

ALICE'S ROOM

Jeffrey Shaw

'International Art & Science Exhibition',
Kanagawa Science Park, Kawasaki, Japan, 1989
Poem written for this work by Shuntaro Tanikawa
Application software developed by Gideon May
Implemented on a Silicon Graphics GT70 computer

Traditionally the art work is a mechanism of representation of reality; realtime computer graphic visualisation techniques now allows the artwork to become a simulation of reality. The space created by such a simulation may reproduce the familiar coordinates of reality, or it may paradoxically alter these coordinates, or it may invent wholly synthetic realities. ALICE'S ROOM explores all three of these simulation possibilities, setting up a conjunction of virtual and actual space where fiction and reality interpolate.

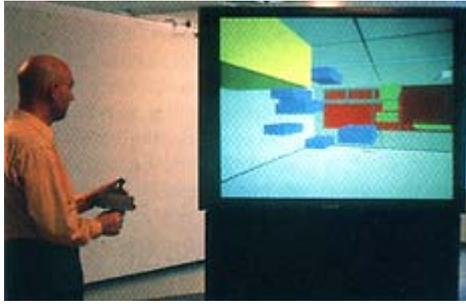
A high-definition (1248 x 1024 pixel) back projected video monitor is mounted in a platform (250 cm x 250 cm) in the middle of the room. Under the platform is an electronically controlled motor drive which can rotate the platform (and monitor) 360 degrees in either direction. The image on the monitor screen comes from the SG GT70 computer, which is situated outside the platform. The spectator uses an infra-red joystick to control and view this work. This allows the spectator to freely walk around the room, following the rotation of the monitor screen. The joystick has two control axes: right/left movement makes the platform rotate clockwise or anti-clockwise with a consequent rotational movement of viewer's position in the computer generated image on the screen. Forwards/backwards movement of the joystick controls an equivalent movement of the viewer's position in the image space on the screen.

Wherever ALICE'S ROOM is installed, its computer graphic database is a fairly exact simulation of the proportions and appearance of the real room where it is located. In effect the virtual space duplicates the actual space, and the viewer simultaneously moves in both spaces. The virtual space (the image on the screen) and the real space (the room) are optically aligned and have the same scale — the viewer facing a door or windows in the real room will also be facing those same features in the simulated room.

The simulated room reproduces the real room, and at the same time adds four new objects to that room — four rectangular boxes, each symmetrically located in the corners, and each a different colour: red, green, blue and yellow. The viewer, moving in the actual and virtual spaces, can approach and enter these boxes.

Each box is in fact a room again, the same room in appearance that the viewer came from (i.e. the simulation of the real room). Once entered, these rooms within a room become as large as the room that contains them. The viewer enters and leaves by just passing anywhere through their walls. Exiting such a room, it becomes again the box floating in the room that the viewer came from.

Each of these four rooms within a room duplicate the room that contains them, but each at the same time has its own unique visual characteristics and phenomena:



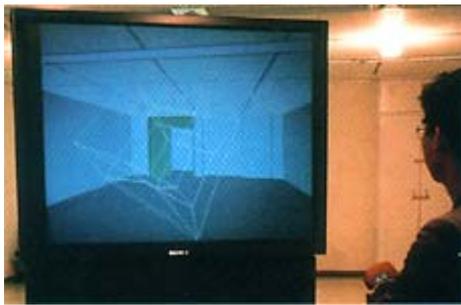
First Room

1st room. This room contains again the four coloured boxes, but these are in a continuous process of each one splitting into eight smaller boxes, and then rejoining back into one. At the same time, during this splitting/rejoining process, each box is moving clockwise around the room to take a new corner position, creating a constellation of moving elements around the viewer.



Second Room

2nd room. This room contains Shuntaro Tanikawa's poem that was specially written for this purpose. The poem is shown as large three dimensional Kanji letters that are continuously travelling through the room. One line of the poem crosses the room from the door to the window opposite, the other is at 90 degrees to this one and emerges from one wall and disappears through another. These two lines of text cross and pass through each other in the center of the room.



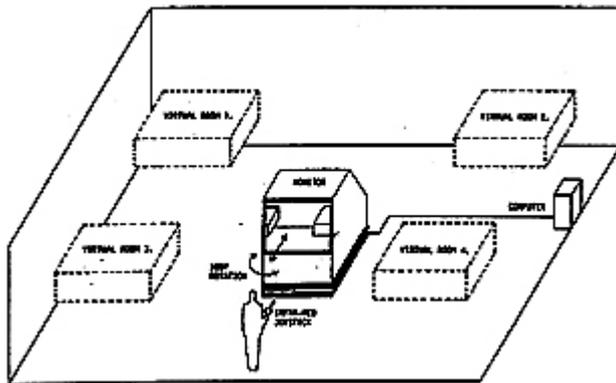
Third Room

3rd room. In the center of the room a large white wire-frame hypercube is continuously and slowly rotating.



Fourth Room

4th room. This room is dark. In the center there is a simulated replica of the real video monitor that the viewer is actually looking at. This simulated monitor is continuously turning, and as it rotates there is a dramatic shifting of coloured light reflections over the surfaces of the room — as if the room were illuminated by an invisible monitor image.



Schematic diagram of installation of ALICE'S ROOM at KSP, Kawasaki, Japan