A LABYRINTH OF INTERACTIVE FILMS

The labyrinthine structure of multiple filmic possibilities, typical of interactive narrative, is echoed here in the physical construction of a labyrinth of small rooms each containing one interactive film. Visitors can wander through the rooms in the same way that they might wander within each film, the overall structure becoming a macrocosm of each work it contains. The labyrinth here is also a reference to the work of Radúz Činčera, who not only created the world's first functional interactive film delivery system (the legendary *Kinoautomat**) but was aware that majority voting was not the same as freedom of choice, creating later in his career the *Cinelabyrinth* - in which alternative sequences of a fiction film were put in different rooms so that each audience member could obtain a personal journey through the work by choosing which rooms to visit.

The trajectory of an interactive film is by nature a result of what the artist made and what the audience did to it. The works contained in these rooms have been developed to be shown in open, public display such as gallery installations or as live theatrical performance. In this way, each work has been created with the anticipated audience activity already in mind, so that the action of the audience becomes rewarding and engaging, rather than a gratuitous or confusing experience. Through the years, the observation of audience interaction - something that would be difficult were the works designed for internet or domestic DVD - has also benefitted the concept and design of subsequent works. The following short explanations have been produced to enable visitors to navigate through the works with the best possible degree of understanding and - hopefully - enjoyment.

Chris Hales May 2008   *recently restaged and published on DVD: www.kinoautomat.cz
c.hales@uel.ac.uk

THE TWELVE LOVELIEST THINGS I KNOW

This film uses a touchscreen.

A visually poetic documentary based on interview material and paintings from children who were asked to describe 'the loveliest things they know'. The responses were gathered into thematic categories (such as animals, funfairs, family, nature) and additional subjective scenes were filmed, inspired by the direct vision of the children's paintings, to unite all the material into a harmonious whole and to give a vivid impression of what the children described. Soundtrack by A. Visser and B. Oliver.

Interaction: The film is composed of multiple associative links between scenes (there are 44 minutes of different material in this film). Brightly coloured or moving items portrayed in the film (things that catch your attention) are usually links to different, related scenes.
TOUCH THE SCREEN ON ONE OF THESE ITEMS AND IT WILL PROBABLY CAUSE A JUMP TO A NEW SCENE.

JINXED!

This film uses a mouse that you need to click at certain moments.
A simple 'slapstick comedy' fiction with no complexity of plot: "an unfortunate man trying to get ready for a job interview, but things in his appartment are jinxed and can comically hinder him if the viewer clicks on them at the right moment with the mouse". This film fits the classic model of joining video segments together in a branching system. It was also planned as episodic, without the need of a 'beginning' or 'end'.
Interaction: As the protagonist wakes and gets ready to leave, specific parts of the house become 'jinxed' at specific times. This is indicated by a "warping" visual effect in the film and a distinctive noise. You must 'click' on these 'hotspot' areas at the right time in order to unleash a funny accident upon the protagonist. If you do not click on a hotspot at the right moment, the protagonist carries on getting ready unobstructed and the sequence is not funny.

BLISS & GRANDAD

These films, investigating 'parallel' structure, use a mouse that you need to click at certain moments.

GRANDAD: A portrait of the daily life of an elderly retired watchmaker, this work investigates how events in space can be mapped out in an interactive movie, in a way that is almost - but not completely - representational, by creating a cinematic space from combining separate moving image streams ('split screens') which are not permanently linked together and are able to show autonomous behaviour.
Interaction: Interaction is very limited in this film. At the very beginning of the film, Grandad's dog 'Jack' decides to run away. Can Grandad find his dog? Click the film on one of the nine screens at which Jack is NOT present - he will then try to run to that location. Grandad will always give chase...

BLISS: Inspired by the 1926 fictional short story 'Bliss' by Katherine Mansfield. Nine movie streams are displayed simultaneously, and these represent 9 scenes in a blissful domestic interior. For example a quiet baby, a hot bath running, gramophone playing. By interaction within each scene, it is possible to maintain a blissful state of order, but each scene has a tendency to go out of control such that a lack of attention and interaction brings about chaos and destruction.
Interaction: As things go wrong in the different screens (e.g. if the iron falls, the baby starts to cry, etc), click on them to restore order. Some situations become irreversible if left unattended. The central scene is a measure of the chaos level. If you do nothing, or very little, the film ends quickly.

LEN'S STORIES

This film uses a microphone for interaction. You must shout into the microphone.

Len Buck was a popular and lively technician in an artschool in Bristol where I used to teach. Filmed in a single hour-and-a-half take (after his retirement and a few years before he died) Len recounted 20 lengthy stories of his life. In the same manner that a narrator often needs prompting, Len pauses often to scratch his head, think, drink, etc. and the viewer must indicate an active interest in the current story by *shouting* to encourage Len to continue the story. Otherwise the current story ends and he begins a new one.
Interaction: Only when a RED RECTANGLE is displayed around the film can you affect the film. At these moments, *shouting* into the microphone will ensure Len continues telling the same story: otherwise he gives up the current story and starts telling a different one.

THREE LANDSCAPES

These films use a mouse that you need to click at certain moments & locations.

KESA/SUMMER presents 45 scenes which represent a single day in the Finnish countryside in some sort of chronological order from dawn to dusk. The scenes intercut between human life in and around a wooden countryhouse, and the small dramas of nature occuring in the immediate environment.
Interaction: There is a single 'hotspot' to be found in each movie clip, click on this to proceed to the next scene...

THE SQUARE is a non-fiction work filmed in a town square, showing various daily activities.When you interact, the deserted empty square becomes animated again with the same people it was when filmed. But gradually the traces of the people - that the user has brought back to life - fade away again like echoes of a memory.
Interaction: Click around the square to find the 'birthplaces' of the items (people, cars, animals, etc.) which will then be brought back to life (in their original location at the time of filming) until they slowly fade away again.

THE SEASONS is an experiment in movie time in which the viewer, by interaction, can reconstruct the traces left in a landscape by the filmmaker in his own movie. There are just 4 tableaux, each from a different season.
Interaction: Click using the mouse to try to find the traces of the filmmaker's footsteps. It is possible by clicking in the right sequence to reveal the entire path and to "complete" each scene (each scene has a definate 'ending') and progress to the next.

THE DUEL

This film uses two mouses, either or both can be used, and it is necessary to position the mouse cursor correctly.

Based on the editing structure of the climax of a 'Spaghetti Western', this film features two enemies with knives duelling to the death on a frozen river. The exact editing and pacing of the film's climax depends on the amount and type of interaction during Act One and Act Two. One of the protagonists will always die, but this depends on how much "life" has been given out during the interactive Acts. This film was designed for live performance to a large audience group and is shown here in an adapted form.
Interaction: Clicking with the mouse is not necessary. At the indicated moments in Act One and Act Two, move the mouse over the body of Mr Green and/or Mr Blue to extend that character's life.
Two mouses have been provided, so that two viewers might try to compete by choosing a different character each. The film is equally rewarding if only one person interacts.

GLOBAL WARMING

This film uses a microphone for interaction. You must make loud noise into the microphone.

A journey across the frozen wilderness...and hopefully back again. This film was designed for live performance to a large audience group and is shown here in an adapted form.
Interaction: The character portrayed in the film needs vocal encouragement to complete his journey. Encourage him by making constant loud noise into the microphone - clapping, cheering, shouting etc.

CRESCENDO

This film uses a microphone for interaction. You must sing the correct note quite loudly into the microphone.

A trainee opera singer discovers the power of her voice to destroy glass objects...but only if you sing along with her! How will it all end? This film was designed for live performance to a large audience group and is shown here in an adapted form.

Interaction: At FIVE moments in the film, you need to sing along with the opera singer. You need to sing loudly and with a high note (try to imitate the singer in the film) whenever the words "SING!" are shown on the screen. If you do this successfully then glass items can be broken...

BAD EDUCATION

If the girl's face is covering up the slideshow, reach your arm forward as if to push her away...

An informative slideshow about interactive videoart...but there is a 'bug' in the system! If audience members do not interact, they will not be able to see the slideshow...but in order to see the slides they must cause apparent suffering to the character portrayed.
Interaction: If the girl's face starts to cover up the slideshow, reach forward with your arms as if to push her away. She should disappear under the water and the slides can again be seen.
Note: It may take more than one person's arm in order to push her away...