

Paul Sermon - Biography

Professor of Creative Technology and Associate Head of School for Research & Innovation at the University of Salford, School of Art & Design. Born in Oxford, England, 1966. Studied BA Hon's Fine Art degree under Professor Roy Ascott at The University of Wales, from September 1985 to June 1988. Studied a Post-graduate MFA degree at The University of Reading, England, from October 1989 to June 1991. Awarded the Prix Ars Electronica "Golden Nica", in the category of interactive art, for the hyper media installation "Think about the People now", in Linz, Austria, September 1991. Produced the ISDN videoconference installation "Telematic Vision" as an Artist in Residence at the Center for Art and Media Technology (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany, from February to November 1993. Received the "Sparkey Award" from the Interactive Media Festival in Los Angeles, for the telepresent video installation "Telematic Dreaming", June 1994. From 1993 to 1999 employed as Dozent for Media Art at the HGB Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig, Germany. During this time continued to produced further interactive telematic installations including "Telamatic Encounter" in 1996 and "The Tables Turned" in 1997 for the Ars Electronica Centre in Linz, and the ZKM Media Museum in Karlsruhe. From 1997 to 2001 employed as Guest Professor for Performance and Environment at the University of Art and Industrial Design in Linz, Austria. Since June 2000 based at The University of Salford working primarily within the research field of immersive and expanded telematic environments.

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My work in the field of telematic arts explores the emergence of a user-determined narrative by bringing remote participants together in a shared telepresent environment. Through the use of live chroma-keying and videoconferencing technology, two public rooms or installations and their audiences are joined in a virtual duplicate that turns into a mutual, visual space of activity. Linked via an Internet videoconference connection, this form of immersive interactive exchange can be established between almost any two locations in the world.

The audiences form an integral part within these telematic experiments, which simply wouldn't function without their presence and participation. Initially the viewers seem to enter a passive space, but they are instantly thrown into the performer role by discovering their own body-double in communication with another physically remote user on video monitors in front of them. They usually adapt to the situation quickly and start controlling and choreographing their human avatar. Nevertheless, the installation set up in the form of an open accessible platform offers a second choice of engagement: the passive mode of just observing the public action, which often appears to be a well-rehearsed piece of drama confidently played out by actors. Compelling to watch, it can be a complex issue to discover that the performers are also part of the audience and are merely engaging in a role. The entire installation space then represents two dynamic dramatic functions: the players, controllers, or puppeteers of their own avatar, absorbed by the performing role; and the off-camera members of the audience, who are themselves awaiting the next available slot on the telematic stage, soon to be sharing this split dynamic. However, the episodes that unfold are not only determined by the participants, but by the given dramatic context. As an artist I am both designer of the environment and therefore 'director' of the narrative, which I determine through the social and political milieu that I choose to play out in these telepresent encounters.

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