immersion: designing experience

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Image: Catherine Gleeson

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Gary Hayes, Director AFTRS LAMP www.lamp.edu.au
gary.hayes@aftrs.edu.au - blog www.personalizemedia.com

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IMMERSION: BEYOND LINEAR
a brief look at experience design for
AFTRS LAMP Residential: Milson Island
3 July 2006 by Gary Hayes

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WHAT IS IMMERSION?

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Eight techniques for 'experience designers'

1. SCALE
2. ESCAPISM OR PLAY
3. SENSES
4. PERSPECTIVE
5. SERENDIPITY
6. TEMPORALITY
7. PERSONALIZATION
8. RESONANCE AND CHOICE

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1. SCALE

...of the experience. The size of the screen and the amount of story world to explore has enormous impacts on immersion – as well as the detail of individual objects within the 'world'.
Ask: Hope big is my story world?

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The Scale can also be cross-media

a) The following moving diagrams describe video rich, multi-layered services that can be delivered to broadband/IP TV, PC or interactive mobile TV (or 3G) screens now or in the near term future.
b) The content can be live, pre-record and/or user generated
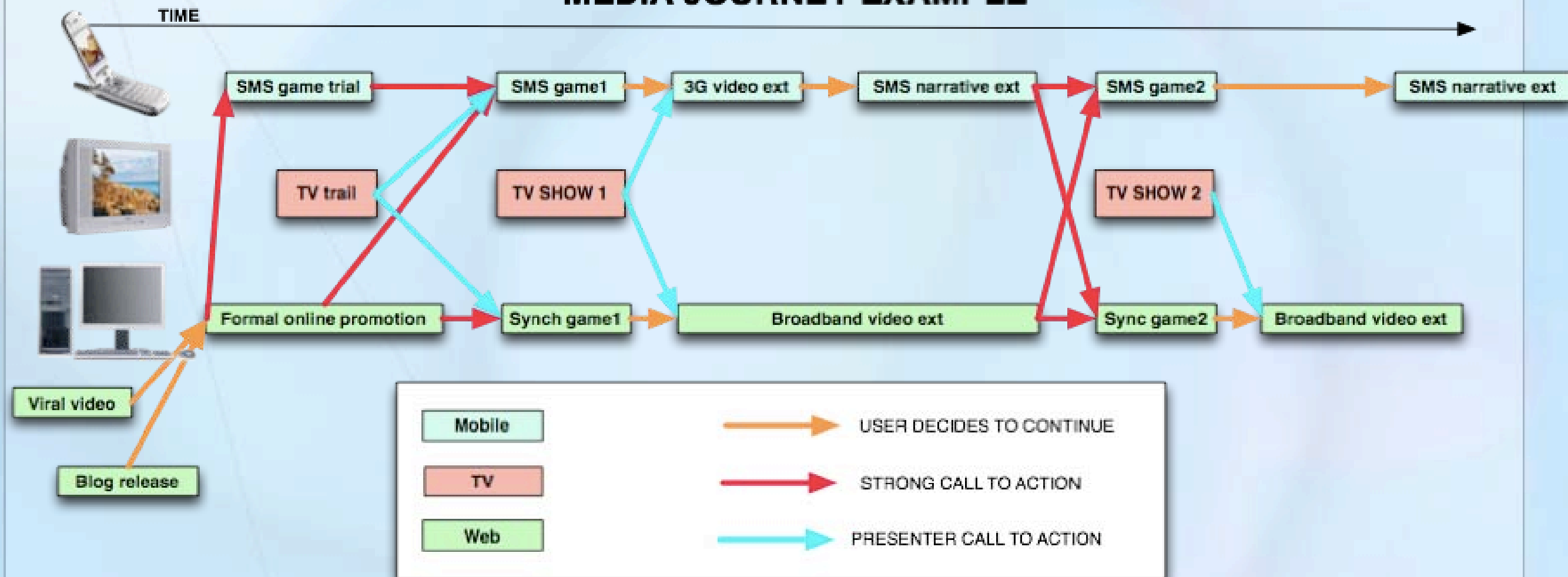c) The black arrows are indicative of the users journey through the media, the media journey.

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TRULY TWO WAY COMMUNICATION   MOSTLY ONE WAY   CONTENT IS FIXED

Gary Hayes, Director AFTRS LAMP   www.lamp.edu.au
gary.hayes@aftrs.edu.au **- blog** www.personalizemedia.com

MEDIA JOURNEY EXAMPLE

SCALE: Unlimited Story World

The technology is about at the point where alpha masked video characters can appear within the game engine. This provides a unique hybrid of free-form gameplay and a variety of insert character driven plot points to move the user forward.

SCALE: AMBIENT LINEAR VIDEO

MMORPG gamers spend on average 21.0 hours per week playing the game, and spend on average 7.7 hours per week watching TV. The national average for TV watching per week is around 28 - In other words time that was spent watching TV has been displaced by MMORPG playing. Of interest is the spike in play-time among female players over the age of 35.

See SL Map...

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2. ESCAPISM OR PLAY

In terms of building 'play' - it should be as fun making it as doing it.Today the experience author has to create tools for play, rather than fixed media and fixed routes through it. Randomness can go someway there - but for true immersion through play, give people tools to create their own variants of your property.
Ask: Can users really play in my creation?

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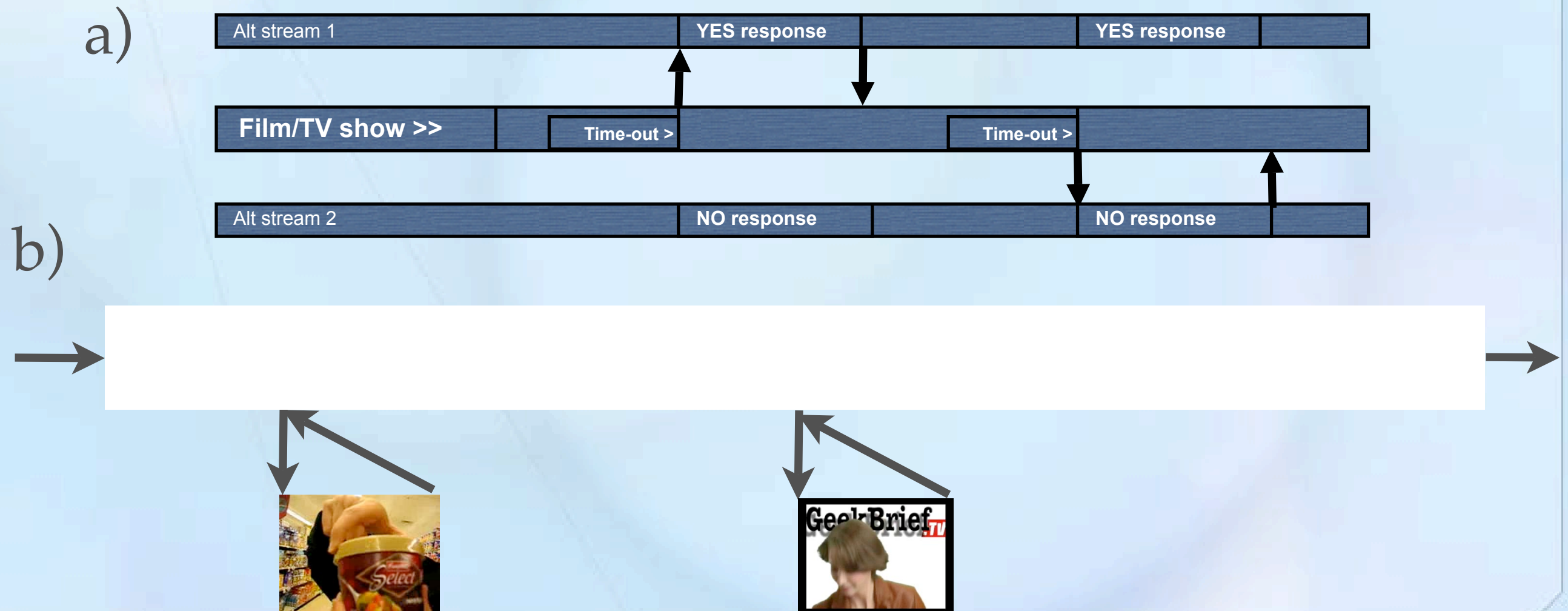# ESCAPISM OR PLAY: Parallel Streams or Clips

Real time, alternate video or audio linked from the main stream (or on other platform) enhancing the linear narrative. Producer can lead viewer or allow free cross linking. Commentary, character insights, background info, gameplay etc: (broadcast schematic)
Example: Untold Beauty, Fame Academy
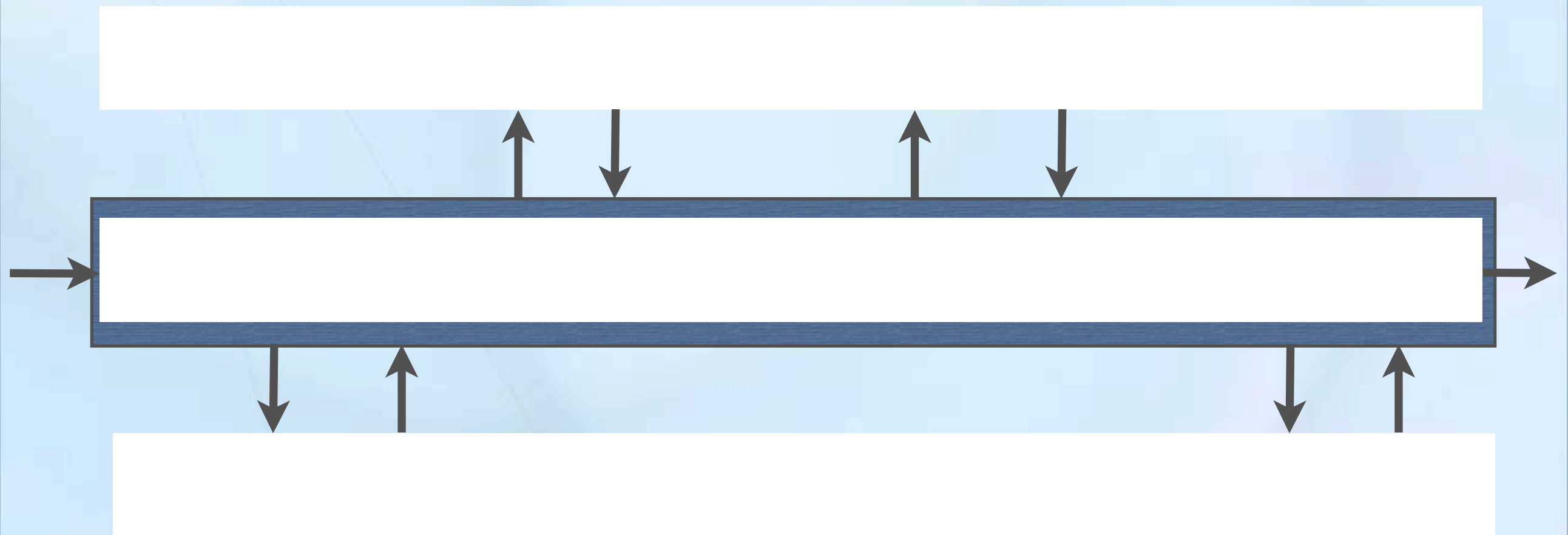
ESCAPISM OR PLAY: Video adventures

a) Simultaneous streams used to give impression of on-demand. Response video is based on countdowns to precise stream jumps. **b)** In a Digital Video Recorder environment the jump out can bring you back to the point you left off. Observation gameplay, more backstory, audience perspective etc: Example: a) Mammals (b) L Word.

a)

| Alt stream 1 | | YES response | | YES response | |

| Film/TV show >> | | Time-out > | | Time-out > | |

| Alt stream 2 | | NO response | | NO response | |

b)

Gary Hayes, Director AFTRS LAMP www.lamp.edu.au
gary.hayes@aftrs.edu.au - blog www.personalizemedia.com

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ESCAPISM OR PLAY: Video adventures

Moving between segments of a pre-constructed story world. Their are many types of hierarchy and variations on paths around the clips. This allows viewer exploration and some routes can take viewer outside the 4th wall into viewer content and back to story for example. Gameplay can easily be built in.

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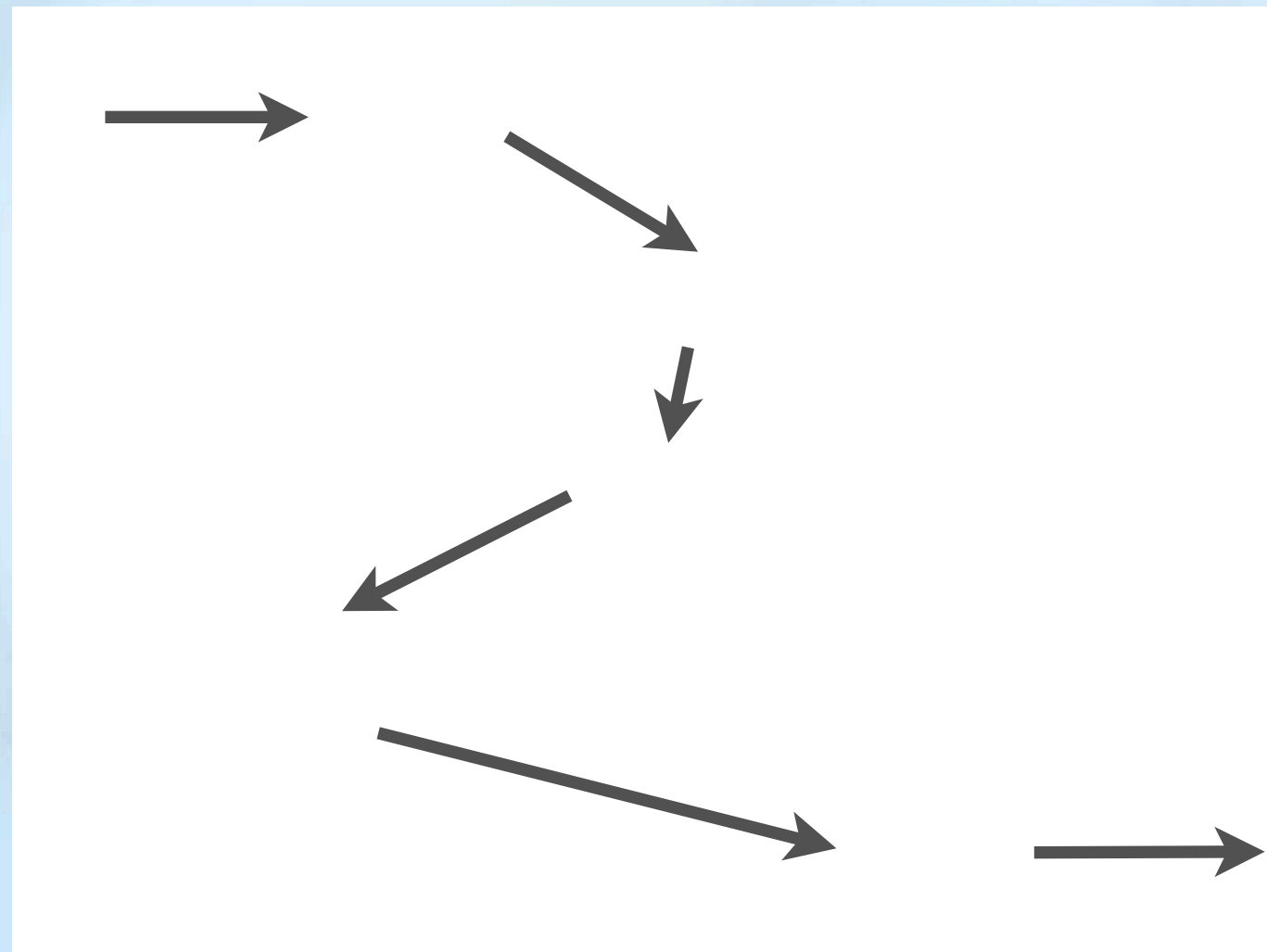
3. SENSES

...the amount of senses that are engaged by an experience gives it the most potential for immersion. Make sure as well as intellectual and emotional engagement you consider sounds and the aesthetics of visual grammar and simm (simultaneous media usage).
On a social network level – be aware that humans are extremely aware of machine vs human interaction
Ask: Are the visuals and audio truly rich and compelling?

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SENSES: Multi-screen

Real time, single screen (any platform) spatially positioned video linked from the main stream embedded in the linear narrative. Commentary as viewer or character insets, commentary, multi-views on events & locative story, alternate and/or parallel perspectives etc:

?

?

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4. PERSPECTIVE

...does the story or narrative engage. This is obvious, if there is nothing for you to be drawn along by (even your own story in some cases) then you will switch off.
Put your audience inside the protagonist's head.
Ask: How can I get the user to 'empathise' and BE a story world character

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PERSPECTIVE: "Putting the audience in the character's shoes"

Video becomes redundant as game engines create the story world dynamically. Not quite yet at photo realistic dynamic characters the narrative engines though are improving. Artificial intelligence can now drive emotion, narrative arcs, character development and production elements such as music, sfx and DOP styles.

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5. SERENDIPITY

...how the world or show you are watching has elements of surprise. The more scripted and formulaic the less immersive. An unspoilt new film at the cinema can surprise, social networks are and should be as unpredictable as life, sadly 'most' TV and pop-music are at the other end of the scale.
Ask: Do I really have anything that will surprise?

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SERENDIPITY

"I'm not a TV producer anymore, I'm a content producer...we are not turning our back in this endeavour on mainstream TV networks or on publishing empires, we will use magazines and television to support and work together to create cross-platform media.

Gold Rush" is a "game changer. We're going to galvanize the world"

Mark Burnett (Milia 2006)

GOLD RUSH

Sept 2006

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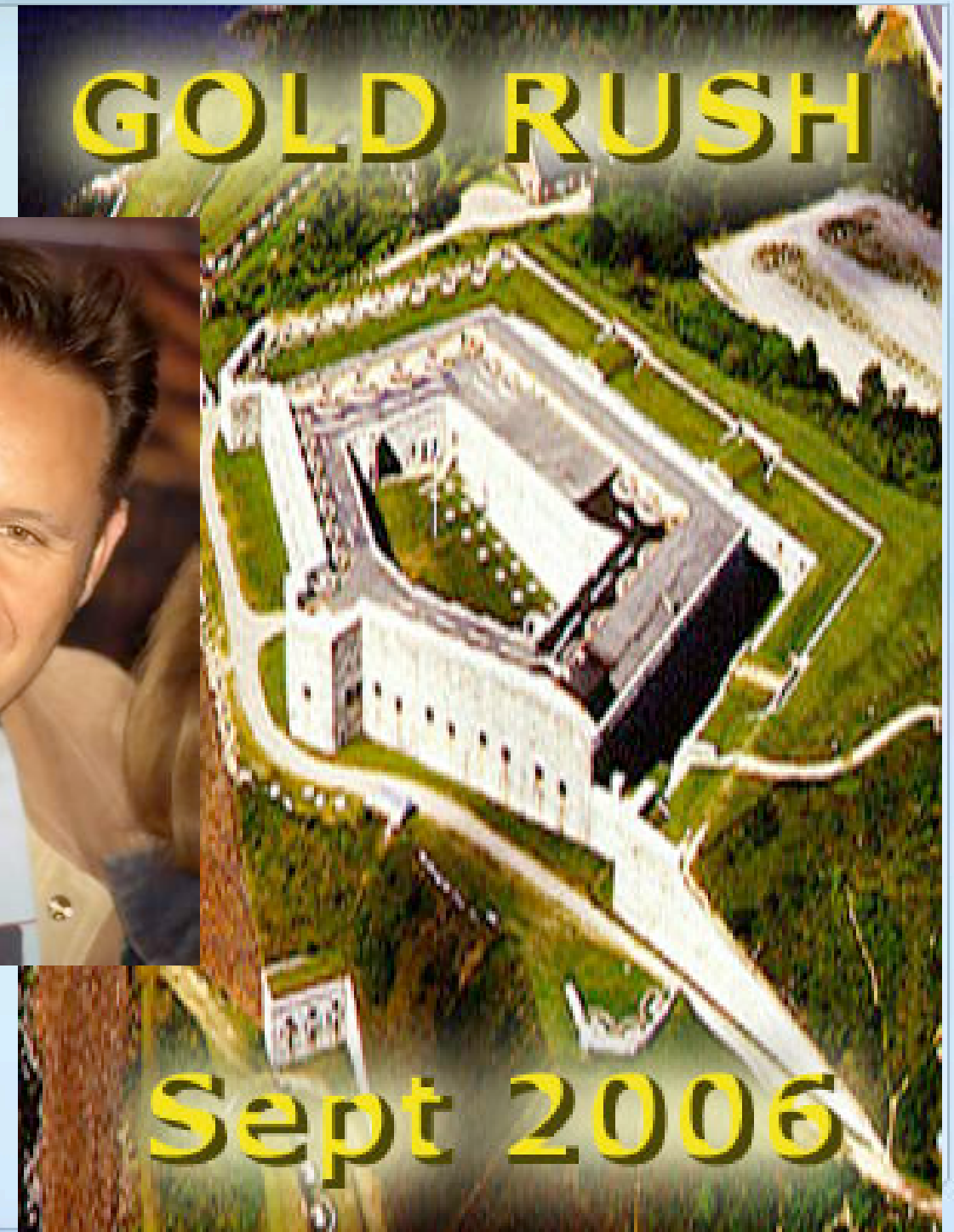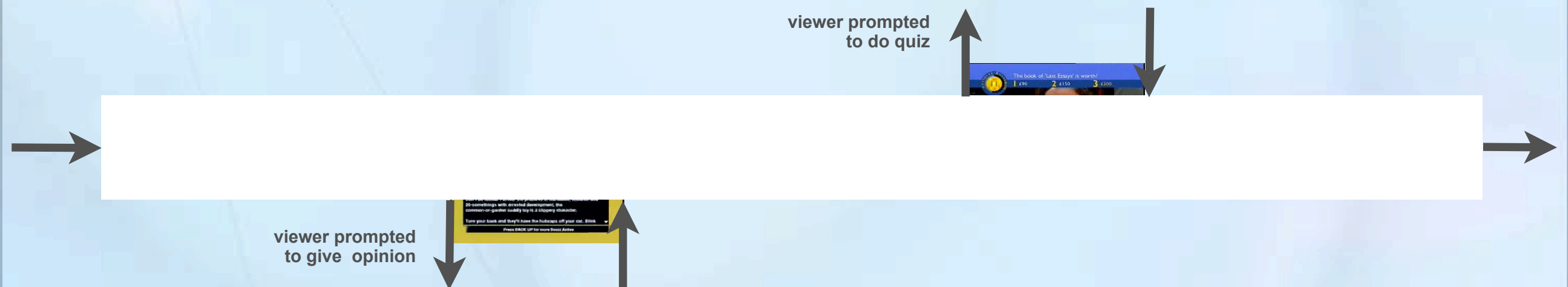
6. TEMPORALITY

How real time does the experience feel? Are you swept along by real time events, that are part of a social network and also are your choices taking place when you want them to. Sometimes on-demand is far less compelling than real time, online game and social network.
Ask: How 'live' does the service feel?

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TEMPORALITY: The Big Synch

Text or graphic layers (or on other platform) supporting linear narrative. viewer is compelled to interact at specific points in time. Text clues, quizzes, votes, audience forum, alternate viewpoints etc:

viewer prompted to do quiz

viewer prompted to give opinion

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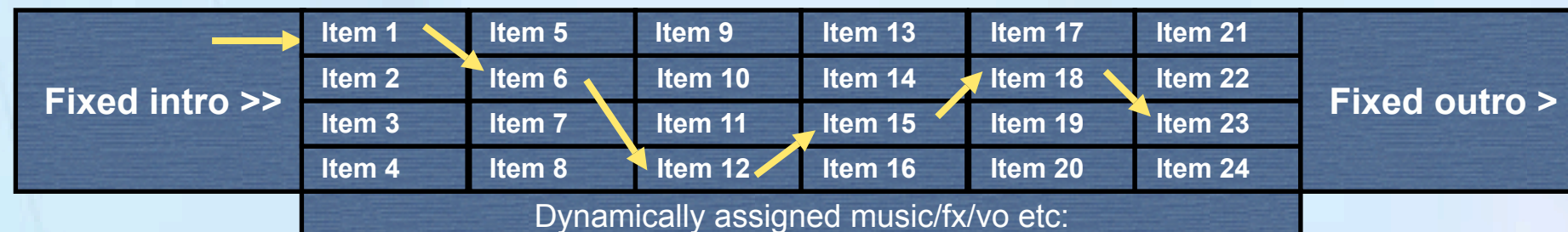
7. PERSONALIZATION

How much can you minutely affect the world and yourself in it? How much will the world reflect you for being there? Most importantly, how much of your real world personality can you bring with you into the experience. It is all about making the world feel like you belong - and TOOLS, TOOLS, TOOLS
Ask: Is each user given an individual user journey, can they roll their own?

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PERSONALIZATION: Self assembling video

Effectively the same as the previous but this is a programme that edits itself based on minimal viewer input. AI agents use 'editor' algorithms to dynamically, on-the-fly layer voice-overs, music and vision to create something unique for every individual viewer. At certain points interaction can be brought in

Fixed intro >>	Item 1	Item 5	Item 9	Item 13	Item 17	Item 21	Fixed outro >
	Item 2	Item 6	Item 10	Item 14	Item 18	Item 22	
	Item 3	Item 7	Item 11	Item 15	Item 19	Item 23	
	Item 4	Item 8	Item 12	Item 16	Item 20	Item 24	

Dynamically assigned music/fx/vo etc:

8. RESONANCE AND CHOICE

How much control or agency do you have over the experience? Are your actions permanent and seen by all? Can you really do and say what you want - freedom of choice. True resonance is like a virtuous circle, you do something and there is a response that forever changes the environment. Like real life.
Ask: Can my service change based on user input?

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Mark Thomson, DG BBC - BBC Creative Futures 25 April 2006
On-demand may be regarded as the 'third age' of broadcasting.
• **First age** – this consisted of limited choice of linear channels on TV and radio. It began in 1922 with the first BBC radio services, and for television in 1936 with the first transmissions of what became BBC One.
• **Second age** – linear channels, great choice: this started in 1989 with greatly expanded choice on TV from BSB and Sky, and then 1995 saw the arrival of digital radio.
• **Third age** – on-demand: this is the fully digital world where on-demand is a mainstream way in which people consume video..individuals seek content that feels **more personally relevant.**
http://www.bbc.co.uk/thefuture/related.shtml

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RESONANCE AND CHOICE:

Fanisodes "People Powered Entertainment"

Showtime's '**L Word**' have allowed viewers to write the episode. Ratings went up 51% The site logged 175,000 visits and over 3,000,000 page views.

"After seven exciting rounds, 1,258 scene submissions and over 124,000 votes and 30,000 comments, almost 20,000 L Word fans have collectively created the world's very first Fanisode"

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A simple resonance continuum

No resonance: Passive observer

Some resonance: Phone vote, SMS vote

Major resonance: Creative Contribution

Total resonance: Active Role Player or Citizen

RESONANCE AND CHOICE
TV 2.0 - Choice, IP video revolution

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In summary:

- THINK "EXPERIENCE DESIGN" not "SERVICE"
- THINK of the eight techniques to deeply immerse
- Professional producers will differentiate themselves from UGC by creating interactive cross-media story universes
- Understand your 'emotional' audience - demo & psycho-graphic
- Give them tools to extend the story world with elements of their own