Seeing Stars

I was in Hollywood the other day entertaining small children. Hollywood's interesting as an iconic representation of entertainment. It's mostly cinemas, a few theaters, and some monuments to entertainment pioneers. Of course, in keeping with Hollywood's often inverted sensibilities, the most well known of those monuments are underfoot, the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Like most things on Hollywood Boulevard, the Walk of Fame is economically driven. Performers who've basically just reached for the lowest common denominator have stars next to those who've moved hearts and souls. One gets a seat at this table by dollars. But the disparity makes a glance at the walk fun. Each star is a reminder of some experience with entertainment, or a spot in the history of entertainment.

The range of people is interesting, too. Performers from the golden age of radio sit alongside those who starred in *Independence Day*. Even men of science, who did no actual entertaining, but perfected new forms of distribution appear. So how long until the computer geeks begin getting the stars?

Computers are not only becoming bigger and bigger parts of existing entertainment - the guys who sank the Titanic, saved Apollo 13, and blew up the Capital were computer geeks - but computers are creating whole new types of entertainment. Granted, the new forms of computer entertainment are still in their infancy. Mostly they're role playing games and puzzle fests with good special effects, but the potential for creating a new kind of entertainment exists.

The first movies were really just recordings of plays or other events, not art forms of their own. But, leave the cameras around, let artists experiment with them, and soon you have a new expressive medium. *Citizen Kane* can only be a motion picture. It stretched the boundaries of a new medium, it was too much for radio, and would be too little to revolutionize CD-ROM authoring. What interactive media (the technology that produces video games now) needs is a ground breaking pioneer to demonstrate what the medium can do.

I'm intrigued to see what people will do with the new digital media. Programs like *Myst* and *Riven* have shown that people enjoy immersive interactive games, but I'm hoping that the designers will come up with more. Games are limited by winning, or at least by keeping score. Once one begins keeping score, it's tough not to pay some attention to the score. No one wins a movie, and without an analogous change to interactive media, it's not clear to me how it'll progress from pastime to art.

I'm confident that some young Orson Welles will show me, though.