at issue in this latter idea is the sense contained in the first ‘there’ that appears in Gertude Strein’s comment on Oakland – the ‘there’ of ‘there is’. This is a sense of place that is, as I indicated earlier, related to the sense of place as simple location, but is also distinct from it, and essentially refers us to the way in which to be is always to be in some place – place is the ground on which our existence is based, and in and through which it is articulated. We are who and what we are through our relatedness to what exists around us, but such relatedness is itself inseparable from the specificity of our own locatedness, from the place, and places, in which we live. Our existence is, then, fundamentally a matter of our being ‘in’ place, our being ‘there’. This sense of place is one that treats place, not as a form of simple location that can be separated from what is attached to it, but as the very framework of relatedness that establishes certain entities, whether persons or things, not merely

as having a certain character, but also as being ‘in’ a place – as being there such that one can indeed say ‘there is..’. Although it may not immediately be evident, this sense of place carries with it a conception of place as essentially relational, since it does not carry any connotation of place as some sort of ‘thing’, but rather as more akin to the framework within which things appear. Elsewhere I have illustrated this point by reference to the character of places as themselves constituted ‘topographically’ through their relation to other places, but this same ‘topography’ obtains within places as well as between them.¹⁷ Place can thus be understood as a ‘matrix’, not only in the original sense that it is that out of which things come to appearance¹⁸ – things appear only inasmuch as they have a place – but also in the more commonly understood sense of a structure of interconnection – things only appear inasmuch as they stand in relation to other things.

The sense of place as existential ground underpins a very different ‘sense of place’ from that which has so far been considered. The sense of place that derives from place as existential ground is a sense of place tied to a sense of concreteness and singularity. To have this sense of place is to have a sense of the uniqueness of this place – of its difference from other places even if that difference cannot be completely elucidated – and to have a sense of one’s own being in this place. Such a sense of place is undoubtedly given content through the particular human meanings that may attach to any particular location, and yet is not a matter just of that meaningful content alone. Instead, the sense of place is a sense of the complexity of relation that is evident within that place, and by means of which the place, as well as what appears within it, is itself constituted. Since this sense of place gives priority to relation, and since there is no limit to the relations that open up within, and are opened up by, any specific place (this is a characteristic of relationality as such), so the sense of place that is operative here is not one that can ever be completely captured or determinately specified. As a result, the idea that one could recreate such a place or the sense of place that belongs to it, in virtual terms is already ruled out from the start – such an idea involves a misunderstanding of the nature of place as such.

The sense of place as existential ground can be seen as underpinning the ideas both of place as significant locale and place as simple location. For places as simple locations to appear, there already has to be a framework of relations that opens up to allow such appearance. Place as simple location is itself based in place as existential ground. The same point also holds, of course, for place as significant locale, but here we can say something more than just this. Understanding the grounding role of place enables us to recognise that one sense of place as significant locale is just the sense in which any and every place, just in virtue of being the place in which our own mode of being in the world is articulated, must always have a sense of place that belongs to it, must always be counted as a significant locale in its own right. This is so even though we may also single out specific places as having some special significance over and above this existential significance. Moreover, when we do look to places as having some such additional significance, then it can only be a significance that is itself articulated through the complex relatedness of the place, and so a special significance that does indeed pertain to the place as such, and not merely to some separable meaning that attaches to that place.

This latter point is quite important, since, amongst other things, it enables us to understand the way in which places may change, and yet the place not only remains the same place, but it may retain its significance in spite of that change. Moreover, no attempt to recreate a place elsewhere can ever be successful as a recreation of *that* place, since the identity of the place is itself tied to its specificity and singularity, and the very attempt at ‘recreation’ marks off the ‘recreated’ place from the original – similarly no such ‘recreation’ can ever do justice to the original sense of place at issue.

Thus the recreated Venice that can be found in Las Vegas remains a different place from the original, standing in a different relation to other places and things, opening up a different set of relations within which it is embedded and which it also embeds.

Some of the implications of this way of understanding place and the sense of place for new media and cultural heritage should already be evident from what has gone before. If we take it seriously, then this understanding of place ought to lead us to reconceptualise the potential of new media away from the aim of virtual 'recreation', and towards the creation of new spaces and places, new modes of interaction, that enrich and illuminate our understanding and experience of the original places and things in which our culture and heritage are founded. Virtual recreation, as I have already indicated, would seem to be a mistaken aim, and one that can never properly be achieved (in this respect, I would argue that the world envisaged in Gibson's *Neuromancer* is also one that could not be realised in quite the way Gibson seems to envisage). This need not imply, however, that those projects that are geared to virtual simulation of heritage sites or environments should therefore be abandoned. Instead, those projects should be reconceptualised, not as attempts at recreation, but rather as tools for the exploration of sites under certain specific aspects, or, perhaps more fruitfully, as providing frameworks that enable users to engage with heritage sites and spaces, and with one another, in new and productive ways. The emphasis here, it should be noted, is on new media as enabling new forms of engagement with and in place, and not the mere simulation, reproduction, or recording of the informational or experiential content that may be thought to attach to place. For this reason, while the attraction of game engines as a basis for new media research and development in cultural heritage is obvious, the immersive character of those engines, and the tendency, therefore, to see them as supporting a more 'recreative' or 'simulative' approach, may be a reason for being cautious about their use. What game engines may offer, however, are a set of tools and environments – a sort of experimental space – for exploring the ways in which the different elements and relations that are constitutive of our sense of place, particularly the structure of action and perception, themselves function.

Perhaps the most interesting and exciting developments in new media, however, at least within cultural heritage practice, seem to me to be those that open up new ways to enter into existing places – often by drawing upon neglected sensory modalities or by bringing to the fore aspects of the place that may otherwise go unnoticed or be difficult to access – that look to enable new modes of engagement between users or new forms of collective activity. In so doing, new media can assist in returning us to a sense of place that involves more than simple location or displaceable 'information' (this may also be where game engines have an 'analytical' or 'experimental' role to play). It can enable us better to understand the ways in which we do indeed belong to the places in which we live, and have lived, and the ways in which a sense of culture and identity, and with it a sense of heritage, must also entail a sense of place.

5. The apparent loss of a sense of place that seems characteristic of modernity can indeed be seen as connected with certain tendencies within new communications and information technologies – tendencies towards the obliteration of place as existential ground and towards the prioritization of place as simple location. Yet what should now also be evident is that these tendencies constitute only a part of the picture. New media may be displacing, but whether it is so depends very much on how it is deployed, and on the conceptual and practical frameworks within which it is located. In fact, new media also has the potential to open up new ways of exploring and articulating place in ways that do not obscure, but bring to the fore, the character of

place as the very matrix out of which human significance and meaning arise. Much depends on the relation to place, and to the idea of place, that is prioritized within the operation of new media itself, and the way in which that relation is given concrete form. Heidegger himself seems to have viewed the tendency towards placelessness as deriving, not from any particular technology, but from a certain general tendency ('essence') that lies at the core of the technological and of modernity as such.¹⁹ This leaves open the possibility that particular technologies may be deployed in ways that would run counter to that tendency – perhaps, at least in relation to cultural heritage, new media can be deployed to do just that.

Notes and references

-
- ¹ 'The Thing', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p.165.
- ² The discussion from 'The Thing' is prefigured by a brief passage in Heidegger's 1927 magnum opus *Being and Time* (see H105) that takes the overcoming of remoteness to be an essential tendency in human being.
- ³ Elsewhere I have characterised this approach as a form of 'philosophical topography', and have argued that it is an approach itself adumbrated in Heidegger's work. For more on this see my *Place and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. pp.39-43, and also *Heidegger's Topology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), esp. pp.27-37.
- ⁴ See Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).
- ⁵ See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), esp. 133-193.
- ⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this way of understanding place, see *Place and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. pp.157-74
- ⁷ See *Place and Experience*, pp.159-63.
- ⁸ Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*, (New York: Random House, 1937, p. 289): "She took us to see her granddaughter who was teaching in the Dominican convent in San Raphael, we went across the bay on a ferry, that had not changed but Goat Island might just as well not have been there, anyway what was the use of my having come from Oakland it was not natural to have come from there yes write about it if I like or anything if I like but not there, there is no there there."
- ⁹ Aristotle, *Physics* IV, 208a30
- ¹⁰ One might object that there are some possible exceptions to this within the history of ideas – for instance, God, universals – but even leaving aside other complications, it is not so obvious that such concepts necessarily entail some 'unplaced' mode of existence, rather than a different mode of existence, and so also of placedness.

-
- ¹¹ See Casey, *The Fate of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p.x.
- ¹² Sarah Menin, 'Introduction', *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.1; the embedded reference is to Amos Rapoport, 'A critical look at the concept "place"', in R.P.B.Singh (ed.), *The Spirit and Power of Place, Human Environment and Sacrality* (Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University Press, 1994), pp.31-45.
- ¹³ Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1977), p.6. Tuan's work is enormously important as a milestone in the theorisation of place as a *sui generis* concept, and is foundational to contemporary humanistic geography, and yet, although Tuan nowhere presents matters in quite the stark fashion that Menin does, still he seems to rely on what I tend to view as a 'subjectivised' conception of place that actually makes place secondary to space. See my comments on Tuan in *Place and Experience*, p.30, n33.
- ¹⁴ See Casey, *The Fate of Place*, esp. pp.79-161, and also 'Smooth Spaces and Rough-Edged Places: The Hidden History of Place', *Review of Metaphysics* 51 (1997), 267-96.
- ¹⁵ Menin adds the remark that "there can be little, if any, material that has no meaning", and if this is to be made consistent, then it would seem that it has to be understood along the lines that there can be little, if any, material with which there cannot be some form of engagement.
- ¹⁶ William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984).
- ¹⁷ See *Place and Experience*, p.39-41; see also *Heidegger's Topology*, pp.33-35.
- ¹⁸ The term originally refers, of course, to the womb, having the same Latin root as 'maternal' and 'maternity'.
- ¹⁹ Heidegger calls this 'Gestell' (often translated as 'Enframing') – see Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp.3-35, esp. p.29.