



PLACE-HAMPI | augmented stereographic panoramas of the Vijayanagara, India

PLACE-Hampi is a vibrant theatre for embodied participation in the drama of Hindu mythology set into a real-world landscape. PLACE-Hampi provides the setting for a stereographic virtual landscape populated by sixteen cylinders enclosing a constellation of cinematic events in which the audience can participate, traverse and examine at will. It is a modular interactive cinema where three kinds of narrative spaces are conjoined: The cylinders comprise augmented high resolution stereoscopic panoramas that present the most significant archaeological, historical, and sacred locations at the site of the World Heritage of Vijayanagara (Hampi) in southern India.

Embedded within this rich scenery are lively narrative events enacted by computer graphic characters based on the mythologies specific to the site (from Karnataka localisation of the Hindu epics specifically the Ramayana and, local cult deities) that have been composited into the three dimensional landscapes. The animations are based on the aesthetic of "magical realism" specific to the region.

The seventeen panoramic cylinders are positioned on an iconic drawing of Hanuman - the user interface screen shows a bird's-eye view of this virtual environment, centred on the viewer's changing location there.

The visual landscape is contained within a spatial aural field made from decoded ambisonic 360-degree recordings enlivened by classical Carnatic compositions. This dynamic interactive rendering and delivery system uses sophisticated mapping and transformation strategies, as the user controls and navigates the space, to deliver a sonic experience which is intimately connected with the visually panoramic and augmented space. This articulates an unprecedented level of viewer co-presence in the narrative exploration of a virtual cultural landscape.

"Visible landscapes are like icebergs: only a small proportion of their real substance lies above the surface" ¹





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PLACE-Hampi provides a framework for a new approach to the rendering of the cultural experience, whose aesthetic and representational features gives the general public a dramatic new appreciation of the many layered significations of such historical, archaeological, and architectural spaces. While PLACE-Hampi embodies a single user interaction model, the autonomous narrative scenarios that populate each of the panoramic scenes with mythological significance become endowed with the emergent narrative relations to become a performance involving the entire audience

PLACE-Hampi is highly significant for promoting dialogues of engagement with the imagery of a cultural landscape and activating the embedded knowledge contained there. Hampi today continues to be an active pilgrim site, not simply an historic and touristic place. Each day its landscape and temples are activated through various rituals and tapas specific to time, place and to discrete locations in the complex. As part of a living tradition, the interpretation of the site by pilgrims is in a constant state of re-definition within the broad tenants of (south Indian, Karnataka tradition) Hinduism. A conversation takes place between mythological characters and the sacred objects/sites/natural features permeated with the contemporary "folkloric imagination" of the pilgrims.²

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Hindi priests and pilgrims are not the only ones to enliven these Hindu images and temples. Bringing with them different religious assumptions, political agendas and economic motivations, others may animate the same objects. As Davies points out "the location of an object plays a constitutive role in the act of looking" and appropriation, relocation and redisplay of an object will dramatically alter its significance for new audiences. The frame of reference designates the historically grounded and socially shared understandings of systems.³ PLACE-Hampi reconstitutes the landscape for these interpretations of mythological narratives in the form of co-presence, enabling a new mode of interpretation accessible for diverse cultural audiences.

¹ Roberts, B. K. "Landscape Archaeology" in *Landscape and Culture: Geographical and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. J. M. Wagstaff. Oxford, Blackwell, 1987: 83.

² Adajania, N. "Towards a new folkloric imagination", in *Kapital and Karma: Recent Positions on India Art*, ed. Angelika Fitz, Kunsthalle Wien. Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2002: 47.

³ Davis, R. H., *Lives of Indian Images*. Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997: 6-9.

Fieldwork logistics: Sarah Kenderdine

MOCAP studio: Sina Azad

MOCAP dance sequence (Shiva as Nataraja): Lingalayam Dance Company, Artistic Director/Choreographer: Anandavalli
 Dancer: Saipriya Balasubramaniam

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Lille3000, Opera House, curated by Richard Castelli, Premier, 2006

Berliner Festspiele, Vom Funken zum Pixel, Martin-Gropius-Bau, curated by Richard Castelli, 2007

Panorama Festival, ZKM, Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, 2008

New Light on Hampi, Museum Victoria, curated by Sarah Kenderdine, 2008

