Chapter 6

LPDT2: La Plissure du Texte 2

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will discuss the artistic processes involved in the creation of the three dimensional, virtual art installation La Plissure du Texte 2, which is the sequel to Roy Ascott’s groundbreaking telematically networked art work La Plissure du Texte, created in 1983 and shown in Paris at the Musée de l’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris during that same year. While the underlying concepts of the original art work, as well as its capability of regenerating itself as an entirely novel manifestation based upon the concepts of distributed authorship, textual mobility, emergent semiosis, multiple identity, and participatory poesis will be underlined, the main focus of the text will be upon the creative strategies as well as the technological means through which the architecture was brought about in the contemporary creative environment of the metaverse. A further topic that will be covered is the challenge of exhibiting what is after all an art work that requires full virtual immersion to bring about a deep level experience and understanding of it, in the physical world, i.e. ‘Real Life’—in a gallery or museum space in which such a virtual immersion cannot be readily obtained.

INTRODUCTION

La Plissure du Texte 1983

The title of the project, La Plissure du Texte: A Planetary Fairy Tale, alludes to Roland Barthes’s book Le Plaisir du Texte (1973), a famous discourse on authorship, semantic layering, and the creative role of the reader as the writer of the text. As was also the case in its first incarnation “distributed authorship,” a term coined by Ascott (2003, pp. 191-208) has been the primary subject of investigation of LPDT2. Since La Plissure du Texte 1983 is the inspiration as well as the precedent of our own endeavors; we believe that, before we present our ongoing work in the three

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dimensionally embodied metaverse, it will be well placed to delve into a brief description of Roy Ascott’s original work, which was shown during the exhibition ‘Electra: Electricity and Electronics in the Art of the XXth Century’ at the Musée Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in the fall of 1983. The invitation had been extended by Frank Popper, the curator of the show, to Ascott in 1982; and the artist felt that this presented him with a perfect opportunity to create a large scale telematic event that would incorporate ideas which he had formed over the previous twenty or more years. La Plissure du Texte sought to set in motion a process by which an open ended, nonlinear narrative might be constructed from an authoring ‘mind’ whose distributed nodes were interacting on a planetary scale (Ascott, 2005).

One of the pathways to La Plissure were the psychic systems that Ascott had been studying since the early 1960s, such as telepathy across oceans, communication with the disincarnate in distant worlds; as was evidenced in some of his writings such as his text entitled ‘The Psibernetic Arch’ from 1970. These convictions led him, a decade later, to formulate ideas of distributed mind and the concept of distributed authorship which were embedded in LPDT. However, coupled with his interest in the world of the psychic was also Ascott’s strong preoccupations with cybernetics, which drew him to, what was for him at that point, the equally mysterious world of computer mediated telecommunications. Further inspirations were also in signs, in semiotics, and in myths which was also fed by Vladimir Propp’s study of narrative structure and the morphology of the fairy tale.

Ascott (2005) conceived of LPDT as “a project involving multiple associative pathways for a narrative that would unroll asynchronously according to the centers of action that determined its development. The outcome would be multilayered, nonlinear in all its bifurcations.” This also had a precedent in a project which Ascott had previously set up as part of Robert Adrian X’s ‘The World in 24 Hours,’ an electronic networking event held at Ars Electronica in 1982 which involved participants at their computer terminals around the world tossing coins for the first planetary throw of the I Ching. Just as was the case with this earlier work, La Plissure du Texte also utilized ARTEX, an early email system that was initiated under the name of ARTBOX in 1980 by Adrian X, Bill Bartlett, and Gottfried Bach to offer artists a cheap and simple alternative to business oriented communication programs which were beginning to increasingly be available in the early 1980s.

When Ascott posted a description of the project on the ARTEX network in July 1983, artists and art groups in 11 cities in Europe, North America, and Australia came into the project. In November of that year each participating node was allocated the role of a traditional fairy tale character, such as princess, witch, fairy godmother etc. Beyond this simple concept of the fairy tale however, Ascott was careful not suggest to a story line or a plot; instead the participants were asked to improvise. The notion behind this was that Ascott also wanted to bring in the element of surprise which would be generated by the differences between time zones which would cause the narrative to often overlap and be fragmented, thus inevitably leading into a multiplicity of directions.

La Plissure du Texte was active on line twenty-four hours a day for twelve days: from December 11 to 23, 1983. With terminals in eleven cities, the network grew to include local networks of artists, friends, and random members of the general public who would happen to be visiting the museum of art space where the terminals were located. Over the three week period of the project hundreds of “users” became involved in a massive intertext, the weaving of a textual tissue that could not be classified, even though ostensibly the project was to generate a ‘planetary fairytale’ (Ascott, 2005).

La Plissure du Texte 1983 turned out to be a fulcrum point in Ascott’s work, showing him the importance of text as an agent of not merely theory
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