

Digital Tourism

Chris A. Wright

United Kingdom

drcawright@yahoo.com

1 | INTRODUCTION

The origins of this review lies in the exhibition *Anywhere is Everywhere is a Circular Tale* shown at tAd Gallery, Denton, Texas in 2014, curated by Araya Vivorakji and includes other research undertaken in Las Vegas to explore how inauthenticity can provide the authentic tourist experience especially through the use of digital media and its access by the everyday Internet browser. It was further discussed as the subject of a conference paper *Anywhere is Everywhere -Tales of a Virtual Traveller* at the EVA (Electronic Visualization of the Arts) Conference in London in 2015. The exhibition explored the notions of the traveller through the physical manifestation of a virtual journey. This, which linked the town of Denton, Texas with the eleven places called Denton, in England. Presented as the narrative of that trip, the English towns were linked in a 1,026 mile, 21 hours and 57 minute circular journey, which were negotiated via internet-based maps. This was set out in 301 steps of detailed instructions. In addition, postcards, photographs in the form of a presentation and souvenirs from the journey were presented to form a comprehensive retelling of those travels. The journey instructions and tourist ephemera gave a physical presence to the exhibition that belied their origins. The places were only visited virtually, the sights were only seen through others' eyes, the descriptions were second-hand and the impressions gained were only through what was seen on my computer screen, sitting quietly at home. It was a

tourist guide that, by way of its virtuality, created a false reality.

The initial context of the exhibition was to present work that had a physical presence and that showed a journey in all its glories, by means of the presentation and souvenirs; that looked at notions of space and place especially in relation to virtual space and created links between communities however distant. It had to extend my own art practice and research, which relates to space and place, identity and absence and also encompasses philosophical concepts such as Heidegger's ideas of gathering and dwelling and Foucault's heterotopias. Therefore the exhibition and paper looked at ideas of place and its identity through relationships and links, virtual place, tourism, Internet art, authorship, digital flâneurism and the authentic/inauthentic debate.

2 | HOW TO GET FROM HERE TO THERE WITHOUT LEAVING YOUR CHAIR

The basic idea of digital tourism is especially prescient today. Amalgamated from research quoted in Hall and Page (2000), taken in the early 1980's, the top aims of a tourist are escape – from civilization, from routine and responsibility; relaxation, enjoyment of nature, creativity and physical exercise. Digital tourism can provide this.

The original exhibition presented a circular journey without comfort breaks, sleep or food and also without taking in any potential sights or viewpoints. Crucially, it was without human contact. It was purely

a road trip without the romance of Kerouac, the human interface of Joyce. It even lacked the conceptual romance of Iain Sinclair's walk around the M25 in London (London Orbital: A Walk Around the M25 by Iain Sinclair, Dave McKean, Renchi Bicknell). It lacked any interesting snippet of information or opportunity to gaze around or watch a sunset. It was a journey driven by the necessity of following instructions, the step-by-step guide to each junction, a robotic action. The aim was to see if these written instructions would create a sense of direction and turn the robotic actions into a sense of place, creating maybe a community feel and create the sense of a journey.

It must be remembered here that the facts presented are not necessarily true; they may be an accurate account or the figment of some person's imagination, all information was taken from the Internet. Thus the facts presented in this article may be purely fiction, contain a percentage of fact or, indeed, be true. The reality is probably a mixture of them all. Typing 'Denton' into a search engine presented a mix of local history, accounts of council meetings, information on public buildings as well as business advertisements with all Dentons mixed up. Some official information appeared to be genuine, or at least hoped, to be genuine. Advertisements could be said to be a gloss on the true facts whilst local history reflected a deep interest of such matters but was also probably included a mix of hearsay. However, information was taken, in this context, as pure truth and absolute fact. A question posed by the 2005 exhibition *Universal Experience: Art, Life and the Tourist's Eye* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago asks,

What kind of truth do we want to believe in?
(Bonami and Dahlgren, 2005, p. 18).

3 | WHERE IS THE TRUTH?

The truth here could be seen as a new kind of authenticity whereby representation of simulacra as facts and artefacts creates a haziness of vision which intersects past and present, time and space and mediates between real and false, constantly weaving in and out. From an artist viewpoint, the use of the copy, from photographs to Internet imagery, could be seen as fraudulent. The questions that arise such

as the ownership of the work are, at once, nebulous and specific. The authorship of the exhibition as a whole lies with the artist but to who does an image of a public place such as a road junction belong? The photographs are presented in a fast moving and deliberately unpeopled slide show that identifies with ambiguous roundabouts and junctions more than recognisable places, in general, public spaces. The images are taken from the web and clearly show the attribution. However, my presentation in this exhibition, whilst displaying inherent deception, was presented as truth. Adrian Franklin states,

we accept that everything has a claim to authenticity; everything has a unique cultural content, even fakes...It is a world of fakes, reproductions, fusions, hybrids and so forth and computer-driven simulation electronics enable (almost) everyone to be quite creative within this graphical, visual infinity (Franklin, 2003, p. 266).

My own research investigates the inauthentic 'posing as authentic' especially in the touristic and commercial space where the 'fake' may be seen as acceptable to some viewpoints such as souvenirs of England made abroad in places such as China. The authenticity is based on manipulation of information and artefacts to present a coherent fictionalisation. It presented a *mise-en-scène* for tourism, which can be looked at from a wider viewpoint. These differing views and what happens when the fake is used was investigated at locations such as Las Vegas Strip.

Las Vegas Strip as a site of contention where, to the casual visitor, the fake is an acceptable part of the experience. Eco states "absolute unreality is offered as real presence" (Eco, 1996, p. 7). In earlier research, I write "Site is constantly mobilised between real and fake. Their synchronicity is total and replicas become real replicas because of behavioural object, the spectator." (Wright, 2012). The inauthentic thus becomes authentic created by the activity of the visitor.

4 | TIME, PLACE AND THE REAL

In *Anywhere is Everywhere is a Circular Tale*, the visitors' presence activated the scene, which then acted as guidebook, museum as well as exhibition. The movement of the viewer through the gallery

created its own journey, whereby fiction became fact, but only through the experience of the viewer and in such a way that the time frame became confused, past and present becoming layered. The place that the viewer further identifies with is linked to this convoluted time frame intermingling with the experience of their own making and the creation of place through the act of being in that particular place at that particular time. Sharr writes

. . . places are made particular by individuals – in complex and ever shifting ways – within the . . . generality of space (Sharr, 2009, p.56)

From this angle, it seems that accepting the inauthentic as authentic is a valid response. The fake has become real through the creation of individual placement and through the particularities of its location. It is thus easy to accept a site, encompassing all within it, as genuine in its entirety and inauthenticity is not a barrier to experiencing the 'real'. Thus, it is my belief that the everyday Internet user can access imagery that can create a valid travel experience only within certain parameters that allow for the exclusion of the everyday experience.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Author's name is Dr. Chris A. Wright. I am a practicing artist and researcher based in the East Midlands. My main research interests concern integrated practical and theoretical investigations of transitional spaces which include transitions from space to place (e.g. the notion of particles existing in multiple places simultaneously); the border within both traditional media and digital (for example, how place is seen as a internet entity); materiality and processes (currently looking at paint as a sculptural medium). These ideas I explore using sculpture, photography, video, digital media and sound. I have exhibited and presented papers and talks in Italy, New Zealand, Norway and the USA as well as the UK. References include artists Ronan Ondàk, Francis Alÿs and Katie Patterson, philosophers, Heidegger, Foucault and Bachelard and theorists such as Augé, de Certeau and Lefebvre.