

Degradation, Removal, Longing, Suspension

My first encounter with Wayne Dunkley's work was the award-winning Web project *www.sharemyworld.net* (2001), subtitled *The Degradation and Removal of the/a Black Male*. From its beginnings, the roots of this project lay in the idea of inviting shared perspectives to emerge through public participation. A series of street posters were distributed in Toronto, featuring the artist's face and a kind of "comments space" below it, which encouraged passers-by to fill in blanks reading "the _____" or "a _____". The online component of the project (still accessible on the Web) began with a photographic documentation of the ultimate fate of these posters (defacements and graffiti), and an interactive design structured to gradually reveal text stories culled from Dunkley's personal experiences with racism and alienation. Site visitors were then encouraged to email Dunkley with their own anecdotal experiences in response. The artist gradually added these anecdotes to the site — first as animated interactives, and later in journal format.

Degradation and Removal adopted an approach to shared storytelling quite different from Lovejoy's *TURNS*. It brought the artist into something of an editor's role, Dunkley working to shape the submitted stories, searching for the core of their narratives in a process similar to the way in which sculptors "find" a figure in a block of stone. The results were compiled in an elegant online setting, carefully crafted to provide visitors with an accessible venue for engaging the work. Indeed, Dunkley's aesthetics of text and image appear to have been governed in important ways by the need to create a Web site that would function as a space for interaction. His approach to selecting stories reflected a similar concern for inclusiveness across social boundaries. It worked to emphasize that problems arising from notions of "race" are multi-sided, that they extend beyond the experience of visible minorities, affecting everyone in the involved society.

As such, *Degradation and Removal* is an excellent example of the First Vision in action — it is heavily occupied with connectivity. But in the act of connecting, and filtering connections and stories through Dunkley's aesthetic, much of the project also necessarily engages a nonlinear format as a fundamental element of its composition. Though there is guidance aplenty, there is no absolute order to be followed, no final message or summary moral to be delivered. The nonlinear framework that allows the First Vision to emerge so clearly also inescapably brings the Second Vision into play.

This same fascinating tension carries over into *FEEL: the longing for home*, a collaborative project guided by Dunkley's artistic vision which went live in mid-February on *HorizonZero*. This time, Dunkley's search for core elements of the human experience inspired him to make poetry the initial seed of the project.

the longing for home, like *Degradation and Removal*, provides a story-sharing space, a context for connection. In many ways, it is a context that feels more carefully minimal, elegant and concise, despite impressive graphical and animated elements. (My favourite is a screen featuring a night skyline: the moon tracks over the blackness and illuminates Dunkley's poem like a searchlight.) This is a space that welcomes us with subtle ambient music (or sometimes sound existing just on the edge of what most people think of as

music). Yet, as an online artefact to be navigated, its nonlinearity is more pronounced than *Degradation's*. The provision of interactive devices (almost games) for the visitor to explore is more extensive. The Second Vision is intensified here. But, as a result, the First Vision — that of a space that draws the viewer in and almost *compels* them to share — intensifies also.

Interacting with *the longing for home* made me anticipate Dunkley's forthcoming project, *Diaries of Suspension*, all the more. According to the artist, it will bring together a series of interviews about the sense of dislocation that immigrants often experience — the feeling of being “suspended” between two places, cultures and realities. These interviews will appear as a set of cross-referenced stories; it will be possible for the viewer to slip from one story to another at points where both resonate with the same themes. The project will play with accepted notions of “whose story is whose”. And like all of Dunkley's work, *Diaries* will emphasize the commonality of the experiences it discusses, moving beyond traditional frames of thought and resonance.

If the progression of his work thus far offers any indication, Wayne Dunkley's designs for shared spaces will continue to grow more compelling, and his mobilization of the Two Visions more challenging and instructive. The expansion of these spaces may continue to offer a hopeful “double vision” of how the Internet can be used to explore some of the most painful and difficult territories of human experience. It will be interesting to see where he goes next.

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