

Dream Grrrls: Metaphors

The process of designing multi-user virtual environments (VE) is similar to the process of designing code or imagery, in that it is necessary to passionately maintain a catalog of ideas and references. VE design combines these passions to construct a consistent graphical user interface (GUI) with metaphors for exploration and self-reflection in a collaborative team effort.

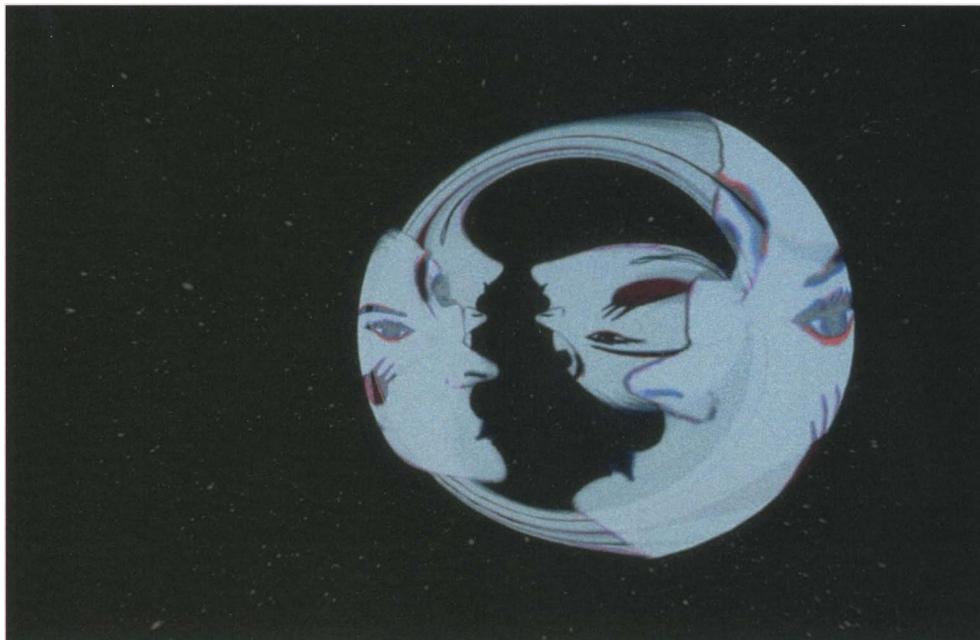
Dream Grrrls, a VE created in the CAVE, focuses on the immersive nature of dreams. A typical GUI has elements or icons that function as navigational tools and sit on the periphery. VE icons do not operate like a toolbox, but are spatially based, like the galleries in an art museum. *Dream Grrrls* is a journey through five different environments presented in a labyrinth filled with paths and three-dimensional objects or "icons."

Much as art attempts to convey insight, *Dream Grrrls* attempts to generate a new awareness based on interaction and immersive experience in order to create an exciting new level of communication beyond verbal knowledge. Dream imagery presents itself in a way that makes the real uncertain. On one path, the participant can ignore the warnings ("Don't go up there!") and enter a commanding head. Inside, the navigational wand becomes a flashlight to reveal walls made of whispering faces and creatures. The light provides illumination – a gateway to another level of consciousness and ultimately, the many sides of ourselves.

In a world inhabited by large vessels, the user approaches the unfamiliar territory like a desert island of loneliness. One vessel has imposing eyes that follow the participant wherever she goes. She comes face to face with what could be her psyche. If she chooses to confront it, she finds herself unable to move, rattled by the world around her, only to awaken back where she came from (the labyrinth), the same, yet somehow different.

Dream Grrrls allows users to experience their world in a new and dynamic way, much like an active or lucid dream. Participants "cooperate" with the computer in such a way that one is uncertain of the action/reaction hierarchy. *Dream Grrrls* becomes a medium to create a personal performance by learning to interact with the environment and recognize its plasticity.

Dream Grrrls could not have been possible without the artist's library of images and the focused dedication on software by Grit Sehmisch. Audio consultation was provided by Joe Reitzer, and programming consultation was provided by Marcus Thieboux, Dave Pape, Bor-Tyng Lin, and an Electronic Visualization Laboratory of sages. Special Thanks to Dan Sandin, Tom DeFanti, Maxine Brown, Dana Plepys, Jim Costigan, and Maggie Rawlings.



Margaret Dolinsky, Grit Sehmisch
Electronic Visualization Laboratory
University of Illinois at Chicago
851 South Morgan Street, Room 1120
Chicago, Illinois 60607 USA
dolinsky@evl.uic.edu