

What is Reality?...What is Real?...

That's an interesting question. In today's technological world of information flow, more and more people are spending a large majority of their conscious hours are spent in so-called cyber-space. The images and words on screen fill the mind, the interactivity of the interface becomes an actual extension of the body. Does this virtual arena hold a real place in time and space?

Prior to the complexity of the internet, visual media has entertained and informed people of situations apart from their own. Television has for decades been a window to the world, flashing documentation and fantasy from its portal to viewers in millions of households. This past century has seen the TV set replace the hearth as the center of family gatherings. Film and motion pictures have transported viewers from their (home) theater seat to fantastic worlds imagined in the future, past or present. Video games have reached a level of sophistication that encompasses all the senses of the gamer drawing them into realms that challenge the mental skill as well as physical coordination. Children, very early in life, are training through problem-solving interactions and fine-tuning motor skills.

The network of personal computers has connected the entire globe to communicate within fractions of seconds. Business transactions, shopping, chatting, education, and entertainment can all flow directly from servers anywhere in the unknown world directly into your living and ultimately into your mind. The information is real enough. The impressions upon the mind have real and lasting effects on the persona. Is this reality?

The subject of perception comes into play here. How one perceives the world, interacts with it, remembers it and imagines it, shapes what one thinks, how one behaves, and ultimately who one is. How is architecture involved with this level of perception? Physical space, buildings and landscapes, directly affects the perception and action of the user. But what of the places that are seen through pictures? If one has never been to Rome, for example, one might still gain a real understanding of Rome through study, images, maps, texts, etc. One understands Rome as a real place, though never actually having to be there. What about a place that doesn't exist physically, but only through images, and words? For example, a scene in movie or picture in a magazine, is this place real? Images of photographed physical architecture often portray a brand new building, brilliant in it's pose, without stain or weather. Is this real? Is this reality?

I would like to submit that it is real. It leaves a real impression upon the mind that causes a real effect in the people that make-up the fabric of our communities. Architecture, in this sense, can be just as potent within a virtual realm, as it can in a physical. The ideas manifested in the reality of the image are transferred to viewers of the image giving them an understanding of the spatial quality of the architecture. Perhaps this definition of real is too general, and there are different intensities of so-called reality. So the question then is not what is real or not...but what is architecture?

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