

'Teleporting' over the internet

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Professors Todd Mowry and Seth Goldstein of Carnegie Mellon University in Pennsylvania think that, within a human generation, we might be able to replicate three-dimensional objects out of a mass of material made up of small synthetic "atoms".

Cameras would capture the movement of an object or person and then this data would be fed to the atoms, which would then assemble themselves to make up an exact likeness of the object.

They came up with the idea based on "claytronics," the animation technique which involves slightly moving a model per frame to animate it.

"We thought that a good analogy for what we were going to do was claymation - something like the Wallace and Gromit shows," Dr Mowry told BBC World Service's Outlook programme.

"When you watch something created by claymation, it is a real object and it looks like it's moving itself. That's something like the idea we're doing... in our case, the idea is that you have computation in the 'clay', as though the clay can move itself.

"So if it was a dog, and you want the dog to move, it will actually move itself. But it is a physical object in front of you - it's not just a picture or hologram or something like that."

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