ABSTRACT

Impossible Geographies 01: Memory is an interactive installation in which memory becomes the metaphor for the fluid boundaries between the physical and the virtual. It dynamically traces visitor’s actions and mixes them in unexpected ways with memories captured by the physical space. Throughout the exhibition, those memories of visitors and actions seep into the present environment, creating a virtually woven fabric of events that grows and evolves over time. This paper discusses the experience of (temporarily) inhabiting a space that senses, captures and remembers.

Keywords: Memory, Mirror, Narrative, Presence, Performativity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Impossible Geographies 01: Memory is an interactive installation exploring memory as a metaphor for the fluid boundaries between the physical and the virtual. The installation is part of a series of Impossible Geographies [IG] that move the contact surface of the virtual closer to the physical space, perforating these two realities and feeding back to them (Gemeinboeck 2005).

Petra Gemeinboeck was awarded the Do While New Media Residency for the completion and installation of this project. A particular aspect of this residency with the theme of ‘Real Space’ was the cooperation with the Soto Gallery, Boston, MA, allowing for a six-weeks period to experiment with the exhibition space. As IG 01: Memory explores the contact surface of the virtual to both a physical space and the presence of its inhabitants, engaging with the physical counterpart over a certain period of time was essential for the understanding of this interplay. The investigation also brought up the question of how the exhibition space is inhabited and how this can be challenged, extended or –in the context of memorizing– manipulated.

The following sections address the experience of (temporarily) inhabiting a space that senses, captures and remembers. They discuss a series of ‘soirees,’ in which people were invited to perform for the space, and visitors that get involved by the space.

1.1 Performative Acknowledgement of Presence

A room is threaded with a network of laser beams, coated with video projections and equipped with a camera, its ‘eye’ (Gemeinboeck 2005). It encloses a series of implied and shifting geographies, signified and made ‘tangible’ only by beams of light. When crossed, visitors interrupt the space and trigger a fracture through which a virtual space can seep into the physical present (Figure 2). Each of the ‘neural extensions’ of the space allow for the creation of fragmentary, connected and fluid narratives (Gemeinboeck 2005). As the memory of the space grows, so do these structures.

Inside the virtual space of this installation, the visitors’ actions form a series of traces, each a remembrance – a performative acknowledgement of their presence. As the memories seep into and displace the present, the space performs what Peggy Phelan refers to as the acknowledgement of ‘the Other’s (always partial) presence’ by acknowledging ‘one’s own (always partial) absence’ (Phelan 1993).

1.2 Performed for or Stolen from the Space

Opening the exhibition of a work that ‘weep[s]’ memories into the present, raises the issue of this work’s past or available memories. While it could be the empty, unshared space or the installation process that seeps into the evening of the premiere, this void also evokes the idea of creating asynchronous, fictive, or non-sequitur memories. During the last two weeks of the residency, performers, artists, curators, and people bringing in other geographies, such as lawyers and passer-bys, were invited to participate in a private soiree and to engage with the space in unexpected ways. In the course of the opening and the following weeks of the exhibition, then, witnessed moments, such as a heist (performed by lawyers), a DJ session, a fly-fishing event or a shaving ritual, occasionally appeared entwined with the memories of participants visiting the gallery space (Figure 1, 2, 3 and 4). As a result, the space becomes infused with the presence of performed or stolen events, making slippery the relationship between fictive and ‘real’ memories. Now the piece will always have a past, and the here and now will not only enlace with the presence of another time but also another place.

Talking to visitors and inferring from a review in the Boston Globe, the experience of one’s own present enlaced with the presence of someone else, now absent, opens an uncertain, haunting ground. As ‘the memory of the room itself’
‘regurgitated back’ the image of the present ‘continually returns to the viewer – indeed, that image never completely dissolves as the older ones rise up and ebb away. “Impossible Geographies” enables the viewer to imagine stepping into someone else’s swirling psyche and playing a bit part’ (McQuaid 2005).

2. NOTES

Impossible Geographies 01: Memory (2005) was conceived and produced by Petra Gemeinboeck with research assistants Greg Turner and Alastair Weakley. The audio was composed by Mary Agnes Krell. The idea of blending fictive or non-sequitur memories with the every-day experience of the gallery space was born in a conversation between Petra Gemeinboeck, Boston, and Thomas Lorenze, Vienna.

The piece was first installed during the DoWhile New Media Residency’05 in collaboration with Mary Agnes Krell and Craig Dietrich at the Soto Gallery, Boston, MA. Information about the residency can be found at: http://www.studiosoto.com/home5a6.htm

3. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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4. REFERENCES