



Reiner Schneeberger

The Primcurator

Planning a Retrospective of an Art Form

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It will be seen in the year 2035 whether the project to archive the first works of Avatakunst published on the occasion of the reopening of the Kunsthalle Bremen this summer will keep its promise: to conserve walkable

3D-worlds in the way they have existed since 2005 ¹⁾. 3D-worlds are at a technological turning point and with this change there is a schism for the artists there. How this change could look was demonstrated in a talk hosted by IPAC ²⁾. The intention was to show the use of avatar-based technology in various fields. Vicki Preston writes in *Paros Life*, July 2011: "... Twelve lucky people had witnessed an Avatar walking through a three-dimensional world, steered only by nothing more than the human brain and their body. No cables, no keyboard, no mouse, just the performer who came directly from London to Paros to display their Avatar persona to present this new work in progress called 'The colliding' ³⁾". The device is called Kinect and it is based on gesture control, well-known to players of the console XBOX 360 ⁴⁾. Furthermore, Microsoft plans to integrate Kinect into Windows 8.

With the EPOC headset of Emotiv, there is even breathtaking technology about to be implemented using only the human brain to navigate it ⁵⁾. The Vietnamese developer Tan Le, an engineer from Australia working in San Francisco, received the Auto Vision Future Award for this invention in Braunschweig in 2011. Will artists now move fully towards interactivity? Is art that interacts with the user or better the "walking person" going to become the norm? All these questions do not concern the writer for the project of the primcurator. His task is to conserve the works of digital art over time, because they are transitory by nature; they exist only in virtual worlds, in computers, as software and this software will no longer exist one day. And this is happening faster than one would expect. The first work of interactive art, made in 1979, could only be re-invented with a tremendous effort in 2007. It was designed by Herbert W. Franke and this software was named Mondrian. The purpose of it was to generate color patterns with the user in an interactive way. The computer was a Texas Instruments TI 99/4 and its technology in embedded graphics was outstanding at that time. With the appearance of the PC, the first generation of interactive art disappeared. Due to the fact that Prof. Franke still had a working TI 99/4 and a few notations about the specifications of the program, it was possible to reprogram it for Microsoft Windows XP ⁶⁾. However, because of time and money restrictions some functions, like sound generation had to be waived. Therefore the reborn Mondrian by H.W. Franke had to remain mute. The revitalization of a pioneer work in flatart, as a system of art in two dimensions, had to remain unfinished. The task of the primcurator is to avoid this happening to art that is in 3D-worlds nowadays ⁷⁾.

When the Internet Dies

It happens silently and it happens daily. Functions which were standard 10 years ago are emulated nowadays, dragged along would be a better description. But the change is becoming more radical as the internet is turning out to be the feeding machine of the world. And the world wants more. It very often happens that a message shows up, "Your browser is not up to date" and then, "Should this website be converted?" ...



We are π - Avatars: 1stBerta as cat, Third Mirror as Guardian Angel, First Prim as time traveler

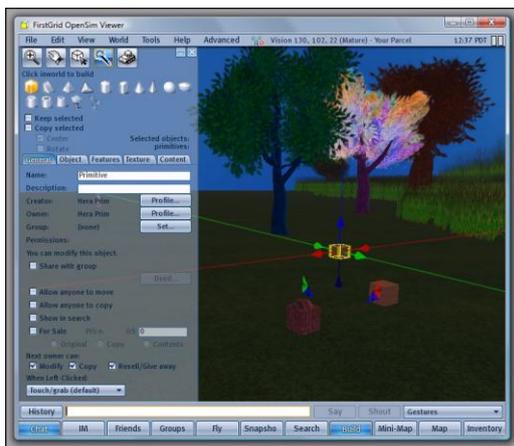
And then warning, "Attention: possible loss of data during conversion" and at some point it is finished. All 3D-worlds use the internet as an intermediary. A client, a viewer (meaning the group of software one can use to enter such a world), checks via the internet if everything is still up-to-date and if not, it requests an "update". If you decline, the viewer simply will not start any longer, because only the newest version is maintained and the use of an older version is disabled. Also legal aspects have an increasing impact. Software is slowly becoming patentable. Some developers think a function can be used as freeware or even more when they have programmed it themselves, though there is already a group of well-paid lawyers just waiting for the commercial success of these lone warriors. But there are also pragmatic reasons. Without a critical mass of users, a further development of software has no foundation. So art that was created in the first years of 3D-worlds will be lost. The worlds are simply no longer walkable. They have been deleted or covered with spam or other projects. The gold-rush mood that evolved commercialization⁸⁾ and stylized a life culture – catchword Second Life - in the years around 2008, has not done any good for this type of art.

The task remains to conserve the beginning of three-dimensional art for future generations. The primcurator does not want to do this by making a motion picture in rooms and installations in 3D; he wants to keep them walkable. His task is to conserve virtual worlds of this area for the future.

Characteristics of a 3D-World

A three-dimensional world is walkable, but not a 2D-world. It makes sense to have a fast look back into 2-dimensions as later we want some ideas about the 4th-dimension, the "world on a wire". A 2D-world is based on points, lines and plane surfaces. There is no depth to it. If there is a need for depth in a 2D-world, this is done by the illusion of a projection by the observer and the camera. This was the way for developing graphic systems until the eighties⁹⁾. The output of the works, mostly drawings, happened on pen plotters or flatbed plotters. Architects also preferred the reproduction of their concepts via ground plans and sectional drawings. Therefore it took quite long until a completely new way of doing made it become standard, i.e., the user becomes an avatar.

Avatar – we know it from the movie *James Cameron's Avatar* – where a human enters the body of a native of the Navi tribe. As a matter of fact, research at Stanford University's Virtual Human Interaction Lab has shown that in 3D-worlds similar effects happen as we know them in a well-written thriller ¹⁰). One quickly finds oneself in the role of the protagonist. Of course you need to be fan of thrillers. Not everybody will become a passionate avatar; some will see in it only a tool to navigate a three-dimensional space. Therefore the design of an avatar can vary considerably; sometimes it's more functional, sometimes it may be an image out of a dream. What makes the world that an avatar enters is the 3rd dimension on which it is based. The smallest element is a primitive, in short a prim. A prim is in the shape of a cube that can vary using parameters to become cuboid or a contorted form of it. In addition, the system that the primcurator has selected for his purpose includes: Cylinder, Prism, Sphere, Torus, Tube, Ring, Sculpted. The name of the system is opensimulator ¹¹). It is available as open-source to everybody free of charge. The origin goes back to the year 2005.



Prims in their basic forms

This means that the data model is now getting a bit old-fashioned. Nevertheless, the main part of the innovation is the viewer. It is impossible to operate a world without a viewer, which is the name of the software used to see, visit and explore.

It will be just a database without causing any emotion of an art experience for the user. So just the viewer is the main point. There are quite a few viewers for worlds that are based on opensim: Imprudence, Hippo, Phoenix, Dolphin, Kirstens, Singularity just to mention a few ¹²). The possibility to design the avatar is common to all. The avatar as already mentioned is not just a camera as it was in the beginning of the 3D-development, when the first systems were set up to visualize buildings – no, it is an “Identity Unit” to quote Rainer Werner Fassbinder. One could say following Jean Paul ‘a machine of men’. According to Jean Paul men are, in turn, machines of the angels ¹³). To understand these words, one needs to enter the 3D-world. How else is it possible to get the feeling of a 3D-world of art when the visitor stays in two dimensions? You can work with perspective, make films and some ideas are transferred. But it is like a person who is partially color blind and you try to explain the missing color to him. Every explanation as taught by Wittgenstein, comes to an end at some point. Only the doing, the pointing to an object counts. And this exactly is the mission of the primcurator: To bring the 3D-worlds as they are now back to life again in the year 2035.

Simulacron 1: Das Museum

Out of the range of available works the primcurator selects similar to Noah's Ark. In addition to this students are also invited to contribute to the works of the already established artists of 3D-art. It is no wonder since the primcurator has been teaching arts education, or more specifically art informatics, for more than 30 years. Students of art and arts education, but also from different fields and persons interested in doing art learn in seminars how such a 3D-world works ¹⁴). They can bring in their own works and have others experience them. The rooms provided look similar to a museum from the time of Queen Victoria. Some of the rooms are reserved for the core of the idea. One can say they represent the permanent collection of the castle owner. His name is First Prim; he is the first in the world of prims.



Artist Met Knelstrom shows his works 'Genesis' to an illustrious audience. Minimal Blue turns this into events generating Avatarkunst that is conserved by First Prim for 100 years. The availability of the storage is guaranteed until 13.08.2110 by network solutions, a company of General Atlantic LLC.

First Prim

First Prim is not only the curator or conservator. He only looks at the works superficially. The actions of the avatars, their interpretation of the works, their own presentation and their experience are of his main interest. Therefore he invites people to grand openings, guided tours and talks. He conserves the impressions that arise to present them as Avatarkunst in his rooms. This way a photo collection becomes a walkable world. Thanks to conservation, this will remain over time. In 25 years avatars will meet in the Bremer Kunsthalle, one can say in the language of facebook to check-in for a class reunion to reflect what has happened since 2012, the day of the conservation of the world they are coming from. Then it will be time to breathe new life into the old technology and to make it run via the internet of the year 2035.

World on a Wire: the 4th Dimension

Time is a core element not only in art history. *James Cameron's Avatar* made a revenue of three billion dollars and is now a milestone in the world of film.

Many viewers also assign it a deeper dimension. The human spirit can be transferred to another body. This idea is not new; it was used 35 years ago by Rainer Werner Fassbinder in his movie "Welt am Draht" (World on a Wire)¹⁵⁾. Now there has been much posthumous recognition: Berlinale Berlin 2010, Museum of Modern Art New York. The remastering of the original work is now available in five languages. The plot was adapted from the novel *Simulacron-3*¹⁶⁾. It was written by Daniel F. Galouye, an American test pilot and dates back to the year 1964. Credit must be given to the Fassbinder Foundation for granting rights of use of some stills for reflexion in a 3D-world for the purpose of art education. Persons taking part in the project of prim-conservation are invited to use them for their individual experience to set up a personal message related to their Identity Unit in the computer world. Who knows if they will get in contact with Dr. Stiller?¹⁷⁾

TAGrez[®]: a Museum without Boundaries

What gives headaches to curators, museum directors and exhibition managers in the real world, namely, having more works than they will ever be able to present, is really no problem for the primcurator at all. He indeed has unlimited space to use, because a room can be refurnished within seconds. Where there have just been works by the artist Navah Dreams, appear artworks by Art Eames at a click – or do you want to see some things by Exy Atreides, a famous 3D-artist making installations based on Steampunk? The reason for this is that objects can be shown like a switch on or off or being transferred from the embedded inventory in the database. Additionally, thanks to TAGrez, there is not even a need to click.

All that is needed is to buy a tag at the virtual payment desk of the museum ¹⁸⁾. Then the visitor has to show the tag and wear it. With the similar technology TAGrezTimer[®] ¹⁹⁾ a time driven exhibition is also possible. A special exhibition by one of the computer art pioneers Herbert W. Franke daily from 10-11 AM and 4-5 PM could be an example. To become famous in the world of 3D is much easier than you might imagine. Just give your artist tag to friends and they can ensure that there is a rush to meet your art presentation. For what other reason do you have Facebook, Twitter, mySpace, ICQ, Skype conferences and more? Andy Warhol said, “In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes” ... and he is correct ...



The museum in Simulcaron-1: Castle Petrov, built by Arhamis diCremona.
A video is in Youtube at <http://bit.ly/tpc-museum>

Footnotes:

1 Catalogue Wunderkammer, Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen 2011. Text online at <http://3d.wunderkammermusik.de>

2 IPAC: International Paros Art Circle; more at <http://ipac.gr>

3 Paroslife, June 2011, Paros; Text online at <http://bit.ly/pk-pl>

4 Damon Tajeddini, Minority Report im Fernsehsessel, Windows-Programme mit Gesten steuern, c't magazin, Issue 11/2011, p. 168-171, Heise Verlag

5 Matthias Winkelmann, Gedanken steuern Computer, Erfinderin Tan Le bekommt auf Zukunftskongress Preis für revolutionäre Technologie, Leipziger Volkszeitung, 01.07.2011, p. 7

6 Reiner Schneeberger, 2037: Auf einen Kaffee mit Minimal Blue, dot 20, dot Verlag, Frankfurt/M., 2009, p. 28-29; Information about H.W. Franke's Mondrian at <http://mondrian21.com>

7 The task of the primcurator is to store and document all components that are needed to set up the 3D-application on suitable media. In addition, he gains knowledge to make a rerun possible whatever might happen in the future of IT-technology. This might be to set up a local Internet-Server, but also to check the legal aspects of doing so. It is recommended to inspect the complete system every five years and update the backups already done. More at <http://primcurator.com>

8 Updated information at Hypergridbusiness.com, see: <http://bit.ly/tpc-08>

9 The computergraphic system named SNE ART '76 designed by the author with kind support of Hans Korneder and Dietrich Scheringer was used until the late 80s in the education of students at the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Munich (Prof. Hans Daucher), at Control Data Institute for Graphic Programming and at the University of Applied Science Bielefeld in the Department of Design (Generative Bildsysteme, Prof. Gottfried Jäger). It was programmed in FORTRAN. It became a milestone in the area of teaching programmed art (Softwarekunst) because it was made specifically for interested amateurs. Everyone could start to generate computer art drawings on paper after a very short first lecture. Nevertheless, the results were given awards by international museums and have been reprinted worldwide. More at <http://bit.ly/tpc-09> (in German only)

10 Jim Blascovich, Jeremy Bailenson, Infinite Reality: Avatars, Eternal Life, New Worlds, and the Dawn of the Virtual Revolution, 304 pages, publishing house William Morrow, 2011

11 more at <http://opensimulator.org> or <http://bit.ly/tpc-08>

12 Mathias Jacob developed for this project the FirstGrid viewer, which can be downloaded via the links given at <http://bit.ly/tpc-12>. The viewer works with no time restriction on Windows XP, Vista, 7 as it needs no internet connection. Opensimulator version 0.7.1.1. for Windows and Linux have been conserved to match the viewer. The same is true for all system components to ensure a stand-alone running in the future and to allow virtualization as well

13 Jean Paul, Men are machines of the angels, 1785; online at <http://bit.ly/tpc-13>

14 Information about the seminars at <http://avatarkunst.com>

15 Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Welt am Draht (World on a Wire), 1973, DVD remastered 2010, Arthaus Collection, see: <http://bit.ly/tpc-15>

16 There are many messages in Simulacron. One message could be that as soon as mankind has perfectly developed a world within the computer and experiences it by sending navigators so that the Identity Units build a simulator themselves - will mankind then think about the navigators in his world differently? William Sims Bainbridge, Professor at George Mason University and the author of "God from the Machine: Artificial Intelligence Models of Religious Cognition ..." (Alta Mira Press, 2006, 180 pages) developed the software "The Year 2100" to collect personality items for a later input to generate personalized agent-avatars. Software for download at <http://bit.ly/tpc-16>

17 Press information at Berlinale 2010 at <http://bit.ly/tpc-17>

18 Reiner Schneeberger, Art on Demand per RFID – Als Avatar in virtuellen Ausstellungen, Museum Aktuell, March 2009, pp. 20-23

19 The software TAGREZ©, TAGrezTimer© can be used under creative commons; more at <http://bit.ly/tpc-19>

About the author:

Reiner Schneeberger, born in Munich in 1957. He did his MBA at the University Erlangen-Nürnberg in applied informatics, politics and communication science.

Award for Excellence in computer art, by Whitney Museum und Museum of Modern Art, N.Y.
Award for his calendar 'Computerkultur' by Prof. Olaf Leu.

Founder of Computer Minimal Art, promoted by H.W. Franke as a companion for developing artinformatics (Kunstinformatics). Lifelong member of Kunsthalle Bremen.

Mission: To conserve digital art by using 3D-worlds. Inspire artinformatics (Kunstinformatics).

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