„Posing at three thirty" (Große Geste auf halb vier)

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http://www.halbvier.de/

"I really think that one day our grandchildren will ask us: Did you seriously listen to the same piece over and over again?"

Brian Eno

As a precondition for this project, it was necessary to systemise aesthetic parameters of cinematic storytelling so as to ensure that a computer programme can generate the entire movie.

"Posing at three thirty" is a self-generating movie on the internet. There is no screenplay. There is no beginning and no ending. There is a multitude of opportunities for developing and dramatising stories.

Generating the story

The movie is generated using a database of almost 12,000 small movie sequences (approximately 30 hours of material). These sequences are very short: each sequence is composed of only one take, for example "the Elderly Lady enters the bar" or "the Anarchist meets another character".

The movie is generated by several generators that have been networked.
These generators not only develop the story line but also make basic aesthetic decisions. To give an example, the camera could be used in a shot–countershot setting, an overshoulder take could be applied, or the scene could be dramaturgically charged using background music where the atmospheric sound of the room is not deemed to suffice.
The basic story line is created by

the main generator, which decides whether or not two characters meet in a set place. If the characters meet, the generator also decides whether or not the characters engage in a conversation. Where this is the case, the dialogue generator takes over. The dialogue generator decides how long the conversation lasts and what is said. The picture and sound tracks run simultaneously but independently of each other, so that the generator can also decide on the appropriate camera take. In addition, it decides whether or not additional movie sequences are to be included in the conversation setting (a third character enters the room). The dialogue generator informs the sound generator when spoken text is used, so that background music can be regulated accordingly where applicable.

Once the conversation is over, the main generator takes over again, decides whether a
singular action, a mood etc. should follow and hands over to the relevant generator.

In the background, the following generators are applied:

• main generator
• dialogue generator
• sound generator
• action generator
• mood generator
• camera generator

Content

The central story line takes place in a hotel in which a total of 12 persons are present. Two of these (the Barmaid and the Singing Lady) take on a special function. All persons have individual characters. Their interests circle around certain themes, and they have been named accordingly.

The Elderly Lady
The Anarchist
The Aesthete
The Woman Who Knows Best
The Man Of The Baroque
The Cocoonist
The Culture-Vulture
The Moralist
The Man Who Has No Doubts
The Woman Of Fate/Chance

Special Characters:
The Singing Lady
The Barmaid

All of these individuals live their lives in the hotel where they do or do not meet and interact. Their personal profiles permit interaction and confrontations; however, these do not necessarily erupt. One does not know what will happen and is carried away in the self-generating movie. Predictions as to what will happen are impossible, as there is a multitude of possible dramaturgical turns.
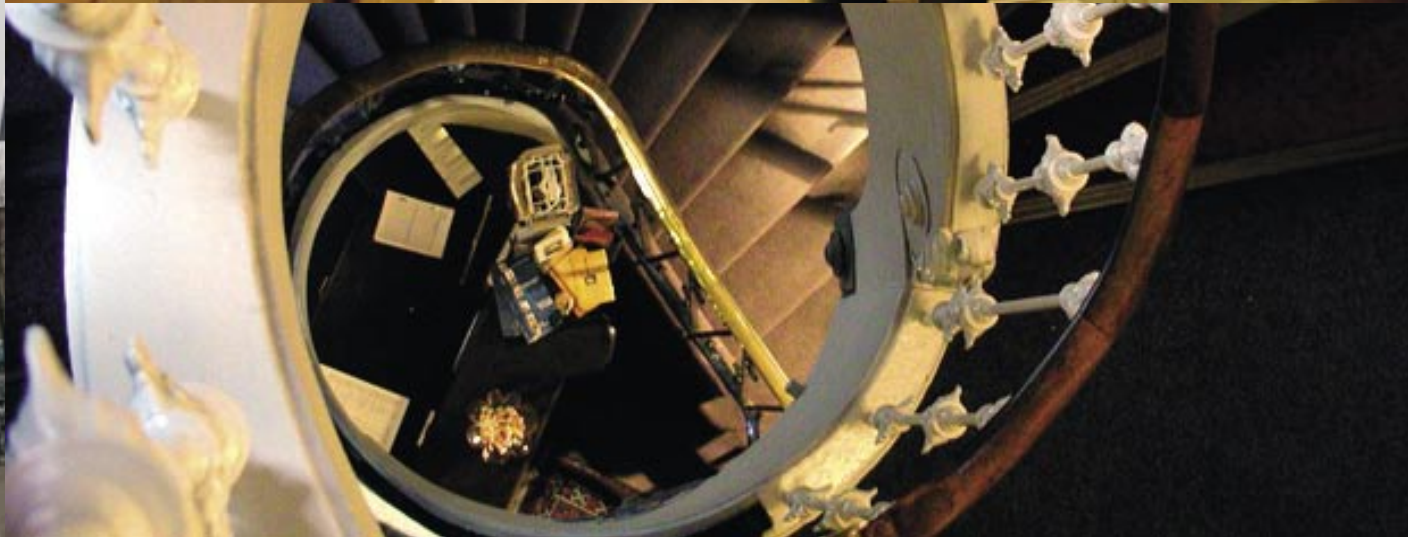
Chronology of events

Autumn 2003:
- Idea and concept are outlined
- The characters are conceptualised
- The first two characters are created

Spring 2004
- A test version using two characters (the Man Of The Baroque, the Moralist) is produced, results are evaluated
- The technical parameters are determined

Autumn 2004
- The characters are created
- The planning for the database and the shooting begins

Spring 2005
- Shooting is concluded
- Cutting is concluded
- English version is prepared
- Programming and Compositing is carried out
- Trial period is started

Summer 2005
- Production will officially go on air on June 10
- English version is set to be finalised

Shooting

As time and budget resources for this completely new genre of movie were extremely limited, the makers of the Institute for Media Design and of Kontrastfilm in Mainz came up with an extraordinary way of organising the shooting.

Shooting was set up similarly to circuit training during Physical Education classes in schools. Surely you remember: there were different disciplines at each location (high jump, long jump, sprint, shot put). Everyone was assigned a task and after a certain time, the students had to change (from high jump to shot put etc.).

The logistics of the shooting were organised according to this principle. There were five locations, each of which had a complete movie team (direction, camera, sound, light). The actors were divided up into the different rooms. Rotation took place after 75 minutes, during which a set number of scenes had been shot. The actors then moved to the next location and were hosted by the next team. Between the changeovers, there was a 30 minute break.

As not all ten actors were available for the entire length of the shooting period, the complex schedule had to be adjusted on several occasions. In order to optimise time efficiency, shooting and equipment schedules were developed for each individual actor. Before the shooting of the movie started, directors and cameramen were briefed about formats, camera work and basic aesthetic premises.

Due to this logistic precision, little effort had to be devoted to post production.
All takes in digital video format were then digitised individually and labelled with a computer compatible number. After that, all takes were revised and read into a huge database.

Aims of the Project

"Posing at three thirty" is an experimental Internet project. Individual artistic elements (camera work, dramaturgical set-up etc.) are combined with purely mathematical procedures. Generated cinematic storytelling is at the centre of this project. This method has only been made possible through modern information technology and is now adequately and individually distributed via the internet. An individual, endless movie can be generated for every user.

The movie does not tell a story created by the authors – it tells its own story: As a result, there is of course a danger of arbitrariness. However, it was decided to let the characters of the movie circle exclusively around their own themes. Therefore, a reasonable and associative story line is probable.

The characters and location of the movie have been chosen so as to bridge possible lengthy passages caused by multi-faceted images.

A conscious decision was taken to exclude the user from any interaction with the story line. Only the various generators interact with each other. Voyeurism as a central principle of art was to play a fundamental part in this project.

The makers will regard this project as a success if it manages to reach viewers on a regular basis (once or twice a week) for a period of 5 to 10 minutes at a time. We are considering placing it in the late night TV programme; however at this early stage, nothing definite can be said about this matter.

Technical Information

Test Version

In order to monitor the technical and content demands of the project, a test run with two characters (the Man Of The Baroque and the Moralist) was re-alised. This test version can be repro-duced using Macromedia Flash. Beta versions of the main generator and dialogue generator were developed using MS Visual Studio. PHP was used to integrate them into the Apache Web Server which organised the stream-ing of data. Thanks to this procedure we gained considerable experience regarding the further development of the project.

Current Full Version

All generators (main generator, action gen-erator, dialogue generator, camera generator, mood generator and sound generator) cooperate to control live cut, synchronisation with sound, and camera takes such as shot-countershot during dialogues. They are controlled by the main generator which determines the order of the takes and the length of the sequences.

Total database size	400 GB
Film Sequences	11.885
Used platforms	Linux, Windows, Mac OS X

Visual Studio	Timeline
	Generators
	Transmission
QuickTime Library	Editing
QuickTime Broadcaster	Encoding (H263 Codec)
QuickTime Plug-in	Media reproduction
Mac OS X Streaming-Server	Lifestream

Apache Web Server	Hosting of the website
PHP	Website (XHTML, CCS)

Authors

Authors, Direction,
Project Management:
Tjark Ihmels | Julia Riedel

Production:
Tidi Tiedemann

Programming:
Tom Klingenberg

Persons involved

Actors

The Elderly Lady	*Monika Dortschy*
The Anarchist	*Inka Schmietendorf*
The Aesthete	*Henry Meyer*
The Woman Who Knows Best	*Christina Hecke*
The Man Of The Baroque	*Stephan Bieker*
The Cocoonist	*Mark Himmelmann*
The Culture-Vulture	*Birgit Heinrich*
The Moralist	*Michael Günther*
The Man Who Has No Doubts	*Aurel Crisafulli*
The Woman Of Fate/Chance	*Anne Werner*

Special Characters:

The Singing Lady	*Ivanca Pitrek*
The Barmaid	*Bianca Kestler*

Team members

Over-all direction	*Tjark Ihmels*	Sound	*Patrik Märker*
	Julia Riedel	Compositing	*Steffen Röthinger*
Executive Production	*Tidi Tiedemann*	QuickTime Programming	
Production Management	*Katja Federkiel*		*Stephan Eichhorn*
Web Design	*Esther Wienand*	Translation	*Greg Bond*

Team 1 – Breakfast Room

Direction	*Daniel Seideneder*
Camera	*Harald Capota*

Team 2 - Lobby

Direction	*Arne Ahrens*
Camera	*Nils Keber*
Sound/Assistance	*Steffen Röthinger*

Team 3 - Room

Direction	*Saskia Wagner*
Camera	*Cordula Stahl*
Sound/Assistance	*Christian Schleisiek*

Team 4 - Bar

Direction	*Jennifer Rohbacher*
Camera	*Nina Werth*
Sound/Assistance	*Tan Kulali*

Team 5 - Bluescreen

Direction	*Johannes v. Hesler*
Camera of Improvisation	*Jean Marc Junge*
Bluescreen Technican	*Uwe Winter*
Sound/Assistance	*Gabriela Mizerska*

Drivers/Runners	*Marco Fois*
	Jascha Hekmati
	Gianni Fois
Make-up/Costumes, Support	
	Claudia Gaida
Art Direction	*Petra Heuser*
Catering	*Jo and Marlis*
Making Of	*Robert Schröder*
	Steffen Röthinger