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In recent years, the popularity of virtual worlds has increased significantly and they have consequently come under closer academic scrutiny. Papers about virtual worlds are typically published at conferences or in journals that specialize in something entirely different, related to some secondary aspect of the research. Thus a paper discussing legal aspects of virtual worlds may be published in a law journal, while a psychologist's analysis of situation awareness may appear at a psychology conference.

The downside of this is that if you publish a virtual worlds paper at an unrelated conference in this manner you are likely to be one of only a handful of attendees working in the area. You will not, therefore, achieve the most important goal of attending conferences: meeting and conversing with like-minded colleagues from the academic community of your field of study.

Virtual worlds touch on many well-established themes in other areas of science. Researchers from all these fields will therefore be looking at this new, interesting, and growing field. However, to do effective research related to these complex constructs, researchers need to take into account many of the other facets from other fields that impact virtual worlds. Only by being familiar with and paying attention to all these different aspects can virtual worlds be properly understood.

We therefore believe that the study of virtual worlds has become a research field in its own right. To date, this research field can claim only a relatively small community, because interested researchers from more established fields largely keep to themselves. FaVE was born to change that. We wanted to start creating a multidisciplinary community of academic researchers all interested in virtual worlds and their applications; and we wanted everyone to talk to each other, regardless of their original field, because we do believe that every one of these researchers has something to say that will be of interest to the rest.

After much organizational work and with lots of help from collaborators all over the world (and of course some sleepless nights), the conference was finally held during July 27–29, 2009. The tracks and sessions were organized with our multidisciplinary goal in mind: that is, we attempted to create sessions with a combination of presenters who are working on similar subjects, albeit perhaps coming from different angles. Over the course of the conference, our attendees did indeed see the advantages of the format. By the end of the conference, there were vivid and vibrant discussions going on, bringing all the diverse viewpoints to the table—surprisingly similar in some cases and surprisingly different in others.

The first set of papers presented at the conference talked about the application of virtual worlds to science, both for research and for education. Virtual worlds are seen as a means to solve problems that have been known to science for a while, but which are expected to become more pronounced in the near future—such as data visualization and extending the reach of scientific teaching. The following papers were presented:
• “Dual Reality: Merging the Real and Virtual” by Joshua Lifton and Joseph A. Paradiso
• “Development of Virtual Geographic Environments and Geography Research” by Fengru Huang, Hui Lin, Bin Chen

The next few papers addressed how people behave and react in existing virtual worlds. This not only characterized how people move and navigate, but also included very tangible advice on how one might improve the usability and acceptance of virtual worlds, such as by adding landmarks and improving the virtual weather. These papers comprised:

• “Landmarks and Time-Pressure in Virtual Navigation: Towards Designing Gender-Neutral Virtual Environments” by Elena Gavrielidou and Maarten H. Lamers
• “Characterizing Mobility and Contact Networks in Virtual Worlds” by Felipe Machado, Matheus Santos, Virgilio Almeida, and Dorgival Guedes
• “The Effects of Virtual Weather on Presence” by Bartholomäus Wissmath, David Weibel, Fred W. Mast

Next, we took a look at what can be done to make virtual worlds easier to use for the end user. This ranged from a shop assistant who attempts to understand typed speech, through a visualization plug-in architecture, to an analysis of current virtual worlds' Terms of Service and how those may be improved. The papers here were:

• “The Role of Semantics in Next-Generation Online Virtual World-Based Retail Store” by Geetika Sharma, C. Anantaram, and Hiranmay Ghosh
• “Complexity of Virtual Worlds' Terms of Service” by Holger M. Kienle, Andreas Lober, Crina A. Vasiliu, Hausi A. Müller
• “StellarSim: A Plug-in Architecture for Scientific Visualizations in Virtual Worlds” by Amy Henckel and Cristina V. Lopes

We subsequently discussed the theory and practice of collaboration in virtual worlds. A formal description of virtual world collaboration was developed that may be used to describe workflow in a virtual world setting. Also, an actual workflow was studied experimentally and some requirements for characters controlled by artificial intelligences in interacting efficiently with human users were set out. The papers were:

• “Formalizing and Promoting Collaboration in 3D Virtual Environments - A Blueprint for the Creation of Group Interaction Patterns” by Andreas Schmeil and Martin J. Eppler
• “Usability Issues of an Augmented Virtuality Environment for Design” by Xiangyu Wang and Irene Rui Chen
• “Conceptual Design Scheme for Virtual Characters” by Gino Brunetti and Rocco Servidio
Finally, we focused on the social aspects of using virtual worlds. While in traditional media the media produces content and consumers consume it, these lines are blurred in virtual worlds. This touches on many important questions such as ownership and rights. Does a user of a virtual world even have rights? The mixing of play and work that is becoming noticeable in many virtual worlds was also explored. The Papers were:

- “The Managed Hearthstone: Labor and Emotional Work in the Online Community of World of Warcraft” by Andras Lukacs, David Embrick, and Talmadge Wright
- “Human Rights and Private Ordering in Virtual Worlds” by Olivier Oosterbaan
- “Investigating the Concept of Consumers as Producers in Virtual Worlds: Looking Through Social, Technical, Economic, and Legal Lenses” by Holger M. Kienle, Andreas Lober, Crina A. Vasiliiu, Hausi A. Müller

The papers are an interesting read and we hope that you take the time to peruse a few that may not be quite in your area of research.
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