THE VASULKAS

Theater of Hybrid Automata

How the work functions:

The basic concept here is the physicality of the "stage" related to an abstract representation held in the memory of a computer. My interest is not only to model this new space virtually but to present it physically: to create a model that contains physicality interlocked with virtual performance. The unification of this binary model is realized through a process of *calibration* in which a set of external coordinates merges with an internal orientation of the apparatus. In the computer, a virtual sphere reacts as the physical camera "head" moves in space. My method of exploring space is thus to explore this dual representation — actual and virtual — and in confrontation between the two, attempt to learn something.

In the primary ritual, which is the calibration procedure, the camera simply scans the space to locate itself by looking at the six targets which are placed precisely at north south east west above and below. In order for The Machine memory to work, and for The Machine to know where to look, it has to first orient itself. The head carries three index sensors for zeroing in on its own position in the nomenclature of an actual command — such as "Home," which sends the head back to its resident state. The representation of space is written in Cartesian coordinates. Once the head is aligned with the targets, The Machine then begins to know itself, to gain a kind of self-consciousness. If it says "I am looking east," it really must be looking east, as far as it knows. Of course, this particular ritual produces a limited kind of imagery — it's not going to produce a complex narrative system. All together though, a well-performed ritual is, in a sense, highly narrative.

A singular feature of my *Theater* is its complete internal interactivity — any part can now influence any other part. A single gesture in space can influence all other elements. The *Theater* writes its own drama as it plays it out. Here, human presence, observation, and participation is optional. However, the construction of the Machine is a product of human curiosity, and as with other investigations of the author, was designed to provide new experiences.

The artistic intention:

The Theater of Hybrid Automata is yet another attempt to extend a set of syntactic devices operating in a dramatic space employing the instruments of new media. Its construction derives from a long tradition of dramatic and spatial experiments, giving attention to early stage apparatus and its conceptual significance in the evolution of a dramatic genre. On the whole, knowledge of the Memory Theater and other spatial mnemonics (Cicero) has influenced this current line of investigation. However, in my own concept of automated theater, narrative genres employing *frame*, such as film and video, where dramatic telling is conducted through the image confined in a frame, are also considered. Theater, the media, and film in particular, have developed certain syntactic sets through which a representation of space is mediated. The space itself carries a dramatic function. Particularly in film, the narrative system develops out of the syntax of one shot relating to another. I am trying to figure out how these rules of dramatic presentation could be further developed and what rules might define a digitally-organized space. I don't know the rules. I have seen glimpses, certain reflections of possibilities. So I have constructed this Machine to

discover if there is a nucleus of rules of interaction that could redefine the dramatic functions of space, and later, human presence in it.

Virtual Reality differs from what I am doing in that with VR the participant is taken *inside* the computer memory's space. Virtual reality controls virtual space but I am trying to control actual space. There is some virtual space suggested but my work is more theatrical — an attempt to redefine dramatic space.

Hopefully, my *Theater* provides a critique of psychological theater, or psychological drama as presented in film and theater. Traditionally, a genre of drama deals with relationships between people. It is a psychologically-supported system. I wish to find something that appeals to human perception from rather a different angle such as the experience of observing a technological ritual, like the calibration of an instrument in space, which is unrelated to a human being's own emotional conditions or psychological states — something that is not concretized by an emotional relationship between protagonists, but still represents a certain order or pattern that can be discerned.

Of course, the human mind-and-body system constitutes the most elaborate controlsystem ever devised, the codes of communication are so complex and refined, so elegantly crafted and at times executed with such a divinity of talent that we may refer to the system as perfect, unequivocally. But, at the same time, it is a closed system, where success is measured only on the most familiar scale of reinforcements. Our dramatic sense longs for more surprising rules, more abstracted and open-ended genres, expressions, and methods of representing principles and tendencies from beyond our limited psycho-experience. Actually, I am not trying to de-psychologize dramatic space as traditionally represented in the theater and media: I am interested in making models for alternate states of awareness. — W. V., 1992