

VR EVERYWHERE: CONFESSIONS OF A VIRTUAL REALITY PROPAGANDIST

Morgan Russell

(Achtung: You are now entering a Reality-Free Zone.)

"It is of cardinal importance that one should abolish the true world. It is the great inspirer of doubt and devaluator in respect of the world we are: It has been our most dangerous attempt yet to assassinate life. War on all presuppositions on the basis of which one has invented a true world."
F. W. Nietzsche (The Will To Power)



Morgan Russel; Foto: Rosta József

"VR Everywhere!"

"... It should be possible to project on a screen the image of any object one conceives and make it visible. Such an advance would revolutionize all human relations. I am convinced that this wonder can and will be accomplished in time to come: I may add that I have devoted much thought to the solution of the problem."
Nikola Tesla (1919, My Inventions)

East Berlin was not a place I had expected to encounter VR. I had gone to the Chaos Computer Club's Kommunikationskongress in February 1990 in search of outlaw computer hackers who were taking advantage of the lack of laws against computer hacking to gather hassle-free. I found world-class hackers, but almost more interesting to me were the East Germans there and their reactions to the technical presentations, especially that of VR by Berndt von Brincken. They drank in all information eagerly, but in one undifferentiated mass — better telephones along with the Data Glove. VR was just another Western appliance to them.

This lack of awe in the face of the highest of high tech was truly refreshing. The worshipful distance which many create between themselves and high tech was simply not there. It was possible for the East Germans to immediately begin thinking concretely about this ethereal new reality. Nor was time lost in such a common cul de sac as endlessly debating, "Is this technology good or evil?" VR was simply accepted.

VR, like physics, has both theoretical and applied branches. There are very few who actually have VR hardware and software at this point; even the technologically sophisticated must resign themselves to the theoretical realm for the time being. There is certainly no reason why sound thinking about VR cannot be done in Eastern Europe, provided people are supplied with up-to-the-moment information and have an opportunity to actually try it.

It is more than a perverse sense of humour that has prompted me to give intensive briefings on VR to many Central and Eastern Europeans. It is merely an extension of my long-standing campaign to bring philosophers, musicians, aestheticians, psychologists, mystics, scientists of

all stripes, etc. into the VR dialogue in order to enliven, broaden, and enrich the area, promote hybrid vigor, as well as identify novel applications. I've invited the most interesting of these atypical VR cognoscenti to join the "VR Everywhere" Group — wild-eyed polyglot pamphleteers from Hungary, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, Romania, the USSR, the U. K. and, yes, even the US. VR is now the hot topic among the Hungarian Intelligentsia. Schröter Szilvia and Peternak Miklos (author of the brilliant essay "Toward Misunderstanding Virtual Reality") with the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as well as the Mücsarnok (Palace of Exhibitions) have made arrangements to bring VR equipment to Budapest in the Autumn of 1990. Already the Hungarian Academy of Art is planning a VR lecture series. It is not merely the mindfuck potential that motivated me to base "VR Everywhere" in Budapest — the Hungarians are the strongest contingent in this motley organization.

If you, dear reader, have brief brilliant observations on VR which you would like to have mercilessly edited and disseminated in many languages and in strange territories or have extraordinary linguistic skill and would be willing to do impeccable translation for not so much as a thank you, contact: "VIZ Everywhere", Mücsarnok, Dósa György Utca 31, PO. Box 35, Budapest 1401 Hungary. Please allow ten years for a reply. (This is an unpaid advertisement made possible through a shameless abuse of authority.)

Behavioural Bonsai: Self-Cultivation and Personality Topiary

"I want to teach the idea that gives many the right to erase themselves -the great cultivating idea"
Friedrich Nietzsche (The Will To Power, Aphorism 1056)

"The world is my re-Presentation."

"This truth, which must be very serious and grave if not terrible to everyone, is that a man also can say and must say 'The world is my will.'"
Arthur Schopenhauer (The World as Will and Representation)

Once we all too human beings begin spending much time in VR we will become new creatures. As we mould the world around us more and more, so we will mould ourselves in ways which may not even be discerned until we have already become something manifestly different from what we are now.

The "Virtual Reality Principle"

In building our new worlds we may at first furnish them with the familiar accoutrements of our present realities: buildings in familiar terrestrial architectural styles, etc. As we continue to form our own realities, however, and especially as we gain the ability to fashion them quickly, we will become less strictly mimetic and will begin drawing more on the unconscious. Why have we chosen these forms for our VIZ and not some other?

I can imagine going into VIZ with one's psychoanalyst (for a fee suitably "out of this world") and doing "world-association", crafting worlds quickly and spontaneously. Transference Neurosis could be more easily effected with the analyst actually adopting the form of, for example, one's parents. There would be no "real world" consequences in acting out ends Oedipal, Electral, or any other urges. Father-killing and motherfucking might become even more popular yet cause less talk from the neighbours. The most deviant and violent urges could be expressed without real bloodshed. Whether such urges would be safely discharged or "worked through" or merely intensified by acting out in VR remains to be seen. We will only know this when Jack the Virtual Ripper takes off his Eyephones and turns his gleaming eyes on the analyst ...

"Skinner Space"

I also envision the application of operant conditioning for behavioral selfmodification. Consequences of one's own choosing could be built into the very fabric of one's reality in order to selectively reinforce approximations to a desired behaviour. Putting total environmental control in a person's hands (and body) would allow him/her to shape him/herself.

During the 1989 SIGGRAPH Conference in Boston, I was staying in the so-called "Cyberspace Suite" where Randy Walser of Autodesk was demonstrating his "Hicycle", a training bicycle which can be ridden in VR. Being close to B.F. Skinner's home, Cambridge, and, having VR equipment on hand, I rang Skinner to tell him about VR and invite him to try it out. I described VR and what I saw as its possibilities for application as a "Skinner Space" and then put William Bricken, then the director of research for Autodesk's Cyberspace Initiative, on the line to give added scientific background. To my vast amusement, the suntanned, mellow, Hawaiian-shirted William said nothing about such things as "discriminative stimuli", rather, he launched in with, "Many people report that their dreams have become more vivid." "You can fly like Superman!"

I had images of the elderly Skinner vigorously yanking open his desk drawer and fumbling with arthritic fingers to load his tranquilizer gun. These were obviously dangerous lunatics he was talking with and, if these Cyberpsychopaths had gotten his private line, he might not even be safe in his own home ...

"All I need is a good flux."
Morgan Russel

"Eternal becoming, endless flux, belong to the revelation of the essential nature of the will."
Arthur Schopenhauer (The World as Will and Representation)

"... This world must be transfigured ever anew and in new ways."
F.W. Nietzsche (The Will to Power)

"Transitoriness could be interpreted as enjoyment of productive and destructive force, as continual creation."
F.W. Nietzsche (The Will to Power).

"... in the Dionysian state ... the entire emotional system is alerted and intensified; so that it discharges all its powers of representation, imitation, transfiguration, transmutation, every kind of mimicry and play-acting, conjointly. The essential thing remains the facility of the metamorphosis ... The Dionysian man ... possesses the art of communication to the highest degree. He enters into every skin, into every emotion; he is continually transforming himself."
F.W. Nietzsche (The Will to Power)

"The word 'Dionysian' means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states: an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change: the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life: the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence: the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction."
F.W. Nietzsche (Twilight of the Idols)

One of the chief characteristics of VR is its malleability. The forms of the world and oneself may be altered at will. There is simply no necessary "homebase". I believe that perspectival shifting and the creation of ever new forms, necessarily supplanting the already-created, will free us from any static notion about ourselves. The very notion of "self" may be drained of meaning. We'll be dancing like Shiva in Cyberspace! (Until the electric utility cuts us off or Electron-Magnetic Pulse leaves us, we who are accustomed to custom-made galaxies and

designer-planets, whimpering in a corner of our walk-up flat-grounded gods in iridescen
Spandex.)