

Thomas J. McHale

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Professors Shaw & Zaylea

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## **Final Project Paper – Interactive Mobile Text**

### **Postcards Across the Atlantic**

Whenever I think of postcards, I think of my childhood spending summers in Ireland. My mother emigrated from Ireland to the United States in 1964. My siblings and I were all born in Philadelphia, but our mother always made sure that nearly every summer, we would all travel to Ireland to spend some time in the rural Irish village she was born in. Each summer, we would travel the countryside sight-seeing, and collecting postcards to mail back to friends and relatives in the States. The sending of postcards always felt like a way of sharing the journey with loved ones back home while we were apart. It was always a way of saying “we may be somewhere else right now, but you are not forgotten.”

For this mobile interactive text project, I wanted to recreate that experience, but in a more immersive and personal way. This revised version of an earlier project includes three postcards from Ireland to be sent to family and friends back home in the States. Whenever sending postcards, my motivation has always been to share a piece of the experience with someone across a vast distance, and to give them a physical token from that place. Postcards allow for sharing significant scenery or locations, while their mobile text enables a social

interaction to take place within its message between sender and receiver. Augmented reality postcards enhance that form even further, by introducing video, audio, and other personalized content to create a more immersive experience and deeper personal connection.

For my first postcard, the intended recipients are my brother and sister-in-law, Chris & Bridget, sent from my partner, Savannah, and I. The specific location in Ireland that we wanted to share is one of significant importance to our family. Achill Island, off the western coast of County Mayo, is a sightseeing destination that my family has been returning to on every trip back to Ireland for decades. Even when I was still relatively young, my father would always remind us of the specific cliffside where he would one day like his ashes to be spread. He passed away in May of 2020, but because of the COVID pandemic and international travel restrictions, we had not yet been able to organize a family-wide trip to honor those wishes. This summer some of us were finally able to return, but not all of us, so we won't be together for a ceremony until summer of 2023, at the earliest. However, it was an important milestone to at least bring his remains to Ireland, where they now wait in our home there, until next summer when we can all join to spread them at Achill.

The intention behind the design was to emphasize locations I knew my brother would recognize. The postcard's front image, as well as the specific locations seen in the accompanying AR-video triggered by the image, are all locations that my family would recognize and associate with their own memories of times gone by. I was inspired by how Milne describes *Pensée* postcards, particularly that "the image also movingly suggests the power of memory to make present those who are absent and even to preserve life against the destructive power of war. 'Remember me, think of me, keep me in your thoughts' are the

injunctions articulated by this image” (Milne, 2010, p. 128). The personal connection to memory for the recipients is also reinforced by the natural geology of the subject location. The hope is that cliffs created by millennia of erosion, and the never-ending ebb & flow of the ocean waves crashing against that ancient coast would also evoke thematic associations of life, aging, mortality, legacy, and cycles.

I attempted to design the AR video triggered by the postcard to comment on social interaction. In the video, I try to describe as many sensory experiences as I can, to promote a feeling of presence. I tried to choose descriptive adjectives for the smell of the air, the feeling of the mist & sun, or the taste of a Guinness at a familiar pub. Through memory and shared associations, I wanted to make Chris and Bridget feel like they were there with us. My brother and I have always been very different people with opposing opinions, so in order for us to have any type of healthy relationship, we really have to interact by focusing solely on the few things we do have in common. I also wanted to emphasize those shared understandings, and that’s why I chose to sign off with the Gaelic phrase *sláinte*, a traditional Irish toast. Inspired by what Deibert wrote about Ernst Gellner’s imagined communities, and how the emergence of linguistic identity encourages in-groups and out-groups, I wanted to capitalize on our shared heritage as a reminder of what we have in common. (Deibert, 1997, pp. 106-107).

However, as Jennifer Stromer-Galley might point out, interactivity does not only mean “social interaction that occurs between people” but also “interactivity that occurs between people and computer networks” (Stromer-Galley, 2004, p. 391). This second focus of interactivity is important to understand, because as I mentioned before, my brother and I often don’t see eye to eye. Being able to send messages one-way removes some of the anxiety of

communicating in real-time, either face-to-face or talking over the telephone. Because technology affords us the ability to send and receive digital communications over platforms or mediums that don't require immediate response, we allow each other space and time to process emotions and respond in healthier ways.

As mentioned earlier, this final project is the culmination of revisions made to our earlier project. I decided to cut the second postcard from that earlier project and instead design two new cards that I feel have a more consistent theme. After receiving feedback assuring me that it was okay to collaborate with my partner, I wanted Savannah to have a postcard from her perspective, sent to her grandmother. Similar to how the first card mentioned the passing generations on my side of the family, I wanted this one to be an opportunity to develop the same connection between Savannah and her grandparents. Before we left for Ireland, Savannah's grandmother told her about how her and her late husband, Savannah's grandfather, had planned on traveling Europe and seeing castles. "Mom-mom" made Savannah promise to take a picture in front of a castle for her. This card was an attempt to fulfill those wishes while also making the experience more immersive. The video that triggers when the front of the postcard is scanned was edited with the intention of making Mom-mom feel like she was there taking the journey with us. From being seated in the car, first rolling down the driveway to our home; to waking up with the cattle; to walking the Fairy Trail; to ultimately making it to the castle grounds – all were designed to make the intended viewer feel mobile. For someone who is confined to a retirement community as she struggles with losing her own physical mobility, the desire to recreate some sense of movement and adventure was a driving factor behind the video's design and editing.

For the third postcard, I wanted to create a card for our friends Aaron and Colleen. Aaron and Colleen are close friends of Savannah and I. They looked after our pets, house sitting for us while we were away. Because the first two cards are addressed to relatives and have some bittersweet themes, I thought it would be interesting to design this card for friends and make it a bit more lighthearted. Like ourselves, Aaron and Colleen love animals, music, art, and travel. My favorite city in Ireland is Galway, a notable center of arts & culture. It's exactly the type of town friends like Aaron and Colleen would feel right at home in, and I knew that Galway was the town I'd like to design their postcard as coming from. The image chosen for the front of the card was a photo of Savannah posing playfully in front of some Galway street art – itself a form of augmented reality.

In the video the back of the card triggers, the video ends in Galway, near the Spanish Arch on the River Corrib. We wanted Aaron and Colleen to feel like a part of them made the journey, and that their family had presence in Galway along with us. They sent us on our trip with a few stickers of their cat, Gus. They have an Instagram account for Gus, where they post photos of Gus stickers placed around the world. I felt that this was a perfect opportunity to comment on social media, guerilla art, and how we can utilize mobile media to encourage exploration and documentation. As the Humphreys' article about Pokemon GO mentions, the creators of that game felt "everyone is spending all this time inside, by their computers. No one goes to the local parks. We wanted to do something that was aspirational: let's get people outside" (Humphreys, 2017, p. 16). I wanted to use this augmented reality postcard to do something similar.

The complete collection hopefully illustrates the importance of mobile media. By combining mobile text, mobile video, and mobile audio this project is intended to demonstrate how we use these mediums to interact socially. Through the sending and receiving of physical artifacts, to the immersion of the videos they trigger, to the emotional connections they represent, social interactivity is the motivation behind the entire concept. The act of creating the project was both enjoyable and rewarding. This experience has helped me to better understand how various forms of mobile media can be utilized to enhance our social interactions.

**References:**

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