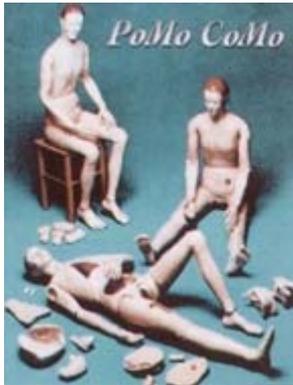**IMmediaCY**
PoMo CoMo

"IMmediaCY, a technological theatre" is an integrated media performance where the stage is a huge computer and the audience its user. It is a mixture of custom-made technology with drama, dance and music, creating collective virtual-reality. Throughout the narrative computers are simultaneously idealized and undermined, they assume personalities, they crash.

Narrative Aspects

Three apparently independent stories make up IMmediaCY:

1. Operator Surface (OS) is the host of the show, "touring" the audience through the imaginary computer. As a "welcoming program" his task is to cater to the audience's expectations. He is an ambiguous persona, pretending to be a piano, a confessional, a smart bomb. He knows things about the public, and provokes them. As an advocate of the world of IMmediaCY, his desire is to assist the audience in having everything within their arm's length, at their fingertips, and the tip of their tongue. His celebration of technology is eventually marred by the mediator's paradox: he who brings things together also obstructs their union.

2. The climactic relationship between two real historical characters:

Giulio Camillo Delminio was a famous 16th century Venetian who invented the "Memory Theatre". His Vitruvian structure was adapted for the storage and immediate recollection of icons and texts in the Hermetic and Cabalistic traditions. As a precursor to the computer and cyberspace, the Memory Theatre makes Camillo an early proponent of the "externalized mind". In IMmediaCY Camillo divulges the secret of his memory theatre, demonstrating the procedure by using examples from local icons and landmarks.

Mnemonist S_ was a Russian from the early 20th century whose perfect memory was studied by A.R. Luria a few decades ago. The famous case study broke several precepts about the human capacity to remember. In IMmediaCY Mnemonist S_ is a circus dancer who "remembers" by assuming different positions of her body. Her extraordinary memory is also her curse. Meeting Camillo would add an extra twist to her fate.

3. The Zulu myth of the chameleon and the lizard, which explains mortality. Death as the ultimate form of forgetting, the mandatory disappearance of everything that changes rapidly, the cold blood immortality, these are some of the themes invoked by this myth.

Formal Aspects

IMmediaCY is a musical theatre. The soundtrack features an eclectic approach to real-time processing, extensive sampling, and a wide array of digital and analogue instruments. The repertoire fluctuates between experimental improvisational music and popular styles, simultaneously satisfying and frustrating most musical tastes. Formally, Steve Gibson notes: "IMediaCY is an ambiguous structure, featuring contradicting processes of deconstruction and reconstruction at the same time, if only with an overall reversal of which one is foregrounded". What happens when hip hop is next to Monteverdi?

The scenography consists of rear-projected 2 & 3D computer animation, video footage, and cameras on the performers and the audience. Live visualization, transformation and distortion help the visual (dis)array.

An innovative aspect of IMmediaCY is the theatrical device we call "plug-in modules". These are empty segments within the narrative and design of the show that are "filled-in" using variable resources.

Examples of plug-ins are:

— Remote video connections to actors touring the host city.

— "Commercials" featuring Cameo appearances by authoritative artists and scientists.

— Processed images of the audience used as part of the narrative.

— "Dirty" statistics from the host city.

The plug-ins tend to be polemic and different in each city, achieving site specificity. The themes of the plug-ins include "your city is a computer, you are a computer", and "you are a city (network)".

Technical Aspects

IMmediaCY uses four computers to afford a cybernetic appearance and mechanics. Music, movement and visuals are all computer associated, with the intention to go further than pure simulation. These systems are in constant communication, allowing the individual elements to have a total compounded effect, much in the same way that organs or parts combine to form a body or a machine.

In IMmediaCY performer gestures are picked up by an ultrasound interface that translates 3D position and velocity into computer signals that control samplers and computer animation. The Gesture and Media System (GAMS) is an award winning invention by PoMo CoMo engineer Will Bauer. The device consists of a custom-made sonar pulse generator and preprocessor, a customized Motorola microprocessor, amplifiers and speakers, radio transmitters and receivers, and software for the IBM or Macintosh platforms. Each of the characteristics of the movement of a performer (3D position, velocity, and acceleration) can be made parameters in the activation and control of external media. For music and slide transparencies GAMS outputs MIDI signals, for real-time animation control it outputs AppleEvents; (please see diagram).

In IMmediaCY GAMS affords the technological recreation of the memory theatre. As "subjective" machines of recollection, both systems lie between magic and mnemonics, between manifestation and metonymy. For the sake of serendipity Giulio Camillo is impersonated by Will Bauer.

In addition to GAMS, the piece uses a Macintosh computer for animation and image editing, an Atari with sequencing software, and a Macintosh with MAX music processing software.

Concerns

IMmediaCY is a look at life after computers. While the piece uses an excessive amount of technology, the aesthetic is not overly futuristic in so far as we want to deal with current issues of the computer era. We are not interested in technology for technology's sake (mostly because we cannot afford it!): the mechanics do not justify the venture. Rather, we would like to participate and problematize prevailing critical theories of virtual reality, post-structuralism, and information theory (a pretentious statement!). One of the key theses of IMmediaCY is that we should not discuss the social implications of the information era without discussing Death. Death, in its individual or collective form, is an unavoidable process of forgetting which has no counterpart in the realm of computers and Al. The digital process of perfect reproduction effectively renders computers immortal. As such, we must research myth and fiction to find more "appropriate" models of interpretation. For example, J.L. Borges, in this short story "The Immortal", advances the postulate that immortality leads to inactivity, an expressionless state of stasis. Seen through this prism, popular science fiction suggesting that computers will "take over" in their plight to gather information (as in the first Star Trek Film) seems insensate. We simply cannot know what computers or immortals would like to do, since they lack the human teleology of truncation. In any case, we can propose, following one possible fiction, that they would like to shutdown and be quiet.

One second concern in IMmediaCY derives from Keat's notion of "negative capability", which we appropriate as the capacity not to be heroic, the possibility of respecting and acknowledging weakness and vulnerability. In the performance, the celebration of technology declines at the point of the (Canadian?) realization that we are technology, and that IMmediaCY is yet another narcissistic carnival. The celebration stops altogether with the elucidation of the military origins and maintenance of 80% of information technology, as well as negative social implications such as surveillance, distancing through mediation, and

standardization of language. IMmediaCY eludes any clear "moral", all it does is pose questions and acknowledge its own complicity with those questions.

One final challenge that we address in IMmediaCY is the exploration of a post-industrial, post-urban aesthetic. It is desirable to seek alternatives to the failed social structure of urbanity, with its emphases on competition, marginalization, and isolation. Of course it is not possible to eradicate urbanity, since it is our prevalent state of mind, but one may just try to ignore it. The aesthetic of IMmediaCY is a reaffirmation of the "superficial". Our performance is a surface that has no depth, no chances for nostalgia, no centre. The traits we encourage are weakness, inconsistency, and acknowledgment of errors. For us memory should be a nomad, not a museum.

In our experience people enjoy the spectacle of technology becoming damaged as much as they like to be submerged in its powers. In IMmediaCY everyone dies and technology fails, less to please the public than to question relativism without resorting to materialism or humanism.

The Group

PoMo CoMo is a creative collective of artists and scientists in disciplines ranging from engineering to dance, from music to chemistry. Originally established as an experimental FM radio program (which is still on the air), PoMo CoMo is an ongoing challenge to the boundaries imposed by professional specialization.

In 1988 the group branched out into the arenas of live performance and production of audio cassettes. Versions of the technological theatre IMmediaCY have been presented in five North American cities so far, since September of 1991. Previous productions were presented in four cities, with various participants.

Some of the slogans of the group are: "Become Simultaneous!" (Gibson), "Become Nobody" (Kitzmann), "Money is not cooperating" (Sawchuk), "Change your mind, mind your change" (Lozano-Hemmer) and "It's a wonderful feeling — it won't last long" (Boyce).

Collaborators: Marcel Achard, Robert Lepage, Elisabeth Littlejohn, Agustin Luviano-Cordero, Chris Migone, Kim Sawchuk, Nell Tenhaaf.