Editor's Introduction: Reconfiguring Place and Space in New Media Writing

Jay David Bolter titled his influential study of the history of writing, the computer, and hypertext *Writing Space* [1991] in part because he believed that computers present us with a fundamental shift in the nature of the conceptual and material space of writing. Bolter wrote that while the writing space of medieval handwriting and modern printing was the printed page, the computer's writing space is "animated, visually complex, and to a surprising extent malleable" and that electronic writing offers a new conceptual space "characterized by fluidity and an interactive relationship between writer and reader" (11). It is perhaps emblematic of the progression of the field of new media writing that among Bolter's more recent projects is *Four Angry Men*, [2003] a "single-narrative, multiple point-of-view augmented reality experience," in which the user sits at a table in a physical space while experiencing an abridged version of *Twelve Angry Men* from the point of view of one of four jurors. The other characters appear as texture-mapped video in the other three chairs at the table. The multimedia writing space has extended from the computer back into the physical world.

From the earliest hypertext fictions written in Storyspace and the interactive fictions of the Infocom era, space and place have had distinctly different and in many ways more prominent roles than setting typically plays in the structure of print narratives. From the spelunking of *Adventure* and the *Zork* series onwards, interactive fictions are always in a fundamental sense about the description of imaginary spaces, and the readers' role is to navigate from one space to the next, solving riddles as they proceed. Hypertexts written in Storyspace software, such as Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* [1995], used that program's capacity to visually represent hypertext nodes as configurations of boxes connected by links to present visual maps of writing spaces. *Patchwork Girl* and Jackson's webwork *My Body & -- a Wunderkammer* [1997] both also integrate woodcut imagemaps of the protagonists' bodies, which the reader can click through to stories describing or related to each organ or appendage.

In most hypertext fiction, the role of chronology in structuring the narrative is greatly diminished in comparison to print fiction conventions. In the absence of chronology, the authors of fragmented multilinear narratives need to offer their readers other tools for navigating the text. In an environment described as *cyberspace*, developed with *home* pages on web *sites*, geographical metaphors make almost intuitive sense. Any textual link is of course itself a means of navigation, but authors of web hypertext typically offer readers other orienting strategies as well. In addition to a calendar and character-based means of navigation, Bobby Rabyd a.k.a. Robert Arellano's network novel *Sunshine 69* [1996] also provides a map of the San Francisco Bay area, enabling the reader to organize their reading geographically. The reader traverses Matthew Miller's "Trip"

[1996] by first choosing a state in the US and then by choosing specific interstates to change course. The collaborative hypertext novel *The Unknown* [1999] likewise used geography as an organizational strategy, and the road trip as a trope. Stuart Moulthrop's *Reagan Library* [1999] can be navigated both by textual links and by moving through a three-dimensional Myst-like Quicktime VR world. In Moulthrop's most recent work *Pax* [2003], the user clicks on bodies rising and falling through space, momentarily visiting each avatar's consciousness in the process of assembling a patchworked story of American consciousness during the war on (or in) terror. The collective narrative project *Mr. Beller's Neighborhood* includes hundreds of individual contributions of short fiction and nonfiction set in specific locations all over New York City. The reader can navigate to stories by selecting a New York neighborhood or by zooming in on a satellite map of Manhattan to the specific street address where the story takes place.

Since the 1980s, there have been a number of installation-based new media writing projects, including Jeffrey Shaw's *Legible City* [1989], which had the user navigating a labyrinthine city of words by riding a stationary bicycle. Installation-based forms of new media writing typically utilize the user's body as an instrument in revealing, uncovering, arranging, or modifying the text. In Camille Utterback & Romy Achituv's *Text Rain* [1999], users catch and play with letters as they fall like rain on the users' mirror images in the projection in front of them. In Noah Wardrip-Fruin et al.'s *Talking Cure* [2002], the user's face or body is projected as a text field that reveals one layer of a three-layer text centered on Anna O, Joseph Breur's patient that gave him and Freud the idea of the talking cure. Another layer of the text is created by the user's voice translated by a text-to-speech engine. Recently, Robert Coover has led a series of CAVE writing workshops at Brown University, which have produced a number of literary pieces designed for that fully immersive three-dimensional environment, including Noah Wardrip-Fruin et al.'s *Screen* [2002-2005] and William Gillespie and David Dao's *Word Museum* [2005]. CAVE installations give the user the sensation of being inside a computer-generated environment. Words and graphics become material forms that can peel off the wall and fly at your head, or can be approached from many angles like a sculpture in a museum.

While installations and VR environments have increasingly liberated the user's body from the seated-in-front-of-screen-at-keyboard position and brought the body inside the ontological space of the work itself, mobile computing and communication technologies are increasingly powerful and pervasive. Writers, artists, performers, and "puppet-masters" are employing network writing strategies to deploy a variety of projects that extend from the network into the real world. Projects such as Teri Rueb's *Itinerant* [2005] make use of mobile and locational technologies including GPS and RFID to create narrative experiences affected by the user's movement through the physical world. In the case of *Itinerant*, as users walked through Boston Commons

and surrounding neighborhoods they experienced an interactive sound work that re-framed Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Projects such as *Yellow Arrow* [2004-Present] pair coded stickers with text messaging, enabling users to write and read brief personal narratives about locations tagged in the physical world. *Implementation* [2004] is a fragmentary novel published on stickers that was deployed and photographed by participant readers around the world. *Surrender Control* [2001] utilized SMS as a performance medium, sending its users a series of directions as text messages, ordering them to perform a variety of absurdist actions during the course of their everyday lives. Similarly, the phenonmenon of flash mobs makes use of text messaging to assemble groups of people for alternately absurdist and political activities. Extensible web technologies such as Google Maps paired with GPS coordinates also offer narrative possibilities, as evidenced by projects such as the "Memory Maps" group on Flickr, whose users have created personal narratives of places through coordinate-tagged photographs accessed through interactive maps.

This installment of the *Iowa Review Web* explores the function of place and space in recent new media writing. Each of the four interviews concern works that in some way attempt to reconfigure our understanding of the relationship between space and storytelling. Each of the primary works discussed in these interviews also pushes space in another sense, in that each attempts to explore a new "possibility space" on the boundary between different forms and fields of multimedia experience: between story and game, between game and drama, between literature and conceptual art, between game and performance.

Nick Montfort and Jeremy Douglass discuss Montfort's new interactive fiction *Book and Volume* [2006], a work that casts the player character as a kind of cross betweeen a flâneur and Pavlovian functionary, a computer tech completing the quotidian tasks of working life in the grid city of nTopia. The work explores the nature of the phenomenological experience of life in the city, among other aspects how the idle chatter and white noise of city life affect our experience of the polis as place. Montfort says "These things are sort of irrelevant to you as a human being in an ontological world, but nevertheless are going on all around you in the city, and reminding you of the existence of city life. So, in addition to there being a literary purpose for wanting these amusing texts to appear once in a while, there is also a connection to the atmosphere and experience of a city."

Andrew Stern and Michael Mateas discuss with Brenda Harger the process of writing and programming their groundbreaking interactive drama *Façade*. The 2006 Slamdance Guerilla Gamemaker Award-winner, *Façade* [2005] is a game in the form of an interactive one-act play. The player character, an avatar in a partially three-dimensional environment, arrives one night at

the apartment of two old college friends, now married, in the midst of a fairly tense argument. You as the player become embroiled in their argument, cast into the role of referee. Insofar as there is a goal in *Façade*, it is to moderate a therapy game and manage the intractable marital discord of your hosts, as you navigate the anxious and awkward spaces of both Grace and Trip's small urban apartment and the crumbling edifice of their relationship. Mateas highlights *Façade*'s inversion of the commercial gaming conventions of vast virtual environments that players wander having shallow interactions with "objects and non-player characters--dodging, jumping, running, shooting, etc." to a more intimate environment that fosters "deep interaction."

Shelley Jackson offers a discussion of her recent work in print, electronic, and epidermal media. Jackson is the author of the print fiction collection *The Melancholy of Anatomy* [2002] and the forthcoming novel *Half Life*, electronic works including the canonical hypertext fiction *Patchwork Girl* and the webwork *The Doll Games*[2002], and most recently the story "Skin," [2004-Present] which is being published on the skin of 2,095 volunteers in the form of single word tattoos. The interview focuses in particular on the various ways that Jackson has thematized the intimately alien space of the human body. Jackson writes "I am feeling my way through some sort of impossible topological figure here, probably a Klein bottle, to explain the outside-inness of my sense of self, but there are other ways to put it. Let's see if this is simpler: there are some parts of me that are permanently unknowable, and one of those things is the very basis of knowing: the body."

Jane McGonigal is a designer and practictioner of alternate reality games. McGonigal provides a discussion of massively collaborative play and performance in everyday spaces. Alternate reality games such as *I Love Bees*[2004] and the *Go Game* are cross-media experiences, typically played both via the web and other communication technologies and in physical real-world environments. Players perform the games based on the clues and prompts of "puppet-masters." In navigating the path of challenges laid by the puppetmasters, players uncover and in a sense help to author a controlling narrative, while simultaneously developing the emergent narrative of their own experience of the game. McGonigal writes that "Stories linger in the places after we experience them. And the stories we tell about our personal experiences in a place help us own that space, to feel comfortable there, to make others comfortable there, to feel alive there. I believe the job of the designers of reality-based games like big urban games and alternate reality games is to figure out: What kind of story would players want to be able to tell about this space?"

Monfort's *Book and Volume* and Mateas and Stern's *Façade* are both featured works in this installment of the *Iowa Review Web* and are available for your download, play, and interaction. I hope that these new works and interviews will give you a window on four very different ideas of

the function of place and space in new media writing and will perhaps inspire some other writers to take advantage of some of the vast potentialities of creating new writing spaces at the intersection of virtual environments and real-world geography.

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