Brisbane International Film Festival 1996 (Catalogue notes – final draft)

This year the Brisbane Film Festival introduces a new aspect of motion picture art to its program - interactive CD-ROM. Throughout the ten days some 20 CD-ROM titles will be available for perusal at The Hub Cybercafe, one of the many imaginative initiatives taken by the restaurant and catering industry to not only encourage more people to drink more coffee but also share with others, in this the Year of Webness, the booming on-line phenomena of the World Wide Web, where upwards of 40 million pages of information and some entertainment await your perusal. The difference between on-line and off-line delivery of what we now refer to as 'interactive multimedia' (IMM) can be compared at The Hub during this short season. Broadly speaking, the on-line Internet, (which carries the World Wide Web), is at a stage of its development which restricts the amount of digital data that can be delivered from one computer, the Web site - what you are looking at, to another, the Browser - where you are. The off-line CD-ROM, because it is on the same machine as you, does not have those restrictions and can deliver lots of images and sounds almost as fast as you can interact with its interface. Put succinctly by a producer recently, 'the distinction (is) between whether you are seeking information or experience...'.

For ten years now film-makers in Hollywood have poured huge resources into the special effects sub-genre and thereby spun-off further research and development central to the interests of the technologists down the road in Silicon Valley, keen to universalise the computer as the 'mediating tool'. The ubiquity of this machine in the office and the home has helped pay for the emergence of IMM, or the so-called new media, the convergence of film, video, sound, graphics and text. Over the next few years IMM will move off the test-bed of CD-ROM and the Internet and through all manner of on-line services further redefine our private and social environments. Clearly the experience of the physical space in which the cinema image is received and the image from a computer monitor is distinct, as is the *mise en scene* experience; linear form in cinema and non-linear form in interactive multimedia.

The CD-ROM discs selected for this preview of IMM are those related to the aesthetics of cinema, and in particular, the traditions of the narrative form. Games CD-ROMs often follow the plot lines developed for the thriller/horror genre of cinema, some of them directly referencing famous films. Others explore notions of what 'interactive cinema' might be and whilst remaining within the genre introduce devices specific to IMM, for instance, the subjective point-of-view camera, the player, being presented with dialogue options for plot

development. The Music CD-ROM extends developments of the documentary genre of cinema and links with the Experimental area, demonstrating and exploring ways in which a new aesthetic is beginning to emerge from interactive multimedia. Amongst the most innovatory titles available will be:

GAMES

Bad Day On The Midway "It is a delightfully subversive and wholly original attempt to meld multimedia storytelling with the more traditional interaction of the RPG. There is also admirable attention to detail in the way the developers have constructed entire histories for each of the grotesques that inhabit this carnival of the damned. And throughout this interactive narrative the distinctive Residents vision shines through for all to see". Mat Toor CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Critical Path combines video, sound and awesome graphics to a create a science fiction saga described by the manufacturers as the world's first interactive movie. "Hmmm… Aside from the opulent graphics, however, the gameplay is sparse. This is doubtless a consequence of the interactive movie format – which forces you to watch what is happening on the screen until you reach a decision point and then make a decision based on information gleaned from General Minh's insane scribblings. The puzzles are not desperately taxing either, especially for more experienced players, which means that the game shouldn't take more than a few hours to complete". Jim Morgan CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Daedalus Encounter "This is probably the most 'interactive movie' I've seen for some time. What does it mean to be on the receiving end of an interactive movie? In this case, it means sitting in front of the monitor for several minutes at a time, watching a QuickTime movie, with nothing whatsoever to do. .... Tia Carrere, the woman from Wayne's World, is in it.... Daedalus Encounter is a technical achievement. But as a game, it's… well, an 'interactive movie'". Patrick McCarthy CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Dark Eye "A first-person-view adventure with a dated graphical style, Dark Eye is like a cross between Myst and The 7th Guest. .... The game is based around the stories of Edgar Allen Poe, which along with disturbing stop-film animations, ... with occasional narrations read by William 'Naked Lunch' Burroughs, there's more atmosphere here than you can shake a blood-dripping stick at". Dan Gilbert CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Discworld Join Eric Idle, Jon Pertwee, Tony Robinson and friends for what may be the best adventure game ever.... it complements its pedigree well, is well structured and the voice characterisations are superb. Just for once a licence-based game is worth every

penny. John Davidson CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Frankenstein: Through The Eyes Of The Monster "While Frankenstein does little to disprove my theory concerning interactive movies, I have to say that it's considerably better than a lot of the rubbish we've had in the past year". John Davison CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Marathon 2: Durundal "Doom II .... provides more of a short-term, frag-filled adrenaline rush while Marathon 2 is a more immersive cinematic experience. In the end, though, the one real winner is the Mac gamer…" Mat Toor CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Midnight Stranger "Midnight Stranger is as far as you can get from conventional Mac adventure games which have you wandering around a deserted, computer-generated environment, confronting intellectual puzzles and trying to map your surroundings; it's a real town, and you can go where you like. There are no puzzles, no maps, no hidden doors, no strange runic symbols – and no computer drawn rooms. In their place are real-life high streets, alleys and residential cul-de-sacs for you to wander around as you choose .... People chat to you – about their day, their lives, their feelings. And you respond using a 'mood bar' - a horizontal band at the foot of the screen graduated from red to green. Click in the red and your response is hostile; in the green you're very friendly ... This is a landmark game: unlike any other computer game, this really does start to feel like real life ... this could well be the way first person adventure games will go". Steve Caplin CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Rebel Assault "LucasArts mixes Star Wars with CD-ROM to create the closest thing yet to an interactive movie..... From the moment you boot up this CD-ROM, and the sublime John Williams score – performed by the London Symphony Orchestra – wraps its brassy fingers around your heart, you know you're in for something special ... everything revolves around controlling your space ship ... and shooting everything in sight .... What makes it so enjoyable is the intelligent use of video and sound footage sourced from the original films". Mat Toor, CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Wacky Races "It's beautifully animated, shot like a film and based on a superb kids' programme from the '70s. The pits it's not .... It uses US content (Hanna Barbera), US technology (MacroMedia, QuickTime) but the inspiration is all Japanese. Whether it's a game as such is debatable, but it's great fun and for the first time CD-ROM feels as consumer friendly and accessible as VHS or TV. This is real entertainment". Paul Fisher CD-ROM Magazine

Rob Roy: Legend Of The Mist "The core of the disc is the film itself – including the entire 144-scene script and no less than 21 movie clips. These are generous enough to give an

abridged version of the film .... Another 10 short clips from behind the scenes give a flavour of the location shoots... Exploring Rob Roy: Legend of the Mist is so intuitive that you wouldn't immediately look for a manual..." Herbert Wright CD-ROM Magazine.

MUSIC

Jump: The David Bowie Interactive CD-ROM "If you enjoyed Peter Gabriel's Explora disc, you will love David Bowie's interactive CD-ROM. ... JUMP includes a lot of material that will delight Bowie fans ...– it comes with a host of well-implemented interactive features as well as slick graphics and some groundbreaking technology". Sarah Mason CD-ROM Magazine August 1996.

Puppet Motel An anthology of Laurie Anderson's obsession with the exotic byways of the everyday. A kind of rural daydream in Main Street which tests ones graphic memory as well as ones powers of intuition. At what appears at first to be '20 Ways into Salvador Dali Land', soon adjusts expectations to accept elegant and colourful objects as a matrix for entering a world of sound and recitation. The spoken words teeter on the brink of New York (or New World?) Portentious but seduce the 'player' to openly Enjoy, with a series of Oooohs and Aaaahs as each morsel dissolves in front of ones senses. Mike Leggett.

REFERENCE

Criterion Goes To The Movies "A self-proclaimed guide to "the
 greatest movies of all time" .... is essentially a multimedia catalogue of the collection including QuickTime movie clips, critical essays on the films, cast and credit lists and synopses of the 150 movies featured. ... this is an interesting and informative offering, and one that any film fan should check out". CD-ROM Magazine.

EXPERIMENTAL

We Make Memory by Abbe Don, a media artist, one of the pioneers working in this field in San Francisco, made an essay contribution in 1990 to the seminal, The Art of Human Computer Interface Design, edited by Brenda Laurel, published by Addison-Wesley. Her interactive documentary completed in 1994 explores the 1890-1990 history of a Jewish family's women using short anecdotes related, or told by some of the women using Quicktime movies, (the small screen movies set into the frame of the multimedia piece and which can be controlled using the same graphic symbols as are used on a VCR). The elegant 'home page' of the interface design uses photographs of the individuals viewed either by control of a panning movement or by using a date indicator to lead into the

histories, which thereby are both the history of the individual and of the group.

Surfing on Electronic Surfaces by Elisa Rose and Gary Danner who run a technokultur studio in Frankfurt, Germany, is a documentation of one of the oldest electronic art events, Ars Electronica, held each year in Linz, Austria. This CD-ROM presents the material that has accumulated over the last fifteen years from when it started as a sound event, through the computer-mediated installations, and on to IMM and work on the Web. It will be possible to make an interesting comparison between this title and the Web site run by Ars Electronica.

These artists and another, George Legrady, have some more work appearing in *Burning the Interface<International Artists' CD-ROM>*, which this writer curated with Linda Michael and will be at the Brisbane City Hall during April 1997 as part of a national tour organised by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. George Legrady's short piece **[the clearing]**, explores the Media coverage of the conflict that occurred in the old republic of Yugoslavia, as reported from within the separate regions and from overseas. Whilst having a pedagogic intent, the foreboding atmosphere created by the interplay of stills, sounds and texts resists any flippant interaction using the mouse.

Nigel Helyer is a well-known Sydney-based sound sculpture artist whose work is regularly exhibited world-wide and together with guru interactive designer Lloyd Sharp, has produced **Hybrid**, a complete document and documentary about the installations, objects and performances he has produced over the years. As you roll the mouse over various parts of images, shattering sounds burst out. The dazzling redefinition of what form an icon might take, to enable you to move from place to place and part to part of the interactive is reflected in the Web site that Lloyd has established and which will be 'bookmarked' on the Browsers for your further examination and comparison.

Christine Tamblyn has visited from the USA with her well known piece, **She Loves It, She Loves It Not: Women and Technology**. In her most recent title, **Mistaken Identities**, the biographies of ten famous women are presented through material from 'virtual' albums, 'virtual' books, puzzles, tv, morphologies, bibliographies etc. As with the earlier work, there is wry humour in the background here and a droll approach to visual design.

Another American woman, Susan E. Metros in **good daughter, bad mother, good mother, baddaughter : catharsis + continuum** examines the detritus of child-rearing as seen from the perspective of a daughter. References are accumulated as interaction proceeds through fragments from diary, photos, film, spoken quotes and sounds.

 Such a work, like several other titles that will be available, was produced using the considerable resources of a fully commercial production company, with a central

production team of from five to ten people backed-up by any number of freelance specialists working out of their own studios. By contrast was the artisanal production approach of Chris Hales, whose interactive touch-screen installation, **The 10 Loveliest Things I Know**, moves the experience away from the computer and back toward the physical space of cinema, in a multi-imaged introspective meditation upon the experience of childhood, tempered by mischievous interactive intervention which at one stage can cause, or not cause depending on your mood, a child to fall off a sliding toboggan! Using hi8 video and working from his London home when not teaching, whimsical portraits of friends and children are woven together on the computer into an example of 'interactive cinema'. Hales avoids the 'classic narrative' interactive approach , revisiting instead the cinema of pathos and slapstick comedy.

Another Londoner, Graham Harwood, spent the last three years making **Rehearsal of Memory** in association with the patients and staff from Ashworth Maximum Security Hospital. The work records the lives of the patient and staff group "that act as a mirror to normal society and stimulates us to examine our societies excesses". Interactive access is via the extraordinary body images of the subjects, complete with scars and tats, and the stories you quite literally trigger as you move the mouse over them.

Mike Leggett 1996.