Moving Images - Static Spaces: Architectures, Art, Media, Film, Digital Art and Design

• Paper / Proposal Title:
VRchive Or, How to Hold your Archive in a Digital Age

• Author(s) Name:
Dr. Simon Tarr (University of South Carolina) // TARR@mailbox.sc.edu
Prof. Evan Meaney (University of South Carolina) // eemeaney@mailbox.sc.edu

• University or Company Affiliation:
The University of South Carolina (United States)

• Presentation Method. I would like to:

  i. present in person (with/without a written paper)
  ii. present via pre-recorded film (with/without a written paper)
  iii. present via skype (with/without a written paper)

• Abstract (300 words):
It is a challenge to touch the digital. Keyboards, mice, and screens proxy a tactile experience, promoting our blinking cursors to primary investigators, while we sit by, eyes glazing over, as page after page of metadata tags scroll on. Traditional, two-dimensional computer searches are great at aggregating data you already know you want to
retrieve, but what about searching in an archive and allowing something to catch your eye? A digital dérive? What about allowing for the experience of an unexpected search? How else may a new digital space be mapped?

VRchive is a shared, interdisciplinary project between the Moving Image Research Collections (MIRC), the Research Cyberinfrastructure (RCI) high performance computing group, and the School of Visual Art and Design (SVAD), all connected at the University of South Carolina. This software prototype ports current archival information-seeking methodologies to virtual reality technology, demonstrating the inherent advantages of 3D, VR-assisted tactile media queries.

A VRchive user intending to search the Moving Image Research Collections’ archive of Fox Movietone newsreels could input a request for early aviation footage. In the VR headset, the user becomes surrounded by video clips all pertaining to that query. When the user haptically selects a clip of interest with the grip controller, the footage is virtually foregrounded and metadata lines begin to grow outward from it, visually connecting the user’s selection to other items in the virtual background. Green lines for shared authorship, yellow lines for similar keyword, blue lines for similar date, red lines for similar format—all interpreted from the archive’s original metadata holdings, now made visible, tactile, and immediately usable.

We would like to conduct a thirty-to-sixty minute presentation concerning our research into tactility and digital archives, using VRchive as a scaffolding for discussion and coupled with a short technical demo of the VR interface available via the audience’s smart phones.
• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Simon Tarr

Prof. Simon Tarr is an associate professor of art. As a filmmaker, he has pioneered new forms of digital cinema that he has performed at Carnegie Hall, and from Tokyo to Cairo. His work has screened on every continent, recently featuring archival and historic footage remixed into new and surprising contexts. He has also published research on information seeking behaviors and digital user experience.

Evan Meaney

Evan Meaney is an associate professor of new media and gaming in the School of Visual Art and Design. He has worked on NSF- and led DOE-funded projects which use game technologies to complete social and humanities objectives. His creative productions are represented by and distributed through the Video Data Bank of Chicago.