

Prof. Marc Alexa, Dr. Stefan Göbel, Dr. Thomas Kirste

The digital world has become a major component of our lives. Multimedia information and services are ubiquitous, electronic intelligence begins to pervade our everyday appliances. As information technology is available in abundance, one may wonder how the individual will manage to stay on top of this ever expanding universe of knowledge, features, and possibilities. Today, we are able to observe an important transition in focus: from a functionality-oriented view on information technology, where the number of features is a meter for quality, we are changing to an accessibility-oriented view. A plethora of features is taken for granted. What is counting today is the pain the user has to go through in order to access these features. Man machine interaction has always been an important issue in computer science. But with this change in perspective it has now become the decisive factor in the success of services, applications, and devices.

The focus of this topics issue is on technologies that enable new types of man-machine interaction. Three complementary research areas are of primary importance for this objective: using the human sensory capabilities effectively, supporting the interaction with information, and supporting the interaction with physical environments.

»Intelligent Visualization« investigates the constituent strategies that simplify the comprehension of complex information by taking advantage of the human visual perception capabilities.

With regard to the acceptance of human-computer interfaces, immersion represents one of the most important methods to attract users.

Exciting and diversely presented content as well as intuitive, natural, and human-like interfaces are indispensable to bind users to an interactive system with real and digital parts.

»Digital Storytelling« takes these aspects into account and it looks at technologies to communicate information efficiently to the user by exploiting the specific properties of human perception and cognition such as the fact that situational appropriateness and emotional involvement have a significant effect on memory and recall.

Finally, »Ambient Intelligence«, a notion taken from the ISTAG report »Ambient Intelligence: from vision to reality – For people & participation«, looks at mechanisms that provide the user with personal assistance to interact intuitively and effectively with the multimedia devices dispersed throughout our everyday environments.

The activities of the INI-GraphicsNet in these research areas are backed up by major national and European research strategies. Specifically, INI-GraphicsNet has participated very successfully in the strategic research initiative on »man-technology interaction«, where six major projects with a time frame of four years have been launched by the BMB+F in July 1999. The focus of these projects has been the investigation of new concepts and techniques for the interaction with complex technological environments. The projects were completed in September 2003.

INI-GraphicsNet has played a major role in the »Arvika«, »EMBASSI«, and »MAP«-projects, which address the research areas Intelligent Visualization, Digital Storytelling, and

Ambient Intelligence, respectively. Reports on specific aspects of these projects have been published in previous issues of CG topics. In this issue, we will present additional roundup reports on the Arvika and Embassi project overall results. MAP is addressed within the article concerning Storytelling based edutainment applications.