



Using Literature as low-tech virtual tool for Intercultural Understanding

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***Even if nowadays, virtual worlds,
simulated reality and distance learning
using advanced technology
are the protagonists of our time
in bringing cultures and peoples together,
can literature still prove useful
as low-virtual instrument,
in increasing mutual understanding
among cultures?***



Workshop's purposes

- ◇ To define the best use and limits of virtual e-learning methodologies in the field of Intercultural training
- ◇ To rediscover literatures as a low-virtual tools for Intercultural understanding
- ◇ To experiment how sample of literatures texts can be used within an intercultural training program with the aim of developing trainees' intercultural competence
- ◇ To provide participants with a low tech-virtual tool that they can easily apply in, or to adapt to, others Intercultural training contexts



Overview

- ◇ Virtual worlds: roots and definitions
- ◇ Strengths and limits of using virtual reality e-tools for Intercultural training
- ◇ “Finction” as a virtual world
- ◇ Using literatures as a low-virtual tools for Intercultural Understanding



Virtual world: roots and definitions



1989, Jaron Lanien

Concept of
“Virtual Reality”



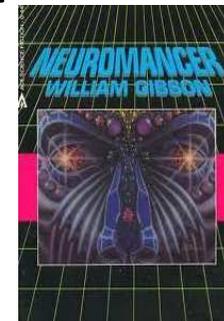
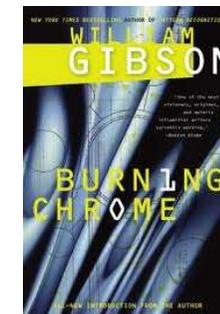
‘70, Myron Krueger

Concept of
“Artificial Reality”



‘80, William Gibson

Concept of
“Cyberspace”





Virtual world: roots and definitions

- ◇ Hardware and software applications that can **reproduce and simulate the reality**
- ◇ An always and everywhere **accessible communication environment**, that allow people, whom are not physically present, to communicate and to interact
- ◇ Virtual reality is **a way to live and experience the reality**, characterized by an experience of **multisensory immersion and interactivity**



Virtual reality e-tools for IC training

- ◇ **They are not the IT applications of the web 2.0**, such as the social networking sites, blogs, tags, wikis, video sharing site, and so on
 - these have the main function of facilitating **information sharing** and the **interaction/collaboration** of web users engaged in social media dialogue

- ◇ **Comprise all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching**, such as web-based learning, intranet/extranet, audio and/or video recording, CD-ROM, digital collaboration, and so on
 - they mainly serve to **transfer knowledge** and **develop capabilities**



*To what extent, however if limited,
can e-tools be used to help developing
personal or organizational
“Intercultural Competence”?*



Using virtual reality e-tools for IC training

E – tools	Strengths	Limits
<p>E-learning (CD-DVD, text, audio and video supports,...)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can facilitate acquiring knowledge and operational capability • Can be used networked or individually, in and out-of-classroom • Can reduce training costs by offering standardized contents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important aspects of the learning process are missed: emotions, identification with the trainer, group dynamics, direct confrontation, immediate questions... • Creative processes are limited, because problems usually have a closed range of alternative solutions from which to choose
<p>Webinar or audio-video conference call</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is an audio-video shared system for presentations, for conveying knowledge, transferring operational capabilities, and exchanging experiences • Many people can participate at the same time, while physical and time distances are eliminated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not everyone is able to use this technology • All aspects of embodied interaction are left out • The quality of interaction is limited and mainly unidirectional • Users do not reinforce or develop their emotive and social competence



Using virtual reality e-tools for IC training

E – tools

Strengths

Limits

Computer simulation games

- Trainees can live the simulation and the scenario very vividly and engrossingly, alone or networked
- It's possible to interact with objects and situations, manipulating the proposed stimulus, thus to explore and exercise possible cognitive and behavioural models
- Can reinforce and develop trainees' cultural/intercultural knowledge, procedural or expected behaviours, problem solving abilities, decision making abilities, etc.
- Can reduce training costs by offering standardized products

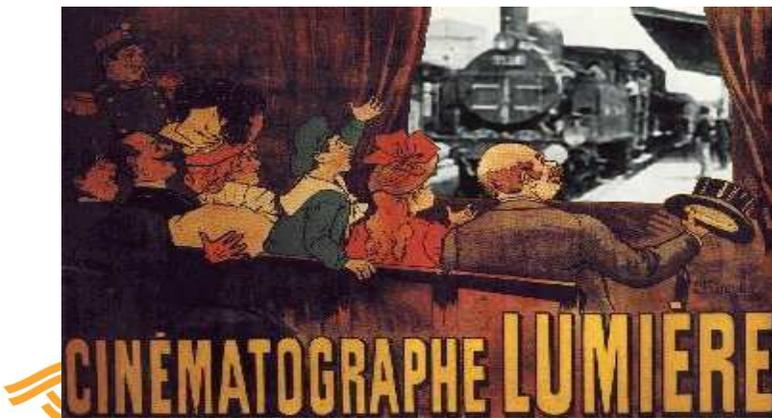
- Not everyone is able to use computer technology optimally
- Simulations are necessarily incomplete model of reality, because they offer a closed range of alternative solutions and predefined scenarios from which to choose (unpredictability of the real-life is missed).
- The virtual experience may be taken for reality; and reality may be perceived in a similar and oversimplifying way to the virtual reality
- Simulations can confirm and reinforce stereotypes and prejudices
- Rarely help people to reinforce or develop their emotive and social competences





Fiction as a virtual world

- ◇ Fiction – in all its languages, such as literature, cinema, theatre, comics, photo romances, simulation games, etc. – can give us the **opportunity to live reality virtually**
- ◇ Fiction is not a true story, but the **events narrated can appear likely** or at least possible
- ◇ It can cause the **experience of temporal immersion and interactivity**





Fiction as a virtual world

- ◇ It can be highly **engaging**: indeed, we identify ourselves with one or more of the characters, and we try to imagine what will happen next and how the narration might end
- ◇ The reader may **be transported into another world**, living out a kind of dream and distancing him/herself from surrounding “real life” reality.
- ◇ Fiction may gasp, tremble, cry or **produce physiological, emotional, and sometimes even behavioural reactions**
- ◇ The text might also represent a **medium** through which the reader can **enter into contact with different cultural values, ethical concerns, habits and rituals** that are not part of his or her world



Using literature as a low-tech virtual tool for Intercultural Understanding

1. Select short excerpts of texts from novels touching on the intercultural themes we intend to cover in our training session, or that we want the trainees to reflect upon

2. Write 3-4 questions that can stimulate the reflection upon specific intercultural topics and to move toward an ethno-relativistic perspective

3. Ask to trainees to read and discuss the selected text in small groups

4. Ask to trainees to answer the questions proposed in small groups

5. Ask to trainees to share their group's answers, interpretation, opinions and feelings and reflections to the rest of the training participants



Using literature as a low-tech virtual tool for Intercultural Understanding

Strengths

- Permit people to engage in experiencing virtually a non-present reality
- Narrations can open to the encounter between different cultures: the text might represent a medium through which enter into contact with different cultural values, ethical concerns, rituals and habits , and so on
- By confronting in small group, trainees can share their thoughts, emotions, experiences, values, etc.; they can discover multi-interpretation, re-elaborate and modify their ideas, thoughts and attitudes
- Questions stimulate reflection and provoke a process of transformation one's points of view, perspectives, social judgments, emotions, attitudes. Thus, trainees can be guided to pass from an ethno-centric to an ethno-relativist perspective

Limits

- Trainers need time to select texts and to chose questions that might guide trainees in the process of recognition of otherness as well as the characteristics of their own culture, the differences and analogies with the culture evoked by the narrative, and so on
- This tool – like the others - might be used just after having decided which intercultural competences are the target goals to be developed or reinforced



The team behind the booklet



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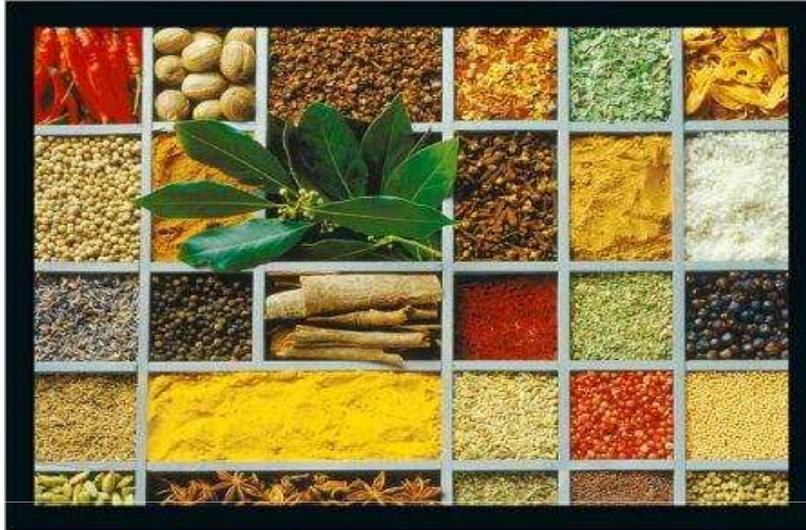
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Thanks!

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“I’m convinced that just the diversity of the world can create vitality and can give more freedom to many people; while, the totally adaptation to predefined models can just exasperate some certain situations, and eliminate many beautiful alternatives”.

Tiziano Terzani, *The end is my beginning*