

Works discussed

No. 38 – 2008

S.T.A.L.K.E.R (2007)

by GSC Game World

(see synopsis by Fotis Jannidis)



Yes, the same nuclear plant that exploded in 1986 and, in S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s fiction, again in 1989, creating a radioactive hotspot brimming with mutants, heavily armed rival factions, and all sorts of weird, paranormal activity. Your task: Figure out who you are and what's going on at the core of the zone.

At its heart, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. is a first-person survival game that blends action with role-playing. This isn't a linear game, like Half-Life or Call of Duty, where you basically are restricted to a straight path and are taken for a tightly controlled and scripted ride. S.T.A.L.K.E.R.'s huge environments and open-ended gameplay make it more like a role-playing game, as you can go where you want and do what you want if you're willing to live with the consequences. However, you don't have to worry about

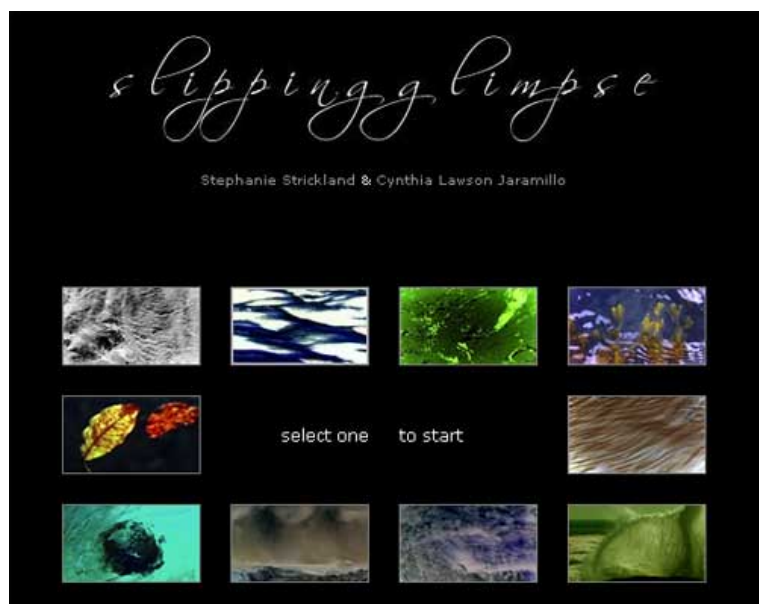
traditional role-playing attributes such as strength or intelligence, or accumulating skills and abilities. Instead, all you have to worry about is your skill with a rifle and scavenging enough weapons, ammunition, and med kits from fallen enemies to keep going.

The game's goal is to create a virtual world with an ecology all its own and then place you in the middle of it. That's something that's rarely been attempted, particularly in a first-person game. However, to the credit of THQ and Ukrainian developer GSC Game World, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. is an impressive accomplishment. This first-person survival game is at times amazing and engrossing and on par with such classics as Deus Ex and System Shock.

Slippingglimpse (200?)

by Cynthia Lawson Jaramillo and Stephanie Strickland

(see synopsis by N. Katherine Hayles)

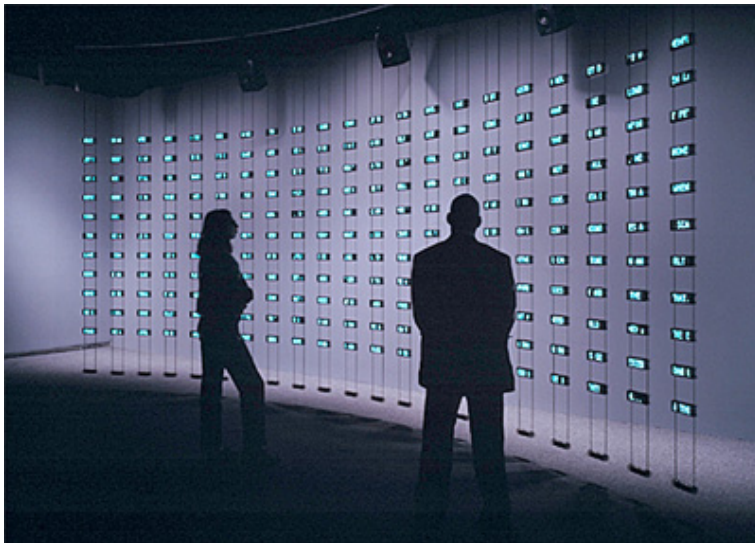


Listening Post (2000-01)

by Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin

(see synopsis by Rita Raley)

Listening Post is an art installation that culls text fragments in real time from thousands of unrestricted Internet chat rooms, bulletin boards and other public forums. The texts are read (or sung) by a voice synthesizer, and simultaneously displayed across a suspended grid of more than two hundred small electronic screens. Listening Post cycles through a series of six movements, each a different arrangement of visual, aural, and musical elements, each with its own data processing logic. Dissociating the communication from its conventional on-screen presence, Listening Post is a visual and sonic response to the content, magnitude, and immediacy of virtual communication.



Facade (2005)

by Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern

(see synopsis by Jörgen Schäfer)

Facade is an artificial intelligence-based art/research experiment in electronic narrative – an attempt to move beyond traditional branching or hyper-linked narrative to create a fully-realized, one-act interactive drama. The player, using her

own name and gender, plays the character of a longtime friend of Grace and Trip, an attractive and materially successful couple in their early thirties. During an evening get-together at their apartment that quickly turns ugly, the player becomes entangled in the high-conflict dissolution of Grace and Trip's marriage. No one is safe as the accusations fly, sides are taken and irreversible decisions are forced to be made. By the end of this intense one-act play the player will have changed the course of Grace and Trip's lives – motivating the player to re-play the drama to find out how your interaction could make things turn out differently the next time.

This work is unlike hypertext narrative or interactive fiction to date in that the computer characters actively perform the story without waiting for you to click on a link or enter a command. Interaction is seamless as you converse in natural language and move and gesture freely within the first-person 3D world of Grace and Trip's apartment. AI controls Grace and Trip's personality and behavior, including emotive facial expressions, spoken voice and full-body animation. Furthermore, the AI intelligently chooses the next story "beat" based on your moment-by-moment interaction, what story beats have happened so far, and the need to satisfy an overall dramatic arc. An innovative text parser allows the system to avoid the "I don't understand" response all too common in text-adventure interactive fiction.

Somewhere between a video game and a drama, *Faade* takes advantage of voice acting and a 3-D environment, as well as natural language processing and other advanced artificial intelligence routines to provide a robust interactive fiction experience.



Text Rain (1999)

by Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv

(see synopsis by Francisco Ricardo)

Text Rain is a playful interactive installation that blurs the boundary between the familiar and the magical. Participants in the Text Rain installation use the familiar instrument of their bodies, to do what seems magical - to lift and play with falling letters that do not really exist. In the Text Rain installation participants stand or move in front of a large projection screen. On the screen they see a mirrored video projection of themselves in black and white, combined with a color animation of falling text. Like rain or snow, the text appears to land on participants' heads and arms. The text responds to the participants' motions and can be caught, lifted, and then let fall again. The falling text will land on anything darker than a certain threshold, and "fall" whenever that obstacle is removed.



Bust Down the Doors! (2000) and The Art of Sleep (2006)

by Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries

Bust Down the Doors! tells the tale of a midnight raid on a home by unidentified armed aggressors: "They bust open the door while you sleep, rush into your home, enter your bedroom, drag you out of bed, push you in your underwear out into the street..." The point of view begins in the second person, then shifts to first and third person, offering various perspectives on the narrative. In 2004, Young-Hae Chang

Heavy Industries produced *Bust Down the Doors Again! Gates of Hell-Victoria Version*, a remix in which the original text appears in red, superimposed over a photograph of their work as it was displayed on nine Internet refrigerators for an exhibition in the Rodin Gallery at the Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul. The artists "thought that an Internet refrigerator would be an unusual way of presenting Net Art. Advertisers would have us believe that the Internet refrigerator puts the housewife at the cutting-edge of modern, hi-tech life. We titled our piece THE GATES OF HELL because, on the contrary, we feel that their refrigerator helps keep women in the kitchen."

Most New Media art employs interactivity to engage us as participants in the work. Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries eschews interaction, but the result is hardly a passive experience. By accelerating the pace at which the text appears to a rate just within the threshold of human cognition, the artists coax us into a state of rapt concentration. *Bust Down the Doors* is remarkable for its ability to produce a strong, visceral impact with limited means.

Employing their usual mix of animated black and white typography, jazzy music and humour, *The Art of Sleep* explores the international contemporary art market from the artists' perspective.



edinburgh/demon (2007)

by Esther Hunziker and Felix Zbinden

(see synopsis by Karin Wenz)

The project can best be described as a collage which is divided into 79 poetic forms from interactive text, text-image generators to short music videos. Thereby the artists did not create a simple multimedia collage but an intermedial whole. The text entries are in German.

**Nemo me
impune
laccessit**

Love Letter Generator (1952)

by Christopher Strachey

(see synopsis by Peter Gendolla)

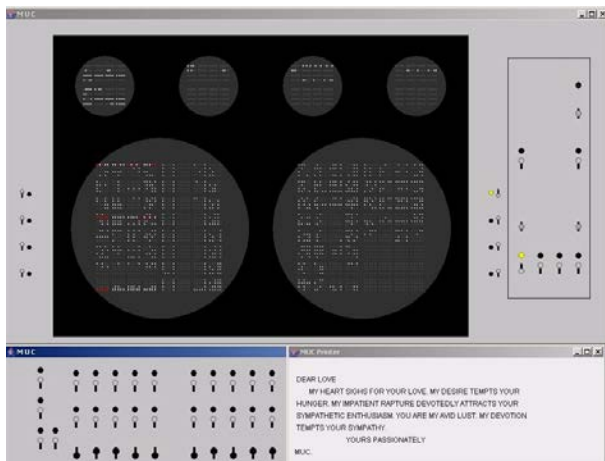
As early as 1952, Christopher Strachey invented a program he named Love Letter Generator, which automatically produced love letters on the basis of predefined words and patterns. The results reads like this:

LOVE DEAR

MY AMBITION LUSTS FOR YOUR ARDENT ARDOUR. YOU ARE MY SEDUCTIVE
ENCHANTMENT. MY PASSION THIRSTS FOR YOUR INFATUATION. MY DARLING
ENTHUSIASM CARES FOR YOUR AFFECTION. YOU ARE MY BEAUTIFUL WISH.

YOURS SEDUCTIVELY

M. U. C



Syntax (1992-95)

by Abílio Cavalheiro and Pedro Barbosa

Syntax is a "Generator of texts" containing various programs each making use of chance elements and permutation.

