PREMO: An ISO Standard for a Presentation Environment for Multimedia Objects

I. Herman¹, G.S. Carson², J. Davy³, D.A. Ducé⁴, P.J.W. ten Hagen¹
W.T. Hewitt⁵, K. Kansy², B.J. Lurvey⁶, R. Puk⁵, and G.J. Reynolds¹, H. Stenzel⁹

¹Centrum voor Wiskunde en Informatica, PO Box 94079, 1090 AB Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
²GSC Associates Inc., 13254 Jefferson Ave., Hayward, CA 94545, USA.
³Groupe Bull, rue Jean Jaures, 78340 Les Clayes-Souilly, France.
⁴DRL, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Informatics Department, Chilton, Didcot, Oxon OX11 0QX, United Kingdom.
⁵University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, United Kingdom.
⁶Gesellschaft für Mathematik und Datenverarbeitung, 53754 St. Augustin, Germany.
⁷Wang Laboratories, Inc., 1 Industrial Ave., Lowell, MA 01851-5110, USA.
⁸Intelligentics Inc., 7644 Cortina Court, Carlsbad, CA 92009, USA.
⁹Fachhochschule Köln, Abt. Gummerebach, Am Sandberg 1, 50143 Gummerebach, Germany.

Abstract

PREMO is a major new ISO/IEC standard for graphics and multimedia, which addresses many of the concerns that have been expressed about existing graphics standards. In particular, it addresses the issues of configuration, extension, and interoperation of and between PREMO implementations. This paper gives an overview of PREMO and highlights its most significant features.

Note: Copyright (C) 1994 by the Association for Computing Machinery, Inc. Permission to make digital or hard copies of part or all of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or direct commercial advantage and that copies show this notice on the first page or initial screen of a display along with the full citation. Copyrights for components of this work owned by others than ACM must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, to republish, to post on servers, or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee. Permissions may be requested from Publications Dept., ACM Inc., 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036 USA, fax +1 (212) 869-0481, or permissions@acm.org.

1 Introduction

The Graphical Kernel System GKS[13] was the first standard for computer graphics published by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO). It was followed by a series of complimentary standards, addressing different areas of computer graphics. Perhaps the best known of these are PHIGS[15], PHIGS PLUS[16], and CSOpenGL[14]. More recently, GKS[20] has been revised. These standardised functional specifications have had reasonable success either via direct implementations or through the influence they have had on the specification and development of other graphics packages (the most notable of this second category being the 3D extension of the X Window System, PE3X[4, 27], which is largely based on PHIGS PLUS).

In spite of important differences in their functionality, these standards share a common architectural approach, which, although not a requirement defined within the documents, has evolved in implementations that are large monolithic libraries of sets of functions with precisely defined semantics. They reflect an approach towards graphically rich software libraries predominant in the seventies and the eighties. However, these standards have little chance of providing appropriate responses to the rapid changes in today's technology, and in particular, they fail to fit into the software and hardware system architectures prevailing on today's systems.

The subcommittee responsible for the development and maintenance of graphics standards (ISO/IEC JTC1/SC24) recognised the need to develop a new line of graphics standards, along radically different lines from previous methods. To this end, a new project was started at an SC24 meeting at Chemnitz, Germany, in October 1992. Subsequent meetings (New Orleans, USA, January 1993; St. Louis, USA, June 1993; Manchester, UK, November 1993; Amsterdam, The Netherlands, March 1994; Bordeaux, France, June 1994) resulted in a draft for a new standard called PREMO (Presentation Environment for Multimedia Objects)[19]. This new work was approved by ISO/IEC JTC1 in February 1994, and is now a major ongoing activity in ISO/IEC JTC1/SC24/WG6.

The term "Presentation Environment" is of utmost importance in the specification of the scope of PREMO. PREMO, as well as the SC24 standards cited above, aims at providing a standard programming environment for a very general purpose. The aim is to offer a standardised, hence, conceptually portable, development environment that helps to promote portable graphics and multimedia applications. PREMO concentrates on presentation techniques; this is what primarily differentiates it from other multimedia standardisation projects (c.f. §5).
One of the main differences between PRIEM and previous standards within SC24 is the inclusion of multimedia aspects; hence this activity is of importance for both multimedia and graphics communities. The purpose of this paper is to present the motivation behind the development of PRIEM, its major goals, and its relationship to other multimedia standards. An overview of the architecture of PRIEM is given, although much of the detail is still subject to change that result from the technical review process within ISO.

The paper is organized as follows. After outlining the motivation of the PRIEM project in §2, the general architecture of PRIEM is presented in §3, including a description of the conceptual framework in §3.1, and the presentation of the component model in §3.2. §4 outlines some of the PRIEM components which are currently under development. §5 highlights some of the relationships between PRIEM and other multimedia standards. §6 reports on the application of formal methods during the PRIEM development, and the final section shows the current timetable of the work item.

2 Motivation

Three requirements have shaped the architecture of PRIEM:

- the appearance of new media;
- the need for configurable and extensible graphics packages;
- the requirements of distributed environments.

2.1 Incorporation of Various Media

Traditional computer graphics systems and graphics applications have primarily been concerned with what might be called the presentation of synthetic graphics, i.e., displaying pictorial information, typically on a screen or paper. The aims of any two presentations may be very different. Two characteristic examples are:

- produce photorealistic images (e.g., in commercial film production, or high-quality animation) using very complex models describing the surrounding reality;
- produce ergonomically sound and easy-to-grasp images of complex computer or measured data (e.g., in scientific visualisation, or medical imaging).

These aims determine different fields of interest within computer science, which are all referred to under the heading of "computer graphics" and which are all to be addressed by PRIEM.

Developments over recent years have, however, resulted in new applications where synthetic graphics is insufficient cannot cope with these requirements. Technology has made it possible to create systems which use, within the same application, different presentation techniques that are not necessarily related to synthetic graphics, e.g., video, still images, and sound. Examples of applications where video output, sound, etc., and synthetic graphics (e.g., animation) coexist are numerous and well-known. It is therefore a natural consequence to have development environments that are enriched with techniques supporting the display of different media in a consistent way, and which allow for the various media-specific presentation techniques to coexist within the same system.

"Coexistence" is not enough, though. Integration is also necessary. For example, an audio display is not necessarily independent of the (synthetically generated) image being displayed: the viewer's position in the model, or indeed the model itself when displayed, may influence the attributes of audio presentation. This influence may be very simple (e.g., the volume may depend on the distance from the viewer), but it may also require very complicated sound processing techniques (e.g., to take the acoustic properties of the room model into account for sound reflection and absorption). In other words, it should be possible to describe media objects integrated with geometry and with one another, and also to describe and control their physical influences. The complete integration of various media and their presentation techniques within the same consistent framework is one of the major goals (and achievements) of PRIEM, and one of the features which will make it very different from earlier SC24 standards, and indeed, other multimedia standards that are either already available or under development (such as HyTime[12], HyperOda[18], and MHPQ[17]).

The introduction of new media brings new problems for PRIEM that, hitherto, have been unknown in earlier SC24 standards. One of the most immediate issues is the need for a consistent framework that matches the needs of videodisc systems, and particularly the integration of video and sound presentation. This problem is well-known in the multimedia community; its integration with the more general demands of a presentation system will obviously be a challenge.

2.2 Configurable and Extensible Graphics Packages

As mentioned in §1, most traditional ISO graphics packages, as well as the majority of graphics systems available on the market-place, are defined as monolithic libraries containing large sets of functions with precisely defined semantics. These libraries are frequently referred to as kernels. The choice of functionality for a specific kernel reflects the particular application areas which the kernel tries to address.

Modifying and extending the existing functionality of a kernel requires the definition of additional sets of functions. These functions may either add to or modify existing behaviour. However, modification of the standard interface is not allowed, which often means that these new definitions form completely separate packages on top of the standard with their own sets of well-defined functions. This rigidity of current ISO graphics packages is in sharp contrast with the extraordinary diversity of the algorithms in computer graphics, in visualisation, and in other related application areas. Radically new visualisation techniques are developed, and apparently well-established algorithms are constantly revisited. This diversity and current activity is very well reflected in the proceedings of the major computer graphics and visualisation conferences worldwide (such as, for example, the ACM SIGGRAPH, Eurographics, and Biograph annual conferences and workshpops, IEEE's Visualisation conferences, etc.).

As a consequence, major rendering techniques, which are almost commonplace in advanced graphics applications, cannot be integrated into SC24 standards, as the most startling examples being ray-tracing and radiosity. Although these standards include a rudimentary mechanism to add new graphics primitives, for example in the form of the GDF, (Generalised Drawing Primitives), this mechanism does not give the full power needed by a number of applications to add new display algorithms and/or to modify some aspects of the ones included in the package itself.

An example may help to clarify the problems. PHIGS PLUS[15] includes elaborate techniques to display shaded 3D surfaces using classical Phong shading (see, e.g., [11] for details). The specification of the shading equations (i.e., the equations describing light reflection, absorption, etc.) are described in the ISO standard. The standard mechanism does not make an allowance for an application to specify or to change those equations. However, there are valid application areas where, while making good use of, e.g., the structure handling capabilities, input techniques, or archiving facilities of PHIGS PLUS, need to change some details of precisely these equations. For example, in visualising hyperbolic space[8], C. Gunn had to change

[11] Rensen also offers some possibilities for modifying algorithms in a restricted way, but such extensions lead away from portability.
the reference equations. This requirement excluded the usage of a package like PHIKOS PLUS, in spite of the fact that a large part of the functionality would have been very useful indeed. Similar exceptions can be found in other application areas, where, for example, area filling techniques, character font generation algorithms, curve approximation details, etc., would need a minor or major change via the "unclassified" version, and the inability to change these makes it impossible to use powerful systems like GKS or PHIKOS PLUS.

Note that the inclusion of different media into a new standard makes this type of problem even more acute. The techniques to achieve integration of media are extremely disparate, and they use the results of various fields of computer technology, like, for example, high quality synthetic graphics, image processing, speech synthesis, etc. Some of the techniques are also application dependent. It is almost impossible to define a closed programming environment which would satisfactorily encompass all these needs; even if a specification could be finished, complete implementations would be so complex that the entire product would lag behind current technology.

The usual approach to solve such problems is to use object-oriented techniques. This is also the method that has been adopted by P3M0. Object-oriented techniques have already been used for graphics and multimedia, and they provide great values in using inheritance as a tool for extensibility and user configurability (see, e.g., [22, 5, 6, 1]). Using inheritance, additional information may be integrated into an existing object of a graphics system, allowing extensive reuse of inherited methods. Referencing to the example above, in a carefully designed object-oriented system it would be possible to redefine the reflection equations of a "shaded object" only, and thereby make full use of the power of the surrounding system with the shading method adopted for a particular use.

2.3 Distribution

It is no longer necessary to argue in favour of distributed environment; their widespread availability has made their use very natural in both academia and industry. Some graphics and multimedia applications and tools are notoriously computationally intensive, and as such are prime candidates to exploit the advantages offered by a distributed environment.

There have been numerous projects in the past which have tried to use, e.g., GKS or PHIKOS in a distributed setting; it was never easy. Indeed, the SC24 graphics standards were not particularly well prepared for distribution (see, for example, [10, 26]). In contrast, the terminology which has become widespread in the past years, particular P3M0 implementations may offer multimedia or graphics "services" on a network; hence, the P3M0 specification should allow for the straightforward implementation of such services.

Object-oriented technology also provides a framework to describe distribution in a consistent manner. Objects can be considered as closed entities which provide "services" via their methods; from the point of view of the object specification it is immaterial how an object/method is realised: within the same program, or via calls across a network.

Designing complete object-oriented systems to be used in a distributed environment leads to software engineering issues, whose complete solution would lie far beyond the charter (and the experience) of the P3M0 working group. Instead, the P3M0 specification will make use of techniques developed elsewhere, both within and outside ISO. An active liaison agreement has already been set up with the Object Management Group (OMG), whose CORBA specification has already influenced the current design of P3M0. One important objective of the working group is that the approach used in P3M0 should be compatible with OMG, and the liaison agreement between the P3M0 group and OMG may make it possible to mutually influence developments to achieve this compatibility. As a result, it should be possible to develop P3M0 compliant applications which will also be usable in a CORBA environment.

Although OMG is an industrial consortium whose activities are not related to ISO, it does have contacts with another ISO working group (ISO/IEC JTC1/SC21 WG7) working on what is called the "Open Distributed Processing initiative" (ODP). A detailed analysis of the analogies and the differences between OMG's results and ODP is beyond the scope of this paper; suffice it to say that there is a strong cooperation between the activities of these two groups. In any case, P3M0 will benefit from this cooperation; a liaison with ISO/IEC JTC1 SC21 WG7 should provide for ODP compliance too.

3 General Architecture

Underlying all of P3M0 is a concise conceptual framework, comprising a description technique (not detailed here), an abstract object model used for the definition of data types and the operations upon them, and the notion of components which contain and organise the P3M0 functionality needed to address specific problem areas.

3.1 The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework addresses three fundamental areas: an object model, the activity of objects, and events and event handling.

3.1.1 Object Model

At the earliest stages of the P3M0 project specification it became clear that a concise framework, i.e., a precise object model, would be needed to assure the smooth cooperation among objects within P3M0 and also to provide a consistent approach to some of the technical issues raised by multimedia programming in general. Such an object model was adopted at an early stage of the P3M0 project, patented after [24].

The object model is traditional, being based on subtyping and inheritance. Object Types support certain operations which describe the actions that can be applied to the object. Each operation has a signature, which lists parameter types and return types. An operation invocation, also called a request, specifies the operation and the parameters, possibly causing results to be returned.

Subtyping is a relationship between types, based on their interfaces. Intuitively, type S is a subtype of another type T, if it is a specification or a refinement of T. Inheritance is a mechanism for reuse; it allows a type to be defined in terms of another type. Intuitively, if it inherits from T, this means that the operations defined for T are also defined for, or can be used by it. All these notions are well-known and are described in other documents (e.g., [34]); consequently, the details are not relevant here.

Although subtyping and inheritance are defined separately, the P3M0 object model explicitly states how they are related. Indeed if S is declared to be a subtype of T, then S also inherits from T. The P3M0 object model supports both multiple supertypes and multiple inheritance.
All multimedia (see [2.2], subtyping and inheritance provide the basic mechanism in PRIMO for extensibility and configurability.

In PRIMO, a strong emphasis is placed on the ability of objects to be active. This feature of PRIMO stems from the need for synchronisation in multimedia environments (§2.1). Conceptually, different media (e.g., a video sequence and a corresponding sound track) may be conceived as parallel activities that have to reach specific milestones at distinct and possibly user definable synchronisation points. In many cases, specific media types may be directly supported in hardware. In some cases, using explicitly specified synchronisation schemes, the underlying hardware can take care of synchronisation. However, a general object model should offer the capability of describing synchronisation in general terms as well (see also [5, 6, 1] for similar approaches taken in multimedia programming systems).

Allowing objects to be active does not contradict the OMG object model. However, some details of object requests have to be specified in more precise terms for PRIMO, in contrast with the OMG object model. In PRIMO, objects may define their operations as being synchronous, asynchronous, or sampled. The intuitive meaning of these notions is:

- If the operation is defined to be synchronous, the caller is suspended until the callee has serviced the request.
- If the operation is defined to be asynchronous, the caller is not suspended, and the service requests are queued on the callee's side. No return values is allowed in this case.
- If the operation is defined to be sampled, the caller is not suspended, but the service requests are queued on the callee's side. Instead, the respective requests will overwrite one another as long as the callee has not serviced the request.

The unusual feature of this model, compared to traditional message passing protocols, is the introduction of sampled messages. Yet, this feature is not unusual in computer graphics. Consider the well-known idea of sampling a logical input device, e.g., locator position values. A separate object modelling (or directly interfacing) a locator can send thousands of motion notification messages to a receiver object, and this latter can just "sample" these messages using the sampled message facility.

Using active objects, synchronisation appears to be no more and no less than synchronisation of concurrent processes, i.e., concurrent active objects in PRIMO. This does not mean that synchronisation becomes easy. What it does mean is that the terminology, the results, the machinery, etc. of the theory and the practice of concurrent programming can be reused in PRIMO. There are other issues of synchronisation that can be considered quality of service issues, which go beyond this basic synchronisation mechanism. Nevertheless, the model provides a clean and straightforward framework on which other such facilities can be built.

3.2 Components

The object model, the event model, the concept of non-objects, etc., described in §3.1, give a conceptual framework for all the basic notions in PRIMO. Components allow for a structuring of the PRIMO standard in terms of the services provided.

A component in PRIMO is a collection of object types and non-object data types, from which objects and non-objects can be instantiated. Objects within one component are designed for a close cooperation and offer a well-defined set of functional capabilities useful for use by other objects external to the component. A component can offer services as in OMG (see [2.3]), i.e., services usable in a distributed environment, or it may be used as a set of objects directly linked to an application.

Components may be organised in component inheritance hierarchies. For example, in Figure 3, both components B and C inherit from component A. This means that object types in B and C are subtypes of types defined in A (see §3.1.1). All PRIMO objects are subtypes of a common PRIMO supertype, so this rule enables new types of objects to be defined. As far as subtyping and/or inheritance are concerned, objects within components B and C are all distinct types: no type in B may be a subtype of a type in C and vice versa.

The role on component inheritance does not imply that objects in different components have to have a subtyping relationship in order to be able to communicate with one another. Again referring to Figure 3, B can of course make use of the services offered by component C. Components may also specify how they exploit functionality from other components, with the option of hiding this from the client. Hence components may become clients of other components' services.

Underlying all PRIMO components is a Foundation Component providing functionality which is necessary for all PRIMO components. It is mandatory that all other PRIMO components inherit from this Foundation Component (described in more detail in §4.1.

The rules for components are part of the standard. These rules form the basis, in conjunction with the object model, for the properties of configuration, customisation, extension, and interoperability.

4 Component Structure

With the above description of the conceptual framework and the component model, we now describe the structure of the PRIMO standard in more detail.

The initial PRIMO standard will:
- define the exact conceptual framework for multimedia presentation, along the lines described in §3.1, i.e., the object model, the event model, etc.;

- define rules for components, their interrelationships, inheritance, conformance rules, etc.;

- include the specification of the Foundation Component;

- include the specification of some other components, namely:
  - a component for Multimedia System Services (see §4.2);
  - a Modelling, Presentation, and Interaction Component, which will provide for the basis of components inherently related to modelling, geometry, traditional computer graphics, etc.

PRIMO should, however, be thought of as an evolving standard; new components will be added in the future. On the basis of the Modelling, Presentation, and Interaction Component, components may also be added to ensure applications using current SC24 standards will continue to work, and be upwards compatible. Two types of components are planned: extension of existing SC24 standards as PRIMO components, e.g., P3HS or O3S, or new components, e.g., a pure audio component, or a component for virtual reality. Although the exact component hierarchy is not yet finalised (June 1994), Figure 2 gives a view of the expected hierarchy of standardised components.

In the following sections, highlights of some of the components defined above are given. The reader should remember, however, that the specification of these components is still an ongoing activity.

4.1 Foundation Component

The foundation component is a collection of foundation objects. Foundation objects are those which support a fundamental set of services suitable for use by a wide variety of other components.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to give an exhaustive specification of all foundation objects defined in the foundation component; only some highlights are given here. The list of foundation objects includes the following object types:

- The PRIMO life-cycle Manager object provides object life-cycle services for PRIMO objects. This includes the creation of new objects, destruction of object and object references, handling of object references. The separate management of object life-cycles and associated object references is essential if a component intends to offer services in a distributed environment.

  In fact, PRIMO defines two such life cycle manager objects, whose functionalities are identical, but they manage remote, service objects and local object respectively. This distinction is necessary to control objects which offer services over, e.g., a distributed environment and, alternatively, to have objects which are to be used in a local setting only.

- Data objects. The semantics associated with a data object define the construction and modification interface of a particular data object. Examples are geometric 2D or 3D points, colour, matrices, with related operations and other attributes, video frames, frequency spectra, etc.

- Producer objects: provide an encapsulation for defining the processing of Data objects and the production of refined or transmitted Data objects. Producer objects may receive Data objects from any number of sources and deliver Data objects to any number of destinations. Specific subtypes of type Producer may place restrictions on the number of sources and destinations of Data objects if necessary. Specific types of Producer object are characterised by the behaviour made visible through their associated sets of operations.

- A Portar object is the PRIMO foundation object which interconnects to systems and environments defined outside of PRIMO, e.g., files, physical devices.

- The role of a Controller is to coordinate cooperation among objects. A Controller object is an autonomous
and programmable finite state machine (FSM). Transitions are triggered by messages sent by other objects. Actions of the FSM correspond to messages sent to other objects. The actions of a Controller object may cause messages to be sent to other Controller objects, thus a hierarchy of Controllers can be defined.

- Event Handler objects provide methods to register interest in certain events, for dispatching events to the interested objects, manage event lists for events, etc. These objects also play a fundamental role in synchronisation mechanisms.

As an example of how these notions can be used, let us see how basic, event-based, synchronisation can be expressed with these objects. Synchronisation is handled by using synchronisation events that are sent by synchronisation sources to event handlers. An Event Handler then forwards the event to objects that have registered their interest in these events. The interested objects could be either objects that are the immediate target in the synchronisation, or controller objects for more elaborate synchronisation. Figure 3 illustrates a more complex case: two Event Handlers take care of two independent clock events, but, for one of them, the same event may also be "eliminated" by another object. A separate controller receives these events and, based on its own internal state, may then dispatch a synchronisation call to two other PRIMO objects.

The combination of Event Handler and Controller objects can also be used for schemes where actions are scheduled to take place at a certain time. In this case, a clock object (to be provided by a higher-level component) can be used to trigger the action at the right time. This allows for the more general notion of temporal synchronisation.

### 4.2 Multimedia System Services

The primary goal of the Multimedia System Services (MSS), defined as a recommended practice by the DMTA (Interactive Multimedia Association), is to provide an infrastructure for building multimedia computing platforms that support interactive multimedia applications dealing with synchronised, time-based media in a heterogeneous distributed environment. The emphasis is very much on distributed services for "low-level" media processing; MSS does not include any concepts for geometry, modelling, etc. Instead, it is concerned with problems like the definition of abstract media devices, resource control, connections among virtual devices (in the form of so-called streams), etc.

Active cooperation between the ISO PRIMO group and IMA and resulted in the decision to encapsulate MSS within PRIMO. Figure 3 shows how MSS will be integrated into PRIMO: it will form a separate component, only relying on the objects defined in the Foundation Component. The design of these objects already reflects the requirements of MSS. A first implementation of MSS will be available (independently of PRIMO) in the course of 1994, and the first draft for an integration with PRIMO will be available in 1995.

### 4.3 Presentation, Modelling, and Interaction Component

The Presentation, Modelling, and Interaction Component (PMI) of PRIMO combines media control with modelling and geometry. This is an abstract component from which concrete modelling and presentation components are expected to be derived. Thus, for example, a virtual reality component that is derived, at least in part, from the Presentation, Modelling, and Interaction Component, might refine the renderer objects of the PMI component to objects most appropriate in the virtual reality domain. This component introduces abstractions for such things as modellers, modelling objects and their properties, scenes, renderers, etc. Objects with geometry may be placed into scenes, and may subsequently be transformed and visualised. This notion is a general one and applies equally well to objects that do not have a clear graphical representation. For example, an audio object with spatial properties can be located within a scene and appropriate reordering algorithms can take this into account to achieve a stereo audio effect.

The abstractions defined in this component allow for the inclusion of objects with time properties. Indeed, time in PRIMO is treated simply as another spatial coordinate. This approach permits the analogous treatment of, for example, temporal vs. spatial constraints, layout policies, etc. Others have already pointed out the rich possibilities offered by the use of such abstractions (see, e.g., [22, 31]), and PRIMO is building upon these experiences. Time-based synchronisation can be described in the same terms as geometry, and the underlying mechanism can use the elementary synchronisation patterns offered by the PRIMO object model and the objects of the Foundation Component.

### 5 Relationships to other Standardisation Activities

PRIMO will support still computer graphics, moving computer graphics (animation), synthetic graphics of all types, audio, text, still images, moving images (including video), images coming from imaging operations, and other media types or combinations of media types that can be presented. This support involves using media-specific standards when available and appropriate. PRIMO is designed to interoperate with existing and emerging standards. More specifically in the multimedia area, these standards, or standardisation activities, should be mentioned here: HyperTime[12, 29], MHEG[17, 25], and HyperODA[18]. The relationships of PRIMO vis-à-vis these activities is summarised as follows:

One of the primary goals of PRIMO is to support presentation using a variety of media, that is, in the simplest terms, to support output on physical devices (as well as representing output in output from physical devices). On the other hand, MHEG, HyperODA, and HyperTime do not aim at the presentation of media objects, as defined above. This is probably the most important difference between these standards and PRIMO. It also highlights how PRIMO and these other two standards can benefit from each other.

The difference between PRIMO and MHEG, HyperTime, and HyperODA may also be characterised in another way. All three standards are concerned with multimedia/hypertext documents. Although, of course, PRIMO should offer a suitable basis for the
implementations of applications based on this approach, it has to be emphasized that the document abstraction does not cover all possible application areas involving various media. Within PRIMO a data model is used to create application modules. These modules are intended to be presented and interacted with. Such interactions would involve direct embedding of one form of media within another. Secondly, the two examples attempt to highlight the application areas which PRIMO intends to address, and which are not really covered by MBHG, HyTime, or HyperODA.

Example 1 In scientific visualisation applications, graphics, audio, and other media data are generated by the application using internal data, output of mathematical calculations, etc. Depending on the interactive choices of the user, during one session the same data may generate pictures using colour coding to visualise specific data types, or audio data using different sound types to present the same data.

Example 2 An architectural application might support interactive construction of a room model, including a television playing within a room with sound emanating from speakers. The television set would play captured video data or display camera output in real time and the speakers should play the corresponding sound data. However, the model should show the effects of the interaction of the television picture and sound with other components of the model. For example, the displayed video data should be modified by the lighting effects emanating from the model of the room (colour of lights, shadows, etc.). Sound effects should be modified by the position of the viewer, the (modulated) texture of walls, etc. In a virtual reality presentation, such a model will allow a viewer to walk through the room and have the visual, and other senses change as the viewer’s position alters in real-time.

MBHG defines an interchange format for multimedia and hypermedia objects as well as specifications regarding how to process the data being interchanged. It does not standardise methods of presentation. PRIMO provides services which can be used to create an MBHG engine, which, in turn, processes the MBHG objects and presents them appropriately. Also, MBHG objects are considered to be in final form whereas PRIMO objects are considered to be in either revisable or final form. MBHG objects can have their attributes modified but the content can only be replaced. PRIMO objects which are in final form can later be inserted into another PRIMO object. Both the attributes and content of PRIMO objects can be revised. A full-blown PRIMO system may generate the content syntactically, and the media chosen may depend on application needs. The specification of PRIMO objects will ensure that an MBHG engine could be realised as a PRIMO component.

The major overlap between HyTime and PRIMO is that HyTime does not provide a mechanism for the synchronisation of media data. PRIMO has a similar requirement. PRIMO will take that the HyTime model into account when defining details of the synchronisation mechanism in the Foundation Component and time control in the Presentation and Modelling component. As a result, it should be possible to map the HyTime model onto the PRIMO synchronisation mechanism. This will allow HyTime documents to be input to PRIMO environments and, conversely, for PRIMO environments to produce HyTime documents. For example, it will be possible to create, using PRIMO facilities, highly interactive and flexible multimedia authoring tools which can produce and/or interpret HyTime documents.

ODA specifies an open architecture and an interchange format for documents when documents were originally thought of as based on paper. New extensions of ODA under development now will go beyond paper based media and cover other media like audio and procedural elements such as those used in spreadsheets. With these extensions, new types of "contents" are included which extend the so-called "content architecture" of ODA. One focus of ODA is the structuring of documents where the logical structure is separated from the layout structure. HyperODA@[16] extends the structuring mechanisms by providing links which can connect arbitrary objects within a document, as in hypertext documents. Furthermore, temporal presentation of a layout object and temporal relationships among layout objects can be specified, which extend the two-dimensional layout by an additional time axis. PRIMO will consider the structuring facilities and the temporal relationships of HyperODA when defining corresponding functionality. PRIMO, with its focus on modelling and presentation of multimedia objects, complements the HyperODA standard by providing the tools for the generation and presentation of HyperODA documents.

6 A Formal Approach to Developing the PRIMO Standard

The graphics standards community have in the past employed formal methods in only a very limited sense. The semantics of first generation graphics standards, such as GKS and PHIGS, were described using natural languages, and in some cases this has meant that ambiguities have crept into the specifications. The PRIMO R&D plans to address this problem by employing formal methods at an early stage and to continue this activity throughout PRIMO’s development. This work started after the July 1993 PRIMO meeting and some early results are documented in [21, 7]. The intention is to provide a formal specification of the PRIMO object model and some of its components, where the main emphasis is placed on reading results back into the standard’s development. This is essentially a complimentary activity and it is not currently planned that this should replace the usual natural language description.

7 Timetable

The current timetable for the work progress in PRIMO is as follows:

Draft International Standard: June 1996
International Standard final text: June 1997

Acknowledgements

Obviously, PRIMO is a teamwork project, involving a large number of experts from a number of industrial and academic institutions involved in ISO/IEC JTC1/SC24/WG6. Instead of trying to list everybody and thereby incurring the danger of forgetting and perhaps offending somebody, we prefer to omit such a long list. We would just like to express our gratitude to all the members of the ISO/IEC JTC1/SC24/WG6 rapporteur group.

REFERENCES


