introduction

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> As the forces of biology are reproduced in machines and the forces of com-
> puters are reproduced in bodies, the interplay of "ideality" and "reality"
> anticipated in philosophical theories and artistic practices can be discerned
> throughout what was once called "nature." This transfiguration of the mate-
> rial and immaterial infinitely extends processes through which reality is vir-
> tualized and virtuality is realized.
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> —Mark Taylor [1]

Virtual Interiorities was originally a conference to be held at Florida Inter-
national University in the summer of 2020. When the conference was
canceled due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak, this three-volume collec-
tion was born in a moment of necessary virtuality. The co-editors met
online and decided to, in turn, produce a book or series of books based
on similar themes while borrowing from the conference title. However,
the notion of what the collection could be was amorphous. It was appar-
ent that we approached our new, online lives differently. The virtuality of
never-ending Zoom meetings and Netflix binges had forever altered our
sense of what it meant to be stuck between a hard physical reality and
a sometimes inadequate digital world. Our seemingly virtual lives had

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1. Mark Taylor, *Hiding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 324.

become strange and complicated during the pandemic. As we considered our moment of transfiguration, we wondered if we should (re)address our research in light of our situation—could we develop new perspectives? Each of the editors brought to the project their own ideas, interests, experiences, and, most importantly, a list of potential contributors whose ideas we wanted to hear. We compiled a master list of researchers and writers who were exploring a unique aspect or overlap of the key disciplines but who were all investigating some particular quality of virtuality.

We used our quarantine and stay-at-home moments to start in earnest, yet the true virtuality of the early project was the moment we engaged the authors. There was the usual email exchange and, in several instances, a video chat. Surprisingly, online meetings were a moment of respite and hope in an otherwise dreary 2020. Many of the contributors seemed eager to start a project, to talk about their work, and to connect to something beyond an insular life during lockdown. And perhaps that is why we have such a rich collection of writing in this collection. Virtuality is always set in contrast to the actual, the physical. Each contributor learned intimately the nuances of being stuck in a liminal space, relying on technological connectivity and fictional story spaces to make sense of their situation. While it may date some of the content herein, the COVID lockdown required us to understand new ways to think about the spaces we all study. Additionally, we have worked diligently to outline how this collection will expand our understanding of the issues pertaining to virtuality across media and disciplines. The result is three distinct books which introduce, inspect, and connect all facets of virtual experiences.

Contributors to *Virtual Interiorities* are recognized experts in their particular fields, rather visible and widely published. Others are promising younger scholars who have found excellent research networks within which to collaborate. Some writers will be returning to earlier ideas to bring their polemic in line with current states of virtuality, making this book a timely and forward-looking volume describing not only present but also potential futures. Others will be presenting entirely new ideas and investigations.

How then do all the topics relate to one another in such a collection? Each author scrutinizes the notion of the virtual in a socio-spatial context, thus this collection pertains to film, theme parks, video games, virtual reality, architecture, narrative, branding, placemaking, cultural studies, and various combinations of all of these concepts. Each article presents a context for and an application of virtuality, and when taken in total, the entire collection begins to theorize virtuality in its own way, its own ontological direction. In its simplest form, *Virtual Interiorities* is a rough guide to exploring the connectivity of virtual and physical spaces.

However, as these chapters have arrived in the *Virtual Interiorities* inbox, each one has expanded our definitions of the virtual, resulting in a bit of a dilemma amongst the editorial team as we each approached ferreting out meaning from the collection quite differently. Ultimately, we made the decision to parse them as such:

Book One: When Worlds Collide
Book Two: The Myth of Total Virtuality
Book Three: Senses of Place and Space

Every chapter, in all three books, brings us back to these fundamental questions: How does virtual media historically frame, filter, manipulate, and alter our perceptions of the built environment? How do our moments in varying virtualities (re)construct our understanding of experience? What happens when the material and immaterial collide and collude? To address these haughty questions, each book provides its own con-textualization, introduction, and focus. Each book presents a collection of essays that bears some thematic relationship to one another. Every chapter, however, provides a somewhat different theoretical grounding and method of investigation: some authors provide a historical account while others favor a more theoretical or even case-study type of analysis. We asked that authors avoid technical descriptions of designed projects and instead focus on broader theoretical accounts of compelling work that might alter our audiences' understanding of what it means to live, work, and play within immersive, mediated environments. All the authors address a unique aspect of our experience with these environments and, again, highlight some sort of connectivity to the volume theme. Some

authors probe how the virtuality of themed environments and game spaces overlap and interact; others challenge our notions of what heritage, history, and nation building mean through that lens of the mediated story.

All the chapters in Book One scrutinize the physical and virtual continuum in some way and, by default, explore the meaning of liminality between those dipoles. Book Two centers on themes of (dis)embeddedness—such as the designs of visceral, immersive productions and commoditized virtualities of transmedia storytelling and branding—that expose the myth of total virtuality. The chapters in Book Three expand on the notion of virtual non-place, thus investigating a sort of virtual ontology and playing with post-human interactions, such as novel game interfaces and the role of drone technologies.

For *Book One: When Worlds Collide*, it is paramount to describe how our authors explicitly address the notion of liminality, connectivity, and the transfiguration of the virtual and the physical. Each author pointedly addresses the proverbial elephant in the room: more and more of our spatial experiences—which touch every element of our lives—are not conceived of architecturally, nor are they designed by architects. Many don't even exist within what is traditionally called the "built environment." Furthermore, the variety of mediated experiences has expanded and combined to produce referential moments that are situated squarely between the real and virtual.

In "Building the Theme Park of Your Imagination: Virtualizing the Theme Park Experience in Digital Games," Péter Kristóf Makai describes how aficionados use electronic games and long-form video essays about decommissioned and demolished attractions to create novel virtual experiences. Makai explains how electronic games as "ultimate ersatz experience machine[s]" challenge the theme park. He goes on to outline how such games allow players to construct their own renderings of the rides, fostering a different, but no less authentic, theme park experience. To Makai,

theme parks are intermedial cultural products that can be reclaimed by virtual re-creation, which abstracts and idealizes the actual park. That idealization, in many ways, mirrors the themed virtualization of the original referent physical theme park.

Stefan Al, in "The Strip as a Movie Set: Immersive Experience Design in Las Vegas," describes how Las Vegas works as a movie set. He breaks down the qualities that reveal a set-like structure: false-front architecture, immersive interiors, and digital screens. Together, those aspects produce an experience that amplifies both a sense of virtuality and a shared sense of symbolism with Hollywood. The result is a thoroughly designed environment that rests firmly in between real and fictional references.

In "Imagining Cities Through Play: Immersive, Playful Video Game Experiences and the Liberation of Civic Imaginations," Konstantinos Dimopoulos addresses the role that games play in informing our understanding of the built environment, urbanism, and society in general. His argument is that, as spatialized media becomes unmoored from physical space, video games can provide a unique utopian image of the urban environment. Dimopoulos describes the complexity inherent in using the video game as a model of civic imagination and goes on to champion the noble goal of enhancing popular impressions of the built environment.

"Resurrecting Defunct Theme Park Attractions: Fan Preservation in Virtual Worlds" by Bobby Schweizer takes us to Defunctland and probes the values underlying the re-creation of decommissioned theme park rides. Schweizer explains how DIY preservationists use the modeled theme park experience to capture more than the mechanical aspects of long-gone theme park rides; they capture a broader experience and thus give viewers an opportunity to revisit old feelings and modes of interaction. The result is something that augments our memories of in-person experiences.

The second part of this book is focused on the experience of liminality. Giuliana Bruno, in "Surface Encounters: Empathy and Intermediation," describes the relationship between the material and virtual and the experience one has interacting with the built environment. Bruno parses out

a richer understanding of our mediated moment by asking us to address these surfaces, providing us with rich examples where surface in the built environment supplies the basis of our aesthetic experience. Tensile projections, screens, and membranes thus all mediate between actual and virtual spaces.

In "Design at the Border," Laura Hollengreen and Rebecca Rouse outline "an emergent typology of liminal design" using three examples from different periods in time and different locations in the world. What results is an expanded definition of liminality. Hollengreen and Rouse's analysis of mixed reality experiences offer insight into the design of interactions with mediated environments. The result resonates beyond experience design strategies and instead offers creators a "historically informed way to consider…interior transformation of the participant."

Finally, Ulrich Götz, in "Spaces of Possibility—Spaces of Purpose: The Emergence of Narrative Space in Theater, Film, and Games," describes narrative space as the key shared spatial context in film, theater, and games. This chapter outlines a variety of definitions of space—from Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of smooth and striated space to the Situationist's psychogeography—to put us on the trajectory to corporeal space and, ultimately, narrative spatiality. Needless to say, spatialized media generate new conceptualizations of action and experience. Götz gives us the framework to understand mediated space as something purposeful that can, potentially, create new possibilities for interaction.

The collection of all these chapters, including those in the second and third books, reveals the richness of virtuality beyond the confines of the virtual reality headset. Instead, we see historical precedent and contemporary connectivity across mediated products. Interactivity and narrative are the seeds planted by the stories and descriptions of these authors. The interiority of isolation during lockdown was fertile ground from which colorful new ideas about our virtually augmented lives have blossomed.

Bibliography

Taylor, Mark. *Hiding*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.