

ARTICLE NO.10

CYBERDRAMA AND POTENTIAL FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

By Sue Davis (Australia)

Abstract

What kinds of engagement might be possible for young people through cyberdrama? This was one of the questions that underpinned the process for creating the cyberdrama www.cleo-missing.com, a drama that was created to be experienced through a fully mediated form on the internet. This article explores the concepts of engagement, aesthetic engagement and immersion, and explores the key factors contributing to engagement through the creation and experience of cyberdrama.

Abrégé

Quels types d'engagement peuvent être possibles pour des jeunes à travers l'art dramatique sur internet ? C'était l'une des questions qui ont fondé le processus pour la création du site www.cleo-missing.com, une pièce de théâtre créée pour être perçue par l'intermédiaire d'une forme totalement médiatisée sur l'internet. Cet article explore les concepts de l'engagement, de l'engagement esthétique et de l'immersion, et explore les facteurs clés contribuant à l'engagement à travers la création et l'expérience de l'art dramatique sur internet.

Sumario

¿Qué tipos de interactividad podría proporcionar el ciber-drama a los jóvenes? Esta fue una de las preguntas que sustentó el proceso para crear el ciber-drama www.cleo-missing.com, una obra teatral creada para ser experimentada a través de un proceso mediático en la Internet. Este artículo explora los conceptos de interactividad, la interactividad estética y la inmersión, explorando también los factores predominantes que contribuyen a la interactividad a través de la creación y la experimentación del ciber-drama.

Author's biography

Sue Davis is currently lecturing at Central Queensland University Noosa Hub and is a PhD candidate in the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology. Her current research involves exploring the nature of engagement and creativity in a digital age. She has been a drama educator for many years and was until recently a secondary school Performing Arts Head of Department. She currently sits on the Queensland Studies Authority state panel for drama and was involved in the development of the drama component of the Queensland 1–10 Arts Syllabus. Sue worked on the Drama Queensland committee for many years, initiating the XLD Drama Showcase in partnership with Queensland Performing Arts Centre, and has also been a project officer for Drama Australia, developing two sets of guidelines.

CYBERDRAMA AND POTENTIAL FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Throughout human history, drama has been created and adapted within different eras and cultures, its proponents responding creatively to constraints and capitalising on opportunities. The rapid technological change of the emerging digital age presents unprecedented opportunities (along with related constraints) to explore how drama might be adapted and shaped into exciting new forms.

This current generation of young people is the first to grow up with digital technology as part of its everyday lives. Today's youth will continue to innovate and create new artistic forms in response to the contexts and technologies they encounter. Drama experienced through mediated forms on the internet — or cyberdrama — is a field that offers great potential and which, in many ways, is only just starting to be explored (see Carroll & Cameron 2003; Flintoff 2003). Through the project *cleo-missing.com* conducted during 2005, I sought to test out some possibilities and explore the nature of the engagement that might occur through the creation of an interactive online drama, or cyberdrama. The project involved myself as a drama leader working with a group of university students in the creation of an interactive narrative that invited involvement from other users (for more detail on the process drama components of this project, see Davis 2006). My research focused on the nature of the engagement for both the main participants in the drama and the online users. The findings from the research suggest that the more significant experiences of engagement for different participants and users were characterised by the experience of three 'pleasures'.

Exploring engagement and immersion

While much of the literature on aesthetics interrogates the nature of the experience for the person who perceives the work, work by drama educator Penny Bundy explores the nature of the aesthetic experience for participants in a collaborative play-building process. She identifies three key qualities required for the aesthetic experience. These are:

- *connection* — to an idea stimulated by the work, read by participants against their own prior life experiences and understandings;
- *animation* — a feeling of invigoration experienced as (and perhaps after) they respond, feeling more alive and alert, engaged by and open to the experience of the drama; and
- *heightened awareness* — a product of the simultaneous experience of animation and connection, becoming open to questions regarding humanity which have previously not consciously been considered (Bundy, 2003).

Another field of study that focuses on the experience of the participant is that of the digital arts, where the term 'immersion' is more commonly used. An initial cross-check against some of the terms used in the field of the digital arts reveals some interesting similarities. Janet Murray (1997) argues for the centrality of three terms in cyberdrama: *immersion* — whereby the world of the cyberdrama seems real and complete; *agency* — where one is allowed to control a character; and *transformation* — whereby a cyberdrama allows one to become another person, taking on their identity.

Could there be some similarities between the nature of connection and immersion, animation and agency, and heightened awareness and transformation? An exploration that begins with the first term leads to some interesting propositions.

Bundy (2003) identifies a number of areas to which that connection refers, but one of the key areas upon which she expands is the notion of connection as it 'relates to the experience of percipients when they engage with the *idea* of the work ... It requires them to make some association between the drama and previous personal experience or understanding. The *idea* emerges in the association' (2003: 177). She, like Brad Haseman and others, goes back to the writings of classical philosophers such as Kant and Schopenhauer to explore this notion of the 'idea' further. According to these theorists, the aesthetic experience involves the mind grappling with experiences and ideas that are at first incomprehensible — but through grappling with them we may experience a kind of pleasure and even a sense of the sublime:

Such a movement of mind brings with it a feeling of pleasure and release for in the connection with the aesthetic idea, we sense the superiority of our being in the face of the overwhelmingly powerful. (Haseman 1999: 24).

From this discussion, there are two terms that I wish to note, and to which I will return later: the notion of this experience being one of an *active* engagement; and the feeling of *pleasure* that is related to the aesthetic experience.

Marie-Laure Ryan has written extensively about the notions of immersion and interactivity in relation to cyberdrama and virtual reality. She notes prior definitions of immersion as 'the blocking out of the physical world' (1999: 113), whereby the medium for the experience becomes invisible and the user 'experiences an unmediated presence'. In the experience of immersion, the user can develop empathy to such a depth that they adopt the vantage point of the character in the fiction and their consciousness may be relocated to the fictional world. She also notes that 'reaching this sense of presence is not a passive subjection to the text, but the result of a demanding mental activity' (1999: 117). So while notions of an emotional connection and transportation to another 'world' are significant here, so is the idea of this being an *active mental activity*. This notion of an active engagement by the creator of the work or the 'user' of the work is one that I note once again.

The pleasure of working it out

This notion of an aesthetic experience that involves mental 'work', engagement and aspects of pleasure is an interesting one. It seems to be relevant to the experience of hypertext, which is common to internet-based texts. A relevant term in relation to this experience was proposed by philosopher Oswald Hanfling. He identified that, as people engage with a work, they also engage in a process of 'working it out', and this can lead to enjoyment and a kind of pleasure. His term for this active perception is 'the pleasure of working things out' (Hanfling 2003: 180). He notes that this is a 'pleasure common to all kinds of puzzles, including those of mathematics and philosophy' — and, one might add, cybertexts and computer games. This once again signals an experience of a work that involves the interplay of enjoyment with overcoming difficulties. While this notion of 'work' and 'pleasure' might seem to be unexpected, Hanfling relates this notion to some basic human experiences, positing the idea that humans derive pleasure from overcoming difficulties:

Human life consists, to a large extent, of striving and overcoming difficulties. We are faced with tasks that need to be fulfilled and we fulfil them; and in fulfilling them we feel fulfilled. The struggle of fulfilling may even be thought more satisfying than the fulfilment. (2003: 181)

The working it out, then, is not separate or prior to the aesthetic enjoyment, but rather part of it, contributing to the enjoyment of the work.

Other kinds of engagement

It is worthwhile to note that, while this kind of significant engagement is what we might hope to generate for our cyberdrama users, other kinds of engagement are possible. There are several aspects to consider here, including the different ways young people engage with the internet.

What is also of interest in relation to the current pattern of internet usage by young people is that significant narrative engagement is not part of the experience of most young people online. Most young people go on to the internet to communicate with friends, or to do school work and (or?) have fun. As young people grow older (e.g. leave school, go on to further study or enter the workforce) their internet use tends to decrease. Young adults tend to diversify and specialise with their media use — for example, becoming music specialists or screen specialists. In relation to narrative engagement and satisfaction, most people go elsewhere to get it: for today's young people, it is television that provides a good story, and the computer that provides all the information one could ever want (Livingstone 2002: 222).

This means that, currently, most young people are probably not seeking out an experience of narrative engagement with a cyberdrama (apart from that available through playing games) through the internet.

It also seems possible that the kinds of significant engagement which are more similar to those usually described as part of aesthetic engagement may not necessarily be experienced by all users of a cyberdrama. While it is possible to structure the process and the text to try to engage participants and

users, the experience of engagement is likely to vary considerably.

Research findings

The rest of this article outlines some of the findings of research I conducted in 2005 which related to the creation of an online cyberdrama or cybersoap; this became www.cleo-missing.com. This work was created collaboratively with a small team of undergraduate university students. A website was created for the drama and, over a period of three months, various materials — including short video clips, text, photo stories and audio clips — were uploaded that developed a narrative about a girl who went missing from university. The development of the drama was managed by myself from within the drama as I took on the role of Ivy, a girl investigating Cleo's disappearance. This is a role quite similar to that of the teacher-in-role in a process drama. We also endeavoured to incorporate some interactive elements through the use of forums on the site. Other users could contribute information (in role), which we tried to weave into the unfolding drama. A primary concern that underpinned the research process and the progressive collection of data during the *cleo-missing.com* project was about the nature of engagement within a cyberdrama.

The focus was on two different kinds of participants: the 'project participants' who were involved in a collaborative devising process to create the drama, and on the 'user participants' — those who experienced the drama online. I wondered whether there could be anything that was common to the experiences of different participant groups, or whether they would be quite different — since, essentially, one group comprised the creators and actors and the other the audience. The data drawn upon included my journal notes from the project, interviews with three of the four project participants, communication documentation and online survey responses from a small number of users. The findings discussed here focus on the way the framing of the experience impacts on engagement, and the nature of the engagement itself.

Finding an audience: Diversion and immersion

What became of increasing interest to me throughout the project was that, because the drama was to be experienced by users through an internet website, expectations about internet usage provided a general frame for reading the site. The ways that young people find out about sites and how they are introduced to them were important for us to consider. For many young people, unless they are looking for specific information linked to study, work or leisure interests, contact with new sites often occurs through communications with others on the internet or through other kinds of web links.

A performance that takes place on the internet has to find an audience, make them believe that the time spent at the site will be worthwhile, and then hook them in or seduce them into wanting to participate in the experience of the drama (on a regular basis until the drama concludes). This kind of committed dramatic engagement is probably not the kind of experience that many people are looking for currently on the internet.

S: So you're talking about people mainly filling in time using the internet when they're bored?

P1: Yeah.

S: So that it needs to be really, what? Easy to access, and in using?

P1: Yeah, and not long-term commitment.

(Interview).

Diversion and immersion — experience of users?

The main avenue for 'user' responses was through an online survey which was attached to the final video clip. The survey response rate was not high, which in itself is perhaps an interesting reflection on the nature of engagement of users. Between May and August 2005, there were 1149 visits to the site. While we have no way of knowing, one could assume that some of these were return visits. The online survey was placed on the site in such a way that users had to at least complete some aspects of it before they could view the final clip. At the end of the live component of the project (September 2005), only seven people had completed the survey properly. One could assume, then, that for most users the level of engagement was not strong enough to entice them to want to see the final clip. This acknowledges,

however, that some people might have wanted to see the clip but really didn't want to fill in a questionnaire. However, the case remains that, out of a possible 500–1000 visitors, only seven completed the survey. It is therefore probably fair to assume that, for most users, the experience of the cyberdrama was more in the nature of a diversionary rather than an immersive experience.

Based on their survey responses about the number of times they visited the site, it was evident that a few users experienced significant or meaningful engagement. These people seemed to be those who were high-volume internet users and likely to be university students — people who were interested in the development of the digital arts. It is therefore relevant to note that the state of mind, interests and perceptions of the user are significant in considering notions of engagement. In the case of a cyberdrama, there probably needs to be a sense of interest and anticipation for users to get the most out of the experience.

'Carnival' and the role of amusement

While communications and community might be key reasons why many young people use the internet, there are certain kinds of communications that seem quite common on the internet. Many young people seem to be looking for amusement and fun — with this often extending to the experience of communicating with others.

One aspect of the internet, and the increasing popularity of email and instant chat, is that of forwarding on pictures, website links and various other material. It is the nature of this kind of material that is of interest. It is of significance that much of this material is often of a humorous or amusing nature, although some of it could be termed 'grotesque' (e.g. photographs of people doing bizarre things) or shocking. Amusing and entertaining material seems to be most common, although there are other kinds of material, including chain emails, which are personality quizzes or stories that are uplifting.

I further explored the humorous content and the grotesque in some interview material with Participant 1 (P1) and Participant 2 (P2), both of whom I would describe as high-volume internet users:

P2: *I go to the site that just has funny videos — like all different funny videos. Like there's heaps of them and they update them every few days with new videos. It's funny. I never used to do that but lately I do ... because.*

P1: *You're a loser.*

P2: *Because it's funny, I laugh.*

S: *Are they animations or video?*

P2: *Videos, like funniest home videos, except they're not all funny. Some of them are like 'wow'.*

S: *How are they 'wow'?*

P2: *Like the other day I saw this video of a fireworks factory exploding and that was cool.*

(Interview)

In searching for some means of understanding this fascination with the humorous, the grotesque and the profane on the internet, Bakhtin's work on 'folk humour and carnival laughter' seems to offer some parallels. Bakhtin's study explores the work of French writer Francois Rabelais and the role of folk humour during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Bakhtin identifies that, while historically the 'authoritarian word' of the official realm (involving the church and recorded politics of the day) is generally that which is studied and explored, there is a complementary and unofficial realm that existed alongside the official realm and this culture, rooted in folk humour, laughter and carnival, has largely been ignored and is rarely studied:

And yet, the scope and the importance of this culture were immense in the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. A boundless world of humour forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture. In spite of their variety, folk festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers, the vast and manifold literature of

parody — all these forms have one style in common: they belong to one culture of folk carnival humour. (Bakhtin, in Morris 1994: 196)

Perhaps it is the case that the internet is the main space for the experience of 'carnival' for many young people, a space where folk humour flourishes — often outside the official realm.

Framing performance through technology

Something that struck me from the first time we photographed the participants in role was the way that they seemed to become particularly connected and engaged when their experiences were framed by technology. I noted this not only when photographing the participants in role, but also when we videoed scenes and created some audio recordings. It seemed that the use of various recording technologies framed the performance in such a way that the performers achieved a sense of connection with their roles and a kind of heightened awareness.

In discussing this experience with participants, it seemed that this framing of the performance signalled the awareness of a future or possible audience, but perhaps something more. It is almost like a validation of existence, an acknowledgment that others know of, or will know of, our existence.

These reflections bring to mind the work of Roland Barthes and his analysis of the power of the photograph — and, in particular, the personal experiences of being photographed:

being photographed sharpens our self-consciousness, tempts us with the possibility of being seen as we would wish to see ourselves, threatens us with its non-fulfilment. But death is never far away from the image: however the end-product turns out, we shall have no control over how it appears to others; and to experience the process by which we come to exist for others independently of our existence for ourselves (as an object without subjectivity) is to undergo a kind of mini-death. (Barthes, in Moriarty 1991: 202)

Interestingly, it is the person's perception of how they will appear that may provide the sense of satisfaction or pleasure in this framing. This was evident in the perceptions of one of the participants regarding a scene that was filmed early in the project, the tape of which was lost for a time. This interview was later refilmed and that version was used on the project website but, while she had never seen the footage of the original interview, her perception of it was very positive:

S: *So what sort of moments do you remember as really working for you? That you really connected with?*

P4: *Ummm, the original take of the clip that [was] lost.*

S: *I've got that tape back now, they finally found it.*

P4: *The original take, I ... really, they were really good. I wish we could put them on there.*

(Interview, 22 July 2005: lines 171–79)

While there is a glimpse of immortality offered through the experience of being photographed (or digitally recorded), it may be shadowed by the possibility of its failure to do so in the way that we would wish. There may, at times, be a clash between our 'perception' of our imagined presence with that which the recorded image presents to others. This was something that was interesting to note in some comments that Participant 2 made regarding some of his videoed scenes. There were several scenes with which he was happy with the time of filming, but later his perception changed. Another person's comment about his physical presence impacted on his perception of his performance, and to some degree shattered the positive sense of validation the filming of the act had originally generated.

Another important aspect of using recording technology as a frame for performance was that minimal time was required of participants for rehearsing and learning lines. It was possible to discuss a scene or interview, run through it and then film it within an hour or two. The commitment to that material was then complete. In a live performance, rehearsals and line-learning required for a similar kind of performance would generally take much longer. This seems, therefore, to be a way of working that probably fits more easily within the lives of many 'digital natives', and with the kind of work processes Prensky (1998) recommends: 'Several possible approaches include speeding things up via technology ... Re-engineering

systems and activities so that things simply move faster is another.’ (1998: 2)

It became obvious throughout the process that the participants were also highly engaged and connected with the process when they were *using* technology to ‘frame’ performance — that is, when they were behind the camera taking photos or recording scenes on video. During this time, they had a sense of agency and of being in control. There was also the opportunity for them to exercise creative control through the framing of the shot, making decisions about angles, light, shot size, length of shot and whether we needed to reshoot scenes. Therefore, it seems that having participants using (and controlling) technology to frame and record experience as well as having their experience framed by technology can lead to more significant engagement for most participants.

Sense of control/contribution

Throughout the project, participants had the opportunity to impact on the drama and its development in several main ways: through participating in discussions at meeting and prior to filming; through negotiations between themselves about their roles and relationships; through deciding how they wanted to dress and represent their character; and through the way they created and played their role. For some specific participants, they had other input through image creation and manipulation, video filming and editing. There were some occasions when participants emailed me material or responses to what I’d suggested. However, the main sense of agency and control they exhibited was generally in those times when we were together, working in the moment and responding to decisions we made in a fairly immediate way.

What I found interesting was that participants were engaged in and contributing to the creative process and narrative development in the moment at face-to-face meetings. However, they did not seem to wish to contribute to the overall narrative development in between these face-to-face meetings. While I then became responsible for most of the narrative development of the drama, they still felt a sense of ownership (and control) through their work in those live interactions. This idea of control with a fairly immediate return for effort expended seems to fit with the Prensky notion of the twitch speed generation. These digital natives want to see results quickly and in real time.

Control as experienced by users

Interactivity is one of the catch phrases of the digital experience, with many theorists commenting about the nature of the human computer interface being based on the notion of action/response cycles. For users, there is often an expectation that effort expended online will be rewarded — in interactivity terms — with action that will take the experience further. For a drama that takes place in this context, it would seem apparent then that users expect to be able to take part in the process and be able to impact upon it. People don’t want to spend considerable lengths of time on the internet being positioned as a passive audience:

- P2: *... but the successful dramatic things on the internet are things like ‘Activeworld’ and online worlds where people just walk around and talk to people, and there is a touch of fantasy, ’cos you can fly. In the ‘World of Warcraft’, even though it’s set in fantasy and stuff, people all interact with each other.*
- S: *Do you have an avatar?*
- P2: *Yeah, I guess there is that fantasy though ... OK ... I think people go on to the internet for a much more controlled fantasy. They expect to have more control over their fantasy than when they read a book or a movie, where it ‘shows them’.*
- S: *Do you mean, when they have to take on a role?*
- P2: *Yeah.*
- S: *Yeah, when they can take on a role and not just watch other people?*
- P2: *Yep. That’s the difference with immersion I think ... For a longer amount of time.*
- (Interview)

While *cleo-missing.com* had some opportunities for user input and control, apart from the option of

different navigational possibilities, the interactive elements weren't heavily utilised and were limited to asynchronous experiences. While some users said they were happy with this, it is likely that others would have liked to have more opportunities to interact with the drama:

... more viewer interaction would be good — it's great to have a cyber drama because it allows that. (Online survey, Respondent 9)

This idea of control seems to have some resonance with the idea of the 'pleasure of working it out'. When participants or users have a sense of agency or control over the drama, and feel they can contribute to developing it or working it out, their engagement is of a more intense and significant nature.

Connection with the role

One of the other things to which participants seemed to respond well was the creation of characters that drew on aspects of 'themselves' combined with other fictional elements. One participant in particular commented on how this was one of the most significant aspects of the project for her:

P4: ... we got to incorporate little parts of ourselves in the piece, which was amazing 'cos then it's easier to know what to feel, or say, how to react when it's coming from a piece of you ... When it's that character mixed with myself, it was interesting because it was my initial reaction shown through another character.

(Interview)

With the participants being so closely involved in the creation of the characters, they could quite quickly find the appropriate attitude and response to material when it was then time to perform. This seems to suggest that this may be another kind of pleasure that is significant to the experience of cyberdrama — 'the pleasure of becoming the other'. This draws on the noted experience of participants and users feeling a sense of identification with roles and characters and making connections between the character's experiences and their own — a point made by others in regard to engagement and immersion (e.g. Aarseth 1997; Bundy 2003; Ryan 1997, 1999).

Sensory qualities

During the interviews with participants, I asked them about what scenes they enjoyed and those with which they felt a sense of engagement. One of the interesting things I noted as I reflected on these scenes was that they often had quite a sensory element to them ... touching, eating and dressing.

Sensory engagement helps create the world of the drama and the embodiment of the character and the context. In a way, this would appear to be something that would not necessarily be specific to mediated drama, as it seems to be a validation of the human and the lived experience, helping the participant inhabit the fictional reality of the drama. However, in combination with other elements, it did seem to be an aspect that was important to heightening participant engagement.

This seems to suggest the existence of a third pleasure required for the experience of significant engagement through cyberdrama. This relates to the notion that the aesthetic experience is often described as speaking directly to the senses. In the field of gaming and computer immersion, the visual and kinaesthetic elements are crucial to the development of the virtual experience (Laurel 1993: 21). The power of the visual, kinaesthetic and aural media for speaking directly to the senses would seem to be particularly relevant to the creation of cybertexts or cyberdramas that are not just text-based.

This would seem to verify the claims of theorists such as Abbs (1989), who have previously made the connection between perceptual experience and emotional experience as a key feature of aesthetic experience:

It is essential also that we perceive the contiguity between sensation and feeling, of sensory experience and sensibility. Again and again the practices of our language, the inherited conjunctions and the daily alliances of our speech, suggest the intimacy of this relationship. 'To keep in touch' is both to keep in contact and to remain close in feeling ... Our brief analysis discloses that the aesthetic involves both the perceptual and the affective. The education of aesthetic intelligence must therefore be concerned with the development of sensation and feeling into what is commonly called sensibility. (1989: 4)

Common elements in participant/user experience

While it is impossible to define the nature of engagement for all, there may be some elements that are common to the experience of a kind of committed or significant engagement with a cyberdrama, possibly to an aesthetic of cyberdrama. These relate to the space or framing of the work through technology and users having an interest in and anticipation towards engaging in a narrative experience. Throughout the experience of creating or using the cyberdrama, a combination of certain elements or pleasures seems to be evident. It is this notion of the experience of certain pleasures that will be the focus of the following discussion.

The three pleasures?

The early stages of my project were influenced by the idea of there being something that might be common to the experience of engagement for different kinds of participants —that being ‘the pleasure of working it out’. Curiosity about this pleasure influenced my decision-making during the early phases of the project as I tried to make the cyberdrama site one that people could explore in different ways to arrive at their own meaning. It would seem apparent that, in relation to a cyberdrama, the pleasure of working it out has another component to it. The user may require the opportunity to have some control or agency within the drama and a fairly immediate return on effort expended.

However, while this ‘pleasure’ may indeed be significant to the experience of significant engagement, for the aesthetic experience to occur (especially in relation to various kinds of cybertexts or cyberdramas) I would suggest there are at least two other pleasures involved:

- the pleasure of connecting with and/or becoming the other; and
- the pleasure of the senses.

There are, of course, many different kinds of pleasures at play in the experiencing of a drama of any kind, and certainly for drama narrative pleasure plays a significant role. While there may be considerable variation to this experience for different users, perhaps when certain aspects coalesce, a more worthwhile, engaging or significant experience is possible. The aspects that may contribute to this kind of experience of a cyberdrama are summarised in Figure 1.

[Editor: The following table is not properly formatted, owing to unrecoverable platform transcription issues. We apologise for this]

Engagement through cyberdrama	
Framed by technology	
Participant creator — use of recording technology creates a context whereby an elevated sense of presence is possible.	User — internet context characterised by user expectations of the experience they are seeking (diversionary or immersive).
Participant/user expectations of experiencing narrative satisfaction	
Significant engagement characterised by ‘three pleasures’	

1. The pleasure of working it out with the potential for agency

Participant creator — improvised action within dramatic frames where own input and creative agency is possible.

User — creating own text through exploring hypertext options in experiencing interactive options which impact on the action.

2. The pleasure of becoming the other	
Participant creator — creating identities linked to own experiences.	User — vicarious experience of the other or the possibility of creating a fictional identity.
3. The pleasure of the senses	
Participant creator — sensory engagement increasing the sense of presence in the fiction.	User — sensory engagement creating stronger sense of the fictional world.

Figure 1: Cyberdrama engagement — key factors

Conclusions about engagement

To summarise some key points that have arisen from the research, it would appear that engagement with a cyberdrama must be considered within the context of the space and frame of its viewing. The context determines that, for many, the experience is more likely to be of a diversionary nature than of the immersive kind. For significant engagement to occur, the framing of the drama is important. For participant creators, the experience of the drama being framed by recording technology appears to increase engagement. For users, the setting up of the frame (through building an audience and audience awareness about interactive components) and utilisation of aspects of internet 'carnival' may help to generate engagement. Finally, there appear to be a number of pleasures that might be experienced by those whose engagement is of a more committed nature, these being related to impacting upon and working out the drama, connecting to the role or characters, and some kind of sensory engagement (visual, aural, physical, emotional). While this is not saying that these are the ingredients of an aesthetic of cyberdrama, they may provide some pointers for others who may continue to investigate the potential of this field.

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