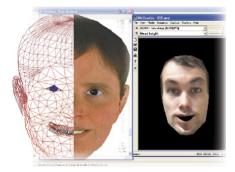## Virtual participants

"Everybody says there are 55 participants at the eNTERFACE workshop, but in reality there are 57. They forgot us: even if we are only virtual, we would want some consideration. Who are we? We have many names, among them avatars. In Hinduism, an avatar is the incarnation of an Immortal Being. According to Kiara Windrider, an avatar can be referred to one who comes to earth in response to humanity's call when there is a certain level of stagnation. So we are immortal and we are here to improve humanity relations with machines as human incarnations."

These avatars can have an entire human body or only parts of it (as the face) and they can use the same language, gesture, expressions and now emotions as their creators. The two avatars available at eNTERFACE'05 are quite different.

The surname of the first one is "Clone" (his face is cloned on a real researcher from INPG, France). His purpose is not to mimic humans but to make the human to computer communication more natural. He is the face of the next computer generations, much better understanding our speech and gestures and providing an enhanced face-to-face communication. In project #7 he will give the user an audiovisual speech recognition feedback.

The second avatar is the one used in project #2 to produce a caricatural mirror. Here speech synthesis is only pitch-driven and face expressions and emotions are exagerated. This avatar is not directly used to provide meaningful communication with a machine but to express emotions. The purpose is to obtain human spontaneous expressions once people sit in front of him which is interesting for creating an emotional database. To know more about these strange creatures, the excellent free encyclopedia Wikipedia is a good starting point: *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avatar_(virtual_reality)*.

Sunshine from Greece

Hi, Mum and Dad. I have a nice time here in Greece. I met a student, Yannis, who makes me discover Greece. He travels for 15 hours to reach his home from his university in Crete. Say hi to the family! See you in Mons!
Your daughter

It could be a postcard from Greece but without leaving Mons: we met Irene, Athanasios and Yannis in eNTERFACE'05. Ah! The weather in Mons is in all discussions. We decided to interview them to bring sunshine for the rest of the week.

In the South of Greece, Yannis and Athanasios, from the University of Crete, work mainly with Gaussian Mixtures Models (GMMs) for their master's thesis but for different goals. Athanasios is his formal name, Thanasis is his usual name and do not hesitate to call him by his nickname: Thanos! Performing GMMs for speaker identification and verification, he uses these techniques to identify and recognize speaker for a biometric purpose. As for Yannis, in Heraklion, he uses GMMs to discriminate between continuous or discontinuous concatenative speech synthesis to

improve the overall quality of synthetic speech. In project #5, GMMs are until now used to train voice features. Yannis, initially from Gargaliani, is the person described in the postcard. He is far from his family and quite discrete, but beware: he started Kung-Fu three years ago. From the University of Aristotle, Irene arrived in Belgium during the second week of the workshop. PhD student in facial expression recognition, she rapidly integrated project #2 to recognize face emotions. She is keen on human motion analysis and human models in general. Hence, for her PhD, she restricted her field around faces.

Do not forget that Greece is the country where you say "Ne" to mean "Yes" and "Ochi" to say "No" ! (We can only hope that face movements are not inverted too :-)

Céline & Matei

Thierry's Revenge

In a previous issue of this Journal, Yannis Stylianou mentionned my legendary distraction. It is now time for me to reveal the very nature of my fellow Bell Labs roommate: Yannis specializes in antique cars. At Bell Labs, he decided to buy the ONLY car that had been sold so many times that no one could really remember who bought it first. It was a white Rabbit Golf, supposely owned at some point by Bastiaan Kleijn (but the list of people who did not drive it was shorter than the converse). There is no word to describe the kind of noise it made, nor the smell of its exhaust gas. Every morning, tough, Yannis managed to start it (there must be a Greek God for old cars). Yannis tripled its value just before selling it, by filling its tank :) Now it is probably still making noise and smell somewhere in New Jersey (I heard recently a German guy had won a contest by driving 1 million kms with his Rabbit: I have no doubt this is Yannis's car).

Thierry