

Digital Humanities v. New Media

Theory, Practice, Critique

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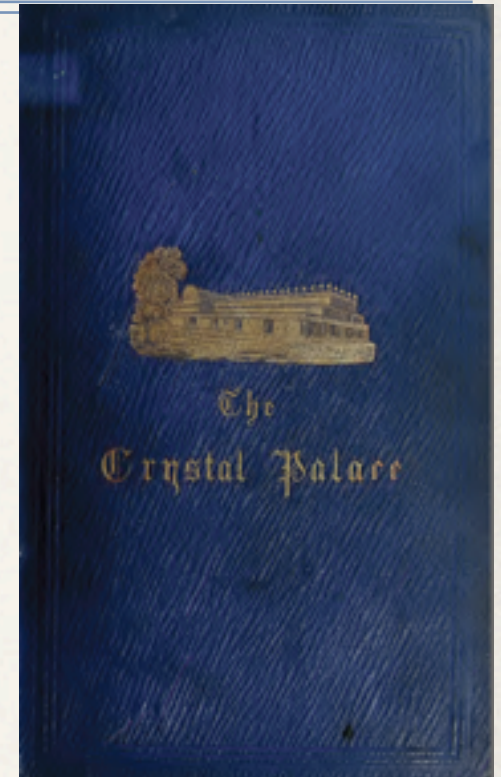
My Perspective

- Technology and Media Studies - in theory and practice
- Social and cultural history and effects of new technologies on production, reception, circulation of “texts” or memes - special interest in 19th c. genealogies of influence and effects (background in Victorian literature and culture)
- Affordances of multimodal and transmedia expression
 - database-driven narratives
 - spatial media - maps, virtual worlds, games, mixed reality as expressive environments with historical analogues and antecedents
 - experience, immersion, affect as elements of reception and cultural expectation
- Merger of critical, creative, quantitative modes of scholarly authorship and knowledge-production in collaborative, project-based work
- Point of angst: The MLA and Me -- where do I fit? (Stanley Fish *might* say I don't ...)



Digital Humanities (my definition)

- Application of digital **tools** and **methods** to objects (analog and digital) of humanistic study (media objects, buildings, people....)
 - close reading
 - comparative analysis
 - distant reading (through metadata, data mining etc.)
 - critical approaches to production, reception, circulation, and meaning-making
- Also more quantitative approaches to humanities-oriented materials, for validation, discovery, illustration:
 - text mining
 - data visualization
 - modeling and simulation
 - mapping
- Element of **making** implicit and explicit in digital humanities practice -
- essential to understand the tools and methods from the inside out



Is it humanities? Not exclusively, but a fundamentally humanistic outlook

New Media Studies Interventions

- Theoretical critique of derivatives (digitized, data representations) of media objects as themselves historicized, complex cultural products implicated in a system
- Instantiation of critical approaches to objects of inquiry within a self-consciously architected dimensional environment, with awareness of the assumptions built therein
- Recognition of cultural conditions underlying technologically-assisted engagement with these questions, historically and today
- Awareness that “old” media were once “new” media, and that the newness itself affects perception, reception, interpretation

Thursday, January 12, 2012

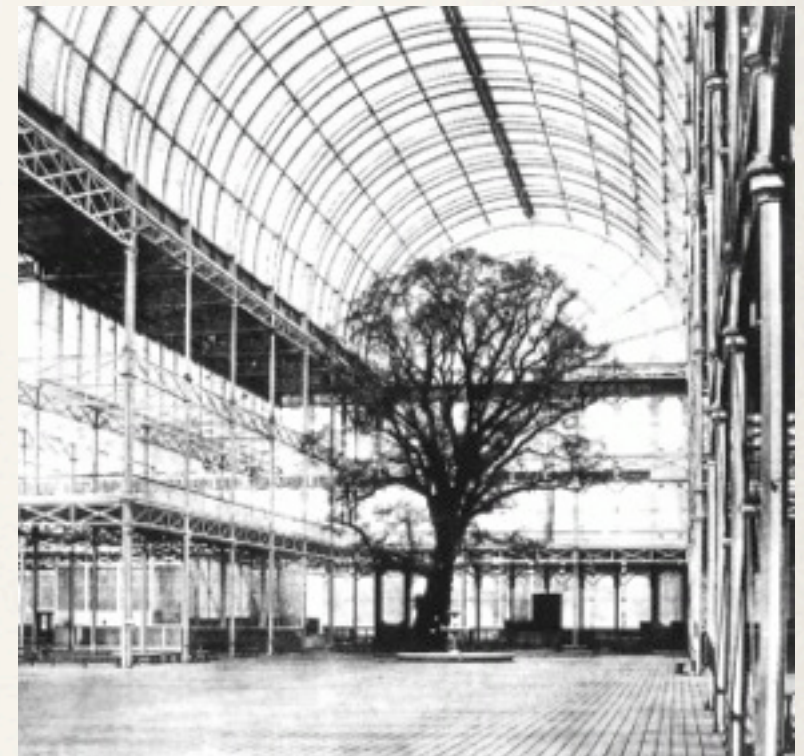
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Common Forms and Key Characteristics for Digital Media

Media-illustrated essays	Textual narrative argument + citations
Websites and Electronic archives	Collections ready for random access and narrative overlay; cumulative; metadata for search
Time-based media (audio, video, animation)	Visually focused narrative argument about an object, set of objects, or milieu
Virtual exhibitions	Collections organized spatially to convey historic or associative meanings
Annotated maps with points, lines, edges and regions; + timelines	Spatially organized, geo-referenced or location-based archives and narratives; quantitative analysis, flows and paths overlaid
Data visualizations (graphs, charts; network diagrams)	Abstracted and quantified derivative properties for exploration and illustration
Games (video, hybrid, mixed)	Branching narratives; exploration w/in defined parameters; deepened understanding of content thru interaction; experiential; visually immersive
Social Media	Crowd-sourced content and annotations; often appended to other forms
3D models and simulations	Representation of artifacts, real and speculative for purposes of illustration and study

Example Project: “Apprehending the Great Exhibition”

- ❖ “The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations ” - first World’s Fair of Culture and Industry.
- ❖ Took place in the Crystal Palace, a purpose-built structure, in Hyde Park, London, from May 1 - October 15, 1851.
- ❖ Organized by Prince Albert, Queen Victoria’s Consort, to demonstrate Great Britain’s role as industrial leader, while at the same time showcasing the work of the world.
- ❖ Fundamentally an “interested” and complex rhetorical phenomenon - massive but in no sense objectively produced or simply consumed.
- ❖ Research interest: Great Exhibition as a constructed **place**, located within the **space** a particular social and cultural context, and operating as a complex, perhaps self-contradictory, multimodal **site of cultural production**.



How can we begin to understand the Great Exhibition as itself a medium, and its workings as a place-based rhetorical phenomenon? First step: locate the object of inquiry. What is the “text”?

The Challenge of the Exhibition

- ❖ Where's the object of inquiry? Indirect access. An array of options:
- ❖ Great Exhibition of 1851 in London - vast, diverse traces. Records are in catalogues, engravings, etchings, narrative accounts, plans documents
- ❖ Known as much for the venue - the Crystal Palace - as its contents and cultural effects
- ❖ Content and visitors came from everywhere: carefully calculated square footage for exhibits, costs, values
- ❖ Race, class, gender, national and other identity issues paramount to contemporaneous accounts and secondary critiques then and now
- ❖ Already studied from a variety of disciplinary perspectives: architectural and design history, economics, cultural analysis, literature, engineering, post-colonial theory as well as public history
- ❖ Large community of scholars familiar with the phenomenon of the GE and CP
- ❖ Fundamentally (for our purposes) about objects, space, and place in time, as produced, experienced, and remediated actively by diverse communities



“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

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Searchable
Archive

3D Model

Data Viz

Maps & Charts

Illustrated
Essays;
Websites

Social Media

Virtual Worlds &
Games

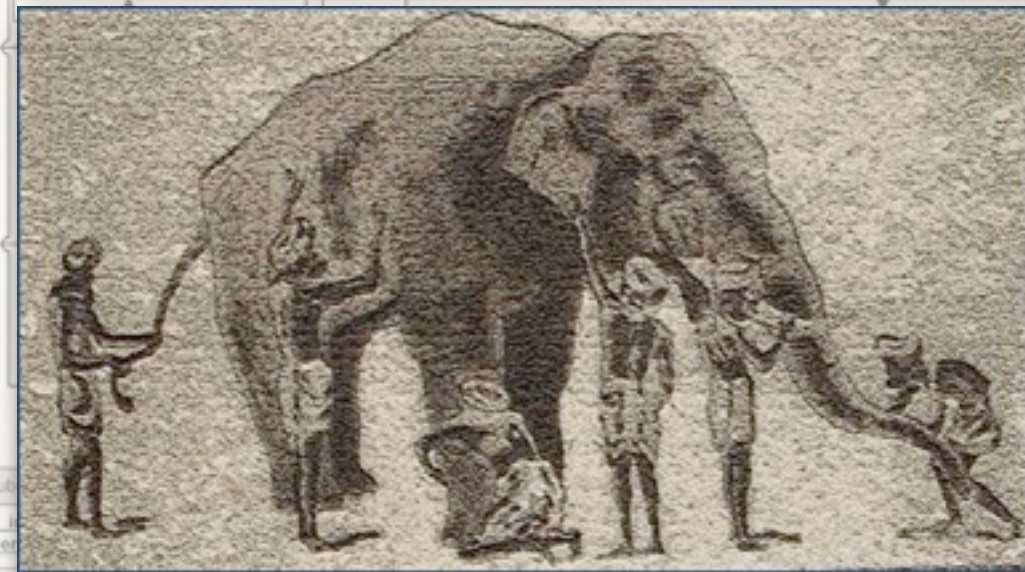


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Representing the Exhibition: A Complex, Annotated, Immersive 3D, Omnimedial Environment(s)

❖ Goals:

- ❖ Addresses the sheer volume of material associated with the GE by providing a **spatialized “index” to a database** of the content based on a recognizable log (3D web site) w/ **location** as a key metadata point [see Mayhew on impossible taxonomies, a common Victorian complaint about the GE] - *database*
- ❖ Offer a **setting, or (more likely) settings**, for spatial analysis of the placement and effects of the experience (simulation environment; game environment), with ability to drill down into details - *database views via virtual worlds, maps, websites etc.*
- ❖ Provide a **framework** for annotation, elaboration, and trails of associations within the Exhibition as well as linking outward - *social media interventions*
- ❖ Provide a mechanism for future authorship within the complex space already **scaffolded** - *infrastructure*
- ❖ **Future-proof** with modular components and data abstracted from presentational views wherever possible



Apprehension

- * The concept of “**apprehension**” - in the old sense of knowing, understanding through the senses and emotionally, as well as the more modern senses of fearing and capturing a suspect
 - * Like Mayhew (who was thinking about the Exhibition as an educative tool), we want to *apprehend* the GE in the CP! - even if we can never truly *comprehend* it.
 - * Our models and views cannot pretend to **represent** the Great Exhibition, even if we were to completely populate a virtual environment - we are, after all, creating another derivative version of a catalog
 - * However, their **construction** and **use** might help us understand the **genre** of 19th c. (and later) exhibitions and how they operate rhetorically, providing critical tools for deeper dives into specific questions within the system, as well **mechanisms** for **illustrating** and **sharing** that knowledge
- * Apprehension as a less ambitious goal than comprehension - or *immersion*.

Henry Mayhew, *London Labor and the London Poor* V. 4 (1861)- complaining of Prince Albert’s finally incomprehensible classification scheme:

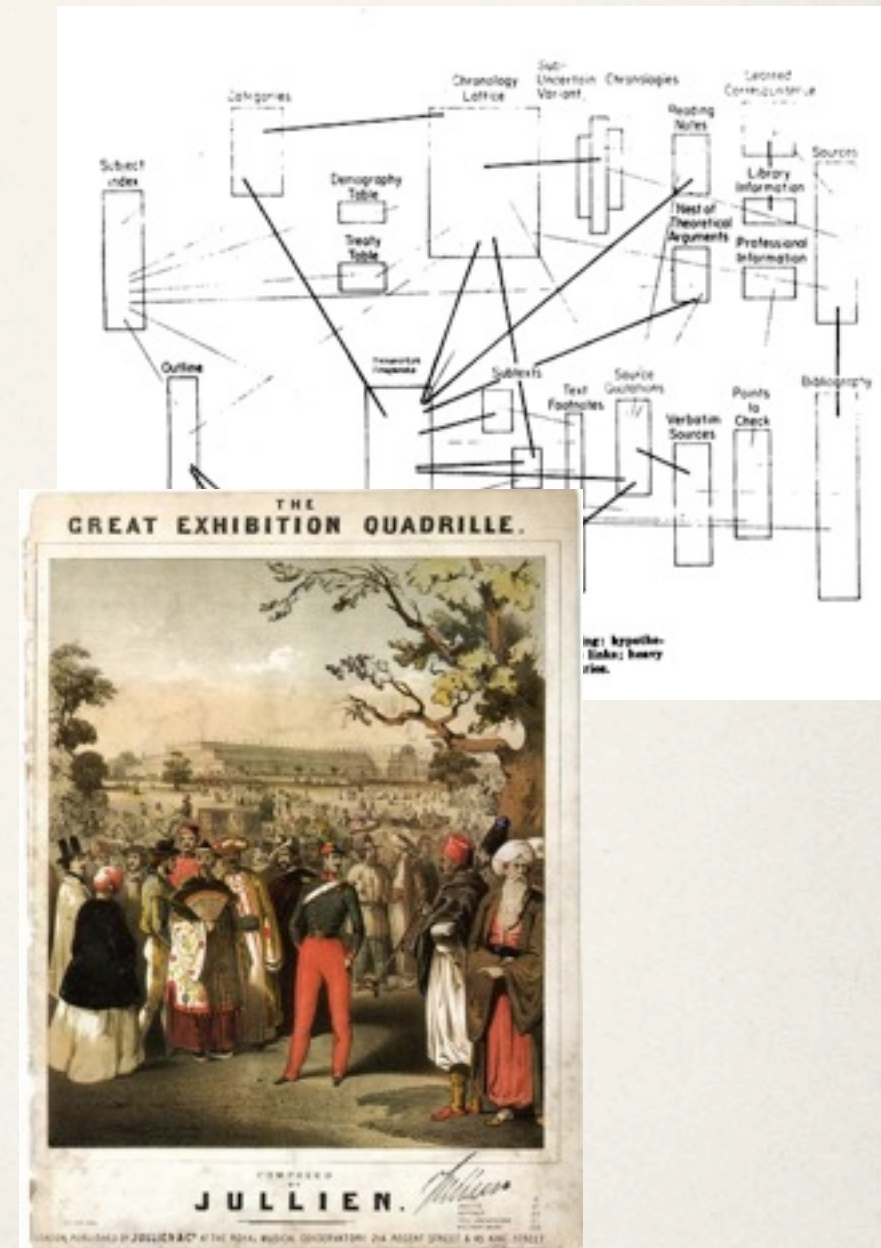
Of all scientific processes, the classification of the various phenomena is perhaps the most important; indeed...without distinguishing between one object and another, there can be no knowledge, nor, indeed, any perception. Even as the seizing of a particular difference causes the mind to **apprehend** the special character of an object, so does the discovery of the agreements and differences among the several phenomena of a subject enable the understanding to **comprehend** it.

- qtd by Elaine Gillooly in *A Victorian Prism*, 23 [emphasis mine]



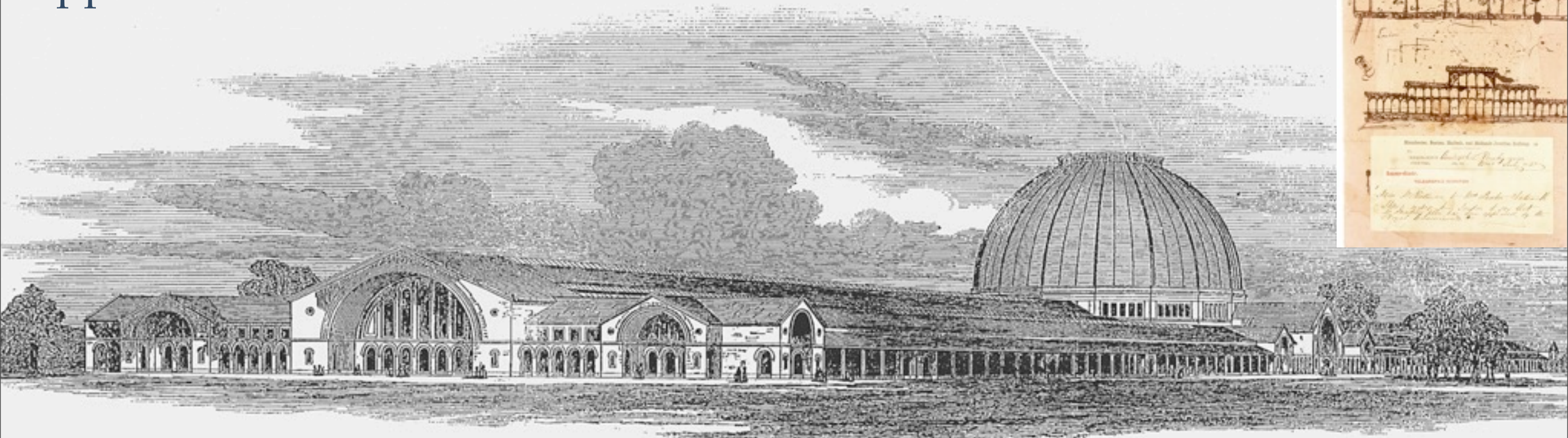
The “Immersive Fallacy” and Virtual Environments

- ❖ Assumption that sensory transport = immersion; corollary of the assumption that the more “real,” the more immersive
- ❖ Other types of immersion can create as deep an engagement, according to game theorists:
 - ❖ challenge-based, active engagements
 - ❖ imaginative pre-occupation w/ in-world activities
- ❖ Reminder that virtual environment is not necessarily the best environment for our **own** audiences to experience all aspects of this phenomenon either
 - ❖ we aren’t pretending we are reproducing experience, but pointing towards ways of apprehending it from various angles
 - ❖ Sometimes a textual, visual, or quantitative approach will be appropriate - especially if we are focused on derivative objects and their details; shifting center points

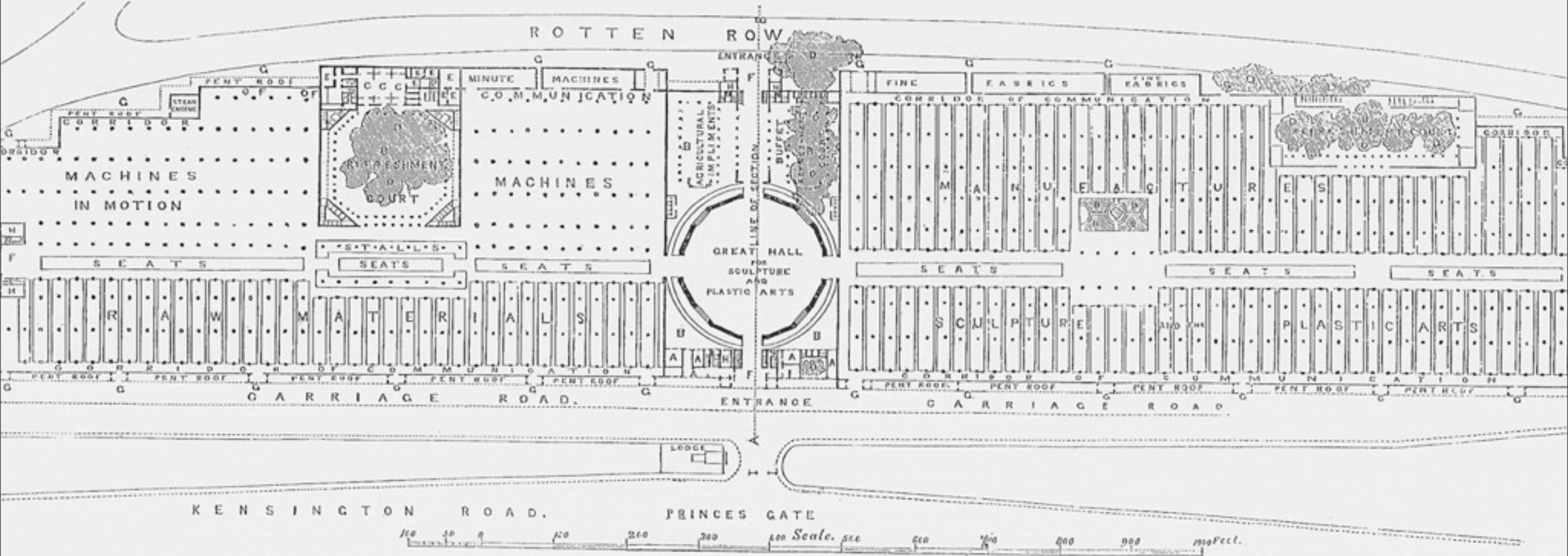


-Salen and Zimmerman, 204, qtd. in
Digital Cityscapes, 139

Apprehension I



BUILDING FOR THE GREAT INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION, TO BE ERECTED IN HYDE-PARK.



REFERENCES.—A A Executive Offices. B B B. Gardens. C C C. Exhibitors' Retiring Rooms. D D D. Trees. E E E. Offices for Refreshment Department. F F F. Hall. G G G. Doors of Exit. H H H. Accesses.
GROUND-PLAN OF THE BUILDING FOR THE GREAT INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION, TO BE ERECTED IN HYDE-PARK.

Apprehension 2



the people. Would they come sober? will they destroy the things? will they want to cut their initials, or scratch their names on the panes of the glass lighthouses? But they have surpassed in decorum the hopes of their well-wishers. The fact is, the Great Exhibition is to 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, the working-man has generally a greater share than those who are said to belong to the “superior classes.” Hence it is, that what was a matter of tedium, and became ultimately a mere lounge, for gentle-folks, is used as a place of instruction by the people.



but once. I shall go many times more, at my convenience. The object of my first day's visit was to see the exterior, and the Park on which it is situated, and to take a running view of the contents. No one can do this



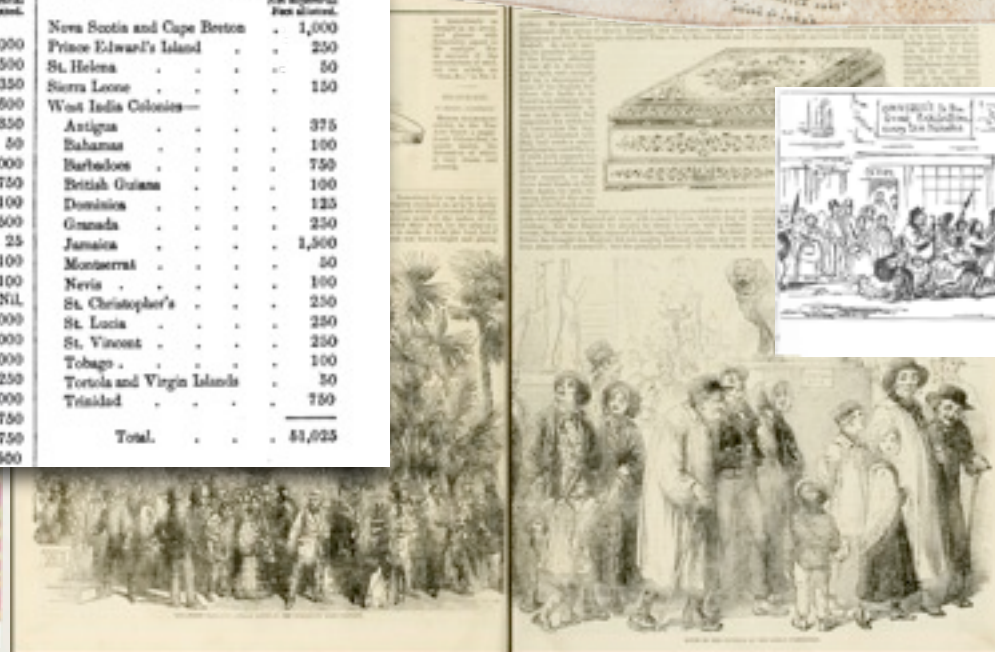
Map 3. The railway network in 1851.



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Australian Colonies—		North Scotia and Cape Breton	1,000
New South Wales	2,000	Prince Edward's Island	250
New Zealand	500	St. Helena	50
South Australia	350	Sierra Leone	150
Van Diemen's Land	600	West India Colonies—	
West Australia	850	Antigua	375
Bermudas	50	Bahamas	100
Canada	4,000	Barbadoes	750
Cape of Good Hope and Natal	750	Betish Guiana	100
Cape Coast Castle and Dependencies	100	Dominica	125
Ceylon	1,800	Grenada	250
Falkland Islands	25	Jamaica	1,500
Gambia	100	Montserrat	50
Gibraltar	100	Nevis	100
Hong Kong	NIL	St. Christopher's	250
Hudson's Bay Co.'s Territories	1,000	St. Lucia	250
India, including Singapore	30,000	St. Vincent	250
Ionian Islands	1,000	Tobago	100
Labuan	250	Tortola and Virgin Islands	50
Malta	1,000	Trinidad	750
Mauritius	750		
New Brunswick	750	Total	51,025
Newfoundland	500		



19. The Queen's retiring room, at the Crystal Palace, Egypt.



20. Crowds in the Great Exhibition, looking to Crystal Palace.



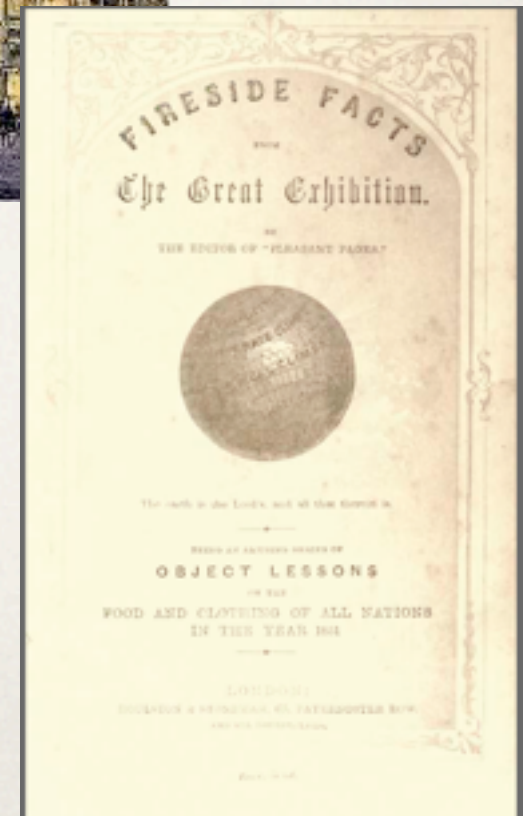
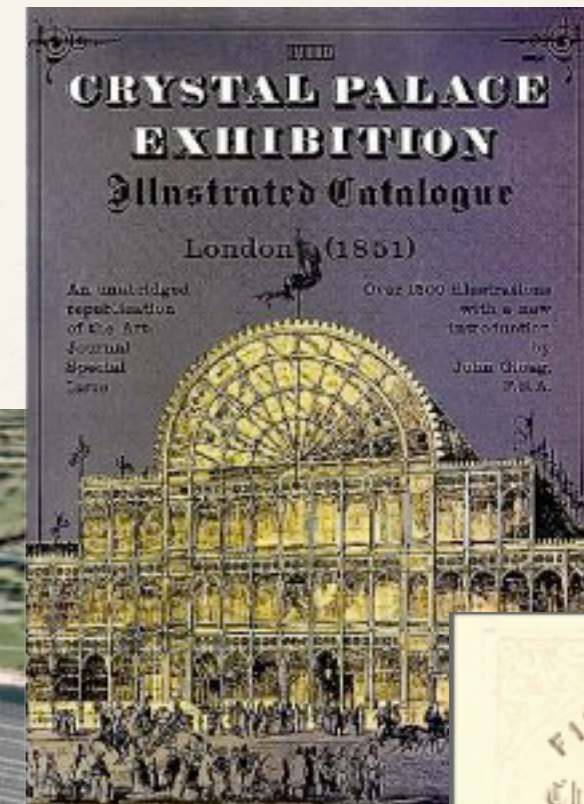
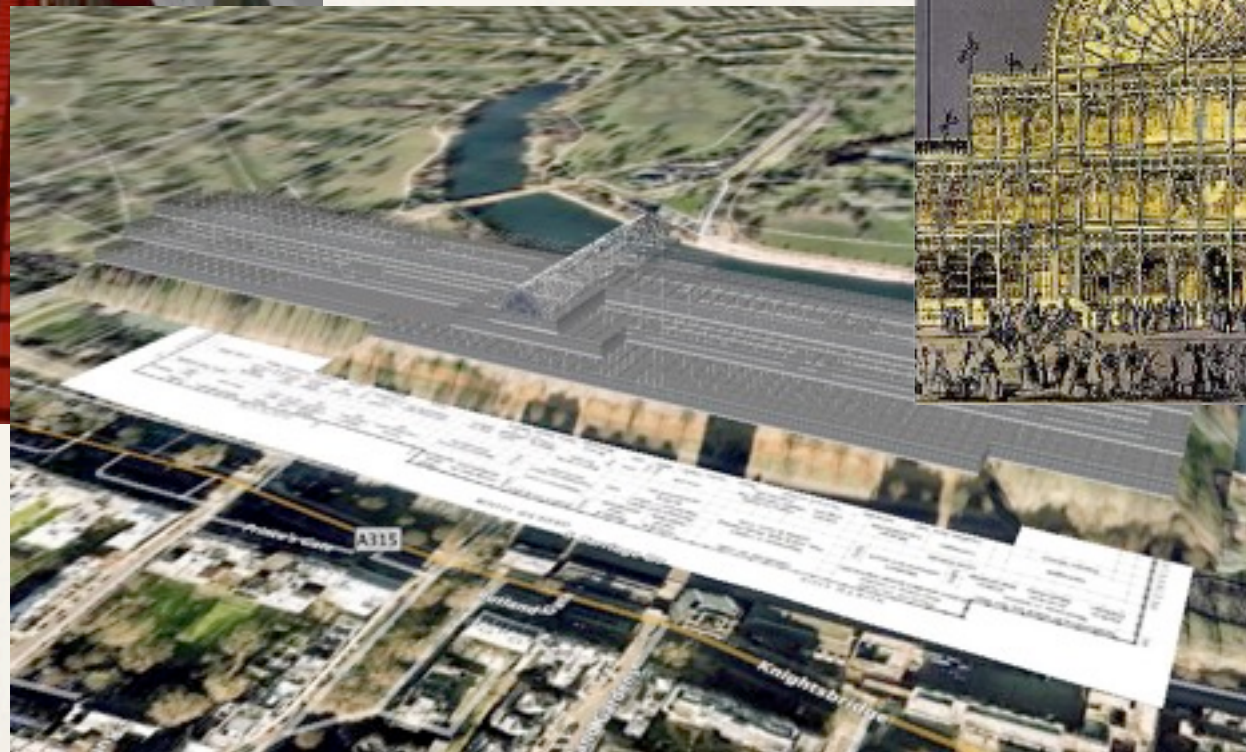
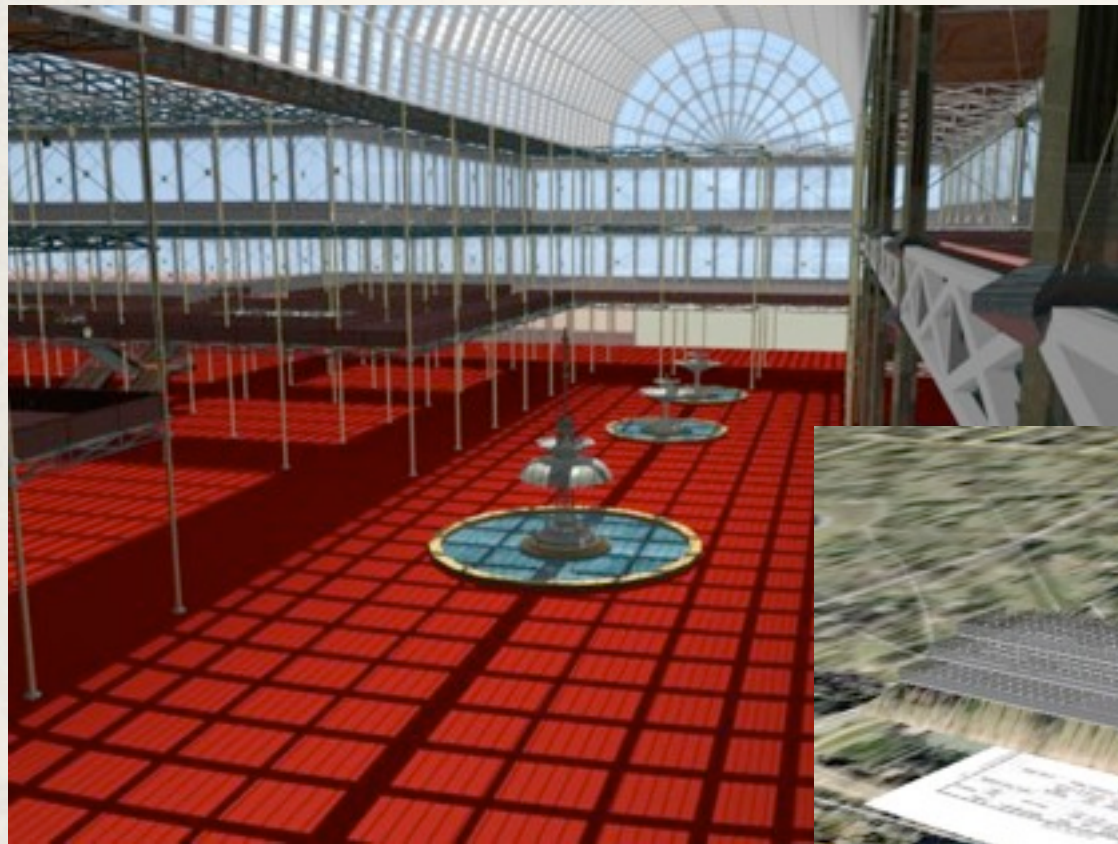
21. View of the park, with some of the buildings, Crystal Palace, looking to the south.

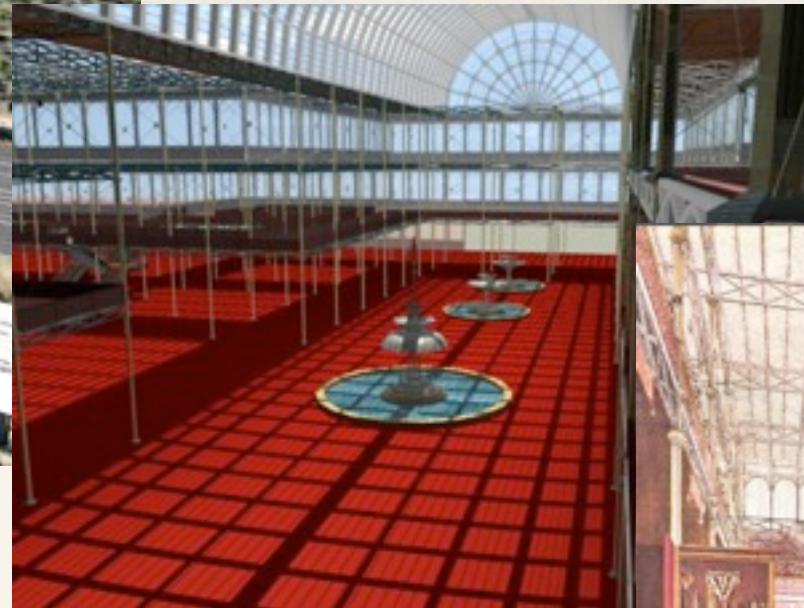
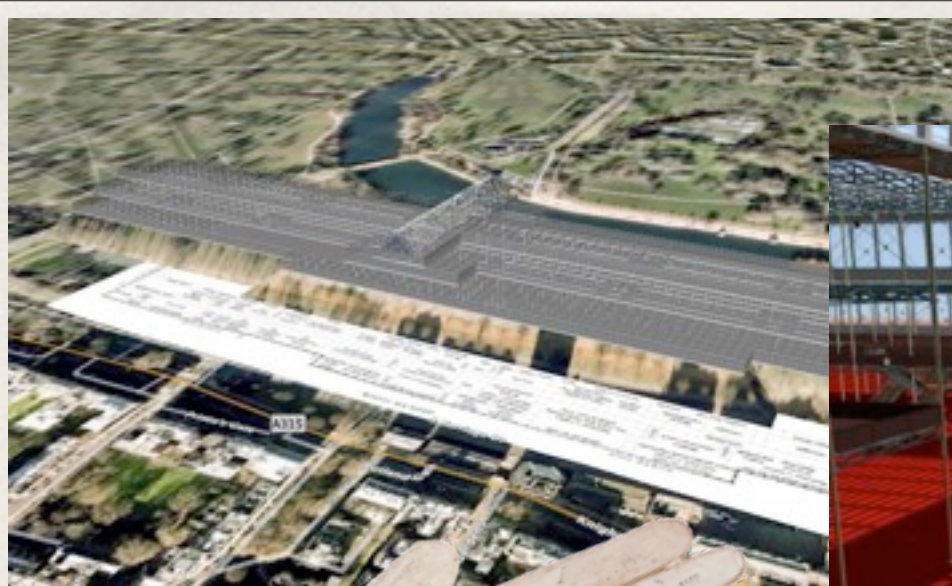
Henri Lefebvre on Social Space

- ❖ Three concurrent parameters for spatial analysis (the “**spatial trialectic**”):
 - ❖ **Spatial Practice** - perceived space (material form)
 - ❖ embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation” (1991:33, 246). -**materiality**
 - ❖ **Representational Space** - conceived representations (planned)
 - ❖ “conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” who “identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived” and is the “dominant space in any society (or mode of production).” - disembodied via **visuality**; de Certeau’s “**voyeur**”
 - ❖ **Represented Space** - lived, directly experienced (meaning-making w/ in the space)
 - ❖ space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’” (1991:38-39).- **experiential, embodied**; de Certeau’s “**walker**”

-The Production of Space (Lefebvre); The Practice of Everyday Life (de Certeau)

Perceived, Conceived, Lived





20. On arrival at the Great Exhibition, Ealing by Crickchank.



to 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, the working-man has generally a greater share than those who are said to belong to the "superior classes." Hence it is, that what was a matter of totem, and became ultimately a mere lounge, for gentle-folks, is used as a place of instruction by the people.

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Map 3. The railway network in 1852.



2. All the world going to see the Great Exhibition, Ealing by Crickchank.



Authoring Annotated 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 Annotated 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



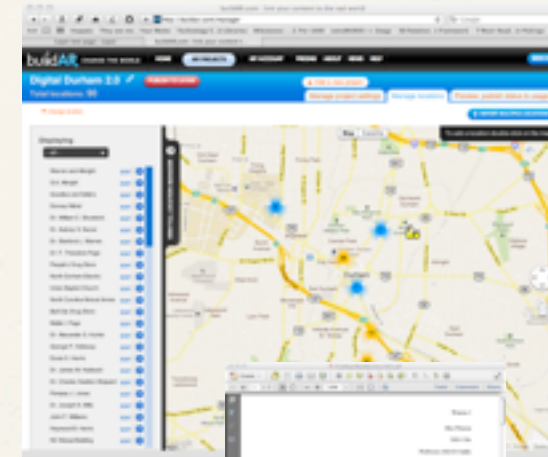
Emergent Tropes for Virtual Worlds Authorship and Critique

- ❖ 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

Critical Digital Media Authorship

Implications: DM & NM

- ❖ Project-based, collaborative work over time
- ❖ Building up from simple interventions to more complex research projects through ongoing, structured inquiries - similar substrates form emergent genres of authorship
- ❖ Focus is as much on form and conscious critique of method as it is on the object of inquiry itself (GE)
- ❖ Hybrid forms of scholarship combining narrative exposition with experiential media objects - iterative cycle of study, creation, reflection
- ❖ Seemingly disparate projects coalesce around critical questions around the forms and affordances of digital media
- ❖ New ideas about relationships between teaching, research and service (building) - they all inform one another - Objects, Forms, Pedagogy



Spring 2012: The Greeks on Exhibit

(team-taught)

- * Deeper dive into a specific query / site:
 - * textual accounts
 - * catalogs
 - * engraving and images for a “pano” wallpaper
- * Build out:
 - * map view (highlighting flows of goods and circulation patterns)
 - * 3D model view
 - * possible wallpapered game engine view with “teleport” into fully 3D space as needed (travel v. panorama) w/ this example
- * Big-picture, “distant reading” analysis of digitized objects using various text viz tools of the site as a whole, but also detailed analysis of that particular component
- * Rich media essays that weave through the space on a stable platform or series of platforms in order to combine textual narrative with rich media annotation and vice versa



Panel Discussion and Q/A

see <http://www.duke.edu/~ves4/mla2012> for abstracts and talks