

Extended Abstract for the 2nd International Workshop on Presence.

Participatory Immersive Drama - A Media Paradigm for the Next Century.



The technologies needed to create a new media experience are fast becoming available. Developments in such areas as telepresence, real-time computer imaging and advanced network capabilities are all progressing rapidly. What has traditionally been lacking is a clear overall vision of how all of this diverse technological momentum will be successfully harnessed by the creative community itself, in order to achieve the true paradigm breakthrough that "convergence" has been anticipating for some time now. At Cambridge University's Centre for Communications Systems Research, we intend to exploit these technological developments in order to devise new systems that will directly empower individuals, allowing them to make use of their own innate creativity by casting them in active roles within unique shared dramatic works.

Through such a system, everything from drama through education could potentially be transformed.

This project is founded upon the vision of a future "many to many" media landscape, characterised by real-time generation of interactive experiences, experiences that the end users themselves have as much of a hand in shaping as do professional production companies. As with the early days of the moving image industry, a new entertainment form, the computer game, is already being explored along the fringes of mainstream culture, in the video games arcades and through millions of PCs and domestic games consoles. The only area of our modern media society that has grown faster or bigger is of course the Internet itself -also fundamentally characterised by its ability to directly empower the end user.

Within these new forms there is one overriding common denominator - it is not about watching, it is about doing.

Our concept for this new form of media experience is based upon three fundamental principals-

1. Real Time 3d Engines and other forms of dynamic content generation are potentially as significant a breakthrough as any that has come before, and consequently, could eventually be hailed as "*The sprocket holes of the 21st century*".
2. The increasing availability of fast, wide and multi-directional networks leads to real individual empowerment, and consequently, is giving rise to the ultimate media paradigm shift - "*Users as creators of content*".
3. Anonymity, which is widely recognised as being *The wine of the Internet*, is the social lubricant that awakens both the communicative and the creative potential. This gives rise to what might be called "*The Karaoke factor*" - the potential within all of us to relax into the fun of the moment, to enter into a state of *social play* when presented with the right *safe* context.

These factors, when tied together with our fundamental affinity for storytelling and drama, an affinity that goes to the very heart of our psychological makeup, present a very compelling combination. One that we feel holds the key to unlocking the full potential of future media experiences.

As well as seeking to advance a new concept of what an entertainment or educational experience can be, we expect that this Immersive Drama project will also lead to the development of a whole new generation of technology. Technologies which will allow real voices, gestures, emotions and spontaneous actions to become the primary means of interacting with computers and telecommunications networks.

And, more importantly, of projecting one's actions through such networks, to others around the world.

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March 1999

For more detail about this project see ["A Program Proposal for Interactive Immersive Drama"](#).

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