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## VIRTUAL PRESENCE AND THE MIND' S EYE IN 3-D ONLINE COMMUNITIES

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**Abstract.** Digital technologies have introduced fundamental changes in the forms, content, and media of communication.

Indeed, some have suggested we are in the early stages of a seismic shift comparable to that in antiquity with the transition from a primarily oral culture to one based upon writing. The digital transformation is rapidly displacing the long-standing hegemony of text, and restoring in part social, bodily, oral and spatial elements, but in radically reconfigured forms and formats. Contributing to and drawing upon such changes and possibilities, scholars and those responsible for sites preserving or displaying cultural heritage, have undertaken projects to explore the properties and potential of the online communities enabled by "Virtual Worlds" and related platforms for teaching, collaboration, publication, and new modes of disciplinary research. Others, keenly observing and evaluating such work, are poised to contribute to it.

It is crucial that leadership be provided to ensure that serious and sustained investigation be undertaken by scholars who have experience, and achievements, in more traditional forms of research, and who perceive the emerging potential of Virtual World work to advance their investigations. The Virtual Museums Transnational Network will seek to engage such scholars and provide leadership in this emerging and immensely attractive new area of cultural heritage exploration and experience.

This presentation reviews examples of the current "state of the art" in heritage based Virtual World initiatives, looking at the new modes of social interaction and experience enabled by such online communities, and some of the achievements and future aspirations of this work.

[Conference Paper](#) (PDF, 311 KB)

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