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Experiments in electronic arenas for connected communities: CAT, Memoria Futura, i2TV

i2TV: Experiments in New Formats for Connected Communities

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i2TV (interactive Internet TV) is an experiment in researching new dramaturgical formats, media integration, and models for medial staging of online/on-site events, such as integration of Internet participants in an event taking place at a real physical location. The challenge is to create a setup in which online and on-site participants are equal partners, while retaining the specificity of both situations (online, on-site). The different space-time conditions of online and on-site participants pose the biggest problem: no less than an emerging architecture of time/space is questioned. To achieve this goal, the experiment concentrates on the combination of new dramaturgical concepts in an architecture of medial elements. Exploring and developing such concepts relates to lessons and experiences from different fields of the arts, from traditional theater and 1960s "participatory performances" to interactive situative environments and mixed-reality stages.

This sketch discusses issues of presence and presentation underlying the i2TV system and its technical realisation, as well as experiences in public rehearsals: the Memoria Futura symposium at GMD, and the distributed poetry play experiment at the European Media Art Festival in Osnabrück. We discuss open questions and possible strategies for further exploring i2TV as the basis for a medial staging that integrates Internet and on-site participants. The presentation itself tries to demonstrate a new format by using i2TV as a front end for artistic live production.

The i2TV event at the Memoria Futura Symposium focuses on integrating online/on-site participation as an extension of the common conference format and moving it toward new models for connecting people or communities. The on-site discussion integrates a group of invited experts as Internet participants through the i2TV system. It is the proof of concept for i2TV as a real-time conference and archive system, and editorial online environment. The system builds on top of publicly available MOO-WWW technology (enCore Xpress) [1] combined with live audio-video, virtual environments, and digital TV.

The EMAF2000 (European Media Art Festival) i2TV event concentrates on new dramaturgical concepts for online/on-site events. It explores a theatrical concept as a basis for integrating online and on-site participation with the staging in physical space. The distributed poetry play experiment aims to involve the participants in an open workshop and/or a performance situation. Questions addressed are: How can the conflict of "real-time delay" and the conflict of "immediacy of involvement — distance for reflection," as intrinsic qualities of the online/on-site situation, provide fertile ground for new artistic concepts? How do we create a spatial situation in which both online and on-site participants feel present and involved, even if not in the same way? How do we create a situation that is both theatrically staged and enables reflective discussion, at the same time? How can such an approach help us to open the "black box" of fast-developing technology to a public consciousness?

1. Developed by Jan Rune Holmevik, University of Bergen, and Cynthia Haynes, University of Texas at Dallas, as a platform for academic virtual communities (lingua.utdallas.edu).
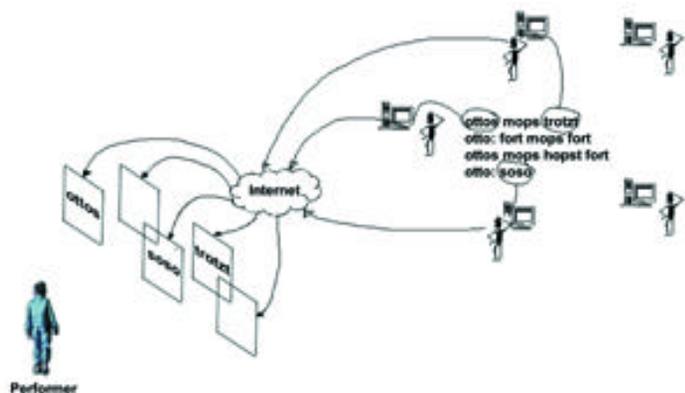
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Figure 1: Current i2TV Web interface.

Figure 2: Conceptual sketch for a distributed poetry play.