



Baywatch

Pfarrplatz, a square in downtown Linz, is the gravitational center of this year's Ars Electronica Festival. The design of the square alludes to the Festival logo, an aerial view of Bondi Beach, Australia, and thus associates it with a beach in *Second Life*.

On this square, the physical reality of the cityscape blends with the virtual world of *Second Life* to form an artistic scenario that is constructed in both domains, *Second Life* and Real Life. Sand is heaped upon the real Pfarrplatz to form a beach, and a replica of it is installed in *Second Life*. The avatars that are moving about on the *Second Life* Pfarrplatz are perceivable on the *Real Life* Pfarrplatz by means of acoustic and visual signals—thus, they move virtually in real space.

In addition to the sound systems and screens that are needed to make the virtual components audible and visible in the real world, Pfarrplatz is also equipped with several reclining chairs and various other beach accessories. Together, they constitute bi-directional interfaces in that they, like all the rest of the props, are present in both virtual and real domains. The verbal interaction among the avatars in *Second Life* makes the transition to the real world via text-to-speech software and loudspeakers. Through the use of the numerous terminals providing a direct linkup to *Second Life*, visitors to the real Pfarrplatz can also simultaneously enter *Second Life* and complete the cycle of communications between the real world and the virtual one.

The overlaying of and interplay between these two realities give rise to a new realm in which virtual and physical presence are equated. Populated jointly by physically present festivalgoers and avatars, the virtual space that emerges on Pfarrplatz can be physically explored, whereby tele-representations move about through material space.

Surveillance technology links together the two domains whose architectures have been precisely coordinated by means of elaborate measurements and modeling, which makes it possible to generate real-time, collaboratively controlled scenarios involving physically present festivalgoers and avatars. Thus, the process of personal encounter with this domain of experience and its feedback loops is also determined by the experience that, in it, conducting surveillance and being the subject of surveillance correspond to one another and, as such, constitute preconditions of communication.

Translated from German by Mel Greenwald

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