Mediating Heritage:
The creative use and re-use of cultural inheritance

Date: Wednesday 26th September 2012
Place: The Innovation Centre, University Road, Canterbury CT2 7FG
Organisers: The Centre for Architecture and Sustainable Environment (CASE), Kent School of Architecture, University of Kent

Keynote speaker: Eric Baczuk, Senseable Cities Lab, MIT
Cultural Inheritance and the Digital City

The increasing deployment of sensors and hand-held electronics in recent years is allowing a new approach to the study of the built environment. The way we describe and understand cities is being radically transformed - alongside the tools we use to design them and impact on their physical structure. Studying these changes from a critical point of view and anticipating them is the goal of the SENSEable City Laboratory. In his talk, Eric Baczuk will explore the interface between cultural heritage and the urban environment. Taken from perspective of both the theoretical and applied, Eric will outline a number of interactive projects developed by the SENSEable City Lab that enable communities to serve as dynamic creators and curators of the digital age.

Keynote speaker: Nora McGregor, British Library
The Digital Research Space

The British Library, as the national library of the UK, receives a copy of every publication produced in the UK and Ireland and the collection includes well over 150 million items in most known languages. From the first handwritten Alice in Wonderland to the latest blogs the library is diligently preserving the intellectual memory of the nation. Underpinning the massive operation is a priority to guarantee and enable access to this rich legacy of physical and digital materials for whoever wants to do research here and abroad. In this talk Nora will explore the digital research space in its conceptual and physical manifestations and demonstrate the opportunities and challenges that digital technologies afford the library.
Speaker abstracts:

Ben Dalton (Faculty of Arts, Environment and Technology, Leeds Metropolitan University) “Incidental Psychogeography: Motivating typical audiences in urban heritage exploration”
Considering a GPS music app case study. How connections to music history fostered community collaboration and storytelling, and how playful design and music context expand potential audiences.

Michael Stewart (UCL Anthropology) “MyStreet Films”
MyStreet: It’s where you are, who you are and how you live... your place on the map. MyStreet is a living archive of everyday life, encouraging you to make your mark and bring your area to life. People use video to record the experiences and people of a place that means something to them. Others watch films online and discover more about other people’s lives and places. These films are part of the MyStreet community – an ever evolving slice of life, linked to the MyStreet map: “MyStreet is your story, your patch, wherever and whatever that may be.” In this talk I will present two short films from MyStreet to illustrate the diversity of social media practices generated by a site like this and discuss the significance of ‘minor practices’ for generating alternative forms of knowledge about the places we live in. The talk will draw on Ginzburg’s contrast of ‘venatic’, ‘conjectural’ or ‘singular’ knowledge to abstract, bureaucratic and statistical reasoning.

Evangelos Kyriakidis (Classical and Archaeological Studies, University of Kent / Athens University of Economics and Business) “Digitizing Heritage: The Initiative for Heritage Conservancy Digitization Programme”
In the project called, ‘Initiative for Heritage Conservancy’ a programme with the aims to promote best practices in heritage management, we have dedicated a third of the project to digitization. In this communication I will present the wider vision of the digitization programme and the reasons why digitization should be a primary tool for the management of archaeological sites. New directions and trends in the heritage digitization will be discussed.

Ania Bobrowicz, Jim Ang and Genevieve Alelis (Engineering and Digital Arts, University of Kent) “Visitor experience and digital media”
There will be two presentations, one on our collaboration with Turner Contemporary, and another one, presented by Genevieve Allelis, on her recent pilot study at Powell-Cotton museum. Genevieve investigated visitors’ emotional responses to various museum artefacts.

Helen Graham (School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds) “Heritage, Politics and the Digital”
‘Heritage’ is a knotty tangling up of old stuff, institutions, funding, governance, legitimacy, expertise, linear time and access. Materiality and its rival nature has given ‘heritage’ its politics: a politics which has found its constantly anxious articulation through the relationship between keeping safe and making available and which has worked to secure the idea of professionals acting as stewards on behalf of everyone now and everyone in the future. This knot – which tightly links materiality, expertise and professional stewardship – is being loosened. It is being loosen by people pulling on certain strings already part of knot. Such as the specific openings offered by the fundamental idea of public access which has lead to much more persistent demands for heritage to be ‘can do’; to achieve policy goals and to delivery greater participation. However, it has also been loosened by the digital and its (apparent) immateriality. The materiality which secured more effectively the need for public funding and public professional expertise is being called into question.

As such where we are now opens up certain kinds of research possibilities:
• how to interrelate the different political logics made possible by material and digital heritage;
• how ideas of public service and professionalism might be reimagined in this context;
• how old or new political settlements are being knotted up in the micro practices which go on in ‘crowdsourcing’ and other forms of participation;
• what is at stake in the blurring and rearticulation of ideas of ‘public’ in intersections of museums, heritage organisations and online platforms (pinterest; you tube; history pin).
• how activism made possible by open government might intersect with research (questions of governance of public institutions; how ‘heritage’ interrelates with materialities of housing and wages).

Hilary Young (Museum of London) “Museum of London and #citizencurators: can Tweets be museum objects?”
The Museum of London together with the University of Westminster ran an experimental pilot digital collecting project during the 2 weeks of the London Olympics called #citizencurators. The core aims of the project for the Museum were firstly, to investigate if Tweets can be collected as objects in their own right; secondly, to capture London Twitter users’ daily experiences during the Olympic fortnight; and finally, to explore if social networking can facilitate alternative ways of collecting objects (in its widest sense) for the museum. This paper will focus on why we developed this project and how we executed it before opening up the discussion about what we actually got and what we do it with now.