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Virtual Celluoid

Switch Staffs

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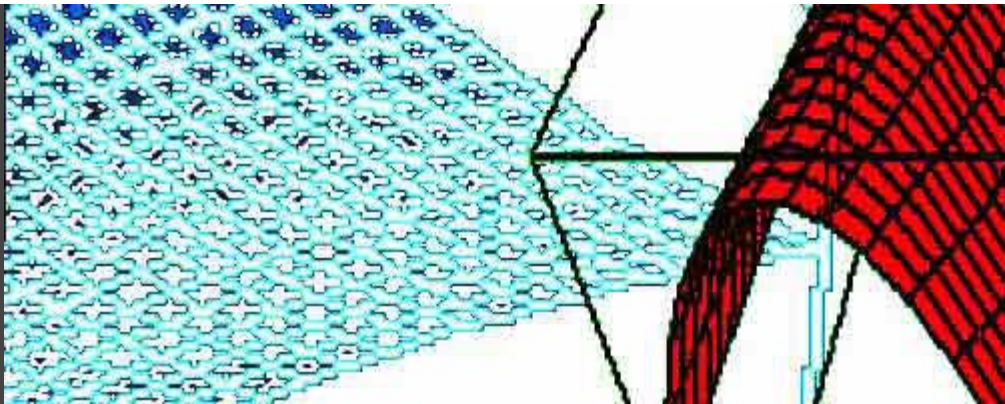
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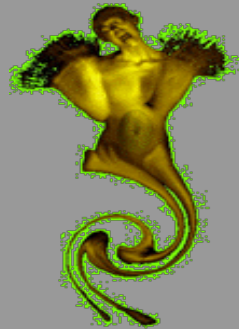
Virtual Celluoid

Switch Staffs on Sep 1 1995

issue 02

Films involving Virtual Reality

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VIRTUAL CELLUOID

Recently it was put upon me to research some of the new films involving Virtual Reality in order to get the scoop on what was being projected out to the great unwashed masses. Always game to subject myself to something new and possibly awful I went tripping off to movies such as: Johnny Mnemonic, Virtuosity, and The Net. I also included Disclosure which, although it did not market itself as a computer movie, addresses computers and VR in a manner that actually brings out some very basic issues.

The movies themselves vary widely in their plots, talent and special effects and in fact deal with VR in different ways. Johnny Mnemonic deals with *Keanu Reeves* appropriately cast as a man who, having given up a chunk of memory in order to smuggle computer data, is somewhat flat in character. (Albeit desperate to get it back.) The heroes are a sort of underground guerrilla group called the "LoTechs." They represent more of the general society, which is being plagued by a lethal disease called "NAS" for which there is no cure. The plot thickens... The special effects portrayed as shown through the VR headsets are pretty dazzling.

The storyline in Virtuosity is pretty engaging. It harks back to a more traditional "good cop been wronged" kind of drama that is crossed with some hi-tech smaltchz. **Denzel Washington** plays a cop in jail who is given a chance at freedom. His Task -- to find a serial killer that was invented on the computer but then taken out and grown into a person out of silicon. (!?) Artificial life gone awry, ok, sure we'll buy it. Unfortunately, racial overtones (complete with Rodney King scene) come into play and squelch some of the story. Anyway the special effects are oddly weak even though interesting and

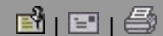
obviously this was a low ball affair, because even though it is supposedly in the 21st century the Ford Broncos look amazingly familiar.

The Net is a story about a modern day hacker (*Sandra Bullock*) who loses her identity over the computer and is given a new unflattering profile by the people out to get her. Although not VR as we might normally think of it, it definitely plays into that world by examining people whose entire existence revolve around cyberspace.

Again set in modern day times, Disclosure is a movie about reversed sexual harassment. *Michael Douglas vs. Demi Moore* (Enough to frighten me) However, the setting is done in a Hi-Tech company that deals with Virtual Reality Software and throughout the movie there are subtle and not so subtle references to a new world where gender and race are no longer an issue. With this being a key component to any talk about the Internet, VR etc., it is one of the more progressive notes in all of these of films.

Something these movies have in common is that they all require a serious stretch of the imagination, and even then they have a few holes. Sandra Bullock (*not the homeliest girl around*) living in the same town for four years and having absolutely no one able to identify her is barely plausible. I highly suspect that even the most devout hackers have to go out for air sometime, along with somehow acquiring a very well-paying job with a computer company across the States without ever meeting anyone in person. *It might happen*. In Virtuosity we have a man who is grown out of some very intelligent silicon that reads computer-generated DNA. Not to mention the VR graphics in Disclosure are coming from another planet way ahead of ours. *If there are Virtual Reality headsets out there with those kind of visuals I want to know where*.

Even though the stories are different, *there are some themes about VR and the cyberworld that are a common thread in all of them*. Virtual reality is still being shown as something more for the elite group and typically, though not always, an evil brother is lurking right in there over our shoulder. *Call it the need for Hollywood drama, but VR is providing us with an excellent Hi-Tech turn of the century villain. This is not totally unlike the American sci-fi movies out of the 50s when people were just becoming aware of new technologies and the exploration of the then unknown outerspace*. Now we have cyberspace and a seemingly infinite number of frightening possibilities for the future. Between a virtual world, artificial life, and intelligence, will computers be able to evolve into their own personas? It seems that there is a general fear of the loss of identity (Johnny Mnemonic), no identity (The Net), or a new computer-generated identity which could take on its own ugly life (Virtuosity, the Net). All in all there are some predictions being made about our future which will be interesting to follow.



::CrossReference

last 5 articles posted by Staffs

- :: **Curator's Statement** - Mar 27 2003
- :: **Douglas Engelbart Transcript** - Mar 25 2003
- :: **Marisa Olson Transcript** - Mar 25 2003
- :: **Peter Lunenfeld Transcript** - Mar 25 2003
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