HYPERIMAGE RELOADED. THE EXPANSION OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE IN VIRTUAL SPACES
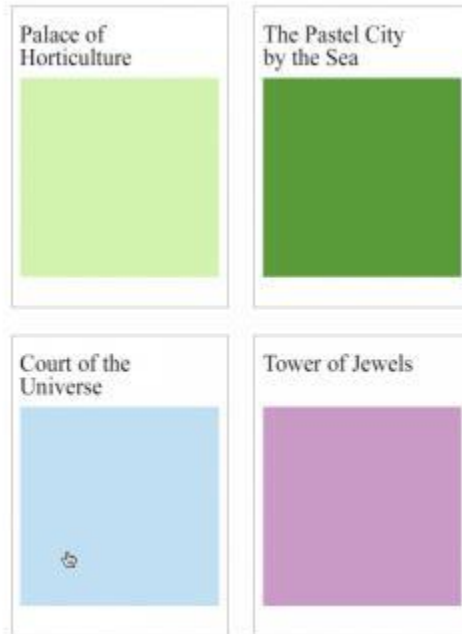
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"HYPERIMAGE reloaded. The expansion of the photographic image in virtual spaces" is based on the on-going interdisciplinary collaboration between the artistic practice (Hanakam & Schuller; artists, Vienna/Austria) and the art/cultural sciences (Karin Mihatsch; researcher, Paris/France).

Fig. 1. Palaces & Courts, 2009/10, Markus Hanakam & Roswitha Schuller, web-based Computer Application (Flash); Screenshot Detail, copyright Markus Hanakam & Roswitha Schuller.

This paper is based on the ongoing interdisciplinary collaboration between artistic practice and the art/cultural sciences. It is intended to broaden and deepen some of the issues raised during the inter-working of the online-work "Palaces & Courts" (1) by Hanakam & Schuller. The work – based on the im-agery of photography – was created within the ongoing discourse with the researcher Mihatsch. (2)

From his concept of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners Lee paved the way for a wide distribution of im-ages on the Internet. These images follow other regulations than printed images and are committed to the process: links between images may be set by respecting a network or structure called "Hyperimage". According to this structure, any image can be integrated in any network or sequence. These sequences may be narrative or not, transparent or not.

The Matrix behind "Palaces & Courts" ("P&C").

"P&C" is a Flash based computer application for online use basically working on various Pools of Text/Image information in connection with random generators. These so called "Pools", which are ex-tracted text fragments from the exhibition catalogue "Palaces & Courts of the Exhibition" by author Juliet James, attempt to give an overview of the Panama Pacific Exposition San Francisco from 1915, in

terms of describing the exhibition areal, its palaces, courts and intersections as well as the exhibit, show-cased in this temporary World Fair architecture. The catalogue text can now be found online as a digi-talised version at Project Gutenberg.

The artwork "P&C" works in two dimensions; reconstructing the architectural setting in an abstracted and interactive mode as well as distilling the atmosphere of a World Fair of a time, that nowadays appears to be nostalgic. The basic graphic pattern consists of uni-coloured fields in combination with short texts; these may appear in a group of four, or as single units or as just "detail", which takes the single colour tone only. In a group of four, every colour field has the same quotient of grey, so there is always the impression of a harmonious colour play.

The Matrix of "P&C" is simple in its programming, but confusing to the user, as it does not follow a tree-like structure, as one could expect on the first clicks. There are four instances -which form pools- the random generator can revert to: Architecture (A), Exhibit (E), Exhibit Detail (ED) and Colour (C).

Pool A is composed of architectural terms of the world fair; for example "Palace of Varied Industries" or: "Court of the Ages". Pool E refers to single exhibits inside these Palaces or the various Courts. Both A and E pages always show a group of four. ED is a direct link from one element of E. Finally C shows details from EDs.

The starting page always shows the user A, which can link to the pools A again and E; this action continues randomly.

Once the user gets onto the instance E, then E or ED is linked in; this action also continues randomly. Once the user gets onto the instance ED, there is only the option of linking onto C, and in this case it does not link to the whole pool of Cs, but only onto the colour that is connected to the colour from the previous exhibit detail page. Once the user gets onto the instance C, this may randomly link back to the previous ED; or to pool A, or to pool E, or to pool C.

Behind this Matrix, that is not over-complex, lays the artists attempt to mirror strategies of pictorial production as well as the motional and atmospheric embedding of this production within Web2.0. This paper is also intended as an interplay between a theoretical discourse about re-production of (photographic) images, the structuring of images and a media-artistic approach towards this issue.

Creating the Hyperimage.

The development of the Internet dates from the 1960s and was a coproduction between scientists (content) and the US military (budget). (Warnke, 17f) At the beginning economic reasons were not the focus, but rather the exchange of information in a scientific context. The first networks were developed in the USA (Paul Baran: ARPANET with following applications from the early 1970s: TELNET, FTP and E-MAIL) (Warnke, 34ff) as well as in Europe (Donald Davis: MARK I, opened in 1969). (Warnke, 20ff)

Beside these there were several other networks. To enable communication (links) between the different nets, the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP, presented in 1973) was introduced. TCP and the Internet Protocol (IP) permitted the connection between different networks. (Warnke, 43)

In the late 1970s/early 1980s the first PCs, Apples and Macintoshes came on the market. For this reason and due to the dissociation of the Internet and the Military, the user-community enlarged remarkably despite geographical limits. From 1989 to 1992 the WWW was developed at CERN at the suggestion of Berners Lee. (Warnke, 46ff) There, different research teams worked on „non-sequential writing". The so called "Hypertextsystem" offers a references-net: Consequently, researchers can work simultaneously but in an independent way on the same document. (Warnke, 50ff) This innovation lays the foundation for the distribution of images on the Internet. The processual images on the net can be integrated in the Hyperimage-Structure that allows a non-sequential link-network and creates a sort of narrative structure between images.

Besides the structure of Hypertext and Hyperlinking; what is especially intended by using the term "Hyperimage" is not only its quality in web-based structure based on its programmatic level, but its very distinct quality of unfolding narration, plus an atmospheric "sense" of the topic it is related to, which can be allegorised by the term "cloud". Continuing with the example of the world fair catalogue – how can a physical representation of the world be transferred into the virtual? And in the sense of this transforming process, taking a world fair catalogue and reconstructing it as an online computer application is so much an allegory for the internet itself. It is about putting a physical setting into an imaginary setting; digitalisation and virtual re-construction then have narrative quality, in the sense that the virtual space unfolds an imaginary space as we know it from literature or gaming. This shift from "analogue" imaginary to "digital" imaginary spaces – the difference cannot be made by the term virtual itself - may be caused by a crisis of physical space, a process that Paul Virilio describes as "the aesthetics of disappearance". (Virilio, Schroer 263)

From exhibition structures and guiding systems to image structuring in networks.

Paul Baran defined three different communication-net-systems: the star (centralised), the tree (decentralised) and the interconnected net (distributed). All three net-structures do not correspond to the Internet. The Internet is rather provided with a lot of nods linked with little links and little nods linked with a lot of links. This is typical for a scale-free network. The research-group around Albert-László Barabási tried to display the "continents" of the WWW. This attempt showed the wish to reproduce visually a given situation. (Warnke, 106ff) The desire to visualise the world became apparent in the universal exhibition a long time ago. For example, the "Panama-Pacific Exposition of San Francisco" presented a representation through the latest inventions and fabrications. By the decontextualisation of the traditional frame and this new structuring of the exhibit objects, another perception is evoked amongst the beholders. (McLuhan). So, our world is translated into another structure by original objects and representations.

The representation-process is submitted to another translation by the catalogue. (3) On the occasion of the "Panama-Pacific Exposition" the catalogue „Sculpture of the Exposition Palaces and Courts" was published. It contains texts and BW images and documents on the architecture and sculpture of the exhibition. So we can say, that in a linguistic and visual way, the catalogue focuses on the structure providing elements, like the pavilions (= nods), independently from the exhibited content. (The IP also doesn't care about the content.) So the succession of the chapters proposed by author Juliet James could be considered as the representation of a way (=links) through the real exhibition/network of pavilions.

The catalogue is organised in a tree-like-structure. It is introduced by a general foreword, which aims to give a certain orientation to the reader. The reader then has the option to follow the sequence proposed by the author, or to follow their own personal order.

There are different online versions of this printed catalogue. Here we will have a look at the OPEN Library version.(4)

The formal characteristics such as pages and chapters, have been maintained in the (animated) scans of the catalogue.

The typical internet structure is not visible for the user at first glance, but influences the handling and the reception (Genette): instead of thumbing through the catalogue, the user clicks on the pages, the haptic sensation with the object "book" gives way to visual interaction with the screen. Finally, the dimensions of the pages have been adapted to the screen format. (Malraux) Another difference between the printed and the online version is the choice of having the catalogue read to the user. This processual characteristic is an element that cannot be translated into another media.

The structure of the real exhibition is very well presented in the online version: the internet technique permits the showing of several small pictures of the catalogue pages at the same time. This application rends possible a new point of view of the exhibition structure.

As users we grew up with the "traditional" internet of the 1990s, that was organised mostly in tree-like structures, a setting that represented reality in a form with reduced complexity without limiting the possibility of listing content. With the rise of so called Web2.0 applications, our orientation through the internet has changed. The term of "surfing" may still be appropriate to the single user, although this new 'wave' carries along with it, much more individual information than ever before. Users show a tendency to develop a second "reality" inside the "virtual reality" (an example is "Second Life"), so there is a huge contingent of highly individual data transported via the internet. To come back to the media art context of this paper, the example of "P&C" shows an attempt to make this process of stumbling through pictures and stories, without finding the way back or knowing how one got there, visible.

Narrative aspects, associations and the role of the beholder in hierarchical and net-like structures.

The narrative is accented by the dramaturgy developed by Hanakam & Schuller. "Dramaturgy" is described - in the German Duden - as the "teaching of the outside structural form and the regularities of the inner structure of the drama [...]" This definition evokes the presentation structure which is put on centre stage: the frame will be visible.

The issue of the narrative within the internet is spreading in various directions, as it deals with hierarchies, power, communication, psychological aspects and many more themes. With "P&C" the focus is set on the main aspects of reproducing physical space and developing a kind of stage-like setting; principles known from literature as well as from gaming. Indeed, the matrix of "P&C", and the immersive aspect on the user, is quite similar to Role Game Playing, a play-structure at the intersection between story-telling and gaming, that is also strongly connected to improvisational theatre, but without a clearly defined audience.

Three-dimensional elements disappear in photographic (digital) reproduction. The picture is reduced to two dimensions. Hanakam & Schuller break up this two-dimensionality thanks to the narrative moment: the beholder takes an active position (Push and Pull Media) and follows a way/parcours through the structure. The beholder/user moves through the space of the universal exhibition using imagination on the one hand, and on the other hand by paging through the catalogue "Sculpture of the Exposition Palaces and Courts". This all doesn't happen in a linear way, but follows the non-sequential linking system.

"P&C" makes the transformation of the physical world into the imaginary playground visible, as it unfolds this transformation process visually, in re-assembling text passages and by offering a colour-based guiding system that gives the most possible latitude for association.

Photography in the light of the transformation of its materiality in depictions of exhibitions, printed and online exhibition catalogues.

There are no longer any images in the computer system, only binary codes, which can represent either image, text or sound. So the image itself disappears by being translated into another coding-system. It only evokes the impression of still being a picture. Image and text are now at the same code-level; only the user makes a perceptional difference.

The uni-coloured picture on the screen still has the same density of date information, as the "concrete" picture would have; though the information to its beholder is at first sight less complex – in consequence the "abstract" picture will be assumed as complex to, depending on the effort the reader has to put into its interpretation (McLuhan).

In contrast to analog photography, which serves as a memory tool, digital photography devotes itself to visual communication, according to Andreas Schelske. (5) This means that the digital image communicates in an active way, whereas the analog picture rather memorises in a passive way (Push and Pull media). So, we can speak about an interactive situation between digital data and the beholder.

Setting up a digital representation of a genuine physical figure always results in a third, different figure, not only within the internet, but in digital media in general ("The virtual reality"). So this „third" should not be analysed in reference to its representative quality, but also by its transformatory effects – that impact on structure, narration and aesthetics.

References and Notes:

Notes

1. http://www.palacesandcourts.com
2. Karin Mihatsch, Photographic Representations of Imaginary and Its Beholders in the Light of Web 2.0., in eyes on Monat der Fotografie, (Wien: Fotohof Edition, 2010)
3. André Chastel: "Un catalogue est une publication [. . .], dans laquelle les objets d'une ou plusieurs séries sont décrits sous forme de liste méthodique. Il peut être sommaire ou détaillé, illustré ou non." (Chastel, 62)
4. http://openlibrary.org (accessed June 5, 2011)
5. 2nd Symposium der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Photographie und des Fachbereichs Gestaltung der Georg-Simon-Ohm Fachhochschule Nürnberg, 2005

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