Writing in 3D:
Immersive Virtual Writing as Authorship and Critique

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Four Courses, One Theme

Within the past half century, a powerful new paradigm has emerged in the ways in which we produce and consume information. The idea of an immersive “virtual reality” space for intellectual inquiry and exploration encompasses education, engineering, industry, and the arts. While the idea of a virtual reality goes back to the earliest human storytelling and pictorial practices, technology has helped established these in increasingly flexible forms. Fueled by decades of growth in computational processing power, these new modes of knowing are transforming the foundations of the arts, sciences, and humanities by providing new experimental, rhetorical, and experiential interfaces to information.

Students in the Virtual Realities Focus take two of the four courses listed below, plus participate in the collective Interdisciplinary Discussion Course once a week. The cluster is highly collaborative and project oriented, and welcomes students from all academic backgrounds and interests (humanities, sciences, engineering). No gaming or programming experience required, though gamers and programmers are welcome!

Click here to view the Virtual Realities cluster on The Focus Program website.

For Virtual Realities faculty and students: click here to view the cluster’s blog.
“Virtual Realities” Courses

- Authoring Digital Media: The Victorian Crystal Palace and Virtual Exhibition Spaces (ISIS)
- Constructing Immersive Virtual Worlds (ISIS)
- Good and Evil in Imagined Worlds (Classics)
- Virtual Form and Space (Visual Arts)
- Weekly Collective Interdisciplinary Discussion Group
The Challenge of the Exhibition

- Great Exhibition of 1851 in London (Crystal Palace) - vast, diverse
- How to “write” about something inherently multimodal, presentational, performative?
- Exhibition Rhetoric
  - Objects and their histories
  - Placement and annotation
  - Narrative flows and interactions
  - Reception and interpretation
- How to explore the medium as itself a new mode of authorial expression?
- How to evaluate work done in this form as implicit and explicit argument?

“Its grandeur does not consist in one thing, but in the unique assemblage of all things. Whatever human industry has created you find there. It seems as if only magic could have gathered this mass of wealth from all the ends of the earth.” - Charlotte Bronte, 1851

Thursday, December 15, 2011
Virtual Realities

Archive

Archive for the '110-Week 05 (9/20-2/26) -- Second Life' Category

SLurls

October 1st, 2009  Max Li
http://slurl.com/secondlife/Spaceport%20Alpha/135/209/34/
International Spaceflight Museum—A cool assemblage of various NASA rockets, arrayed in an open circle. Forms a nice, visually pleasing ring.

http://slurl.com/secondlife/Phobos/223/154/33/
SecondLife Historical Museum! Detailing the original history behind SL—the original avatars, etc.

Museum of Robots... and famous robots!

110-Assignments, 110-Week 05 (9/20-2/26) -- Second Life, ISIS110FCS, Max

Places in Secondlife

September 29th, 2009  China
Astronomy 2009. Really great visuals and is very educational.
This place resembles a zoo exhibit and is creatively pieced together. Take a look
Renaissance Art and other Genres.

110-Week 05 (9/20-2/26) -- Second Life, China Walker, ISIS110FCS
Physical Exhibits

Figure 7.1 The centre of the courtyard of the Gallery of Zoology provided a spectacular view. A group of giraffes stood in the centre alongside other big mammals. Next to them hung six whale skeletons. With permission of the National Museum of Natural History, Paris.
Virtual Exhibits
Circulation Patterns in Museums

Figure 6.1 Levels of integration at (a) the Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, (b) the Natural History Museum, London, (c) the Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, and (d) the Burrell Museum, Glasgow. Light tones show high levels of integration. Dark tones show progressive segregation.
Structures and Flows

proximity

sociality

interactivity

flow
Bodily Immersion Activities

- Space Blogs
- Museum Visit
- Construction of the Crystal Palace in the DiVE (our VR cave environment) in another Focus class
- Visits to immersive VR spaces at a UNC engagement center
Assignment:

Use Second Life to produce an interpretive representation of a selected Crystal Palace exhibit. Your work must cite sources from original documentation (catalogs, newspaper accounts, etc.) and take advantage of spatial effects to convey your points about its construction and cultural impact.

“Meaning does not only reside in discourse and design, it also resides in production” - Kress and Van Leeuwen
For many days before the "shilling people" were admitted to the building, the great topic of conversation was the probable behaviour of the people. Would they come sober? will they destroy the things? will they want to eat their initials, or scratch their names on the panes of the glass lighthouses? But they have surpassed in decorum he hopes of their well-wishers. The fact is, the Great Exhibition is not them more of a school than a show. The working-man has often little book-learning, but of such knowledge as constitutes the education of life—viz., the understanding of human motives, and the acquisition of power over natural forces, so as to render them subservient to human happiness—of such knowledge as this, we repeat, he working-man has generally a greater share than those who are aid to belong to the "superior classes." Hence it is, that what was a matter of teedium, and became ultimately a mere lounge, for gentles, is used as a place of instruction by the people.
Another sign of India’s importance was one of the centerpieces of the Indian exhibit, the royal throne. Presented as a gift from an Indian prince, the throne had “its purple canopy supported by four silver poles, its seat in scarlet velvet with gold and silver embroidered border, and more silver and gold used in the frame” (Leapman 134). Prince Albert himself utilized the throne for his personal use during the exhibition, and many marveled at its craftsmanship, especially in comparison to more utilitarian European pieces: “Critics agreed that the examples of state furniture exhibited by European craftsmen compared unfavorably with the Indian throne, which exhibited greater control and coherence in both decoration and design” (Breckenridge 203).
Dialogic Relationship: Worlding + Reflective Writing & Machinima

1. Virtual World Environment Design and Implementation, including documentation and analysis

2. Machinima “Tour” for explanation and documentation

3. Website and Blog-based textual write-ups as reflection and critique

The structure of my Exhibit

The Scoven article about the use of space explains that exhibits in museums typically get 10-25 seconds of viewer time. Naturally, I structured mine as a linear path that would be logical to facilitate bouncing from exhibit to exhibit. Scoven points out that “hands-on” displays elicited more interest. I bought and reimagined some farming equipment for a 3-D feel. The articles also mention the importance of immersing your audience into the world of the exhibit. To do this I put up paintings on the walls of the Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition. I altered and re-sized the images to try and make them somewhat blend together. Since the farming exhibits were houses in one “wing” of the Crystal Palace, I tried to make my display in one wing of a building.

I added a wheelbarrow outside my exhibit to “lure” guests in. I also linked the wheelbarrow to this website in order for visitors to get more information. I made a large sign to clearly explain my ideas as my exhibit theme. I placed a picture of the Earth in the frame of my building to symbolize the unity of the Great Exhibition. The texture of the table and floor of the exhibit were designed in such a way to combine elements of a rustic “farming” feel and the luxury of the Crystal Palace.

Of course, as neat as it is to design a virtual exhibit, there are some natural limitations to SL’s capabilities. In an ideal world, I would have had the tools to create 3-D representations of each of the Exhibitor’s agricultural displays. Unfortunately, SL’s interface is not one that facilitates such intricate designs. Rather, I was left with the prospect of making fairly basic shapes and simply manipulating them with graphics.
Haven't been able to get my website to work, but I did finish Friday, so I'll post it here for now, in addition to the SURL.


To state the patently obvious, exhibiting in SecondLife is a completely different medium than exhibiting in the tangible, three dimensional world that we currently occupy. While some parallels do exist between the two mediums, enough difference exists that many new possibilities are opened for the exhibitor, yet at the same time, some limitations (with respect to the "real" world) are much more noticeable in the SecondLife universe. It is safe to say that even if a real world exhibit were duplicated in SecondLife, insofar as technology allows, the experience from the user's point of view would be completely novel (of course, this relationship cannot always be reversed!) All in all, when creating any sort of space that is meant to be "experienced", it is extremely important to consider several questions: What is the purpose of the exhibit, and how can it be best conveyed or experienced? What resources are available, and how are they best allocated? How does the "human element" fit within the exhibit? With the added aspect of a virtual world with different rules than the real world, however, additional questions must be asked: What new rules make it necessary to break the mindset developed by living in the "real" world? How does this change what is most effective in terms of conveying the exhibition experience? What are the limitations of this virtual world, and how does it affect the exhibit and the expectations of the participants who will interact with the exhibit? By examining these ideas and theories carefully, it is possible to utilize a new medium to effectively express complex concepts in a parallel but at the same time different context.

One of the most appealing aspects of working in a medium such as SecondLife are the new freedoms that come with being in a virtual universe. In some cases, limitations that existed in the real world suddenly do not play a role in the design of exhibits. Specific to SecondLife, these new freedoms can be classified in four major categories: Navigation, Object Interaction, Ease of Usage, and Cost. Of these four, navigation is quite likely the factor that most differentiates the virtual existence of SecondLife from the limiting laws of physics of the real world. Ask any SecondLife user for an introduction to the digital world, and invariably, amongst phrases such as "community" and "creation", the ability to fly will be mentioned. By adding a third, vertical direction to the normal range of human movements, SecondLife allows the creation of literal "castles in the air". For exhibits, especially, this opens up many possibilities. No longer must objects be anchored firmly to the ground or two-dimensional displays be placed only side by side; instead, because visitors can go up and above or down and under, exhibitors have a much more complex 3-D workspace to develop into one cohesive idea. In addition to flying, SecondLife also offers "teleportation" to move between areas quickly and, as an internet capable world, linking to outside websites. Teleportation is extremely useful in several ways: first, it eliminates the need for a user's avatar to be "driven" through an environment to find the next exhibition area (which, admittedly, is sometimes a little...
Virtual Worlds Commonalities with Traditional Texts

* Argument-driven, narrative flow
* Involves close reading and/or research
* Non-fiction, though inherently creative
* Often quotes “originals” in making an argument
* Active critical thinking
* Demonstration of mastery
* Communicates new knowledge
Unique Affordances of Virtual Worlds Authorship

- Space design, architecture, interactions, sociality as narrative, non-linear (though progressive?) argument

- Object creation and placement as research products with documentary evidence as needed (static, dynamic)

- Textures, media as source citations and annotations; “truthiness”

- Often multiple authors involved in creation: environmental coherence, sophistication of content rely on harmonizing approaches

- Varied cumulative effects for individuals and groups based on unique navigation patterns through content

- Participatory environment: distributed cognition effects, network development, negotiation across communities of knowledge
Next: Quantitative Turn

Fall 2011: *Digital Places & Spaces*
Emergent Themes for Virtual Worlds Authorship and Critique

- Historical contextualization via spatial media, both representational and abstracted
  - Reconstruction of original reception-locations
  - Enriched sense of the archive, or “animating the archive” (Schnapp)
  - Potential for representing data and human flows
- Database thinking:
  - content as part of a collective to be accessed and shared
  - content includes not only exhibits, models and texts, but methods of representation
  - there is no such thing as content abstracted from form or annotation or delivery method - it occurs in response to a query w/ conditions
- Publishing as making visible submerged patterns and associations
- Reflection and narrative argument -- not a replacement but a complement
Questions/Comments?

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