Cyberspace: the architecture of instability

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This article is not a critical one, where the subject or topic is to be strongly or passionately presented. This is a paper resulting from many questions and curiosity arisen regarding the relation between Global Discourse and the new virtual culture.

Global Discourse configures a process of interactive collaboration between two or more individuals. This process, which embodies a dynamic exchange of experiences, takes place in a new kind of media. The "Web" has become the medium in which architects, artists, and designers create spaces that are physical and virtual at the same time, allowing individuals to experience new ways of communication.

We are now facing profound effects on the contemporary understanding of virtual space with the progress of new electronic technologies and the advance of digital media. Form and function have now been conceived for a virtual environment. This new space / environment is to be sensed, felt, and perceived in various ways. That idea of "navigating," or "surfing" the Internet definitely begins to take shape.

In virtual spaces, it has been possible to leverage existing "real" human skills and abilities. According to the media artist Douglas Davis, in his "Museum of the Third Kind," the "Web" is a social institution, where the "virtual" intensifies the "real" by creating an intimate and personal environment. [1] Some recent studies have actually confirmed this idea. For instance, a group of psychology scholars of the Jaume I University of Castellon, Spain, worked with a group of 66 people, ranging from 29 to 34 years of age. Of this group, 34 were men and 32 were women. 97 per cent declared themselves heterosexual. The results of this sample study indicated exactly the contrary of what the public normally expects: they suggested that online chats, for example, are "an interactive media for socializing and rich in relational nuances that may stimulate rather than inhibit social relations." [2] Consequently, the new social space for communication leads one to a new notion of interactivity, where technical and aesthetic transformations happen in the realm of one's participation. [3]

Here are some questions: Where exactly does this process of communication take place? Where is this meeting point? And most importantly, how does one perceive it? Is this virtual space only meant to be temporary, transitional? Or could it contribute to one's sense of belonging somewhere?

Prof. Artur Matuck's "Interpresence" project gives us an idea of how interactivity and inter-communication transcend the experience of one-to-one contact by adding an active audience. [The interaction is to be sensed in the realm of the audience and by the audience.] The exercise of communication is based on a complex system of information that flows through cyberspace, a sort of specially designed media architecture. The idea or sense of this interaction happening in the audience "sphere" is what characterizes it as "interpresence." However, the audience's interactivity is a subject that still remains open. Even though the audience becomes an "insider" in the interaction process, it does not participate directly.
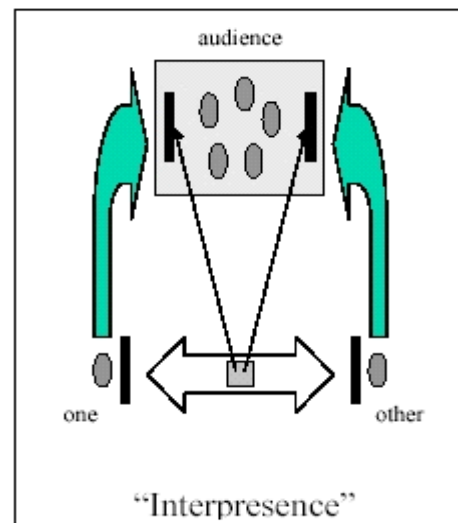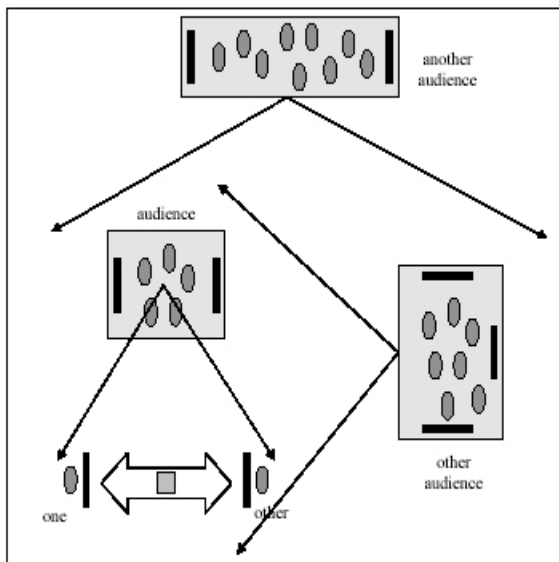

"Interpresence"

My analysis is that the real experience of interpresence does not happen in the realm of the audience, but somewhere in between the audience and the virtual interaction.

Real "interpresence"
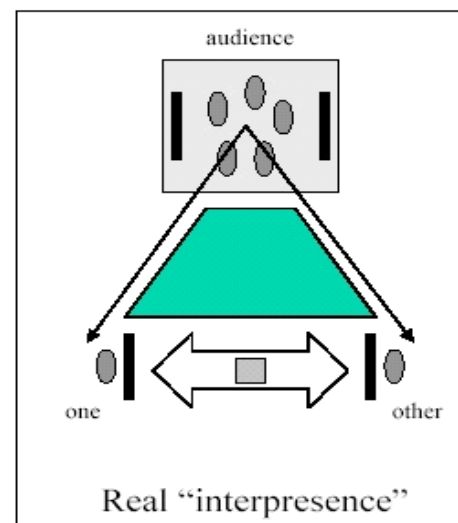
Since the audience is really just an audience, formed by a group of spectators and not participants, the sense of "interpresence" thus can be stretched to an infinite equation. The real "interpresence" configures a set of interrelations between the interaction of one / another and the audience. On a larger scale, the inter-relation between the audience and the interaction between one / another becomes the object of a new interrelation with another audience.

The interaction between one / another results in the interaction between this interrelation and the audience. This bond, initially part of an interrelation with one audience ends up being the object of interaction of another audience. And so on.

Therefore, the idea of "interpresence," as much as it yields qualities of interaction and interrelation, also raises questions of instability and actuality.

The ideological space is certainly one that formulates a territory where stability and actuality are tempered by a transcendental reality. Experience is transitory and place is unstable. This is what Hani Rashid, from Asymptote, calls architecture of "flux." [4] The boundaries of time and space are blurred in cyberspaces. Cyberspaces are de-centered in a way that enables interaction to prevail over the linearity of real communication processes. [5] They configure an architecture of instability. And where do we stand in this architecture of instability?

Considering these de-centered aspects of virtual spaces and the Internet, in general, one must consider Miwon Kwon's definition of the "wrong place." [6]

My observation of Kwon's mainstream idea is that the sense of self is actually acquired by the sense of "belonging-intransience," where one's immediate association of time and space has been disrupted. With the advent of technology, sites have become intertextually and distributedly located, thus uncertain, unstable, ambiguous, and impermanent. Facing those qualities,

adjusting to new experiences, or simply transcending the capacity to locate oneself, is what makes the "wrong" place almost "right."

For this reason, if the "Web" -- with all its transient aspects -- is to be considered as a social institution, aren't we already in the "wrong place"? A virtual museum, for instance, is used as a medium to create an intimate and personal environment where "virtual" intensifies "real," therefore adding to the rupture of space and time. Doesn't this unstable state of mind / place, virtual / real force architects to create challenging spaces and artists to create challenging art? If so, are they still engaged in the search for the "right" place? Those questions lead me straight to the connection between Miwon Kwon and Douglas Davis, and their non-relation with the postmodern idea of de-centeredness. After all, to be "de-centered" does not always mean to be "deconstructed."

It is intriguing how uncomfortable one can be facing this term: "the wrong place." One's first attempt is to try to categorize or even "place" the "wrong place": whether it is a trend of postmodernism, a revival of the avant-garde, or also a question of nature. For this reason, I cannot explain or try to "place" the term, but accept it as new conception.

In conclusion, what is groundbreaking is to look at virtualism as an event not only associated with radical technological changes, but also with an aesthetic change. This new "artistic intercommunication" brings the experience to a whole new personal scale, where questions of style, purism, or historical tradition are no longer the main concern. [7] Even though virtual spaces have been gaining popularity over the recent years -- being used mostly in the form of "chat" spaces -- there aren't enough questions being asked about how the level of communication and sociability have increased.

Works Cited

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[3] Joseph Nechvatal, "Origins of Virtualism: an interview with Frank Popper" in: *Art Journal* 3 No. 1 (Spring 2004), pp. 62-77
[4] Hani Rashid, "Asymptote Architecture," *Domus* 822 (Jan. 2000), pp. 26-31
[5] Peris, p. 43
[6] Miwon Kwon, "The Wrong Place" in *Art Journal* 59 No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 32-44
[7] Nechvatal, pp. 62-77