

First, Second and Third Wave

In my work at universities and production houses all over Europe I often follow discussions about “getting into the market” on the one hand and “pushing the boundaries of the medium” on the other. The discussions always start with a wish for creating something genuinely new that goes beyond the boundaries of the new media and a wish for being first with the ideas – also in order to make the projects realistic from an economical point of view. But it is an old truth that the first wave gets the ideas, the second wave earns the money and the third wave makes everything stiffen.

Introduction

There comes a time in the career of every new media worker where the choice has to be made: which wave do I belong to and which lord am I going to serve?

At a first glance it may seem that this article is more about politics and morality within the new media rather than the art of writing for them – but that is not the case. My motive for writing this article is to make clear that the way we write for the new media depends on the technological solutions that are to be used as well as how the product is going to be sold. These things intersect in a very, very confined system. In the very moment that the multimedia author writes his first letter, the game designer starts to define his gameplay and the art director tries to mark out a style, they are all deeply involved in a battle between artistic, scientific and commercial interests.

My ambition with this article is to describe the three waves in order to display the premises that the market rests upon and in order to explain why the restrictions upon development content and experiment so easily appears. But I would also like to show the artistic potential of the medium and why I am so hopelessly in love with it.

Why games suit the computer

I will take my main examples from the game industry, mostly because it’s been there for at long time. However, as you will see, my experiences in this field can easily be related to the fields of the Internet, interactive television and the cell phone.

First of all it may be interesting to ask why games happened to dominate the entertainment in the first place. Quite obviously a lot of other things could have been interesting. In my own work, for instance, I focus more on the narrative drive than that of competitive gameplays. And even though I may be absorbed by *Doom* or *Counterstrike* only a few games give me more than the adrenalin kick. When I watch a movie the range of content is much broader: I can be affected, I can become morally or politically involved, I can get into a romantic mood and I can become challenged in my worldview. We don’t find this broad range of content in the field of computergames and even if I should find a game that appealed to a broader register of feelings I can be sure that it’s a commercial catastrophe. I do have a top ten of remarkable multimedia productions that break with this pattern but they are rare. Everybody brings them forth as ideal examples – not least in the

Michael Valeur
“First, Second and Third Wave”
Content, Applications and Challenges
Universidade Lusófona, Lisbon 2004

academic field – but still they don’t manage to gain a position on the market and only a few have managed to generate a profit. So... how can that be?

To answer this question it is important to remember what the computer is and what it’s capable of. Fundamentally, the computer is very good at calculating. It can process an immense amount of data extremely fast and present us with the results just as fast as we can touch the keyboard. This is the power of the computer and in this regard it is fantastic. On the other hand it’s not so good at communicating or being intuitive. It doesn’t understand irony, a twinkle in the eye or an ambiguous message. It’s not very good at reading between the lines. Thus, when it comes to communication, all game designers know the importance of addressing the computer in a language it understands. Put very simply it’s a question of communicating in zeroes and ones. The computer wants clear information and it gives clear and unambiguous answers. The abstractions that appear underway derive from a high level of complexity in the calculations (that is, a lot of zeroes and ones) and not because the machine is capable of feeling or sensing anything. It doesn’t communicate – it calculates. Of course, this may give way to an interesting sort of interaction that resembles communication in many ways but it is important to be aware that it all starts with calculations. Writing for the medium thus implies the challenge of putting some sort of meaning into a clearly defined system. Closed universes with unambiguous rules – this is where the computer is best.

And here we stand with a broad range of fictions and a wish to arouse some feelings in the participant. We have a lot of genres to create and a lot of questions to ask in this new medium. But the game is immediately put up front – because what is a game? Games are closed universes with unambiguous rules and clearly defined goals. Chess could be made a sort of prototype – a restricted number of squares, a restricted number of pieces and some clearly defined rules with regard to the movement of each piece. At a first glance it is a very simple game but we all know that the complexity is extremely high – the possibilities are almost infinite. In this way games are more or less tailored for the computer: you define a universe, describe some rules and define a clear goal.

However, next to the game remains another alternative – that of narration. We know it from the novel and from the film. The process of narrating or storytelling is based on another sort of logic than that of the game. It may be brought to the new medium but it poses some challenges to the traditional way of telling a story. To make a story work on the computer the universe has to be made a lot more concrete than in other media. There has to be made room for the recipient since the recipient is now a participant. Also, there has to be found a way to communicate in a dynamic way – one that takes us beyond a simple “win or loose” dichotomy. For a long time this has been my main ambition: to go beyond game playing and explore the narrative qualities of the computer medium

Of course, gamers are seldom motivated for the element of narration at all – for them the “win or loose” dynamic is highly sufficient. Furthermore, as I stated above, it is easier to integrate the principles of game playing with the logic of the computer. Thus, quite evidently, the games take the tête and some people will even doubt that it’s possible to create narratives in the new medium. But it definitely is – it’s just a question of choosing this as a goal. It requires a lot of innovation and it requires a will to break down boundaries and challenge traditions. Put shortly, it takes the interest in creating something new that is not in accordance with mainstream assumptions. And this is where the question of the three waves comes into the picture. The desirability of breaking down boundaries or seeking out new audiences depends very much on the wave that you ride and in this

way the wave comes to define what you want from the medium and thus which tools and principles you eventually get to use.

The first wave: New standards

If you belong to the first wave it makes a lot of sense to meet the challenge of the narration. The sheer fact that there exists a border makes it interesting to try and cross it. And even if gamers that want traditional games and recognisable gameplays should dominate the market you will always try to get further. The basic question of the first wave is: what can we do to create even more possibilities?

This question requires creativity. It involves the integration of art and the challenge of competing with the standards of film and literature. But it also involves the question of the target group. Only here it is a question of broadening the target group and see if it is possible to reach other people than the traditional audience. Finally, it has to do with technology and design: it is driven by the wish to establish new technological standards and experiment with the graphical appearance and technical finesses.

This was more or less the spirit of the mid-nineties. Before this time the market was satiated with action- and platform games from production houses like Atari. Small shooters with simple but extremely absorbing gameplays and minimal graphics. Closed worlds with unambiguous goals. Slowly however, the graphics were improved and in the middle of the nineties a wave appeared where the aesthetic elements seemed to gain importance in the face of the demands for pace. Whereas the producers of the actiongames spent their energy on working with fast 3D engines and a not too refined graphical display another type of game suddenly appeared where the aesthetic and artistic qualities were up front and where the slow tempo became a virtue. *Myst* was one of the games that saw the daylight, as a part of this trend with its poetic landscapes, meditative soundtrack and slow pace – and it became a bestseller. In London Alex Mayhew’s beautiful *Ceremony of Innocence* appeared. Some may remember this title as the “postcard fiction” and it displays an exceptionally imaginative style that spoke to an audience that appreciated art. This was further accentuated by the list of actors that included Isabella Rosselini and Ben Kingsley. In Denmark I took part in this trend with productions like *Black Out* and *The Angel* – both published by Deadline Media. Even in USA, the centre of commercial game production, new types of alternative production houses and titles appeared. Among these my favourite is the bizarre *Freak show* published by Voyager that experimented with the position of the user in a genuine way. Also more acknowledged avant-garde artists started to take some interest in the medium – for instance, Laurie Anderson came up with *Puppet Motel*. A common trait of all these productions was that they added to the simple aesthetics of the some more artistic and narrative ambitions. It was as if the medium was becoming a little more mature in its content.

Alongside the avant-garde productions the action games also became much more impressive. Most importantly, the field of 3D graphics were conquered which enhanced the feeling of “being there”. *Doom* enjoyed its triumphs and created new standards that were quickly followed by new productions. In this way a new wave of pioneers appeared within the artistic field as well as commercial game production – people wanted to develop the medium and create something interesting. Prizes were given and praises were made and sometimes the productions even paid themselves – sometimes they didn’t. Most important was the feeling of creating something new to define new standards and regarding the investments it was not too impossible since most people

Michael Valeur
“First, Second and Third Wave”
Content, Applications and Challenges
Universidade Lusófona, Lisbon 2004

wanted to have a part in the future. Consequently during the first wave commercial and artistic interests would exist side by side as they do in the fields of literature, theatre and cinema. The activities would give way to a broad range of entertainment and artistic productions and pluralism with regard to genres and contents.

In the work as an author the field of new media was plenty with challenges. Experiences from games and from the literary tradition were brought together and the hours were spent wondering how to integrate participation and storytelling in compelling ways. During the first wave this was not a problem – it was a challenge. The new media brought a wholly new dimension to an old project within the literary tradition: that of the multilinear novel. The story displayed a new sort of spatiality and a new sort of contact with its recipient. When you paint a picture, you have to choose from where to see your motive but when you create a sculpture this is suddenly the choice of the spectator. The same thing could now happen to the interactive story. It was the user who had the choice and it was the user who decided the point of view. In this way, the interactive story was a kind of 3dimensional novel.

But why didn't this way approach become much more powerful in the field of new media and why have we end up with the conformity and boredom of the current market? To answer this question we will have to turn toward the other couple of waves.

The Second Wave: Establishing a market.

Each time a new medium is brought into being a shift will appear from a wave of experimenting and groundbreaking to a wave of establishment. If the first wave has to do with putting up tents in every corner of a new landscape the second wave has to do with building a house that can endure the winter. In this case the interesting thing is not to conquer new landscapes but to become established in the current one. From an artistic and creative point of view this means to define clear goals and strategies regarding how to reach them. It also means to investigate the target group and if it is not big enough it means to change your project in accordance with this. In the case of the computer medium, for instance, it was obvious that the potential buyers in the field primarily was young men between 15 and 25 – they represented a significant and growing computer culture and they were willing to pay a considerable amount of money for a computergame. The attempts to deal with this target group resulted in the decrease of more experimental titles or, at least, in a redefinition of these titles to a new audience.

Whereas the artists and designers hold the power during the first wave the second wave is always introduced by marketing. The designers are now supposed to adapt their work to a specific target group not to the conquest of new landscapes. And of course, in this marketing directed approach it becomes particularly interesting how much money that can be made. Quite obviously, teenage boys and men establish an immense market for competitive and fast paced content – the type of content that is most obviously suited for the computer. Hence during the second wave boundaries slowly start to appear regarding the level of creativity and curiosity in content development.

On the other hand bigger businesses start to appear. The small garage-companies of the first wave find their way into more established fields and turn into middle sized companies and even though the experiments and the narrow productions become less numerous it also means that more money are into circulation so that it becomes possible to create bigger and more ambitious projects. First of

all this means an opportunity for creating superior technological solutions but in a content perspective it also implies the opportunity of working with more sizeable manuscripts. In this way the projects grow during the second wave and so do the investors. Regarding the content limitations do appear but new opportunities are also opened up.

To take the market of the computer as an example the eighties mark an explosive growth. Newer and bigger machines appear every year, the level of graphics is improved and there is a lot of money to be made. In many homes the desire for games is the main motive for investing in a computer. And in the second wave of the computer fiction it thus becomes important to meet the requirement of excellent graphics – and to adapt to the target group. Whereas the first wave is mainly motivated by going beyond the boundaries the mantra of the second wave is “a realistic, attitude toward the content” meaning that experiments might be good, but “we must adjust ourselves to the conditions of the market”. The more this approach is taken the closer we’re getting toward the third wave. And at that point we will see that all experimental titles have disappeared or at least are not distributed into the stores. Even though there still seem to be a small adventure market and a few strategy games incorporating some narration and slow gameplays the adrenaline rush has taken over the field. A good game becomes a game that sells in a lot of copies and this is where we hit the third wave.

The third wave: The Art of Positioning

It is possible to have some artistic ambitions during the second wave – it is just a little more difficult. During the third wave, however, it is almost impossible. Here artistic ambitions are almost considered to be a subversive activity. The third wave is not driven by marketing people alone, it is primarily driven by investors that for the main part don’t really care about the things they invest in – as long as it makes some money. This is more or less where we find ourselves at the moment. If you take a look at the multimedia titles that are published today it is obvious that traditional game concepts are flooding the market. From a genre perspective they are well defined and specialised and from a content perspective you will see that there is a top ten – nothing more – of possible themes. Second world war, science fiction and fantasy for the main part. In other words the diversity is not impressive and the amount of new and interesting content is easily surmised. Experiments regarding the content are almost non-existent. And even though the game industry makes a tremendous amount of money more and more production houses have to close. This leaves the market with a few large production houses and a lot of small ones whereas the middle-sized companies of the second wave have either closed or grown bigger. The financial muscles required for lifting the mammoth-sized productions of the third wave cause this development. This takes a heavyweight actor and there is only room for those who wants to go all the way. Of course, the small companies can take care of the flash-productions for the Internet – or small factual cd-rom projects for different organisations but there are no middle-sized companies left that create small but interesting productions. And hence no innovation.

When a company grows beyond a certain size it must team up with the big boys who have the big money. Productions at this level take a lot and trying to create anything without a good 3D engine is out of the question. The technological standards are extremely high. And while the technological requirements increases the requirements regarding content decreases. Things are made even more complicated because of the enormous licenses that have to be paid to either Microsoft or Sony if you want to use one of their platforms (The X-box or the Playstation 2). And you might actually

Michael Valeur
“First, Second and Third Wave”
Content, Applications and Challenges
Universidade Lusófona, Lisbon 2004

want to do so because this is where the big sales numbers are to be found. This is where everyone’s trying his luck. Accordingly, production prizes are enormous, Microsoft and Sony want their share of the cake and the investors are definitely not philanthropists either. At the same time it’s impossible to raise the price of the product because the competition is severe and there is hardly room for a top ten on the market – the rest are out in the cold. There is only room for a few big productions that earn most of the money. With these big budgets and big risks there is only room for one sort of content – the one you know for sure will bring your money back. The ambitions regarding content are gone.

During this third wave the mantra is positioning: stay close to a well-known success and add a single feature or two that makes the target group prefer your product. This strategy succeeds in one out of ten cases while the rest falls into oblivion. The production that survived has only brought a minimum of innovation regarding content to the field. Prizes are high and risks have to be kept low. This requirement is so powerful that a company may even avoid a game about World War I because World War II is known to sell better. And of course the style is no exception: it has to be recognisable from other productions as well. In this way the companies generally try to please the target group that they know will buy the production. Thinking in new markets with new target groups and gameplays or having artistic ambitions are generally seen as a minus. Accordingly, the market stiffens and everything looks alike. This is why so many middle-sized companies have to close and this is why women generally don’t want to play computergames. Basically, the creativity and the intellect have been kept out – and thus a medium with an extreme potential becomes a poor and meagre experience from a content point of view. There is a long way to the film and other kinds of fiction.

Working on the conditions of the different waves

During the past decade I’ve had to choose which wave to be a part of several times. Many of the small companies I’ve been working for have grown and the focus has been changed... others have had to do utterly intolerable things from an artistic point of view in order to please the investors. For those who’s dream has been to keep a company going these changes have been necessary compromises but for me as a writer it has meant the very motive for working in this field has been taken away.

Thus, as the reader might have figured out already, my heart is with the first wave. Of course, it is satisfactory to have some more wide reaching projects realised during the second wave but the third wave only calls for a not too heartfelt professionalism and a chance for earning some money. However, each wave calls for a specific set of tools – a specific way of writing for the medium. To illuminate this point I will take my own field as an example and describe how I’ve dealt with the interactive story, that is, the meeting between narration and interaction on the conditions of each wave. To begin with I will provide a more general introduction to this challenge of combining interaction with storytelling and afterwards I will describe how this problem may be solved during the three waves.

The Dilemma of interaction and narration

The problem of writing for the computer medium can be stated in many ways. As the previous pages should make clear my main area of interest has to do with storytelling and how to practice this art in the field of interactive media. This implies a set of tools and principles with regard to the

Michael Valeur
“First, Second and Third Wave”
Content, Applications and Challenges
Universidade Lusófona, Lisbon 2004

structuring of narration and interaction. This range of tools and principles is highly shaped by the wave to which you belong but before I describe this in detail I will make a more general introduction to the essential problem: how to combine interaction and narration.

A lot of people choose to develop traditional games instead of narrations with reference to a classical dilemma – namely that the story wants to seduce and direct its reader whereas interaction gives the participant a choice. Thus, when a story integrates the principle of interaction it's necessary to rethink the dramaturgy as well as it's necessary to make clear how the communication with the participant is going to take place. Fundamentally what happens is that the reader is invited to become a participant and a sort of conversation appears: Questions are asked and answers are given. When a question is asked it should be possible to give more than one answer – at least a “yes” and a “no” but more possibilities would also be preferable. This means that the writer has to split up the linear sequence of his story into two or more. Thus, as an author I don't know which direction the participant is going to choose as I would in the case of the novel or the feature film. Accordingly I'm unable to use timing in the same way as I would in the linear manuscript. The participant makes a choice and as an author I have to be able to take the consequence of this choice. I have to design my manuscript as a web of stories and this is rather complicated because there has to exist different realities at the same time.

People who have been working with these multilinear structures know that a story most often thrives with some level of tightness or timing. Whereas the free choice and the multitude of possibilities expand the interaction and the immersion of the participant they also take away some of the dynamics of the story. While writers are good at telling stories, users are often lousy amateurs and it can be risky to give them a choice. Most people with experience from the theatre will recognise this problem: When the audience is invited to the scene the play will seldom persist. People in the audience don't have a plan with their story; they don't know their lines and so on. If you want to invite them into the fiction you have to design your fiction with regard to this. You have to give the audience some roles they can relate to. We know this situation from ordinary conversations: If we are not talking about the same thing we lose our interest in the discussion. Thus, what we need is a setting and some roles that turn the audience into participants.

These roles have to be designed in a way so that the participant is able to do something. A goal has to be created and some sort of dynamics has to be invented that makes it interesting to strive toward this goal. In most computergames this can be defined as the “gameplay”. In a shooter, for instance, this implies the goal of destructing all enemies on a given level. This activity may be further particularised with regard to a number of parameters like ammunition (which may be sparse or which may have to be collected or conquered) or health (which may define easily or severely you are wounded) that provide the gameplay with another set of subgoals and obstacles in order to enhance the challenge and excitement. In an interactive fiction like the ones I've been working with the “gameplay” may alternatively be focused on creating dilemmas. As it's been said by The Clash: “Should I stay or should I go now/If I go there will be troubles/if I stay there will be double”. Insolvable situations where ethical or emotional dilemmas are created in the participant may represent another sort of drive that enables the integration of interaction and storytelling.

Apart from the gameplay and the goal the participant will also need something to interact through. A couple of hands in the fiction so to say, with which he can act upon the story. These hands are the interface. In a shooter it is your weapon and in an interactive fiction it may be some other things. In

Michael Valeur
“First, Second and Third Wave”
Content, Applications and Challenges
Universidade Lusófona, Lisbon 2004

The Angel, one of the fictions I’ve been working on, the participant is provided with a number of “angel buttons” with which he can read the thoughts of the characters, create miracles and so on. These abilities as well as a fairly complex system of navigation make it possible for the participant to move around in the universe. In this way *The Angel* constitutes a tree-like dramaturgy that enables the participant to follow a number of threads leading to a number of experiences and moralities. A multilinear structure where the scenes follow each other as they would in a film but where the sequence and appearance of events are caused by the choices of the participant.

For some people this interaction is not enough. Of course we could loosen everything, dissolve all storylines and let the participant do anything but as I mentioned before in relation to the theatre metaphor this doesn’t necessarily further the experience – people can do anything and so what? Anything is not interesting! But for those who think that navigating the fiction is not enough, some other alternatives do exist that I will come back to later on. At this point the most important conclusion has to do with the way the problems of interactive storytelling are to be solved. This depends very much on the specific wave.

Writing on the conditions of the first wave

One of the most satisfactory projects I have been working on was *Black Out* – a fairly big interactive fiction that was published in 1996. At this time there was still public funding for these kinds of projects and they were even expected to be innovative and of a high artistic quality. For this reason I had a chance of developing new forms and tools and of working in a more systematic way with dramaturgy and interaction. A work that gave way to a range of experimental features.

Among other things, this included a hidden system of points that used the calculating power of the computer as effectively as an ordinary computergame but in a very different way, that is, it used it in order to present the narrative content. The method consisted in registering every click of the participant in order to place him or her in one four profiles. These included fire, earth, air or water. Fire for temper and aggression, earth for systematics and habits, air for intellectuality and reflection and, finally, water for sensitivity and fear. If a participant thus chose to visit a Chinese restaurant instead of a brothel this would add a point to one specific profile and make the fiction act in a specific way toward him. Put very simply, the fiction would have an idea of the participant as being aggressive, systematic, intellectual or sensitive and the following events would depend on this profile. Of course, the participant was unaware of this system and would thus never really know what to expect from the fiction. For this reason he would have to analyse his own actions in order to understand the sequence of events and in this way the interaction implied that the participant was confronted with himself. One of the experimental features of *Black Out* hence consisted in using interaction as a psychological tool for reading the participant and framing the fiction in accordance with this.

Another important feature of *Black Out* was the distribution of narrative elements into an open space. The world of the fiction consisted in a big town where the participant could walk around freely and contact the persons that he met. Each of the many actors would hold a very little part of a very complex story. At a first glance this would be a criminal plot but as the fiction unfolded new elements and questions would appear: questions about who we are and why we are here. It was up to the participant which part of this story he wanted to unravel. The story was distributed into the inhabitants of the town, so to say, and the actual perspective and sequence of events would depend on the choices of the participant. Of course, there would be a sort of direction in this world. A

number of plotpoints would mark narrative turns after which the town and its inhabitants would increase in hostility and the participant would be forced to make difficult choices – toward the end he would have to face serious dilemmas.

In this way the dramaturgical structure of *Black Out* represents an alternative to that of *The Angel*. Whereas in the latter the fiction is ordered into narrative “threads” that the participant can move between, the fiction of the former is embedded into the fictional space and the story emerges from the way the participant acts and navigates within this space. Both dramaturgies represent ways of dealing with the question of interaction and narration from a more artistic point of view – as ways of imagining new ways of storytelling.

In this way working on the conditions of the first wave implies a creative and experimenting activity. It is a question of inventing new tools and new ways of doing things. To reinterpret interactivity for instance, as a way of confronting people with themselves or to distribute a story into an open space and see how that works. The keywords are innovation and new ways of artistic expression. The guidelines do not exist – they are to be invented.

Working under the conditions of the second wave

Being a first wave production *Black Out* was actually fairly big. Budgets of this size are most often seen in second wave projects and this made it possible to realise some ideas with regard to dramaturgy and content that would normally not have been taken this far. From an artistic point of view this is of course the absolutely most satisfying situation. However, these kinds of projects are very rare – when the budgets grow as they do during the second wave the creative space becomes a little more narrow while the opportunities of getting things realised on a larger scale become better. Personally, I’ve been working on a broad range of children’s productions during the second wave. Children’s productions have certain advantages: They require a lot of fantasy, the target group has already been defined and there is a commercial basis for the production. But what does that mean to the practical work?

First and foremost it means the chance of working in longer periods of time on the same sequence of titles. Most producers see a new title as the first in a row and thus you have to work strategically to create a more wide reaching universe rather than using everything up in the first try. On the children’s productions I was a part of this implied a greater gallery of characters and the opportunity of working with different dramaturgical concepts. My first production (*The Mad Magician*) had a very open structure where the content was distributed into the surroundings to be experienced in any possible order. Apart from a common beginning there was only one single plotpoint that all players would have to get through. The sequel (*The Doggone Dognapping*) had several storylines. The player could move freely between these storylines but each of them would follow a specific set of plotpoints. The third production (*Bellini’s Bikini*) alternated between a rather strong storyline and passages with a great freedom of interaction whereas the fourth production (*The Great Cheese Conspiracy*) had a so-called base-oriented structure. It was possible visit a number of bases freely in order to solve a specific problem. I don’t have the room to describe these dramaturgical concepts in detail. I just want to point out that an obvious opportunity during the second wave is to seek out different perspectives on a common theme over a sequence of productions. In this way there is still some room for creativity as long as the target group is kept in focus and the games can be sold.

Accordingly, the second wave implies a certain degree of stability that enables some experimentation – it just have to be distributed onto a number of productions. On the other hand there is no way of avoiding the target group – the marketing department has gained in power and influence. The market gets thoroughly researched and user tests are a part of the project plan. You may be able to push the boundaries of what is aesthetically and structurally possible but you are not allowed to cross them. Thus, as a designer you have to be aware of everybody else on the market as well as you have to keep your audience in focus – what do they expect and what can they possibly tolerate? Also, you have to accept that you are a part of a teamwork where marketing is equal to creativity in importance: Experiments are welcome as long as they can be sold. Part of the way this requirement may put some limits to the activity but listening to the target group can also be a very inspiring thing. As a designer you take a step back in order to concentrate on the audience. Any tool that is taken into use in order to solve the problems of interaction, gameplay and narration has to be seen in relation to the expected audience and how they may receive the final product.

Working on the conditions of the third wave

Taking a step back becomes a little more difficult during the third wave. Here you not only have to study your target group you may also have to deceive it. During this wave the investors have the power – it is their ball game and the main criterion of quality has to do with the number of copies sold. From the point of view of the writer and the game designer this means that the work consists in rationalising and cutting to the bone.

One of the first rules: Thou shall not confront anybody with anything that they don't know already. If anything new is to be launched it has to be recognisable from some other context. It is important to be one hundred percent up to date with the trends on the market and with the titles that are passed over the desks in this very moment. You can compare the situation to a game of domino. Each piece always has to fit the previous and from there on you may perhaps be able to take just one tiny step forward. Your material is the clichés that appear on the top ten of copies sold and what marks your influence is how you manage to push the market from here. In other words: You have to park your creativity and find a well known cliché for the basis of your work and possibly provide it with a little original twist that marks your part in the business.

Compared to the previous cases the third wave requires that you adapt your writing style and strategies to a recycling of what is already on the market. Whereas the first wave implied the invention of new tools and strategies the second wave implied that these tools and strategies were adjusted to the specific wishes and worldviews of the target group. During the third wave your main rule is the market trends and, of course, the investor's bank account.

In a parallel to the movies you may say that directors like the Danish Lars von Trier belongs to a first wave of groundbreaking experiments whereas the Cohen brothers or Mr. Tarantino are typical of a second wave that play with the clichés and develop them in interesting ways. Finally, products like *Spiderman* or *Charlie's Angels* are typical of a third wave where the strategy consists in staying close to popular predecessors and (gently, gently) pushing plot and performance a little further. It is very important that there exists an interchange between these waves and that they are all present in the general picture. This is the case in the filmindustry where the avant-garde serves as a constant inspiration whereas the mainstream production ensures commercial circulation. In the field of multimedia, however, this doesn't seem to be the case – rather everything seems to have stiffened in a third wave that doesn't seem to move.

ITV: The pleasure of dubious quiz concepts

The current lack of movement within the field of computergames has sent a lot of creative people into the field of interactive television. I've also been working within this field with productions like *Backseatcop* that integrates radio and the Internet as a platform for interaction. Another Danish project called *ROFL* used the remote control and the set top box as a way of integrating interaction and television viewing. Both projects were given prizes as first wave productions usually are – and none of them were too successful from a commercial point of view. Thus, after a short time, the second wave took over.

Some of us hoped that the combination of interactivity and television would lead to interesting concepts within, for instance, television news. The news have a considerable group of viewers and there is a latent desire to see a story from more than one perspective – to have add-on material of different kinds that would lead to additional and more exhaustive news. But apart from a short statement at BBC this field remained untouched. What seemed to attract attention was the sports- and quiz shows. Again: Games, closed universes, simple goals and competition. The whole potential of television for creating fiction was ignored. When all has been said and done what people really wanted were all the things they already knew. The principle of phone-in programmes was adopted and translated into the remote control. And even though the television medium is broadly recognised in the population and even though we have (or ought to have) certain public service responsibilities with regard to content nothing more seemed to happen. This is indeed a shame since interactive television represents a quite unique situation for storytelling: Getting people away from their desktops and into their sofas gives way to another sort of context for fiction making and storytelling that may bring new elements into the field of interactive storytelling. However, the discussions with regard to content and user positions (the role and integration of the participant in the communication) have been more or less nonexistent and realisations of more ambitious ways of incorporating participant choices in the flow of a programme have not appeared. As a result the experience of interactive television is rather meagre compared to the one of traditional gaming platforms.

For this reason the focus has been directed toward game consoles and mobile phones. As regards these platforms the consoles are trapped in the system of third wave economics and the mobile phones don't seem to have come very far either. Within this field the first wave barely came into being before it disappeared. Quite unfortunately, since this technology has a fascinating potential for integrating the physical position of the participant in the fiction and for working with mobile and immersive concepts. During the short phase of experimentation that was allowed in this field the idea of treasure hunting represented a way of exploring the potential of mobile concepts: a treasure was hidden somewhere in the real world and the participants would be able to hunt it by way of their mobile phones and different positioning concepts. In this way the fiction moved out in the real world and infested the everyday surroundings with a new kind of enchantment. However, as I mentioned previously, the second and third wave came rolling more or less overnight in this field and reduced the ambition to one of generating traffic – as much as possible – with no regard to the content involved in this activity. The goal is to make teenagers generate greater phone bills than they would otherwise have done. In this way you can see all the arcade games from the beginning of the 1980's have a revival. Graphics that would have been intolerable on a computer seem to work perfectly on a Mobil phone and to make money.

Epilogue

And while the primitive graphics flicker over the displays of the mobile phones and while the interactivity of ITV seems to be reduced to its most minimal and mediocre possibilities I wonder how it can be that only million-dollar projects can be made for the computer. I wonder how it is that ONLY quiz shows and sports concepts are considered to be suitable for the interactive television. A single glance at cinema shows that this field contains more than one single main stream. Of course most of the content is defined by phenomena like James Bond and *Terminator* (and I can live with that), but there do seem to exist a Lars von Trier and a Roman Polanski and with them an alternative way of approaching the entire field of filmmaking.

Thus, I would like remind the reader that computer technology as such were made by people that did not follow mainstream assumptions – not even Bill Gates knew the potential of the personal computer when he created his first programmes. Technology has its waves and rhythm just as anything else and a restriction upon experimentation may serve the investors in the short run but it leads to stagnation in the long run. At the moment only the surface seems to be skimmed while a depth of great potentials are waiting to be rediscovered.