

meatspace an experiment



A handful of people find themselves at a “meetspace” somewhere between the real world and the virtual one at a location in Linz over the course of four days of the festival. Their avatars in cyberspace function as agents, catalysts and interfaces between themselves and Internet users. By means of communication and interventions between the two spaces, the virtual/reality show is played out.

The “real players” are stationed in a sort of “intermediate world”—elevated out of everyday life and shifted into the spotlight à la reality TV. This “real space” is located in a newly opened business structure in a former VÖEST office building (www.city-tower-linz.at). If VÖEST as an industrial complex was once the very trademark of the “Steel City” and its blue-collar workforce, then the new tower symbolizes the transformation of an Industrial Society into an Information Society.

During the transitional phase prior to the building’s completion, Stadtwerkstatt is temporarily installing an autonomous zone there, a prototypical space at the interface of real space and cyberspace, a location at which, for a short time, the participants can meet one another and, simultaneously, be visited via the Internet.

The format of reality TV is sprouting up all over television land, accompanied by snapshot updates on the latest developments that can be accessed on a 24/7 basis on the Web. Why, one might ask? What is it about watching these banalities and mundane events that is so much fun for audience members? The possibility of identifying with the “star” on the screen, someone who doesn’t act all that differently than they do, who could be their neighbor, and might even be?

“Meatspace” is not a matter of instant stardom; rather, it has to do with an encounter bringing together computed and empirical worlds, and with cooperative behavior involving Internet users and people in the real world. Only by means of collaboration can tasks be carried out in the virtual and real worlds. Users all over the globe meet each other at a website and encounter “genuine human beings.” Here, however, the Internet does not simply provide supplementary information about events transpiring in the real world as is the case, for example, in the Austrian reality TV series *Taxi Orange*—what the cast members living together in Kutscherhof happen to be up to at the moment, how a particular cast member made out during a shift as a taxi driver, or what the TXO fans think about a mother who purportedly leaves her son alone. The possibilities of virtual reality—decentralized joint action, the representation of subjects via virtual proxies and a mode of dealing with these virtual figures that is uncoupled from the body—as well as essential elements of real life—the body as subject, as here and now with all of its possibilities, spontaneity, processual development of decisions, the sensory organs, the “illogical” logic, etc—intersect with one another in this setup.

This is a reciprocal interweaving of real and virtual actions, whereby one cannot lead to a positive outcome without the other. A certain degree of dependency of real persons upon the cooperative behavior of Internet users intensifies the situation and raises the question of the “consciousness of responsibility” on the part of the Internet community.



Its members, moreover, are not—as in the case of computer games—dealing with bits & bytes that die and are resurrected without consequences for real human beings, but rather working against/with real people who are represented in cyberspace as bits & bytes. In a video stream, the two worlds will finally be mixed together with each other—the virtual bodies, the real bodies, as well as the festival audience, which will get involved in what's happening every evening in a live communication situation from a streaming studio at the Kunstuniversität.

avatar n. Syn.

[in Hindu mythology, the incarnation of a god] 1. Among people working on virtual reality and cyberspace interfaces, an avatar is an icon or representation of a user in a shared virtual reality. The term is sometimes used on MUDs. 2. [CMU, Tektronix] root, superuser. There are quite a few Unix machines on which the name of the superuser account is 'avatar' rather than 'root'. This quirk was originated by a CMU hacker who found the terms 'root' and 'superuser' unimaginative, and thought 'avatar' might better impress people with the responsibility they were accepting.

[www.houghi.org/jargon/avatar.html]

meatspace/meet'spays/ n.

The physical world, where the meat lives—as opposed to cyberspace. Hackers are actually more willing to use this term than 'cyberspace,' because it's not speculative—we already have a running meatspace implementation (the universe).

[www.houghi.org/jargon/meatspace.htm]

team:

Konzept: Gabriele Kepplinger, Luis Wohlmuther, Brigitte Vasicek

VR: Alexander Wilhelm, Werner Pötzelberger, Juergen Hagler, Sabine Retschitzegger, Markus Pirker

Flash: Mario Kishalmi/Network/Streaming: Markus Panholzer, Didi Kressnig, Ufuk Serbest

TV: Bernd Aichberger/Moderation: Eva Pözl/Organisation: Manu Pfaffenberger

Consulting: Georg Ritter

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