

'To engage in telematic communication is to be at once everywhere and nowhere. In this, it is subversive. It subverts the idea of authorship bound up within the solitary individual. It subverts the idea of individual ownership of the works of imagination. It replaces the bricks and mortar of institutions of culture and learning with an invisible college and a floating museum the reach of which is always expanding to include new possibilities of mind and new intimations of reality.' Roy Ascott quoted by Lovejoy [32] p. 212.(1)

Chameleon:

Introduction:

Chameleon is conceived as a tool to facilitate remote communication associated with an interaction with the environment. The work, such as it is, will exist through the utilisation of the technology in the specified locations. The proposal is to make the tools for this process.

Roy Ascott suggests that in telematic communication the participant exists multiply, in an environment where collaboration is essential. The telematic artwork is the collaborative act, be it visual, aural, tactile... It exists in the realities of the separate locations of the participants and in the virtual space they inhabit together.

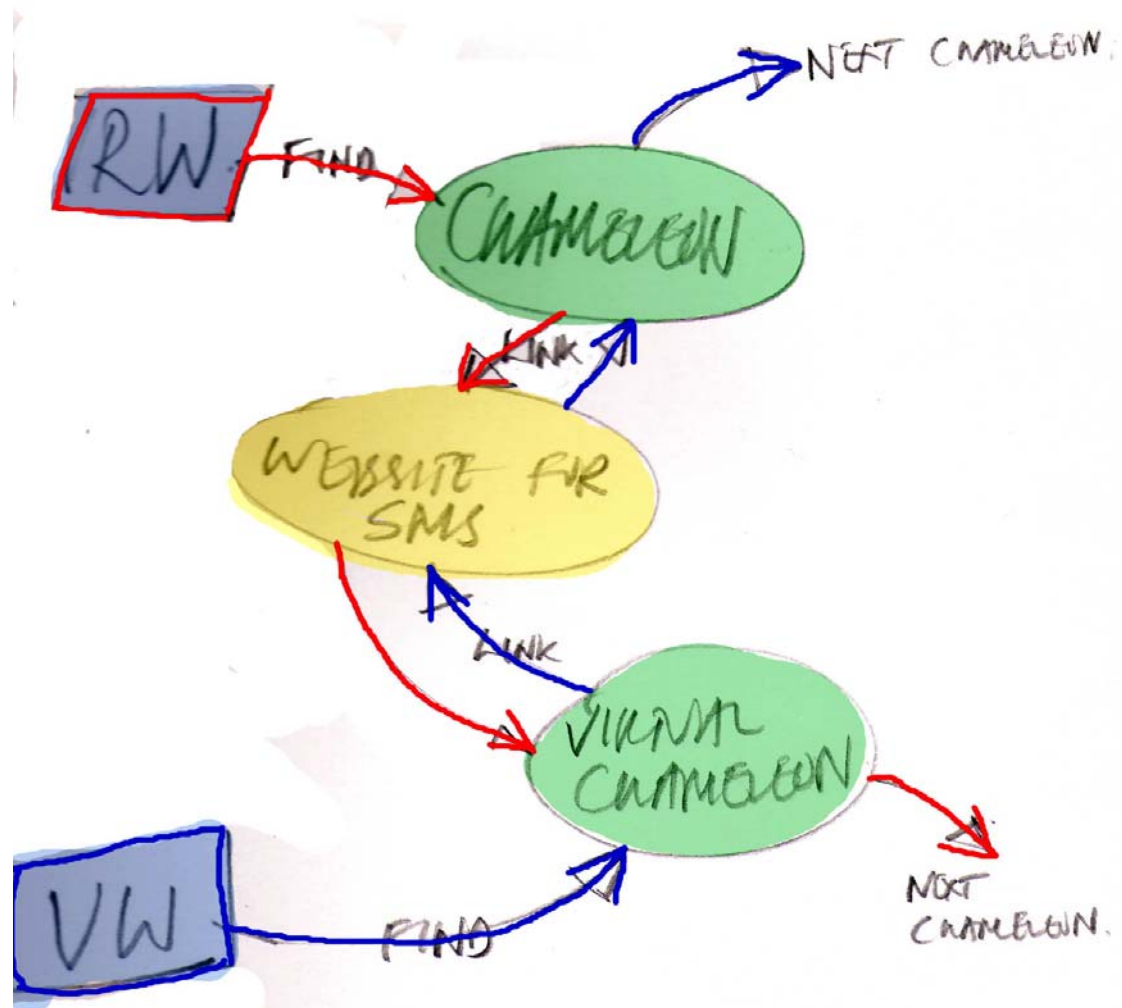
The notions of telematics and telepresence began to gain importance for interactive media art in the late 1980s. Telepresence allows the viewer parallel experiences in three different spaces at once: 1. in the «real» space in which the viewer's body is physically located; 2. per tele-perception in the «virtual, simulated visual space reproducing a fictional or real, remote visual sphere; and 3. per tele-action at the physical location of the «data work or even of a robot controllable over one's movements or equipped with a sensory apparatus over which one can find one's bearings».(2)

Since the late eighties the pioneers of telematics have made extravagant claims for a new world order based on the *'co-creating [of] non-imperialistic, multi-cultural or domestic agendas for community or global scale aesthetic endeavors'*(3) The idea is to change the essence of communication through the non-commercial exploitation of new technology, to use 'new' media to create a 'new' world.

In common with twentieth century philosophy and media commentary the play of language drives the agenda. The desire to use media to mediate in an unmediated space is a central political plank of the major developers of this form of art. As is already shown Ascott and Galloway/Rabinowitz see the form as a conduit for social change. Other players such as Robert Adrian X used telecommunications to *'«create individual access to telecommunications media and to develop strategies for their artistic deployment. The artistic dimension of the overall project consists precisely however not in creating special objects—«artworks»—with means such as fax, but in establishing dialogical interchange relationships, that is to say: special relations among the participants who «produce» communicative occurrences.»'*(4)

Telematics essentially describes the means to create the space, the space is where the 'work' exists, the 'work' is ephemeral, existing in an undefined elsewhere, Ascott's 'everywhere and nowhere'.

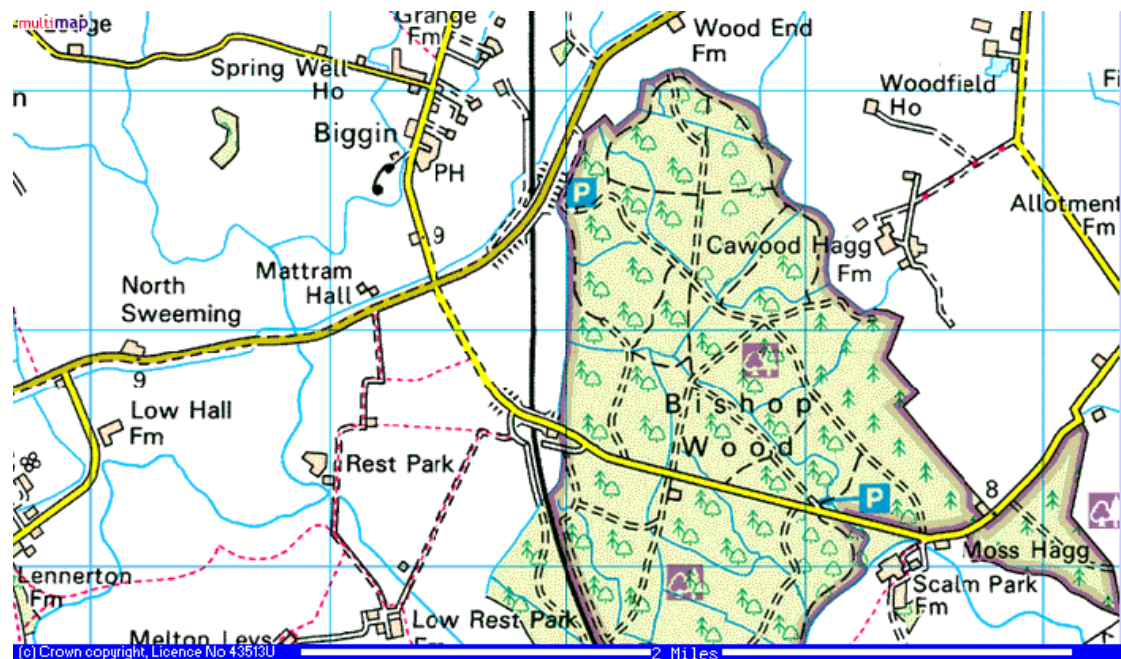
Proposal:



Schematic for the operation of chameleon.

Chameleon links a virtual world to a real world. The interface with the virtual world directs your actions in the real world and vice versa. Discovery is accomplished through anonymous collaboration.

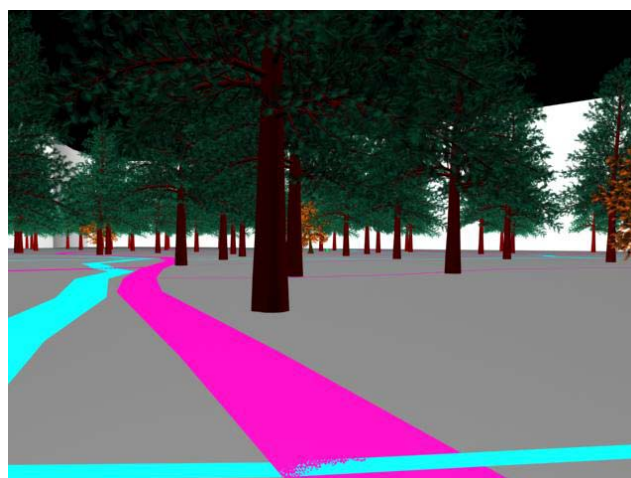
Chameleon explores conversation and collaboration through the interaction of a real and a virtual space.



Bishop Wood covers nine hundred acres near Selby in North Yorkshire. The land is partially classified as ancient woodland, although the ravages of the first world war in particular make that claim somewhat dubious. It is fair to say that the area has been wooded since the days when the Bishop of York had a hunting lodge at Selby and wild boar roamed. An interesting feature of the environment within and surrounding the woodland is the considerable number of dykes that crisscross it. The dykes were built by Dutch engineers who were employed to help in the building of York Minster, to transport the stone from local quarries to York, about fourteen miles, dykes were built for barges to carry the stone.

The woodland is owned by the bishopric but leased for a peppercorn rent to the Forestry Commission with the proviso that it remain open to the public.

Chameleon is presented within the six hundred or so acres to the north of the road in the map above and represented by a VRML model of the woodland in cyberspace.



VRML woodland model. 3ds Max 6 exported to VRML97

The participants in the woodland walk through the woods using a map provided and search for the chameleons.



Chameleon mobile phone. Metal, Wood, Plastic.

The chameleons are text only phones placed strategically around the woodland. The participant picks up the phone and reads the message. They reply to the message and receive another message that directs them, somehow to the next chameleon. The next chameleon will be a different text only phone.

On the website, the participant explores the website in the manner of an online game. She finds the chameleon and reads the message. She replies to the message and receives an answer directing her somehow to the next chameleon.

The messages are mediated through an sms webserver, messages from one chameleon are stored as incoming until a message is received from another chameleon, then the first message becomes outgoing (i.e. back to the first chameleon) and the second incoming (i.e. awaiting reply).

The participants are engaged, unknowingly, in a conversation through cyberspace. The real world participant receives answers from the online participant and responds. The online participant reacts to the virtual environment and offers clues based on that, the real participant only has reality.

Progress:

Technical:

VRML 97 has the most enormous number of bugs known to man. The Open source community continue to develop it, Open VRML version 0.15.5, was posted on sourceforge on the 10th January, 2005. The VRML97 (VRML 2) is generally used to create 3d advertisements on the web but competes with Flash, Shockwave et al. There are some sites that create VRML worlds that are used as avatar based chatrooms, but the processing power needed to use them makes the exercise slow and frustrating on all but the most powerful computers. It is generally a programming language that works on the **siwsid** (sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't) standard.

So the VRML site is at the furthest forward I could manage. Individual sites do link but struggle to link back.

The mobile phone is entirely possible but I haven't been able to get an old one to remodel, I am in the process of begging from manufacturers.

The web software is easy to get hold of and can be adapted. It is time intensive and I'm not convinced I want to pursue it yet.

Aesthetic:

Why use chameleons? Why not use your own phone? What questions do you ask? How do you answer?

Bibliography:

(1) Lovejoy, Margot, **Postmodern Currents, Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media**, 2nd Ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997)

(2) Oliver Grau, *Virtuelle Kunst in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Visuelle Strategien*, Berlin, 2001, p. 180. Cf. also id., «Telepräsenz. Zur Genealogie und Epistemologie von Interaktion und Simulation,» in Gendolla et al. (2001), op. cit., pp. 3963. quoted at http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/overview_of_media_art/communication/6/

(3) All rights reserved 1983 - 2001 Kit Galloway & Sherrie Rabinowitz quoted at <http://www.ecafe.com/>

(4) Robert Adrian X writing in the brochure accompanying the exhibition «On Line,» Graz, 1993. Cited in Marc Ries, «Netzkunst Kunst der Netze,» in *Kunst und ihre Diskurse in den 80er und 90er Jahren*, Carl Aigner/ Daniela Hölzl (eds.), Vienna, 1999, pp. 175192, here p. 177 quoted at http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/overview_of_media_art/communication/9/