

Physical and Online St. Kilda:
A Comparison of 'Senses of Place'

M.Sc. Dissertation

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PHYSICAL AND ONLINE ST. KILDA

“Place is the first of all beings, since everything that exists is in a place and cannot exist without a place.” Archytas, commentary on Aristotle’s Categories

Research Questions:

1. Is the St. Kilda island archipelago becoming an online ‘place?’
2. How do constitutions and representations of on-the-ground and ‘online’ St. Kilda compare and contrast for the visitor / computer user?
3. What are the implications of multimedia and information technology for understanding the UNESCO World Heritage Site St. Kilda today in the context of St. Kilda’s cultural history?

Introductory Overview:

Suppose we started to correspond about St. Kilda, that you found some “Quicktime” movies (a technology which gives the viewer a three dimensional experience of a place, etc.; using this technology, the viewer can scroll 360 degrees around, as well as zoom in and out for viewing) representing this place, and then we found a chat room in which people were writing and communicating about St. Kilda and their time there, and we also found some web cams regularly capturing shots of St. Kilda. Then we found two people interested in the art, landscape, people and history of St. Kilda who started to go around St. Kilda with their laptop computers and, using a wireless connection and video conferencing software, began to talk about the place with insight, and in some detail. In addition, suppose you (in Rome) and I (in Scotland or the United States) had remote access to observing these processes and began to engage in some of these communications. Could we begin to talk about ways in which online St. Kilda, with a 'sense of place,' was emerging? I think that one could at least suggest that an experience of online ‘place’ was beginning to emerge.

Then suppose that we began to compare what people said about their experience of St. Kilda as online place with what people said about St. Kilda when they went there.

This MSc. dissertation examines ways in which St. Kilda as place is developing online.

Physical and Online St. Kilda Introduction

The Internet and multimedia are reshaping the way ethnologists and ethnographers have traditionally examined the field and conducted fieldwork, permitting the development of virtual ethnography. This development invites comparison between two distinct groups of visitors to St. Kilda, those to the physical place and those to the National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site. St. Kilda's unique cultural history - including its unique cultural and natural history, its attraction for writers and visitors, its remoteness, otherness, exoticness, difference, distance from urban centers - in conjunction with the development of multimedia and the Internet, thus shape a new ethnographically analyzable discourse, where the researcher can examine the way people experience and think about online and physical St. Kilda as having a sense of place. I thus examine the following evidence in examining ways people visit and what people say about 'online' and 'physical' St. Kilda, in the context of the Internet and the development of multimedia. This study is significant because, with the advent of information technology, I posit and examine the idea that people nascently can visit online the very remote UNESCO World Heritage site, St. Kilda.

In the following sections I examine writers' texts, from 1697 (Martin Martin 1697) to the present, about St. Kilda in terms of place, as well how individuals who have spent large amounts of time there in recent decades, and visitors to the present day National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site understand online and physical St. Kilda. Although each of these areas of evidence inform a wide variety of ways in which tourists

visit St. Kilda today, for the purposes of this essay I shall focus on the significance of writer's characterizations of "sense of place" in relation to St. Kilda.

Sense of Place Characterized

The concept of online 'sense of place' is important due to St. Kilda's remoteness and the development of information technology. Place is inextricably bound with an ethnographic conception of the field. In recent years, there has been a debate over what constitutes the field. This literature review briefly examines the role of field and place as the basis of what visitors and computer users to St. Kilda experience and come to know. The changing 'nature' of the "anthropological field" has been examined by the writers Marcus and Fischer (1986) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997). They suggest that anthropologists have historically looked at and gone to "the field," a specific, physical site that has traditionally been geographically bounded.

Within this context, ethnographic inquiry into ways in which landscapes are culturally constructed is relatively unexamined (Feld and Basso, 1996). Using St. Kilda and the National Trust for Scotland's web site as an example shapes interesting theoretical questions in relation to the conception of "the field" as place. If one looks at a specific UNESCO World Heritage web site, the National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site, as a destination in itself, disembedded in a form of time-space compression shaped by the multimedia characteristics to be outlined below and accessed by clicking a mouse, using a search engine or entering a URL, the ways in which visitors access the "cyberspace" of online St. Kilda can be potentially viewed as another "place" with another set of methodological challenges, shaped by developing information

technologies. In anthropological terms, the place / field in these cases becomes shaped by visitors and computer users, who engage a variety of histories and living traditions, both National Trust for Scotland and an UNESCO World Heritage site agendas to preserve these sites, a concept of common history, and the ways in which it is represented on the Internet in the context of developing multimedia technologies. Although there are many interesting theoretical questions about field and place, this essay primarily focuses on the data / evidence that shape the visitor and computer users' experiences.

Methods

The methodology I employ is ethnological and ethnographic, both online and on-the-ground, thus permitting for a comparison between what two different groups of people think, experience and report. Using texts, interviews, online surveys and other data, I examine ways in which individuals say they engage both online and physical St. Kilda. In the process, I also examine ways in which they conceive of St. Kilda as place.

Evidence / Data

I examine first ways writers and visitors who have visited St. Kilda have shaped representations of St. Kilda in terms of "sense of place." Visitors to St. Kilda have shaped narrations about the place, both as contemporary representations and as part of an historical cultural discourse about the island archipelago. An examination of writers' representations of St. Kildan place, as ethnographic informants, can provide new contours to an ethnological understanding of "sense of place." I also examine interviews with individuals who have spent large amounts of time there in recent decades. These

individuals have shown a love for and knowledge of St. Kilda in a way that shapes an in-depth experience, yet overview of, St. Kilda.

Another key body of evidence I examine includes computer user visitors to the National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site, who over the past 4 years have left entries in its guestbook, which shape an understanding of St. Kilda's 'sense of place.' Some of these individuals have visited the physical place and then written about it online. Others have only visited the web site. This evidence is significant because it constitutes unprompted reports of the way people visit St. Kilda as place, both online and physically.

The National Trust for Scotland has management responsibility for St. Kilda and produces the St. Kilda web site. While there is considerable debate about ways in which heritage is constructed especially in relation to media (McCrone 1995), in this dissertation I primarily research ways in which visitors and computer users experience St. Kilda in terms of 'sense of place.'

Textual representations and cultural discourse about St. Kilda

For over 300 years, literature about St. Kilda has particularly highlighted St. Kildans's unique lifestyles, history and culture in relation to the island archipelago's sense of place. Sense of place here refers to the visitor's understanding of St. Kilda's unique lifestyles, the experiences which visitors attribute to St. Kilda due to a great variety of factors including its remoteness, its unique history, etc. Visitors, tourists, travelers and writers have shaped fascinating representations of their experiences of the St. Kildan island archipelago since Martin Martin's writings (1697). These writings have drawn new St. Kilda visitors and continue to shape different types of representations of

St. Kilda's heritage. For example, Martin's (1697) description of St. Kilda provides the first detailed account of customs, traditions and life there, written for audiences of travel monographs in London and other metropolitan areas. The journalist John Sands' account (1878) describes the topography of St. Kilda as well as the people who lived there and their customs. His account is more visceral than many. Heathcote (1900) describes many facets of island life and highlights his own role as interpreter to St. Kilda.

More recent accounts examine the significance of the evacuation and its effects on St. Kildans. Tom Steel's (1975) important and vivid description of life on St. Kilda describes the events that lead up to the evacuation, giving compelling insight into some of the decision making processes of the islanders, as well as offering a unique history. The book has led many people to visit St. Kilda. Maclean (1980) narrates the changes that a 'primitive' society underwent in coming in contact with modern processes, focusing on both material and cultural process. His description of life on St. Kilda is a rich source of metaphors and tropes shaping a unique interpretation of St. Kilda. Other contemporary descriptions include Quine's work (1988), whose observations about St. Kilda include bird checklists, a geology guide, a chronology of St. Kildan history, and descriptions of the archipelago's difficult-to-access islands, thus shaping for the reader a sense of place based on its natural history.

Academic projects include Harman's (1996) comprehensive, recent analysis of textual sources that examine the history and culture of St. Kilda until 1930. The book contains a comparison of all the known maps of the island as well as descriptions of the island life, customs, contact with the outside world, farming, fowling and fishing and homes, highlighting the way our understanding of St. Kilda as place, has changed due to

cartographic representations. Andrew Fleming's article "St Kilda: Family, Community, and the Wider World" (1999) looks at the ways in which St. Kildans related to the 'outside world' and dispels some of the utopian conceptions of St. Kildans which visitors from the mainland sometimes espouse. For example, he asks why St. Kildans had locks on their stone storage containers / cleits, if St. Kilda was a utopian democracy where people practiced a communitarian egalitarianism. He thus reshapes a social historical understanding of place, based on archaeological evidence. Fraser MacDonald's "St. Kilda and the Sublime" (2001) examines how the search for the sublime in the nineteenth century finds articulation in relation to St. Kilda. He argues for more agency on behalf of St. Kildans in relation to previous interpretations, thus suggesting an conception of St. Kildans making active choices in relation to the place they lived, contrary to some previous accounts, where place defines people and agency (Buchanan 1793).

The recent addition of the National Trust for Scotland's Gaelic web site reintroduces the language that was spoken on St. Kilda into the public domain, now accessible around the world, thus redefining St. Kilda as place in a new way, made possible only through information technology. Nearly the entire written record of visitors to St. Kilda since Martin Martin's time is in Gaelic; St. Kildans themselves left nearly no personal accounts, especially in Gaelic. In addition, the detailed, management plan publication for the extension of the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation to include both waters of international marine quality as well as a cultural designation shapes an ongoing St. Kildan conception of St. Kilda as place embodying somewhat abstract management and research goals.

This selection of writings provides a basis for understanding textually St. Kilda's history and ways in which visitors today have interpreted St. Kilda as place. Collectively these works provide an approach to understanding the ways that representations of St. Kilda may contribute to the development of virtual representations of it as place. They serve to help contextualize ways in which visitors and tourists continue to interact and narrate visits to St. Kilda.

NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND ST. KILDA WEB SITE:

Place and Online Guestbook Entries

Criteria for place

In the following section, I examine the way the concept of St. Kilda as ‘place,’ entailing a name, boundaries, unique social and physical qualities, a distinctive kind of permanence (Harvey 1996: 293), ethnological items, is visited as such online at the National Trust for Scotland’s St. Kilda web site by computer users and on-the-ground. The permanence of St. Kilda as physical place, in this case, is related to a series of social processes in turn related to a landmass, and defined by a specific history, customs and lifestyles. [JUXTAPOSE TO THE EMPHERAL QUALITIES OF cyber PLACE in conclusion]

St. Kilda as place is describable in terms of place-time coordinates and is therefore an entity which occurs within, and is transformative of, the constitution of space-time (Harvey 1996: 294). For example, because the cottages on St. Kilda, built most recently in the 1830s, housed specific families who lived there at specific dates making their livelihood from birds on St. Kilda’s cliffs, the cottages at these times constitute a specific aspect of St. Kilda as place at a specific time in history. A century and a half later, the National Trust for Scotland’s improvements to, for example, these cottages - which are very significant to the ethnology and history of St. Kildans’ lives – thus transform and constitute place and time as they change. (But the St. Kildan cottages are permanent in the sense that they change relatively little with regard to place. Permanence here is relative: St. Kilda’s permanence as place contrasts, for example, with the pace of change which takes place in a city, for example, which is continually being

rebuilt.) In relation to other physical features on St. Kilda which have been there beyond written memory, the pace of change of the cottages taken with other topographical features, for example, is extraordinarily slow, and St. Kilda reflects this relative permanence, especially for the visitor.

Besides permanence, the idea of online 'place' also includes names, representations of boundaries, distinctive social qualities, and representations of physical qualities. In the context of the Internet, these online representations of St. Kilda have specific characteristics which shape the experience of the computer user visiting it. The idea of 'place' thus becomes mediated by representations of physical aspects of a particular kind. For example, the computer user experiences the cottages online in Village Bay as part of a Quicktime movie (Photo tour - <http://www.kilda.org.uk/frame7.htm>), in which one can scroll 360 degrees around, pan up and down, and zoom in and out to view the whole bay. One also experiences the cottages in some of the introductory web site photos and in the slide shows themselves. Because they are Quicktime images and photos, the photographers / ethnologists have selected certain angles, times of day, and other information to include and exclude in the photo, now mediated by Internet technologies. These views of St. Kilda add progressive layers of representation between the viewer and physical St. Kilda, which the individual would otherwise not experience walking there. Information, for example, which the computer user can see in the photos on the web site, as well as critical information about the photos such as captions, is, by the same token, not available in person when visiting the island. The web site thus constitutes aspects of St. Kilda as 'place' as defined above, but of a different order. Thus,

the concept of ‘place’ offers a useful mode of analysis for contrasting online and physical St. Kilda.

On-the-ground St. Kilda

Visitors have gone to and characterized St. Kilda as ‘place’ for centuries. In terms of place, writers in the past have concentrated particularly on St. Kildan ways of life, its ethnology, its remoteness, and the natural environment. Post evacuation, writers and visitors have emphasized its cultural history and the natural environment in particular. St. Kilda as name, boundary, having distinctive social and physical qualities, permanence, ethnological aspects and visitors encompass / epitomize these features for which visitors have traveled to St. Kilda.

Name

St. Kilda as a name, as well as place-names on St. Kilda, has continued to define and signify place for on-the-ground St. Kildan visitors today as in the past. St. Kilda as name evokes ‘place’ encompassing a multitude of facets. For example, writers frequently observe that the name *St. Kilda* is very similar to the Norse word for shield, *skildir*, but that its exact etymology is lost. St. Kilda as place defined by a name represents a very specific set of boundaries, ethnology and history.

Boundary

The boundaries of physical St. Kilda are shaped not only cartographically, but also by where the beaches of St. Kilda meet the waters. St. Kilda as an island archipelago is particularly clearly delineated in terms of its coastal boundaries. For example, Mary Harman’s complete list of maps (Harman 1996), for example, identifies both how the

boundaries have been represented and how they have changed textually through time. In addition, St. Kilda's boundaries are defined by the extent of the expanse of water that separates St. Kilda from other Scottish isles and the mainland. Its remoteness, as one of its key social features, is shaped by the relatively great distance of water as boundary, influencing who visits St. Kilda, as well as how many people visit there.

Distinctive social aspects

St. Kilda as place is also distinguished by distinctive social aspects. One of the most significant ones is the evacuation which occurred a little less than 80 years ago. A declining population and increased reliance on tourism and the mainland led to the British government deciding, in conjunction with St. Kildans, to move the remaining 36 St. Kildans to the mainland. In the late 1920s, with only 6 able-bodied men left to carry out birding on the cliffs, disease and a declining birth rate, St. Kildans who had lived on St. Kilda continuously for millennia left, mostly for Argyllshire. Many former St. Kildans later rued this breakup of their way of life and close knit community. This evacuation event and particularly Tom Steel's description of it in *The Life and Death of St. Kilda* (1975), has shaped a distinctive social history, an aspect which continues to draw visitors and writers. This investigation of the way St. Kilda today is understood as 'place' suggests that the reports of St. Kilda's 'death' are somewhat exaggerated; online St. Kilda reshapes St. Kilda anew as 'place.'

Permanence

Many of the writers of the past 300 years have referred repeatedly to the same physical features of St. Kilda, suggesting a remarkable degree of St. Kildan topographical, as well as some social aspects of, permanence (Martin 1698, 1703, Sands

1878, Heathcote 1900, Steel 1975, Maclean 1980, Quine 1982, 1988, Fleming 1998, MacDonald 2001, Harman 1996).

Ethnology

One main interest of the numerous visitors and writers of the past three centuries has focused on ethnological features of St. Kilda. This ranges from a fascination with bird catching to the shape of St. Kildans' toes to St. Kildan stories (Martin 1698, 1703, Sands 1878, Heathcote 1900, Steel 1975, Maclean 1980, Quine 1982, 1988, Fleming 1998, MacDonald 2001, Harman 1996).

The recently opened St. Kilda museum on St. Kilda also highlights ethnological items found there.

Visitors

For the purposes of this essay, the writers of the past three centuries comprise an historical group of visitors who have significantly shaped an understanding of physical 'place' allowing subsequent St. Kildan researchers to begin to base their data historically. These writers have also shaped conceptions of St. Kildan place for later visitors. Writers have described the physical qualities of St. Kilda, particularly emphasizing the wind, Village Bay and its cottages, and birding life on the cliffs. In addition, they have emphasized not only St. Kilda's remoteness, but also the difficulty of life there as a central physical quality.

Online St. Kilda as Place

In this paper I suggest that the National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site as online 'place' is similar to physical St. Kilda in the way that it represents characteristics

of place as defined above: name, boundary, distinctive social and physical qualities, permanence, ethnology and visiting it as such through multimedia. It does so in such a way that individuals can experience and learn about St. Kilda remotely via the Internet. In a nascent way, I suggest that the computer user actually can ‘visit’ St. Kilda online ‘place.’ In the context of multimedia, visiting online St. Kilda means being able to do many of the things a person on physical St. Kilda does when visiting. While physical and online visiting overlap in many ways, online visiting also includes access to information and resources which do not exist when visiting St. Kilda physically. By the same token, visiting St. Kilda only online is in no way a substitute for going to St. Kilda in person. Significant overlap exists which I examine in the discussion. In this essay, I define ‘visiting’ as the “visiting of marked sites,” (MacCannell, 1975) sites which are designated as such by a sign or a guidebook, for example. The visiting of online St. Kilda extends the variety of ways of marking. But visiting St. Kilda also includes what people say about their experiences, both online and physically, thus giving rise to a discourse about visiting St. Kilda shaped by informants. In the discussion which follows, I shall examine some of the main differences between St. Kilda, on-the-ground and online.

Name

‘St. Kilda’ as name defines the online National Trust for Scotland web site, as well. Computer users use the name ‘St. Kilda’ in search engines to find information about St. Kilda, the place, from places as far away as St. Kilda, Australia, a suburb of Melbourne, which took its name in the mid 1800s from a ship of that name, “The Lady of St. Kilda.” The word ‘kilda’ is part of the Internet web address, the uniform resource locator (URL). In the online guestbook, visitors inquire about the history of the place

name, as well as describe its significance to them today. Online, the name comes to represent an online place, but now accessible from anywhere with Internet access. Because of the great amount of online information about the place on the web site, the name also comes to represent many other aspects of St. Kilda. For example, the web site makes clear on its main index page that St. Kilda is an UNESCO world heritage site. When surfing online, one sees the name “St. Kilda” much more frequently than when visiting St. Kilda on-the-ground.

Boundary

The boundaries of the physical site are represented online in the form of maps. The four islands that make up the island archipelago are depicted cartographically in relation to its distance from the mainland. Instead of traveling for 6-7 hours on a boat to get to St. Kilda and thus experiencing the distance of the ocean as a boundary, online one learns about the distance graphically. The online maps are also on a web page with links to slide shows and an interactive, 360 degree-around Quicktime movie, which visually depicts some physical boundaries of St. Kilda, such as various shorelines of the Village Bay harbor.

The St. Kilda web site as an online ‘place,’ however, is bounded in its own specific ways. I want to suggest that the pages linked together under a domain name shape a boundary which describes a kind of online ‘place’ distinct from the physical boundaries. The web site pages which all have ‘kilda’ in the address (URL) shape the boundary of a novel kind of online place, which in turn describes physical place. One visits online St. Kilda as place by linking through domain-name related web pages in a wide variety of possible combinations to learn about St. Kilda through representations of

physical 'place.' In a sense, the online 'place' of St. Kilda becomes defined by the 'boundaries' – the web pages, web page addresses, links, interactive technologies, ways of integrating a variety of media, etc., - of the technologies that represent it and make it interactive.

Distinctive social and physical qualities

The St. Kilda web site highlights specific distinctive social aspects of St. Kilda as place. In the "Photo Tours" section, for example, one can view a slide show of historical aspects of St. Kildan life (<http://www.kilda.org.uk/frame7.htm>) or one can take a more general tour in two forms – extended and short. The computer user can also view an online wildlife tour. Some of the slide show images are linked with sound. Each of these slide shows provides more information than an on-the-ground user could probably experience, but selected by the photographer(s) over time. On the "St. Kilda – The Past" web page (<http://www.kilda.org.uk/frame1.htm>), specific aspects of St. Kildan history with related photos are represented. Compared with an on-the-ground tour, one learns much about specific social and physical qualities.

Permanence

The permanence of online St. Kilda is represented, for example, by the Flash Movie (<http://www.kilda.org.uk/frame4.htm>), which depicts a history that begins 60 million year ago with volcanic activity and represents St. Kilda through to the present, highlighting its relatively unchanged, natural qualities. Similarly, permanence is also suggested by photos and paintings of St. Kilda centuries ago which are then comparable to similar contemporary representations. The 5000 years of human habitation of St. Kilda (<http://www.kilda.org.uk/frame4.htm>) as 'place' until 1930 also represents permanence.

But unlike the permanence of physical St. Kilda, the web site itself, as ‘place,’ however, is instead a series of information technologies, subject to updates.

Ethnology

St. Kildan ethnology is represented online on the “St. Kilda – the Past” web page (<http://www.kilda.org.uk/frame1.htm>), for example, where photos and descriptions of customs ranging from “The Fulmar Catch,” “Communications,” “Life in the Village” to “Religion and Culture” are represented. Computer users can easily access information about these aspects of St. Kildan life online in a way that highlights these ethnological aspects in relation to place.

Visitors

Computer users are online visitors and can sign the online guestbook, making comments and leaving their email address. They can live in any part of the world with Internet access and visit St. Kilda through multimedia representations. The selected signers in the following guest book examples live in England, Wales, Australia and the United States and their observations provide a preliminary examination into the varied ways that visitors experience St. Kilda.

Online visitor example # 1

Some guest book signing visitors have been to St. Kilda physically, and their entries in the guest book reflect a comparison of ‘place,’ allowing them to relive place as well as contrast St. Kilda’s ‘place’ qualities, which include St. Kildan Soay sheep, with other places with the same kind of sheep, but different ‘place’ qualities. For example, a

recent signer of the guest book, Howard Payton, explains why he visited St. Kilda in the mid 1980s and what the experience meant for him:

Name: [Howard Payton](#) **Date Posted:** 19/01/2004 14:34:47 GMT
Location: North Down Farm, Yeoford, Devon

Comments: An excellent site, bringing back many wonderful memories of the months I spent there in 1984 and 1985, studying and photographing the sheep and island. We have a small flock of Soay sheep here in the cider apple orchard. A far cry from the cliffs, the sea and the gales.....

The web site serves to evoke his previous visitor experiences of the St. Kildan cliffs, the sea and the gales and Soay sheep, as online ‘place.’ His online visit to St. Kilda as place thus articulates with his physical visit.

Online visitor example # 2

Sarah Jones, in Wales, requests more digital information about St. Kilda as place, suggesting that the web site producers expand their ways of representing St. Kilda.

Name: Sarah Jones **Date Posted:** 18/01/2004 10:35:07 GMT
Location: Wales

Comments: Include more info on location and weather patterns

The inclusion of weather pattern information and representations, digitally mediated in novel ways, would extend the concept of St. Kilda as online ‘place.’

Online visitor example # 3

Luc De Pauw from Australia, who visited physical St. Kilda underwater as a scuba diver, uses the language of traveling to place to describe his online visits to St.

Kilda. He writes that it is now possible to visit there online every week, i.e., with much greater frequency than would be possible traveling to physical St. Kilda.

Name: [Luc De Pauw](#) **Date Posted:** 12/01/2004 12:38:41 GMT
Location: Melbourne, Australia

Comments: Hello, I was in St. Kilda during May 1995 on a scuba dive expedition. Sailed over there on Jean De La Lune. I'm still thinking about this trip. Five years ago I migrated from Belgium to Melbourne, Australia. Now I travel every week to St. Kilda! Though, it doesn't look as good as the "real" one.

While entertaining the possibility of the metaphor of online travel to place, he concludes by juxtaposing the 'real' one with the virtual one.

Online visitor example # 4

Some visitors learn of St. Kilda in books, then use information technology such as the Google search engine (<http://www.google.com>), to find out more about St. Kilda, which in turn stimulates this signer to want to visit St. Kilda:

Name: Tony Aguirre **Date Posted:** 20/11/2003 12:15:38 GMT
Location: Ann Arbor, Michigan. USA

Comments: I've just finished reading Hammond Innes' "Atlantic Fury" which takes place on a remote island off Scotland called "Laerg". A look at a large -scale map convinced me it was St. Kilda (there were other clues also). Thanks to Google I was rewarded with your wonderful website - now to make to the Hebrides!

People like Tony Aguirre from the United States thus visit St. Kilda as 'place' from about 1500 miles away.

Online visitor example # 5

Walter Peyton describes, in language that suggests that the web site itself is St. Kilda, the relief he gets from a bad day by visiting the St. Kilda web site. Indeed, the

quality of remoteness of 'place' which he experiences from the web site has a specifically mentioned beneficial effect on him.

Name: Walter D.Peyton
Location: Staten Island ,NY

Date Posted: 11/11/2003 02:34:17 GMT

Comments: When I'm having a bad day I come to St.Kilda.Somewhat the remoteness of the place has a soothing effect on me.You have a great site.

The effect Peyton experiences at the web site reflects the experiences many visitors may have when visiting the physical site. The language is potentially similar; with online St. Kilda, Peyton can visit it as 'place' again and again.

Thus computer users visit St. Kilda as online 'place' using similar language to that which people use on physical visits to places. According to their reports, computer users visit online St. Kilda both as a way to experience St. Kilda as 'place' itself and in ways which articulate with going to the physical place.

VISITING ONLINE ST. KILDA: What Computer Users Report

In the following section, I begin by outlining the methods and results of two questionnaires and a series of follow-up telephone interviews with computer users who visited the National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site and signed its guestbook. This online pilot study is the first part of a comparative ethnographic project which examines ways in which people are visiting St. Kilda, both on-the-ground and online. In the 'summary and discussion of data' section, I analyze how what people reported and said relates to new characteristics of multimedia (Packer and Jordan 2001). In the final section, I situate my online ethnographic examination of place in relation to both Basso (Basso 1996: 54) and Heidegger's phenomenological approaches to a 'sense of place.' In doing so I want to suggest that the way visitors visit St. Kilda online nascently recasts the idea of a 'sense of place,' as well as how visitors experience 'sense of place,' in relation to St. Kilda, as a consequence of new multimedia technologies.

Specific Research Questions

The questions I seek to address in this online ethnography concern the degree to which people visiting the National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site may or may not be beginning to understand it in terms of a 'sense of place,' as if they were visiting St. Kilda itself, as well as more generally what and how people are visiting the St Kilda web site.

Methods

Questionnaires

In both questionnaires I inquire how people visit the NTS St. Kilda web site, including how they visit it as if it were place. In the 1st questionnaire I use both specific and open-ended approaches to examine why, how and what computer users do when they visit the web site.

In the 2nd questionnaire, I ask more particularly about the ways in which people visit the St. Kilda web site in terms of 'sense of place,' narrative, interactivity, the paths computer users take through the web site, and how the convergence of media elements affects their experience of St. Kilda online. In this questionnaire I'm particularly interested in examining in some detail their online 'sense of place' in relation to the St. Kilda web site.

In this study, I justify the use of questionnaires for examining ways in which computer users are beginning to engage place on the basis of a new kind of participant observation field work, similar to a semi-structured interview. I implicitly argue for a kind of 'face-value' methodology. The opportunity for a more involved engagement with informants, as well as subsequent kinds of analysis, becomes possible through the responses to these questionnaires, where potential face-to-face meetings, video conferencing, MS Messenger chat, and telephone interviews can serve for follow up communication. All of the respondents provided phone numbers and those that had MS Messenger contact information also provided that information. The questionnaire then both serves methodologically to begin to elicit responses to questions concerning ways in which visitors think about the St. Kilda web site, and as an approach to further potential discussion about the online web site. It thus makes possible one approach to

communicating with informants, who have visited the St. Kilda web site and signed the guest book, and are now distributed around the world.

Sample

I drew my sample of informants from the NTS St. Kilda web site's guestbook. I sent the first questionnaire to 91 individuals who signed the guestbook near its inception (between February 1, 2001 and April 26, 2001) on three separate dates: April 15, 22 and 30, 2004. 30 out of these 91 e-mail addresses no longer worked. I received 7 responses out of 60 to the first questionnaire.

I sent an in-depth 2nd questionnaire on May 1 to the respondents who permitted me to do so, to which I received 0 responses. I followed up by calling each of them, with their permission. I interviewed all 7 of the respondents by telephone.

Through the use of this questionnaire methodology, I make the following assumptions. I posit and examine the idea that either the St. Kilda online web site is or is not 'place.' I also assume that, in addition to the web site, computer users' entries in the NTS St. Kilda guestbook thus constitute representations of an online St. Kilda "sense of place" or not. By approaching questions of how St. Kilda is visited online, I thus examine, for example, neither the role of any specific representations on the web site, nor do I extensively engage in methodological approaches or contemporary approaches such as those used in Media Studies. While the question of whether the NTS St. Kilda web site represents 'place,' as well as a new development in St. Kildan cultural history, for computer users is complex, I utilize for the purposes of this pilot ethnography a methodology centred around open-ended responses. I justify this approach on the basis

that it provides the most effective and salient ways in which to begin to examine whether computer users are or are not beginning to understand online St. Kilda as place.

Follow-up Interview

Because I received no responses to my more in-depth follow-up e-mail questionnaire, I telephoned each informant, since almost all informants provided their phone numbers. In our conversations, I asked informants questions from my 2nd questionnaire. Methodologically, I employed a modified form of the “Experience Sampling Method¹,” (Czikszenmihalyi 1991: 8). On the basis of these questions, informants and I discussed St. Kilda’s web site and ways of understanding it. While conversation allows for the development of thoughts in a variety of directions, as well as the exploration of specific aspects of that thought, the interviewer also interprets the significance of the ideas in the writing process.

Summary and Discussion of Data - Responses to First Questionnaire

The following data, based on responses to the 1st questionnaire, provide a sketch of ways in which individuals visit the NTS St. Kilda web site. Taken together, the informants’ responses contribute to shaping an understanding of ways in which the NTS

¹ Czikszenmihalyi 1991: 8 – In his study of enjoyment, Czikszenmihalyi used the Experience Sampling Method, which, in this instance, involved asking people to wear a pager for a week. The subjects in the study were then randomly signaled about 8 times a day and, in response to a questionnaire, asked to write down what they were doing, how they are feeling and what they are thinking, at the time they were signaled. At the end of the week, a running log of what people were doing at a series of representative moments exists. From this data, it is possible to determine what it is people are doing when they report enjoying themselves.

St. Kilda web site online is visited, as well as if and how respondents may be beginning to visit it as if it is 'place.'

1. > How many times have you visited the St. Kilda web site?

42.8% of the respondents (3) visited it more than 10 times

14.28 % of the respondents (1) visited it more than 5 times

14.28 % of the respondents (1) visited it more than 3 times

28.56 % of the respondents (2) visited it twice

A majority of the informants visited the NTS web site more than 10 times.

2. > Why did you visit the National Trust for Scotland's (NTS) St. Kilda web site?

One respondent visited the St. Kilda web site out of "general interest." Another "planned to visit" St. Kilda. Another respondent "used to live on St. Kilda" and continued to return online. The 4th respondent said they visited "mainly to remind me of places I had been to. I was on Hirta and Dun." The fifth respondent reported the reason for visiting the NTS St. Kilda web site as "web surfing." The 6th respondent said: "I was an exchange student to Ayrshire when I was in high school. I discovered the website while researching a hoped-for return trip over." The last respondent "wishes to visit."

While the reasons for visiting the web site vary, some emphasized visiting the web site to remind them of their time on the island archipelago while others wished eventually to go there.

3. > Do you visit the NTS St. Kilda web site regularly?

Four respondents report they do not visit the St. Kilda web site regularly, while 3 stated they do.

Although a number of informants did visit the web site many times, most reported not visiting the site very often.

4. > Which other non-NTS St. Kilda web sites have you visited?

Respondent A – “Some found in search machine but I do not remember which”

Respondent B – Didn’t respond.

Respondent C – “None”

Respondent D - “Cannot remember the sites - I usually use google to look them up”

Respondent E – “Probably none - I did it a while ago.”

Respondent F – “ayrshire-arran.com”

Respondent G – “None”

Informants found the NTS St. Kilda web site through a search engine or another web site.

5. > Have you visited St. Kilda itself?

71.42 % (5) respondents have visited it and 28.57% (2) haven’t.

Most of the respondents have visited St. Kilda itself.

6. > Please describe your feelings, thoughts and experiences as you visited the NTS St. Kilda website, as if you were visiting St. Kilda itself. (Please write in some detail about this question, if possible: more than 150 words would be helpful).

Feelings, thoughts, experiences as if people were visiting St. Kilda itself.

All respondents wrote enthusiastically about the National Trust for Scotland St. Kilda web site for a variety of reasons. Many of the respondents found the St. Kilda web site to be valuable for updating them on events and developments since they last visited.

Respondent A spoke of their experience of the web site, as if ‘almost as returning.’ But this respondent focused primarily on the St. Kilda web site’s role for news and developments there.

Respondent B read the question as asking for thoughts about St. Kilda itself and wrote glowingly of their previous ‘physical’ experiences there. B especially highlighted the sense of St. Kilda’s environment / place – Village Bay, the birds – as well what B considered to be the privilege of going there. The writer’s response provides an unexpected narrative for comparison with descriptions of St. Kilda experiences online. On the way to physical St. Kilda, B describes talking about it as a fairy tale to an acquaintance. Visiting St. Kilda was the ‘fulfillment of THE dream’ of her life. B also writes how significantly different it is on-the-ground, compared with what she knew from extensive reading about it. In this brief preliminary study, this contrast suggests a basis for both comparing physical St. Kilda with its online representations, as well as comparing texts about S. Kilda with St. Kilda online. Such a comparison, while not within the scope of this analysis, would provide ways of highlighting ways in which multimedia technologies make possible new forms of communication. In general, Respondent B’s language suggests reverence for the people and way life that existed there prior to 1930 as well as for the unique current environment. Physical St. Kilda serves as a place which contrasts with B’s place of origin, as well a kind of idyll of the sublime, representing distance from the realities of the world.

Respondent C found the St. Kilda web site to serve as a reminder of previous visits. C suggested that the reason why St. Kilda interests people so much is due to the history of the people who once lived there. While many people are indeed drawn to both physical St. Kilda and St. Kilda online for its history, culture and an interest in the lifestyle of and people who lived there, respondent C deemphasizes the role the web site plays for computer users vis-à-vis its natural history and its geological history, for

example. Respondent C also identifies a specific historical period as most significant for him / herself, privileging an interest in more web content from one time period over another time period. While the expression of such an interest can potentially contribute to computer users' constitution of the web site, it also highlights the contrast between expectation and personal interest when visiting the St. Kilda web site.

Similar to respondent B, Respondent D used the site to revisit places s/he knew on St. Kilda from nearly 20 years ago. The web site, s/he says, allows access at any time, especially in relation to other forms of media, as well as in contrast to the place itself. Respondent D mentions the experience of his sense of self as being very small but 'able to do things', after walking to the top of the small St. Kilda mountain 'behind' Village Bay called Connachair. While one can see Connachair in the Quicktime movie, one doesn't experience the small sense of relative size through St. Kilda online, nor do computer users in this study express a sense of feeling 'engaged' or 'able to do things,' after using the multimedia technologies.

Respondent E highlights her ancestral connections as informing her interest in Scotland, his / her strong interest the highlands and islands, and also St. Kilda. Respondent E found the photos important in particular, but described how the web site makes him / her want to go there, rather than that the web site in any way begins to provide a sense of place. For E, the web site operates as a form of information / quasi-advertisement. His / her interest in ancestral places echoes others' interest in St. Kilda' history.

Respondent F found the information about the work done there exciting and inspiring. The web site contributed to F's desire to work on a work party.

While Respondent G found the web site stimulated his / her memory of the uniqueness of St. Kilda's landscape, as well as a sense of specialness, visiting provides an opportunity to immerse oneself online in a culture. Unlike all the other web respondents, s/he explicitly said that the web site was not like St. Kilda in reality. **By observing, however, that it is the closest thing to being there, s/he touched on some of the significances of computer users relations with new multimedia technologies.**

7. > How did you hear about the National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site?

Respondent A – Other: St. Kilda mail (St. Kilda club)

Respondent B – Other: internet

Respondent C – Other: internet

Respondent D – Other: email from the US

Respondent E – Other: I was searching the web for information on visiting the Islands of Scotland

Respondent F – Other: discovered on the Internet

Respondent G – National Trust for Scotland

Most respondents found the St. Kilda web site either via the Internet (search engine, email from friends), via the National Trust for Scotland, or via the publication “The St. Kilda Mail.”

8. > What St. Kilda books have you read, web sites have you visited, or literature have you seen? Please mention specific titles. (Condensed list).

Steel: Life and Death of St. Kilda

Harmon: An Island called Hirta

Buchanan: St. Kilda: The Continuing Story

MacLean: Island at the Edge of the World

Quine: St. Kilda Portraits

Colin Baxter: St. Kilda

Coates: The place-names of St. Kilda

Stell: Buildings of St. Kilda

St. Kilda Mail since 1984

Voyage to St. Kilda
 St. Kilda - Settlement and Structures on Hirta
 Scotland's Island Edens
 Descriptions from Natural World Heritage Properties
 Britannica search: St. Kilda
 NTS Work parties on St. Kilda
 Ian Mitchell: St. Kilda Diary
 Monica Wellers` photographs
 The Internet`s guide to Scotland
 1930 Last days on St. Kilda.
 NTS web sites
 Martin Martin: A voyage to St. Kilda
 WR Mitchell: Finlay MacQueen of St. Kilda
 St Kilda: The Continuing Story of the Islands

Respondents reported reading a total of 22 different titles. The most frequently reported books were Steel's "Life and Death of St. Kilda," MacLean's "Island on the Edge of the World" and Quine's "St. Kilda's Portraits."

9. > What other parts of the National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site did you visit?

Respondents:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
'Flash' Movie	X		X	X		X	X
Slide shows	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
History page	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
NTS's Management pages	X		X			X	X
Other: News / Work parties / Liter.	X		X		X	X	

All informants visited the slide shows and history pages. Respondents secondarily visited the 'Flash' animation history and NTS management pages. Many respondents visited other pages.

10. > Which web pages did you enjoy most?

Respondents:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Specific textual content		X		X	X	X	

Photo tours	X		X	X		X
Quicktime movie	X					X
Paintings						
Other:	U	V			Z	

U: in general I liked all of them!

V: None stood out in particular

W:

X:

Y:

Z: Information about the Soay sheep project, and the work of the wardens and the archaeologist.

Based on the choices on the list, people reported enjoying text and paintings most.

11. > Have you found anything disappointing about the website? If so, what?

Respondent A - No

Respondent B - Better information according to work parties?

Respondent C - Lack of historical information concerning the people who used to live there.

Respondent D - Would like more pictures

Respondent E - I would always like to see more pictures!

Respondent F - Some detailed climatological and weather trend information needs to be included, e.g. annual rainfall, rainiest month, driest month, average temperatures by month, etc. Ideally, an internet site where one could check the daily weather conditions and high and low temperatures etc. would be included, as well.

Respondent G – “nothing I can think of”

Respondents thought the NTS could improve the web site by providing better information about work parties, more historical information concerning the people who lived there, more pictures, climatological and weather trend information, as well as daily high and low temperatures. Two respondents were not disappointed by the web site.

Demographic Information

Respondents:

Male 2; Female 5

Age:

5 respondents were between the ages of 50 and 64

1 respondent was between the age of 30 and 49

1 respondent was between the age of 18 and 25

Education:

Respondent A – no answer

Respondent B – post graduate degree

Respondent C – no answer

Respondent D - I left school aged 15 but acquired much education after that

Respondent E – college degree (BA)

Respondent F – college degree (BA)

Respondent G – High School Student or younger

Occupation:

Respondent A - Paint Technician

Respondent B - Teacher in senior high school

Respondent C - Computer Engineer

Respondent D - I was an Inspector of Taxes - took early retirement; Worked in the voluntary sector; Started the Caithness.org web site and became self employed running a web business; I am also now Highland Councillor. Director of three companies - unpaid I sit on several bodies - voluntary and statutory.

Respondent E - Director of Property Tax for major U.S. hotel company

Respondent F - Former schoolteacher, now medical transcriptionist.

Respondent G - student

Nationalities:

Respondent A - German

Respondent B - Norwegian

Respondent C - British / Scot

Respondent D - British

Respondent E - US

Respondent F - US

Respondent G - German

The respondent lives in:

Respondent A - Buxtehude, Germany

Respondent B - Norway
Respondent C - West Lothian Scotland
Respondent D – North of Scotland
Respondent E – Near Washington D.C.
Respondent F - Texas
Respondent G – Near Hamburg, Germany

Telephone Interviews

Each interview yielded a different narrative primarily about how the informant understood St. Kilda as place or not, as well as how they visited it for information. The informants provided many useful ideas for understanding the way computer users interact with, and shape their own personal trail of links in relation to very large number of link options (hypermedia). While I asked the interviewees questions about what role representations of St. Kildan culture, history, and people play, their responses highlight the significance of using the web site to find information.

Many interviewees found the St. Kilda web site useful as ‘a round up of information’.

For interviewee A, the web site answered her questions about ‘what type of place’ it is (A). The site provided a useful explanation about the place for people who don’t know about it: “a lot of people even in Britain don’t know about St. Kilda.” More critically, the web site is well designed: ‘it makes it easy to go through the links’. ‘The titles for the pictures might be a little bit difficult for someone who doesn’t know the place’. In relation to hypermedia, the informant suggested that: ‘It’s not one click and you know everything’. The web site is well-styled and nicely designed so as ‘to catch the interest of the people who visit the web page.’ In terms of integration of media elements,

my first interviewee found the addition of the sound of the waves to be a positive addition. 'A web cam would be a good addition'. To get more visitors, she also suggested 'Try something like the haggis hunt'.

Interviewee A said 'I already know a lot about St. Kilda culture from the literature. I like the news. It's always interesting to see what's going on. I don't know one day whether I'll return one day or not'. Interactive-wise, "the pictures are most impressive". 'It might be attractive in fog and storm.'

When asked how the web site differs from the real St. Kilda, she said that "It's a good mirror of St. Kilda".

Interviewee B "went to the St. Kilda web site for cruise information." She wants 'people to have people have the best impression of St. Kilda.' She thinks that 'some of the pictures are too dark.' While she would "add more bird pictures" (B), she wouldn't add more technologies, because they are sufficient.

For B, the soul of St. Kilda is what's important. She asked reflexively what was the best way to express soul on the web site'? She can't say whether the web site expresses soul or not. She originally went to St. Kilda because of Hammond Innes's book "Atlantic Fury." The book was 'filled with mystery, filled with passion.' She went there in person and found the place mysterious, like the edge of the world. She doesn't know how one would put that on the web site – those emotions. However, when she goes to the web site and sees a boat, for example, she gets that feeling again. She said a number of times that she is so filled 'humbleness' for the people who lived there. So the web site for may not echo her feeling responses to St. Kilda. She (B) finds the people who lived on St.

Kilda interesting because of their humbleness, their strength, and their patience. The way they lived in their society, the trust in each other, the techniques they developed to live in such place all interested her.

In terms of interactivity of the web site, she said the mouse helps provide fast access. It's easier to find a lot of stuff without having to search so much. It's also easy to go to other links quickly.

In terms of new forms of narrative mediated by multimedia, she observed that the history material shaped one kind of narrative, the preservation material another, the natural history material another and biology-related information another. The web site makes possible accessing these different kinds of narratives.

For Interviewee C, physical St. Kilda contrasts with St Kilda online in the following way: “Even if you tried to represent to others the experience of being on St. Kilda on the web site, you couldn't do it because St. Kilda is so much greater, so much more special, so and intense.” In some ways it's ‘so unreal to be out there’ (C). It's so hard to represent the feelings and emotions on the web site.

For her the significance of it as an UNESCO world heritage site has to do with its preservation: She appreciated the fact that it would be well taken care of and that one can't just do what one wants.

Another informant looked at the St. Kilda web site partly from the viewpoint of a web producer. D mentioned a number of approaches to designing the site, such as introducing a series of thumbnails as if one were walking on the ‘road’ in front of the

cottages; one could then turn in either direction to look at thumbnails and they would 'open' up to the large view. On web sites that he's designing, he wants to increase the size of the large images, as well. He also suggested including some aerial photographs. He observed that people always want new content.

Informant E suggested using imaging technology to shape the web site. She also suggested including more pictures. She would 'like to see more about the geology.'

Informant E: 'I like the fact that there's nobody there.' Similarly, 'the web site doesn't overpower one with graphics or flashy stuff.' The web site 'relates to the place.' There aren't 'any bill boards.' 'The web site gives you the impression that it's an isolated place, as if there are not a lot of people.' 'Then as you read the history - with the work groups' – and it's interesting. 'For me, I have a very hectic life – I would be interested if I had the time to go to a place that's very simple.' She looks at it as an alternative.

Why St. Kilda for you rather than other remote beautiful? 'I have looked on the web for remote, beautiful places' and been to them. 'St. Kilda had a guestbook' 'The web site certainly exposes the place to many people who wouldn't know about it.

Sense of Place: For E: 'I'm very place oriented. I think of places before people. There are people who go places and they relate to people, but I relate to places, both cities and countryside.' 'Something which I see and which gives me a good image in my mind' is what place is. If I think a place is beautiful or very attractive, that makes me want to go there.' Interviewer: So using the St. Kilda web site gives you a sense of place? 'Yes.' 'Some people would say that's too remote for me, and not go,' but I like remote places.

Informant F would add web cams and video material.

She said that the integrative media elements (sound and photo together, quicktime movies, etc.), adds to web site, makes it seem three dimensional, like you are really there.

She said the web site definitely has ‘a sense of place.’ As far as the quality or sensation wise, she ‘felt very drawn to it and felt as if it was place.’ ‘I was being allowed to experience, through the web site, a place that I felt a strong affinity for. Actually when I discovered the web site, I had never heard of St. Kilda – I went on the web looking for places I wanted to travel to. I knew I wanted to go to Skye. I found the Internet guide to Scotland – which I thought was excellent – so I had to navigate to it.’ She would like to see more about geology.

Concerning interactivity and hypermedia: ‘Having all the links gives one a much more comprehensive understanding. There’s a feeling of being there. The web site isn’t one dimensional.’ ‘At times it made me feel as if I was there.’ It’s ‘more of an immersion experience.’

Informant G (between age 18 and 25)

About the effects of multimedia technologies, informant G said: ‘The pictures and sounds take you there. The sounds had a real effect – almost like being there . . . it gives you the feeling.’ ‘They all work together.’ ‘It’s difficult to describe the feeling.’ With the Quicktime movie and interactivity: ‘It’s like being there because if you are on the island you can look in a certain direction.’

The way the web site differs from the physical St. Kilda: 'It's much more limited. It's just the magic of being there. I'm on St. Kilda and I'm here - the magic of the moment – the 'something of being there' – you don't get that on the web site.' The web site works to help remembering, - it's fascinating that way.

While she described ways in which St. Kilda multimedia did, for her, make it seem if she was there, she also suggested that the web site helped stimulate people's memory (she worked on St. Kilda 4 years ago).

Each of the informants characterized the effects of the St. Kilda web site in different ways. Some highlighted the way it changed how they interpreted St. Kilda. Others emphasized its usefulness for information. Others related how it did convey a sense of place and ways in which the multimedia technologies contributed to this in a nascent way.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

St. Kilda: Place and Visitor

In this dissertation I examine the ethnographic concept of the ‘field’ and ways in which the idea of physical ‘place’ gives rise to idea of online ‘place’ in relation to the Scottish Island archipelago of St. Kilda. I develop new ways of examining these concepts in ethnographic discourse related to online St. Kilda (<http://www.kilda.org.uk/>). I suggest that the St. Kilda web site as multimedia in conjunction with St. Kilda itself, understood in the context of the Internet, constitutes a new kind of ethnographically analyzable ‘place,’ and that visitors experience and learn about this place in novel ways shaped in part by characteristics of multimedia and the Internet, a new ‘field.’ I also suggest that online St. Kilda is ‘place,’ analyzable as a key component of the developing concept of the ‘field,’ has significant ethnological aspects, characterized below. More broadly, the St. Kilda web site and what on-the-ground visitors say about St. Kilda, are new forms of ethnological material, comparable to folksongs, descriptions of ways of life, and similar items. Using examples from the online St. Kilda web site and reports by visitors to physical St. Kilda, I examine ways in which visitors both shape and interact with representations of St. Kilda.

Virtual Ethnography – Literature Discussion

Reviewing the literature about the UNESCO world heritage site St. Kilda and information technology includes examining the National Trust for Scotland's St. Kilda web site (<http://www.kilda.org.uk/>) and other technologies, such as the recent controversy over installation of cameras on St. Kilda. Information technology, the Internet and

multimedia reshape the significance of St. Kilda's remoteness and cast the virtual representation of its cultural heritage today in many new ways. People from all over the world can now visit St. Kilda from any place in any country with Internet access. Virtual ethnography inquires into how new information technologies such as web-based multimedia and e-mail are co-constructing 'physical' and 'social' 'reality.' For example, Hine's "Virtual Ethnography" (2000) develops a methodology for examining the Internet. The author suggests that the idea of "net life" is overblown. She also suggests that the Internet does not transcend traditional notions of space and time, contrary to some claims. Instead the book suggests that the Internet produces many different 'approaches to' / 'orders of' time and space which cross the online/offline boundary. Hine also rejects both a postmodernist understanding of the Internet as a site for playfulness and the related idea of the end of authenticity. Miller and Slater (2000) suggest that contrary to the commonly held idea that cyberspace is "placeless," the Internet is very much rooted in specific places. They suggest that Trinidadian communities (their focus) put a great deal of time and energy into their online 'life' which then appear naturally "Trini." Many writers about the Internet have claimed that virtual technology involves a dis-embedding but these authors suggest that dis-embedding from offline reality is not occurring here.

Hine identifies (Hine 2000: 43) three crucial areas for looking at the Internet ethnographically:

- the role of travel and face-to-face interaction in ethnography
- text, technology and reflexivity
- the making of ethnographic objects

Historically, Hine suggests that travel and face-to-face interaction have allowed the ethnographer an 'immersion' experience, which has in turn generally made ethnographies

convincing (Hine 2000: 44). For Hine the ethnographic crisis of representation of culture (Denzin 1997), originating in part with Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986), contributes to lessening the significance of face-to-face interaction in ethnographic writing. Hine thus highlights the significance of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a site for interaction which potentially is ethnographically authentic on its own terms (Hine 2000: 44). Thus, for Hine, ethnographic representations of online 'interactivity' offer a useful and authentic way to examine the Internet.

For Hine, 'text, technology and reflexivity' offer another way to understand the Internet, distinct yet not inseparable from the 'interactiveness' of computer-mediated communication (Hine 2000: 50). For Hine, there are no precise distinctions between cyberspace as 'text' and cyberspace as 'interactive.' Instead, each idea is useful for the ways in which it helps characterize and constitute each as a phenomenon. For example, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), Thompson (1995), and Swales (1998) each develop ethnographic approaches to look at the ways the ethnographer can examine text in relation to context / situationality. Hine suggests that it is relatively easy to analyze text vis-a-vis social context in relation to the Internet (Hine 2000: 52). In proposing that text and computer-mediated communication (CMC) interactivity are significant in virtual ethnography, Hine methodologically proceeds to write an ethnography in a fairly conventional style, to "say the things which my experiences lead me to want to say, without claiming that these represent a single true reality, but also without strictly censoring those parts which might come across in a realist way" (Hine 2000: 56-57). She justifies writing a conventional ethnography for the pragmatic reason that there may not

be a large enough readership to warrant an examination of new ethnographic forms due to a related representational crisis (Hine 2000: 57).

Methodologically, Hine lastly suggests that the way a field site maps onto a physically bounded place is significant for the way ethnographers constitute ethnographic objects (Hine 2000: 58). While ethnographic objects have historically related spatially to a specific locale, the questioning of the significance of local boundedness in a world where cultures and processes appear increasingly interlinked and global allows one to engage a ‘vocabulary of mobility’ (Thrift, 1996a: 297). This thus reshapes how ethnographic objects are constituted. Ethnographers have examined two distinct but related methodological processes focusing on cultural interconnectedness. One concentrates on a more in-depth, richer articulation of varied cultural objects in a particular location (Radway, 1988, Abu-Lughod, 1997; Hirsch, 1998). “Situating their argument within media reception and consumption studies, these authors question the particular notions of audiences which emerge from studies based on the reception of a specific media text or technology” (Hine 2000: 59). They argue that multiple discourses, identities and locations implicating the ‘audience’ or ‘consumer’ are significantly under-examined (Hine 2000: 59). The other way emphasizes ways in which place is performed and practiced as necessary (Olwig and Hastrup 1997; Marcus 1995).

Hine concludes her methodological analysis by laying out ten principles of virtual ethnography, for example, 1) that the virtual ethnography is a device to render the use of the Internet a problematic and 2) that interactive media problematizes the question of ‘site of interactivity,’ relating to the discussion above, to 10) where virtual refers to something both disembodied and ‘not quite’ adequate for practical purposes (Hine 2000:

64-65). Each principle, like Hine's three crucial approaches, either only partially articulates with or doesn't recognize at all some of Packer and Jordan's key multimedia characteristics at all, such as hypermedia and integration. Hine's overall methodologies therefore examine limited aspects of 'virtuality' but do not engage what are arguably theoretically acute, methodologically useful, and comprehensive characteristics of multimedia (Packer and Jordan 2001).

Miller and Slater (2000) examine 4 key analytical dimensions in investigating ways in which the Internet remains embedded in a particular place: the dynamics of objectification, the dynamics of mediation, the dynamics of normative freedom and the dynamics of positioning (Miller and Slater 2000: 10). Concerning objectification, with which they began their initial inquiry and which is their main interest, they ask how people engage with the Internet as an example of material culture through which they are involved in processes of identification. In other words, how do Trinidadians objectify themselves as such through particular kinds of usage of the Internet. Fully utilizing a participant-observation approach, they suggest both that place continues to remain significant – that is, that no disembedding of place occurs - and that virtuality hasn't 'materialized.'

Both Hine's (2000) and Miller and Slater's (2000) accounts do not examine ways in which new characteristics of online multimedia (Packer and Jordan 2001), taken as a whole, contribute to shaping a new kind of communication process which uniquely informs / reshapes computer users' experiences here of place and cultural discourse. They thus omit a thorough and systematic examination of the characteristics of multimedia technologies themselves. Indeed, Miller and Slater argue for the irrelevance of 'virtuality'

(Miller and Slater 2000: 7). While situating their Internet ethnographies within an historical ethos of holism (Hine 2000: 21; Miller and Slater 2000: 1), Hine's and Miller and Slater's methodologies thus only examine tangentially some parts of Internet-mediated communication. For example, Hine's focus on ways in which online users interacted with online newsgroups and bulletin boards doesn't examine the significance of the integration of these media elements or the way users move through and wide variety of linked paths in this environment.

Similarly, as a result of the advent of the Internet, Miller and Slater examine online Trinidad identity suggesting that identity in relation to the Internet is firmly embedded in 'place'; the Internet, however, now does make Trinidadness multi-sited and diasporic. However, Packer and Jordan's characteristics taken as a theoretical aggregate – interactivity, integration of media elements, new kinds of narrativity, hypermedia and immersion - do point toward both a disembeddedness of 'place,' as well as developing the significance of virtuality. Contrary to Miller and Slater's claims, an analysis of cultural discourse is similarly possible on the Internet. The significance of Packer and Jordan's characteristics lie in the way they function as a new form of communication as a whole. Packer and Jordan's online multimedia characteristics thus provide the basis for a thorough participant-observation approach including the use of open-ended interviews, questionnaires, and surveys to examine how both computer users and visitors to St. Kilda are engaging and understanding St. Kilda.

Virtual ethnography is the study of new forms of communication which arise in relation to developments in information technology. It focuses on changes which occur as

a consequence of information technology in relation to place, people, and communication. None of the virtual ethnographic studies to date, however, examine the ethnographic significance of the five characteristics of multimedia, which Packer and Jordan (2001) identify - integration (hybrid artistic and technological forms), interactivity (direct manipulation of and communication through media), hypermedia (personal trail of association created by the linking of separate media elements), immersion (experience of 3-D environment) and narrativity (“aesthetic and formal strategies that derive from the above concepts, and which result in nonlinear story forms and media presentation”). These characteristics, taken as a whole, are integral to understanding new ways in which the computer user engages cyberspace in relation to place and people, culture and tourism.

Ethnographically, the Internet establishes new networks of associations in relation to specific places and cultures, cultural discourses, and cultural artifacts. As a theoretical framework, I assume a kind of mediated technological determinism (Castells 2000, 2003) of unintended consequences (Bimber, 1996). I thus examine the ways the Internet and information technology are changing the way people experience place and culture based on the assumption that the Internet as technology creates a way “of bringing together reliance on networks ... with the capacity for coordination of tasks and management of complexity” (Castells 2003). I also examine the way cultural construction of place (Basso, 1996) is mediated by a second kind of network of UNESCO World Heritage sites (UNESCO, 2003) predicated on the idea of “outstanding universal value.”

Multimedia and Representation of Place

Multimedia Internet technologies, while still in an incipient form, shape new modes of representation of place. Packer and Jordan's (2001) five interrelated processes together suggest a new form of communication and cultural process. For the computer user, these characteristics of multimedia shape new ways of interacting with representations of place, an examination of which in the context of modernity provides new approaches to representation, e.g. Harvey's examination of the 1992 world exhibition in Spain (Harvey 1996). These computer user experiences of place are in turn comparable with the experiences of, for example, the tourist's physical visits with place (Harvey 1996).

"Virtual tourism" entails a re-examination of the conception of "culture" in the broad anthropological sense. 'Culture' as a nexus of discourse, (Clifford 1988) and now mediated by information technology, is extended and reformulated as a kind of representation. The UNESCO world heritage designation and sites, as particular 'cultural' artifacts, shaped around the 'cultural' idea of "outstanding universal value," and potentially 'read' by multiple people from multiple countries and traditions via information technology both 'virtualize' and dislocate 'meaning.' Cultural notions of universal and local are further articulated. Clifford (1988) contextualizes "the predicament of culture" in an historical understanding where cultural artifacts 'shape' paths of hybrid meaning. Clifford (1988, 5-6) contrasts this with a view of history that sees the authenticity of culture, peoples, and products as endangered and in juxtaposition to modernizing influences. Thus he rewrites an oft-described or oft-assumed cultural dualism between authentic versus modern, by situating 'pure products' -- artifacts, identities and communities -- within blurring / shifting processes. For Clifford (1988), the

problem encapsulated in *The Predicament of Culture* examines “far-reaching questions about modes of cultural interpretation, implicit models of wholeness, styles of distancing, stories of historical development” (Clifford, 1988: 8).

The problem of ethnographic representations of ‘culture’ is partly definitional, situated within a historicized ethnographic landscape of conjunctural processes. In the context of today’s world, ethnography involves questioning the ethnographer’s authority to objectively and realistically portray the ‘other,’ as well as ways in which the ethnographer is a ‘product’ of culture.

Methodological Questions Shaped by a New Conception of Sense of Place

Anthropologists and ethnologists have historically looked at and gone to "the field," which has traditionally been geographically bounded. Examining the UNESCO World Heritage site St. Kilda on-the-ground and online as a “field site” reshapes methodological approaches to various ways of conceiving of “the field.” First, the remote St. Kilda web site as "field," defined to include its visitors, is inherently multi-sited, spanning national boundaries. It is also shaped by a set of UNESCO criteria of what common heritage is. Secondly, if one looks at UNESCO World Heritage web sites as nascent destinations, that is as ‘places’ to visit, in themselves, embedded in a form of time-space compression and accessed by clicking a mouse, using a search engine or entering a URL, the "cyberspace" of online world heritage can be potentially viewed as another "field" with another set of methodological challenges, shaped by changing information technologies. In anthropological terms, the field in these cases becomes shaped by a variety of histories and living traditions, an UNESCO agenda to preserve

these sites, a specific concept of common history, and the ways in which UNESCO world heritage is represented on the Internet in the context of developing multimedia technologies for visitors, tourists and computer users.

In George Marcus's (1995) 'Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography,' the author's examination of recent methodological trends in anthropology shows the way in which anthropological approaches are beginning to examine complex objects and become multi-sited within the context of a world system and late capitalism. Marcus (1995) shows how ethnography is moving from a single-sited approach to cross-cut dichotomies of global and local, of "lifeworld" and system. Utilizing an extensive review of anthropological literature, he identifies the way multi-sited ethnography is now located within new interdisciplinary spheres including media studies and science and technology studies. One of Marcus' underlying arguments is that

"any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single-site *mise en scène* of ethnographic research, assuming indeed it is the cultural formation, produced in several different locales, rather than the conditions of a particular set of subjects that is the object of study." (Marcus 1995: 99)

For Marcus, "Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography." (Marcus 1995: 105) By identifying field sites within the context of a world system, Marcus provides a methodological orientation in which to contextualize the idea of "the field" based on online and on-the-ground St. Kilda. Its UNESCO World Heritage site designation based on conceptions of

natural and cultural 'common heritage' further extends approaches to examining it as part of a specific conjunction of locations at a particular time in history. Visitors to the St. Kildan web site surf there from locations around the world, learning about it from multiple perspectives. From an anthropological perspective, visitors to St. Kilda as a field site extend an understanding of multi-sitedness across multiple national boundaries, specifically incorporating multiple historical and living traditions. In the aggregate, St. Kilda as field site invokes a very wide cast of actors which not only include the various local and regional producers and consumers of online and on-the-ground heritage from their respective countries and language groups, but also institutional actors relating to St. Kilda's role in Scotland's heritage industry (McCrone 1995) and institutions that support it. Physical and online St. Kilda in this case defines a cultural formation based on a specific history and geographical location and cultural discourse and explicitly attempts to identify outstanding shared characteristics which transcend national boundaries, thus constituting a unique anthropological, global "field."

The bounded, island-site of St. Kilda, arguably now sharing a transnational, common heritage with online visitors from many parts of the world, is now produced and represented in a series of web sites, representations, and digitally-mediated forms of communication on the Internet. In 'Discourse and practice: "the field" as site, method and location in anthropology,' Gupta and Ferguson (1997) relocate the field in terms of social, cultural, and political locations, de-centering it from its constitutive (Stocking), 'local,' on the ground, anthropological origins. In the context of the Internet and cyberspace, St. Kilda, as a worldwide-accessible, digital, field site, contributes to such an anthropological repositioning of the field by not only providing an example about

what one visitors might presently find there. Social communication and communities involved in these new technologies and online St. Kilda shape nascent processes of online interaction and meaning. Ethnographically, 'cyberspace' as a field site spurs questions about the ways in which visitors, tourists, end users, and producers interact, both globally and locally, using these new technologies in the context of a world system. Opportunities for new kinds of fieldwork, both online, and on-the-ground, thus present themselves, thus rewriting the ways in which St. Kilda community members, producers, tourists, visitors and computer users utilize these representations and digital means of communication.

St. Kilda, the destination and the concept, constitutes a potential anthropological 'field' as do the ways in which it is represented on the Internet for the actors involved. New modes of digital communication also reformulate linkages, contours and associations articulating new forms of St. Kildan on-the-ground and online "field sites." St. Kilda, as an example, begins to represent an online 'place' in the context of a world system, thus contributing to an ongoing relocation of the anthropological concept of the "field." While I examine the anthropological concept of the 'field' in terms of linkages, threads, and paths between various aspects of St. Kilda, with a posited logic of connection, 'place' here refers to online representations of St. Kilda. Physical St. Kilda is an interesting example articulating various chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography. In this paper I refer to place as including distinctive geographical boundaries, as well as a name, distinctive social and physical qualities, and symbolic / discursive significance.

In conclusion to this section, this study of online ‘place’ is a new area of research in that it engages an analysis of online St. Kilda as ‘place’ in relation to St. Kilda’s physical place. Its significance lies in the bringing together of visitor, place and field to shape a research project which situates what people say about physical and online St. Kilda as a new locus of study. I situate this ethnographic and ethnological project in line with the writings of previous St. Kilda authors' such as Martin, Sands, Heathcote, Steel, Maclean, Quine, Fleming, MacDonald and Harman. By examining what tourists and visitors say about St. Kilda today, both those who visit it online and physically, I thus research and write a contemporary ethnography of St. Kilda. By examining the co-constitution of St. Kilda as nascent, online ‘place’ in relation to physical place, I conclude that ‘place’ is beginning to emerge online. The study of the way people engage this kind of ‘place’ provides new approaches to understanding some of the social effects of information technology in relation to St. Kilda.

Phenomenology of Place

In the following analysis, I examine ways in which a philosophical, phenomenological approach to the understanding of ‘sense of place’ articulates with the idea of place mediated by new multimedia technologies. In “Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape,” Basso (Basso 1996: 54) suggests that a sense of place and how people understand it are unexplored ethnographically.

“Consequently little is known of the ways in which culturally diverse people are alive to the world around them, of how they comprehend it, of the different modes of awareness with which they take it in and (in the words of Edmund Husserl) discover that it matters. Nor can much be said about the effects of such discoveries on the persons who make them, about why some localities matter

more than others, or about why viewing a favored site (or merely recalling aspects of its appearance) may loosen strong emotions and kindle thought of a richly caring kind. In short, anthropologists have paid scant attention to one of the most basic dimensions of human experience – that close companion of heart and mind, often subdued, yet potentially overwhelming, that is known as sense of place. Missing from the discipline is a thematized concern with the ways in which citizens of the earth constitute their landscapes and take themselves to be connected to them. Missing is a desire to fathom the various and variable perspectives from which people know their landscapes, the self-invested viewpoints from which they embrace the countryside and find the embrace returned. Missing is an interest in how men and women dwell.

As formulated by Martin Heidegger (1977), whose general lead I propose to follow here, the concept of *dwelling* assigns importance to the forms of consciousness with which individuals perceive and apprehend geographical space. More precisely, dwelling is said to consist in the multiple “lived relationships” that people maintain with places, for it is solely by virtue of these relationships that space acquires meaning. (Basso 1996: 54)

“Spaces receive their essential being from particular localities and not from ‘space’ itself.” (Heidegger, 1977: 332 cited in Basso 1996: 54)

In this essay and using reports from visitors to St. Kilda online, I recast aspects implicit in Basso’s thesis above to suggest that the NTS St. Kilda web site is a ‘place’ and that the interviews I’ve conducted do suggest that people understand St. Kilda online in a nascent way as if it were place.

I want to explicitly state three reasons for my assumption that online St. Kilda is place: 1) In a phenomenological sense, if place is defined as multiple ‘lived relationships’ with particular localities (Basso 1996: 54), I want to suggest that this process exists now in a limited way in relation to simulacra of place. 2) If people report experiencing online representations such as St. Kilda as both nascent place and as media / information, then I want to suggest that the NTS St. Kilda web site has therefore become nascent place. In Heidegger’s formulation above, the St. Kilda web site as a form of cyberspace recasts the idea of space in a way that Heidegger perhaps can’t envision; the idea of cyberspace as space becomes disjunctive with Heidegger’s ontological assumptions. 3) If place is

defined in terms of categories of place (see above), then online St. Kilda meets many of those criteria.

In positing these rationale and as a consequence of the development of multimedia, I depart from both Heidegger and Basso to situate an understanding of place more fully in the mental experience – the narrative - of beings who engage with multimedia place, rather than place just being rooted in ‘dwelling’ as relating to particular localities. By making this distinction, I want to suggest that while ‘dwelling’ in relation to geographical space is very significant in shaping the consciousness of individuals in relation to place, especially through time, the rise and use of multimedia – both phenomenologically and as people report engaging it - shapes a new kind of relationship with place, which is now mediated by new forms of narrative, interactivity, integration of media elements and hypermedia (Packer and Jordan 2001). Whereas for Heidegger, dwelling consists of multiple lived relationships in relation to particular localities, which thus gives space meaning, multimedia recasts this experience by providing a ‘mental experience’ with place. In contrast to Heidegger, I suggest the possibility of a technologically-mediated kind of duality, where particular localities (the room in which the computer user visits the web site) and the experience of the online ‘place’ (i.e. the St. Kilda web site) visited diverge.

Multimedia representations of place differentiate the idea of place as distinct from some spatio-temporal understandings of both place and space. If space for Heidegger is understood as people’s ‘lived-relationships’ with particular localities, and understanding particular localities is mediated through being in it in time, which includes a temporal understanding of it communicated via our senses via our ‘being-consciousness’ as well as

via our 'lived-thoughts', I suggest a logical recasting of Heidegger's reading of dwellingness in relationship to multimedia. On this interpretation vis-à-vis St. Kilda, informants' reports of nascent place in relation to the St. Kilda web site takes place outside the spatio-temporal continuum of their lived-in environment. The kinds of narratives they shape, as well as the 'distances' (the death of distance argument in geographical readings of cyberspace) they may virtually 'travel' to St. Kilda online (e.g. through mouse-clicking from a distant country) shape new ways of conceiving of lived-relationships with particular localities both in and out of the spatio-temporal continuum.

Third, the network of people connected to St. Kilda through its web site today is now multi-sited and international. While information technology contributes significantly to the distribution of people in relation to both online place as well as physical place, it also provides new forms of information which shape a kind of subculture (Hebdige), where the style determines a certain set of relationships.

CONCLUSION

Representations of St. Kilda continue to have great significance for people in Scotland and around the world. The way people experience a 'sense of place' as a consequence of multimedia is new. By examining ethnographically, for example, how what people think about St. Kilda, the island archipelago 40 miles west of the outer Hebrides, is styled / shaped / influenced in part by both new media and the kinds of information conveyed on a web site, I suggest that in a nascent way, place has emerged as a consequence of the development of information technology. In other words, the way people articulate a sense of place in relation to online multimedia can suggest ontologically that place has 'emerged' online. When people who know, feel connected to and love St. Kilda now live all around the world and can 'gain access' to St. Kilda through web sites, as well as physically - but this is difficult because it is so remote (hence the project) – the constitution of a new kind of online place suggests that a new network of associations has taken shape. Thus, early forms of multimedia - which include new forms of narrative, interaction, integration of media elements and hypermedia - gives rise to nascent senses of place and ways of thinking about St. Kilda, which an ethnographic approach helps to understand.

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FIELD WORK – AND DEFINITIONS

Field work is the basis of the practice of ethnography and ethnology. The field, common to ethnographers, who have typically participated and observed there for an extended period of time, and to ethnologists, who have gone to the field to collect data and then left the field to study and archive it, has united them in practice. In conjunction with the development of new social processes, such as the advent of information technology, researchers rewrite ways in which they relate to the field as well as how the researcher practices contemporary field work.

In ethnology and ethnography it is important to not only define what the field is, but especially to examine how this affects fieldwork itself. Ethnographically, recent writers such as Marcus (1995) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have examined and theoretically revised theories of the field as multi-sited. The Internet extends this rewriting in multiple ways.

In ethnology, folklorists Linda Dégh in *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (2001) and Jan Harold Brunvand in *Too Good to be True - The Colossal Book of Urban Legends* (2001), for example, examine the role and impact of the Internet for both distribution of and information about folklore, a development that originates with publishing, and as a site for the study of folklore itself. In addition, folklore and urban legends are now ‘living’ on the Internet, including on St. Kilda.

DEFINITION OF ST. KILDA AS FIELD

Online St. Kilda as ethnological ‘field’ here refers to what visitors from around the world experience as a series of multimedia, web-based representations of St. Kilda, its folklore

and history. Novel forms of representation, then, contribute to shaping what people interact with when visiting “St. Kilda” remotely online. Some of these visitors have left their names and email addresses in the guestbook and typically offer comments about their experiences of and interest in St. Kilda. They write as if they were visiting St. Kilda as ‘place.’

Physical or on-the-ground St. Kilda refers to the place and visitor experiences of St. Kilda itself. Visitors can go to the physical site or the online web site, or both and thus report learning about / visiting St. Kilda in different ways. By identifying online St. Kilda as part of an ethnographic field – the field here includes online and physical visitors from around the world, as well as online and physical St. Kilda - of study, this paper suggests that a new community of St. Kildan visitors has developed as a direct consequence of the advent of information technology. St. Kilda as field site comprised of visitors from around the world visiting St. Kilda online thus results from the development of information technology.

St. Kilda is very difficult to get to: it lies forty miles west of the outer Hebrides and there are not any regular ferries even in the summer. This paper examines ways in which the St. Kilda web site provides a comparable amount of information constituting an online computer user’s ‘touristic’ experience - i.e. through potentially interactive flash animation movies with sound, sound, a Quicktime panoramic movie, online slide shows, brief histories, a bibliography, a guest book and much more – just as a visitor might experience traveling to St. Kilda itself, to begin to suggest a kind of online ‘place’ itself.

By comparing online St. Kilda with on-the-ground St. Kilda in relation to the visitor / tourist / computer user, I want to examine how and in which ways this online site

begins to give new definition and interpretations to the concepts of place, analyzable within a developing conception of the anthropological 'field.'

[First, St. Kilda, an UNESCO world heritage site, as a "field site" is part of a collectively multi-sited - spanning national boundaries - and shaped by a set of UNESCO criteria determining common heritage.]

Draw from papers

Textual assessment in terms of experience of place and cultural discourse

Online virtual ethnography

Comparison

The following authors . . .

Analysis of each author

Buchan

Macaulay

Meg Buchanan

Buchanan

Charnley

Clegg

Connell

Emery

Harman

Harris

Heathcote

Jewell

Kearton

Macaulay

MacGregor

MacKenzie

Maclean

Martin

Mitchell

Quine

RCAHMS

Sands

Seton

Steel

Stell

Williamson

St. Kilda Interviews

Stone

About web and place

Turner

About web and place

MacEachen

Construction of place

VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY LITERATURE

METHODS – VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

For both online (<http://www.kilda.org.uk>) and physical St. Kilda, we propose to study how people visit it, first using in-depth questionnaires and then follow-up in-depth, semi-structured interviews, in person, on St. Kilda, and online with MSN Messenger and telephone interviews (Punch 1998). By comparing responses to an array of specific and open-ended questionnaire questions, we plan to highlight ways in which online visiting is similar and dissimilar to physical visiting.

More specifically, we will study St. Kilda ethnographically and online using purposive, snowball and convenience sampling procedures. To study the St. Kilda web site, we will also employ survey research and content analyses of the St. Kilda web site (<http://www.kilda.org.uk>) itself. By combining ethnographic and communication methods to study St. Kildan cultural discourse of physical and online St. Kilda in terms of the visitor and computer users who may live anywhere, we will compare and contrast physical with nascent online tourism. We are particularly interested in the way they visit St. Kilda as place and the role its cultural discourse role plays in their ongoing interest, both online and physically, as a consequence of multimedia and information technology.

Methodologically, we will focus on the following main aspects of physical / online St. Kilda tourism. We will examine ways in which visitors today narrate and articulate their reasons for visiting St. Kilda. These visitors include St. Kilda club members, naturalists, ornithologists, writers, artists, people off yachts, NTS work party members and staff, former St. Kildan residents, staff at the Puff Inn and army base, QinetiQ radar station maintenance staff, researchers, cruise boat members, kayakers, and the St. Kilda web site guest book signers. In particular, we want to know what cultural, historical and natural history stories and events make St. Kilda so interesting to them, and in what ways they visit the island archipelago. We also will examine the significance of St. Kildan cultural history / natural history for computer users. In addition, we want to analyze ways in which the technology of the Internet has affected the way online visitors experience St. Kilda. We will also inquire into the role that St. Kilda's listing on the UNESCO World Heritage register plays for the physical and online visitor, St Kilda club members, as well as others. We will operationalize these questions and characterize what has changed in the transition from physical to online touristic experience of St. Kilda with the methods that follow.

Online St. Kilda

We will develop methodological approaches to examine the extent of online visiting to St. Kilda and its parameters. We seek to identify who is visiting online St. Kilda, what they are visiting, where they are coming from, when and why, as well as how many.

To operationalize computer user experiences of online multimedia, we will assess ways in which the online computer user visits St. Kilda, focusing on the following multimedia experiences: integration, interactivity, hypermedia, and narrativity.

- 1) Integration refers to hybrid artistic and technological forms;
- 2) Interactivity refers to direct manipulation of and communication through media;
- 3) Hypermedia refers to personal trail of association created by the linking of separate media elements; and
- 4) Narrativity refers to “aesthetic and formal strategies that derive from the above concepts, and which result in nonlinear story forms and media presentation” (Packer and Jordan 2001).

To collect data about integration of artistic and technological forms, we will conduct content analyses of the National Trust for Scotland’s St. Kilda site. We will also observe computer users as they navigate the National Trust for Scotland’s St. Kilda site to examine ways in which they use the integrated media elements. In addition, we will analyze web site statistic usage for ways in which integrated media elements are utilized.

To collect data on interactivity (direct manipulation of media) in relation to place and cultural discourse, we will interview and observe computer users to examine ways in which they control their multimedia environment. We will examine how long they interact with the site, what they choose to visit, novel ways in which they do so, and ways in which they are interacting with place and “cultural discourse.”

To collect data about hypermedia (personal trail of association), we will observe users and examine web site statistics to quantify the variety of paths computer users took, including where computer users came from and went to and whether they linked away and returned in the middle.

To collect data about narrativity (strategies from above yielding nonlinear story forms), we will administer questionnaires and interview, using participant observation techniques, computer users to observe what stories were significant for them and why.

Web site statistical analysis

We will examine hits per month, amount of time spent on web pages, and most frequently visited assets among other processes to determine ways in which computer users access information about St. Kilda. We will correlate this with reports from interviews about usage.

Physical and Online St. Kilda Visitor Comparison

We will examine ways in which the experiences of the physical and online tourists to St. Kilda compare and contrast. We compare the reported experiences of touristic and computer user visitors to St. Kilda. We will then develop a series of comparative practices to identify key quantitative and qualitative similarities and differences between physical and virtual tourism. In our interviews, we will particularly focus on comparative narrative explanatory processes. In terms of narrativity, for example, we will inquire about ways physical and virtual tourists compare and contrast in terms of what they visit, what they say they want to visit, how they report experiencing their visits and the meaning of their visits to them.

In conclusion, by first examining ways in which previous Internet ethnographies have theorized and shaped methodologies to study the Internet, and then articulating these approaches with Packer and Jordan's characteristics of multimedia, we develop new methods to examine St. Kilda online place and cultural discourse. The methodologies include qualitative ethnographic approaches utilizing participant-observation and in-depth interviews of visitors to the physical destination, St. Kilda, as well as quantitative data from web site statistics, interviews, questionnaires, and surveys of the NTS web site's guest book signers who have left their email address.

This project is important because it develops new theoretical and methodological approaches to examine ways in which people's experiences of physical destinations and 'cultures' are developing in relation to information technology. Such research is applicable to understanding how multimedia will co-constitute the online UNESCO World Heritage site, St. Kilda, as well as related visitor usage patterns and experiences. More broadly, it provides approaches to examine nascent ways in which the World Wide Web and multimedia will shape ethnographically analyzable online interactive simulacra of the 'physical' world.

Describe how I've gone through this piece of work . . . I did this. What, how, why.
Emphasize empirical evidence.

Medium is the message

McLuhan

What's being constructed?

- Constitution of place vs. experience of place
- All are constituted – interviews, questionnaires by me, guest book

by NTS

Scottish Place

- Tartanry vs. urbanism – ongoing debates – St.Kilda as rural, idyllic

- McCrone – Scotland the Brand
- Naddell Klein essay in "After Writing Culture"

St. Kilda in the Scottish Heritage Industry

Virtual ethnography

St. Kildan texts, representations, cultural discourse, and sense of place

Authors as on-the-ground informants / texts as representing experience

- Don't omit significance of previous texts in aggregate
- All have generated texts, but focus and content is different

Online St. Kilda as Place study

Video interviews – role of user . . .

Guestbook informants

Online Study informants

Comparison

Problematics

Preliminary results

Analysis and Discussion

Methodological Questions Shaped by a New Conception of Sense of Place

Describe how I've gone through this piece of work . . . I did this. What, how, why.

Emphasize empirical evidence.

Guest book entries - Form of Weblog?

Other forms of analysis

Medium is the message

McLuhan

Place

Criteria for place

Construction of place

What's being constructed?

- Constitution of place vs. experience of place
- All are constituted – interviews, questionnaires by me, guest book

by NTS

Scottish Place

- Tartanry vs. urbanism – ongoing debates – St.Kilda as rural, idyllic
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St. Kilda in the Scottish Heritage Industry

Virtual ethnography

Multimedia representation

Worldwide community

Sense of Place

Basso

Heidegger

Description of how I've gone through this piece of work.

I did this, what, how, why . . .

> Conclusion

- **Sense of Place in digital age**
- Contribution to heritage debate

Representations of St. Kilda continue to have great significance for people in Scotland and around the world.