

ShapeShifting Media: Accidental Lovers and Beyond

Accidental Lovers (Sydän kierroksella, Crucible Studio & Yle, Finland 2006) is an interactive, dark musical TV-comedy. It explores variations of a love relationship between 61-year-old cabaret singer Juulia Kristiina Elstelä and 30 years younger pop star Roope (Lorenz Backman). Viewers are able to affect the unfolding drama, encouraging, or spoiling, a possible love affair between the two unlikely lovers by sending mobile text messages to the broadcast. On television screen, viewers see their text messages and hear the characters respond to their texts. A glowing heart shows whether the audience messages are warming or cooling the hearts of the romantic couple, and viewers see the relationship develop according to their comments and discussion.

Accidental Lovers premiered on the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE Channel 1 as a mini series of 4 episodes on each Wednesday and Friday evening between Dec. 27, 2006 – Jan. 5, 2007. Altogether 12 different love stories were created, based on the mobile text message discussion that the participating audience had during the shows. Cumulatively Accidental Lovers reached over 1 million television viewers, who sent about 3 000 text messages to the show: advices to the characters, opinions about them, comments about love and even their own alternate fantasy scenes. Some broadcasts had over 100 000 viewers simultaneously watching and participating in the dark musical carnival of love and death. The peak audience groups were 20+ men and 60+ women, which fulfilled the goal of the artistic core team to break the generation and genre gap and bring them together for interaction by new media.

As a piloting production of new type of interactive drama genre for television Accidental Lovers has discovered a fluent organisation of media elements in order to create a satisfying narrative experience. It has formulated an effective rhetoric for keyword triggered dialogue while ensuring a rewarding user-experience for text-message-based interaction where both individuals and viewers as community will have an effect on the story. Original cinematic style that unites linear, episodic, cyclical and associative dramaturgies was developed for this new genre.

The technical components of this "ShapeShifting" drama were developed in European research project nm2 (new millennium, new media). "Realisation Engine" holds a detailed representation of the Accidental Lovers story world as defined by the production team. It continuously analyses viewers' text messages and automatically directs the mood and pace of the narrative, choosing how the video, audio and graphics layers should be assembled, delivering these as a continuous stream of instructions to the playout system built on PubliTronic Indigo hardware. Text messages are moderated and processed using a Text Message Moderation tool, which is linked to a dynamic model of the drama's narrative structure.

Director Mika 'Lumi' Tuomola will introduce Lovers and take a sneak peak to the future of ShapeShifting media.

<http://www.ist-nm2.org>

<http://crucible.lume.fi>

<http://www.gamesandstorytelling.net>

<http://www.m-cult.org>