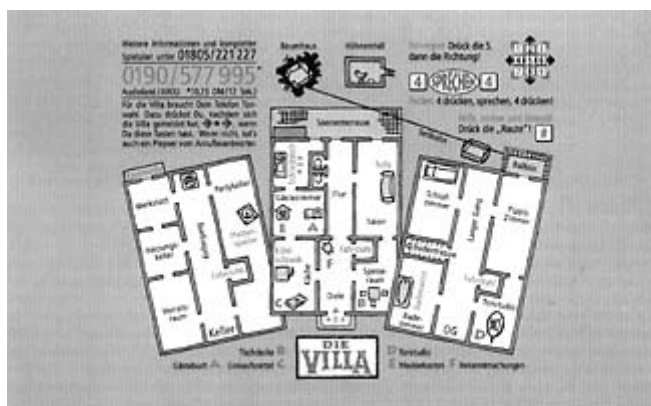
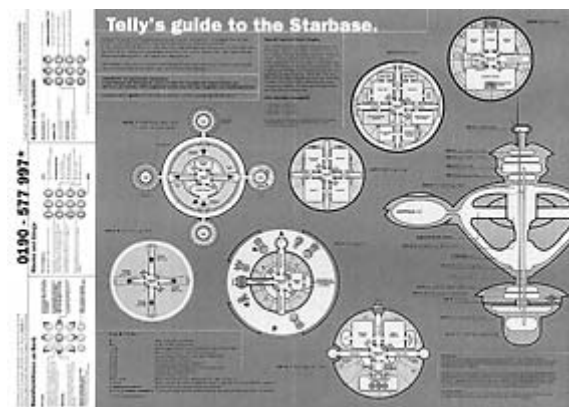
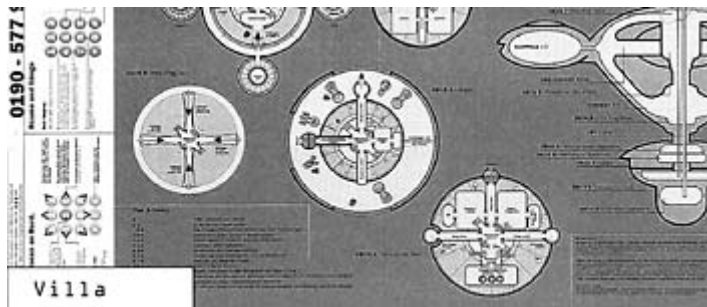


## Villa Steffen Wernery



## AUDIOREALITY THE SPACE IS SIMULATED — THE PEOPLE ARE REAL

Audioland International

Cyberspace doesn't always have to be complicated. You don't necessarily need a modem or a computer, a head-mounted display or data glove. AudioReality is cyberspace for your ears, accessible to everybody in the land with a simple push-button telephone.

Fascination with technology aside, it wasn't our goal to make people talk to machines. We wanted to make people talk to people with the help of sophisticated new technology. AudioReality is a kind of "Windows for telephone" — a new way of orientation in complex systems, using the telephone as its medium. The pushbuttons of the phone are used like a joystick (mouse) to get to a specific location (window). No tedious searches in menu after menu — you simply "move" in a virtual three-dimensional space. Just like in real life. The

simulation tries to imitate reality as closely as possible: if the elevator is not on your floor, you will have to wait until it arrives; if you step in and someone else pushes the button, you simply ride along with them.

The seed is bearing fruit. Among the "Villanauts" (which is how the visitors of our virtual house like to refer to themselves) the system has long acquired cult status. More than half of our regular guests are women, which is certainly also due to the Villa's deliberately non-technical and offbeat design. The system's casual and intuitive set-up soon makes you forget that you are actually at home, on the phone. This effect is intended, of course, for it is the very "immersion" in a different reality which creates the specific attraction of this medium.

It isn't all that exciting really to phone a computer just because many other people do — there's nothing new to that. The thrill of AudioReality lies in something entirely new and different. It is the active self-regulation of the system. Callers are not left to themselves on some line — they are automatically introduced to each other, they move around a virtual room together, they hear each other come and go, they can pass messages to each other "on the quiet" or talk to each other publicly.

Regulars may create their own microcosm within the system. Setting up their own desk, they can also receive messages when they are absent. A great deal of imagination and ambition is put into creating one's personal acoustic calling card to present to newcomers casually browsing around for information. In the open fora the villanauts, who usually get to know each other within a few days, confess their love, trade gossip about each other or talk plain nonsense. The "Villa" scene has grown into a true subculture in and around the system. It is by no means an exaggeration to say that the Villa is full of life!

Initially we were surprised about the enthusiastic reaction to this new medium. The reasons are quite obvious, though. Contemporary life doesn't really offer too many convenient opportunities for informal encounters, and even where it does offer them, set patterns of behavior usually prevail. The Villa seems to be filling a rather big gap between the need for privacy and the desire to socialize with others. You can drop in and mix with people at the Villa even late at night when you're already lying in bed. If you get tired, you just hang up.

Apparently, the Villa is meeting quite a fundamental need — with visitors spending endless hours there every day. We even had to introduce a daily time limit to ensure equal access. Small wonder that the place always seems to be busting shortly past midnight when the limit is automatically reset.

In the meantime, we have established an even easier way of access to the system. Regular callers can open a minute account directly at Audioland, deposit any amount they choose and then spend the time they have purchased by dialling a normal Hamburg telephone number.

Today the Villa is no longer the world's only AudioReality. We have set up a big sister for her behind the moon — Starbase 49 space station. A giant steel construction with twelve decks and a hangar for pilots to land their own spacecraft. What's best about it is that everybody can design their own spaceship with their own characteristic sounds. The 100% interactive medium thus becomes even more interactive: users now also take part in programming the system.

Villa and Starbase are run by Audioland, Hamburg.

Audioland have designed the special software themselves.