My space, immersive experiences, chat rooms, virtual play-spaces, spatial stories, the architecture of games... much effort, in the digital realm, is invested in maintaining an illusion of three dimensions beyond the otherwise emphatically flat computer screen. With technological development facilitating great leaps forward in the depiction of animated movement, real-time navigation and photo-realistic imagery, the 2D surface has given way to persuasive 3D digital realities with, and in which, the reader/player might engage. Yet has immersion and participation encroached upon a more vital space between text and reader—a space in which, arguably, awareness of self, one’s context and, importantly, one’s ability to translate virtual experiences into real-world applications lose out in favour of experiential immediacy.

This paper examines various constructions of space in the virtual world, with a view to asking the question: To what extent is space in new media informed by the pursuit of pleasure at the expense of a critical space of discernment, reflection and creative response?

In her 1D: The Quest for Identity in the 21st Century (2008), neuroscientist Susan Greenfield argues that the increasingly ubiquitous and intrusive presence of the screen image is conflating life and its representation, particularly in the minds of the young, such that the capacity of the brain to critically reflect on what is experienced in the virtual realm is diminishing. Digital technology proffers heightened engagement, collaboration and participation; how might we exploit these booms while retaining the creative potentials of traditional media? Dan Pinchbeck’s (2006) proposals regarding Bertold Brecht’s alienation techniques and their relevance to game environments will be considered as a possible means of negotiating this dynamic between contemplative and immersive space.

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