

Cyberspace is language-based (cf. Cicognani, 1996, 1997; Winograd, 1987), and so are virtual communities. The author argues that virtual communities are ideal places to experience and enhance a language for design, and for designers.

Design in virtual communities can actually be performed using speech acts that in real life wouldn't perform any design: we will call these acts "design speech acts." For example, the command "@create wall" issued in a MOO environment corresponds to the creation of a (virtual) wall in that environment.

Beyond the interest of computer-mediated communication researchers (cf. Cherny 1995), who deal with the content of the communication in text based virtual realities, there is a possibility for designers to finally employ speech acts for the purpose of designing cyberspace, for cyberspace's sake. Speech act theory has been applied as a way of designing computer systems and feedback processes to natural language interaction. It is interesting to observe that these applications have been abandoned, mainly for two reasons: on the one hand, the intentionality and on the other, the meaning of utterances, which create ambiguity in the interpretation.

To "perform" with natural language, there is the need to consider the context in which the speech act is uttered, and how that speech act is going to be interpreted by the hearer(s). The theory, then, has been restricted to the analysis of speech acts as content of messages issued in a computer mediated environment, rather than commands issued to "make the computer do things with words," to actually create virtual things.

The author argues that the coincidence of functionality and appearance in textbased virtual realities can be an advantage for design in these environments, through the application of speech act theory. CAD system interfaces are not considered as relevant in the scheme of definition of design speech acts in a textbased virtual community, due to their lack of correspondence between appearance and functionality. It is in fact this discrepancy that the application of speech act theory tries to fill. Even though graphic interfaces seem to be the only actual solution to computer-based design representations, textbased virtual realities can become a relevant area of study and application for alternatives to those interfaces.

This sketch presents an hypothesis and a methodology for structuring and defining design speech acts, so that a language and interface for design in a virtual community can be subsequently developed. The author has selected and categorized a list of design verbs that can be used in a virtual community for design. A first model of this categorization is also presented and discussed. The author has developed a specific virtual community in which designers can articulate their needs and produce text-based design objects.

Any collaboration is a negotiation. While most artistic teams hide the filibustering, intellectual posturing, and shifting alliances that lie behind their decisions, *Agree to Disagree Online* brings these facets of collaboration to the fore.

Especially designed for the World Wide Web, this interactive work charts an argument among the three artists that begins with the inflammatory statement "In the future, books will be replaced by maps." *Agree to Disagree Online* maps this negotiation in time and space. Viewers can navigate through an individual argument by clicking one at a time on the participants' responses to each other. These responses are represented both in words and by a series of arrows that indicate agreement or disagreement in spatial terms: if the negotiation is nearing consensus, the arrow moves toward a central point between the artists' three initials. If the discussion is becoming more divisive, the arrow moves toward the periphery of the screen. In this way, the cumulative overlay of arrows expresses the shape of the argument, and viewers can trace this final trajectory in animated form.

The largescale structure of *Agree to Disagree Online* is determined by digressions from one argument to another, which the viewer is free to pursue. The forking paths that result from these digressions wander into such absurdly unrelated topics as Watergate, the way buffalos roam, and the efficacy of the Evelyn Wood speed-reading course.

The authors have been agreeing to disagree since their first adversarial collaboration in 1992. Unlike most artistic teams, they emphasize the conflict inherent in collaboration by basing each work on a particular competitive event, such as marking territory by spitting pins, targeting an opponent with projectiles, or evaluating each other's ideas for an artwork.