
The Era of Technology Heirlooms and Pervasive Monuments

Dave Kirk

Mixed Reality Laboratory
School of Computer Science
University of Nottingham
Nottingham, UK
dsk@cs.nott.ac.uk

Abstract

We are at a curious moment in history whereupon aspects of our lives are becoming increasingly vested in digital media. Never before has the opportunity for this existed. As we reach the end of our lives however, this poses some curious challenges for the unprepared. What happens, or should happen, with the digital residua of a life? The digital footprint, as it is being termed, will come to be seen as a commodity which an individual has a right to exploit within their life, and which will be something they actively manage on a day-to-day basis. This digital footprint then becomes a digital legacy at the point of death, and this has consequences for how it might be appropriately managed or curated. My current investigations at the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham (and in conjunction with Horizon Digital Economy Research and Microsoft Research Cambridge) are seeking to explore potential aspects of such digital footprints, embodied within the concepts of 'technology heirlooms' and 'pervasive monuments.'

Technology heirlooms as a concept refers to the ways in which digital technologies and artefacts will become sentimental and inheritable items, passed from generation to generation, and importantly the implications that this might have for how we choose to design our digital technologies; moving us away from our current notions of planned obsolescence and back to the days of designing for longevity and

sustainability. Understanding the importance of material qualities, the embodiment of social relations in objects and the practice of rituals such as bequeathing becomes richly informative for the process of designing digital technologies for inherent 'heirloomness'.

Pervasive monuments, as an alternative, moves our consideration of digital legacy and the exploitation of digital footprints into another realm, one might posit at a broader scale. Within this project we are exploring concepts of memorialisation, narrative, place/space, and the role of pervasive media in facilitating dialogues of reconciliation. Within the project we are building two interactive experiences, both acting as pervasive monuments and both repurposing digital records of those memorialised. The first memorial called Spomenik, commemorates those killed in Stalinist purges in post world-war II Yugoslavia, raising consciousness of the many mass graves littered

throughout Slovenian and subversively starting a discussion of events that have never been discussed publically in that country. The second monument, Rwanda, is being designed as a mobile learning experience, to educate children in Rwanda about the recent genocide/civil war in their country, using personal narratives as a vehicle for fostering understanding.

My talk will outline the work that we have conducted thus far, exploring both technology heirlooms and pervasive monuments and the inherent difficulties of researching in such spaces. It will consider how concepts of digital longevity can be used to shape the design of new forms of technology and new forms of interactive experience; and it will also consider how such design poses critical questions about the nature of our evolving relationship with digital technologies.