

Judy Malloy
talk in the PARC beanbag room
PARC called this series of research reports "dealer"
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Murder After Dinner in LambdaMOO

The Internet as it existed in 1993 when I first came down to PARC was a place where text based art, like conceptual art information art and experimental writing could thrive outside the confining walls of galleries, museums and book covers. In this communication oriented environment, art was a part of a group mind and the artist could shape art not only for that group mind but with that group mind.

In the year and half since this time, The Internet has evolved radically. With every museum clamoring for its own web space, with museums and art organizations looking at that space as a place for exhibition rather than a medium, with a rapid shift from participant to audience/information consumer, working in LambdaMOO now seems at the same time both quaint and forward looking.

from Cynthia Duval's transcription: Pavel and Judy:
collaboration discussion on the CSL veranda at PARC
November 1993

Pavel: creating a space that was itself literature in that by walking through the space and manipulating the objects that I might see there
or taking different paths through the space encounter this work of literature

Judy: that sounds good

Pavel: There are two things that I think are the strength of LambdaMOO. One is it's creative side, its possible to create things and the other is the social side. There are lots of people there to share what you are doing.

Brown House Kitchen, the narrative I began in LambdaMOO in November of 1993 is now contained between the covers

of a virtual book luridly titled Murder After Dinner

You see a red leather bound book.
The words Murder After Dinner glow
mysteriously on its spine.
open book

You open Murder After Dinner. The story is so
compelling that you feel you have been transported to
the site of the murder. The book slips from your
hand.....

You are in An Early UbiComp Era kitchen

It is sometime in the not too distant future in the East
Bay. Most people no longer live in
space-wasting houses or apartments.
Instead, they sleep in small spaces
and eat in communal kitchens -
like this kitchen,
where not too long ago,
a murder took place.
The intelligent devices that control the environment
here
have observed events in various ways.
In Rashomon fashion, they are capable of relating the
details of things that occurred in previous November
in separate but related ways.

Two of the devices,
the robot Ralph will clean up after you
and the food dispensing table GoodFood,
are time-based.
The information they disclose varies according to the
day of the month and the time of the day in which you
enter the story.
Two of the devices - The narranotor
("My name is Sandy. The notes I write after dinner in
Brown House Kitchen are scattered haphazardly in the
memory of this device.")
and Sarah's diary (You see a blue leather-bound book
embossed with gold writing)
disclose screens of information
pseudorandomly.

The video player (housed in a black food preparation
device that burns, chars, and crisps red meat as well as
smothering it with a wide array of sauces)
is sequential - a text based tape that you pick up where
the previous reader left off.

Brown House Kitchen,
is structured with parallel, intersecting data streams,
that are contained in and disclosed by this motley
collection of somewhat flawed objects.
The work exists in virtual time and space
and not only challenges readers to discover streams of
text but also locates them within the story.
(show and tell: WASTING TIME)

To structure the work, I used food as an integrating
device -and started by writing the menus for the 93
meals that were to be served by GoodFood the table
device
over the course of a month.
Because what Ralph says, what the video recorded,
needed to be consistent with what was being eaten,
A chart where these details were plotted,
hung on my wall for months.

(show and tell: chart)

In ways that teams of writers, artists,
computer scientists and musicians
may eventually do on the future multimedia Internet.
Brown House Kitchen integrates narrative disclosing devices
that both relate to each other and respond interactively
to investigation.

The story is communal
in that it works best when several people are in the
room Last fall, I invited a Carnegie Mellon Art Systems
class into the work. Sitting at separate terminals in
the computer room,
they jointly explored Brown House Kitchen.
Given my own misgivings about the work,
the fact that the environment worked very well in this
situation,
that its rich detail was apparent, that the students
were enthusiastic
was rewarding.

The story is not collaborative.
I did experiment with a collaboratively created
LambdaMoo environment last summer when I was a visiting
artist at Deep Creek School in Telluride.
The model of Deep Creek school that was made by the
students there is a simply constructed work
made with Tiny scenery and no programing.
However, it is effective

and students who had never touched a computer before enjoyed working on it.

Brown House Kitchen, because of the large amount of detail that it required, would have evolved more smoothly with a team.

Actual video and audio running in Jupiter rather than my writing out with words what you see on the video screen what Ralph the Will Clean up After You Unit says (etc). would be more effective.

Nevertheless in its high level of detail and attempt to find ways of structuring and integrating parallel narrative streams in a complex environment, Brown House Kitchen is of interest - an interesting model. Perhaps this is not inappropriate for PARC.

However, I am having some difficulty linking into the community for which it was destined. They don't want it.

"We already have a kitchen"

"It is not consistent with the theme of LambdaMOO."

and I feel like a NY artist foisting a piece of sculpture on a an understandably resistant community. It had not occurred to me that LambdaMOO already had a kitchen. I didn't think of Brown House Kitchen in quite those utilitarian terms,

Because, it is really a narrative, putting the work inside the virtual covers of a book called Murder After Dinner was one way to link the work into the community. Now all I have to do is convince the present owner of the library in LambdaMoo to accept this book as part of the collection.

Since I am essentially a writer, I am going to conclude this talk the way writers usually do - with a mercifully brief reading from the work in question.

Reading from a work designed to run on the computer presents a challenge. One way to do this would be to run the work in real time here and read the words aloud as I made my way through it.

But I do not like to deal with tech when giving small talks. Instead, I used a very simple strategy to prepare this reading. I opened Murder After dinner on Wednesday May 17 and wandered semi-purposefully through it.

Because the ways of accessing narrative information in LambdaMOO - look, get etc. are repetitive and to regular users of the system equivalent to a few keystrokes on the computer so that their oddness is quickly forgotten, I eliminated the look and gets for the purposes of this reading. Recalling as I did so, that someone in this lab had suggested that it might be beneficial to change these commands into more natural English. At the time I agreed, but as I got deeper into LambdaMoo I realized that this would be akin to visiting Paris and altering the French language to suit me. For better or worse, these commands are the language of LambdaMoo.

Although Brown House Kitchen works best with more than one person in it so that, as in any entertainment center, different players are activating different devices, this effect although it is not confusing if you are actually "there" would make a confusing reading. So this reading is a solitary exploration.

The paths that readers take through computer literature are always interesting. It is inherent to the genre that no two paths are ever the same. This, lightly edited, is the path that I took last Wednesday.

```
*****  
* Welcome to LambdaMOO! *  
*****
```

Running Version 1.7.8p4 of
LambdaMOO

PLEASE NOTE:

LambdaMOO is a new kind of society, where thousands of people voluntarily come together from all over the world. What these people say or do may not always be to your liking; as when visiting any international city, it

is wise to be careful who you associate with and what you say.

The operators of LambdaMOO have provided the materials for the buildings of this community, but are not responsible for what is said or done in them. In particular, you must assume responsibility if you permit minors or others to access LambdaMOO through your facilities. The statements and viewpoints expressed here are not necessarily those of the wizards, Pavel Curtis, or the Xerox Corporation and those parties disclaim any responsibility for them.

For assistance either now or later, type `help'. The lag is approximately 8 seconds; there are 153 connected.

connect malloy yellow
*** Connected ***

Outside a brown shingled house
You are standing on a wooden porch. To the South, a stone path leads to the yard, but you observe that the gate is locked.
You see Murder After Dinner here.

You open Murder After Dinner. The story is so compelling that you feel you have been transported to the site of the murder. The book slips from your hand.....

An Early Ubicomp Era kitchen
The sun, coming through white lace curtains that frame a small irregularly watered yard, falls invitingly on a round oak table, surrounded by chairs. In the Northeast corner, an old man sits in a bluegreen rocking chair, reading a newspaper. He looks like your grandfather. To your left, you see what appears to be a sculpture of a kitchen drawer mounted on a pedestal. Near the Northwest wall, there is a kitchen sink, decorated with blue tiles. An orange cat stands on the edge of the sink, drinking water from a slow faucet

drip.....-
.....

You see a Barbie-Q Unit, a wall-hung telephone device, the drawer, a brown-clad figure barely visible in the dim Southeast corner light, empty pizza boxes neatly stacked by the door, some eaters sitting at the table, a

Ralph Will Clean Up After You, an electronic menu display, a GoodFood, and a narranoter here.

The tiles with which the kitchen sink is paved are white with blue birds flying above blue flowers.

The cat has a white splotch across the top of his face. If you say "Fireball, get down!", he will look at you with yellow eyes and then go back to drinking from the slowly leaking faucet. When Ralph approaches the sink, Fireball retreats to the small shelf beneath the telephone.

Dirty dishes from the last meal are stacked in the stainless steel sink. The wooden door below the sink is slightly ajar, revealing an old fashioned garbage can.

Through lace curtains, out the South window, you see unmowed brown grass in a yard that looks like any yard in a Northern California University town. Under a centrally located apple tree sits a lifeless looking Sophie unit

She - a Sophie Will Weed Your Garden Unit - sits like a life size abandoned doll on a white metal lounge chair under the apple tree in the yard. At her feet lie rotten apples and a metal spade.

A wood handled spade lies at Sophie's feet. Dried black dirt clings to its rusted triangle-shaped metal blade.

I see no "dirt" here.

In the Northeast corner, an old man sits in a bluegreen rocking chair, reading a newspaper. He looks like your grandfather.

Ralph appears to be human, but look! He has laid his newspaper on the table beside his chair, next to the ship in a bottle. He walks slowly to the sink and begins to wash dishes. Is he for real?

You can only make out part of the date of the faded local newspaper that lies on the floor beside Ralph's chair. It looks like November something.

Ralph turns his head, and speaks these words softly: "At dinner Robbie sat down next to Becky. At first she ignored him, but I could see her face soften as he talked. I was not able to hear what they were saying. You weren't there, were you? Jack ate his chile releno silently."

A food procural, storage and dispensing unit that is housed in the center of a round oak table. GoodFood was introduced into Brown House kitchen by Becky, a vegetarian. It is programmed to procure, store, and dispense foods that it considers are good for you. GoodFood serves 93 different meals that are determined by the time and day.

The yellow brown straw that covers the floor is prickly looking, but there is an empty eaters chair at the GoodFood Table. You sit down there. Beside an empty yellow plate, nestled in a white linen napkin is a small device.

In the kitchen, unobtrusive devices hum quietly and musically. Your eye is drawn to the small square devices with 3 buttons that are nestled in white linen napkins on the top of the GoodFood table.

There are buttons in various places around the room. One of the buttons on the table "tab" says "order food" you notice.

You push a button on the table device that says "order food".

poached eggs, croissants, strawberries, tea slide slowly up the plastic tube. The beverage exits from a door in the tube and slides to a stop beside the plate. Food spurts from the top of the tube and shoots down a translucent tongue - landing squarely on the plate.

You are standing beside a translucent glass jar that is set into the floor near the table.

Your eye is drawn to a shiny black food preparation

device that burns, chars, and crisps red meat as well as smothering it with a wide array of sauces. The word BARBIE-Q is written in pink sequin-studded letters on its side. "Property of Jack" you read underneath these letters in smaller pink print. A television screen is set beneath the grill.

You put your hands on the cold black metal that encases the Barbie Unit, but the combined grill and video display are too heavy to lift.

It appears to be a combination monitor and state-of-the-art pre-narrative video recorder.

The embossed metal doors under the Barbie Unit's grill swing slowly open, revealing a video display. View Barbie.....View Barbie....., a female voice utters enticingly.

On Barbie's television screen you see round colored circles that look that cereal your little brother used to stuff relentlessly into his mouth ("Don't put so many Fruit Loops in your mouth," your mother said) emerge from Goodfood and flow down her tongues like lava into empty bowls. Around the table, fingers push the milk icon on their personal tabs. Sarah lifts a spoonful of milk soaked cereal into her mouth. THIS TASTES FUNNY she says.

On Barbie's television screen you see a greasy hamburger from which blood oozes, congealing on the plate as the camera lingers on its open pores. Becky gets up and walks away from the table towards the telephone that is affixed to the wall beside the sink. She dials a number. the words THE FOOD SHE SERVED WAS DISGUSTING materialize over her head. Fireball rubs against her legs, and she leans down to pet him.

On Barbie's television screen you see Ralph. It is dark except for the otherworldly light that emanates from the tips of his fingers. A collection of keys fastened together with a silver ring lie on the table beside him. He has picked up the ship on the bottle that normally sits beside his chair and is turning it around in his hands. You notice a small crack in the glass of which the bottle is made.

On Barbie's television screen you see Robbie. The words IT SNOWED IN THE WINTER. WE HAD THINGS CALLED SKIS THAT WE STRAPPED TO OUR FEET hover over his head.

You are looking at a sculpture mounted on a pedestal. The words SANDY'S DRAWER are written on its base, and it looks like a mid twentieth century kitchen drawer."

Among other things, the drawer contains
a narranoter
a blue leather-bound book embossed with gold writing
from the drawer.

When you place your hand on the narranoter, the screen above the three buttons lights up and displays these words: My name is Sandy. The notes I write after dinner in Brown House Kitchen are scattered haphazardly in the memory of this device.

You put your finger on the word READ below the display screen of a
narranoter . These words appear on the screen:
.....

Egg salad oozed out of the sides
of GoodFood's thickly sliced
whole wheat bread.
I don't like milk.
It is redolent of childhood.
I have made a fool of myself
and am feeling small.
You should not wear yellow, Sarah said.
.....

The screen on the narranoter grows dim.

You put your finger on the word READ below the display screen of a narranoter . These words appear on the screen:
.....
Sarah's poisonous phrases hang in the air beside me.
I have never seen Becky so angry.
Her eyes black.
(like the scorpions under the sink)
Parsley and rough ground black pepper
float on the surface of our mushroom soup.

.....
The screen on the narranoter grows dim.

You put your finger on the word READ below the display screen of a narranoter . These words appear on the screen:

.....
I liked the way the amber brown liquid lay in the white interior of Jack's cup.

.....
The screen on the narranoter grows dim.
read noter

You put your finger on the word READ below the display screen of a narranoter . These words appear on the screen:

.....
The roar of the planes is not insistent enough to keep Jack's words from looping in my mind. It was the one thing he could say that would really hurt.

.....
The screen on the narranoter grows dim.

You drop a narranoter

the noter bounces on the floor. It's screen dims.

get diary from drawer

You remove a blue leather-bound book embossed with gold writing from the drawer.

The pagescreens of the Sarah's diary are like thin cathode ray tubes. The book grows warm in your hands. Text flickers on the pagescreen, and you read these words:

.....
In the stall, the three strangers were filling paper bags with internal modems. They had taken all the old communications components that lay on top of hay bales and, on their hands and knees in the straw on the barn floor, were looking for stray devices."

.....
The screen dims. The book grows cold and snaps shut in your hands.

The pagescreens of the Sarah's diary are like thin cathode ray tubes. The book grows warm in your hands. Text flickers on the pagescreen, and you

read these words:

.....

"I remember the silver buckets full of ice and champagne, and the clink of champagne glasses at white covered tables surrounding the swimming pool, and the slow bounce that the ball too on the grass courts, and the smell of the hair tonic with which the Australian tennis player who danced with me had plastered his hair."

.....

The screen dims. The book grows cold and snaps shut in your hands.

A telephone panel is built into the wall near the sink. Several numbers are tacked on the wall above the phone.

The telephone isn't ringing.

in bold letters: POLICE - 526-3993. Below someone has scrawled in pencil: pizza - 829-0815 followed by '' to use this damn phone speak **very** loudly into the panel

We are already on our way over there, says a familiar sounding voice. What do you mean? How do you know what I wanted or where I am, you ask, but the line has gone dead. You put the telephone down. Your eyes stray to the window. Three policemen have entered the yard. They are carrying shovels and photographic equipment.

@quit

*** Disconnected ***
Connection closed by foreign host.

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