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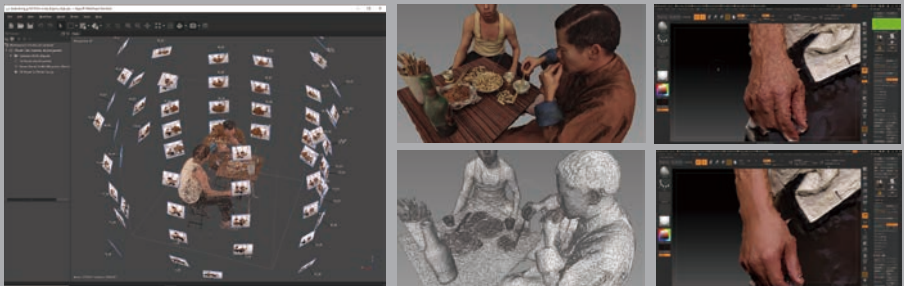
Left) Workshop at St.James Settlement while watching old photos with local residents. Center) Interview with residents while watching the family album they brought. Right) Research visiting Hong Kong House of Stories in Wan Chai.



Left) Discussing scenario while watching photo with actors. Center) Hair design and make-up at the dressing room. Right) In front of the photogrammetry studio set at APA(Academy of Performing Arts).



Snap-shots taken during the studio show 70 digital cameras and the lighting equipment that completely surrounds them.



Left) Screen capture of Photogrammetry software, which shows 3D point cloud generated from 70 photo images. Center) The mesh data is generated from a large amount of 3D points (Point Cloud). Right) Post process of 3D modeling, removing noise from the 3D model data.

## **Osage interviews Masaki Fujihata for “Arts in the 21st century: Reflections and Provocations”**

*OSAGE: What made you decide on the title of the project “BeHere” ?*

MF: The central premise of this project was that “we cannot meet those who have been here but are not here now.” My first draft project title was “Wish you were here” , which expressed the sense of longing and impossibility of having someone from the past here in the present. Of course, it was probably overly sentimental. When I discussed it with Roger Garcia, his response was to use the minimal form of this sentiment in imperative form: Be here. We combined the two words into one term BeHere, which is simpler and stronger, more suited to the project and works better with the apps. I still like the coherency of the title being as common as the act of using the app, which summons figures from the past, replicated in 3D.

*OSAGE: Why did you choose photogrammetry to reconstruct the scenes in the 1940s–70s from the archived photographs which are the references for this project?*

MF: The project impetus was the numerous vintage photographs which had been uploaded by countless amateur enthusiasts, who had digitised their family albums or old books and allowed them to circulate on the internet. I could find endless examples of interesting scenes from ordinary life in Hong Kong, and this stimulated my curiosity. I wanted to go behind the scenes that I saw in them. Each figure in them had originally been in motion; these were snapshots, not posed portraits or sculptures. Technology had frozen them in unknown moments amidst their busy lives.

There are mainly two different types of 3D data production: crafting 3D data by hand from scratch in 3D modelling software, or photogrammetry, which is often used in map production to photograph the topology of actual objects (in my case, actors). We selected the images and then developed our scenarios around key moments, by organizing a workshop with local residents where we were able to explore the meanings behind each moment and develop each into a scene. Then I created a lot of micro-narratives around the scenes to use in directing the actors. The actual shooting environment was quite similar to shooting special effects in cinema; actors had to relive the scenario and recreate the scenes in front of 70 synchronised cameras that were fixed onto grids so I could recapture the "moments", one after another. This process made it so that, in the final

application, users could walk freely around the 3D human figures, situated in various locations in Hong Kong. It's quite interesting because they are 3D, yet they aren't sculptures or wax figures, but rather 3D snapshots of the "moments" we found in this archival photography, only captured alive, with movement.

*OSAGE: Would you say that the project "BeHere" addresses the critical consciousness of new media technology?*

MF: "BeHere" is not just the use of a new media technology to demonstrate its current power, but rather a referencing of "new media" technology, dating from the 19th century when photography was new, up to today's "new media" of Augmented Reality (AR), as well as employing a hybrid of techniques for displaying data mixed with reality. Photography does not only record a moment, but it externalizes our way of seeing, in that we come to perceive what we saw through the photographic apparatus. Digital technology enables us to manipulate formerly static images. This manipulation is organised via programming, which externalises our way of thinking. AR technology is still quite new. We could say it's still at a novelty "spectacle" stage. "BeHere" is using it to explore new platforms for manipulating information for communication. I can imagine that technologies like AR will enable more image-based communication forms which don't rely as heavily on words and texts. My challenge is to open up new communication platforms which enable the manipulation of photographs, moving images and 3D models. This can only be done through practical experimentations in inventing new media.

*OSAGE: What is your expectation of the audience participation in the project?*

MF: I had been thinking about this as a kind of public art project, where people from the street coincidentally can access and experience moments and micro-events from the past. By using this AR application, older Hong Kong residents might reminisce on the past and want to talk to their grandchildren about it. Also, the application may stimulate younger participants to want to learn more about local histories and get them to start asking questions of their grandparents. In this sense, it's basically the same as any other public statue or monument.

The application enables us to capture an image on the surface of a smartphone display and share it with others. Hopefully this functionality will motivate participants to generate better photography using 3D from the past. We saw users trying to coordinate their positions in relation to the 3D figures, such as shaking their hands, hold their handbags, looking at each other and so on. Some would

place the 3D figures into strange contexts, such as the edge of a terrace or stair cases. By directing their friends in front of the camera, users were trying to combine the past and the present. The users were rapidly programmed by the application. (Laughs)

It's been about 10 months since the project began. My understanding of it has evolved. I spent a lot more time meeting with "ghosts" from the past than I had imagined. It was a project that dwelt in the uncanny valley more than I expected. By resuscitating what were exchanges between humans, it made it seem as though one could talk to ghosts, because human psychology often imagines that our voices can communicate with those who are not here, or that they can communicate with us. The meetings were imaginary, but the technology creates verisimilitude, which is often enough. The "effect" is in the human, not the technology. But that means that it's enough to generate emotions and trigger the imagination and create narratives. Another surprising element was the extent to which the scenarios needed to be rich, like a family member, so that emotionally engaging triggers could be generated. Once you accept the 3D figures as visualised ghosts, too, the scenery is suddenly transformed. A particular feeling is evoked, and you see the past transposed within the present, co-existing right here, right now, in parallel, related yet unrelated. In the end, I think that successfully visualising this parallel state might have been the biggest accomplishment of this project.

When I checked the images generated by the current day's users, I found some curious images which do not show overlapping or connections with the past and the present. The present is present, such as a guy talking to a mobile phone at the edge of a garden, or a man sitting on a chair obviously waiting for someone to come back. Both gestures show a common moment of social life in different eras, but neither is an attempt at crossing over and this was an unexpected discovery. The past exists parallel to the present, but there's no need for us to communicate with the past. There's no need for us to try and influence it. We do live in parallel with our history, in different modes of presence. In that sense, this project is not like a public art monument of bronze or stone. Maybe the project's real subject is a parallelism of past and present, and the impossibility of exchange with the past? I feel like at its core it's about immaterial art.

Translated by David d'Heilly