introduction

Dave Gottwald

> In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. "Space" is more abstract than "place." What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. Architects talk about the spatial qualities of place; they can equally well speak of the locational (place) qualities of space. The ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition.
>
> —Yi-Fu Tuan[1]

The seven chapters which comprise *Book Three: Senses of Place and Space* are all concerned with ontological matters of spatiality, representation, and inhabitation. As the first two volumes in this collection demonstrate, contemporary virtuality complicates traditional distinctions between what is "physical" and what is "virtual" to reveal new collisions and liminalities. The mediated experience itself has also been redefined; the very concept of illusion is not what it once was. And this is also true of what is meant by "place" and by "space."

1. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

In his seminal work *Space and Place* (1977), humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan characterized the relationship between the two as being embedded within a powerful matrix of time and experience. As concepts they cannot be cleaved from one another, but they can certainly be reconfigured, and this reconfiguration plays out across the chapters in this volume. Tuan defines space as being mythical, pragmatic, and abstract or theoretical, with a good deal of overlap between. To these he overlays "place" as a sense of inhabitation which develops over time. What does Tuan's distinction mean on a personal level? Think of checking into a hotel room in an unfamiliar city. Upon arrival, you slide your key into the door and are presented with a new space. Over the time you spend in this space, you unpack your belongings and perhaps rearrange the furniture. You have likely brought spatial practices along with you, such as where you place your toiletry bag by the sink, or what you decide to unpack. You have a favorite place where you charge your phone and perhaps a routine for other items: always a glass of water by the bed, shoes at the door. These are your habits. Literally, through this process of inscribing behavior over time onto a space, you have *inhabited* that space. And this inhabitation means that when you leave at the end of your stay, whether overnight or for a fortnight, you depart from *a place* rather than just *a space*.

All essays across the *Virtual Interiorities* collection complicate Tuan's experiential topology in some way because the virtual allows for non-spaces, placeless spaces, and everything in between: human experience and a sense of inhabitation that is free of any space/place distinction. The chapters in this third and final book are linked by a more direct engagement with these recombinations.

In "Representing Imaginary Space: Fantasy, Fiction, and Virtuality," Nele Van de Mosselaer and Stefano Gualeni present what could be considered the philosophical heart of this volume. For them, Tuan's mythical, pragmatic, and abstract distinctions of space melt completely within the construct of virtuality. Instead, they characterize virtual space "represented by computers and . . . explored interactively" as a unique amalgam of three concepts: lived space, fantasy space, and fictional space. Splitting the difference between lived, fantasy, and fiction, "our imagining of vir-

tual space is not limited nor determined by the represented explorations and perspectives of characters or creators, but rather, much like our experience of actual space, shaped by our own (albeit fictional) spatial practices."

Johan Höglund and Cornelius Holtorf investigate trends in immersive fitness technologies in "Making Sense of Virtual Heritage: How Immersive Fitness Evokes a Past that Suits the Present." They describe in detail Les Mills's *The Trip*, a gym experience which merges a room of individual exercise bike riders with a domed IMAX-like visualization. Various virtual films are shown which combine images of cultural antiquity with fantasy spaces and pop music. The result shuffles space and place, reducing inhabitation to the duration of the workout and providing something like a time travel experience in which those exercising "navigate through ancient landscapes that are ultimately not about the past but about the future." Egypt blends with Classical Greece, African plains, and modern American cityscapes in these films, thus reinforcing the way these locales are consumed as tourist stereotypes rather than leveraging their virtuality to deepen the cultural probe of each place.

Scott A. Lukas considers both place and space as a singular, dynamic, embedded experiential "dream object" in "The Theme Park Ride (In and of Itself) as a Cultural Form: An Investigation of Kinetics, Narrative, Immersion, and Concept." Here he charts the evolution of the amusement park/theme park attraction across four overlapping eras beginning at the dawn of the twentieth century: kinetics, narrative, immersion, and, finally, the transmechanical. At first a rider's sense of place—of inhabitation—was purely visceral; it was one of motion, speed, and heights. Then, as cinema became intertwined via the dark ride model, external places of popular culture formed a "shared spatial aesthetic" which has inevitably led to increasing levels of both immersion and virtuality. With many ride experiences now both virtual and gamified, Lukas posits that as space and place continually reconfigure and transmorph via emerging technologies "devices of the home will not only resemble (if not replace) public theme park rides, attractions, and associated entertainment machines," and they "may also achieve a future state of singularity."

Daniel Vella's "Gods of the Sandbox: *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* and the Fluidity of Virtual Environments" interrogates the unique properties of the virtual sandbox world of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (2020) and similar digital games. Such sandboxes are neither interactive, resistant playgrounds of ludic push and pull nor "god games" where the player is disembodied and omniscient. Instead, *AC:NH* and like virtual environments are "a non-place, a possibility space." Yi-Fu Tuan's separate notions of space and place crumble across this playscape in which every contour can be remade at will and both the grid of digital space and time itself are atomized and cut up by an ontology of measure. Vella draws upon contemporary philosophers Byung-Chul Han and Federico Campagna to demonstrate that, through their inexorable fluidity, the virtual sandbox is "central to our contemporary moment and a perfect representation of it." Inhabitation becomes compartmentalized; the landscape itself becomes a mutable social media feed of tasks, messages, and relationships.

"Space at Hand: Ever Nearer to *HλLF-LIFE*" by Michael Nitsche reminds us that the virtual world goes well beyond environments. Evoking performance theory and puppeteering, Nitsche uses the *HλLF-LIFE* game series as a case study to demonstrate the evolution of actionable objects and game engine physics. This culminates with *HλLF-LIFE: Alyx* (2020) in which "players can form their own sub-spaces . . . within which the role of the active object is growing." He argues that the game's Gravity Gloves—which allow the player a typical range of hand motions like grasping, holding, and writing, but also lifting impossibly heavy objects and pulling with invisible force distant ones—creates an entirely new notion of space within VR, a "space-at-hand." This "scaling up of detail in close quarters" shatters Yi-Fu Tuan's static conceptions of space, calls attention to enhanced object agency as a spatial practice, and emphasizes yet another unique property of the virtual—its elasticity.

Lastly, in Jon Yoder's "Aerial Viscosity: The Architecture of Drone Photography" we are reminded that virtuality is also bound up with *perceptions* of space. In arguing that "the architecture of drone photography draws attention to the intricacies of the aerial apparatus itself," Yoder

characterizes his own photography as well as the work of others as a deconstructivist practice which cuts across property lines and development narratives to free structures from the cartesian grid. Especially via oblique views which allow for greater dynamism than a satellite's top-down perspective, drones provide a "non-dimensional yet relational perspective" that allows artists and designers to explore the built environment as a digital game "from walkthrough to flythrough." Here, the idea of place is challenged by shifting the paradigm from which space is interrogated, allowing that which has already been "lived space" (in Van de Mosselaer and Gualeni's terms) to combine with the technological regime of the camera and drone itself, thus becoming its own unique kind of virtual experience.

Throughout these three volumes of *Virtual Interiorities*, the editors have favored approaches that may be concerned with technological matters yet are not overly wedded to them. This particular group of chapters invites us to consider the gym, digital games, the theme park attraction, a pair of virtual gloves, or the aerial drone through the lens of place and space. As Nele Van de Mosselaer and Stefano Gualeni remind us, the contributions to all three volumes are each, in their own way, somewhat philosophical in nature. Through this broader and more inclusive praxis, we hope future researchers will consider this or that technological advancement as a fluid entry point into a vast and ever-expanding metaworld of virtual experiences, identities, and perceptions.

Bibliography

Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.