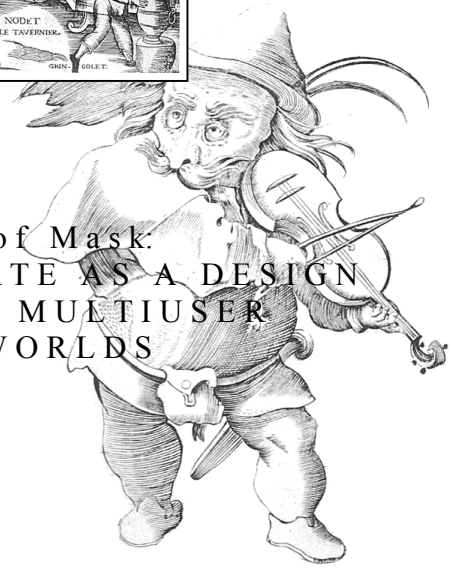

The Power of Mask:
COMMEDIA DELL´ARTE AS A DESIGN METAPHOR FOR MULTIUSER VIRTUAL WORLDS

Copyright: Mika Tuomola, Coronet Interactive Oy 1998

The Power of Mask: Commedia dell'Arte As a Design Metaphor for Multiuser Virtual Worlds

© Mika Tuomola, Coronet Interactive Oy 1998

Imaginary avatar world images in the body of the text by Christer Nuutinen

Abstract:

The research subject of this paper is to discuss how *Commedia dell'Arte* (CdA) may be used as a design metaphor for Multiuser Virtual Worlds (MVWs) and specially for those constructed with Fujitsu's WorldsAway 2.x (WA) technology. Introduction gives an overview of the beginning ideas and the general findings of the research, as well as connects CdA and MVWs with other forms of masked represention world wide. In many aspects, CdA is found a universal way of representation and thus suitable for the global, networked media of MVWs. The claim may be further studied through notes in references. An explanatory introduction to CdA is followed by a detailed account on the possibilities of transforming practices and ideas from the non-improvised and improvised elements of CdA characters, staging, scenarios and themes to MVWs. The account will concentrate on using CdA mimics and masks in WA body animation and avatar head design. In conclusion, CdA is found a resourceful design metaphor for MVWs with high potential to capture and maintain customer loyalty.

"The primitive notion, usually developed among normative circles, of some linear development forward will be done away with. It will be found out that any truly relevant step forward is always accompanied with returning to primeval beginning, or more correctly, with renewal of the beginning. It is possible to move forward only by recollection, not by oblivion." (Baktin, 1979)

Contents

I. Introduction

II. Commedia dell'Arte to Start with

II.1. Essentials
II.2. Characters
II.3. Stage and Music
II.4. Rules Create Drama

III. Commedia dell'Arte in Multiuser Virtual World Design and Management

III.1. Avatar Design
III.1.1. Body Language and Types
General Rules - Focus! - Zanni the Animal - Pantalone the Miser and the Witch - Isabella the Divine Beauty - Arlecchino the Youth - Il Dottore the Plump Academic - Il Capitano the Noble Boaster
III.1.2. Masks as Heads
General Rules - Pantalone - Il Capitano - Il Cavaliere - Colombina - Isabella - Il Dottore - Arrlechino - Brighella - Zanni
III.1.3. Contrast Creates Drama

III.2. Object / Property Design
III.2.1. Symbolism
III.2.2. Encouraging Improvisation

III.3. Staging Space
III.3.1. Implications of Staging
III.3.2. Spaces beyond Commedia dell'Arte

III.4. Event / Scenario Design and Management
III.4.1. Overall Structure of Representation
III.4.2. Structure of Scenario
III.4.3. Scenarios for Community

III.5. Themes

III.6. Improvisation – Anything Goes

IV. Conclusion

References

Images

Appendix: Conversations in Dreamscape