ABSTRACT

First conceived in 2003, a Flash Mob is basically a group of anonymous individuals, having nothing in common apart from their connectivity to a digital network, that agree to meet in a predetermined location, perform an unusual act and then disperse peaceably within ten minutes. This is generally seen as a fun, spontaneous event that has by default no ideological background and focuses only on the excitement of the moment.

Both case studies can be seen as place-making activities, each one in a different way, and they can hence question the philosophical, socio-anthropological and psychological perspectives of place. Second Life consists of a community developed in an entirely digital world modelled on individuals’ fears and desires of the real world. It serves as a medium to easily visualise, read and study the existence of digital place, because of its three-dimensional graphics and the resemblance to the real world. On the other hand, Flash Mob displays how an email can activate a digital community to perform a physical action in the city. During those performances, the Flash Mobbers surprisingly transformed a physical space just for a short period of time and suggested alternative uses and new forms of appropriation for the urban environment. In the contemporary city that often becomes a field of urban anxiety, the Flash Mobs attempted to put public and semi-public spaces back into the map. Finally, they established ‘visible’ links between the city and its superimposed networks.

Such sorts of action and their wider context attempt to question our perception of materiality and connectivity. Our world can no longer be considered only physical or local and at the same time, the digital realm cannot be seen as utterly unreal. The juxtaposition of the two displays how our “physical presence” in the world is being overlaid with electronic networks and suggests that instead of distinct, the real and the virtual are in fact closely linked and interwoven.